

# ISSUES PAPER

# CHALLENGES and OPPORTUNITIES for a JUST TRANSITION

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Issues of just transition should be a **core component of climate action**, sustainable development, and the transformation of societies and economies.
- Just transition measures can **mitigate the adverse impacts of economic and societal transition**, protect workers, communities, and vulnerable groups, and make sure that no one is left behind.
- In addition, a just transition can also **capitalize on opportunities, synergies, and co-benefits** presented by this transition, increase resilience, and accelerate development efforts.
- **Challenges for a just transition** include limited data availability, gaps in coordination and communication, limited stakeholder engagement, issues of social exclusion, inequality, and marginalization, lack of regulations or enforcement, lack of access, high initial investment costs and risks of transition, lack of financial resources, and issues of informality.
- **Recommendations for facilitating a just transition** include coherent and effective policies and regulations tailored to local contexts, inclusion and participation of all stakeholders, enhanced (re)training and skills development, safety nets and concrete guarantees, creation of trust, support of innovation, identification of entry points and road maps for concrete actions that can be scaled up, and partnerships between diverse actors.

• **The short- and long-term effects of climate change are increasingly felt across the globe, threatening human livelihoods and exacerbating underlying socio-economic issues. These adverse impacts highlight the need to reduce emissions, adapt to changing climatic conditions, and transition into greener, more sustainable economies and societies.**

The concept and strategies of just transition were first introduced by labour unions and environmental justice groups and have become key elements for **addressing climate change in a more inclusive and just manner**. One of the early foundational documents comes from the International Labour Organization, and issues surrounding just transition were addressed in the work on response measures under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as well as the Paris Agreement and the Silesia Declaration. Just transition as a key consideration for climate action and commitments is now becoming a mainstream concept that is endorsed by labour unions, civil society, intergovernmental organizations, and national governments.

## DEFINITIONS of JUST TRANSITION

Just transition refers to the transformation of economies and societies toward environmental sustainability, decarbonization, climate change adaptation, eradication of poverty, decent work, social inclusion, justice, and equity. There is no universally accepted definition of "just transition," but various organizations such as unions, ILO, or OECD, have put forward frameworks and key elements. At its core, just transition is about leaving no one behind and providing safety for workers, their families, and communities at large. It is also about utilizing opportunities and choosing pathways of transformation that will provide decent work, social inclusion, equity, and resilience for all. Key elements include institutional arrangements and policy coherence (including macroeconomic and labour market policies), social dialogue, skills development, occupational health and safety, and social protection.

Aspects of just transition such as capacity-building and skills development, social protection, inclusive and participatory processes, and gender-responsive or -transformative actions are pivotal for climate action in key sectors such as energy and extractives, food systems and land use, industry, waste management, construction, transport, or fashion.

A just transition involves the large-scale, structural **transformation of societies and economies** on a sustainable, low-carbon, climate-friendly pathway that protects and improves the economic and social well-being of workers and communities in the process. It comprises changes in livelihoods and ways of life, business practices and methods, the rise of new sectors and the replacement of others through a social dialogue that includes all relevant stakeholders and addresses existing inequalities. The notion that **“one size does not fit all”** is vital in working towards this goal, recognizing the different context, impacts, vulnerabilities, and needs across communities, sectors, countries, and regions.

## JUST TRANSITION and the UNFCCC

Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), just transition was first identified as a key area of work under the work programme and forum on response measures adopted and established at the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) in 2011. As part of the work programme, a SBSTA/SBI workshop on just transition took place in 2013, resulting in a number of suggested actions to advance the discussion.

In 2015, the issue of just transition was included into the Paris Agreement through a commitment of parties to take into account *“the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities.”*

The inclusion of a just transition of the workforce into the the Paris Agreement is a major landmark to link climate action with worker’s rights, sustainable development needs, and the idea of leaving no one behind. The **Silesia Declaration** adopted at COP25 in 2018 provided additional political support and a further commitment of governments to solidarity, support, and the mainstreaming of just transition into their Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans, and other climate-related policies and plans.



