



Just Transitions to Decarbonisation in Sectors and Industries Globally

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

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 potential opportunities and obstacles for decarbonising economies and societies is key to the challenges faced by policymakers.

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".¹

It is clear from this definition that evidence from the SHAPE² disciplines is critical in order to deepen 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 expand our understanding of the term across geographical, cultural, economic, and social contexts by examining the challenges of decarbonising economies and societies. They help to develop lessons learnt and set out guidelines for transitions that are just.

Since 2019, the Academy has undertaken an extensive programme of work on Just Transitions. Nine research projects were awarded in November 2021, building on the Academy's work related to Just Transitions and COP26.³ These projects engage in exploring the needs, impacts, and implications of Just Transitions in diverse sectors, for diverse groups, and include diverse approaches to justice. They also consider how to build capacities and capabilities for climate change 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 by these research projects, this document outlines their key findings and sets out insights for policy, which are as follows:

- (i) Developing positive narratives of Just Transitions will broaden engagement and ensure their success
- (ii) Just Transitions require broad consultation and collaboration with(in) and across diverse communities and stakeholder groups
- (iii) Frameworks with clear objectives and measurements are necessary to drive Just Transitions within sectors and industries
- (iv) Addressing transitions of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality employment are integral to Just Transitions within sectors and industries

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

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

³ See here for the list of research projects: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/just-transitions-within-sectors-and-industries-globally/>. The Academy's publications related to Just Transitions to decarbonisations within Sectors and Industries Globally can be seen here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/just-transitions-within-sectors-and-industries-globally/>. The Academy's wider Just Transitions and COP26 work can be seen here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/>

(i) Developing positive narratives of Just Transitions will broaden engagement and ensure their success⁴

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 framings of Just Transitions. Many of the projects place emphasis on the framing of Just Transition narratives in order to broaden participation, encourage open conversations, and build acceptance for change. For example, one project focused on wind turbine manufacturing and windfarm communities in Europe and South Africa found that framing wind as a national resource bolstered support for windfarms in Scotland.⁵ Another project focused on the oil and gas sector in Nigeria, Mozambique, and Kenya highlighted the importance of building new narratives around participation and inclusion, sharing a vision of a future world without a dependency on fossil fuels as well as addressing different or competing dimensions of justice, including distributive, restorative, and intergenerational justice.⁶

Key policy insights from all the research projects include:

- Build a narrative of hope and opportunity to encourage participation and inclusion in Just Transitions.
- Highlight the economic benefits of Just Transitions to communities and sectors.
- Develop communication strategies for communicating visions for the future between local and global settings.

(ii) Broad consultation and collaboration as well as open communication are key to supporting Just Transitions to decarbonisation⁷

Just Transitions to decarbonisation within sectors and industries will require engagement at all levels from within all spheres 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. A research project carried out on the global forestry sector highlights how consultation with local communities can build trust and lead to the development of policies that tackle deforestation which are appropriate within their own national and local contexts.⁸ Another project found that the local co-ownership of wind turbines was effective in redistributing economic benefits and encouraging local engagement in decision making.⁹

4 See the following publications: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/wind-energy-political-socio-economic-pinch-points-europe-south-africa>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/energy-freedom-solar-modern-slavery-just-transition>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/net-zero-greenhouse-gas-emissions-forestry-sector-climate-policy-integration-learning>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/making-space-dialogue-africa-oil-gas-regions>

5 See here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/wind-energy-political-socio-economic-pinch-points-europe-south-africa>

6 See here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/making-space-dialogue-africa-oil-gas-regions>

7 See the following publications: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/net-zero-greenhouse-gas-emissions-forestry-sector-climate-policy-integration-learning>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/energy-freedom-solar-modern-slavery-just-transition>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/net-zero-greenhouse-gas-emissions-forestry-sector-climate-policy-integration-learning>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/making-space-dialogue-africa-oil-gas-regions>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/rare-earth-elements-global-inequalities-just-transition>

8 See here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/net-zero-greenhouse-gas-emissions-forestry-sector-climate-policy-integration-learning>

9 See here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/wind-energy-political-socio-economic-pinch-points-europe-south-africa>

Insights from across all the projects include:

- Encourage mutual learning between communities on local and national levels for knowledge sharing, which will require flexibility and adaptability in terms of the objectives and measurements.
- Ensure policymakers and stakeholders remain responsive to emerging problems and the needs of local communities through engaging in social learning to develop processes that are suited to complex local conditions.
- Place affected communities at the centre of decision-making by engaging in broad and transparent consultation and empowering local people to lead the transition.
- Create and protect civic space for community engagement on the issue of Just Transitions.

