

# A LOOK AT TRANSITIONS IN COAL MINING TERRITORIES IN COLOMBIA

**ACTORS, RESPONSIBILITIES  
AND DIALOGUE**





## **A Look at Transitions in Coal Mining Territories in Colombia: Actors, Responsibilities and Dialogue**

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This document compiles and expands on the lessons learned from the events held by CREER in August 2025, on the occasion of the visit to Colombia by the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining at The University of Queensland (CSR), the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB), and the Ford Foundation, with the aim of strengthening the just transition agenda in mining contexts.

CREER is a think-and-do tank that promotes respect for human rights in business activities across Latin America. Its fundamental purpose is to lead the Business and Human Rights agenda in Colombia and Latin America, as well as to advocate for responsible business conduct and public policies that support it.

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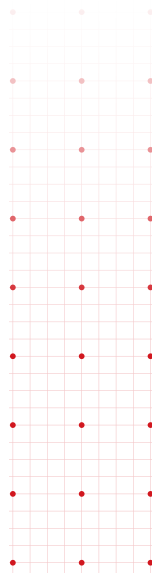
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### **Acknowledgments**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION



The Centro Regional de Empresas y Emprendimientos Responsables (CREER) is at a unique moment of feedback, consolidation and institutional projection. The decade from 2015 to 2025 of continuous work around the relationship between business, human rights and territories has enabled the organisation to position itself as a relevant actor in knowledge production, informed dialogue and public advocacy on issues that are now decisive for Latin America: the energy transition, the transformation of extractive industries, and the construction of fair and sustainable territorial futures.

2025 marked CREER's tenth anniversary and coincided with a phase of strategic redefinition. To this end, the organisation established two fundamental milestones for the year: (i) the creation of a new strategic line of "Just Energy Transitions", under the umbrella of an institutional Just Transitions programme that draws on a decade of presence in mining and energy territories; and (ii) the organisation of a working visit with international partners specialising in transitions, climate agenda, mining and human rights, aimed at strengthening collective reflection, enriching national and regional debate, and consolidating lessons to guide future action on **transitions in mining territories**.

This institutional moment not only invites CREER to value what has been built, but also to project itself more clearly in the face of the challenges facing a country like Colombia in a context of declining coal, geopolitical and global market transformations, regulatory redefinitions, and growing demands for social and environmental justice. In this context, CREER recognises that its contribution to the Latin American public debate requires not only systematising experiences, but also formulating strategic questions that guide the discussion, structure the analysis and guide its intervention towards 2026 and beyond.

In light of the work carried out in mining territories, the organisation has now identified a set of questions that guide its research and strategic reflection agenda. These questions are not an isolated academic exercise or an

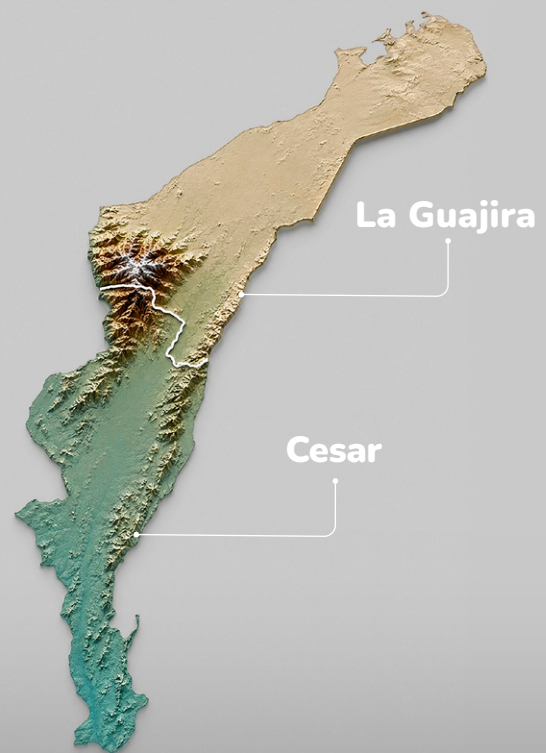


exhaustive list of problems to be solved; rather, they represent an analytical framework that frames CREER's reading of the agendas for responsible exits and energy transition and guides its institutional action. In this sense, the working visit and the various spaces developed in 2025 should be understood as a contribution to enriching this analytical framework; not as an exercise aimed at definitively answering each of the questions raised, but rather at qualifying and positioning the conversation on these issues in the country's public agenda at different levels.

The complexity of the transformations underway—economic, social, environmental, and institutional—exceeds the scope of a single visit or a specific cycle of meetings. Therefore, this process constitutes, above all, a first approach: a recognition of the current state of the territorial and national context in relation to these agendas, as well as an opportunity to contrast perceptions, identify tensions, and open new lines of reflection. Far from closing the questions, the visit made it possible to clarify some, complicate others and, in several cases, formulate new questions that will continue to be addressed by CREER this year and in the years to come.

Within this framework, the following guiding questions arise:

- ❓ What **institutional capacities** do the mining territories of Cesar and La Guajira require in order to anticipate and manage transitions and responsible exits in a co-responsible manner, avoiding scenarios of abandonment, mistrust and deepening inequalities?
- ❓ How can **land use planning** facilitate the **coexistence of emerging and traditional economic** activities—mining in transition, renewable energies, agroecosystems, and community economies—so that productive transformation contributes to sustainable, inclusive economic and social development with human rights guarantees in territories traditionally dependent on coal?
- ❓ What demands and criteria of **justice** should be considered in the transition of mining territories—in their procedural, distributive, restorative, ecological, and climatic dimensions—to ensure that decision-making processes and outcomes respond to the needs, rights, and aspirations of communities, women, young people, ethnic groups, and workers?
- ❓ What models of **corporate co-responsibility** are necessary for **mining** companies to manage the impacts of the gradual phase-out of coal, labour retraining, damage repair and post-extractive sustainability of the territory in a proactive, transparent and human rights-based manner?
- ❓ How do dominant **narratives** about 'transition', 'closure,' and 'responsible exits' influence the way companies, the state, and communities understand the future of the territory and the possibility of building lasting **agreements** on post-extractive development?



These questions frame the reading and analysis developed in this document. In turn, the findings and reflections presented here should be understood as preliminary inputs to strengthen public discussion and informed decision-making, as well as to guide CREER's institutional strategy in the medium and long term.

CREER consolidated the findings that emerged from the events held in August 2025 following the visit to Colombia by representatives of the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRM) at the University of Queensland (Australia), the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) (United Kingdom), the Ford Foundation (United States) and partner organisations. Based on this, this document presents a specific contribution to the agenda on just transitions in mining territories.

This document systematises the reflections, concerns, recommendations and perspectives that emerged from the various meeting spaces—both at the national and territorial levels—with civil society organisations, companies, local and regional authorities, ethnic and peasant communities, trade unions, academia and other key actors.

In this regard, the document sets out the following objectives:

- Collect and systematise knowledge and lessons learned from mining territories in transition in Colombia, with the aim of providing input for advance planning, informed decision-making and territorial governance in Latin America.
- Analyse national and international trends in mine closures and energy transition, connecting global lessons with territorial realities in Colombia.
- Identify structural challenges and opportunities for advancing towards responsible exits and just transitions in mining territories, with an emphasis on social participation, public institutions, economic diversification, labour retraining, human rights and differentiated impacts.
- Align CREER's strategy with its work on Just Energy Transitions, strengthening its capacity to support public, private, and community stakeholders.
- Contribute inputs for coordination and networking with national and international allies, positioning CREER as a key actor in promoting approaches to just transition, social justice and sustainable development with a human rights focus.

# 2

## CREER'S WORK IN MINING TERRITORIES IN TRANSITION



Since its creation in 2015, CREER has worked to close gaps in the respect for and protection of human rights in business environments and to transform socio-environmental conflicts through dialogue, collective knowledge-building and the generation of consensus. Its work has focused on supporting communities, local authorities, social organisations and companies in territories that coexist with large-scale business activities and are undergoing socio-economic transformation processes, as has been the case in the departments of Cesar and La Guajira in Colombia. This engagement has enabled CREER to gain first-hand understanding of the impacts on territories associated with business operations, as well as the conditions necessary for these to be conducted responsibly.

In this process, CREER has adopted a broad approach to the concept of transitions, understanding them as the set of transformations that territories experience when their productive bases, energy sources and relational dynamics—the social fabric among the actors that make up the local ecosystem—change. These changes are complex and uneven: they do not progress at the same pace, do not generate the same impacts, and are not experienced in the same way in urban areas as in rural or ethnic territories. For this reason, CREER has maintained that these transitions can only be properly managed if they are built by integrating local democracy, leadership at national, regional and local levels, and co-responsibility among actors; and if trust is positioned as the foundation for the collective impact required for change.





Specifically, in relation to transitions taking place in mining contexts, CREER has focused its efforts on understanding and generating knowledge and dialogue spaces around responsible exits, economic diversification and the arrival of new renewable energy projects.

Drawing on the lessons from the exit of Prodeco (Glencore) in 2020 and other transformation processes currently emerging in mining territories such as the so-called “Life Corridor” in Cesar (formerly the Mining Corridor) and La Guajira, CREER has progressively strengthened its relationships and close collaboration with local authorities in both departments, Wayuu communities, youth groups, producers’ associations, companies and trade unions, among others. This process seeks to understand how to approach the energy transition—and with it, closure processes and responsible exits—from a social, co-responsibility and human rights perspective. Although this work is still under development, it has yielded key elements that build on previous analyses<sup>1</sup>, such as:

- ➔ The need for **meaningful community participation** in decisions affecting territories, particularly those related to business activities; especially for populations that have historically been excluded from decision-making processes, such as women, youth, ethnic communities, LGBTIQ+ individuals, among others.
- ➔ The importance of **properly managing the social, environmental and human rights risks** and impacts associated with business activities—particularly mining—as well as implementing comprehensive reparation measures (especially for ethnic communities).

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<sup>1</sup> Among the main previous studies carried out by CREER related to responsible mine closure issues are: the Comprehensive Sectoral Impact Assessment (EISI) on Human Rights in Colombia's mining sector ➔ ["How to Avoid Running Before Walking: A Human Rights Perspective on the Tensions Between Energy Transition and Territorial Transformation"](#) ➔ [Polarization and Energy Transition](#) ➔ ["Peace and Conflict Analysis: The Interconnections Between Conflict, Just Transition, and Decent Work in the Mining Corridor of Cesar, Colombia"](#), among others.



- Technical and social preparedness for **labour reconversion** and the creation of local **income-generating** opportunities.
- The importance of **multi-stakeholder** dialogue spaces built on trust and safe environments.
- The alignment of transition initiatives with concrete strategies for economic **diversification** and **land-use planning**.

CREER's contribution has been enriched through the comparative analysis of experiences in mining territories at the international level, making it possible to identify lessons learned, challenges and common patterns in processes of territorial transformation.

A key finding of this analysis is that the terms **“mine closure,” “responsible exit,” “transition,” and/or “decarbonisation”** are often used interchangeably, which creates ambiguity regarding objectives, responsible parties, and implementation strategies.

While mine closure constitutes a comprehensive process for planning the end of extractive operations—encompassing environmental, social and economic management, labour reconversion, productive diversification and community strengthening—territorial transition is conceived as a broader process that may incorporate these elements but does not depend exclusively on the closure of operations. In other words, transition seeks to prepare and strengthen territories for sustainable post-extractive futures, even in contexts where (extractive) mining activity continues, by promoting community capacities, economic diversification and environmental management from the present.

This approach makes it possible to design transition policies and projects with a flexible character, bringing together social justice, environmental sustainability, local economic development and land-use planning, without being limited solely to the closure of extractive operations, and ensuring that territories can build resilience and opportunities beyond—or alongside—extractive activity. For this reason, **the term “responsible exits” is proposed as a broader and more systemic concept** in relation to mine closures as such.



## WHAT DO INTERNATIONAL MINING STANDARDS AND THE COLOMBIAN NATIONAL FRAMEWORK SAY ABOUT MINE CLOSURE?

International standards—such as those of the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA), the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development (IGF), and the Copper Mark—establish guidelines for responsible conduct and the planning of mine closures.

These frameworks agree that, for mining activity to be considered responsible—whether in a transition context or not—it must ensure

- > **Meaningful participation** of communities and Indigenous peoples at all stages of the project.
- > Cross-cutting respect for **human rights**, aligned with international standards.
- > Accessible **grievance and remedy** mechanisms that provide effective and culturally appropriate responses.
- > **Sustainable community benefits** that endure beyond the life of the mining operation and contribute to local development.
- > **Early closure planning**, beginning at the outset of the project rather than only in its final phase.
- > Ongoing and continuous **consultation** with communities for decision-making related to closure.
- > **Transparency and accountability**, with public access to information related to closure and its implementation.

However, CREER has observed that, in practice, the implementation of these standards faces significant challenges, including their voluntary nature, limited independent verification, prior consultations that sometimes function more as formal procedures, grievance mechanisms with limited effectiveness, and a certain disconnect between social programmes and community priorities. Additionally, early or unilateral closures and limited state oversight may pose risks to the continuity of livelihoods and the management of socio-environmental liabilities in affected territories.

In Colombia, although the regulatory framework has historically addressed closures primarily from a technical and environmental perspective, Resolution 318 of 2018 issued by the National Mining Agency (ANM) marked an important step forward by requiring closure plans to include a social management component, with measures aimed at mitigating economic impacts, strengthening community capacities, and ensuring respect for human rights with a differentiated approach.

The [proposed Mining Law for a Just Energy Transition, National Reindustrialisation and Mining for Life](#) ▶ whose objective is oriented towards the planning and regulation of the sustainable use of minerals in the country, although still under discussion in the Congress of the Republic, seeks to update Colombia's mining regulatory framework

by incorporating a comprehensive vision of mine closure that goes beyond the environmental dimension to include social and territorial development aspects. Guided by approximately twenty principles (including, among others: the primacy of water; responsibility in the context of the climate crisis; energy efficiency and transition; the shift towards productive economies; due diligence; intergenerational solidarity; gender equality), the initiative proposes that mining projects incorporate, from their initial stages, strategies for progressive or final closure, with measures for environmental restoration and land rehabilitation, as well as post-closure actions aimed at preventing social or economic gaps once extraction has ended.

It includes a chapter dedicated to mine closure and post-closure measures within the project lifecycle, with an emphasis on verifying compliance with the Social Management Plan (SMP). Within this framework, it seeks to ensure the implementation of socio-economic transition measures in the territory, in line with the Mine Closure Plan. This plan must include specific strategies for technical, mining and operational closure; socio-environmental closure; and labour closure in the territories where mining activities have taken place. In this regard, the draft law recognises that mine closure is not solely an environmental issue, but a process that must be articulated with territorial planning, ensuring that post-mining land use responds to the territory's vocation and to the interests of local communities. In addition, it promotes community participation and prior consultation, and establishes the co-responsibility of the State,

the mining authority and mining titleholders in mitigating impacts. Complementarily, it proposes reforms to the Mining Code to strengthen territorial planning, improve title oversight, regulate small-scale mining and organise mine closure based on social, environmental and economic criteria, while also defining strategic minerals and aligning the sector with the energy transition.

Overall, the proposal is based on a premise that would change the rules of the game for mining in Colombia: the leading role of the State in mining planning and operations, above the participation of the private sector. The implications of this approach have not yet been discussed in depth or with sufficient clarity in Colombia.

CREER's research, reflected in the document *How to Avoid Running Before Walking: A Human Rights Perspective on the Tensions Between Energy Transition and Territorial Transformation* (2023), shows that legal and operational gaps persist in Colombia's mine closure plans. Limitations have been identified in the definition of institutional responsibilities, the articulation between environmental and social instruments, and the financing of labour and economic transition.

Closure plans rarely translate human rights commitments into concrete obligations, nor do they incorporate ongoing due diligence to prevent or remedy impacts. Co-responsibility between the State and companies remains unclear, and limited access to information restricts the effective participation of communities and workers, undermining social trust and the recognition of rights.



In this context, CREER's work is consolidated as a commitment to support mining territories, among others, in planning responsible exits and transition processes. This entails strengthening community and institutional capacities for informed decision-making; promoting governance based on transparency, accountability and effective participation; and advancing

corporate co-responsibility through compliance with human rights due diligence standards. It also seeks to contribute to territorial development models that ensure social justice, socio-environmental sustainability, and real economic opportunities for territories that currently depend on mining.



# 3

## **VISIT OF CSRM, IHRB AND THE FORD FOUNDATION TO COLOMBIA**

### **Key outcomes of the dialogue spaces**



In recent years, CREER has worked to achieve two central objectives: (i) to integrate a human rights due diligence approach into decarbonisation processes and transitions in the extractive sector, and (ii) to strengthen responsible action in extractive activities that continue to operate in territories in transition. From CREER's perspective, the transition goes beyond the closure of mines or oil fields: it involves structural changes that require advance planning aligned with land use planning, territorial development and climate commitments based on the principles of informed participation, equity and the creation of sustainable economic opportunities.

Within this framework, in August 2025, CREER convened representatives from the CSRM- Queensland University, IHRB and the Ford Foundation to promote a strategic dialogue on the challenges and opportunities of moving towards just transitions in mining territories with a human rights approach. Anthony Bebbington and Camilo León (Ford Foundation), Deanna Kemp and Sarah Mackenzie (CSRM), and Haley St. Dennis (IHRB) participated as representatives of the three organisations, contributing global perspectives on social performance in mining, just transition, human rights in extractive contexts and the global climate agenda.

The visit provided a unique opportunity to link international knowledge with local experiences in Colombia, at a time when the country is deepening its discussions on energy transition, mine closure, and the emerging role of renewable energies and strategic minerals. This exchange responded to a growing national and international debate on





the need for fossil fuel phase-out and transition processes to be socially robust, ethically responsible and based on human rights and environmental justice, while also recognising the socio-environmental legacy and leverage that the sector could generate in this transition.

The purpose of the visit was to promote strategic dialogue, strengthen collective learning and consolidate cooperation around responsible and progressive exit processes and the transition of extractive industries, as well as the growing role of renewable energies and strategic minerals in mining territories. It also sought to connect international knowledge with territorial realities in regions such as Cesar and La Guajira, deepening the work that CREER has been carrying out.

### **Methodology of the visit**

The following section describes the spaces developed, the objective of each one, and the approaches that guided the discussions. The key messages, main reflections, and results of these meetings are detailed below. The latter are not presented individually by space but are organised around central themes for the discussion on mine closure and energy transition.

The visit was organised in two stages. The first consisted of conversations and spaces for reflection in Bogotá with civil society organisations, national institutions, business representatives and international cooperation actors, aimed at identifying progress, tensions and challenges in the construction of institutional frameworks for responsible closure that incorporates principles of social justice and sustainability. As will be explained later, the second stage focused on conducting territorial visits with key stakeholders in Cesar and La Guajira around these issues.

### 3.1.1. First stage

#### 3.1.1.1. Responsible Exits and Mine Closures

##### Event: Global Lessons for Local Action

The event “*Responsible Exits and Closures: Global Lessons for Local Action*” held on 5 August 2025 was organised by CREER, in partnership with the INSUCO Centre for Social Innovation (ICSI) and the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI), organisations that share the vision that the closure and exit processes of extractive industries must be addressed in a proactive, participatory manner with a focus on human rights.

