



Advancing just transition: Tackling distributive impacts and building societal support

Event's recap

This brief summarises the main takeaways of the final conference of the Horizon Europe project AdJUST "Advancing a Just Transition", which the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), the Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change (CMCC) and partners, in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee, organised on 12 May in Brussels.

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Along with its partners, the Institute for European Environmental Policy organised the final conference of the AdJUST Horizon Europe project "Advancing just transition: Tackling distributive impacts and building societal support", where the main project results were presented and discussions sparked on key issues on how to deliver a just energy transition. The event took place on 12 May and was hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee. The AdJUST project stands on 4 main pillars:

1. Building societal support for the transition;
2. Quantifying distributional and competitiveness impacts, including both climate policies' impacts and the impacts of transitional support measures, while assessing stakeholder responses to these impacts and measures;

3. Understanding gaps in capacity and motivation of public bodies, with a particular focus on institutional capacity and motivation as key factors for implementation;
4. Promoting a context-specific options of feasible, fair, efficient, inclusive, procedural, and transitional assistance measures, with particular attention to case studies in Spain and Romania.

The event was structured into two sessions: an institutional panel in the morning, during which representatives from EU institutions reacted to the project's results and outlined the current challenges of policy implementation from their perspective; and an interactive session in the afternoon, which engaged various stakeholders and focused on how the project results are "adjusting" to a changing world. This brief summarises the main takeaways from both sessions.

Institutional session

Keynote: **MEP Jana Toom** (Renew Europe)

Speakers: **Dirk Bergrath** – Member of the European Economic and Social Committee (Group representing workers); **Marcos González Álvarez** – Head of Unit on Social Climate Fund at DG CLIMA, European Commission; **Sari Rautio** – Member of the Committee of the Regions

Moderator: **Chiara Antonelli** (IEEP)

Presenters: **Elena Verdolini** (CMCC), **Xaquín García-Muros** (BC3), **George Stefan** (PSV), **Johannes Gallé** (PIK), **Marion Dumas** (LSE), **Ioannis Charalampidis** (CM3)

The session began with a keynote by MEP Jana Toom, the rapporteur for the Directive on Just Transition in the World of Work. MEP Toom opened by highlighting one main issue of the clean transition: people do not feel that the promise that "no one will be left behind" is being upheld. She referred to a specific case from her home country, Estonia, focusing on the town of Narva, a small-town bordering Russia that has been highly reliant on fossil fuels for five decades, and was reported to be the second largest emitter in the EU in 2018. In Narva, 4% of the population was forced to move away as residents lost their jobs, undermining trust among citizens.

MEP Toom also expressed concern and disappointment in seeing that the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) does not include the continuation of the Just Transition Fund. In her report on the [Directive on Just Transition](#), approved by a large majority in the European Parliament last January, MEP Toom calls on the Commission to include a comprehensive EU framework for regions affected by the green and digital transitions, emphasising the need for increased support and targeted funding to ensure a just transition.

“For many people, a job is not only about income, but it is also a key part of their identity, dignity, and belonging, which must be reflected in policy design.”
MEP Jana Toom

After the presentation of the Just Transition Vision, which envisions a way for the transition and is the result of a co-creation exercise with a bottom-up approach where numerous stakeholders took part, the project’s researchers presented key messages outlining the main results of the project’s 4-year work:

1. **The transition produces uneven costs and uneven opportunities.**
2. **Compensation design is a key link between justice goals and implementation.**
3. **Institutional capacity and policy credibility are necessary conditions for delivery.**
4. **Procedural justice improves both fairness and feasibility.**
5. **Just transition is not only about cushioning losses but about creating credible pathways forward.**
6. **Technology and the transition vision need to be paired with equity from the outset.**

The speakers, reacting to the project’s results, highlighted additional challenges and recommended a course of action, drawing on their respective areas of work.

Dirk Bergrath (EESC): focused on the need for robust and comprehensive mapping of workers at risk of losing their jobs due to the transition, as well as the scale at which they are affected, underscoring the risk of underestimating the cost of the transition. He also noted that a just transition should have a broader scope, as climate change and the energy transition affect multiple industries beyond coal. Referring to Enrico Letta’s concept of the “right to stay”, Bergrath emphasised the importance of ensuring that people can transition fairly into high-quality jobs, without facing downward mobility.

Marco González Álvarez (DG CLIMA): stressed the key role of carbon price revenues, including future revenues from the ETS2, which is set to enter into force in 2028, and is intended to support just transition and climate action, such as social housing, affordable public transport, and household renovation subsidies. He noted that the Social Climate Fund can be distributed

in two ways: direct support (income support) and indirect support (e.g. public transport access, green energy). He also stressed that dialogue with local authorities is essential, as the predictability and transparency of investment decisions are key to securing public support.

