

# Climate, Jobs and Justice

## For a green and socially just transition

GEF Project Just Transition – Working paper  
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## About the project

This paper is part of the Green European Foundation's Just Transition transnational project. The project looks into the question of transforming from an extractive to a regenerative economy in a just and equitable way to find the necessary support among the population. The project is focused on collecting and sharing insights on the development of future-proof politics and policies, developed in a sensitive way that keeps in mind local specificities.

The project is on behalfs of GEF coordinated by OIKOS (Belgium), with as project partners Green House Think Tank (UK), Institute for Political Ecology (Croatia); Sunrise (North-Macedonia), Transicion Verde (Spain), Networked and Federation of Young European Greens (FYEG) and Networked (Serbia).

In the course of the project, the partners will implement activities in their countries to increase awareness of the importance of a Just Transition all over Europe. Eventually, the partners will compile a book on the subject to be published September 2021.





## Introduction

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Sustainable development, the concept that has dominated public debate on socio-ecological challenges for decades, promised the simultaneous flourishing of people, planet, and profit. However, in recent years, inequality has risen to an all-time high (Piketty, 2013). The financial crisis of 2008 provoked the most severe economic shock since the 1930s, pushing millions of people worldwide into poverty (Alexander, 2010). Moreover, as of 2015, we have transgressed four out of nine planetary boundaries, thereby exceeding the carrying capacity of the planet in four of the nine critical parameters (Steffen et al, 2015). As a global society, we are thus increasingly confronted with multiple crises requiring us to undertake profound changes (Brand, 2016).

The rising importance of concepts such as “transition” and “transformation” – often used interchangeably – reflects the growing insight that structural changes are needed in our societal architecture. The concept of “just transition” has been introduced as an overarching framework to guide our transformation into ecological societies in a socially just and equitable way. With the development of this concept, labour unions and climate movements are bringing to the fore the need for systemic transformation. Just transition entails fundamental changes, not only of key production and consumption systems such as energy, transport, agriculture, and food but also infrastructure, societal values, and politics (Heyen, Menzemer, Wolff, Beznea & Williams, 2020). Moreover, it emphasises the need for a global shift towards a human and fair economic system, with healthy ecosystems, healthcare, public service, education, and culture at its heart.

The core scientific reports of our time also highlight this need. The 2019 report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) declares that “goals for 2030 and beyond may only be achieved through transformative changes across economic, social, political and technological factors”. In the report, transformative changes are defined as “a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values”. For its part, the IPCC report of 2018, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, states that “limiting warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels would

require transformative systemic change, integrated with sustainable development. Such change would require the upscaling and acceleration of the implementation of far-reaching, multilevel and cross-sectoral climate mitigation and addressing barriers. Such systemic change would need to be linked to complementary adaptation actions, including transformational adaptation, especially for pathways that temporarily overshoot 1.5°C” (IPCC, 2018: 315).

The emergence of the yellow vests (*gilets jaunes*) movement in France illustrates the fact that introducing “environmental” policies without taking social justice into account does not work. “At the heart of [sustainability narratives and the reluctance towards them] lies the fear that addressing the monumental climate challenge will inevitably require us to choose between either protecting the planet or protecting workers and the economies that sustain people. The idea that environmental protection and employment protection are incompatible [...] cuts across social, political and geographic divides.” (UNRISD, 2018: 3). Only a vision of transition that considers the complexity, context-dependency, and interconnection of the multiple challenges faced will be able to bring about the radical change that is so urgently needed.

The Covid-19 crisis has thrown the need for deep, transformative change into even starker relief. The pandemic and its consequences reinforced inequality worldwide, with people in precarious situations suffering most. It underlined the major shortcomings of hyperglobalisation, such as the dramatic effects our dependency on global supply chains can have on basic rights such as healthcare and food provision (van de Pas, 2020). It also showed that democratic governments are able to have a real say in economic matters, and that citizens are willing and able to help those in need. Using the colossal national and European relief budgets to simply return to business as usual would be a catastrophic mistake. Yet, in many countries, this type of “recovery” is already taking place. Things can, however, be done differently: the pandemic offers the opportunity to engineer a comprehensive plan, combining solutions to both the pandemic itself and the imminent threat of global warming and ecological collapse.