The meeting was conceived as a space for strategic dialogue and learning, aimed at sharing lessons on responsible closures and just transition in territories historically dependent on fossil fuels, with special participation by civil society organisations. It came at a key moment, when regions such as Cesar and La Guajira are facing the need to anticipate mining transitions that cannot be limited to technical aspects, but require social, human rights and corporate co-responsibility approaches; while oil-producing regions in the south of the country are beginning to question their future with the cessation of these operations.

The aim of the event was to generate a dialogue among peers in the social sector that would identify common principles, strengthen collective capacities and connect global learnings with territorial realities, providing tools for planning responsible exits and just transition routes.

The main panel, moderated by Guillén Calvo (INSUCO-ICSI), addressed the key elements for responsible exits and transitions in extractive industries. Deanna Kemp (CSRMI), Haley St. Dennis (IHRB), Anthony Bebbington (Ford Foundation) and Nicola Woodrofe (NRGI) participated, sharing international experiences on participatory planning, governance, labour retraining and justice in transitions. The panellists also contributed to thematic roundtables with local experts, addressing topics such as informed participation

in territorial planning, governance and capacities for local development, legal frameworks for responsible exits, and economic diversification and employability. The closing remarks were given by Camilo León (Ford Foundation), who summarised the lessons of the day and proposed regional perspectives for future responsible transitions in Colombia and Latin America.

#### 3.1.1.2. Workshop “Systemic Approach to Transition” with civil society organisations

A space for co-creation between civil society organisations, with the aim of identifying synergies, strengthening relationships and co-developing collective impact strategies aimed at promoting rights-based transitions, responsible exits and territorial transformations. This meeting was held as a complement to the event ‘Responsible exits and closures: Global lessons for local action’, and was also convened by CREER, ICSI and NRGI.

The main objective of the workshop was to enable a strategic and collaborative dialogue that would allow for the exploration of systemic approaches to collective impact, the identification of synergies, the alignment of efforts, and the advancement towards a shared vision that would enhance the actions of the participants based on their diverse backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences.

Additionally, CREER shared and tested the Narrative Spectra of Transition Tool, an analytical and participatory instrument designed to understand, map, and compare the different narratives that exist around transition processes. It is based on the idea that transition does not have a single, fixed definition, but is rather a dynamic social construct, with nuances and dilemmas, influenced by political contexts, agendas, actors and territories. The tool allows us to identify how different actors understand transition in terms of what it is, who participates and how it is carried out, considering dimensions such as environmental or social nature, pace, scale, the roles of key actors (state, businesses, communities and civil society) and decision-making, collaboration and





trust processes. Its main objective is to highlight tensions, reduce polarisation and promote more open and nuanced narratives that facilitate dialogue, collaboration and trust-building among actors in conflict contexts<sup>2</sup>.

The meeting was attended by national and international organisations, including the University of Magdalena, Governance Action Hub, Stockholm Environmental Institute (SEI), Dialogue Group on Mining in Colombia (GDIAM), Inter-American Association for Environmental Defence (AIDA), and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). This space allowed for the consolidation of learning and the strengthening of collective capacities, facilitating the construction of a framework for collaboration that will serve as the basis for future joint actions on just transition and responsible closures of extractive industries in Colombia.

Overall, the meeting highlighted CREER's role as a facilitator of collaborative spaces that contribute to collective action, trust between actors, and the construction of just and territorially relevant transitions.

### **3.1.1.3. Responsible entries and exits: how to build a sustainable legacy from the mining industry**

The dialogue was organised by CREER, the Colombian Mining Association (ACM) and the MARS-NIR programme, with the aim of strengthening companies' understanding, commitment and capabilities in relation to responsible and progressive transitions in the extractive industries. The meeting placed special emphasis on the social dimension as a fundamental pillar of long-term sustainability and provided an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned that guide responsible exit strategies and the early design of critical mineral projects linked to the energy transition, considering both the political and economic context of Colombia and the international dynamics of the sector.

The space facilitated the exchange of experiences between different mining companies and allowed for the exploration of opportunities to incorporate responsible exit principles from the initial stages of projects, strengthen advance planning for closures, and apply lessons learned from international experiences on responsible management of the mining transition.

<sup>2</sup> In 2026, CREER plans to expand the scope of the tool and implement it with diverse actors at both the national and territorial levels, with whom it is currently developing projects and holding strategic discussions around the Just Transition agenda.



### 3.1.2. Second stage

The second part of the visit consisted of territorial dialogues in Cesar and La Guajira with representatives of local administrations, both from provincial and municipal governments, former mining workers and trade unions, local communities and different population groups (including women, young people and ethnic communities historically excluded from decision-making on economic projects that transform their territories). In addition, the delegation visited and learned first-hand about Drummond's operations at one of the mines located in La Jagua de Ibirico (Pribbenow), as well as the company's perspective on the transition.

These spaces allowed for the collection of testimonies on the socio-economic and political context of the transition in the mining sector;

the labour, environmental, social and cultural impacts of the decline in mining (particularly in Cesar); and local strategies and aspirations for transition, economic diversification and the construction of sustainable futures.

#### 3.1.2.1 Visit to the Pribbenow Mine

Upon arriving in the department of Cesar, an academic visit was conducted to the Pribbenow Mine, hosted by the company Drummond Ltd. During this visit, a meeting was held with different members of the company's team (including workers from the local area and from other regions of the country, belonging to various departments), who presented the company's strategies regarding markets, social goals, and engagement with the territory, as well as its environmental, educational, and operational strategies. Participants also observed the environment in which operators carry out their daily work: mining workers involved in the mineral extraction process, teams responsible for surveillance and monitoring, personnel in charge of environmental rehabilitation areas, among others.

In addition, participants visited the company's academic facility, where training is conducted on the mine's operational management as well as on topics related to renewable energy and energy efficiency. Finally, the group toured the Cañahuate I solar park, a project designed to supply approximately 33% of Drummond's energy demand, with an installed capacity of 65 MWp. This reflects the actions the company is undertaking as part of its carbon neutrality agenda.

#### 3.1.2.2 Dialogues with youth organisations, women and diverse populations in Cesar and La Guajira

The event was organised by CREER in Valledupar as a forum for dialogue and learning to explore how different social groups experience and perceive transition processes in mining areas. During the event, which was attended by representatives of youth organisations, youth councils, women's organisations and the LGBTIQ+ population, topics related to the social and economic impact of the decline in mining, the participation





and inclusion of these historically under-represented populations, and the challenges associated with the energy transition and productive diversification were addressed.

The meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on local dynamics, including the effects of mining dependence, limitations in employment and educational opportunities, and the need to strengthen the effective participation of different actors in the planning of transition processes. Experiences of community and youth leadership, the role of ancestral knowledge and women's initiatives in building economic and social alternatives were also discussed.

In addition, there was a space called Vocesx-CREER (VoicesxCREER)<sup>3</sup>, through which CREER seeks to give visibility to the voices of the territories and regions, facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues that allow different points of view to be heard on the issues that are part of the debate agenda around responsible solutions and

the energy transition. In this space, broadcast live from Valledupar, reflections, knowledge and opinions were shared by local leaders involved in these discussions.

On this occasion, [Rafael Antonio Ramírez](#), director of [Fundación Diversidad y Vida](#) (Diversity and Life Foundation), participated and highlighted the importance of thinking about the transition from the perspectives of diversity and inclusion, explicitly incorporating the needs and realities faced by the LGBTIQ+ population in the region. [Yenilin Lubo Bonivento](#), Wayuu leader of [Eiruku Ipuana](#), contributed reflections from the perspective of young women and an ethnic approach, especially based on the experiences and challenges of the Wayuu people in the face of territorial transformation processes. Finally, [Mariana Parra Avendaño](#), a researcher at the [Energy Transition research group at the University of Magdalena](#) focused her presentation on the experiences of women and young people in mining contexts, as well as on the social impacts associated with coal mining and mine closure processes.

<sup>3</sup> The opinions expressed by participants invited to VocesxCREER do not necessarily reflect the institutional positions of CREER.



In addition to them and the international guests from the CSRM and the IHRB, Maritza Rodríguez (Mujer y Medio Ambiente, Mexico) also participated in this space, sharing her reflections and experiences on how to integrate a gender perspective into the transition. All of them contributed local and global perspectives that enriched the dialogue on just and responsible transitions.

### **3.1.2.3. Workers' Commitment to a Responsible Closure: A Knowledge-Sharing Dialogue with the Workers for a Just Transition Collective**

The event was organised by CREER, in collaboration with CNV Internationaal, as a knowledge dialogue focused on workers' perspectives on mine closures and just transition in the mining territories of Cesar and La Guajira. The meeting sought to highlight the experiences of workers, former miners and representatives of various trade union organisations in the sector, as well as institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and the University of Magdalena, reflecting on working conditions, employment alternatives, productive reconversion and the protection of rights. In addition, these local experiences were linked to international lessons learned on responsible closures and just transitions.

During the conference, topics such as the role of workers in the transition, the need to guarantee decent employment and technical training, the participation of women and young people, and the importance of articulating inclusive policies that integrate labour rights and territorial sustainability were addressed. The progress of the Collective of Workers for a Just Transition was presented, including [The sectoral Petition Document for a Just Energy Transition in the coal sector](#) —the first sector-wide proposal of demands for the coal industry in Colombia, representing a historic milestone in the region and in Latin America.

The meeting was attended by international guests, who shared experiences of mine closures and labour transitions in different countries, helping to link global lessons with local challenges in Cesar and La Guajira.

### **3.1.2.4. Dialogues with local institutions in mining territories in transition: Cesar and La Guajira**

The aim of these spaces was to generate dialogue among local authorities to reflect on the strategic role of territorial institutions in planning,

coordination and support in the face of mining decline and transition processes. These meetings sought to identify challenges and opportunities to strengthen local public management, promoting the exchange of knowledge between institutional and international actors. The spaces were held separately, one with authorities from Cesar and the other with those from the department of La Guajira.

In the case of Cesar, local authorities participated, including the department's Ministry of Mines, the Secretary of Agriculture and Environment of Chiriguaná, and representatives from the municipalities of La Jagua de Ibirico and Becerril. The dialogue focused on the strategic role of territorial institutions in the face of mine closures and productive transition, addressing social and economic impacts, limitations of state planning, challenges of community participation, and the sustainability of productive alternatives.

Representatives from the municipalities of Albania and Maicao, Corpoguajira, the La Guajira Post-Carbon Corporation, Asoranchería, ALQUIMIA TEC COLOMBIA SAS, ESE Hospital San Rafael and ASOMALAWI participated in the La Guajira institutional space. During the session, the main challenges for integrating national strategies with the territorial reality were discussed, especially in the face of centralism and regulatory disconnect. The need to update and articulate land use plans (POT, by its acronym in Spanish) to incorporate new energy models and mining closure processes was highlighted, as well as the need to strengthen institutional capacities and manage financial resources to enable economic diversification projects and energy communities.

The dialogue also addressed the uncertainty surrounding mine closure and its environmental, social and economic implications, the lack of clarity on environmental responsibilities and liabilities, and the lack of productive diversification in the region.

International lessons learned highlighted the importance of measuring mineral dependence to assess the feasibility of reducing extractive activity, the need to promote political decisions at the local level without waiting for an ideal context, and the relevance of combining rigorous diagnosis, planning and community participation.

### **3.1.2.5. Dialogue with the Wayuu people on the mining transition in La Guajira**

The event was organised by CREER and brought together the Wayuu and Afro-descendant communities of Albania, Hatonuevo and Barrancas in the Paradero Community, with the aim of highlighting the perspectives of ethnic communities on the impacts of mining and the energy transition in La Guajira. The event sought to learn about community proposals for the future of the territory and the transformation processes underway, emphasising the active participation of ethnic peoples in mine closure plans and the construction of a just transition.

This space was used to gather the opinions of ethnic leaders and communities on issues related to mine closure processes and plans, the environmental, social, cultural and spiritual consequences of mining, and their positions on comprehensive reparation from the territory. The impacts on water, sacred territories, agricultural production, grazing and community ties were also discussed, as well as the importance of ensuring that any transition process respects Wayuu autonomy and the Wayuu regulatory system.

Exercises were carried out to imagine the future, highlighting the need for participatory closure plans and the unity of communities in the face of business and institutional actors. The conference showed that mine closure and energy transition are deeply social, cultural and territorial processes, where the voice of communities must be central to building a fair, diversified and sustainable post-carbon future.



# 4

## NATIONAL POLITICAL CONTEXT ON TRANSITIONS IN MINING ENVIRONMENTS



Colombia is at a turning point. For decades, mining and other extractive activities such as hydrocarbons and gas have shaped the national economy, social life and territorial dynamics. In particular, coal mining has established itself as a central component of the country's economic, energy and geopolitical development. Colombia is currently the largest coal producer in Latin America and has consistently ranked among the top ten exporters worldwide. In 2023, the country accounted for around 4.5% of international coal trade<sup>4</sup>. It is Colombia's second most exported product after oil. Its production is concentrated in thermal coal for electricity generation and is mainly oriented towards European markets, a region where demand is set to decline more rapidly, making Colombia one of the coal exporters most vulnerable to the global process of phasing out this fuel<sup>5</sup>.

According to the TEC Report – Energy Transition of Colombian Coal<sup>6</sup>, based on figures from the National Mining Agency (ANM), coal titles account for 15% of Colombia's total mining titles and cover 19% of the country's titled area. Of the total area devoted to coal mining, 33% is concentrated in the departments of Cesar and La Guajira, where large-scale open-pit projects predominate, while the remaining 66.82% corresponds to small and medium-scale operations located

4 Agencia Nacional de Minería (ANM). 2024. *Ficha Carbón 08 2024*. <https://mineriaencolombia.anm.gov.co/sites/default/files/2024-09/Ficha%20Carb%C3%B3n%2008%202024.pdf>

5 Yanguas Parra, P. A. (2025). *How Colombia is responding to changes in international coal demand and the transition challenges they bring*. JET-CR Knowledge Hub, IISD. <https://www.jetknowledge.org/insights/colombia-international-coal-demand-energy-transition-challenges/>

6 Centro Regional de Estudios de Energía [CREE] & Federación Nacional de Productores de Carbón [Fenalcarbón]. (2024). *Informe TEC - Transición energética de los carbones colombianos: Escenarios y decisiones clave al 2030 para la seguridad energética y la competitividad del país*. [https://creenergia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Informe\\_TEC.pdf](https://creenergia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Informe_TEC.pdf)



in inland departments. In 2019, nearly 90% of national coal production came from Cesar and La Guajira, with municipalities such as Hatonuevo, Chiriguaná, El Paso, Agustín Codazzi, Barrancas, Becerril, Albania and La Jagua de Ibirico standing out. In this context, and according to the World Coal Association, Colombia ranks as the world's fifth largest exporter of thermal coal, mainly from production in these departments.

In addition to the above, the contribution of this economic activity to the national budget is evident and significant: around 2.4% of the country's tax revenue comes from coal, and more than 80% of mining royalties are generated by this activity<sup>7</sup>. Its contribution to employment, public finances and foreign trade has been significant; especially in regions such as La Guajira and the Cesar coal corridor, coal mining has generated income, infrastructure and employment,

becoming a local and national economic engine. In these regions, coal has come to represent between 43% and 61% of the departmental budget<sup>8</sup>. According to the aforementioned TEC Report, mining contributed \$7.6 trillion in taxes, royalties, and compensation last year, accumulating \$19.6 trillion between 2021 and 2024. In departments such as La Guajira and Cesar, coal mining accounted for up to 95% of royalty and tax revenues.

However, in recent years, multiple factors have begun to transform the structure of the sector and its future, in addition to historical socio-environmental conflicts, health impacts and territorial inequalities. Among the challenges are the evolution of international markets, growing demands for climate action and sustainability, and the redefinition of public priorities in development and energy transition.

<sup>7</sup> Patzy, F., & López, S. (2021). *Carbón térmico en Colombia: implicaciones para la economía de La Guajira y Cesar*. Natural Resource Governance Institute. [https://resourcegovernance.org/sites/default/files/documents/carbon\\_termico\\_en\\_colombia\\_implicaciones\\_para\\_la\\_economia\\_de\\_la\\_guajira\\_y\\_cesar.pdf](https://resourcegovernance.org/sites/default/files/documents/carbon_termico_en_colombia_implicaciones_para_la_economia_de_la_guajira_y_cesar.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> SEI & Natural Resource Governance Institute (2025). *Transiciones justas del carbón en Colombia*. <https://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/coal-transition-colombia-sei2025.pdf>

In this context, Colombia faces a complex dilemma: how to move towards a just transition that reduces dependence on fossil fuels and promotes sustainable productive alternatives, without leaving behind regions and communities whose economy and livelihoods depend almost exclusively on mining. This transition is not only technical; it involves political, cultural and institutional transformations that raise fundamental questions: What happens when a mine closes? Who bears the costs? What is the future of communities and territories that have historically depended on coal? How can we ensure that the transition is fair for all stakeholders? To fully understand the background of the transition in Colombia's mining territories, it is essential to analyse the current socio-political landscape facing both extractive industries and local communities.

Colombia's transition away from coal is taking place amid a complex and, in many cases, contradictory and polarised scenario. At the institutional level, the Colombian government (2022-2026) has adopted a position of gradually reducing the role of coal, among other fossil fuels, in the national economic model, while simultaneously promoting renewable energies and incorporating the discourse of a just transition within the framework of the country's climate commitments. It has thus created various figures, mechanisms and policies to carry out this commitment. Since the beginning of its term, the administration has declared that it will not sign new exploration contracts for oil, gas and coal mining<sup>9</sup>, which is a sign of its strategy to gradually wean the economy off fossil fuels. Later, in 2024 and 2025, Decrees 1047 of 2024 and 0949 of 2025 – dated 28 August 2025 – established a ban on coal exports to Israel as a symbolic foreign policy measure that links extractive decisions with ethical and geopolitical considerations<sup>10</sup>.

In line with the Government's intention to redefine the role of mining in the national economy, in October 2025, the Mining Bill for a Just Energy Transition, National Reindustrialisation and Mining for Life was submitted to the Congress of the Republic<sup>11</sup> which, at the time of publication of this document, it is currently undergoing legislative proceedings.<sup>12</sup> The initiative updates the mining framework to align it with the energy transition, strengthening licensing and requiring early planning for mine closure and abandonment, incorporating social, labour and human rights criteria to mitigate impacts on territories, and incorporating guidelines related to the prohibition of thermal coal exploration and exploitation through a transition plan to achieve climate goals. The bill introduces tools such as Areas Suitable and Excluded for Mining (ZAM and ZEM, respectively), greater state oversight capabilities, and the formalisation of small-scale miners. In addition, it integrates principles of participation, prior consultation, local hiring and gender equality, consistent with the government's commitment to more regulated mining, with responsible and socially just closures, and subordinated to the country's productive diversification, while marking a state-led commitment that, if approved, would completely change mining policy in Colombia.