Sari Rautio (CoR): emphasised the diversity of European regions and the need for a common vision combined with localised action. She highlighted that local communities should be empowered to participate, as they are the best placed to understand territorial challenges, and the young people should be given hope and opportunities to shape their own future. She also stressed the importance of combating climate disinformation and ensuring clear communication about the opportunities offered by the energy transition. As CoR rapporteur on the next MFF negotiations, Rautio has advocated for reflecting climate, environmental, and social priorities, reaffirming that Just Transition remains a central subject.

Interactive session

Scene-setting: **Marion Dumas** (LSE) and **Irene Chiocchetti** (IEEP)

Speakers: **Ioli Christopoulou** (The Green Tank); **Frank Siebern-Thomas** (DG EMPL, Commission); **Bela Galgoczi** (ETUI); **Sebastian Hrib** (Brussels Office of the North-East Regional Development Agency, Romania).

Moderators: **Ines Omann** and **Karin Küblblöck** (ÖFSE)

The afternoon session kicked off with a scene-setting presentation of the project's survey results, focusing in particular on how employers and trade unions perceive the just transition, with an emphasis on the concept of credibility. This was followed by an overview of the political landscape, highlighting current legislative priorities, including the MFF and ETS2, as well as the challenges arising from geopolitical tensions and the opportunities to strengthen energy independence, energy security, and decarbonisation. This framing underscored that the just transition remains relevant and should be made a cross-cutting issue.

The speakers then explained how the project's results are relevant for their work, with contributions from the audience further enriching the discussion.

Ioli Christopoulou (The Green Tank): highlighted the challenges faced by coal regions in Greece, including population decline, youth brain drains, and a sharp drop in GDP. For them, it is critical to break the dependence on fossil fuels by ensuring that Member States' investments are structural and sustained over time, as transitions unfold over decades, and by providing certainties to firms. She also noted that making just transition chapters mandatory in the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP) would support these efforts.

Frank Siebern-Thomas (DG EMPL): emphasised the need to “AdJUST” policies and assess them during implementation. He noted that the transition generates uneven impacts across sectors, regions and population groups, leading to a “triple injustice”: those who have contributed least to emissions often bear a disproportionate share of transition costs while being least empowered to respond. He added that the reskilling process and quantification of sectoral impacts are more difficult to assess and predict than the distributional impacts on households. He also referred to DG EMPL’s new pilot project, the “European Fair Transition Observatory” which collects best practices at national level and monitors progress, noting that the AdJUST results could feed into this initiative.

Bela Galgoczi (ETUI): identified the core challenge as making the change feasible, acceptable and just. He observed that public resistance to change is amplified by the cost-of-living crisis, the post- COVID-19 economic environment, and the current geopolitical situation. He also pointed out that the Commission’s forecast of three million new renewable energy jobs by 2030 is far from being met. However, the green transition is anchored in EU law, with trade unions recognising their future in a green economy. He highlighted the value of the AdJUST results, particularly their intersectionality approach, strong civil society engagement, and the carbon price simulator.

Sebastian Hrib (North-East Regional Development Agency, Romania): underlined that the transition extends beyond coal regions, affecting all sectors and communities, although not all can decarbonise at the same speed. He also pointed out the challenges related to the workforce, in particular for middle-aged workers approaching retirement whose identities are closely tied to specific industries. Supporting their transition requires reskilling opportunities, social security, and trust-building. Finally, he stressed the importance of ensuring that EU funding is used effectively, noting that real impact depends on better coordination between cohesion, innovation, skills, and energy funding instruments.

Conclusions

The event generated valuable discussions and shed light on several key elements for ensuring a successful, inclusive, and fair energy transition. These can be summarised as follows:

- **Maintain a steady, well-supported transition pathway:** The transition must progress at a consistent pace underpinned by sustained investments and long-term commitments. It is essential to ensure that this change is fair and acceptable for all individuals and communities.
- **Uphold the “right to stay” and territorial cohesion:** the principle of territoriality and the right of communities to remain and thrive in their regions should be central pillars of the transition.
- **Advocate for a dedicated Just Transition framework in the next MFF:** the next MFF should include a reinforced and clearly defined Just Transition Fund, enabling communities to continue phasing out of fossil fuels. Numerous successes demonstrate the effectiveness of such targeted final support.

- **Ensure accessible and high-quality reskilling pathways:** Reskilling takes time and must be accessible in terms of cost, availability, and compatibility with working hours. Crucially, it should facilitate transitions from high-quality jobs to equally high-quality employment, without degrading workers' living standards, status or qualifications.
- **Strengthen communication and public engagement:** clear, transparent communication is needed to highlight the tangible benefits of the transition, while actively fighting misinformation and disinformation.
- **Adopt a systemic and differentiated approach:** the transition concerns all sectors, communities and regions, each with a different starting point and capacities. Policies must be flexible and provide tailored tools to ensure that all can progress at an appropriate pace.
- **Embed continuous monitoring and policy adaptation:** ongoing evaluation and "AdJUSTment" of policies allow for identifying shortcomings early, responding effectively and scaling up best practices across regions.

The [Horizon Europe project AdJUST](#) final event was organised by IEEP in close collaboration with the project partners and in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee.

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