



Task Force 6
Accelerating SDGs: Exploring New
Pathways to the 2030 Agenda



ACHIEVING JUST GREEN ECONOMIC TRANSITIONS BY IMPROVING GENDER EQUALITY

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Abstract



To be 'just', transitions to green economies should leave no one behind. As the G20 countries develop and deploy just transition strategies, greening their economies presents important opportunities to improve gender equity. But policymakers too often fail to link moves to green economies with gender equity. This results in gender-blind green transition policies that miss important opportunities for creating gender responsive and more socio-economically effective transitions.

Failure to consider the needs and priorities of women and girls in all their diversity can perpetuate or even exacerbate existing gender inequalities within green economies. Therefore, just transition policies and measures should be planned, designed, and implemented to contribute to transformational improvements in gender equality.


The G20 countries can use gender analysis of regional and national policies, guidelines, strategies, and institutional governance systems to uncover and address the structural barriers to achieving gender equity through green economic transitions.



The Challenge



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The concept of a ‘just transition’ has become increasingly important in policy making. It has now become a mainstream idea globally as countries try to decarbonise their economies and move towards greater justice in society, while promoting green and sustainable growth.¹ This just transition, in its emphasis on justice, is fundamentally about putting in place measures to address societal inequalities where certain groups and individuals have lower status and access to rights and opportunities than others.²

How transitions are defined, designed, and implemented across regions, countries, and categories of people will have a significant impact on the persistence of inequality. Today, it is understood that just transitions will need to be plural and differentiated based on different countries’ individual circumstances. In an increasingly globalised world, where trade-offs and impacts of decarbonisation are transboundary, there is an urgent need for changes within the current global system where alignment between developed, developing, and

least developed countries is weak. Understanding and resolving the political and economic challenges and implications of low-carbon transitions is central to democratising just transitions rooted in inclusiveness and justice.³

Decision -/CMA.4, taken at the Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) in 2022, the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, affirms that “sustainable and just solutions to the climate crisis must be founded on meaningful and effective social dialogue and participation of all stakeholders and notes that the global transition to low emissions provides opportunities and challenges for sustainable economic development and poverty eradication”.⁴ Yet, while transitions to green economies are happening, boosted by large-scale public and private investments, improving gender equity through the transition process is frequently overlooked. While the importance of the gender dimensions of climate and environmental policy are gaining recognition, too often policy makers fail to put in place climate and gender coherent policies, resulting in gender-blind transition policies.



Globally, women and girls are more economically disadvantaged than men and are therefore less likely to be able to cope with economic risks and shocks. As UN Women reports, economic crises hit women harder because women tend to earn less than men and have fewer savings.⁵ Moreover, women are more likely to have precarious work, including part time jobs, or carry out unpaid care and domestic work. This makes them more likely to have to drop out of the paid labour force, reducing their economic welfare. In stark contrast with the Global North, more women than men in the Global South work in precarious jobs, live in poverty, and shoulder greater responsibilities of care without adequate social safety nets.

Indeed, gender disparities are more pronounced between developed G20 countries and developing countries in the Global South. On the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index from 2021, much of the developed world, including Western Europe and North America performed well when it came to gender parity in economic opportunities, education, health, and political leadership. Developing regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, on

the other hand, fared poorly. Iceland, Finland, Norway, and New Zealand ranked the highest in gender parity while Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan ranked the lowest.⁶

The absence of a gender responsive perspective in the design and assessment of economic changes and policies has led to gender-blind approaches that only further existing inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent green recovery processes brought about large-scale economic and social shifts that can now help inform just transition policies. These recovery processes showed the risks of transitions when gender equality is overlooked. For example, the pandemic generated a high demand for unpaid care work, but also excluded women from decision-making processes. This led to increased economic insecurity for women because social protection and employment creation responses inadequately recognised and addressed the gendered impacts of the crisis.⁷

Assessing gendered green transitions

Gendered aspects of green transitions can be assessed at three levels: (1) moves towards inclusive economies, (2)

society-wide transitions, and (3) post-growth transformations.


Moves towards inclusive economies:

The inclusion of women in newly created green jobs is often overlooked in just transitions. Recent analyses of the renewable energy sector shows that women continue to be employed mainly in lower-paid administrative and non-technical jobs.⁸ Of the new jobs that the International Labour Organization anticipates a sustainable energy transition will create by 2030, three-quarters are expected to be held by men and only a quarter by women.⁹ Women face barriers in accessing skills and advancing in the Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM) sector because of exclusionary social norms and practices including gender-based discrimination and harassment in schools and workplaces. Such social attitudes perpetuate negative perceptions of women's abilities in STEM jobs.