In addition, it proposes moving beyond the primary-export model that has characterised the sector, positioning mining as a strategic lever for national reindustrialisation, energy transition and territorial development. The initiative seeks to link mineral exploitation with national production processes, promoting added value, strengthening MSMEs and productive chains that boost regional economies. By reaffirming the state's sovereignty over mineral resources and establishing

<sup>9</sup> Portafolio. (2022, 8 octubre). Gobierno no firmará nuevos contratos para exploración de hidrocarburos. Disponible en: <https://www.portafolio.co/economia/gobierno/gobierno-no-firmara-nuevos-contratos-para-exploracion-de-hidrocarburos-572323>

<sup>10</sup> Decreto 0949 de 2025. (2025, 28 de agosto). Por el cual se modifica el Decreto 1047 de 2024. Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo. <https://www.mincit.gov.co/normatividad/decretos/2025/decreto-0949-del-28-de-agosto-de-2025>

<sup>11</sup> Ministerio de Minas y Energía. (2025a). ABC: Proyecto de Ley Minera para la Transición Energética Justa, la Reindustrialización Nacional y la Minería para la Vida. <https://www.minenergia.gov.co/documents/14572/ABC-Ley-Minera-2025.pdf>; Ministerio de Minas y Energía. (2025b). ¿Qué es la propuesta "Ley Minera para la Transición Energética Justa, la Reindustrialización Nacional y la Minería para la Vida"? <https://www.minenergia.gov.co/es/misional/mineria/>; Ministerio de Minas y Energía. (2025c). Articulado del Proyecto de Nueva Ley Minera. [https://www.minenergia.gov.co/documents/14579/Articulado\\_PL\\_-\\_Nueva\\_Ley\\_Minera\\_dp8o2Au.pdf](https://www.minenergia.gov.co/documents/14579/Articulado_PL_-_Nueva_Ley_Minera_dp8o2Au.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Ministerio de Minas y Energía. (2025d, 1 octubre). Gobierno radica ante el Congreso la nueva Ley Minera para la transición energética y la reindustrialización del país. <https://www.minenergia.gov.co/es/sala-de-prensa/noticias-index/gobierno-radica-ante-congreso-nueva-ley-minera-para-transicion-energetica-y-reindustrializacion-del-pais/>





more transparent contracting mechanisms geared towards the public interest, the project seeks to ensure that the economic benefits of mining are distributed more equitably among the state, communities and producing territories. In this way, the strategic use of minerals<sup>13</sup> —including those essential for clean technologies— presents an opportunity to integrate mining, industry and energy transition, correcting the historically weak link between these areas and paving the way for a development model based on innovation, productive diversification and internal transformation of the country's resources.<sup>14</sup>

Although the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME) maintains that this law is fundamental for the country's future, as it reinforces the State's leadership, prioritises life, the environment and communities, and links mining with energy transition and reindustrialisation<sup>15</sup>, companies and

trade associations in the sector have expressed concerns. The Colombian Mining Association (ACM) describes it as 'anti-mining,' considering that it limits private and foreign investment, jeopardises energy security and employment, creates legal uncertainty — especially due to the scope of prior consultations and the participation of ethnic communities — and could favour illegal mining and affect territorial competences<sup>16</sup>. In addition, they argue that the transition should be gradual and financed largely with resources that currently come from these industries, while allowing more time to meet climate targets and seeking alternatives to replace the income from the General Royalties System (SGR) and rent so as not to destabilise public finances. Given this scenario, it is essential to promote spaces for dialogue and multi-stakeholder consultation that prioritise territorial planning with a human rights approach, economic diversification, poverty reduction and a just transition, so as to ensure adequate coexistence between communities, mining and other economic activities.

Within this institutional architecture, which is being consolidated within the framework of the Just Energy Transition (JET), the 'Corredor de Vida del Cesar' programme is part of the national government's strategic commitment to productive diversification, socio-ecological restoration and

13 According to Agreement 01 of 2023 and Resolution 1006 of 2023, issued by the National Mining Agency (ANM), "strategic minerals for Colombia are those considered to be of greatest importance in guaranteeing the supply of minerals to meet domestic demand, associated with the development of industry necessary for the advancement of a just energy transition, re-industrialisation of the economy, agricultural development and public infrastructure, and strengthening of production chains for the exploitation of strategic minerals in the country, associated with meeting the different needs of Colombians and the economic and social strengthening of the regions and the country in general." In 2012, the government published a list of 10 strategic minerals, but in 2023 this list was updated through the aforementioned resolution, which identified 17 minerals, including copper, nickel, gold, silver, metallurgical coal, among others. Taken from: <https://mineriaencolombia.anm.gov.co/contenido/minerales-estrategicos>

14 Ministerio de Minas y Energía. (2025a). ABC: Proyecto de Ley Minera para la Transición Energética Justa, la Reindustrialización Nacional y la Minería para la Vida. <https://www.minenergia.gov.co/documents/14572/ABC-Ley-Minera-2025.pdf>

15 Ministerio de Minas y Energía. [MME] (2025, 5 de octubre). Tres razones por las que proyecto de nueva ley minera es clave para futuro de Colombia. <https://www.minenergia.gov.co/es/sala-de-prensa/noticias-index/tres-razones-por-las-que-proyecto-de-nueva-ley-minera-es-clave-para-futuro-de-colombia/>

16 Asociación Colombiana de Minería. (2025, 10 de octubre). Análisis jurídico sobre el proyecto de ley de minería en Colombia. <https://acmineria.com.co/blog/analisis-juridico-leymineral/>



environmental protection in municipalities historically dependent on coal mining in the department —Agustín Codazzi, Becerril, Chiriguaná, El Paso and La Jagua de Ibirico—, in direct accordance with the principles of a just, territorial and participatory transition. Through its four components —socio-environmental governance, bioeconomy, ecological restoration and community monitoring— the ‘Corredor de Vida’ proposes moving beyond a development model focused exclusively on extraction, promoting new economies based on the sustainable use of biodiversity, the recovery of strategic ecosystems, integrated water management, the strengthening of local production systems, and the active participation of communities, workers, and social organisations in decision-making. It should be noted that this programme is led by the environmental sector, through the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MADS). According to the Alexander von Humboldt Biological Resources Research Institute (IAvH), ‘the Cesar Life Corridor is the country’s biggest commitment to fair economic, social and energy transition, with a focus on territorial innovation.’<sup>17</sup>

In this process, CREER has played a strategic role as a coordinating actor in the methodological design and early implementation of actions in the field within the ‘governance’ component, working in coordination with El Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt (IAvH) (the Alexander von Humboldt Biological Resources Research Institute) (IAvH), the Alma-Natura Consortium and Programa de Desarrollo y Paz del Cesar y La Guajira (PDP-CG) (The Cesar and La Guajira Development and Peace Programme). These joint efforts have contributed to strengthening socio-environmental governance, building spaces for multi-stakeholder dialogue, promoting the bioeconomy as a real alternative for productive diversification—through training, technical support, and the structuring of community initiatives—and consolidating local capacities for ecological restoration and community environmental monitoring. In this way, the ‘Corredor de Vida’ is projected not only as an environmental policy instrument, but also as a comprehensive platform for the productive and social transformation of the territory, aligned with the environmental, labour and economic challenges posed by the energy transition in Cesar.

17 Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt. (20 de agosto de 2025). La Casa Humboldt llega al Corredor de Vida del Cesar. <https://www.humboldt.org.co/noticias/la-casa-humboldt-llega-al-corredor-de-vida-del-cesar>



In parallel, Law 2294 of 2023, which issues the 2022–2026 National Development Plan ‘Colombia, World Power of Life,’ formalised the creation of Special Mining Districts for Productive Diversification (DMEDP). This figure establishes as strategic axes for its implementation the land use planning around water, the protection of environmental determinants and areas of special interest to guarantee the right to food, as well as productive transformation and climate action. The DMEDPs are defined as: “an instrument of socio-environmental planning, management and institutional coordination to achieve sustainability in the regions where mining operations and projects are carried out, promote partnerships between small-scale miners, as well as industrialisation based on strategic minerals, the development of new productive alternatives, labour retraining, if necessary, the concerted resolution of conflicts caused by mining, and the creation of conditions to guarantee the food sovereignty of the populations.” For its regulation, Decree 0977 of 2024 was issued, establishing the principles, objectives, criteria, mechanisms and tools for the identification, prioritisation and delimitation of DMEDPs, as well as for the preparation, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the Strategic Management Plan. Consequently, they are conceived as a public policy instrument aimed at transforming economies that are highly dependent on mining and promoting their diversification.

On the one hand, the La Guajira DMEDP is planned to be delimited in the municipalities of Barrancas, Hatonuevo and Albania, in accordance with selection criteria established by the Mining and Energy Planning Unit (UPME)<sup>18</sup> related to the historical link between these municipalities and coal mining. Carbones de El Cerrejón is one of the ‘world’s largest open-pit coal mining operations, with more than 12,500 direct and contract workers and an integrated operation of extraction, rail transport and

export to Puerto Bolívar’<sup>19</sup>. Although the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME) and the Mining and Energy Planning Unit (UPME) have presented technical information, scores and arguments supporting the prioritisation and selection of the municipalities included in the DMEDP, in various forums for dialogue with local communities and stakeholders, dissatisfaction has been expressed with the delimited area. Some stakeholders point out that coal operations cross a large part of La Guajira to the port of Puerto Bolívar, in the north of Uribia, and therefore consider that the impacts are not limited to the prioritised municipalities. Consequently, they have argued that the DMEDP should consider, at least indirectly, actions aimed at other municipalities where the effects of coal mining are also evident. In particular, they have emphasised the need to review the role of the port area, which has experienced specific impacts associated with coal exports and has historically had limited participation in the sector’s decision-making processes.

However, these processes have not progressed significantly in La Guajira (compared to the level of progress in the dialogue on this issue in Cesar), where the issues and processes associated with the closure of mining and economic diversification have not yet been addressed in depth in the department’s public agenda, which has been causing great concern and uncertainty among communities in the areas of influence, as well as trade unions and public institutions. Although the government has made a major commitment to the Pact for a Just Energy Transition in La Guajira, its emphasis has been more on the introduction of renewable energies and less on the issue of mining closure or diversification.

On the other hand, there is a draft resolution “*delimiting the Special Mining District for Productive Diversification in the municipalities of Agustín Codazzi, Becerril, Chiriguaná, El Paso and La Jagua de Ibirico, in the department of Cesar, called*

18 Unidad de Planeación Minero-Energética (UPME). (2025). Diagnóstico del Distrito Minero Especial para la Diversificación Productiva (DMEDP) de la Guajira. [https://acmineria.com.co/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Diagnostico\\_distrito\\_minero\\_especial\\_para\\_la\\_diversificacion\\_productiva\\_de\\_la\\_Guajira.pdf](https://acmineria.com.co/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Diagnostico_distrito_minero_especial_para_la_diversificacion_productiva_de_la_Guajira.pdf)

19 Asociación Colombiana de Minería [ACM] (s.f.). Cerrejón. Tomado de: <https://acmineria.com.co/tsmcolombia/compania/cerrejon/>





the “Special District of the Cesar Life Corridor”<sup>20</sup>, which has yet to be approved for implementation. Even so, in previous exercises to set up the working groups that will influence its implementation, sectoral working groups were proposed on topics such as comprehensive management of mining operations and closures, rural development, reactivation of the secondary and tertiary sectors, environmental governance, ethnic issues, human rights, equality and peace.

<sup>20</sup> Ministerio de Minas y Energía. [MME] (s.f.). Proyecto de resolución “Por la cual se delimita el Distrito Minero Especial para la Diversificación Productiva en los municipios de Agustín Codazzi, Becerril, Chiriguán, El Paso y la Jagua de Ibirico, en el departamento del Cesar, denominado “Distrito Especial del Corredor de Vida del Cesar”. [https://www.minenergia.gov.co/documents/13026/Proyecto\\_de\\_Resolucion\\_DMEDP\\_Cesar.pdf](https://www.minenergia.gov.co/documents/13026/Proyecto_de_Resolucion_DMEDP_Cesar.pdf)

## WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF SPECIAL MINING DISTRICTS FOR PRODUCTIVE DIVERSIFICATION (DMEDP)?

DMEDPs represent an institutional commitment to transform territories historically dependent on mining into more diversified and resilient economies. Among their main opportunities is the possibility of promoting territorially based productive diversification, supported by technical assessments that identify agricultural potential, coexistence of economic activities, and opportunities for environmental restoration. They also pave the way for strengthening food sovereignty, promoting sustainable production systems, and advancing the recovery of degraded ecosystems. Within the framework of the Just Energy Transition (JET), DMEDPs also offer the opportunity to promote labour reconversion by boosting new sectors such as agribusiness, ecotourism and manufacturing, as well as creating training and employment pathways for workers affected by the decline in mining activity. However, one of the major challenges is to ensure that these alternatives generate decent working conditions and wages for the economic development of the territories.

Nevertheless, it is possible to glimpse a series of major challenges or risks in terms of their implementation. For example, tensions arising from regulatory overlap and coexistence with mining, hydrocarbon and energy projects have been identified, requiring high levels of institutional coordination and multi-stakeholder dialogue in contexts marked by mistrust and polarisation. Likewise, implementation faces the risk of saturation and duplication of participatory spaces, which may affect the quality of participation, especially for women and local leadership. For this reason, it is essential to articulate the DMEDPs—or any mining planning strategy—with existing mechanisms, strengthen institutional capacities, and ensure effective participation mechanisms that enable a genuine transformation in line with local land-use planning guidelines.



According to what has been announced by the national Government, the department of Cesar will host 45 strategic projects with an estimated investment of COP 433 billion, aimed at productive diversification, social infrastructure and environmental restoration. Their governance will be overseen by an Interinstitutional and Social Roundtable, bringing together public entities, communities, trade unions, the private sector and local authorities to advance a Just Transition Pact in the region.

In parallel, the Government is working to elevate this initiative to a CONPES document, which would allow for the securing of long-term resources and more robust interinstitutional monitoring. This CONPES, announced by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Mines and Energy since 2024 and being developed with the National Planning Department (DNP), seeks to establish a national framework to address the labour impacts of the energy transition, with particular emphasis on the departments of Cesar and La Guajira. Its objective is to articulate job training programmes, skills reconversion, strengthening of local institutional capacities and the dynamisation of alternative sectors, integrating currently dispersed instruments (Public Employment Service – SPE, National Training Service – SENA, productive incentives, public investment and

technical education). Its significance lies in the fact that it would be the first national public policy specifically designed to support the labour transition from fossil-based sectors to new economies, ensuring job protection and new opportunities for workers and territories.

In this process, the labour sector has played a fundamental role, particularly through the Workers for a Just Transition Collective, a trade union alliance created in 2023 by SINTRADEM, SINTRACARBÓN, SINTRAMIENERGÉTICA and SINTRADRUMMOND—organisations with first-hand knowledge of the realities of the mining corridor in Cesar, La Guajira and Magdalena. The Collective emerged in response to a climate of growing uncertainty, marked by abrupt decisions such as the unilateral closure of operations by the mining company Prodeco (Glencore). This episode, coupled with the institutional neglect that workers and former workers have long pointed out, revealed the absence of an official roadmap to address mining decline and prompted trade unions to take on the task of planning their own future. In this way, the Collective has become not only a space for defending labour rights, but also a proactive actor proposing productive, social and territorial alternatives for a post-extractive scenario. This vision is reflected in the “Sectoral Petition for a Just Energy Transition”.



## SECTORAL PETITION FOR A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION IN THE COAL SECTOR<sup>21</sup>

The sectoral petition presented by the trade union organisations of the coal value chain—SINTRACARBÓN, SINTRAMIENERGÉTICA, SINTRADRUMMOND and SINTRADEM—constitutes a **sector-wide instrument** that brings together, in a single document, a shared agenda of labour, social and territorial demands in response to the scenario of the progressive decline of the coal industry. Unlike traditional bipartite negotiations focused on internal labour conditions, this petition explicitly incorporates both companies and the State as actors involved in managing the energy transition.

The document is based on a diagnosis shared by the trade union organisations, according to which the projected decline of thermal coal—driven by climatic, regulatory and market factors—could generate significant impacts in terms of employment, household income, regional economies and the deepening of historical inequalities in territories highly dependent on this activity. Based on this diagnosis, the petition sets out a series of demands aimed at preventing abrupt transition scenarios and ensuring a more balanced distribution of the social and economic costs of productive transformation.

The main pillars of the petition include the following:

### Labour reconversion and economic diversification

The document proposes training and labour reconversion programmes, partnerships with SENA, labour demand studies and mechanisms aimed at facilitating the integration of workers into alternative sectors. It also proposes the creation of a Fund for Economic Diversification, financed through business contributions, public resources and cooperation, to support collective productive projects and new economic activities in the departments of La Guajira and Cesar.

### Social protection, economic security and trade union guarantees

The petition includes measures related to the continuity of contributions to the social security system, compensation schemes linked to seniority or loss of working capacity, debt relief with employers, educational protection for families and restrictions on outsourcing. It also envisages the strengthening of trade union organisations and the adoption of collective reparation measures in response to the impacts associated with mine closures.

### Gender and care approach

The document recognises that the energy transition has differentiated impacts by gender and proposes specific studies, the creation of care centres, labour inclusion programmes with a gender perspective and measures aimed at ensuring the effective participation of women in spaces for dialogue and decision-making.

21 CNV Internationaal. (2024). *Pliego final 240425 firmado*. [https://justtransition.cnvinternationaal.nl/\\_Resources/Persistent/e/f/3/f/ef3f-d5e94e561ac1cf1c59fb2c710b2664c1d2c9/PLIEGO%20FINAL%20240425%20FIRMADO%20.pdf](https://justtransition.cnvinternationaal.nl/_Resources/Persistent/e/f/3/f/ef3f-d5e94e561ac1cf1c59fb2c710b2664c1d2c9/PLIEGO%20FINAL%20240425%20FIRMADO%20.pdf)



### **Reparation and just territorial transition**

The petition incorporates demands related to the territorial impacts of mining, including comprehensive reparation programmes, cumulative environmental impact assessments and proposals for post-mining land use with basic infrastructure for agricultural, forestry, tourism or community-based activities.

### **Institutional architecture and state co-responsibility**

The document proposes the creation of public policy instruments, such as a CONPES on productive reconversion, labour observatories and mechanisms for interinstitutional coordination. It also proposes that mine closure plans include labour and territorial obligations, and that the National Mining Agency (ANM) make the issuance of final clearance certificates conditional upon verification of full compliance with these responsibilities.

Based on the dialogues held, it can be said that this sectoral petition has been interpreted by social actors as an instrument that redefines the place of a **Just Energy transition**, situating it within the realm of public policy rather than solely within corporate management. It has also been noted that it expands the traditional scope of collective bargaining by proposing it as a mechanism for organising processes of productive transformation, in addition to regulating labour relations, and by setting standards aimed at a more balanced distribution of responsibilities among companies, government and workers in the context of an ongoing structural change.

