

What is “just transition”?

Just transition refers to the need to take into account fairness considerations towards workers and communities when transitioning to a low emission community. The concept is included in the Paris Agreement and is increasingly addressed at COP or CMA, however, it still lacks an agreed definition within the UNFCCC regime.

States tend to match the concept with their internal priorities. Some narrow it to dealing with the workforce, while others extend it to broader community and ecosystem rights. Similarly, some situate just transition as something happening at the national level, whilst others emphasise the cross-border effects of climate measures and the need for developed countries to support developing countries in respect of their just transition measures in alignment with the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and equity.

Existing definitions and competing narratives

For the International Labour Organisation (ILO) the ‘just transition’ means greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind. It involves maximizing the social and economic opportunities of climate action, while minimizing and carefully managing any challenges – including through effective social dialogue among all groups impacted, and respect for fundamental labour principles and rights.

A UNFCCC Secretariat technical paper (2016) builds on the ILO understanding and highlights the positive and negative impacts on employment that a global transition towards a low-carbon and sustainable economy will have. It states that the transition towards an inclusive green economy must be “just and fair, maximizing opportunities for economic prosperity, social justice, rights and social protection for all, leaving no one behind”.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), many trade unions and employers’ organisations use broadly the same narratives: while shifts away from carbon-intensive production and consumption towards renewable energy sources are expected to generate net gains in employment, there are people who will lose their jobs and livelihoods.

These conceptions of ‘just transition’ are heavily influenced by the political discourse and economic priorities of the global north, which focus on their energy needs, the reduction of greenhouse gases through low carbon sources of energy and deployment of technology, as well as their labour market structures and the capacity for activities and skills required in a future, greener economy.

The IPCC (AR6, 2024) expands the concept and recognises that just transition entails fairness in energy access and use and social dialogue, among others, and that just transitions may embody the redressing of past harms and perceived injustices.

The demands and realities of developing countries do not always correspond to global north priorities. For many low- or middle-income developing countries, basic access to energy and other vital services is still a development priority and their source and origin a secondary concern. As part of their just transition to a greener economy, many will have to use conventional sources of energy before they can switch to renewables. A joint report by the International Energy Agency and others identifies that Sub-Saharan Africa is highly energy intensive (meaning the cost of converting energy into GDP is high) and access to electricity remains a major barrier to socioeconomic development in the region, where more than 80% of the global population lacking access to electricity lived in 2021.

In this context, some argue that a just transition may be better described as socio-economic changes that are implemented in a way that addresses existing disparities and avoids creating new ones.

Others go further. Since some developed countries keep importing cheap fossil fuels from developing countries –while often local population suffers from the related social and environmental impacts- some campaigning and advocacy organisations hold that a just transition needs to remedy current and past harm through reparation or other tools to create different industrial – or in general power – relationships for the future. Moreover, some fundamentally question the current market-based economic system, promote new approaches to organise production and consumption cycles, and focus on just transition as a process that represents a host of strategies to enable communities to build thriving economies which create dignified, productive and ecologically sustainable livelihoods, and democratic decision-making processes as well as ecological resilience.

All these definitions and priorities are also present in the climate negotiations on just transition, where States prioritise different elements of the concept.

How does just transition relate to other UNFCCC negotiation workstreams?

Mitigation

To meet the Paris Agreement's long term temperature goal, States need to rapidly decarbonise their economies. Article 4(1) of the Paris Agreement puts this into effect, providing that "Parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognising that peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter". States are increasingly incorporating just transition into their nationally determined contributions (NDCs), and long-term low-emission development strategies (LT-LEDS) to advance inclusive climate action, and it is expected that the new cycle of NDCs will see stronger elements of just transition.

Adaptation

Just as action to decarbonise should be equitable, adaptation must be too. In practice, a just transition for climate adaptation will involve national, local and private sector adaptation plans, which prioritise livelihoods and climate resilient jobs.

Global Stocktake

Decision 1/CMA.5 on the outcomes of the first global stocktake, taken at CMA 5 (COP 28, 2023), underlined the role that just transition can play in supporting more robust and equitable mitigation outcomes. Specifically, it called on countries to transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly and equitable manner and to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that do not address just transition. AILAC, supported by other countries is aiming to include a reference to this wording on transitioning away from fossil fuels in the decision on the Just Transition Work Programme, acknowledging the need for an ambitious just transition.

Finance

At CMA 5 (COP 28, 2023), the UNFCCC Forum of the Standing Committee of Finance focused on financing just transitions. It noted that the integration of just transitions in national frameworks is essential and highlighted the need for improved grant allocation mechanisms, debt swaps and other innovative forms of finance to be made available to developing countries so as to avoid increasing their national debt burdens.

