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Trade unions demand a labour inclusive Just Transition Work Programme to be decided at COP28

Introduction

Unprecedented heatwaves have had a major impact across all continents, breaking heat records in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe. Since mid-March 2023, ocean temperatures have risen to levels previously unseen over 40 years of satellite monitoring, and the repercussions are causing unprecedented disruption around the world.

Workers, their families and communities are affected in multiple ways, both in their jobs, where they are increasingly working in extreme temperatures and unadapted environments, and in their livelihoods, where they are vulnerable to bearing the brunt of businesses being forced to close because of climate-related sectoral disruption. Many are forced to migrate when they are displaced from their traditional livelihoods or when decent work at home literally dries up. Beyond climate change and environmental disruptions, workers may also be adversely affected by mitigation and adaptation policies. The global labour movement has proposed the concept of 'just transition' to deal in a comprehensive way with the social impact of the climate crisis. It is also a crucial enabler that will allow policy makers in the global North as well as in the South to increase the ambition of their climate policies in line with the scientific recommendations of the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC AR6).

The JTWP must put labour issues at the centre

At the UNFCCC COP27 climate negotiations in Sharm El-Sheikh in November 2022, governments decided to establish a work programme on just transition (JTWP) to discuss pathways to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. At COP28, a decision on the implementation of the JTWP must be adopted. The global labour movement urges parties to respect the mandate of the Paris Agreement that makes the importance of the labour focus of a just transition clear: *"Taking into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities"*. We also highlight the International Labour Organization's (ILO) recently renewed commitment to just transition and its formal endorsement of the ILO Guidelines for the implementation of just transition policies and measures that offer the international normative framework for just transition – inclusive of all its

elements.¹ The ILO is the UN agency bringing together governments, employers and workers of 187 Member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.

The global labour movement proposes the following definition of a just transition that can be used to guide the work at UNFCCC:

A **just transition** secures the future and livelihoods of workers and their communities during the transition to a low-carbon economy, effectively limiting global temperature rises to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.

Just transition plans should be co-created with workers and their trade unions to provide and guarantee decent work, social protection, training opportunities and job security for all workers affected by global warming and climate change policies.

Plans must be underpinned by the fundamental labour rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining and facilitated through social dialogue between workers and their unions, employers and governments, as established by the ILO.

A just transition requires guarantees for intra-, intergenerational and gender equity, racial justice, respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples, impacted communities and migrants and promotes and protects human rights and ILO fundamental labour rights.

Scope of the JTWP

The CMA.4 decision is clear on the broad scope that is needed to set up and implement just transition policies: “*Just Transition pathways that include energy, socioeconomic, workforce and other dimensions, all of which must be based on nationally defined development priorities and include social protection.*” The scope should be on all relevant sectors (energy, agriculture, transport, etc.) and consider all socio-economic dimensions of the climate crisis and its impacts on workers and communities. This includes a strong focus on the gender dimension and the role of Indigenous peoples and youth. It is important that the scope is not exclusively focused on the energy transition. It must cover mitigation as well as adaptation policies, as the work programme must contribute to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement and build on and complement all relevant workstreams under the Convention and the Paris Agreement.

The CMA.4 decision also explicitly states that just transition pathways should include ‘social protection’ and ‘instruments related to social solidarity and protection’. The right to **social protection** is of crucial importance to protect people from poverty caused by the absence or a substantial reduction of income from work due to various eventualities which increasingly include

¹ ILO (2015). “Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.” https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf and ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities – ACTRAV (2021) *User's manual to the ILO's Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.* https://www.ilo.org/actrav/pubs/WCMS_826060/lang--en/index.htm

impacts of the climate emergency.² The JTWP should build on the work done in the context of the **Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions**, launched in September 2021 by the UN Secretary-General and formally endorsed by G20 Leaders at the Delhi Summit, held 9-10 September 2023.³ The aim of the Accelerator is to direct investments to help create at least 400m decent jobs, primarily in the green, digital and care economies, and to extend social protection coverage to more than 4bn people who are currently excluded. It offers an operational tool to pursue the objectives of the JTWP at the global level.

Climate policy solutions must be founded on meaningful and effective **social dialogue** with social partners at all policy levels. This must be enabled by freedom of association and collective bargaining, as established by ILO fundamental rights.⁴ Engaging in social dialogue to produce just transition plans with organised workers from all economic sectors (formal and informal), at all policy levels (company, sector, national and global) representing all workers (including documented and undocumented migrants, refugees and migrant workers) will enable governments to design better and more ambitious climate policies supported by workers, their families, and communities. It will contribute to the social acceptance of climate policies. The full integration of genuine social dialogue is important for the scope of the JTWP as well as for its modalities (see further).