From this perspective, the petition has been understood not only as a programmatic document, but also as a political and institutional reference point for the debate on just

transition in the sector. In this regard, the observation of Maurice Van Beers of CNV International is illustrative, as he noted that “**the value of collective agreements lies in their ability to bring actors together at a common table effectively, with commitments that are truly binding and that help align all parties.**”

Likewise, in the public debate surrounding the presentation of the petition, tensions have emerged regarding its feasibility, which are not explained solely by the specific content of the demands, but by the way in which these could expand the traditional scope of corporate obligations. In particular, the petition brings together responsibilities that correspond to both companies and the State and presents them in an integrated manner, which has given rise to different interpretations regarding the nature of the commitments that could fall upon companies, their duration and their financial scope.

From this perspective, the critical reactions that have emerged in relation to the petition are not necessarily aimed at questioning the principle of corporate co-responsibility in the transition, but rather at highlighting uncertainties related to the gradual implementation of obligations, the distribution of burdens among actors and the mechanisms envisaged for their implementation. In this sense, the debate has pointed out that the feasibility of the proposed obligations will depend on the definition of regulatory and public policy frameworks that establish clear rules, differentiated roles and shared financing mechanisms, ensuring that the responsibilities assigned to companies do not exceed their capacity to act or replace functions that properly belong to the State.



An example of this is Joint Resolution 40324 of 2025 issued by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME)<sup>22</sup>, which created the Social Dialogue Roundtable to guarantee decent and dignified working conditions during the energy transition of the coal sector. Although it is a government initiative, its design reflects several of the demands put forward by trade unions in the sectoral petition: it recognises sector-wide collective bargaining, incorporates principles of decent work, a gender perspective and effective trade union participation, and establishes a tripartite body responsible for discussing and monitoring the labour impacts of coal decline. It also provides for oversight by entities such as the Ombudsman's Office and international organisations, which lends greater legitimacy to the process. In terms of the country's transition agenda, this Roundtable elevates the energy transition to a labour and territorial issue as well, requiring that any decision regarding closures, reconversion or diversification be adopted with social participation and clear safeguards for workers' rights and the socio-economic stability of mining regions.

While it remains a challenge to involve mining companies in this process, it is important to

open channels of dialogue to reach minimum agreements around the concrete proposals that are being put forward—for the first time in the country—collectively by multiple trade unions. This reflects the importance and scale of adopting a responsible exit approach for the Colombian Caribbean.

More recently, in November 2025, the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) on climate change was held in Belém (Brazil), where the Belém Action Mechanism (BAM) was advanced. This is a formal mechanism for a just transition aimed at coordinating support, resources and best practices to achieve a transition towards low-carbon economies, involving vulnerable communities as well as workers from fossil fuel sectors, particularly in territories that have historically depended on these industries<sup>23</sup>.

In this global context, Colombia took advantage of COP30 in Brazil to present a roadmap for the gradual phase-out of fossil fuels from a climate, social and territorial justice perspective. The Colombian State, through the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MADS), promoted a high-level international initiative by

22 Resolución 40324 (21 de julio de 2025) <https://acmineria.com.co/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Resolucion-40324-21-07-2025.pdf>

23 United Nations University - Institute for Environment and Human Security (2025). 5 Outcomes from COP 30: What the Belém Political Package Really Delivered. <https://unu.edu/ehs/article/5-outcomes-cop-30-what-belem-political-package-really-delivered>

presenting a roadmap for the progressive elimination of fossil fuels. This proposal is based on three structural pillars<sup>24</sup>:

1. Address the fossil fuel value chain comprehensively, from exploration to final consumption, in order to ensure a coherent and complete phase-out
2. Promote an ecological transition that incorporates criteria of social, labour and territorial justice, particularly considering the vulnerability of regions dependent on extraction
3. Position the country as a coordinating actor in global climate change forums, with the aim of consolidating multilateral consensus to advance towards energy systems that are less dependent on fossil fuels

Although these decisions do not mandate the immediate closure of the coal industry, they do signal a shift in the Government's direction (at least during the 2022–2026 period) towards treating this activity as a sector with a limited horizon that requires specific management in the territories that depend on it. Taken together, new regulations, ongoing reforms, dialogue spaces and international initiatives show that the country is reconfiguring, at different scales and with varied responses, the role of coal in its economy.

On the other hand, the validity of mining titles until 2034<sup>25</sup> together with the explicit recognition that factors such as the global market, climate regulation and private investment decisions will also be decisive in the future of coal, are noteworthy. In the business sphere, recent dynamics show that the reconfiguration of the sector does not depend solely on state policy, but also on profound transformations in international markets and corporate strategies. Major companies operating in the mining corridor of Cesar and in La Guajira have begun

to adjust their operations, citing declining demand, reduced competitiveness and less attractive prices for coal destined for distant markets. These adjustments have translated into production cuts and announcements of “alignment” with new market conditions, as seen with Drummond and Cerrejón<sup>26</sup>, and even the suspension of operations, as occurred in 2020 in the case of the La Francia mine operated by CNR<sup>27</sup>. Alongside this, a key milestone in the sector was the decision by Prodeco (a subsidiary of Glencore) in 2020 to withdraw from the country, after keeping its mines closed during the pandemic due to economic unviability. This exit exposed the social, fiscal, environmental and cultural costs of poorly planned closure: massive losses of direct and indirect employment, a sharp decline in royalties, contraction of local commerce, deepening gender gaps (alongside an escalation in Gender-Based Violence [GBV]) and increased social conflict within the Corridor. For the municipalities of Cesar and neighbouring La Guajira, and indeed for the country as a whole, this experience became a significant precedent, demonstrating that the reduction of coal is not only a regulatory matter, but is already underway through corporate decisions.

Furthermore, this case highlighted that, in the absence of clear rules and monitoring mechanisms for mine closure in Colombia, the acción de tutela has played a fundamental role, becoming a key instrument for demanding corporate accountability and participation. The ruling of the Constitutional Court (resulting from a tutela filed by communities of the “Life Corridor”) through Judgment T-029 of 2025, ordered Prodeco to expand its closure plan development process to include meaningful public participation as a condition for submitting the plan to the environmental authority. In doing so, the judiciary had to intervene to fill institutional gaps and ensure minimum standards of transparency, co-responsibility and social oversight.

24 Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible. (2025). *Colombia impulsa la hojaderutaparalaeliminaciónprogresivade combustiblesfósilesenlaCOP30*. <https://www.minambiente.gov.co/cop30-colombia-impulsa-la-hoja-de-ruta-para-la-eliminacion-progresiva-de-combustibles-fosiles/> ▶ La Silla Vacía. (2024). *Esta es la declaración que lidera Colombia para frenar los combustibles fósiles*. <https://www.lasillavacia.com/silla-amazonia-amazonia-en-breve/esta-es-la-declaracion-que-lidera-colombia-para-frenar-los-combustibles-fosiles/> ▶

25 Agencia Nacional de Minería (ANM), Expediente 081-91, Título minero Carbones del Cerrejón – Cerrejón, fecha de expiración 26 de febrero de 2034, consultado en Anna Minería, [16 de febrero de 2026], <https://annamineria.anm.gov.co> ▶

26 Portafolio. (2024). *Drummond anuncia que bajará su producción en Colombia por condiciones del mercado*. <https://www.portafolio.co/energia/drummond-anuncia-que-bajara-su-produccion-en-colombia-por-condiciones-del-mercado-627412>; ▶ El Tiempo. (2025, 14 febrero). *Drummond se suma a Cerrejón y también disminuirá su producción de carbón por difíciles condiciones de mercado*. <https://www.eltiempo.com/economia/sectores/drummond-se-suma-a-cerrejon-y-tambien-disminuira-su-produccion-de-carbon-por-dificiles-condiciones-de-mercado-3442528> ▶

27 CNV Internacional. (2025). *El cierre de la mina La Francia: un espejo de desafíos en la transición energética*. <https://justtransition.cnvinternacional.nl/es/actualidad/Articulos/el-cierre-de-la-mina-la-francia-un-espejo-de-desafios-en-la-transicion-energetica> ▶



## VOICES FROM MINING COMPANIES: THE CASE OF DRUMMOND LTD.

According to the visit carried out to the Pribbenow Mine and the dialogue held with the company, representatives emphasized that their operation has been a driver of progress with social and economic results. They noted that a reflection of this evolution can be seen in living conditions indicators from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), which show how in municipalities within the company's area of influence—such as La Jagua de Ibirico, Chiriguaná, and El Paso—Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) have declined significantly. While in the 1990s (when operations began) the index exceeded 60%, by 2018 it had fallen to below 30% (DANE, n.d.). They also noted that the value of royalties, taxes, shares, and contributions for 2024 amounted to approximately USD 916 million.

These substantial improvements are supported by robust budget execution which, in 2024 alone, exceeded 135.978 billion Colombian pesos (approximately USD 33.3 million) in total social investment, covering employee benefits as well as programs for local communities. Among the most significant impacts is a high-impact housing project benefiting 240 families in the municipalities of La Jagua de Ibirico and Chiriguaná. This is in addition to more than 520 interventions in educational infrastructure and the awarding of 244 scholarships for higher education. Furthermore, Drummond has promoted economic diversification through the financing of 474 business units and support for productive projects such as those of cacao producers in the Perijá region, enabling these producers to increase productivity from 230 kg to 800 kg per hectare. This

performance has allowed Drummond to consolidate its social license to operate, achieving first place in reputation within Colombia's mining sector according to the Brújula Minera study, with favorability levels of 93% in Cesar and 91% in Magdalena.

Finally, during the visit there was also discussion of the company's roadmap toward carbon neutrality. It was observed that the company has developed specific reductions, compensation, and management actions in line with its climate agenda, including:

1. Reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which will be addressed by reducing: (i) CO<sub>2</sub> emissions derived from fuel use, through initiatives aimed at implementing alternative fuels; (ii) fugitive emissions generated in mines and gas operations; and (iii) CO<sub>2</sub> emissions associated with electricity consumption. In this regard, solar energy projects such as Cañahuate I have already been implemented, and these actions are expected to be complemented with energy efficiency programs. Within this framework, one of the established targets is to reduce direct CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 30% by 2030.
2. Implementation of compensation strategies, including renewable energy projects and nature-based solutions.
3. Management of indirect emissions across the entire supply chain, including suppliers of goods and services as well as clients.

Although progress is evident in the social and environmental strategies implemented by companies, it remains a significant challenge



to open and sustain dialogue around the definition of, and opportunities that could arise from, a “responsible phase-out” of coal mining. Both in discourse and in practice, a long-term continuity of operations still predominates, even in a context marked by transformations in the energy market and by growing climate commitments at the global and national levels.

In this context, it is essential to strengthen and promote channels of dialogue that incorporate the business perspective and help clarify corporate responsibilities and roles in mine closure processes. These processes must be accompanied by effective mechanisms for community participation and multi-stakeholder dialogue, bringing together governments, communities, and companies, as well as by adequate conditions of access to information that enable informed participation.

Likewise, it is key to advance in the understanding and adoption of human rights due diligence standards that guide the management of the social, economic, and environmental

impacts associated with transitions and coal mine closure processes. This approach must be built on a deep understanding of territorial realities and local dynamics in order to promote responses that are more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable.

#### **For more information:**

<https://drummondLtd.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Informe-de-Sostenibilidad-2024-Drummond-Ltd.pdf> ➤

<https://www.brujulaminera.com.co/noticias-y-presencia-en-medios/ranking-de-reputacion-2021-bm> ➤

[https://naturgas.com.co/drummond-es-la-minera-con-mejor-reputacion-del-pais-como-lo-logro/](https://nатурgas.com.co/drummond-es-la-minera-con-mejor-reputacion-del-pais-como-lo-logro/) ➤

<https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema-2/pobreza-y-condiciones-de-vida/necesidades-basicas-insatisfechas-nbi> ➤



In this context, a central question emerges for public policy analysis and territorial planning: to what extent is it possible to sustain the thesis of the structural decline of coal when signals from the international market and corporate narratives offer divergent trajectories, and what implications does this ambiguity have for the development of transition and development strategies in mining territories? What is beginning to take shape is a complex and not contradiction-free scenario: on the one hand, several companies in the mining corridor have begun adjusting their operations to protect profitability in response to signals of a potential structural decline in coal demand—reflected in lower prices, reduced competitiveness and increased uncertainty in traditional markets; yet, on the other hand, in more direct dialogue spaces, some companies insist that in Colombia “there is still plenty of coal”, that they expect to remain for a considerable period, and that global

energy demand, including thermal coal, continues to show growth trends, particularly driven by countries such as China.

This narrative of continuity is not only present in some corporate discourses but is also shared by territorial authorities in regions highly dependent on coal. During local dialogue processes, this position was explicitly expressed by the Secretary of Mines of the Government of Cesar:



*We still have many years of prosperity ahead of us, of ‘boom times’, despite international prices. Even if we move towards an economic transition, it will be difficult for it to generate for workers the same income that mining currently provides. In our regions, it will be very hard to find another sector capable of generating employment on the same scale as mining. Therefore, as long as millions of tonnes of coal remain, the possibility of opening new mining rounds in the future cannot be ruled out.”<sup>28</sup>*

This coexistence of narratives—one oriented towards adjustment and the other towards continuity—creates additional tensions in the territories, where the social, fiscal and labour costs of any restructuring are borne predominantly by local communities that are not yet adequately prepared, lack clear productive alternatives and do not have a sufficiently planned transition. Local authorities and trade unions have warned about these impacts and the risks of moving towards an accelerated transition without adequate protection mechanisms.

<sup>28</sup> Secretary of Mines, Government of Cesar, intervention at the event “Mining Territories in Transition: Local Institutional Management for a Responsible Mining Transition – Cesar”, Valledupar, 8 August 2025.



In departments such as La Guajira and Cesar, coal mining remains the main source of formal employment, the largest contributor to public financing, and the backbone of multiple economic activities related to services, trade and transport<sup>29</sup>. For this reason, any change in the sector is immediately felt in household incomes, in the budgetary stability of local governments and in the day-to-day economy of mining municipalities.

In other words, while at the national level there is growing discourse around the energy transition and reducing dependence on fossil fuels, mining territories continue to experience a reality in which coal still sustains a large part of their economic and social fabric. **This tension between the national vision and the territorial reality—and even territorial planning—constitutes one of the major challenges of the transition in Colombia:** ensuring that shifts towards a more sustainable energy and productive model are planned in advance and in a participatory manner, so that mining communities do not disproportionately bear the costs of the process.

In this context of uncertainty regarding the future of coal, and in the face of still nascent and evolving state responses, various organisations and territorial collectives have emerged in the departments of Cesar and La Guajira which, from a grassroots level, seek to anticipate and prepare post-coal scenarios, influencing public debate on productive reconversion, economic diversification and justice in the transition.

These initiatives aim to provide vision, coordination and concrete proposals to promote participatory, equitable and sustainable processes in response to the gradual move away from mining dependence. One such effort, grounded in a regional approach, is the Workers for a Just Transition Collective, which has placed particular emphasis on labour reconversion, economic



diversification and social protection for those currently dependent on the coal industry.

In Cesar, Coomustier stands out as a cooperative and social organisation working to strengthen the local economy through agroecology, food sovereignty and sustainable community development. Coomustier has received support from various organisations and institutions, such as the University of Magdalena, CNV Internacional and Movilizatorio, among others, which has strengthened its capacity to promote viable productive alternatives and foster economic models based on collaboration, respect for the territory and community autonomy.

In La Guajira, meanwhile, the La Guajira Post-Coal Corporation emerged<sup>30</sup>, a technical, non-prof-

29 Natural Resource Governance Institute & SEI. (2025). *Transiciones justas del carbón en Colombia*. <https://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/coal-transition-colombia-sei2025.pdf>; Yanguas Parra, P. A. (2025). *How Colombia is responding to changes in international coal demand and the transition challenges they bring*. IISD – JET-CR Knowledge Hub. <https://www.jetknowledge.org/insights/colombia-international-coal-demand-energy-transition-challenges>

30 Nace 'Corporación La Guajira Post Carbón', una apuesta para preparar el departamento ante el cierre de Cerrejón en 2034. Tomado de: <https://guajiranews.com/actualidad-politica/nace-corporacion-la-guajira-post-carbon-una-apuesta-para-preparar-el-departamento-ante-el-cierre-de-cerrejon-en-2034/>



it organisation created by a group of professionals from La Guajira committed to the future of the department in light of a potential closure of the El Cerrejón mine in the coming decade, and to preparing the department for this scenario. It functions as a think tank to support La Guajira's post-coal mining development, aiming to become a technical and planning reference point for reconversion, reactivation and economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability. The corporation seeks to anticipate, coordinate and promote solutions that will enable La Guajira to reinvent itself without dependence on coal, strengthening the institutional fabric and collaborating with public entities, industry associations, the academic community and other territorial actors in the formulation of inclusive public policies and development strategies.

Taken together, these and other organisations, along with others, represent initiatives emerging from within the territories themselves and from grassroots actors, seeking to ensure that the process of coal mine closure is not addressed solely as a technical issue, but as a project of territorial transformation in which the active participation of workers, communities and local actors is central to building fair and sustainable economic, social and environmental alternatives for the future of Cesar and La Guajira.

Moreover, in the run-up to Colombia's presidential elections in mid-2026, the debate on

coal takes on a new political dimension. On the one hand, pre-candidates have included in their agendas the need to recognise the economic importance of coal-producing regions, although they differ in how to approach the energy transition: while some propose maintaining coal as a regional pillar of employment and income, others emphasise the urgency of a transition grounded in socio-territorial justice<sup>31</sup>. On the other hand, certain leaders explicitly call for a more accelerated phase-out or reduction of fossil fuels, including coal, as a central component of the country's environmental and economic policy.

This electoral dynamic adds further pressure on both corporate and state decisions in the sector: mining companies warn that the stability of contracts, royalties and investments may depend on the electoral outcome, while coal-producing regions perceive that promises of productive diversification and labour protection are at the centre of the political agenda. In this way, uncertainty regarding the future of coal in Colombia and in mining territories is not only shaped by global markets or corporate decisions, but also by the electoral outcome that will define regulatory frameworks, incentives and transition policies in the years ahead.

<sup>31</sup> La República. (2025). *Precandidatos defienden rol y aportes fiscales del carbón en la transición energética*. <https://www.larepublica.co/economia/precandidatos-defienden-rol-y-aportes-fiscales-del-carbon-en-la-transicion-energetica-4254594>

## POLARISATION AND THE ENERGY TRANSITION

The country's sociopolitical landscape currently faces a complex scenario of polarisation. The energy transition, in particular, has become a highly controversial issue and has intensified this problem. Since 2023, CREER has been researching this topic, through which it has identified several critical areas for action.

Firstly, CREER understands polarisation in the context of the energy transition as the phenomenon whereby the opinions and positions of actors involved in the debate shift towards opposing extremes, without a genuine willingness to build bridges or reach consensus on the strategic aspects of the transition. This divide may arise from differing interests, beliefs or perceptions regarding the benefits and costs of the energy transition. Polarisation implies a reduction in moderation, a loss of nuance and, consequently, a higher degree of confrontation and hostility in interactions between individuals. In this context, polarisation poses significant challenges for decision-making, the effective implementation of policies and the building of the consensus required for a just energy transition.

