

An aerial photograph showing a large array of blue solar panels installed in a field. A single, vibrant green tree stands prominently in the center of the panel array, symbolizing the integration of nature and renewable energy. The panels are arranged in a grid pattern, and the surrounding area is lush with green vegetation.

# Just Transitions to Decarbonisation in the Asia-Pacific

*Summary and policy synthesis  
of a British Academy research  
programme on Just Transitions*

Climate change is the existential challenge of our time. Ensuring Just Transitions whilst tackling climate change and biodiversity loss is key to supporting inclusive economies and societies in the future. The need to engage with communities, workers, businesses, policymakers and the wider public in order to identify the potential disruptions of and opportunities for decarbonising economies and societies is key to the challenges faced by policymakers.

As referenced in the COP26 Just Transitions Declaration, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Guidelines for a Just Transition, to be negotiated between governments, employers, and their organisations, as well as workers and their Trade Unions, established a global understanding for the term "Just Transitions", which is described as a process "towards an environmentally sustainable economy, which needs to be well managed and contribute to the goals of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty".<sup>1</sup>

Evidence from the SHAPE<sup>2</sup> disciplines is critical in order to broaden our understanding of the term "Just Transitions" so that it includes the complex human and social dimensions to environmental challenges, and their solutions. These disciplines also expand our understanding of the term across geographical, cultural, economic, and social contexts by examining the challenges of decarbonising economies and societies, help develop lessons learnt and set out guidelines for transitions that are just.

Seven research projects were awarded in November 2021, building on the Academy's work related to Just Transitions and COP26.<sup>3</sup> These projects aimed to engage in exploring the needs, impacts, and implications of just transitions in diverse sectors, for diverse groups, that include diverse approaches to justice. They also consider how to build capacities and capabilities for adaptation as well as mitigation. These projects were funded by the UK's Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

With the objective of harnessing the knowledge developed as part of these research projects, this document outlines their key findings and sets out lessons learnt for policy makers.

These are as follows:

- Just Transitions are shaped by geographical, political, economic, and cultural contexts
- Developing positive narratives of Just Transitions to ensure a wide base of support and understanding of the term
- Just Transitions require broad consultation and collaboration with(in) and across diverse communities and stakeholder groups
- Addressing transitions of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality employment are integral to Just Transitions

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<sup>1</sup> See here: <https://ukcop26.org/supporting-the-conditions-for-a-just-transition-internationally/>

<sup>2</sup> SHAPE is an acronym for our disciplines, the Social sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy.

<sup>3</sup> See here for the list of research projects: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/new-funding-announced-for-international-research-projects-into-just-transitions-to-decarbonisation-in-the-asia-pacific/>. The Academy's publications related to Just Transitions to decarbonisations in the Asia-Pacific can be seen here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/>. The Academy's wider Just Transitions and COP26 work can be seen here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/>.

## **Just Transitions are shaped by geographical, political, economic, and cultural contexts<sup>4</sup>**

These projects highlight the importance of acknowledging that just transitions to decarbonisation in the Asia-Pacific will develop differently across the region, within countries, between urban and rural areas, and local communities as well as across sectors and industries. They also indicate that transitions take place over multiple, conflicting timescales. These findings highlight that the specific contexts in different places and differing perceptions for the necessary timescales of a transition will affect opinions of what is just.

Specifically, insights from across the projects include:

- Acknowledge that definitions of just transitions are specific and sensitive to place so that transitions towards decarbonisation capitalise on regional or sectoral strengths.
- Encourage both local and international mutual learning between regions confronted with similar challenges so that they can share knowledge and expertise.
- Understand that regions best-placed to take up opportunities for net-zero development are not guaranteed to be those where carbon-intensive industries are currently located, thus, requiring policymakers to engage with just transitions in all regions and at all levels.
- Acknowledging that timescales are context-specific and will affect individual perceptions of justice in a transition. Balancing the short-term priorities of those such as workers for employment and the long-term goals of decarbonisation will be critical to their success.