# I. JUST TRANSITION in the ENERGY SECTOR

## Pathways, entry points, key requirements, gaps, needs, and challenges

The energy sector and extractive industries are central sectors when it comes to just transition and climate change mitigation. **Shifting away from fossil fuels** is imperative to transition toward a low-carbon or carbon-neutral economy and addressing issues of global warming and climate change. A **transition towards 100% renewable and not carbon-intensive sources of energy** is a necessary precondition to curb global warming and achieve the targets of the Paris Agreement.

However, such a transition will require **large-scale changes to infrastructure, technology, and socio-economic frameworks**, and many state and non-state actors are concerned about the economic and social repercussions of implementing this transition. Energy transition has far-reaching implications for economies, businesses, and local communities, as millions of individuals are directly or indirectly employed in the global energy sector. However, in the long term, prolonging transition in the energy sector will lead to much higher economic, social, and environmental costs.

### PATHWAYS and ENTRY POINTS

Low-carbon energy transitions have already begun in a number of countries, often based on health, economic, and environmental considerations in addition to climate commitments. Energy transitions involve **restructuring the economy and labour markets** and can lead to short- and long-term market contractions or expansions.

**Early action on just transition** can significantly minimize adverse impacts and maximize the opportunities offered by a transformation of the energy sector, creating new green jobs in renewables-based industries alongside skill development programmes.

Just transition needs to be **inclusive and focus not only on the developed world**. The principles of just transition should be integrated into climate plans and policies of developing countries while respecting their right to development and acknowledging existing power dynamics. Under the Paris Agreement, just transition should be a key consideration in national commitments and climate actions of all countries, with a focus on climate justice, inclusive and equitable processes, building local capacities, and considerations related to climate finance, technology transfer, and different national circumstances.

### Key requirements and entry points for a just transition in the energy sector include:

- Formulating clear national targets and programmes supported by coherent and effective policies and regulations that prevent exploitation and integrate just transition into climate and development processes;
- Involving all stakeholders in inclusive and participatory decision-making processes through tripartite or multi-actor partnerships, community-led initiatives, and structures that connect actors from the public sector, private sector, research institutions, and civil society;



- Enhancing skill development, capacity-building, and international technical and financial support;
- Fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and creativity as well as dispelling the notion that the energy sector is the exclusive playing fields of big corporations;
- Guaranteeing energy security and creating awareness of the issues and benefits surrounding a transition to clean and renewable energy, including government outreach, education reform, and awareness creation by civil society and non-governmental organizations;
- Addressing economic models from an angle of resilience and not just growth; working upstream and in a preventative manner;
- Bringing in elements of local production and control of energy supply and infrastructure;
- Integrating just transition into holistic risk management frameworks and plans, treating job loss and market failure as additional risks to be prevented, reduced, or transferred;
- Addressing concerns of affordability and access to clean energy in a pre-emptive and proactive manner;
- Keeping in mind issues of energy pricing and access and avoiding negative social impacts and resistance to climate action caused by rising prices for energy and energy-dependent services and activities such as public transport, individual transport, waste management, and home cooking;
- Developing evidence-based policies and interventions that are tailored to the national and local context.

## **GAPS, NEEDS, and CHALLENGES for a JUST TRANSITION in the ENERGY SECTOR**

A just transition of the energy sector is a vast undertaking that faces several obstacles and challenges. The negative impacts of an unmanaged transition could include economic decline, decay of community culture and identity, loss of livelihoods and job security in fossil fuel-based industries or businesses, loss of energy access and affordability for poor populations, and rising inequality and poverty in communities dependent on the sector.

**Key challenges with regard to the implementation of a clean and renewable energy transition** include issues of pricing and investment, limited data availability, poor physical access to infrastructure, issues with securing land permits and land ownership, gaps in communication and coordination between local and national government authorities, lack of regulations or the enforcement of existing regulations, an immature energy service companies (ESCOs) market, and lack of financing mechanisms. On the government side, there are often tensions between local, central, and sectoral needs as well as a lack of stakeholder engagement, capacity-building, and policy coherence. There is also a lack of gender-responsive or transformative actions, a loss of cultural knowledge and technologies, and a lack of integration of just transition into climate-related plans and policies.