According to a survey conducted by CREER in Cesar and La Guajira in 2023, multiple challenges are evident in relation to knowledge, information channels, community participation, the relationship between companies, the State and communities, and social conflict, among other aspects. The results show that approximately 67% of respondents did not clearly understand what the energy transition means, 77% were unfamiliar with the concept of decarbonisation, and only 24% reported having a strong understanding of renewable energy sources. Meanwhile, 45% stated that coal mining should continue until a way is found to replace its use in industry, energy generation and other sectors, whereas 22% believed it should be halted immediately to protect against the consequences of climate change. In addition,

78% considered that the country was polarised, while 68% stated that the energy transition was an issue dividing the social, political and economic life of the region; 46% even indicated that they had observed conflicts in how the energy transition was being approached in the region.

Among the main points of controversy between different types of actors are, among others, the following:

- > The imminent (or not) phase-out of coal mining
- > The pace and direction of the transition
- > Resistance to the transition as an ideological opposition
- > The definition and understanding of justice in the transition
- > The responsibility of Colombia and the mining sector (or others) for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as well as uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of mitigation measures
- > High employment expectations associated with the introduction of renewable energy
- Misinformation and oversimplification of discourse in the media

In this regard, limited capacities for effective participation in decision-making processes are identified, as well as weak integration between technical knowledge and territorial knowledge. There are also misaligned expectations regarding the benefits of projects and insufficient understanding of their impacts. In terms of coordination and knowledge management, gaps persist in mechanisms for sharing lessons learned, there is limited capacity to produce and disseminate strategic information among different actors, insufficient contextualised documentation of international experiences, and a lack of clear pathways for conflict resolution. In light of this scenario, it is necessary to design and implement strategies aligned with territorial planning that enable progress towards a Just Energy Transition (JET), tailored to the realities of regions historically dependent on coal.



# 5

## MINING TERRITORIES IN TRANSITION

### Lessons from local voices and international experience



The transition towards post-extractive economies entails profound transformations in the country's mining territories, particularly in the case of coal mining. The dialogues held during the visit of CSRM, IHRB and the Ford Foundation revealed that the scaling down of coal mining triggers social and political processes that directly affect community life, the protection of rights and the capacity of territories to envision futures beyond coal.

Based on the perspectives gathered and their comparison with international experiences, the numerous lessons can be organised into five (5) central pillars that guide dialogue, knowledge generation and decision-making on the transition: consolidating effective social participation as the foundation of different forms of justice; strengthening governance and institutional capacities to anticipate and manage closure in a co-responsible manner; promoting labour reconversion and economic diversification to protect livelihoods; building shared meanings and narratives that align expectations regarding the future of mining territories; and recognising corporate co-responsibility in territorial transformation, understood as the need for companies to actively participate in transition processes by contributing to closure planning, the development of local capacities and the construction of sustainable futures in these territories.



### 5.1. Social participation and justice(s) in the transition

The dialogue spaces developed during the visit, both at the national level and in Cesar and La Guajira, revealed that although formal participation mechanisms exist within mining transition processes, these are largely occasional and focused on the socialization of information, offering limited opportunities to substantively influence decision-making. This gap between the call to participate and the implementation of concrete actions generates the perception that participation is merely procedural, without fully responding to the priorities, needs, and visions for the future held by communities. Consequently, the transition is often perceived as a process imposed “from the outside,” with limited recognition of and impact from local demands and conditions.

The case of Prodeco’s closure clearly illustrates these tensions. Following the cessation of operations at the Calenturitas and La Jagua mines, a group of 14 communities in Cesar filed a tutela action, arguing a violation of their rights to due process and citizen participation, given that the mechanisms provided for their involvement were insufficient. The Constitutional

Court, through the landmark Judgment T-029 of 2025<sup>32</sup>, recognised that the consultation carried out—limited to a single informational meeting—did not guarantee effective participation and ordered the creation of a broad consultation roundtable, involving the community, the State, the company and workers, to advance social, environmental and labour agreements. During 2025, the company held various consultation and co-creation spaces for the development of the closure plan, which, to date, has neither been submitted nor approved.

However, communities continue to report that consultation processes remain unidirectional, fragmented and lacking pedagogical support. Technical information and environmental reports circulate without mediation that would facilitate their understanding or enable informed collective deliberation, generating a widespread perception that closure plans are symbolic, de-contextualised and poorly adapted to local socio-economic realities. This pattern reinforces dynamics of exclusion and undermines the institutional legitimacy of the process, demonstrating

32 AIDA. (2025). Colombia: comunidades y trabajadores ganan el primer fallo judicial sobre cierre de mina de carbón que protege sus derechos. <https://aida-americas.org/en/press/colombia-communities-and-workers-win-first-court-ruling-on-coal-mine-closure-that-protects-their-rights>

that merely convening formal dialogue spaces is insufficient when there is no guarantee of real capacity to influence outcomes.

In the dialogue space held with Wayuu and Afro-descendant communities in La Guajira, participants noted that mining activities take place in a context of uncertainty and mistrust. Community leaders pointed out that the company does not have a final closure plan, but rather a draft, and emphasised that any closure process must be developed in a mandatory, binding manner, with genuine participation from the affected peoples.

This scenario is particularly relevant when considering that the company presented a Preliminary Closure Plan in 2015, later updated in 2023 under the title *Reversal and Closure Plan*<sup>33</sup>. However, despite the existence of this instrument, testimonies from participants in the dialogue in La Guajira reveal significant gaps in community awareness regarding its content, scope, timeline and concrete implications. While the purpose of this document is not to provide a technical analysis of El Cerrejón's Closure Plan, the focus is rather on highlighting the gap between the corporate formulation of closure instruments and the appropriation, understanding and effective participation of communities in these processes, which directly affects levels of trust and territorial legitimacy.

Unresolved structural issues persist, as perceived by communities and expressed through their territorial dialogue processes—territorial dispossession, displacement, impacts on water, cultural and spiritual harm, and the absence of guarantees regarding the “post-closure” period. These factors have contributed to a prolonged history of denial of harm, institutional co-optation and state permissiveness. In this context, uncertainty is not temporary but structural: there is no clarity as to who guarantees compliance with corporate obligations, nor how a dignified life will be ensured after mine closure.

33 Censat Agua Viva. (2025). *El cierre minero en La Guajira desde la perspectiva de la reparación integral del territorio: Un camino para remendar la vida*. Censat Agua Viva. [https://censat.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Cierre-minero\\_14Abril.pdf](https://censat.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Cierre-minero_14Abril.pdf)



*We cannot dream because we have no territory in which to dream”<sup>34</sup>, expressed Wayuu leaders, referring to the loss of the material, cultural and spiritual conditions necessary to envision a collective future.*

In this context, community leadership has insisted that mine closure must be understood as a comprehensive process of reparation and territorial, social and economic reorganisation, whose impacts extend far beyond technical and environmental dimensions and shape the future of territories highly dependent on coal activity. As one local leader stated:



*Today, as we find ourselves in a transition phase marked by the closure of certain mining projects, we see a strong need to coordinate actions among companies, the State and civil society. It is essential to create spaces where the real needs of communities can be heard, particularly in relation to closure plans, given the existing concern about what will happen to the socio-economic status of municipalities that depend entirely on coal. Therefore, dialogue and consultation roundtables are indispensable for the implementation of these closure plans, but also for projecting a future of responsible mining through new processes of energy transformation.”<sup>35</sup>*

34 Wayuu leader from communities in southern La Guajira, intervention at the event “Mining Territories in Transition: Voices of the Wayuu People for Territorial Transformation”, organised by CREER, Paradero, 10 August 2025.

35 Rafael Jiménez, Director of the Diversidad y Vida El Paso Foundation and Coordinator of the Alliance for Diversity of Cesar, intervention at the event “Mining Territories in Transition: Voices of Women, Youth and Diverse Groups in the Cesar–La Guajira Bioregion”, organised by CREER, Valledupar, 8 August 2025.



However, this demand contrasts with institutional practices that, in many cases, continue to treat social participation as an administrative requirement of the extractive cycle, rather than as a fundamental political component for the democratic construction of post-mining futures. The quality of such participation—its capacity to influence decisions, the legitimacy of the actors involved, and the binding nature of agreements—will be decisive in determining whether the energy transition becomes an opportunity to advance social justice or, on the contrary, continues to reproduce historical inequalities and conflicts. This perspective was also expressed by one of the participants in the territorial dialogues in La Guajira:



*I learned that by weaving, different communities—Afro-descendant, Indigenous and peasant—can come together to fight for the restoration of social justice, a right that transforms peoples by reclaiming their ancestral rights and identity. Above all, the energy transition must be a project that reflects our collective voice and recognises communities in all mine closure processes.”<sup>36</sup>*

As Anthony Bebbington noted during the visit, procedural justice is an enabling condition for other forms of justice: without effective mechanisms to deliberate, agree and oversee the territorial future, distributive, restorative and transformative justice will not be possible.

Comparative evidence confirms this diagnosis. International experiences show that transitions with the greatest likelihood of success are those in which participation goes beyond



information-sharing and instead structures the governance of the process. As shared by Haley St. Dennis from IHRB, in Collie, a former coal region in Western Australia undergoing the closure of its mines and power plants,  the transition has been structured through a formal multi-stakeholder governance space that brings together the community, trade unions, local authorities and the state government to co-design the territory's economic future<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Leader of the Tabaco community, intervention at the event “Mining Territories in Transition: Voices of the Wayuu People for Territorial Transformation”, organised by CREER, Valledupar, 8 August 2025.

<sup>37</sup> Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB). (2025). *Collie Just Transition: A blueprint for the world's eight million coal workers*. <https://www.ihrb.org/resources/collies-just-transition-a-blueprint-for-the-worlds-eight-million-coal-workers> 



*In Collie, Australia, we saw a truly promising coal transition. Coal miners and community members speak about closure and transition as an opportunity. There are smiles, hope and conversations focused on the promise and potential of change. There is no resistance to closure, and the reason for this enthusiasm is clear: the process is co-designed.*

*Workers and the community were involved from the outset, with strong leadership from the metalworkers' union, which for many years promoted a sustained process of preparation for both workers and the community as a whole.*

*The process began by acknowledging the grief and anger associated with the loss of identity, but it has moved towards deep support that enables people to imagine a future beyond coal. The psychological transition required for a just transition is addressed in a deliberate manner.”<sup>38</sup>*

In Gujarat, another of IHRB's Just Stories,<sup>▶</sup> where thousands of informal women workers produce salt under precarious conditions in the Kutch desert, the organisation SEWA leads a community-driven process in which women participate in transforming their livelihoods through the adoption of solar technologies and the collective management of the transition<sup>39</sup>. In both cases, active, binding participation supported by resources has been key to ensuring that the transition generates sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes, rather than being limited to a purely technical change.

By contrast, the case of the coal regions in England during the 1980s highlights the effects of exclusion from participation in mine closure processes, with consequences that are still reflected today in structural unemployment and deep community fractures.



*“The fact that the closure process [of mines in Stoke-on-Trent in England] was deeply polarised meant there was a complete absence of procedural justice. There were no participatory dialogue spaces in which we could collectively ask ourselves what we wanted to build after the mines.”<sup>40</sup>*

Local actors in mining territories undergoing transition in Colombia, aware of these risks, expressed their interest in actively participating in transition planning, emphasising the need to move from consultative mechanisms to processes with real influence and effective multi-stakeholder dialogue leading to concrete agreements. The legitimacy of the transition depends on decisions being built transparently, with full access to information and with strengthened local authorities capable of exercising oversight and guiding investments. Where access to information is restricted or participation remains sporadic, mistrust deepens and the long-term agreements required for a just transition become unviable.

38 Haley St. Dennis, intervention at the event “Workers’ Commitment to Responsible Closure: Dialogue of Knowledge with the Workers for a Just Transition Collective”, organised by CREER and CNV Internationaal, Valledupar, 9 August 2025.

39 IHRB. (2025). *Just transitions in the Gujarat desert: A signal of a cleaner, fairer future for informal workers*. <https://www.ihrb.org/latest/just-transitions-in-the-gujarat-desert-a-signal-of-a-cleaner-fairer-future-for-informal-workers> ▶

40 A. Bebbington, intervention at the event “Responsible Exits and Closures: Global Lessons for Local Action”, organised by CREER, ICSI and NRG, Bogotá, 5 August 2025.

## JUSTICE IN THE TRANSITION AND MINE CLOSURES

According to Anthony Bebbington, closure and transition processes in extractive contexts should be understood as exercises in multidimensional justice, where the way participation is structured defines the distribution of costs and benefits, the redress of historical harms, and the future transformative capacity of territories. In his framework, **procedural justice** occupies a central place: it is the enabling condition that allows directly affected communities to deliberate, co-decide, and exercise control over the future of their territories. Only in such a scenario—where there is meaningful voice and the capacity to veto or redirect decisions—can the other dimensions of justice begin to emerge.

*“The most important form of justice is procedural justice. For any other form of justice to be achieved, it is essential that all actors involved and affected actively participate in the planning process and in the construction of future visions. This includes decision-making about what should be done, what should not be done, what is desired and what is not desired. This participation is the necessary foundation for any other type of justice.”<sup>41</sup>*

The second dimension is **distributive justice**, which refers to the equitable distribution of both the impacts and the benefits of mining operations and closure. In the absence of binding participation, international experience shows that this distribution tends to be regressive: communities bear the liabilities while receiving few long-term sustainable benefits.

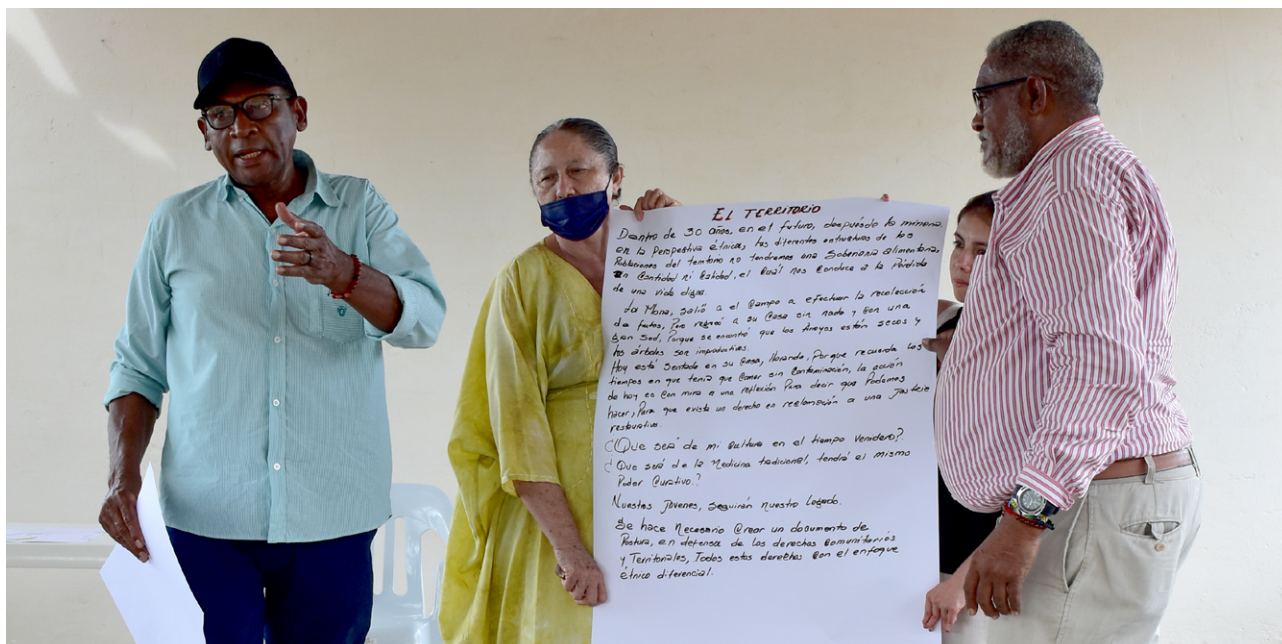
**Restorative justice**, in turn, requires recognising and repairing the accumulated harms that extractivism has generated over decades. It is not limited to environmental measures, but also involves rebuilding the social fabric, guaranteeing rights and restoring the trust broken between the State, companies and citizens. In territories such as Cesar and La Guajira, marked by armed conflict and historical violations of rights, this dimension is unavoidable.

Finally, **transformative justice** makes it possible to question the development logics that have sustained inequality in mining territories. This dimension opens up the possibility of imagining ways of life beyond extractivism, redefining the relationship with nature and the collective meaning of well-being. Although A. Bebbington notes that this perspective has lost prominence in recent international debates, its relevance in the territories visited is evident: without it, the transition risks being reduced to a technological shift that leaves underlying structures of inequality intact.

From this perspective, participation is not an end in itself, but the political mechanism that articulates and enables all forms of justice. Its absence largely explains the polarisation and social crisis that accompanied failed transitions in places such as England in the 1980s, where mine closures were carried out without the consent or co-responsibility of communities. Its strengthening, by contrast, has been the foundation of the successful cases analysed, such as Collie in Australia, where trade union and community participation enabled the transition to advance as a process of recognition, redistribution and transformation.

41 Ibidem.





For this reason, the role of information is central to this discussion. Although it is recognised as an essential input for democratic participation, in the territories there remains a perception that information is fragmented, overly technical, delayed, or difficult to understand and verify. This not only limits the possibilities for informed deliberation but also deepens accumulated mistrust in contexts where the relationship between the State, companies and citizens has been shaped by power asymmetries and unfulfilled promises. Access to information is, in fact, a fundamental enabler of a range of related processes and rights, such as participation. Therefore, a just transition requires that information be accessible, verifiable and mediated by legitimate actors within the territories; otherwise, dialogue processes will continue to be symbolic rather than genuinely influential.

The dialogue held with workers and trade union organisations highlighted that labour participation in the energy transition is not limited to the condition of a workforce affected by mine closure but is understood as an exercise in political influence and collective future-building. In this context, the value of the sectoral petition developed by workers was emphasised as a comprehensive proposal that goes beyond traditional labour demands. According to one of the participants, this document brings together “five points that

would allow us to move forward in how our territories, after coal, could sustain workers and communities”<sup>42</sup>, explicitly incorporating women, communities and other population groups. This perspective reinforces the idea that workers’ participation extends towards the construction of economic and social alternatives for post-mining territories.

From this standpoint, workers emphasised the need to move towards genuine, permanent and binding social dialogue mechanisms that recognise their experience, their knowledge of the territory and their capacity to influence the definition of roadmaps for a just transition, both with the government and with mining companies. During the discussions, the centrality of tripartite dialogue as a mechanism for structuring such participation was consistently reiterated. The Ministry of Labour stressed that just transition and mine closure processes must be carried out with the active participation of workers and trade unions, highlighting the creation of a tripartite dialogue space between the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Mines, trade union organisations and companies as a key step in ensuring this participation.

<sup>42</sup> SINTRACARBÓN trade union leader, intervention at the event “Workers’ Commitment to Responsible Closure: Dialogue of Knowledge with the Workers for a Just Transition Collective”, Valledupar, 9 August 2025.