## **Develop an understanding and positive narratives of Just Transitions to ensure wide support and their success<sup>5</sup>**

Understandings of, as well as challenges and opportunities related to “Just Transitions”, differ across a range of contexts. This requires stakeholders and communities to develop positive narratives of “Just Transitions”. Across the projects, many demonstrate the importance of the language associated with “Just Transitions” as it encourages broad and open conversations. For example, a research project examining the decarbonisation of the transport sector in India highlights the positive impact on individuals and societies of the transition and how it can support the socio-economic development of the country and help meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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4 See the following publications: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/australia-low-carbon-lives-policy-industry-practice>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/away-from-coal-australia>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/facilitating-affordable-energy-transition>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/climatescapes-exploring-opportunities-challenges-trade-offs-decarbonisation>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/ecological-civilisation-urban-china>

5 See the following publications: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/equitably-decarbonising-india-transportation-sector>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/net-zero-sustainable-society-japan>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/away-from-coal-australia>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/australia-low-carbon-lives-policy-industry-practice>

Key policy insights from all the research projects include:

- Use the language of “Just Transitions” to build a narrative of hope and opportunity benefiting both the individual and communities.
- Recognise that the term “Just Transition” is understood variously across the Asia-Pacific region and may be negatively associated in some contexts.
- Ensure that the language of “Just Transitions” also considers issues of inequalities and (historical) injustices.
- Employ vigilance against the co-option of the term “Just Transitions” and challenge misrepresentations.
- Recognise that “Just Transitions” are concurrent and complex realities and listen to the concerns of communities to find a common language and positive narrative.

### **Broad consultation and collaboration are key to supporting just transitions to decarbonisation<sup>6</sup>**

Just transitions to decarbonisation in the Asia-Pacific region will require engagement at all levels of society. In particular, the findings from these projects highlight the need to learn from local knowledge in communities and consult broadly with a wide variety of stakeholders, as well as ensure the coordination of governing bodies. A research project carried out in Australia highlights how the term of “Just Transitions” has been utilised by some stakeholders to align decarbonisation with unemployment in the absence of public engagement with the term.

Insights from across all the projects include:

- Put embedded and community-focused participatory approaches at the centre of just transitions and empower local communities to lead the transition as well as ensure that just transitions benefit local communities
- Communicate transparently with local communities about the benefits but also the potential negative impacts of a just transition.
- Foster the long-term engagement of young people with just transitions in order to build longevity and impact.
- Ensure that policymakers and stakeholders remain responsive to emerging problems and the needs of local communities through engaging in social learning so that innovative transition processes that are suited to complex local conditions can be developed.
- Join-up cross-sectoral coalitions of actors and establish a clear understanding of responsibilities.

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<sup>6</sup> See the following publications: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/australia-low-carbon-lives-policy-industry-practice>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/away-from-coal-australia>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/climatescapes-exploring-opportunities-challenges-trade-offs-decarbonisation>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/facilitating-affordable-energy-transition>

## **Addressing transitions of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality employment are integral to Just Transitions<sup>7</sup>**

Economic vulnerabilities are deeply entwined with environmental vulnerabilities. These projects highlight how achieving a just transition in the workplace will demand the engagement of many industries, workers, and stakeholders at all levels. One of the research projects examining just transitions in Japan showcases the importance of training and certification for workers aiming to transition to net-zero jobs and investing in skills among existing carbon intensive regions and workforces.

Relevant policy insights across all the projects include:

- Ensure that workers themselves experience the full benefits of a just transition.
- Identify potential net-zero jobs and begin retraining and reskilling programmes accordingly.
- Develop understanding of the skills of a carbon-intensive workforce and give due consideration to how these can be transferred to net-zero jobs.
- Engage with trade unions, local communities, NGOs and academics to assess the impact of just transitions across regions and workforces.

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<sup>7</sup> See the following publications: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/australia-low-carbon-lives-policy-industry-practice>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/away-from-coal-australia>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/net-zero-sustainable-society-japan>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/decarbonisation-asia-pacific-region/facilitating-affordable-energy-transition>

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