Objectives of the JTWP

The role of workers and their representative organisations (trade unions) has been undervalued in the UNFCCC process till now. The JTWP is an important opportunity to strengthen and foster engagement with this group. They play a crucial role in facilitating and implementing ambitious and urgently needed climate policies.

The JTWP should:

- Enhance a collective understanding of just transition pathways and actions by parties and observers to facilitate implementation.
- Share and synthesise knowledge, best practices, experience of lessons learned relevant to just transition pathways. This includes reporting on progress made on voluntary initiatives, such as JETPs, and providing recommendations for developing future partnerships to access support for just transition covering all socio-economic dimensions.
- Address gaps, barriers and challenges faced by those promoting just transition strategies with a view to unlocking or facilitating enhanced ambition.
- Recommend ways in which just transition pathways can be pursued in an inclusive, affordable and sustainable manner, particularly for workers and their organisations through meaningful and effective social dialogue. Provide recommendations to engage with local communities, women and gender groups, youth and Indigenous Peoples based on stakeholder engagement. Integrate recommendations in the modalities of the JTWP itself.

² <https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/lang--en/index.htm>

³ <https://unglobalaccelerator.org/>

⁴ <https://www.ilo.org/declaration/lang--en/index.htm>

- Serve as a space for accountability and peer-to-peer evaluation of just transition initiatives, such as JETPs.
- Recommend decisions to constituted bodies on recommended processes, criteria, policy package, to ensure just transition principles are integrated coherently in all UNFCCC processes and workstreams.
- Provide guidance for developing national just transition strategies and how to incorporate them in the NDCs.
- Develop aspirational pathways to support actions at global, country, regional, sectoral and company levels. This should also include considerations on industrial policies and the role of public services in the backing of economic development within global climate boundaries.
- Identify indicators that could be used for monitoring progress on just transition.
- Identify instruments and areas where international cooperation would help to accelerate action on just transition by unlocking appropriate and available opportunities, resources and means of implementation support. This could include collaboration in areas such as finance, technology, and capacity-building.

Modalities and institutional arrangements of the JTWP

A just transition that delivers on the Paris Agreement must be considered a long-term programme. The JTWP should therefore have **a standalone mandate** reflecting the importance of the social dimension of climate policies with a central focus on the **workforce dimension of just transition**. The JTWP should be open-ended, with decisions made on a regular basis based on work to be developed in between the sessions of the Subsidiary Bodies. The structure and process must also remain fit for purpose in a rapidly evolving context and, therefore, regular review is suggested. This could comprise a first review of the functioning and deliverables in CMA7 (2025).

An **expert committee or advisory body to the work programme with representatives of social partners and relevant stakeholders** should be established to provide the parties with independent information, advise and input on measures and policies for just transition. Workers' representatives must be recognised and have a seat at the table in all discussion bodies overseeing just transition issues at the expert level. This includes their representation in the Katowice Committee of Experts on the Impacts of the Implementation of Response Measures (KCI).⁵

A system of annual **monitoring and reporting to the COP**, with participation from party and non-party stakeholders should be implemented. Active engagement of trade unions, as workers' representatives, should be included.

The **annual high-level ministerial round tables on just transition** should give guidance on the implementation of the JTWP and its coordination with other work streams at the UNFCCC. The ministerial meetings should ensure that involved parties give the decisions of the JTWP sufficient

⁵ A good example of observer participation is the Facilitative Working Group (FWG) that activates and supports the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP). This Working Group consists of 14 representatives: seven country representatives and seven Indigenous representatives (one from each of the seven world regions).

levels of commitment and urgency. The round tables should be organised with appropriate observer participation.

The JTWP should provide and receive input to and from all relevant work streams inside the UNFCCC, including the Mitigation Work Programme, the Forum on Response Measures (including the KCI) and the climate finance processes, including the work of the Standing Committee on Finance and the NCQG, the Gender Action Plan and the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples' Platform.

The JTWP must recognise the mandate of UN processes outside the UNFCCC on just transition, most importantly the role of **the ILO as the recognised tripartite body and the ILO guidelines on Just Transition**, which provide the foundational UN definition for just transition, as well as an elaborate framework for implementing just transition.

Actively engage with and learn from the wide range of initiatives and processes taking place outside the UNFCCC, including national-level tripartite bodies, such as the Scottish Just Transition commission, the Spanish Just Transition agreements, the German Coal Commission, Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs), and global sector-level initiatives, such as the Maritime Just Transition Task Force.

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CSI Confédération syndicale internationale

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