Just transition measures are used to **mitigate the aforementioned negative impacts** whilst maximizing the positive aspects of the energy sector transition. The final outcome or success depends on the strategies utilized and how well they connect to the local context and take into account different capabilities, needs, and scales across developed and developing countries.



## II. JUST TRANSITION in FOOD SYSTEMS

### Pathways, entry points, key requirements, gaps, needs, and challenges

Food systems are another key area in need of just transition. **Current industrialized food production is a major greenhouse gas emitter** accounting for 20-30% of total global greenhouse gasses and causing widespread environmental degradation and destruction. At the same time, agricultural systems are **vulnerable to climate risks and changes** including droughts, floods, temperature increases, erratic precipitation patterns, and sea level rise. Furthermore, while the world's food systems are highly productive and vital to human survival, they are often inefficient in allocation, indicated by the fact that millions of people worldwide are still undernourished and suffering from food insecurity. This is particularly important in the context of COVID-19, which has highlighted and amplified inequalities, inefficiencies, and vulnerabilities in existing food systems.

**Food systems must move away from a carbon- and resource-intensive, industrialized approach** to more resilient, regenerative, and agroecology-based modes of production. However, this transition can have significant negative impacts on individuals and livelihoods within a sector that already experiences inequality and injustice, exploitation of rural farmers, women, and other marginalized groups, and huge numbers of informal or unregistered laborers. Blanket or blind transition policies will exacerbate these issues and amplify climate impacts on vulnerable groups, in particular in developing countries.

A just transition indicates approaching the transformation of the food sector **in a holistic way** that captures social, economic, and environmental dimensions as well as being inclusive of the perspectives and issues of rural farmers, low-income consumers, women, farming and processing workers, and any other stakeholders. It

should ensure their livelihoods and social protection, bridge existing inequalities, and facilitate an equitable distribution of resources and benefits. In the lead-up to the **United Nations Food Systems Summit**, it is vital to create discourse on this topic, increasing awareness and engagement on the need for just transition within the food sector.

### PATHWAYS and ENTRY POINTS

A just transition in the food sector would improve **worker wellbeing and livelihoods** through economic diversification. This transition should not be the sole responsibility of local communities, as that will lead to an inequitable distribution of impacts and benefits among stakeholders. There should be a focus on agroecology, agroforestry, permaculture, organic farming, and other sustainable agricultural practices to build **resilient and regenerative food systems**, along with training, extension services, and support to help farmers adopt these methods.

An **inclusive and participatory approach** to the food sector transition does not simply indicate consulting all stakeholders, but also employing specific strategies to manage power imbalances. Integrating agricultural, biological, cultural, dietary, environmental, financial, and gender diversity is crucial to facilitating a just transition, as is the inclusion of informal and unregistered workers, in particular in developing countries.

Farmer revenue is likely to increase with the adoption of regenerative agriculture, as less resources are spent on inputs, soil health is conserved, and the ability to sustain agricultural practices is enhanced. Managing risks from climate impacts such as rainfall variation and drought will also contribute to increasing food security while ecosystem restoration and agroforestry practices

can create carbon sinks. In terms of the farming community and its livelihoods, a transition of food systems will lead to more stability and opportunity for rural and women farmers, with overall decent work and sustainable livelihoods for all farmers.