Likewise, trade union organisations warned that the transition cannot be resolved through short-term negotiations, as it is shaped by structural factors such as market dynamics, environmental policies and the deepening climate crisis. In this regard, an explicit call was made to promote concertation processes that bring companies, governments and workers together at the same table to agree on a shared roadmap:



*Our invitation, as trade union organisations, is to begin exerting pressure so that mining companies sit down with governments and trade unions to discuss or initiate a roadmap towards reaching an agreement around the transition”.<sup>43</sup>*

Likewise, the testimonies gathered during the VocesxCREER<sup>44</sup> presentations and in the dialogue held in August 2025 in Valledupar with women, youth and LGBTIQ+ populations revealed that participatory processes reproduce structural inequalities related to gender, age and ethnic belonging. Women pointed to persistent barriers to accessing decision-making spaces, stemming from social and economic structures that continue to limit their participation in decision-making processes and concentrate caregiving responsibilities within households on them, as well as from the lack of access to productive resources (such as land) and the difficulties in achieving economic autonomy.

Youth participation, for its part, although formally recognized, remains more symbolic than decision-making in nature, while structural barriers to their labor and political inclusion persist. In this context, young people emphasized the need

to rethink the energy transition from an intersectional and transformative perspective that recognizes their differentiated experiences and their potential as political actors. As one of the participants expressed:



*We must build an energy transition by giving young people a voice, and ensure that the transition is people-centred—not only people-centred, but also diverse, ethnic and feminist [...] Why? Because young people perceive the transition differently, and it affects us differently.”<sup>45</sup>*

This testimony shows that, beyond formal consultation mechanisms, there is a clear demand for participatory processes that grant real decision-making power, incorporate gender, diversity and ethnic perspectives, and recognise the structural inequalities that shape the transition in these territories.

Indigenous peoples, particularly the Wayuu, warned that without full recognition of their territorial autonomy and their own systems of governance, new transition agendas risk becoming a repetition of traditional extractivism under “green” rhetoric. They therefore emphasised the importance of fully integrating the Wayuu worldview, customary law, and the cultural and spiritual impacts affecting their people into the planning and implementation of any mining-related instrument or process. Based on this, they propose the development of their own dialogue methodologies, designed from the vision, practices and organisational forms of the Wayuu people, avoiding the imposition of external consultation frameworks.

<sup>43</sup> SINTRADEM trade union leader, intervention at the event “Workers’ Commitment to Responsible Closure: Dialogue of Knowledge with the Workers for a Just Transition Collective”, Valledupar, 9 August 2025

<sup>44</sup> VocesxCREER presentations at the event held on 8 August 2025 in Valledupar on women, diversity and youth in the transition and mine closures in Cesar and La Guajira.

<sup>45</sup> Member of the Cesar Sin Fracking y Sin Gas Movement, intervention at the event “Mining Territories in Transition. Voices of Women, Youth and Diverse Groups in the Cesar-La Guajira Bioregion”, organised by CREER, Valledupar, 8 August 2025.

## GENDER, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND COAL MINE CLOSURES

A key element of the analysis that CREER has developed in recent years relates to the differential impacts of mining activities, both during their operational phase and in closure processes. Much of the literature and fieldwork carried out by CREER, as well as by civil society organizations, has focused on the gender gaps affecting women. However, various actors involved in these processes have emphasized the need to broaden this perspective toward an intersectional approach that allows for the identification of relevant intersections among variables such as ethnic belonging, social class, sexual orientation, and age, among others. These reflections have contributed to LGBTIQ+ communities and young people in the department of Cesar beginning to have greater involvement in debates and processes related to the energy transition and mine closure.

Preliminarily, some of the impacts identified as significant for local communities in relation to these dimensions can be grouped into the following aspects<sup>46</sup>:

- > Low participation of rural women, youth, and LGBTIQ+ populations in spaces for public policy formulation and binding decision-making related to mine closure.
- > Increase in gender-based violence (GBV) against women and people with diverse sexual orientations.
- > Impacts on the economic autonomy of women and people with diverse sexual orientations, who have traditionally assumed caregiving responsibilities and participated informally in the value chain of mining-based economies.
- > Limited employment opportunities for young people, associated with low levels of economic diversification and the limited educational opportunities available in the territories once mine closures take place.
- > Reconfiguration of family structures and impacts on psychological well-being resulting from mine closure, due to the decline in household income previously sustained by mining activities.

<sup>46</sup> Soon, a study will be published in collaboration with the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) Latin America on the analysis of gender, intersectionality, and mine closures, which will explore these types of impacts in greater depth.



From the dialogues, a central message was reiterated: **strengthening social participation requires advancing towards forms of governance that distribute real decision-making power, ensure adequate funding to sustain permanent dialogue mechanisms, and strengthen institutional and community capacities to deliberate on the transition. This entails clarifying corporate and state responsibilities regarding closure and promoting community agreements on the future use of land and on investments derived from the energy transition. Participation must structure the entire lifecycle of extractive projects, from initial planning through to post-closure, in order to ensure co-responsibility, democratic legitimacy and justice**

**(including intergenerational and gender justice, among others).**

In summary, social participation is a foundational pillar of a just transition, not an accessory component. Transformation in mining territories will only be viable if it recognises the diversity of actors inhabiting these territories, redistributes decision-making power and enables the collective capacity of communities to imagine and build alternatives beyond coal. Without effective inclusion, the transition risks perpetuating the legacy of exclusion and dependency characteristic of extractivism; with meaningful participation, it can become a democratic opportunity to redefine life prospects in the country's mining territories.

### MESSAGES FROM CSRM TO WAYUU COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHERN LA GUAJIRA

During the dialogue with Wayuu leaders, questions, challenges, and opportunities emerged regarding informed, collective, and meaningful participation in mine closure processes. In this regard, Sarah Mackenzie and Deanna Kemp highlighted the following key messages:

- > When groups are strong collectively, they are better able to advance their agendas; fragmentation should be avoided.
- > In the context of closure processes, it is essential to prioritise the recognition and respect of the rights of the Wayuu people.
- > It is important to have clarity and a realistic vision in order to negotiate and advocate around concrete issues agreed upon within communities (it may not be possible to address everything at once).
- > Methods and approaches must be found to engage and maintain dialogue with all actors.
- > It is important to achieve visibility at different levels: local, national and even international.





## 5.2. Governance, land-use planning and institutional capacities

The dialogues carried out made it possible to confirm that the energy transition agenda, and the uncertainty associated with the gradual phase-out and transformation of coal mining as a predominant economic activity, are unfolding in a context shaped by regulatory, normative, institutional and political challenges that condition the possibility of a just transition. Far from being a merely technical procedure, the exit of extractive industries in this context represents a critical phase in the social life of territories that have depended on them for decades, as it redefines existing power balances, transforms the foundations of the local economy, invites a rethinking of land-use planning and reshapes collective visions of the future.

This interpretation aligns with international evidence presented during the dialogue spaces, which shows that the capacity of States and

territories to manage responsible mine closure or scaling-down processes is decisive for subsequent social outcomes. Weak governance can lead to abandonment and the deepening of inequalities; conversely, strong management can turn gradual exit and transition into a turning point for economic reactivation, damage reparation and the strengthening of the social fabric. In this sense, the management of the transition not only determines whether and how mining ends, but also what type of development is enabled in contexts where extractive activities coexist with other economic alternatives aligned with the climate agenda, as well as how possible futures for territories are envisioned. This concern for the future of the territory and for intergenerational responsibility was clearly expressed by community leaders.

In the Colombian case, one of the main findings is that when discussing transition—particularly in relation to the mining sector—the conversation tends to shift immediately towards mine closure. While closure and the gradual phase-out of fossil fuels are certainly one of the possible scenarios within the framework of the energy transition, they are not the only ones. Mining transition also involves redefining the activity under higher standards of responsibility, transforming the business model towards mining compatible with the climate agenda, including the development of critical minerals necessary for decarbonisation. Therefore, discussing transition in mining territories cannot be limited to the issue of closure—which may also occur for reasons unrelated to the transition—but must also recognise how the mining sector can contribute to preparing territories for more sustainable, resilient development aligned with climate challenges, anticipating possible scenarios of decline or transformation of extractive activity. However, in Colombia—and particularly following what occurred with Prodeco in Cesar—closure has become the main lens through which transition is understood, to the extent that in regions such as Cesar the discussion is framed not in terms of energy transition, but of productive transition.

## COEXISTENCES: MINING, DMEDP AND APPA IN LA GUAJIRA

Although a post-coal scenario is envisaged in La Guajira by 2034, new mining projects are emerging in the region. This is the case of Max Resource, a Canadian mining exploration company focused on identifying and developing mineral assets in northern Colombia, particularly in the Andean copper belt. In La Guajira, Max Resource is carrying out the Sierra Azul Project, a copper and silver exploration initiative aimed at harnessing the region's mineral potential<sup>47</sup>. This project is located in southern La Guajira (primarily in Barrancas, Fonseca, Urumita and Villanueva), and company representatives have repeatedly linked it to the energy transition, noting that copper is a strategic mineral for this transition, as it is essential in the manufacture of wind turbines, solar panels and other renewable energy projects. They have also highlighted that, in Colombia—especially in La Guajira—wind and solar energy initiatives have already been established that require this material. Likewise, the Corporate Affairs Manager emphasised that the exploration and production of copper could generate a positive impact on the regional economy. However, she also acknowledged that the decline of current mining operations in the region may lead to a reduction in employment and royalties. For this reason, she stressed the need to promote generational renewal within the mining industry in order to ensure a sustainable future for La Guajira and Colombia<sup>48</sup>.

It is important that this type of project learns from the lessons left by El Cerrejón in the department and how its different stages, within the project lifecycle, have been carried out. In this way, it will be possible, on the one hand, to strengthen the capacities of the mining sector towards decarbonisation, taking into account the country's climate agendas; and, on the other, to develop better practices in community engagement, participation and dialogue from exploration through to mine closure, should the operation proceed to the mining stage.

Likewise, in this delimitation of southern La Guajira, a new instrument created by the current government has been established: Areas for the Protection of Food Production (APPA). These are areas that function as second-level territorial planning determinants and hold a higher-level regulatory status. They are declared by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADS), with technical support from the Rural Agricultural Planning Unit (UPRA). In La Guajira, Resolution 000161 of 20 June 2024 was issued, *“Whereby Areas for the Protection of Food Production (APPA) are declared in the municipalities of La Jagua del Pilar, Urumita, Villanueva, El Molino, San Juan del Cesar, Distracción, Fonseca, Barrancas and Hatonuevo in the department of La Guajira”*. These areas are established as territorial planning determinants to ensure food sovereignty by protecting soils with high agricultural potential from incompatible land uses.

In this regard, four (4) main restrictions are identified: (i) the impossibility of developing

47 ANDI (s.f.). Tomado de: <https://www.andi.com.co/Home/Seccional/14-mesa-mas-la-guajira>

48 Max Resource destaca la importancia del cobre en la transición energética de La Guajira. La Guajira Hoy.com. (1 de abril de 2025). Tomado de: <https://laguajirahoy.com/la-guajira/max-resource-destaca-la-importancia-del-cobre-en-la-transicion-energetica-de-la-guajira.html>



uses other than those defined in their agricultural zoning; (ii) higher-ranking regulations that municipalities must mandatorily incorporate into their territorial planning instruments; (iii) respect for acquired rights and consolidated legal situations (such as existing mining titles or already granted licences) prior to 20 June 2024—however, for new procedures or expansions, the APPA designation acts as a legal barrier; and (iv) conditional zoning within the declaration itself. The mining sector has expressed concern, arguing that these areas effectively become “de facto mining exclusion zones” by prioritising food production over the use of subsoil resources. In fact, legal actions have been filed seeking to annul this resolution, claiming that it undermines legal certainty for the sector<sup>49</sup>.

At the same time, in this same area, as previously mentioned, the delimitation of the DMEDP is planned as a strategy for socio-environmental mining planning, alongside other initiatives associated with the energy transition promoted by the government at the national level, such as energy communities.

Thus, **local institutional management faces enormous challenges** in incorporating into territorial planning the various measures promoted at the central level in relation to the energy transition: overlapping planning determinants, limited capacities, constraints in budget allocation and financial and human resources, territorial contexts marked by high levels of conflict and poverty, outdated territorial planning instruments (POT, PBOT, EOT), and a historical dependence on coal revenues, among others. Municipalities are often required to adopt national guidelines without sufficient knowledge or alignment with their local realities, which may undermine their autonomy. Therefore, effective mechanisms of coordination, concurrence and subsidiarity are needed to ensure coherence between decisions made by different authorities in matters of territorial planning. In this regard, it is essential to guarantee the participation of municipalities in the administrative processes for adopting planning determinants, in order to achieve truly effective coordination in pursuit of a just energy transition and responsible mine closure.

49 Rodríguez, J. (2025). Alerta por impacto de las ZPPA y las Appa en el desarrollo de la actividad minera. Portafolio. Tomado de: <https://www.portafolio.co/economia/regiones/sector-minero-en-alerta-por-impacto-de-la-zppa-y-las-appa-621716>

Another key lesson relates to the institutional capacity to manage these types of transformations and lies in the persistence of a regulatory framework that clearly guides responsible exits from the extractive sector or its adaptation in line with the transition and the country's climate commitments. Although regulatory instruments exist that address the environmental component of closure, the social dimension remains largely without legal recognition, generating uncertainty regarding post-extraction responsibilities and creating significant gaps in the management of

employment, productive reconversion and the socio-cultural impacts arising from mine closure.

While the territorial dialogues acknowledged the potential of DMEDPs and energy communities as tools for territorial governance in the transition, this potential is contingent on ensuring that they do not reproduce new forms of dispossession. Communities warned that, in the absence of genuine participation and respect for Wayuu territorial governance, these instruments may deepen dynamics of exclusion and territorial fragmentation.

## KEY PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONSIBLE EXITS IN THE TRANSITION

Messages from Haley St. Dennis based on lessons from the IHRB [Just Stories Initiative](#) ▶



### **START EARLY AND REMAIN PERSISTENT**

“It is essential to begin the transition much earlier than seems necessary and to remain consistent, because when the doors are about to close, it is too late to build trust or open new possibilities. Transition processes require persistence over time.”



### **BUILD TRUST THROUGH PRESENCE**

“Trust is built by being present in the context—not from the capital—by remaining within the community and co-designing decisions alongside those directly experiencing the process.”



### **PLAN WHAT IS OPENING, NOT ONLY WHAT IS CLOSING**

“A just transition is not limited to closing activities; it must include new opportunities in employment, land use, skills reconversion, mental health and collective identity, shaping a comprehensive plan for economic diversification.”



### **INCLUDE INFORMAL WORKERS**

“Their participation in leadership and decision-making processes is essential, particularly in contexts such as Colombia, where they represent a significant part of the economy.”



### **STRENGTHEN LOCAL INSTITUTIONS**

“The creation and consolidation of local institutions are key to sustaining the transition in the long term.”

Comparative analysis with other mining regions around the world facing similar challenges reinforces the importance of addressing this gap. In Australia, for example, as mentioned by Sarah Mackenzie and Deanna Kemp from the CSRM, closure regulation has historically focused on environmental aspects, which facilitated the abandonment of numerous mines and forced subnational governments to assume high remediation costs. It was only from 2010 onwards that stronger requirements began to emerge regarding corporate capacity and financial guarantees, although the social dimension of closure remains marginalised and lacks an effective regulatory framework to support it.

The case of Peru, highlighted by Camilo León of the Ford Foundation, reveals a different yet equally relevant situation: despite having more recent and stricter regulations, these have not managed to address the numerous historical liabilities left by mining activity.

For this reason, despite the enactment of several decrees, resolutions, and strategies within the framework of the Just Energy Transition (JET), the country still lacks a specific and comprehensive strategy that guides how extractive and fossil fuel sectors should transition. Nor does it have a clear roadmap for a gradual phase-out, leaving companies, workers, and territories without clarity regarding the timelines, pace, and support needed to transform or replace the economic activities that currently sustain much of local life.

Territorial discussions also revealed that the governance of mine closure (as there is still no certainty regarding mining transition) is shaped by power asymmetries between companies, the State and citizens. Companies concentrate strategic information and technical resources that guide decision-making; meanwhile, communities and local governments have limited influence due to a lack of accessible information and insufficient institutional capacities to participate on equal terms. As noted by Anthony Bebbington, when this inequality is not addressed, closures tend to reproduce pre-existing inequities, as occurred in

England following the closure of coal mining in the 1980s, where the absence of participatory transition policies led to the socio-economic collapse of entire regions, with consequences that persist today in the form of structural unemployment and loss of community identity.

Finally, a cross-cutting concern emerges that international experiences confirm: the comprehensive sustainability of territories. This goes beyond the environmental dimension to include long-term economic viability, the fiscal stability of local governments, social cohesion, the guarantee of rights and the institutional capacity to manage new productive and social dynamics. Without sufficient financial guarantees, without clearly defined long-term corporate responsibilities and without strong local institutions to manage the new context, the transition and the exit of extractive industries may result in abandonment, the multiplication of environmental liabilities and the deterioration of living conditions. This reinforces the need for the process to be conceived from the outset of operations and supported by public policies that ensure state accompaniment beyond the end of extractive activities.

For their part, Sarah Mackenzie and Deanna Kemp further examined the sociopolitical and economic challenges of mining transitions. They emphasized that **no closure process can succeed without adequate resources, genuine negotiations with companies, and a serious strengthening of mine rehabilitation programs.** They highlighted the Australian experience of the Mining and Energy Union (MEU, formerly part of the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union), where a comprehensive transition framework connects national, regional, and local levels, enabling rapid responses to sudden closures and ensuring that workers are not left unprotected. They also warned that mine closures cannot be analyzed in isolation: they are embedded in broader economic systems shaped by global markets, transnational companies, and national fiscal models. For this reason, they stressed the need to review coal taxes and other financing mechanisms to ensure that the costs of transition do not fall solely on local territories.





In summary, the findings show that the governance of exits and mining transition in Colombia faces structural challenges that have parallels in other parts of the world. However, they also indicate that there is room to learn from these experiences and avoid the mistakes that have marked many extractive territories globally. The transition ahead will be viable to the extent that public and community capacities are strengthened, comprehensive regulatory standards are established and decision-making power is re-distributed. Only in this way can the transition in mining territories become a true turning point for territorial transformation rather than an endpoint of uncertainty.

### **5.3. Conceptual alignment and meaning-making in mine closure processes**

The lessons gathered both in territorial workshops and through exchanges with international experts and diverse stakeholders during the visit made it possible to recognise that mine closure and energy transition processes do not depend solely on technical and regulatory aspects. Their viability is also shaped in the realm of language and the narratives that different actors construct around the future of territories.

In this field, meanings are contested. As emphasised by Deanna Kemp, notions such as “responsible closure”, “just transition” or “orderly exit” are polysemic. For communities, closure translates into job loss and the immediate deterioration of living conditions; for authorities, into environmental rehabilitation and regulatory compliance; and for companies, into the administrative relinquishment or termination of a title or licence. These semantic divergences generate misaligned expectations and hinder the construction of agreements based on a shared understanding.

Territories also pointed out that certain ways of framing or communicating decisions by institutions have served to favour specific interests or to close down debate, leaving key questions about territorial justice unanswered: what is actually being closed? Who decides the pace and conditions? How are those who have sustained the mining economy for decades protected? Without clear and shared answers, the idea of a “just transition” risks becoming an empty discursive resource, closer to a slogan than to verifiable and enforceable policies.

