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### **Summary**

The case for a gender-responsive just transition towards low-carbon economies with quality, decent jobs for women and men is grounded in the Paris Agreement and a growing body of data and evidence that underscores the necessity of incorporating gender equality considerations in just transition policies and initiatives. This policy brief delineates robust pathways to overcome the prevailing challenges to just transitions with gender equality. It calls for governments and other stakeholders to make commitments to a gender responsive just transition and be held accountable for their commitments and actions. Concluding recommendations set forth actions and investments to build sustainable economies and societies that support the survival and flourishing of the planet and present and future generations.

## Introduction: The case for a just transition

The Paris Agreement calls for "a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs", which is reinforced by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all on managing transition to environmentally sustainable, low-carbon economies to create decent jobs at scale, minimize impacts on affected workers, make the economy more inclusive, eradicate poverty and promote social protection. Support to least developed countries and small island developing states, which have historically contributed least to global

greenhouse gas emissions while suffering disproportionate climate change impacts, to pursue gender-responsive just transitions should be the priority.

The acceleration and intensification of climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation are exacerbating poverty and inequality, putting at risk all human and non-human life on earth. By mid-century, under a worse-case climate scenario, climate change may push up to 158.3 million more women and girls into poverty globally (16 million more than the total number of men and boys). 3

- United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022a; Koning and Smith 2021.
- 2. United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022a.
- 3. UN DESA and UN Women 2023.

#### BOX 1

# The Paris Agreement on human rights, gender equality, ecosystem integrity and climate justice

The Paris Agreement acknowledges that "climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity". It notes "the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth, and noting the importance for some of the concept of 'climate justice', when taking action to address climate change".

Jobs, livelihoods and decent work are under threat, particularly for women, many of whom work in informal and vulnerable jobs. The more than 1.2 billion jobs, or 40 per cent of the global labour force, that are directly or heavily dependent on the environment and ecosystems are at serious risk, with women expected to be severely affected due to their high participation in sectors prone to climate change impacts, such as agriculture.

Rapidly rising greenhouse gas emissions and their disastrous effects are magnifying the urgency of phasing out fossil fuels. A transition away from economies based on the exploitation and extraction of fossil fuels and natural resources is imperative to mitigate climate change and environmental degradation. Only concerted, large-scale efforts to transform our economies and societies will maximize opportunities for decent work and livelihoods while protecting and promoting human rights and gender equality and minimizing and mitigating negative impacts on people and the planet. These are the foundations of a just transition.

A just transition was taken into account in the adoption of the first gender action plan at the twenty-third session of the UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP 23)<sup>9</sup> and reiterated in the five-year Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan, adopted at COP 25, which notes that the implementation and means of implementation of climate policy and action, when gender-responsive, can enable Parties to raise their ambition towards a just transition, as well as enhance gender equality.<sup>10</sup>

#### **BOX 2:**

# Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: Core elements of a just transition

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defined the core elements of a just transition in the sixth assessment report as:

- Investments in establishing low-emission and labourintensive technologies and sectors
- Research and early assessment of the social and employment impacts of climate policies
- Social dialogue and democratic consultation of social partners and stakeholders
- Creation of decent jobs, active labour market policies and rights at work
- · Fairness in energy access and use
- Economic diversification based on low-carbon investments
- Realistic training and retraining programmes that lead to decent work
- Gender-specific politics that promote equitable outcomes [emphasis added]
- Fostering of international cooperation and coordinated multilateral actions
- Redressing of past harms and perceived injustices
- Consideration of intergenerational justice concerns, such as the impacts of policy decisions on future generations.

**Source:** IPCC 2022. Sixth Assessment Report, Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change (Working Group III), p. 473.

- 4. United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022a.
- 5. ILO 2018a.
- ILO 2022a.
- 7. United Nations General Assembly 2020.

- 8. UNDP 2022.
- 9. UNFCCC, <u>Decision/CP.23</u>, preamble.
- **10.** UNFCCC, <u>Decision 3/CP.25</u>, preamble and para. 9.