### **Key requirements and entry points for a just transition in the food sector include:**

- Mapping stakeholders and supply chains and understanding the local context including demographic factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, farming type, socioeconomic status, and location, focusing on marginalized groups;
- Finding entry points leading to concrete actions that countries and local authorities can scale up, as well as solutions coming from a bottom-up approach with the participation of diverse stakeholders, for example organizing cities-farmers dialogues to help build understanding of markets, partnerships, and business models;
- Developing concrete roadmaps and model initiatives for farmers, countries, and consumers;
- Supporting farmers in transition through subsidies, coverage of initial losses, and minimum price guarantees;
- Demystifying just transition in food systems to embolden decision-makers to make changes of magnitude, especially on an international level;
- Building trust within farming communities and facilitating organization and collaborative action of farmers in cooperatives;
- Re-allocating budgets spent on subsidizing industrial agriculture and specifically livestock-rearing to provide better extension services and training for regenerative plant-based agricultural practices;
- Supporting transition efforts of farmers and providing concrete solutions, guarantees, and risk management measures including insurance and social protection schemes;
- Raising awareness of the complexity of supply chains and promoting a better understanding among key stakeholders and the wider public;
- Addressing issues of social security and recognition through pension schemes, public social security, and financial incentives for changing farming practices;
- Combining just transition and climate action with adaptation measures, in particular in parts of the food sector where direct climate impacts are more threatening than the impacts of climate action and restructuring.

## **GAPS, NEEDS, and CHALLENGES for a JUST TRANSITION in FOOD SYSTEMS**

Workers in the food sector are exposed to a number of risks and inequalities. For a successful just transition, frontline workers and farmers must be brought into the discussion beyond tokenism on a local, national, regional, and intergovernmental level. Due to existing inequalities, women and other marginalized groups may be neglected and left behind, leading to farming communities ignoring intersectional realities and related impacts they may face in the transition process. The informal, small-scale, or family-run nature of farming also often causes issues related to social security and social recognition that encourage farmers and in particular youth to leave the sector.

**Key challenges** include a lack of technology access and investment in farming, lack of awareness of the benefits of transition to emission reduction, lack of institutional support for diversification within the food sector, lack of compensation payouts for losses, lack of guaranteed income streams, young people moving away from agriculture, and lack of integration of crop agriculture and livestock into NDCs and other climate and development plans and policies. The initial investment cost associated with transitioning to a low-carbon food system can lead to farmers paying their workers lower wages for more demanding physical labour. Furthermore, there is a lack of financial incentives for farmers, especially rural smallholders, to adopt sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices, as they cannot bear the associated costs and risks on their own.

### III. CROSS-CUTTING ASPECTS of JUST TRANSITION

#### Gender, youth, inclusion, and social protection

Sustainable livelihoods, decent work, poverty alleviation, and climate change are some of the **defining issues of the 21st century**. Transitioning to a low-carbon economy, ensuring that economies can efficiently cater to a growing population, providing decent and sustainable work for all, and ensuring special consideration of vulnerable groups will be vital for achieving both the SDGs and the targets of the Paris Agreement.

However, there are **widespread issues** of fragmentation and lack of coordination among existing social security programmes, schemes, and policies as well as gaps in the quality and relevance of information, the availability of data across content, spatial, and temporal scales, timely access to information, and the capacity to use information alongside other resources.

To avoid exacerbating existing inequalities in the transition, it is necessary to formulate **inclusive and evidence-based policies and strategies** and analyze cross-cutting issues of a just transition, including those related to gender, youth, vulnerable communities, marginalized groups, and the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **GENDER and JUST TRANSITION**

**Gender is a key component for a just transition.** While gender equality has been consistently garnering more attention regarding climate action, there is still exclusion, heightened vulnerability, and discrimination. Policies within sectors and climate mitigation and adaptation measures are often not gender-responsive or do not account for equitable participation and consideration of gender-specific vulnerabilities. Gender justice needs to be included as a principle of just

transition, and just transition should be ensured along the entire supply chain and across communities.

**Climate change can worsen existing vulnerabilities and have gender-specific impacts.** Gender must be an integral part of all climate processes, including the transition to a low-carbon economy. This includes challenging industries to transition away from existing gendered power dynamics, including gender quotas in newly established sectors, building inclusive work environments, ensuring gender representation in stakeholder consultations in the transition process, increasing financing and small grant opportunities to support community-based just transition initiatives, and accounting for women's care and informal work. Trained women communicators can enhance the uptake of climate information for women and enable them to better use available information.

