

POLICY BRIEF

JUSTICE AS TRIGGER AND OUTCOME OF POSITIVE LOW- CARBON TIPPING POINTS

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Summary

Justice, in its multiple dimensions, scales and understandings, **is both a trigger and an outcome of any process aimed at tipping regions towards structural low-carbon systems transformations**. This policy brief draws on the results of TIPPING+ research, case studies, published and ongoing publications, to share the insights on **how different considerations of justice influence, trigger and become a major outcome of low-carbon transformations in Carbon and Coal Intensive Regions (CCIRs)**.

The policy brief highlights the importance of taking into account different **notions of justice**, that not only consider traditional notions of recognition, distributive and procedural justice, but also address more structural and ultimate causes of injustice or transformative justice. Such more challenging notions of justice may also consider various temporal and spatial scales at the same. For example, not only local ideas of **fairness** and **distribution**, but also other global issues such as **planetary boundaries** and **intergenerational justice**.

Equity criteria definition and the search for more equitable outcomes resulting from low-carbon energy transformations, should be made explicit at early stages of planning, to ensure uptake, and overcome potential resistances from more affected or vulnerable groups in society. Therefore, integrating justice should go beyond the short-term compensation for the negative environmental impacts or job losses, and take a more long-term systemic transformation approach. This may be achieved by ensuring that **policy measures and processes** taken in the short term, such as the distribution of **EU just transition funds**, are oriented towards more **systemic changes**, engaging a broader range of stakeholders, beyond the usual dominant ones, and extending support to other areas outside of coal mining regions, that also require targeted economic assistance.

Objective



There are many possible pathways to achieve a low-carbon system, some more just than others. The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** of the UN Agenda 2030 are based on the universal principles of following a **human rights** approach, ensuring **gender equality** and women's empowerment, in a way that would "*leave no one behind*". Given that sustainability is primarily a challenge of mobilising large segments of the population and not just a technological or economic one, fair representation and **empowerment of key stakeholders** in decision-making on the transformation required to achieve broad SDGs, such as climate change and global decarbonisation, becomes fundamental.



Moving towards decarbonised regional economies, however, creates many **uncertainties and resistances**, as it is often perceived that there are no guarantees for keeping **old jobs**, or creating **new quality jobs** with the transition to clean development futures. In this policy brief, we produce some summary considerations on justice and in particular we are taking into account a **Just Transition perspective** in the broader processes of decarbonizing CCIRs.

Background

Justice is a key driver and outcome for sustainability transformations. Crucial components to understanding radical positive developments in energy and power dynamics have to do with **gender** relationships, **ethnicity** and **youth** inclusion, as well as with social recognition of **disadvantaged and vulnerable groups**. The **Just Transition approach** to justice can be interpreted as a transitional form of conservative justice, that so far has largely focused on compensation for the **loss of existing power or economic positions** of certain sectors, derived from the new proposed decarbonisation energy plans. Therefore, the Just Transition approach does not involve more ideal, radical or transformative notions of justice that aim to achieve a much broader systems' transformations, in terms of **redistributions of rights, harms/benefits and responsibilities**. However, placing European regions within the broader context of global environmental change challenges and risks, it becomes crucial to avoid trespassing **planetary boundaries** and to ensure a safe and just corridor for humanity. This entails the adoption of more nuanced conceptions of justice, which also consider **intergenerational, intra-generational** as well as **inter-species** dimensions of justice.



Key Messages

- ✓ **Justice** in its multiple dimensions, scales and understandings, **is both a trigger and outcome of any process aimed at tipping regions towards structural low-carbon systems transformations**. Early gains in justice at regional level, create the necessary transformative conditions for achieving positive tipping points at larger scales, and may also help to trigger chains of positive changes in other regions. Addressing inequalities and providing possible mutual gains derived from tackling climate crisis, are likely to help regional agents to support energy and climate policies, and function as demonstrators for other regions, showing that just transitions are possible.
- ✓ **Regional or social inequalities expected from decarbonisation policies can have very negative impacts on their social acceptance, and thus be a strong barrier for their implementation** (e.g., the yellow vest movement in France against carbon taxes on fuel). Just transition policies aimed at overcoming these potential barriers at regional level, must integrate environmental, labour and social justice dimensions, and highlight measures to counterbalance the potential negative socio-economic implications of sustainability transformation processes, even from an early stage.
- ✓ Policy makers in charge of just transition policies, should go beyond negotiations with trade unions, and incorporate a **broader spectrum of interests and perspectives** from vulnerable groups, such as the long-term unemployed, youth, elderly, etc. In this way, policy makers ensure that marginalised communities are included in decision-making processes and that other aspects, such as preventing an unfair distribution of environmental impacts, are achieved.

✓ In particular, **multiple dimensions of justice need to be considered in regional decarbonisation**. These include aspects of *distributive justice*, meaning an equitable distribution of resources/benefits, and/or compensation of the burdens caused by the energy transition among the different economic classes, races, genders, etc, *recognition justice*, ensuring a fair representation of the cultural diversity of communities or groups with different ethnic backgrounds, such as the indigenous ones, as well as *procedural justice*, that guarantees that people can influence the actual decision making processes, by setting inclusive ground rules of participation, access to relevant information, and criteria used in the organisation of such processes. On this, capability approaches emphasise the need to foster means, such as political or community power of agents, to influence decarbonisation decisions, relevant to climate change mitigation, adaptation or more broadly tipping processes towards systems' transformations.