As countries pursue a <u>decarbonization agenda</u> towards the goals of the Paris Agreement to hold global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, 24 million new jobs could be created worldwide by 2030.<sup>11</sup> However, more than 80 per cent of the new jobs created, primarily through the phaseout of coal mining and coal-fired power, will be in

sectors currently dominated by men. Only 20 per cent of these new jobs will be created in sectors where women are the majority.<sup>12</sup> As such, eliminating pre-existing gender inequalities in the world of work is critical for a just transition to be gender-responsive and thus more effective.

## Why a gender-responsive just transition?

Mounting evidence has revealed the differentiated impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on women and girls, especially those in vulnerable and marginalized situations, including Indigenous women, ethnic minorities, those living with disabilities and with HIV, women of African descent and LGBTIQ+ persons (as synthesized in the latest IPCC reports). These impacts are compounded by women's persistently unequal access to decent work, land and natural resources, finance, technology, knowledge, mobility and other assets which constrain their ability to respond and build resilience to climate and environmental crises and disasters. As such, women are most susceptible to climate impacts and most at risk of being left out of the process and benefits of a just transition.

Yet the just transition to low-carbon, sustainable economies presents opportunities for addressing gender inequalities in the labour market through the creation of decent work in sectors and value chains that have typically been dominated by men. 15 To be truly equitable, inclusive and fair, a just transition must take a human rights-based, intersectional approach with social protection and care at the centre (please see UN Women's working paper on The Climate-Care Nexus: Addressing the linkages between climate change and women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work).<sup>16</sup> A gender-responsive just transition is predicated on the centrality of gender equality and care in policies and programmes towards an economy that works for all people and the planet while upholding rights and the principle of leaving no one behind, inclusive of people facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of sex, income, age, race, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others. 17 This is the foundation of a gender-responsive just transition.

# BOX 3: Defining a gender-responsive just transition

Gender-responsive just transition: "The development of green sectors while ensuring a just transition of the workforce and enterprises, be it in the energy sector or those related to the manufacturing of green products, has a significant potential for addressing gender inequalities if equality of opportunity and treatment of women and men is established as a specific focus and goal from the outset. Such an approach presents an opportunity to ensure that sectoral and occupational segregation is not perpetuated, wage and skills gaps are eradicated, inclusive social dialogue is established, working conditions are improved, and social protection enhanced. At the same time, transformations and redefinition of jobs and workplaces can further improve skills, and reduce health and safety risks, which are often worse for women. Moreover, the creation of new labour market opportunities can facilitate the formalization of the informal economy jobs held by women. While building a low-carbon and sustainable economy, a just transition can ensure that women are not left behind, and their existing and potential contributions essential for stimulating green growth and achieving sustainable development for all, are not undermined".

Source: ILO 2017.

<sup>11.</sup> ILO 2018b.

<sup>12.</sup> Saget, Vogt-Schilb and Luu 2020.

<sup>13.</sup> IPCC 2023; IPCC 2022.

<sup>14.</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022a; IPCC 2022.

**<sup>15.</sup>** UNDP 2022.

<sup>16.</sup> UN Women 2023.

<sup>17.</sup> UN Women 2021.

Women's contributions to the just transition are vital to successfully transforming our economies and societies. Women's and girls' capacities to take action and build resilient futures depends on removing structural and systemic barriers and closing gender gaps. At the same time, their participation and leadership are critical for making climate and environmental action, and thereby a just transition, more effective. Indeed, women and girls in all their diversity are taking climate and environment action at all levels and are key agents of change and central actors

for environmental sustainability and climate resilience. Their knowledge, capabilities and innovative approaches are already promoting a gender-responsive just transition in key sectors, for example, in sustainable energy and in agroecology where they are protecting and restoring local ecosystems based on local and Indigenous knowledge. But their voice, agency and participation remain undersupported, under-resourced, under-valued and underrecognized.