Much of the focus of negotiations at CMA 6 (COP 29) was on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate finance, where the decision recognises the importance of continued efforts to 'support just transitions across all sectors and thematic areas, and cross-cutting efforts, including transparency, readiness, capacity-building and technology development and transfer, Much of the focus of negotiations at CMA 6 (COP 29) was on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate finance, where the decision recognises the importance of continued efforts to 'support just transitions across all sectors and thematic areas, and cross-cutting efforts, including transparency, readiness, capacity-building and technology development and transfer, in developing country Parties' (Decision 1/CMA.6). However, this decision fails to address key issues for a just transition including human rights, the exclusion of certain financial flows (ie. market rates) and fossil fuel investments, hence weakening efforts to ensure a just climate transition.



Reporting

The Enhanced Transparency Framework potentially provides a further opportunity for Parties to highlight the just transition dimension of action and support in their Biennial Transparency Reports (BTR), the first of which they were required to submit by 31 December 2024. In addition, Parties are encouraged to report on both social and economic impacts of mitigation and adaptation plans, which is likely to increase the amount of available data for countries to implement just transition approaches. By including just transition measures in their reporting, countries can enhance transparency, accountability and fairness in the transition.

Response measures

Just transition has been linked with commitments under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement to recognise and minimise the adverse impacts of 'response measures' (actions, policies, and programmes that countries undertake in response to climate change). The negotiations on the impacts of response measures were initially led by oil-exporting countries interested to secure compensation for financial losses due to reduced fossil fuel use. The emphasis, however, has broadened over the years to encompass other aspects such as trade restrictions, the effects of response measures on tourism and just transition of the workforce.

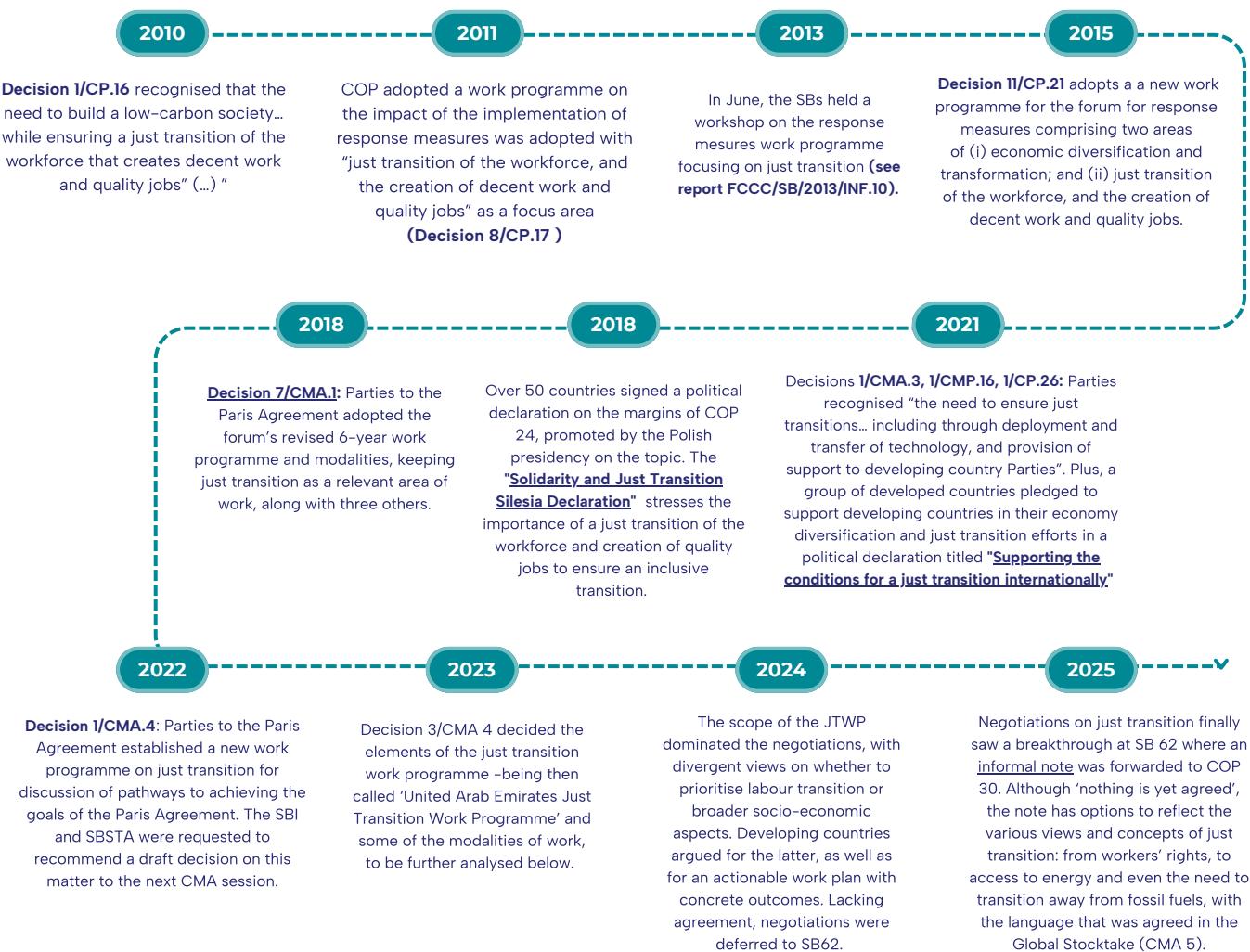
Technology transfer

Technology transfer is a core enabler of the energy transition and seen by many developing countries as a key driver to build a just and sustainable transition. It also has a fundamental role to play in facilitating adaptation action. In Decision 1/CMA.3, Parties recognised "the need to ensure just transitions that promote sustainable development and eradication of poverty, and the creation of decent work and quality jobs... including through deployment and transfer of technology to developing country Parties".