International participants emphasised that a responsible transition in mining territories requires mechanisms for translating between technical,

legal and cultural languages: shared glossaries, informed and legitimate mediators, pedagogical processes grounded in a rights-based approach, and deliberative guarantees that prevent language from being imposed “from above”. Naming a process also means deciding who participates, how and for what purpose; language defines the boundaries of what is possible.

Within this framework, an important reflection also emerged regarding the architecture of dialogue spaces. While multi-stakeholder spaces are essential for building shared visions and coordinating decisions in highly complex contexts, Deanna Kemp also stressed the importance of stakeholders having their own spaces for exchange and learning.



*I also believe it is important for different stakeholder groups to have their own spaces: for companies to speak among themselves, for governments to exchange experiences, and for civil society actors to connect. Multi-stakeholder spaces are extremely valuable and we need more of them, but it is also necessary for each group to have its own spaces to build and share knowledge internally.”<sup>50</sup>*

This is key to consolidating positions, producing situated and shared knowledge—based on common concepts and understandings—and reducing asymmetries in multi-stakeholder dialogue spaces.

In summary, the governance of closures and the energy transition is inseparable from the narratives that guide collective action. Recognising language as a dimension of power (and its effects on people’s behaviour and responses to

these processes) makes it possible to open more democratic spaces for discussion, where the futures of territories are not defined solely from a technical or corporate perspective, but from a plurality of voices capable of imagining more just and sustainable alternatives.

### **Labour reconversion and economic diversification in mining territories**

The exchanges held with institutional, community, trade union and business actors during the visit confirmed persistent concerns in territories such as Cesar and La Guajira regarding the economic future that may result from the scaling-down of coal mining in these regions, within the framework of the transition agenda, given that they remain structurally dependent on this activity as a primary source of employment, fiscal revenues and demand for local goods and services.

In Cesar, the abrupt exit of Prodeco critically exposed the effects of this dependence: immediate loss of income and jobs, increased informality, psychosocial impacts on households whose livelihoods depended directly or indirectly on the mine, and the deepening of socio-economic gaps (particularly affecting women), among others. Although other operations remain active, concerns persist that similar situations may occur again without anticipation or alternatives.

In La Guajira, where coal mining is still ongoing, uncertainty is concentrated in the lack of clarity and information regarding labour transition and the continuity of goods and services provided by the sector. Local actors insist that the greatest threat is not the transition itself, but that it occurs without proper planning, especially given the projected closure date of El Cerrejón, potentially replicating the effects already observed in Cesar.

The potential impacts of mining decline extend beyond formal employment: they affect transport workers, suppliers, trade, hospitality, services, and unpaid work—highly feminised—as

<sup>50</sup> Deanna Kemp, intervention at the event “Responsible Exits and Closures: Global Lessons for Local Action”, organised by CREER, ICSI and NRGi, Bogotá, 5 August 2025.

well as an entire value chain that sustains daily life. In Cesar specifically, women's labour informality stands at 66%, exceeding the national average of 58%<sup>51</sup>, which suggests greater challenges in terms of formal employment in the region from a gender perspective. For their part, young people also warned that their exclusion stems from an economic and educational model that does not guarantee opportunities for them to remain in the territory.

In light of this context, economic diversification emerges as the most frequently expressed territorial demand. However, communities emphasise that it cannot be limited to a scattered set of projects, but must instead be articulated with existing infrastructure—such as the railway line of the mining corridor (in Cesar, La Guajira or Magdalena) or the proposed logistics hub in Chiriguana— and with local training capacities offered by institutions such as SENA and regional universities.

51 OIT Document DANE 2021 GEIH

## DIVERSIFICATION IN COLOMBIA

Addressing the challenges of economic diversification and strengthening productive linkages in territories highly dependent on mining is essential. The UNFCCC defines diversification as the *“process of shifting an economy that depends on a single source of income towards multiple sources derived from an increasing range of sectors and markets. Traditionally, it has been used as a strategy to foster economic growth and development. In the context of climate change adaptation, it takes on new relevance as a strategy to move away from vulnerable products, markets and jobs, and towards income sources that are low-emission and more climate-resilient.”*<sup>52</sup>.

According to NRGI, between 2010 and 2022, the country recorded 57.4% of its total exports from minerals and hydrocarbons, representing 6.7% of GDP<sup>53</sup>. Meanwhile, according to the OECD, Colombia needs to address structural weaknesses, as its productivity has not

increased sufficiently and has remained largely stagnant since the 2000s<sup>54</sup>.

The 2025 Departmental Competitiveness Index (IDC)<sup>55</sup> reflects contrasting realities in regional management. On the one hand, La Guajira ranked 25th out of 32 departments, with a score of 4.23/10. Despite its low position, it stands out as the department with the highest level of trade openness nationwide. On the other hand, Cesar has faced significant challenges in its external sector, registering a sharp 61.6% decline in exports at the beginning of 2025, negatively affecting its competitive profile compared to other productive centres.

In this context, the National Competitiveness Report 2025–2026<sup>56</sup> highlights the need for agreements between the State and the private sector to overcome stagnation and polarisation in traditionally mining-dependent regions.

52 Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático. [CMNUCC] (c) (s. f.). Economic diversification. <https://unfccc.int/topics/resilience/resources/economic-diversification>

53 Arellano-Yanguas, J., & Bernal-Gómez, M. P. (2024). Recursos naturales y dependencia: una revisión de conceptos y enfoques para América Latina. Natural Resource Governance Institute. [https://resourcegovernance.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Recursos%20naturales\\_dependencia\\_revisi%C3%B3n\\_conceptos\\_enfoques\\_Am%C3%A9ricaLatina\\_NRGI.pdf](https://resourcegovernance.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Recursos%20naturales_dependencia_revisi%C3%B3n_conceptos_enfoques_Am%C3%A9ricaLatina_NRGI.pdf)

54 OECD/UN/UNIDO (2019), Production Transformation Policy Review of Colombia: Unleashing Productivity, OECD Development Pathways, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264312289-en>

55 Consejo Privado de Competitividad, Universidad del Rosario, SCORE. Índice Departamental de Competitividad 2025. Tomado de: <https://compite.com.co/indice-departamental-de-competitividad-idc/>

56 Consejo Privado de Competitividad [CPC]. (2025). Informe Nacional de Competitividad 2024-2025. [https://compite.com.co/wp-content/uploads/INC-2025\\_-COMPLETO\\_V1.pdf](https://compite.com.co/wp-content/uploads/INC-2025_-COMPLETO_V1.pdf)



As expressed during the territorial dialogues:



*This discussion, as we know, goes far beyond maintaining labour rights, social protection and social security. It has to do with the fact that companies, together with the State and trade unions, must think about the territory. And thinking about the territory means rethinking public investment, which the State has neglected for many years; identifying opportunities for labour reconversion and economic diversification. And something very important that we have always said is needed are transition funds.”<sup>57</sup>*

Labour reconversion is recognised as one of the most decisive challenges. Mining has structured occupational trajectories in the territory for decades, so the decline or transition of coal requires new skills and new training pathways that ensure real employability. The diploma programme in mining–energy transition offered by the University of Magdalena, which has attracted interest particularly among indirect workers, demonstrates both the potential for learning and the limitations of training when there are no productive investments capable of absorbing the trained workforce. The question that continues to arise within communities is: **What will we live on when the mine is no longer there?** As expressed by a leader from southern La Guajira:



*Twenty years ago, I made that analysis: goodness, this company will leave, everything will end, and I will still be here. I have to start thinking about what I will leave for my children, my family, my neighbours. What will remain here for us?”<sup>58</sup>*

This challenge is not limited to direct employment. Activities that revolve around mining—such as commerce, transport, food services, hospitality, laundry services and informal occupations—are at the core of economic risk within the productive linkages of these regions. Recognising these “invisible” linkages is essential to ensure that the transition does not deepen historical inequalities and, instead, expands opportunities for women, young people and informal sectors.

The dialogues indicated that reconversion requires an articulated training and productive framework that combines:

- Relevant educational provision, enabling rapid labour market insertion in sustainable agro-industry, regional logistics, maintenance of renewable technologies and the bioeconomy.
- Coordinated and organised institutional provision.
- Socio-emotional support, recognising that closure transforms deeply rooted labour identities.
- Linkages with real markets, through job placement services, local procurement, seed capital and incentives for cooperative entrepreneurship.
- Public–private, institutional and business partnerships, in which closure plans establish clear obligations for reconversion with community participation.
- Prevention of new forms of economic dependency, avoiding the reproduction of concentrated models (such as monoculture palm plantations).

International experiences provide specific lessons in response to these concerns. In Collie, Australia, the anticipation of the energy transition was accompanied by an investment of more than 600 million Australian dollars, financed mainly by the

<sup>57</sup> Acting Vice Minister for Labour Relations of the Ministry of Labour, intervention at the event “Workers’ Commitment to Responsible Closure: Dialogue of Knowledge with the Workers for a Just Transition Collective”, Valledupar, 9 August 2025.

<sup>58</sup> Wayuu leader, intervention at the event “Mining Territories in Transition: Voices of the Wayuu People for Territorial Transformation”, organised by CREER, Paradero, 10 August 2025.



government of Western Australia. These resources were directed, among other initiatives, toward the creation of the Collie Jobs and Skills Centre, which offers employment and reskilling programs and has provided personalized assistance, training plans, and specialized courses, enabling the occupational reconversion of hundreds of people in its first year of operation. Additional initiatives include incentives such as the Collie Small Grants Program, which provides community support of up to 100,000 dollars for local initiatives, as well as funds aimed at attracting new green industries, including mineral processing, clean energy, and green manufacturing.

This experience shows that, for the transition to be effective, it is **essential to implement concrete actions that facilitate labour reconversion and economic diversification**, creating real employment opportunities, strengthening local capacities and promoting sustainable territorial development.

From Peru, lessons were shared from privatisation processes that left more than 20,000 workers unemployed, highlighting that productive reconversion only proved effective when rigorous skills assessments, artificial intelligence tools to identify possible career pathways, state-led training programmes and financial support, and emotional assistance for workers facing sudden job loss were

integrated. As emphasised, transition does not happen by decree: it requires time, clarity about what investments may arrive, what labour profiles will be in demand, and which active employment policies will help close existing gaps.

Haley St. Dennis highlighted that one of the most significant achievements of the sectoral petition of the Workers for a Just Transition Collective has been the articulation, for the first time, of several coal sector unions alongside government ministries around a common agenda—an exceptional development even in countries with more consolidated institutions.

Other experiences, such as labour agreements in Germany, show that it is possible to avoid sudden displacement through arrangements that guarantee retraining, support and protection for those unable to reconvert. Meanwhile, from Gujarat, India, a particularly relevant model for contexts with high levels of informality (such as Colombia) was highlighted: cooperatives of women salt workers organised through SEWA, who successfully combined technical training in solar pump operation, business development and access to finance to diversify their incomes. This process enabled many of them to become certified solar technicians, leading energy transitions from the community level.

From Australia, examples were also shared of closures where legislation required companies to provide guarantees for their workers, demonstrating that justice in the transition depends not only on voluntary efforts but also on robust regulatory frameworks and political will. The influence of Australian mining unions was also highlighted, given their ability to shape policy at local, regional and international levels regarding closure, rehabilitation and mining transition.

In addition, according to Haley St. Dennis, reflecting on the cases of Collie and Gujarat, the success of these transition processes was linked not only to trade union leadership, but also to the ability to deliver immediate benefits, build collective power and create conditions for meaningful participation of workers and communities from the earliest stages of the process. In her words:



*I believe that, to a large extent, the transition has been the result of trade union leadership and their insistence that the transition must deliver benefits now for workers and for communities as a whole, rather than at some distant point in the future. If the transition is framed in terms of 2030, if it is projected into such distant horizons, working communities are unlikely to voluntarily engage with the process; why would they?*

*By contrast, when ways are found to build power within the process—even if they begin as small, incremental steps—the transition starts to gain traction and take on the character of a true alchemy. And that is precisely what we have seen in Collie, but also in India.”<sup>59</sup>*



The set of these experiences reaffirms a central message: economic transition cannot be understood as a simple substitution of mining employment. It requires a structural transformation of the territorial development model that ensures income continuity, decent work, economic autonomy, poverty reduction, comprehensive support and socio-economic resilience in the face of coal decline. It entails recognising local capacities, providing training adapted to diverse realities and vocations, and facilitating labour market insertion in green sectors, ensuring that workers—not only companies or governments—are the protagonists in building more just and sustainable futures.

In this sense, the transition in departments such as Cesar and La Guajira must aim to gradually reduce extractive dependency through productive diversification strategies that respond to territorial vocations, are grounded in real investments, and strengthen the labour and organisational capacities of directly affected communities. Only under these conditions can the transition cease

<sup>59</sup> Haley St. Dennis, Head of Just Transitions, IHRB, intervention at the event “Responsible Exits and Closures: Global Lessons for Local Action”, organised by CREER, INSUCO - ICSI and NRG, held on 5 August 2025 in Bogotá.



to be an economic risk and become an opportunity to expand well-being and development options in the country's mining territories.

To achieve this, a set of key enabling conditions has been identified:

- Gradual planning of the transition in mining territories, with clear time horizons that enable productive reconversion and fiscal stability.
- Shared responsibility between the State, companies and communities to finance and implement employment, reconversion and entrepreneurship programmes.
- Real linkages between technical training, private investment, local procurement and emerging clusters.
- Economic inclusion of women, young people and informal sectors, currently at the centre of socio-economic risk.
- Strategic use of existing infrastructure, avoiding the reproduction of extractive dependencies.
- Allocation and use of mining compensations in relation to closure processes to leverage economic diversification in the territories.

## **MINING COMPENSATIONS AS LEVERS FOR DIVERSIFICATION**

In coal-producing territories such as Cesar and La Guajira, environmental compensations—derived from environmental licensing and linked to elements of the Environmental Management Plan (EMP), such as biodiversity loss, the withdrawal of protected reserves, or the mandatory 1% investment—can become a strategic tool for promoting productive diversification. Although their legal purpose is to compensate for non-mitigable impacts, the regulatory framework could allow them to be articulated with processes of ecological restoration, energy transition, and territorial strengthening.

If designed with a strategic approach, these investments can strengthen socio-ecological infrastructures that, in turn, support

activities such as agroecology, the bioeconomy, ecotourism, or sustainable production systems, aligning with territorial vocations and with mine closure processes. However, a restrictive interpretation currently persists, focused exclusively on “ecological equivalence,” which limits their transformative potential and leads to isolated interventions with low socioeconomic impact. Overcoming this perspective would allow compensation resources not only to restore ecosystems but also to act as a lever for productive regeneration and the creation of sustainable economic alternatives, facilitating a just transition in regions historically dependent on coal.



### **5.5. Corporate co-responsibility in territorial transformation**

Territorial dialogues in Cesar and La Guajira revealed that, for local communities and workers, the mining transition is not limited to an immediate withdrawal from extractive activity but rather involves a gradual transformation of the relationship between mining, the local economy and the territory. In this context, corporate co-responsibility takes on a central role, as the decisions made by companies and authorities regarding the continuation, transformation or eventual withdrawal of mining activity directly affect the livelihoods of thousands of families, institutional stability and social trust. As expressed by a community leader from La Jagua de Ibirico: “...the mine may change, but life in the territory must continue...”, highlighting the need for labour re-conversion processes, strengthening of local capacities and the creation of new economic opportunities aligned with sustainable and diversified territorial development.

From the dialogues with the mining sector, the corporate perspective on the transition is currently framed within a context of continued coal

production, supported by the existence of significant reserves and the perception that this resource will continue to play a relevant role in the energy mix and the national economy in the coming decades. Within this framework, companies argue that, on the one hand, they are making significant efforts to decarbonise their operations and, on the other, that “there is coal for the long term” and therefore no scenario of accelerated closure of operations is envisaged in the short term. The sector emphasises that Colombian coal maintains competitive advantages in terms of quality, availability and fiscal and regional contributions, and that its production remains strategic for the country’s energy security, particularly in relation to coal-dependent thermal power plants.

However, the dialogues revealed a significant gap between this principle of co-responsibility and the business practices observed to date. From the perspective of workers and trade union organisations, mining companies—particularly multinational ones—have shown limited willingness to actively engage in energy transition issues, often avoiding discussions on closure scenarios, productive reconversion or the

reparation of impacts. As one participant noted, **“today, multinationals do not want to talk about transition”**<sup>60</sup>, frequently shifting responsibility for labour and social impacts onto the State and disengaging from planning for the “post-mining” future.

This stance has reinforced the perception that, in the absence of clear regulatory frameworks and binding mechanisms, corporate co-responsibility tends to depend on corporate willingness. For this reason, trade union and territorial groups stressed the need to establish legal instruments and government resolutions that oblige companies to participate in just transition processes, including tripartite dialogue with the State and workers. As expressed during the discussion, **“working groups must be carried out jointly between trade unions, companies and the ministry”**<sup>61</sup>, understanding the transition as a process that requires genuine co-responsibility and coordination among actors, rather than fragmented or unilateral actions.

However, according to the companies’ perspective<sup>62</sup>, this view does not imply a denial of the energy transition, but rather an interpretation of it as a gradual and progressive process that should be built upon the continuity of mining activity. In this sense, the mining sector has proposed the need for coexistence between mining and new activities, including renewable energy projects—such as solar parks—and circular economy schemes. Likewise, the sector maintains that the resources generated by coal mining are key to leveraging economic diversification, financing innovation and supporting the development of new productive activities in mining regions<sup>63</sup>.

At this point, the document identifies a significant gap in the understanding and enforcement of corporate co-responsibility: the limited visibility of the role played by coal buyers and downstream actors in the value chain. While the debate on just transition has mainly focused on extractive companies and the State, the dialogues and analysis show that many of the decisions that directly influence the pace, conditions and scenarios of coal decline are made outside the territory, by purchasing companies, traders and end users of the resource.

Initiatives such as Bettercoal, which bring together major purchasing companies and promote responsible sourcing standards, have influenced the definition of social and environmental expectations around coal production. However, their participation in transition planning and in assuming responsibility for the territorial, labour and social impacts associated with the gradual reduction in demand remains limited. This absence poses a central challenge for a just transition: while the social and economic costs of decline fall directly on communities, workers and local governments, downstream actors remain largely absent from spaces of dialogue, co-responsibility and decision-making.

Engaging buyers within frameworks of corporate co-responsibility, multi-stakeholder dialogue and transition planning is essential to move towards a more equitable distribution of responsibilities and to prevent the transition from falling exclusively on producing territories.

Corporate co-responsibility cannot be limited to partial commitments or to environmental management alone. It entails fully assuming the impacts of operations (social, economic, cultural and environmental) and ensuring that, throughout the entire project lifecycle—planning, operation, transition, closure and post-closure—there are clear obligations, verifiable timelines, monitoring mechanisms with effective participation, allocation of resources proportional to accumulated impacts, and comprehensive reparation

60 SINTRACARBÓN trade union leader, intervention at the event “Workers’ Commitment to Responsible Closure: Dialogue of Knowledge with the Workers for a Just Transition Collective”, Valledupar, 9 August 2025.