Against this backdrop, it is clear that we need to embed just transition in a larger context in order to be able to provide a pathway for the future. The pandemic has only amplified the need for market regulation, a solid government, and civil society participation. Economic help from governments to businesses suffering losses due to Covid-19 needs to be coupled with binding environmental regulation and legislation. On a European level, among other things, further elaboration of the Just Transition Mechanism laid out in the Green Deal is necessary. On a global level, the importance of just transition is of an even greater order. With soaring poverty and inequality rates worldwide, just transition will mean nothing without a fundamental reassessment of global economic rationale and unjustifiable neoliberal and neo-colonial regulations. It is crucial that we debate and plan for a more profound transition, one “that could transform the economic and political structures that reproduce and

exacerbate inequalities and power asymmetries. Such a radical transition requires a redefinition of economic prosperity and social well-being. At its heart will be the creation of employment that promotes labour rights and improves working conditions while also encompassing gender and racial equality, democratic participation and social justice” (UNRISD, 2018: 4).

In this paper, we not only try to explain what just transition entails, but also aim to provide orientation in the vast terrain surrounding this concept. We will first explore its origins and history. Second, we will dig more deeply into the different interpretations of just transition. Next, we will elaborate on the importance of the concept in EU policies and analyse the Just Transition Mechanism. Finally, we will use case studies to explore how communities and countries can use this concept as a starting point for building a better future.

## History

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The concept of “just transition” was first mentioned in the 1970s, when workers in the US oil, chemical, and nuclear industries risked losing their jobs because of environmental legislation (Galgóczy, 2018). In 1993, US trade union leader Tony Mazzocchi advocated for a fund that would “provide financial support and opportunities for higher education for workers displaced by environmental protection policies” (Galgóczy, 2018). By the end of the 1990s, just transition had been incorporated into the vocabulary of numerous trade unions in North America and the concept had also been picked up on by international trade unions. As a result of this provenance, the concept of just transition was initially understood as encompassing support programmes for workers whose jobs were threatened because of environmental legislation. Two key features of this original interpretation still survive to this day. First, the idea that just transition is not welfare, but rather a comprehensive plan to provide displaced workers not only with financial compensation and security, but also, and just as importantly, with proper relocation and adequate retraining opportunities. And second, that just transition is more than just switching energy sources, which we interpret now as requiring integrated societal adaptation, economic reorientation, appropriate policy-making, and the equitable redistribution of resources (Galgóczy, 2018).

“A key promoter of Just Transition was the Spain-based Sustainlabour Foundation, a green think tank [...] active at the international level. Sustainlabour organized training sessions for union members, published thematic

reports, case studies, and policy recommendations, and played a pivotal role in getting workers’ voices heard in national and international policy spaces (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), International Labour Organization (ILO))” (UNRISD, 2018). “Within the international climate community, Just Transition was increasingly framed and recognized as the trade union movement’s contribution to the international climate debate. [...] [In 2009] the ITUC presented Just Transition as ‘a tool the trade union movement shares with the international community, aimed at smoothing the shift towards a more sustainable society and providing hope for the capacity of a “green economy” to sustain decent jobs and livelihoods for all’” (UNRISD, 2018).