#### **BOX 4:**

### UN Commission on the Status of Women: Fostering a gender-responsive just transition

The Agreed Conclusions of the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (March 2022) strongly support a gender-responsive just transition:

Paragraph 54. The Commission recognizes the need to ensure just transitions that promote sustainable development and the eradication of poverty, and the creation of decent work and quality jobs, including for women, as well as the need to involve workers and their communities in discussions that affect their livelihoods, including through making financial flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emission and climate-resilient development, including through the deployment and transfer of technology and the provision of support to developing country parties.

Paragraph 20. The Commission recognizes the importance of relevant International Labour Organization standards related to the realization of women's right to work and rights at work which are critical to ensure a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities towards an inclusive, low greenhouse gas emission and climate-resilient development and sustainable economy. It recalls the decent work agenda of the International Labour Organization and the International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and notes the importance of their effective implementation.

The Commission urges Member States and other stakeholders to:

Paragraph 62 (uu). Support and finance a gender-responsive, equitable and sustainable transition towards low-emission energy systems, including by rapidly scaling up the deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures, that work for all people and the planet, taking into account the potential of ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions, with gender-sensitive and age-inclusive social protection and care at the centre.

Paragraph 62 (vv). Protect and promote all women's right to work and rights at work and ensure the equal access of women to decent work and quality jobs in all sectors, such as sustainable energy, fisheries, forestry, agriculture and tourism, by eliminating occupational segregation, discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes, and violence and sexual harassment, supporting the transition from informal to formal work in all sectors, ensuring equal pay for work of equal value, protecting them against discrimination and abuse and ensuring the safety of all women in the world of work, and promoting the right to organize and bargain collectively to advance, as well as access to sustainable livelihoods, including in the context of a just transition of the workforce.

**Source:** United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022b.

Just transitions and achieving gender equality are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.<sup>20</sup> A gender-responsive just transition is an essential pathway to achieve gender equality in the world of work, while ensuring that

a just transition is gender-responsive is fundamental to creating low-carbon, sustainable economies for present and future generations.<sup>21</sup>

### Challenges to achieving gender equality in a just transition

Prevailing gender inequalities are exacerbated and deepened by climate change and environmental degradation.

Women are overrepresented in informal, low-wage, precarious work. Globally, nearly 60 per cent of women's employment is in the informal economy and it is more than 90 per cent in low-income countries. High rates of informality may leave women behind in a just transition and their limited access to social protection systems constrains their ability to cope with climate and environmental shocks. Moreover, a quarter of employed women globally work in agriculture, including forestry and fishing, with agriculture remaining the most important employment sector for women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. With climate change impacts increasingly affecting food production and food systems, women employed, formally and informally, face increased risks to their rights and livelihoods.

Women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work is increased and intensified amidst crises and disasters and by the depletion of resources and services resulting from climate change and environmental degradation. Women's and girls' commitment of time and labour to care responsibilities leaves them further behind in their access to education, training and leisure and women's access to paid employment. In times of climate crisis and drought stress, girls are often forced to abandon their schooling because of heightened responsibilities for unpaid care and domestic work in the household, such as provisioning food and water and caring for family members.

**Persistent gender pay gaps and sectoral and occupational segregation** mean that women trail behind men in both the quantity and quality of paid work they perform, receiving significantly less income and fewer benefits from participation in the labour market.<sup>24</sup> Just transition measures will have to

address these gender gaps and occupational segregation to level the playing field.<sup>25</sup>

Women, especially young women, face difficulties in attaining high-quality jobs in the green and blue economies and in climate and environmental governance due to discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes that perpetuate occupational segregation and limit advancement and persistent gender gaps in secondary and tertiary science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.<sup>26</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, women are well positioned in sectors such as agriculture, forestry and tourism, where mostly lower-paid jobs are likely to be created, while they are underrepresented in key sectors offering the best paid green jobs, such as renewable energy and sustainable transport.<sup>27</sup> While the share of women in the renewable energy sector, at 32 per cent, is higher than that of the fossil fuel sector where only 22 per cent of the workforce are women, in the energy sector as a whole, women are relegated to low-level and administrative jobs and make up just under 14 per cent of senior managers and only 5 per cent of top posts such as board chairs, CEOs and presidents.28