61 Ibidem.

62 This perspective was drawn from the dialogue “Mining Transitions: Responsible Entries and Exits—How to Build a Sustainable Legacy from the Mining Industry”, held on 6 August 2025 with mining companies and the Colombian Mining Agency, organised by CREER, the ACM and NIR, as well as during the conversation with the company during the visit to the Drummond mine in Cesar, conducted by CREER.

63 These perspectives, in addition to the space held as part of this visit, are complemented by sectoral dialogues that have been carried out with the mining-energy sector since 2023.





measures for the historical harms generated by mining activity. Recent experience in Cesar shows that a corporate withdrawal without sufficient planning and without fully assuming these responsibilities generates economic uncertainty, disrupts community programmes, weakens local institutions and increases social vulnerability. This case underscores the need to integrate measures for protection, reparation, capacity-building and territorial monitoring from the earliest stages of the transition. To this end, existing international frameworks and standards must be integrated and implemented, both those specific to the mining sector and those related to Responsible Business Conduct and Business and Human Rights, where due diligence is—and must be—a fundamental mechanism.

A responsible approach to transition and closure requires early planning and secured financial provision. Communities emphasise that this planning must ensure transparency regarding the real costs of the process, independent technical certification and the availability of resources through robust instruments such as trust funds or insurance schemes, which protect communities and workers even if the company reduces operations, transfers assets or withdraws entirely. International experts such as Deanna Kemp highlight that, under the principle of trailing liability, the company that operated a project retains responsibility for inherited environmental, social and economic impacts, even if it transfers assets or exits the territory, preventing liabilities from falling solely on the State, communities or future operators.

The effectiveness of co-responsibility depends on trust and the meaningful participation of communities. Communities must have access to clear, timely and contextualised information about transition, transformation or closure processes, enabling them to influence decision-making. However, companies often show reluctance to share these plans in advance, out of concern that they may generate anxiety or uncertainty, which in turn limits the effectiveness of co-responsibility. Trust is built when information is provided in a clear and accessible manner, supported by consistent engagement, verifiable presence, pedagogical mediation and monitoring mechanisms that ensure the implementation of agreements, including corrective measures and the reparation of past impacts.

International experiences reinforce this approach. In Collie (Australia), the transition was not understood as a simple corporate withdrawal, but as a reconfiguration of corporate commitment through territorial agreements supported by public investment. The prior planning of new industries, services and jobs made it possible for labour reconversion and productive diversification to be implemented in an orderly and sustainable manner, minimising the social and economic impacts of coal phase-out.

## KEY PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONSIBLE EXITS IN THE TRANSITION

Messages from [Nicola Woodroffe](#) based on lessons from the hydrocarbons sector and her work with NRGi



### **REDUCE FISCAL DEPENDENCE ON NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCES**

- “Reduce reliance on revenues from oil and gas, and focus on transparency by understanding subnational government budgets, where revenues are allocated, and promoting changes in planning.”



### **ADDRESS SOCIAL IMPACTS**

- “This involves reskilling and upskilling workers, with clear agreements involving those directly affected. There are examples in Germany, in rural regions, where the coal transition was carried out through shared agreements with workers...There were agreements to maintain wages and government investment in retraining and infrastructure [...] Commitment was a key element.”



### **MANAGE ENVIRONMENTAL LIABILITIES**

- “Ensure the technical and responsible closure of projects, addressing environmental impacts and accumulated legal responsibilities.”



### **PREPARE IN ADVANCE FOR DECOMMISSIONING**

- “The energy transition can accelerate project closures, so planning ahead can secure funding and proper implementation, avoiding risks due to financial shortfalls.”



### **AVOID IRRESPONSIBLE ASSET TRANSFERS**

- “Companies should not transfer projects to actors with fewer financial resources, thereby avoiding responsibility for environmental obligations or decommissioning costs.”



### **STRENGTHEN REGULATORY MECHANISMS**

- “Clear rules are needed to ensure sufficient financing and accountability in project exits.”

In summary, co-responsibility in a just transition requires a long-term vision and shared action among multiple actors. It is not merely about companies deciding whether to close or how to do so, but about all involved stakeholders—the private sector, the State and society—assuming

a sustained commitment to managing the transition and any eventual exit, aimed at preventing negative impacts, repairing historical harms and actively contributing to the well-being and sustainable development of the territory.

# 6

## STRATEGIC CONCLUSIONS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE TRANSITION AGENDA IN MINING TERRITORIES



From the outset, this document set out to address a series of guiding questions regarding institutional capacities, models of co-responsibility, forms of justice and the narratives shaping transition processes in mining territories such as Cesar and La Guajira. Drawing on the dialogues held, international lessons and the voices gathered in these territories, the findings systematised here make it possible to identify not only progress and opportunities, but also structural tensions that will continue to shape the transition agenda in Colombia and Latin America in the years to come.

Overall, the analysis confirms that the transition in mining territories is neither a linear nor an exclusively technical process. On the contrary, it is a deeply political, social and territorial transformation, marked by disputes over the future of development, the distribution of costs and benefits, and the effective recognition of rights. In this context, still-fragmented institutional responses, the persistent economic dependence on coal and uncertainty regarding the pace and scenarios of exit create a highly complex landscape that requires comprehensive and forward-looking approaches.

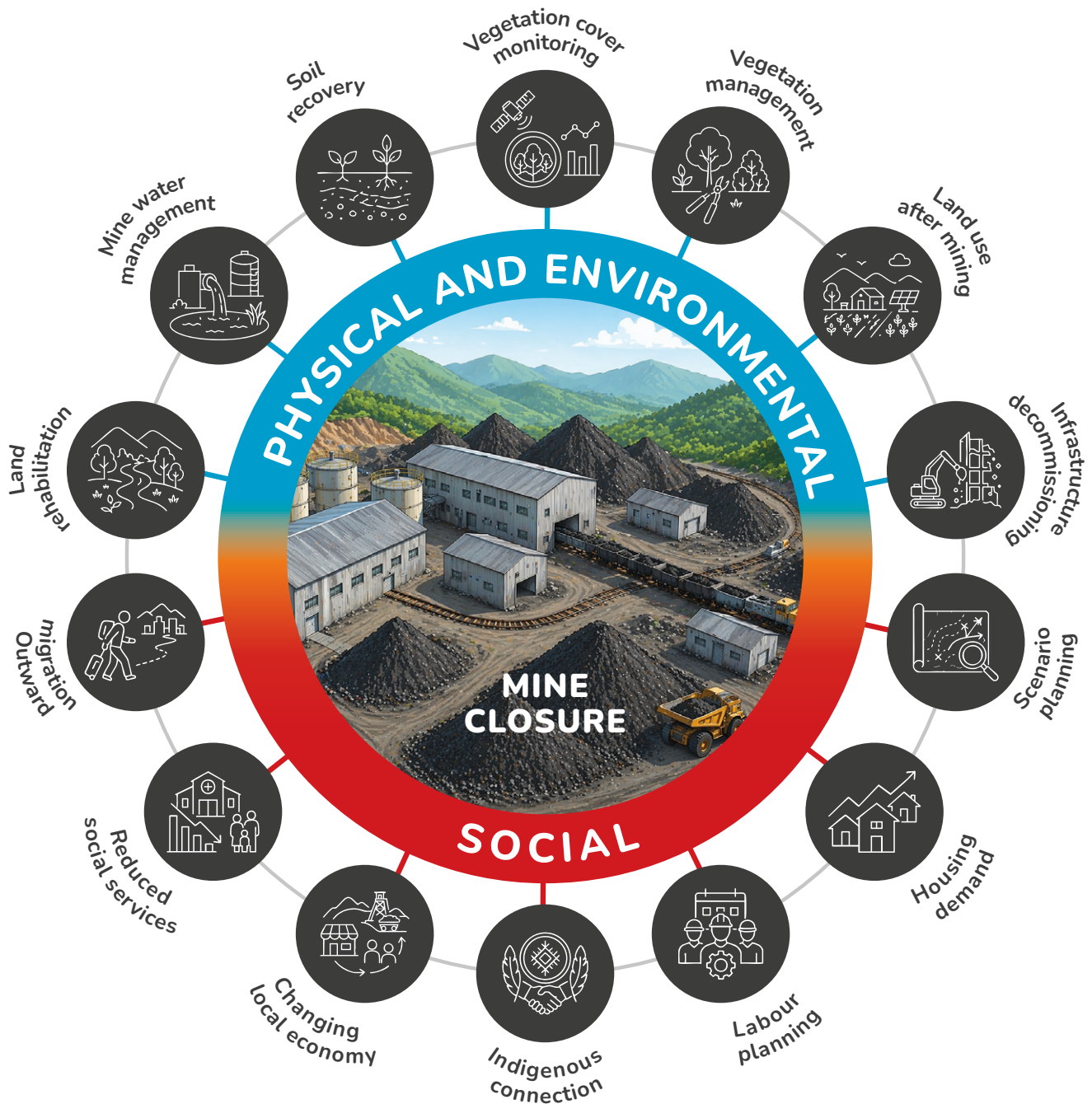
**In light of the findings presented, CREER identifies a set of priority strategic debates that will need to be addressed explicitly in the coming years, both within its research and reflection agenda and in its work on territorial accompaniment, public advocacy, and collective impact in Latin America.**



### 6.1. The importance of a social and Human Rights perspective on mine closures

Although the analysis of mine closures—both in institutional and regulatory spheres and in public debate, in Colombia as well as in other countries—has traditionally focused on technical and

environmental aspects, it is essential to incorporate a social perspective into this discussion. The social dimension is closely linked to the economic, environmental, and political dynamics of territories, and the transformations that occur in these spheres have direct effects on the well-being of communities once mining activities come to an end.



Source: "Mine Closure Overview", Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRM), Sustainable Minerals Institute, University of Queensland (2022). Retrieved from: [CSRM Mine Closure Hub](#).

In this regard, CREER's work moving forward will focus on positioning—across different scales of the public agenda—the importance of strategic, responsible, and orderly planning of mine closures from a social and human rights perspective. To achieve this, it is essential to consider elements such as those highlighted by Sarah Mackenzie and Deanna Kemp, which include: labor transitions and employability (re-skilling, job relocation, and collaboration with other industries); local governance (infrastructure, provision of public services, and the definition of local responsibilities); land use and zoning; housing and accommodation; strengthening local businesses and generating economic opportunities in post-mining contexts; local-level agreements; and the protection of community culture, heritage, and spiritual transitions.

## **6.2. Human Rights due diligence and multiscale co-responsibility in responsible mine closure processes**

It is essential that the notion of co-responsibility and human rights due diligence actions be integrated transversally throughout the entire coal value chain. This implies involving not only the companies that extract, export, and process coal, but also the countries and companies that purchase it, as well as end users. Adopting this perspective helps promote concrete actions so that the different actors participating in the traceability of the value chain assume defined roles and clear, proportional responsibilities aimed at preventing, mitigating, and adequately managing the social, economic, and environmental impacts associated with mine closure processes.

In this context, it is key that companies and business initiatives from the different countries that are part of the coal value chain (such as Bettercoal) coordinate efforts and advance toward building a shared understanding of what due diligence entails in the context of responsible coal mining phase-outs. This involves establishing common criteria, monitoring and evaluation

mechanisms, as well as verifiable commitments that guide the management of impacts derived from mine closures and contribute to ensuring just transition processes for affected territories and communities.

Likewise, this approach requires promoting a multiscale dialogue that goes beyond the strictly territorial or national responsibilities of the countries where extractive operations are located (and where the impacts of mine closures are most directly experienced) to also incorporate the co-responsibility of coal-importing countries. In this regard, it is necessary to involve actors along the supply chains of importing countries such as Netherlands, Turkey, Taiwan, South Korea, China, and Brazil, among others, recognizing that the impacts and responsibilities associated with the transition away from coal are global in nature and require coordinated responses across multiple jurisdictions.

## **6.3. The (dis)connection between the national agenda and land-use planning**

Firstly, the document highlights the persistent tension between the national vision of the energy transition and the territorial reality of mining regions. The findings show that, while at the national level there is a growing discourse oriented towards phasing out fossil fuels, in territories such as Cesar and La Guajira coal continues to sustain a large part of the economic, social and fiscal fabric.

This gap poses the challenge of ensuring that shifts towards a more sustainable energy and productive model, aligned with national and global climate agendas, are planned in advance and in a participatory manner, preventing mining communities from disproportionately bearing the costs of the process. Its significance lies in the need to align national agendas with territorial realities, effectively incorporating the voices, proposals and alternatives emerging from the local level.



#### 6.4. The (dis)articulation of the mining sector with the transition agenda

Since 2016, in the context of the Comprehensive Sectoral Impact Assessment on Human Rights in Colombia's mining sector, ► CREER has identified that Colombian mining policy has been developed without adequately considering territorial contexts. On this occasion, the findings likewise reveal a structural disconnect between the mining sector and territorial development. The lack of articulation between extractive activities, the transition agenda, planning and land-use management, productive diversification, and the strengthening of local capacities has historically limited the possibilities for a just and sustainable transition, exposing territories to scenarios of disorderly closure, loss of livelihoods, and the deepening of inequalities.

In this context, the transition opens up a key opportunity to overcome the extractive enclave model by planning for the coexistence and integration of different economic activities in mining territories. This includes integrating mining activity—whether in decline or transformation—with emerging economies linked to the bioeconomy,

renewable energy, ecological restoration and other sustainable productive activities, as well as with the growing interest in the development of critical minerals in the country.

Seizing this opportunity requires ensuring that the potential expansion of new extractive, energy and green economy activities does not reproduce the patterns of territorial disconnection seen in the past, but is instead embedded within strategies for territorial planning, productive diversification, management of environmental and social liabilities, and the strengthening of local capacities. In this way, mining—including that associated with strategic minerals—could contribute to laying the foundations for sustainable territorial economies before, during and after extraction, rather than becoming a new cycle of dependency and conflict.

#### 6.5. The absence of a strong regulatory and normative framework on responsible exits and closures

Another priority emerges from the absence of regulations and a comprehensive national policy on responsible phase-outs and progressive





mine closure. The document shows that current approaches remain reactive, fragmented and highly dependent on unilateral corporate decisions or on political and electoral contingencies. Recent experience in mining territories confirms that managing the gradual phase-out of fossil fuels requires clear rules, forward planning and an explicit distribution of responsibilities among the State, companies and territories. At the same time, this regulatory gap opens up a strategic opportunity to promote the development of a national roadmap, based on territorial and international lessons, that ensures co-responsibility, early planning and the effective protection of the rights of workers and communities.

## **6.6. The need to strengthen labour reconversion and economic diversification strategies**

Similarly, the document highlights labour reconversion and the construction of decent livelihoods as a central pillar of the transition in mining territories. The findings show that, without guarantees of social protection, economic sustainability and real opportunities for income generation, reconversion processes may result in precariousness, informality or the structural loss of livelihoods in regions highly dependent on coal. In this sense, the transition cannot be limited to isolated training programmes, but requires comprehensive strategies that integrate labour reconversion, productive diversification and the strengthening of local economies. At the same time, the document identifies concrete opportunities to move in this direction through emerging initiatives such as agroecology, ecological restoration and other productive activities aligned with the transition, capable of contributing to territorial sustainability and the economic autonomy of communities.

In this context, spaces for dialogue and the active involvement of organisations and territorial collectives that are already proposing opportunities and alternatives for economic diversification from the local level are particularly relevant, so that these initiatives can influence the definition of national transition agendas and incorporate the perspectives, priorities and solutions developed within the territories themselves.

## **6.7. Governance, participation and co-responsibility of the transition within the framework of land-use planning**

The analysis underscores the importance of advancing towards territorial governance of the energy transition that avoids reproducing extractive logics and new forms of exclusion under renewed narratives. The document's findings show that, in the absence of clear frameworks for territorial planning, co-responsibility and

transparent decision-making rules, transition processes may deepen pre-existing inequalities or reproduce extractivist dynamics under new narratives. At the same time, this scenario opens a strategic opportunity to design more democratic governance frameworks capable of articulating respect for territorial planning, effective human rights safeguards and tangible benefits for local communities.

Within this framework, substantive social participation emerges as a central element of transition governance, rather than an accessory component. The document confirms that the different dimensions of justice in the transition—procedural, distributive, restorative and transformative—continue to be addressed only partially. While social participation is recognised in institutional discourse, it is not systematically translated into a real capacity to influence decision-making; the reparation of accumulated harms remains incomplete; and opportunities for the structural transformation of territories remain fragile. Strengthening access to understandable information, local capacities and effective mechanisms for influence is therefore essential for territorial governance of the transition to achieve social legitimacy, long-term sustainability and coherence with the principles of justice that should guide the transformation of mining territories.

In this sense, participation and the recognition of the agency of young people, women and LGBTIQ+ populations are key elements in building strategic pathways towards responsible closures. Their involvement in decision-making spaces strengthens the inclusion and sustainability of the actions and projects to be implemented in the region in the future.

### **6.8. Multi-stakeholder dialogue as an enabler of the transition**

Across the board, the document highlights the need to strengthen multi-stakeholder dialogue as an enabling condition for the transition, particularly in a context of high political polarisation



and uncertainty regarding the future of the sector. The findings show that building transition pathways, as well as responsible entries and exits, requires permanent, structured spaces with real capacity to influence decisions, bringing together the National Government and the private sector—regardless of their political positions—as well as local administrations, trade unions and communities in mining territories.

Such dialogue is key not only for coordinating technical and economic decisions, but also for building trust, anticipating social and labour impacts, and agreeing on shared responsibilities in the transition. In the absence of these spaces, the transition risks deepening mistrust among actors, fragmenting institutional responses and





weakening the social legitimacy of decisions, thereby increasing the likelihood of conflict in mining territories undergoing transition.

### 6.9. Dealing with uncertainty

The transition landscape is also marked by uncertainty, where market shocks can lead to premature and unplanned mine closures. Consequently, there is an urgent need for safeguards or institutional protocols to address the challenge of stranded assets. Transition planning must go beyond linear, predetermined timelines, incorporating contingency frameworks capable of absorbing sudden industrial shifts.

Given this scenario, an adaptive planning approach must be promoted. A sudden shutdown is not only a financial risk for businesses but also a human rights crisis for the communities that depend on that economy. Therefore, the institutional and social framework must be strengthened so that, in the face of any market contingency, safety nets, transition funds, and productive alternatives are already in place. It is not just a matter of planning for the end of an operation, but of safeguarding people's futures against global volatility.

### 6.10. Coexistence of Diverse and Shared Narratives Towards a Just Transition

Finally, the construction of diverse yet shared narratives about the future of mining territories is identified as a key component for the sustainability of the process. The document shows that the coexistence of narratives of continuity, abrupt closure or indefinite transition generates uncertainty and polarisation. Moving towards more complex and context-specific narratives is essential to align expectations, recognise the historical trajectories of territories and understand the transition not only as a technical or economic process, but as a collective project of territorial transformation.

These strategic priorities do not constitute a closed or exhaustive agenda. Rather, they form a framework for action that will guide CREER's role in a context of high political, economic and social uncertainty. Addressing them will be crucial to ensuring that the transition in mining territories does not remain limited to managing coal decline, but instead becomes a genuine opportunity for territorial transformation, social justice and long-term sustainability.







