

Promises for new jobs in south-east Europe's coal sector are exaggerated, a new Bankwatch report reveals. Hardly any coal operations across the region are economically viable, and as a result many coal workers, especially in the mines, are set to lose their jobs, even if the plans for countless new power plants materialise. Governments, coal workers and their wider communities need to work together towards a just transition.

In a first analysis of its kind for the region, Bankwatch's report explores promises about future jobs in the coal mines and power plants of southeast Europe. The findings show that talk about increasing employment, or even securing the current levels, are in most cases completely unfounded.

The most striking example is the 500 MW Kosovo e-Re power plant. Representatives of ContourGlobal, the only bidder for the project, have been cited in the media claiming 10,000 new jobs will be created during the construction phase, and the plant's operation could offer employment to 500 people. The new report, however, estimates that, based on recent experience with the Stanari power plant in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the construction of the Kosovo e-Re power plant would require just around 1,600 workers, many of which are likely to be foreign specialists. And if built, the plant is unlikely to employ more than 200 workers. The report's conclusions add to growing evidence that coal is also fast becoming a financial liability, in addition to its dire impacts on both public health and the climate.

Most of the mines and power plants in the region are state-owned and are struggling to make a profit. The authors of the report warn that, having committed to join a regional electricity market, the countries can no longer rely on subsidies as a life support for the ailing coal sector.

Around the world, employment in the renewable energy sector continues to rise, the report states, and with the Paris Agreement coming into force earlier this month, the prospects for clean energy investments are bigger than ever. At the same time, governments must make sure that a well-managed, inclusive and just transition takes account of education and training on sustainable energy technologies for workers, as well as plans for decommissioning and rehabilitation for coal mines, power plants and ash dumps. All these have to involve workers and their communities if they are to have any chance of succeeding. "The fact that southeast Europe's coal sector will never return to current levels of employment is a massive elephant in the energy policy room. Instead of sleepwalking into a social disaster it's high time for the authorities to stop pretending and start developing a just transition for workers and their communities who depend on coal", says Pippa Gallop, Research Co-ordinator at Bankwatch and co-author of the report.

Ioana Ciuta, Energy Co-ordinator at Bankwatch, and co-author of the report says: "Seven

Kosovo: Overblown job promises in southeast Europe's coal sector show the need for a just transition

EU countries are already coal-free and a growing number of others are making concrete plans to phase out coal. Policy makers have to acknowledge that the demise of coal is inevitable, and it is their responsibility to ensure that workers in the industry are not the ones to pay the price when it eventually shuts down.”

source: ceebankwatch