Over the years, unions began to consider just transition as “a deliberate effort to plan for and invest in a transition to environmentally and socially sustainable jobs, sectors and economies” (Smith, 2017). The concept was taken into account at the Kyoto Conference (COP3) in 1997 and at the COP16 in Cancún. At the COP21 in Paris in 2015, it became an integral element of the international climate policy framework. Soon after the incorporation of decent work into the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, the ILO published a set of guidelines for just transition (see following section), a policy framework designed to facilitate the transition towards a green economy for companies and different stakeholders in civil society (Galgóczy, 2018, in Heyen et al, 2020). However, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development warns that “the term’s growing popularity should





not [...] overshadow the fact that different groups associate the Just Transition with different things [...] Nor should we overestimate its importance. Many within the environmentalist and union spaces are doubtful of the concept's usefulness. While the Just Transition has gained traction in the international policy space and the global North, apart from a few notable exceptions— including South Africa—it is rarely referred to in the global South” (UNRISD, 2018).

### **The role of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)**

The ILO's *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all* (2015), have since its publication “become the anchor of just transition policies” and the organisation “has been paving the way to make just transition an established element of the sustainable development agenda” (Galgóczi, 2018). They are “the result of a tripartite multilateral negotiation between unions, employers’ organizations and governments” (Smith, 2017), based on the shared responsibility principle, “unlike the capital/labour nexus that is based on conflicting interests, environmental and labour priorities are based on shared interest” (Galgóczi, 2018). In just transition narratives it is important to stress that, alongside ensuring environmental sustainability, societies must be inclusive, provide opportunities for decent work for all, reduce inequalities, and effectively eliminate poverty.

Within this, there are a number of key elements. First, “strategies and policies for a just transition should be **context-sensitive**. A country-specific approach fully recognising the peculiar conditions in each country would be needed, while one size fits all initiatives would be counterproductive (ILO, 2015: 6)”. Second, “a further element of complexity to be considered is that, while the challenges of the transition have territorial specificities, decisions taken at one geographical level may have repercussions at other geographical levels. In other words, while addressing specific territorial or sector-related challenges, to be ‘just’ the transition towards a low-carbon society should also take into account the broader **global** framework and the connections between ‘multi-scalar realities’ (McCauley and Heffron 2018: 2)” (Sabato & Fronteddu, 2020: 10).

### **The framework of the 2015 ILO Guidelines on just transition**

Greening of economies requires a coherent country-specific mix of macroeconomic, industrial, sectoral and labour policies. The aim is to generate decent jobs along the entire supply chain with employment opportunities on a wide scale.

As the challenge cuts across several domains, sustainable development needs to be addressed across all policy fields in a coherent manner. For such a policy framework, institutional arrangements are needed to ensure the participation of all the relevant stakeholders at all levels.

#### **Governments should:**

1. provide a coherent and stable policy framework for sustainable enterprise development and decent work for all.
2. promote and engage in social dialogue, at all stages from policy design to implementation and evaluation and at all levels, from the national level to the enterprise, in line with international labour standards.

#### **Social partners should:**

1. raise awareness and provide guidance among their members for the just transition framework.
2. play an active role in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of national sustainable development policies.
3. encourage their members to participate in social dialogue at all levels.
4. promote the inclusion of environmental provisions through collective agreements at all levels.

Source: Galgóczi (2018)



# Just transition is needed at all levels

## Definition

“A Just Transition secures the future and livelihoods of workers and their communities in the transition to a low-carbon economy. It is based on social dialogue between workers and their unions, employers, government and communities. A plan for Just Transition provides and guarantees better and decent jobs, social protection, more training opportunities and greater jobs security for all workers affected by the global warming and climate change policies’ (ITUC n.d. in Heyen et al, 2020). In this definition adopted by the International Trade Union Confederation, social dialogue and secure decent jobs are key. In sum, just transition “describes the transition towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy that maximises the benefits of climate action while minimising hardships for workers and their communities” (ITUC, 2015).

Other stakeholders in the field interpret the concept in a much broader sense, integrating the global inequality issue and environmental concerns into their definition: “By ‘just’ we mean: some chance of a safe climate for future generations; an equal distribution of the remaining global carbon budget between countries; and a transition [...] in which the costs are distributed progressively, and where everyone’s essential needs for housing, transport and energy use are met” (FoE, 2011 in Heyen et al, 2020). Here we find complementary keywords like future generations and solidarity between countries.

