

Research Report

A Just Transition from Coal in Milas

Perceptions, Approaches and Needs

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Prepared by Adhoc Research Consultancy and Training Company for Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe and 350 for Climate Association

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DESIGN APPLICATION

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The research presented in this report was conducted between September 2021 and January 2022.

Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, is Europe's leading NGO coalition fighting dangerous climate change. With over 170 member organisations active in 38 European countries, representing over 1.500 NGOs and more than 47million citizens, CAN Europe promotes sustainable climate, energy and development policies throughout Europe. For more information <https://caneurope.org/>

350 for Climate Association, gets its name because the safe upper limit for the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere should be 350 parts per million (ppm). 350 for Climate advocates that the use of fossil fuels, especially coal, which threatens public health, nature and climate, should be terminated as soon as possible for livable earth. In this context, the institution, which advocates a fair transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, carries out various studies in this direction. For more information: iklimicin350.org





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the most important discussions in the fight against the climate crisis is how to eliminate fossil fuels – especially coal – as a source of energy production in a way that takes into account all segments of society and does not allow new inequalities to emerge. A just transition to a new energy system requires focusing on the needs and expectations of those who will be directly affected by the consequences of coal phase-out. To that end, this research was conducted in Milas, one of the centres of coal-fired electricity generation in Turkey with two coal-fired power plants and many open mining sites. It aimed to reveal the attitudes, expectations and demands of the local people living in Milas and its surrounding villages towards coal, mining and coal-fired power plants, including the difficulties they may experience during a phase-out of coal, the factors that could facilitate their transition to different work sectors, and the advantages and disadvantages of these sectors.

The research was conducted between September 2021 and January 2022. In the field study, where qualitative data collection tools were used, interviews were conducted with national stakeholders (22), local stakeholders (10) and people living in five rural neighbourhoods of Milas (62). In addition, a fuzzy cognitive mapping study was conducted among 43 people from Milas to reveal what they imagine a “Coal-Free Milas” would be like.

The research findings paint a picture of Milas district and its people. The majority of the rural population of Milas is engaged in agriculture and small-scale family farming, forming a self-sufficient agricultural society. The most influential stakeholders that are trusted and prominent in the district

are producer associations. The people of the district make economic decisions at the household level, relatively independently, and seem to be open to innovation and change. In the rural areas of the district, the main problems people say they face are high agricultural input costs, expropriation, air pollution, water shortages, lack of transportation to villages and the impact of the forest fires that broke out in the region in the summer of 2021.

The Milas region has many potential advantages when it comes to creating new economic resources as part of a just transition process. Residents have many craft and agricultural production skills, and even those currently working in the coal economy are not disconnected from the land. Milas’ proximity to fertile land and to one of Turkey’s major tourism centres, Bodrum, make it suitable for the creation of many new employment opportunities.

The people of Milas do not have a social, cultural or emotional connection with coal. When asked about the main livelihoods of the region, local residents and stakeholders both list activities such as olive cultivation, agriculture, beekeeping and animal husbandry. Mines and power plants are not livelihoods that come to mind quickly, are not identified with Milas and are not considered as a factor that develops the region.

The damage done by coal to the region was the issue most emphasised by participants in the research. Many problems observed by the people of Milas, including air pollution, loss of agricultural yield, olive trees becoming unproductive, increase in cancer and respiratory diseases, and lack of water are associated with coal. The majority of the people interviewed state that these effects

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are caused by coal. The displacement of villagers through expropriation is the most directly experienced and most worrying problem related to coal. Nevertheless, mines and coal-fired power plants continue to be seen as an advantageous source of livelihoods, offering earnings above the minimum wage, pension rights and ease of transportation. These factors particularly increase the attractiveness of this job in the eyes of young people who either work in power plants and mines and thus benefit economically from coal, or seek such jobs. Their perception of coal is thus more positive than that of the general public.

Although the general perception of coal in Milas is negative and almost all of the public demands a coal phase-out, the economy is still the determining factor in this debate.

Because mines and coal-fired power plants are a source of livelihoods, both workers and the rest of the public see the damage caused by coal as bearable. This public perception shows the need to protect the vested rights of those working in mines and coal-fired power plants and to develop alternatives that will match the current employment conditions.

Young people in Milas who are accustomed to salaried work do not prefer to return to agricultural production if mines and power plants are closed. They say they find agricultural production difficult and costly and would instead opt for work in sectors such as tourism, fishery and aquaculture products, and airports. Therefore, alternatives to the coal sector need to be evaluated not only economically, but also in terms of job security and attractiveness for young people.

When alternative sectors that can facilitate an exit from coal are suggested, research findings show that no single sector or livelihood source is emphasised.

Instead, different income-generating activities suitable to the production experience and knowledge of the people of the region must be carried out together in an integrated manner. It is possible to build a new economy free from coal by strengthening local economic actors in a sustainable, solidarity-driven way designed on a regional scale. In a coal phase-out process that complies with the principles of a just transition, it is also necessary to exclude from the new economic system any other sectors that operate in ways that may harm people and other living beings.



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