Just transition in the climate negotiations

Just transition has been addressed in the UNFCCC process, and subsequently since the adoption of the Paris Agreement, including:

Preambular mention to Just transition in the [Paris Agreement](#).



Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP)

The JTWP was established at CMA 4 (COP 27, 2022) under Decision 1/CMA.4 with the objective of promoting pathways to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. At CMA 5, in Dubai, the work programme started to be more fleshed out (hence it has become known as the United Arab Emirates Just Transition Work Programme) ([Decision 3/CMA.5](#)). The programme:

- Is to be implemented under the guidance of the SBs through a joint contact group, convened at each session of the SBs, which then recommends draft decision(s) to the CMA.
- At least two dialogues are to be held each year, in a hybrid format.

The same decision decided that the JTWP consists of seven elements:

1. Just transition pathways to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, outlined in Article 2.1, in the context of Article 2.2.
2. Just transition pathways that include various dimensions such as energy, socioeconomic, workforce, and others, all of which must be based on nationally defined development priorities and include social protection so as to mitigate potential impacts associated with the transition.
3. Opportunities, barriers and challenges in relation to poverty eradication and sustainable development faced during the just transition process, taking into account nationally defined development priorities.
4. Approaches to enhancing adaptation and climate resilience at the national and international level.
5. Just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities. This can be achieved through, among others, social dialogue, social protection, and the recognition of labour rights.
6. Inclusive and participatory approaches to just transitions that leave no one behind.
7. International cooperation as an enabler of just transition pathways towards achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Recent developments and looking ahead



After many negotiation sessions ending with no text, the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) finally saw a breakthrough during the SB 62 session in June 2025, where Parties were able to reach procedural conclusions and forwarded an informal note containing a draft decision to continue negotiations during COP 30.

Some of the main issues still dividing Parties are:

- **The scope of the programme,**

which is related to the concept of just transition. As mentioned above, developed country Parties see just transition mainly as a transition that protects workers' rights. Conversely, developing countries, who often host transition-related projects, see it as a more comprehensive concept, one which includes communities and ecosystemic rights, as well as international cooperation and means of implementation.

- **Considerations of equity and fossil fuels:** AILAC and the LDC aim to promote the transitioning away from fossil fuels (with equity considerations), while the LMDC, India and China hoped to promote instead the importance of access to energy. The Arab Group advocated for keeping a role for fossil fuels in the text.

- **Potential outcome of the programme**

Some Parties had been reluctant to discuss this until agreeing on a concept of just transition, hence, the informal note contains three options: 1) improving existing modalities, 2) new institutional arrangements (such as the creation of a technical assistance network), or 3) to defer this decision to 2026 (para 28).

- **Unilateral trade measures**

The agenda adoption in Bonn included considering the addition of an agenda item on trade-restrictive unilateral measures. The compromise was that this would be discussed in relevant agenda items, including the JTWP. Consequently, the issue was indeed discussed in the room, but Parties did not agree on language, keeping placeholders in paragraph 25 to address the issue.

Other important elements of the draft decision contained in the informal note are the references to the annual dialogues held as part of the programme and various references to synergies with other international organisations, UN bodies, the Rio Conventions and the SDGs, as well as within the UNFCCC, as they invite constituted bodies to integrate just transition in their workplans and reports.

At the time of publication, the JTWP has had four dialogues. The first dialogue took place in Bonn in June 2024 and discussed pathways to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement through NDCs, NAPs and LT-LEDS. The second dialogue took place in Sharm el-Sheikh in October 2024 and discussed people-centric and equitable just transition pathways with a focus on a whole-of-society approach and the workforce. The 2024 Annual summary report by the chairs is available [here](#).

The third dialogue took place from 22 to 23 May 2025 in Panama and focused on the topic "Approaches to enhancing adaptation and climate resilience in the context of just transitions". Information about the third dialogue, including Parties submissions are available [here](#). Finally, the fourth dialogue took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on the theme of "Just energy transition pathways and holistic approaches to just transitions including socioeconomic, workforce, social protection and other dimensions, based on nationally defined development priorities". COP 30 will see negotiations on the JTWP, as the informal note agreed in Bonn will be considered by SB 63 with a view to recommending a draft decision for consideration and adoption at CMA 7.

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