## Structural and transformative approach

Structural changes to our dominant societal and economic models have not always been included in sustainability narratives. With ever-new technological advances and innovations, the illusion is fostered that by swapping energy sources and materials for “sustainable” alternatives, current consumption patterns can be upheld. In the field of energy transition, for example, quite some initiatives focus on energy efficiency. Meanwhile, social demands are of subordinate importance. As a result, while increased efficiency and optimisation allow industrial tools and vehicles to consume less fossil fuels, a rise in consumption has actually created a steep rise in the use of fossil fuels worldwide. To put it simply: we have more cars and drive further with them.

This paper therefore advocates a definition of just transition which emphasises the need for both structural and transformative reform. A structural reform approach to just transition highlights an “inclusive and equitable decision-making process guiding the transition, and collective ownership and management of the new, decarbonized

energy system by the different stakeholders — rather than a single interest (see for example McCauley et al. 2013). Such an approach to Just Transition implies institutional change and structural evolution of the system. Solutions are not solely produced via market forces or traditional forms of science or technology, but emerge from modified governance structures, democratic participation and decision making, and ownership” (Healy and Barry, 2017 in UNRISD, 2018).

A transformative approach to just transition, on the other hand, implies “an overhaul of the existing economic and political system that is seen as responsible for environmental and social crises (Hopwood et al. 2005; Healy and Barry 2017). In addition to changing the rules and modes of governance, proponents of this approach also promote alternative development pathways that undermine the dominant economic system built on continuous growth, and imply profoundly different human-environment relations” (UNRISD, 2018). An example of this approach is provided by Cooperation Jackson, which “sees Just Transition as fitting within a broader struggle to ‘end our systemic dependence on the hydro-carbon industry and the capitalist driven need for endless growth on a planet with limited resources, while creating a new, democratic economy that revolves around sustainable methods of production and distribution that are more localized and cooperatively owned and controlled” (UNRISD, 2018).

## Different levels

In a world characterised by multi-level governance, just transition initiatives are needed at all levels: from companies and economic sectors, over cities and regions, to nations, the European Union, and on a global scale. At all these levels, different specific challenges, groups of stakeholders, and power relations show that there is no “one size fits all” model of just transition. They reveal the need to document the different layers, geographic distinctions, and specificities of each case.

At national or state level, comprehensive just transition strategies have been developed in the Canadian state of Alberta (see section 6), among others. At the regional level, the German Ruhr region provides a relatively successful example of a fundamental transformation from coal and steel to a knowledge-based economy over a time span of sixty years (Heyen et al, 2020). And at the company level, ENEL, the second-largest electricity company in Europe with the Italian state as its main shareholder, is planning to close all of its coal and lignite-fired power plants by around 2030 and has committed to fully decarbonising its energy mix by 2050 (Smith, 2017).



# Necessary elements in a just transition process

According to research carried out by Heyen et al (2020), a just transition process must incorporate the following elements:

- ▶ **Inclusive social and regional dialogue:** This involves consultations and negotiations between governments and employers' and workers' associations, as well as environmental, climate, and consumer NGOs.
- ▶ **Measures to mitigate negative effects on workers and regions:** These include short-term and defensive measures (e.g. compensation for losses) as well as more forward-looking and proactive measures aimed at structural re-orientation (such as skills development policies and the greening of the economy). Regional eco-development plans seem to be key in the revitalisation of regions with high concentrations of "brown" industries.
- ▶ **Support for workers in declining industries in finding work.** Basic measures to facilitate re-employment include job placement services, job search training, assistance for relocation, recruitment incentives for companies, and support for business formation.
- ▶ **Support for new businesses and the creation of decent work:** Governments should support the creation of new "green economic activities" with start-up grants, R&D subsidies, etc. Special attention must be paid to creating equal working opportunities for women.
- ▶ **Support for specific regions and communities:** National governments can support affected

regions and communities by investing in sustainable infrastructure (mobility, energy, etc.) and (re) locate public institutions into the regions affected. Top-down support should be coupled with bottom-up processes for the development of visions and ideas for the region's future.