(iii) Establishing frameworks with clear objectives and measurements is key to successful Just Transitions within sectors and industries¹⁰

Developing comprehensive frameworks and policies within sectors and industries will be critical to achieving a transition that is just at every level of the supply chain. Several of the projects highlight the importance of setting clear and measurable objectives set out in policy and law. For example, one project focused on decarbonisation within the US and UK defence sectors argues that developing legislation to include defence sector emissions in national carbon accounting and introducing contractual obligations for companies supplying the sector is key to decarbonising the sector and ensuring high environmental and employment standards.¹¹ Another research project examining the global solar energy production system showcases the importance of ensuring that modern slavery is not an unintended consequence of a Just Transition.¹² It highlights how standardised estimation methods can improve a sector's ability to identify high-risk relationships and locations to ensure greater vigilance against forced labour.¹³

Policy insights from across the research projects include:

- Frameworks should address the multiple meanings of what constitutes justice which result from different historical experiences and the individual needs of different stakeholders. These issues of justice must also be acknowledged for their ability to converge and transform.
- Frameworks should have national coherence and long-term legislative stability, setting out clear and measurable objectives. They should also be adaptable to local contexts.

10 See the following publications: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/energy-freedom-solar-modern-slavery-just-transition>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/net-zero-greenhouse-gas-emissions-forestry-sector-climate-policy-integration-learning>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/making-space-dialogue-africa-oil-gas-regions>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/rare-earth-elements-global-inequalities-just-transition>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/justice-dimensions-extracting-energy-transition-metals-pacific>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/decarbonising-diversifying-defence-united-kingdom-states-workers-enquiry>

11 See here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/decarbonising-diversifying-defence-united-kingdom-states-workers-enquiry>

12 <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/energy-freedom-solar-modern-slavery-just-transition>

13 *Ibid.*

- Develop scalable risk estimation methods to manage environmental and employment risks across the value-chain.

(iv) Addressing transitions of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality employment are integral to Just Transitions¹⁴

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 research project focused on the garment industry in Cambodia highlights the importance of acknowledging the multiple and complex issues facing workers. It sets out how garment workers in Cambodia are also vulnerable to urban disaster risks due to living in hazard-prone areas of cities where the factories are located.¹⁵ One other research project that explored Just Transitions in the automotive sectors in the West Midlands, UK, and South Australia outlines the value of developing a skills strategy to train and retrain workers in electrical vehicle production.¹⁶

Relevant policy insights across all the projects include:

- Ensure that workers themselves experience the full benefits of a Just Transition.
- Listen to the voices of the workers and include them at all levels of the decarbonisation process.
- Adapt the working environment to the challenges and risks associated with climate change (e.g. rising temperatures within the workplace, disaster risks, flooding)
- Develop an understanding of the skills required in a transition and support the growth of technical knowledge and skills among workers through training provision.
- Involve trade unions and community stakeholders in policy making processes to guarantee decent working conditions across sectors and industries.

¹⁴ See the following publications: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/wind-energy-political-socio-economic-pinch-points-europe-south-africa>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/enabling-just-transition-automotive-evidence-west-midlands-south-australia>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/industrial-sustainability-work-production-climate-precarity-cambodian-garment-industry>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/decarbonising-diversifying-defence-united-kingdom-states-workers-enquiry>, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/energy-freedom-solar-modern-slavery-just-transition>

¹⁵ See here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/industrial-sustainability-work-production-climate-precarity-cambodian-garment-industry>

¹⁶ See here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/just-transitions/sectors-and-industries-globally/enabling-just-transition-automotive-evidence-west-midlands-south-australia>

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The British Academy
10–11 Carlton House Terrace
London SW1Y 5AH

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