

JUST TRANSITION: PATHWAYS TO SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE DECARBONISATION

KEY MESSAGES

- **The transition to net-zero** will not be sustainable if it creates or exacerbates social inequalities. A social justice approach can facilitate the transition and embed it globally.
- **Costs and benefits of climate policies**

WHAT IS A 'JUST TRANSITION'?

Growing calls for a just transition (JT) capture the need to share the costs and benefits of ambitious climate action in a fair and equitable manner².

This is primarily framed in terms of addressing the employment effects of decarbonisation policies, particularly in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) discussions and the Paris Agreement.

Yet while this is rightly a central concern, a narrow 'jobs versus climate' frame risks deepening social divisions, pitting 'winners' and 'losers' of the transition against each other. On the other hand, presenting decarbonisation as a 'win-win' project that will deliver 'green growth' to everyone threatens to de-politicise the transition and silence those most affected by its negative effects³.

This briefing proposes a broader, more nuanced framing of JT that starts by recognising that the costs and benefits of climate policies – as well as the ability to shape such policies – are unevenly

CURRENT BLIND SPOTS IN THE JT DEBATE:

Job creation per se does not deliver 'just' outcomes. It matters what kind of jobs are created, what they pay, how secure they are, and what ripple effects they cause in the local economy in terms of secondary and tertiary opportunities⁷. It matters who is equipped or trained to do the jobs that emerge. Equal access to education and targeted vocational training for lower skilled workers is also vital to ensure that the creation of quality 'green' jobs does not just benefit the already advantaged. Beyond

Open and transparent communication will be crucial to build trust in and support for the transition. Too often, climate policies and the risks and opportunities they engender are framed in a de-ethicised and de-politicised vacuum, silent on how issues of social (in)justice and democratic exclusion are demonstrated through climate policy. Ensuring ongoing access to information to facilitate meaningful participation in policymaking is an important corollary¹⁶.

Continuous learning from success and failure is imperative for enabling complex, large-scale transitions. A growing number of countries, with varying political coalitions and orientations, from Costa Rica to Cuba, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, South Africa or Spain, have legislated on JT, created JT task forces and/or incorporated JT concerns into long term policy planning¹⁷. Sub-state experimentation with JT policies, such as in California, also provides opportunities for scaling up success. Finally, successes and failures in responding to the justice implications of Covid-19 may offer lessons for decarbonisation policies.

Independent interdisciplinary research, connecting insights across climate, energy, and environmental justice scholarships, can enhance understanding of JT and build empirical evidence of what kind of policies are politically feasible, widely supported, and in line with urgent decarbonisation imperatives. Governments could also establish independent bodies to provide advice and facilitate stakeholder engagement (see Scotland's [Just Transition Commission](#)).

Finally, governments should **incorporate JT provisions into their Nationally Determined Contributions**¹⁸. This global stocktake provides opportunities to review such provisions and promote peer-to-peer learning. The UNFCCC, ILO, [ITUC](#) and other international organisations should continue to facilitate real-world evidence gathering (including in developing countries) to inform good practice guidance, e.g. through the Working Group on JT as well as the [Response Measures](#) forum. This could also be linked to action under the SDGs and other international platforms.

In short, there is no 'silver bullet' approach to delivering JT. Policies must 'connect activities across international organisations, regional and national governments, businesses and investors, the development and philanthropic sectors, and, crucially, the workers and communities who will feel the effects of the transition – whether well or poorly managed – most keenly'¹⁹.rm.

REFERENCES

1. Evans, G. and Phelan, L. (2016). Transition to a post-carbon society: linking environmental justice and just transition discourses. *Energy Policy*, 99, pp. 329–339.
2. McCauley, D. and Heron, R. (2018). Just transition: Integrating climate, energy and environmental justice. *Energy Policy*, 119, pp. 1–7.
3. Newell, P and Mulvaney, D. (2013). The political economy of the 'just transition'. *The Geographical Journal*, 179(2), pp. 132–140.
4. Robins, N. and Rydge, J. (2019). *Why a Just Transition is Crucial for Effective Climate Action. Inevitable Policy Response*. London: Vivid Economics. Available at: www.vivideconomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/IPR-Just-Transition-discussion-paper_16-September-2019.pdf.
5. Ciplet, D. and Roberts, J. T. (2017). Climate change and the transition to neoliberal environmental governance. *Global Environmental Governance*, 46, pp. 148–156.
6. Healy, N. and Barry, J. (2017). Politicizing energy justice and energy system transitions: Fossil fuel divestment and a "just transition". *Energy Policy*, 108, p. 453.
7. UNFCCC (n.d.). *Just Transition of the Workforce, and the Creation of Decent Work and Quality Jobs*. Technical Paper. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Just%20transition.pdf>.
8. Baruah, B. (2016). Renewable inequity? Women's employment in clean energy in industrialized, emerging and developing economies. *Natural Resources Forum*,