- ▶ **Enabling all citizens to live sustainable lives:** Financial support for energy-efficient housing renovation, convenient and affordable public transport, and networks for sharing tools and repair services make it easier for low-income groups to opt for sustainable lifestyles.
- ▶ **Protection of vulnerable households from energy poverty:** Measures could include the dedication of carbon tax revenues to helping those most affected by higher energy prices.
- ▶ **Support for affected companies:** Business adaptation can be facilitated via, for example, national tax reforms increasing taxes and duties on resource consumption and emissions while at the same time (and to the same extent) decreasing the tax and duty burdens on the production factor of labour (incidental wage costs).

Moreover, emphasis must be placed on the need to both start as early as possible, and to leave room and time for the gradual adjustment of policy plans: "The earlier that actors have anticipated, accepted and implemented steps to prepare and cushion transition shocks, the better the results". This needs to be accompanied by "concrete timelines with clear, consistent middle- and long-term goals" (Heyen et al, 2020).

## Just transition in the European Union

In the European Union, recent reports focus on the need for transformative politics, echoing the sense of urgency expressed in the IPCC climate and IPBES biodiversity reports. For instance, the first line of the 2020 "State of the Environment" report states that "Europe faces environmental challenges of unprecedented scale and urgency" (EEA, 2019). Therefore, the Union "needs to find ways to transform the key societal systems that drive environment and climate pressures and health impacts – rethinking not just technologies and production processes but also consumption patterns and ways of living. This will require immediate and concerted action, engaging diverse poli-

cy areas and actors across society in enabling systemic change" (EEA, 2019).

In order to achieve these goals, the European Commission has adopted, in addition to its existing environmental policies, a roadmap for a European Green Deal (EC, 2019). The Green Deal aims to achieve climate neutrality in the European Union by 2050 with a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy. Composed of around ten key elements, it articulates strategies aimed at sustainable finance and mobility, as well as a new action plan on the circular economy, a "Farm to Fork" Strategy, and a Sustainable Europe Investment Plan to provide the



necessary funding. Moreover, the European Union gives special attention to its newly developed Just Transition Mechanism (JTM), a funding mechanism composed of three main pillars, put in place in order to allocate funding to the regions and sectors most affected by the transition and ensure that this is carried out in a fair and just manner (see below).

### EU climate neutrality & energy policy

As the energy sector is currently responsible for more than 75 per cent of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions (EC, 2018), it is a crucial sector in climate policy. Transitioning the energy sector offers great opportunities for employment gains. Studies foresee a net employment gain within the EU of between one and two million jobs in 2030 (Heyen et al, 2020). At the same time, going climate neutral will of course have far-reaching effects on the fossil fuel and carbon-intensive sectors. This will have a significant impact on localities and regions where fossil fuel-dependent sectors are concentrated. An important example is coal mining, which is regionally concentrated, mostly in Eastern Europe. The steel, cement, and chemical industries are also likely to face difficult transitions.

If we look at the lives of citizens, going climate neutral can have huge public health benefits, particularly for vulnerable groups. At the same time, carbon taxes can make life more expensive (rising prices for electricity and heating). It is therefore important for special attention to be given to low-income households and the unemployed. In this context, the European Commission's Renovation Wave initiative, designed to improve the energy performance of buildings as part of the European Green Deal, could be of great importance. "Given the labour-intensive nature of the building sector, which is largely dominated by local businesses, renovations of buildings also plays a crucial role in the European recovery of the COVID-19 pandemic" (EC 2020). According to the EC's *A Renovation Wave for Europe - greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives* (2020), "today, only 1% of buildings under-

go energy efficient renovation every year. A faster rate of renovation is necessary to improve energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

### Circular economy & resource efficiency

In 2020, the EU introduced A new Circular Economy Action Plan, building on circular economy actions implemented since 2015 (EC, 2020). This resulted in different strategies and directives focusing on, among others, waste and plastics. Importantly, ecodesign regulations now focus on the lifespan, maintenance, repair, and reuse of products. While the circular economy is still more a goal than a reality, once implemented, it could yield many new jobs. It would also be accompanied by a need for job reallocation, as sectors working with raw materials are likely to decline in size, while the recycling and repair sector could experience substantial growth. Geographical disparities may also increase, with trends such as urban mining creating jobs in more densely populated areas.