Gender also needs to be **systematically considered in NDCs** and should be mainstreamed across all relevant sectors. A just transition that is inclusive of a gendered dimension in this manner can contribute to changing gender norms and encouraging gender equality and equitable participation.



## YOUTH and JUST TRANSITION

**Transitioning to a low-carbon economy will affect youth in particular** because their future and livelihoods are at stake and because they are the workforce of the future and will experience unique struggles and opportunities. Addressing the issues faced by youth in a just transition includes equipping young people with the capacity to be involved in decision-making, keeping processes youth-centred and powered by youth, and guaranteeing their right to participation in international and national processes.

An important aspect of this is **investing financially in re-orienting education** to reflect the new low-carbon industries that are being established and that incorporate climate-based education and learning. Policies related to just transition should also consider strategies that support and encourage youth to stay and work in sectors such as energy or agriculture. Re-orienting youth toward new, climate-friendly, and climate-safe work and practices through capacity-building and funding also helps to better facilitate a just transition while skills development alongside the promotion of green jobs constitutes an integral part of just transition in energy, industry, construction, transport, waste management, and other sectors. In addition, social protection systems are essential to shield youth from adverse impacts to their education, development, health, and safety during large-scale economic and societal transformation.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION and PROTECTION

The IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report emphasized the importance of assessing **synergies between social protection, disaster risk reduction, and social development**, highlighting the opportunities of strengthening social protection schemes for a just transition and connecting them to other processes and mechanisms, such as inclusive insurance. Trade unions can have a significant role to play in determining social protection policy measures, as can the advocacy of CSOs and CBOs.

Social inclusion and protection are key cross-cutting elements of a just transition. As socio-economic and environmental risks are strongly interlinked, climate policies and economic transitions can leave large sub-sections of society vulnerable to loss of livelihoods, exploitation, loss of subsidies and disposable income, and other adverse impacts. There is a large number of unregistered and informal laborers in the agriculture sector and its supply chains, in particular in developing countries, that are vulnerable and lack livelihood and often even food security; there are also marginalized groups and individuals even within communities whose special needs should be addressed.

Social protection refers to a **set of policies and programmes** that manage risks and vulnerabilities, reduce poverty and inequality, and protect populations from deprivation, loss of livelihoods or income, and social exclusion. Social protection is recognized as a human right and as a pillar of just transition. However, according to an ILO report from 2016, only a quarter of the world's population currently has adequate social security coverage, and more than half lack any coverage at all. **Social protection systems for a just transition should be shock-responsive, holistic, inclusive, and able to adapt** to progressive climate change impacts and transforming economies. To achieve these, contributory and non-contributory protection schemes can include elements such as income support; unemployment insurance or benefits; maternity protection; healthcare including workplace injury and sickness benefits; child, family, old-age, disability, and survivors benefits; pensions; social assistance; in-kind (f.i. food) and cash transfers; housing support; skills training, retraining, and upgrading; workforce redeployment; enterprise support; productive safety nets; psycho-social support; asset accumulation; public works programmes; integrated cash+ programmes; compensation for temporary income losses; job guarantees, wage and benefit parity guarantees; minimum crop price guarantees; payment for environmental services; disaster risk financing and insurance to respond to extreme events; and climate risk insurance for contingency financing.





## IV. INTEGRATING JUST TRANSITION into POLICIES and PROCESSES

### NDCs, SDGs, and national climate-related policies and processes



The Paris Agreement and the Silesia Declaration emphasize just transition as a **key principle in minimizing the rise of global temperatures** and ensuring finance flows consistent with a trajectory to lower greenhouse gas emissions and increase climate resilience. Similarly, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) under the Agenda 2030 focus on sustainable economic growth whilst protecting worker rights and livelihoods, for example through SDG 8 (“ensuring decent work and economic growth”), SDG 10 (“reduced inequalities”), or SDG 1 (“no poverty”).