Pre-existing gender inequalities and unequal access to natural and productive resources, including finance, markets, technology, energy, land, water and food, jeopardize women's livelihoods, well-being and resilience and are exacerbated by climate change and environmental degradation. As climate and environmental crises and disasters accelerate and intensify, the gender gaps in access to goods, resources and services will continue to widen and deepen. Access to financing is one of the main challenges to supporting and scaling up gender-responsive just transition

- 20. ILO 2022a
- **21.** ILO 2022a.
- **22.** ILO 2023.
- World Bank, Employment in agriculture, female (% of female employment) (modeled ILO estimate) in 2021, the most recent year available, a decline from 42 per cent in 1991.
- 24. ILO 2022b.
- **25.** ILO 2022b
- 26. United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022; Kwauk and Casey 2021.
- 27. UN Women and African Development Bank 2021.
- 28. UN Women and UNIDO 2023

initiatives.<sup>29</sup> The latest available data indicate that only 3 per cent of climate-related development finance identified gender equality as a principal objective, based on analysis by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) analysis.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the **debt crisis**, particularly in developing countries most vulnerable to the climate emergency, stymies movement towards sustainability and gender equality. Of the 63 most climate-vulnerable countries, 38 are prioritizing debt servicing that restricts investments in sustainable development pathways, including gender-responsive just transitions.<sup>31</sup>

Growing evidence indicates that climate change and disasters lead to increased **gender-based violence and harassment**.<sup>32</sup> The experience of facing and responding to climate-induced livelihood loss and impoverishment heightens the threat

of violence, especially for women and girls, reinforcing pre-existing gender power imbalances and constraining women's access and contributions to adaptation, mitigation and resilience-building efforts to cope with the climate emergency.<sup>33</sup> Gender-based violence, constituting violations of women's bodily integrity and rights, including rights to work and at work, limits women's participation, opportunities and outcomes in the labour market.

Challenges to gender equality must be addressed to ensure that women—in particular those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and those enmeshed in the informal economy—benefit equally from just transition opportunities and outcomes. Otherwise, gender inequalities and discrimination in the world of work will persist or worsen,<sup>34</sup> ultimately condemning the transition to low-carbon, sustainable economies to failure.

## Pathways to advance a gender-responsive just transition for all

A gender-responsive just transition specifically prioritizes decent jobs for women across sectors towards a low-carbon economy and achieving climate goals. The following pathways are designed to both achieve gender equality and women's economic empowerment and point to promising opportunities to increase and enhance quality, decent work for women:

Systematically integrate gender equality considerations into just transition plans, policies and programmes, as well as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), National Action Programs on Land **Degradation Neutrality and National Biodiversity Strategies** and Action Plans (NBSAPs). Only 10 of the 65 countries (15 per cent) that reference a just transition in their enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to deliver on the Paris Agreement have linked it with gender. 35 Similarly, only 7 of the 29 countries (24 per cent) that reference a just transition in their Long-Term Strategies (LTS) on climate mitigation have done so.<sup>36</sup> Ensuring that strategies on mitigation and adaptation systematically integrate gender perspectives can support the resilience and adaptive capacities of women and girls and potentially enable their equal participation and leadership in a just transition.

### Significantly expand gender-responsive climate finance.

Climate finance that specifically targets gender equality considerations—including risks and opportunities—is urgently needed to support countries to shift from fossil fuel dependency to low-carbon, climate-resilient and sustainable economies. Public finance, especially in the form of grants, should prioritize gender-responsive climate change mitigation and adaptation actions. <sup>37</sup> Increasing direct access to climate finance for women's, grassroots and feminist organizations, enterprises and cooperatives will be key for ensuring an inclusive and effective gender-responsive just transition.

Facilitate women's and girls' full, equal and meaningful participation, leadership, decision-making and collective action. A gender-responsive just transition relies on social dialogue and the meaningful engagement of all affected stakeholders, especially women and girls whose voice and agency have been and continue to be undermined and underrepresented. Women's leadership and influence in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of just transition initiatives, policies and programmes will help ensure their effectiveness as well as equal participation and benefits for women and girls in all their diversity.