### Agriculture

"The food system accounts for 32 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions globally today. Europe lies around this average, with agriculture accounting for 12 per cent of EU emissions, to which we must add processing, packaging, cold chain energy consumption, inputs for industrial agriculture, and more. (...) Transitioning to agroecology, reducing consumption of meat and dairy products, as well as using less input-hungry production methods, can therefore play a decisive role" (De Schutter, 2018). Moreover, a number of studies indicate that the transition to sustainable agriculture could create many new full-time jobs across the entire food production chain, as low-impact (organic) farming methods are more labour-intensive than conventional, industrial farming. As such, a 2006 study conducted by the Soil Association concludes that organic farms in the UK provide 32% more jobs per farm than conventional farms.

## Just transition mechanism

The interpretation of just transition adopted by European Union policy tends to fit into a more traditional green growth narrative. Promoting growth remains crucial and is not considered incompatible with environmental protection and social progress (Sabato & Fronteddu, 2020). In her Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019-2024, Ursula von der Leyen stated that "the

key priority of her Commission would be to transform Europe into '[...] the first climate-neutral continent' (von der Leyen 2019: 5), by developing a European Green Deal (EGD)" (Sabato & Fronteddu, 2020). "In so doing, one of the priorities should be to ensure a 'just transition for all' (ibid.: 6)" (Sabato & Fronteddu, 2020). The European Green Deal should serve as "[...] a new growth strategy





that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use' (European Commission 2019a: 2)" (Sabato & Fronteddu, 2020).

The policies and measures necessary to achieve the ambitious targets of the European Green Deal may imply a negative impact on jobs and regional economies, especially in the regions depending on fossil fuels and carbon-intensive industries. Furthermore, to achieve carbon neutrality, financial investments are needed. In order to support those affected, the European Commission proposed the creation of a Just Transition Fund in January 2020 as part of its Green Deal. This Fund is available to all Member States, but its biggest focus is on the regions potentially most affected by transition policies, and hence where the biggest changes will have to take place. The budget proposed by the European Commission amounts

to 40 billion euros, which should be complemented with resources from both cohesion policy funds and national co-financing. The Fund will be part of the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) (EP, 2020). The two other pillars of the JTM are the InvestEU "Just Transition" scheme and the EIB public sector loan facility, which will bring in private investment and public funding respectively. The JTM's total budget is expected to reach 100 billion euros (Widuto & Jourde, 2020). But how much of the budget goes to EU Member States? This is assessed based on a range of social and economic criteria including employment and greenhouse gas emissions in the regions. Member States will receive access to the Fund by making territorial just transition plans, wherein the most impacted regions are identified. In this scheme, Germany and Poland will benefit most. Two thirds of coal mining in Europe takes place in Poland and half of the coal-dependent jobs are situated there (Galgóczi, 2019). At the moment, however, Poland is nowhere near planning a phase-out of coal (Popp & de Pous, 2020).