New roles for women in the workforce emerging out of green energy transitions also tend to be part-time and casual with wages lower than men's.¹⁰ In addition, many green jobs will be created in sectors with historically limited female representation.¹¹

Strategies for a transition to low-carbon economies often overlook the importance of unpaid care work, which is typically dominated by women. Women have important reproductive and domestic roles and green transitions that fail to recognise and support care work risk increasing their burden. The care economy (including health, education, child and elderly care) which provides the foundation of well-being for people needs to be centred in just transition discussions. The care sector is a feminised and racialised sector with low pay, poor conditions, and more precarity than male-dominated sectors. Its value goes unacknowledged.¹² This demonstrates the need to rethink our understanding of 'green jobs' and investments in low-carbon sectors, including the care economy. This is critical for tackling inequalities, as women and people of colour dominate in the care sector.

Society-wide transitions: Beyond the labour market, there is a range of less visible gendered impacts of transitions that occur at household and global levels. Transitions to low-carbon economies will have varied and complex impacts on women and the roles they play in society and the economy. Previous energy transitions have had



complex implications for women, including, in some cases, gender-based violence and a double labour burden resulting from men losing their jobs and their roles as primary income earners in a house.

In addition, transition strategies that focus only on ‘clean energy’ and green jobs ignore the impacts of the Global North’s transitions to low-carbon economies on countries of the Global South. This means paying attention to the full life cycle of low-carbon technologies, including the mining of minerals for batteries and e-waste disposal. These tend to happen in countries of the Global South and negatively affect vulnerable communities, causing, for example, land grabs, dispossession, and pollution– which disproportionately affect women.

Post-growth transformations: The most holistic critique of just transition processes is that they do not go far enough to challenge the root causes of today’s multiple intersecting crises, from poverty, climate change, and biodiversity crisis to gender injustices.

They do not adequately challenge the dominant economic system and the colonial, extractive, exploitative, and violent histories and practices it is built upon.¹³ By prioritising interventions around green technologies and jobs, transitions remain stuck in the current paradigm of capitalism.


These risks demonstrate that specific policies and investments are needed to ensure gender equitable outcomes from just transition processes. Renewable energy transitions do not automatically tackle the structural, intersectional power asymmetries related to socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts. If these are not addressed from the get-go, entrenched structural inequalities will simply be perpetuated in new energy systems. As we have seen, there are significant obstacles to incorporating gender equality outcomes into just transition processes. A number of just transition strategies and processes are critiqued for not giving adequate attention to gender justice. These include transition processes in Canada and the United States, the European Green Deal, and Germany’s coal phase-out.



The G20's Role

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The G20 plays a huge role in supporting successful just transitions globally. The G20 member states represent around two thirds of the global population, generate 80 percent of the global GDP, and account for 75 percent of global trade.¹⁴ Historically, the G20 members also bear a large responsibility for the climate crisis: between 1751 and 2017, the United States, the European Union, and China were responsible for 59.7 percent of historical emissions.¹⁵

The G20 has made several political commitments to tackle climate change. In 2016, the G20 committed to joining the Paris Climate Agreement.¹⁶ The G20 has also reaffirmed its commitment to achieving net-zero emissions, meeting Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG) (Affordable and Clean Energy), and phasing-out fossil fuel subsidies.¹⁷ Despite this, the G20 countries are far from achieving their climate change mitigation targets. According to the Climate Transparency Report 2022, all the G20 members need to further improve their Nationally Determined Contributions targets and policies to be 1.5°C compliant.¹⁸

On the gender equality front, the G20 has room for improvement. The Women, Business and the Law Report 2023 is a useful indicator of women's economic participation. The four G20 members Indonesia (70.6 out of 100), Saudi Arabia (71.3), Russia (73.1), and India (74.4) score below the global average of 77.1.¹⁹

The G20 committed “to put gender equality and women’s empowerment at the core of our efforts for an inclusive recovery and sustainable development”.²⁰ This should translate to facilitating the equal distribution of care work, enabling women’s access to quality STEM education, strengthening women’s entrepreneurship, and overcoming gender stereotypes, norms, and discrimination. However, political action on gender-just transitions is lacking and policy development has not improved gender equality.

We present here different pathways through which the G20 can impact gender just transitions including, (1) domestic policies, (2) international policies, (3) international cooperation, and (4) advocacy and campaigns.



Domestic policies: While international net-zero pledges present opportunities to act on decarbonisation policies with gender considerations, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, and the U.S. have yet to embed their net-zero targets into law. Mexico has not committed to the target at all.