✓ In addition, there are other perspectives and dimensions of **injustice that need to be considered**. For example, *intersectional injustice* occurs when multiple social characteristics or conditions overlap and confluence negatively certain groups, revealing the need to apply equity policy interventions beyond those applied to the general population. Likewise, *epistemic injustice* happens when the knowledge or expertise claims of certain groups are disregarded, ignored or misrepresented, as with indigenous knowledge or non-expert people.

Insights from Case Studies

In **Andorra** (Spain), the **Just Transition Agreement** has created a participative vision for the regional development, shared by the most relevant stakeholders, which focuses on improving employability and working conditions of citizen groups with problems of access to the labour market. This vision pays attention, particularly on women, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, population at risk of exclusion, and youth. Also, to allocate the evacuation rights for the available 1,200MW following the closure of the coal plant at the Nudo Mudéjar connection point, the **Spanish Institute for Just Transition** initiated a tender process that incorporated just transition criteria. Companies participating in the tender were required to submit a diversified industrial plan which promotes green jobs creation, self-consumption and energy communities, generates municipal income, and fulfils strict technical and environmental standards.



In **Romania**, the Academy for Renewable Sources and Energy Distribution in the coal dependent region **Jiu Valley**, is an ambitious professional training project, that addresses the issue of education and retraining of the labour force, and allows workers to obtain certifications to work on renewable energy projects. These initiatives contribute to maintaining jobs locally, and ensuring the availability of labour in the near future, while addressing other issues related to justice, such as demography, sense of community belonging, etc.



The **Ruhr Region (Germany)** serves as a positive example of a relatively smooth transition process without major social disruptions, following the notion of a just transition and the “leave no one behind” paradigm. Justice has so far been the central driver of the very slow and gradual process of transitioning away from coal, and now remains the central driver of the social and economic policies that seek to create post-coal prosperity in both cities. However, focus was given on mining workers and their families, hence their perspectives and their needs dominated.

In **Sulcis (Italy)**, one of the narratives explored highlights that previous pathways suffered from lack of ownership and multiple forms of environmental injustice, such as land dispossession, lack of participation in development decisions, colonialism and dependency relations. Even recent policies and plans, such as Sulcis Plan, Methanization, are presented as measures that maintain the status quo and the industrial hegemony dominance and legitimacy, despite disempowering the local population. This perception arises because transition pathways based on coal-to-gas and large-scale renewable energy technologies are perceived as top-down impositions, leading to adverse local consequences.

Policy Recommendations



Integrated just transition plans for deprived regions and sectors ought to go beyond traditional compensation schemes and integrate environmental, socio-economic and regional policies with locally defined objectives.

While trade unions play a crucial role in advocating for workers' interests, a just transition requires a broader approach that takes into account multiple perspectives and interests. For instance, just transitions should consider that the impacts of environmental degradation are distributed fairly, without exacerbating environmental injustices and ensuring that marginalised communities are included in decision-making processes. Hence, these strategic processes should integrate a plurality of voices, taking into account different dimensions regarding gender, geographical distribution, socio- classes, ethnics, etc. This will make sure that the transition is fair and equitable for everyone and that it is informed by a wide range of knowledge and expertise.



Just transition criteria should be integrated across public tools and instruments along the full policy design and implementation process

Such planning may also serve other sectoral purposes, such as public tenders, public subsidies, and conditions for accessing financing from public institutions. For instance, potential beneficiaries dealing with just transition issues or located in CCIRs should be prioritised in obtaining public subsidies.



Policy makers should ensure that the distribution of Just Transition funds address small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Usually large companies connected to existing coal mining industries are the only ones with enough financial and social capital to prepare project proposals and influence decision-makers. In this way, a vicious cycle that maintains the current status quo and distribution of power is reinforced, preventing opportunities to new and smaller players. For this reason, policy makers should ensure that SMEs are targeted in tenders, including reservation quotas, not requiring excessive financial capacity, and rewarding innovative approaches.



Decision-makers ought to extend their notions of justice in order to cope with complex global environmental challenges and build resilient regions in Europe in the context of planetary boundaries.

This includes notions related to intersectional justice that emerges when multiple social identities and categories that are present in CCIRs, such as gender, race, age, class, or health condition, overlap and thus adversely affect certain vulnerable groups and their ability to respond accordingly.

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About TIPPING+

TIPPING+ provides an empirical in-depth social science understanding of fundamental changes in sociodemographic, geographical, psychological, cultural, political, and economic patterns which give rise to Social-Ecological Tipping Points (SETPs), both positive and negative in relation to socio-energy regional systems. Such empirical and theoretical insights sheds new light on the interdependencies between changes in regional socio-cultural structures and the technological, regulatory and investment-related requirements for embracing (or failing to embrace) low-carbon, clean-energy and competitive development pathways in selected coal and carbon intensive case study regions (CCIRs). The overall goal is to understand why and under which conditions a given social-ecological regional system heavily dependent on coal and carbon-intensive activities may flip into a low-carbon, clean energy development trajectory – or on the contrary may fall into an opposite trajectory with all its negative implications. Towards this goal, main focus of TIPPING+ is the participatory co-production of knowledge on the driving forces and deliberate tipping interventions leading to the emergence of positive tipping points toward clean energy transitions in European CCIRs.

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PARTNERS



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