## The EU's just transition: challenges and opportunities

According to the Egmont Institute's Francesca Colli (2019), the JTM, which "foresees mobilising at least €100 billion through a combination of public and private investments", has three main targets, "people and citizens most vulnerable to the transition; companies and sectors active in carbon-intensive industries; and Member States and regions that are dependent on fossil fuels and carbon-intensive industries." She has identified three main challenges that the JTM needs to address in order to achieve its objectives:

- 1. Overcoming the focus on national allocations.** One pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism, the Just Transition Fund, has been subject to criticism as it draws from the EU's cohesion funds, which has fuelled divisions between (groups of) countries.
- 2. Moving beyond energy production.** "A just transition is not only about energy production and more obvious carbon-intensive industries, but also about systemic change [...] necessary in many sectors [...] that will affect workers, consumers and citizens." Other sectors in need of transition include transport, construction, and renovation.
- 3. Working with the private sector and stakeholders.** Companies are a fundamental actor to have on board during the transition. It is therefore necessary for the EU to ensure that concrete reg-

ulations exist, at both national and EU levels – for instance targets and timelines for the phase-out of fossil fuels. "It is [also] important to keep in mind the "polluter pays" principle [...] [which] is not used efficiently when used to subsidise or resolve the results of negative externalities of companies' activities." Moreover, there is a lack of measures requiring the consultation and inclusion of stakeholders at different levels. Further investigation and reassessments are therefore needed.



# Case studies

In this section, we introduce three different case studies on both a regional and national scale. These examples aim to deepen our understanding of the practical effects of just transition policies. While the Canadian and Spanish cases emphasize some of the challenges governments, trade unions and citizens face in the closure and conversion of certain industries, the South African case study is exemplary of the limited scope of just transition today and the gap between theory and practice in most areas of the world.

## A. Canada

“The production of fossil fuels accounts for approximately 8% of Canada’s GDP and 15% of the country’s goods exports (Hughes 2018; Government of Canada 2018a). More than 200,000 people work directly in the oil, gas and coal sectors—about 1% of the total labour force—and hundreds of thousands more work in jobs indirectly tied to those industries (Mertins-Kirkwood 2018: 16). In the communities and regions where fossil fuels are produced, the share of jobs and economic activity tied to oil, gas and coal is significantly higher. Nearly every job and the entire economy of Fort McMurray, Alberta, for example, in the heart of the tar sands, is dependent on oil production.” (UNRISD, 2018: 19)

In November 2015, the Canadian government announced its national plan to “accelerate the transition away from coal power toward natural gas and renewable electricity generation” (Jackson & Hussey, 2019). Among other things, the plan included “a directive to increase renewable energy in the province from 9% of total power generation in 2015 to 30% by 2030, and the creation of Energy Efficiency Alberta [...] The target of 30% renewable energy by 2030 was subsequently legislated” (Jackson & Hussey 2019). “Labour unions and social and environmental activists in Canada have been advocating for a Just Transition to a cleaner economy for decades, but the national coal phase-out has provoked a new wave of calls for a Just Transition for affected workers and communities.” (UNRISD, 2018: 19)

In 2018, the Alberta Federation of Labour, working with the Coal Coalition, secured a transition settlement for coal workers, including income support to 75 per cent of previous pay, education vouchers worth up to 12,000 Canadian dollars, a pension bridge for older workers, and a relocation allowance to new jobs (ITUC, 2018). These are some of the lessons they learnt:

1. Just transition is needed for global shifts: small communities of workers should not have to bear the costs for bigger changes.
2. Just transition must involve workers in the creation of the policies to mitigate the challenges that they are facing.
3. Worker involvement needs mechanisms for participation.
4. Fear creates resistance: workers are concerned about their jobs and livelihoods. The path towards climate action goes through real communities and lives.

## B. Spain

After trade unions struck a 205 million-euro investment deal with the government, Spain committed to closing most of its coal mines by the end of 2018. The investment deal was meant to alleviate job losses and provide new opportunities in the mining regions (Neslen, 2018). “Unions hailed the mining deal – which covers Spain’s privately owned pits – as a model agreement. It mixes early retirement schemes for miners over 48, with environmental restoration work in pit communities and re-skilling schemes for cutting-edge green industries” (Neslen, 2018).