The current energy crisis, in many ways presents an opportunity to expand renewables and promote women's involvement in this sector. Instead, the crisis has triggered the G20 members to implement short-term, stop-gap measures to stabilise energy prices and ensure energy security. Such measures negatively impact the rapid implementation of energy transition strategies. These include investment in fossil fuel infrastructure, as shown by the increased interest in fossil gas, fracking, and coal use.

International policies: Policies of the G20 countries not only have domestic impacts, but also have significant influence on other countries' economies, societies, and development. International policies could consider the principles of distributional justice and ensure

that the poorest and most climate vulnerable countries have support systems for debt relief and are able to tackle global crises in gender considerate ways. The G20 could support the reforms articulated in the 'The Bridgetown Initiative' which calls for emergency liquidity, expanded multilateral lending, and activation of private sector funds that could support developing countries. This calls for the International Monetary Fund to increase unconditional rapid credit and financing facilities, suspend interest surcharges, re-channel unused Special Drawing Rights to those countries who need it, and operationalise the Resilience and Sustainability Trust.²¹ The G20 could further support the re-establishment of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative that expired at the end of December 2021. Re-establishment should include all Multilateral Development Bank loans to all the poorest countries (only 48 of the 73 eligible countries participated in the Initiative up to end of 2021) and encourage the participation of private sector creditors.

International cooperation: While just transitions require enormous efforts by all stakeholders globally, not all



countries have the same power and resources to realise necessary policies and programmes. The G20 can play a key role in advancing international cooperation. The forum can throw its weight behind different programmes and funding models that support just transitions, such as Just Energy Transition Partnerships which support South Africa, Indonesia, India (G20 members), Vietnam and Senegal (not G20 members) in their just energy transitions.²² In supporting these countries' transitions, the G20 could support the inclusion of measures towards gender equality outcomes in program intervention and design more explicitly.

Advocacy and campaigns: The G20 has a strong signalling effect, that goes far beyond its members. Policy


priorities of the G20 can influence policy makers of other countries, as well as other international and multilateral organisations. The introduction of gender-sensitive and gender-transformative just transition programmes by the G20 has the potential to influence other decision makers. In times of manifold crises, investments and policies for gender equality are often cut back because other policy areas seem to be more important. However, this is a misconception and lasting solutions can only be found if women, their perspectives, and needs are included. Prioritising gender equality in just transitions would therefore be a great signal and opportunity to advance progress on SDG 5.



Recommendations to the G20

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Policy reforms to address gender-blind and siloed approaches to transitions

The G20 should ensure that just transition policies provide holistic, adaptive support that use both compensatory and adjustment assistance to tackle the social, political, and economic impacts of transitioning away from fossil fuel-based economies. By putting in place gender responsive just transition policies, the G20 countries can assess regional and national policies and institutions to uncover and address the structural barriers to achieving gender equity and justice.


Commit resources to support institutions to challenge the inequitable distribution of assets, resources, and rights

Improving access to and control over resources could help women and marginalised groups in overcoming hurdles resulting from entrenched traditions of patriarchy at state, workplace, community, and household levels. The G20 should strive to provide greater financial and technical resources to institutions that address structural inequities such as barriers to land ownership, entry into and retention

of meaningful employment, and access to finance and financial services. Resources must be directed towards training, mentoring, and financially supporting women in STEM. Resources should also go towards installing social safety nets to minimise risks for women in the transition to green and sustainable economies.

Strengthen partnerships and learning to plan a just transition reflecting the transboundary and interconnectedness of global issues

It is important for the G20 countries to overcome siloed approaches to a gender-just transition and to collaborate within the G20 group. After all, in an increasingly globalised world, gains and trade-offs made in decisions around costs, labour, and sourcing of materials related to green growth will have transboundary impacts. It is, therefore, important for the G20 to plan for just transitions in partnership with leaders from the Global South while seriously considering the potential impacts beyond national borders. The G20 could strengthen equitable partnerships with the Global South by facilitating the exchange of knowledge around gender



sensitive energy transitions. This could include sharing of scientific capabilities, technological expertise, and financial know-how.

Reformed economies for a gender-just transition

Economic growth has deepened inequalities and led to multiple crises such as biodiversity loss and the climate crisis. It is, therefore, necessary to reform financing structures and prioritise care for humans and ecosystems. This could include,

adopting alternative economic visions such as ‘doughnut economics’ which recognises care work in the economy. Efforts could also include enforcement of the polluter pays principle with the private sector to minimise the impacts of resource extraction, waste disposal, and pollution within communities. Adopting new social contracts which prioritise relationships between people and nature rather than states and markets should form the bedrock of future partnerships.²³

Attribution: Simon Anderson et al., “Achieving Just Green Economic Transitions by Improving Gender Equality,” *T20 Policy Brief*, July 2023.



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