For a successful just transition, integrated approaches to promote decarbonized societies, regional circular, and ecological spheres, and the formulation of decentralized societies will be vital to create long-term economic and societal benefits. **The NDC process is a key opportunity** to develop inclusive, participatory, equitable, and gender-responsive approaches to the transition, as is the localization process of SDG targets and subnational actions.

To mitigate climate change and limit global warming, sectors such as energy and agriculture need to be prioritized. **Integrating the principles of just transition into climate commitments** is vital to ensure that climate action does not increase existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. Skills and capacity-building, climate education, social protection risk management, and other elements need to be worded clearly and mainstreamed into NDCs as well as other policies and plans related to climate change and sustainable development.

Policy processes should facilitate the **inclusion and engagement of different actors** and provide a space for experts, technical actors, civil society

organizations, and other entities to contribute to the process and ensure that a just transition is achieved through effective integration into policy and planning processes. Different institutions, for instance universities or local governments, can **gather data** on the community and household level to prevent “blind” or blanket policies for a transition that does not address the needs and vulnerabilities of the whole of society. Similarly, public-private partnerships can play a role in ensuring holistic and grounded policy interventions for a just transition.

### COVID-19 and a JUST RECOVERY

COVID-19 has pushed millions of people into poverty, highlighting and amplifying existing vulnerabilities in economies, food systems, and healthcare. However, the pandemic also offers an **opportunity to “build forth better”** and focus on a green recovery that integrates elements of just transition, tackling both the health crisis and the climate crisis through a people-centred approach.

**A green recovery can be instrumental in speeding up the process of transitioning to a low-carbon economy.** However, it must be paired with the concept of just transition to ensure that existing socioeconomic inequalities are not exacerbated but instead bridged to a large degree. This includes measures such as grants, subsidies, loans, and tax relief programmes aimed at stimulating green industries, creating a circular economy, funding research and development, instituting alternative forms of social protection, promoting improved air quality and waste management, defining more sustainable pathways for society and nature, and increasing resilience. Civil society organizations and other non-government actors should be encouraged to push governments for a green recovery and advocate for the integration of climate action, pandemic recovery, and social justice on a local, national, and global scale.

## V. The WAY FORWARD

This issues paper highlights the **energy and food sectors as well as cross-cutting issues** related to just transition. However, just transition will affect every sector of the world's economies and societies and have far-reaching consequences. **Sectors such as construction, industry, waste management, transportation, tourism, or fashion will have to undergo a large-scale transformation** to become climate-friendly, sustainable, and equitable, while other areas such as urban settlements will need to reduce emissions and become more resilient at the same time. In particular in developing countries, most of these sectors have high percentages of family labor as well as informal and migrant workers. For a truly just transition, it is imperative to include their needs, create safety nets and alternative livelihoods, and listen to their voices directly.

It is important that government and policy-makers **initiate and facilitate inclusive partnerships and collaborations for engaging multiple stakeholders** such as industries and the private sector, workers and communities, and civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations to ensure a just transition that addresses all cross-cutting aspects such as gender, youth, other marginalized groups, and their need for social protection, in an inclusive manner. Just transition is a **complex topic with many layers and perspectives** that differ between countries and demographic groups. There is no solution or strategy that fits every country, but there is an overarching need for a just transition that results in the reinvention of regions and communities with economic diversification, enhanced labour representation, and increased access to financial resources for vulnerable groups.

### BACKGROUND & REFERENCES

This issues paper was compiled and drafted by SLYCAN Trust's Research & Knowledge Management Division led by Dennis Mombauer. The information contained in it is assembled from desk research conducted by SLYCAN Trust and the valuable contributions of the session leads, experts, and key stakeholders who participated in SLYCAN Trust's **Virtual Summit on Just Transition held on December 3rd and December 4th, 2020**. The Virtual Summit comprised five sessions with panel discussions, Q&As, and breakout groups to further discuss thematic aspects in-depth.

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