According to Teresa Ribera, the minister for ecological transition, Spain had solved the first urgent task of the government with this agreement. Montserrat Mir, the Spanish confederal secretary for the European Trade Union Confederation, said the just transition model could be applied elsewhere: “Spain can export this deal as an example of good practice. We have shown that it’s possible to follow the Paris agreement without damage [to people’s livelihoods]. We don’t need to choose between a job and protecting the environment. It is possible to have both” (Neslen, 2018). Following the coal mine closure, on 30 June 2020 seven of Spain’s 15 coal-fired power plants ceased operations. According to information from July 2020, four more will soon follow, putting Spain on track to ultimately become coal-free (Lewis, 2020).

## C. South Africa

Taken from the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development’s 2018 report *Mapping Just Transition(s) to a Low-Carbon World – Country Case Studies: South Africa* (pp. 24-5):

In 2018, the National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) obtained a court order



to block the public electricity utility Eskom from signing renewable energy contracts with 27 independent power producers. Some environmental groups opposed this action and are calling for a faster transition and closure of coal mines. NUMSA argued that they were not opposed to renewable energy, but rather to privatized renewable energy. Additionally, they were concerned that some environmental groups were insensitive to the risks of a rapid market-led transition, in particular the associated job losses that are unacceptable in the context of the high levels of unemployment South Africa is facing (Cock 2018) and rising electricity prices that the working classes would not be able to afford. They called on government to follow the Just Transition guidelines it had agreed to in the Paris Agreement. In a country with enormous inequalities and unemployment levels at 27.7%, the key concern is job losses and the danger that privatized renewable energy will perpetuate inequalities rather than alleviate them.

The ongoing reliance of the South African economy on the minerals-energy complex, together with the pressure from the unions not to lose more jobs

or increase inequalities, have unfortunately caused quasi-inertia in terms of implementation. [...] Even though little has been done in terms of implementation, South Africa is one of the few countries that shows a strong interest in the Just Transition, as reflected in some of its policies. The problem is that there are often contradictory positions reflected in different policies.

[...] The One Million Climate Jobs Campaign, an alliance of labour, social movements and popular organizations in South Africa, calls for a much more radical approach including departure from the market-liberal development pathway and towards a public sector-led transition. This transition would involve a shift in public investment away from fossil fuel projects and towards climate jobs, which could tackle climate change and create employment at the same time. Following the suggested path would strengthen the role of local governments in increasing energy equity and access, and would also create decent jobs. It could also serve to support a democratic transition away from fossil fuel capitalism that is built from the bottom up.

## Conclusion

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In recent decades, growing affluence in some areas of the world has led to a worldwide increase in resource use and pollutant emissions. In a slow-motion parallel to the current Covid-19 crisis, the clock is ticking and, unfortunately, there will be no vaccine against climate change or ecological breakdown. Nevertheless, the Covid-19 and climate crises share common features: “the exponential increase of a hazard that is hitting a limited resource” and the fact that we are being confronted with both a crisis and an employment emergency at the same time (Galgóczy, 2020). However, unlike the pandemic, the ecological crisis we are currently facing is not perceived as a direct threat in many areas of the world, simply because we do not feel that our life is in immediate danger. In reality, many lives are in danger, people are already suffering, but we do not feel the emergency. In response to the climate emergency, policies need to be much more ambitious, with more investment in, for example, renewable energy and circular economy, and a more prominent role of the state that at same time support citizens’ led initiatives. It is also about the equitable sharing of the costs and burdens associated with this ambitious transformation. Its outcome should be (green) jobs, decent work within carbon-neutral, societies, based on solidarity – and this at

the local, regional *and* global level. The solution is found in collectives answers, structural changes of life provisioning systems that enable a good life for all within planetary boundaries (Brand-Correa et al. 2020). Although much work has been done in recent years, this remains largely insufficient. The pace at which natural disasters succeed one after the other, is alarming. Moreover, the consequences are mostly felt in the more disadvantaged areas of the world. There is, therefore, much urgent and necessary work to be done. Let’s get to it.



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