- **29.** ILO 2022a.
- 30. Oxfam International 2023
- **31.** ActionAid 2023.
- 32. UNFCCC 2022.
- 33. Owren 2021; Castañeda, Sabater, Owren and Boyer 2021.
- **34.** ILO 2019
- 35. 170 countries have submitted enhanced NDCs. UNDP 2022.
- **36.** 52 countries have submitted LTS on climate mitigation. UNDP 2022.
- 37. United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022a.

Promote the right to work and rights at work to leave no one behind is foundational to a gender-responsive just transition. This means ensuring women's access to decent work in green and blue economies and emerging low-carbon sectors, bearing in mind the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that limit women's equal access to and benefits from the labour market. It also means promoting and protecting social dialogue and collective bargaining and expanding access to social protection.

Invest in training and education. To facilitate women's transition from low-paid, vulnerable and precarious employment to quality, low-carbon decent work requires retraining and reskilling, closing gaps in educational outcomes, increasing women's and girls' representation in STEM fields, including in renewable energy, and engagement by governments and worker and employer organizations. Initiatives where women, especially young women, can hone the necessary skills to access the decent jobs being created are critical to ensure they equally participate in and benefit from the just transition.<sup>38</sup>

Invest in the care economy for a gender-responsive just transition. No economy nor society can thrive without the effective and equitable provision of care. Just transitions that prioritize investments in quality care jobs, services and infrastructure help ensure that women are not left behind and that their disproportionate share of unpaid care, domestic and communal work does not undermine their potential contributions to and benefits from a just transition.<sup>39</sup> Care jobs—such as in health, education and long-term care—are low-carbon jobs. An average health or care job produces 26 times less greenhouse gas than a manufacturing job, over 200 times less than an agricultural job and nearly 1,500 times less than a job in the oil and gas sector.<sup>40</sup> An effective just transition measure would be to make significantly greater investments in decent work in the care economy. More broadly, all climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives contributing to a just transition must not increase women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work, and instead should actively decrease it by emphasizing climate-resilient and time- and effort-reducing technologies and practices and ensuring women's and girls'

greater access to public services, social protection and sustainable infrastructure, including care services and infrastructure.<sup>41</sup>

**Advance gender equality through sustainable energy transitions.** A transition to sustainable energy requires a global shift away from unsustainable energy production and consumption patterns to reach climate goals. The energy sector, as the dominant contributor to global emissions, can and should play a pivotal role in just transitions and ensure that women and gender-diverse people equally lead, contribute to and benefit from the sustainable energy transition. <sup>42</sup> It is estimated that the number of jobs in the renewable energy sector could nearly triple from 12.7 million to 38 million jobs by 2030. <sup>43</sup> This offers an opportunity for women to acquire the necessary skills, training and education to access these newly created jobs, which are generally better paid and provide greater benefits and security than jobs in sectors traditionally dominated by women. <sup>44</sup>

Close data gaps to monitor and assess changes in the level and quality of gender-responsive climate financing and in the world of work. Investments to address data and evidence gaps are essential to support a gender-responsive just transition. While the evidence is increasingly clear that climate change has gendered impacts and aggravates preexisting gender inequalities, enhanced gender data collection and analysis and gender statistics are needed, particularly with reference to women's livelihoods and resilience; access to resources, goods and services; the care economy, both paid and unpaid; and the sustainable energy transition as well as other sectors heavily affected by just transition policies and programmes.<sup>45</sup>

**Ensure accountability for gender-responsive just transition commitments and investments.** Gender-just transitions can only be achieved through open and transparent pathways and processes, in which governments are held accountable for their decisions and actions, including implementation of commitments made in NDCs and other national communications to the UNFCCC and under the Multilateral Environmental Agreements as a whole. Other actors, such as the private sector, must also be held accountable for the gap between their promises and what they actually do.

- 38. ILO 2022b.
- **39.** UN Women 2023.
- **40.** Women's Budget Group and Wen 2022.
- 41. UN Women 2014; United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022.
- 42. UN Women and UNIDO 2023
- 43. IRENA and ILO 2022.
- **44.** WECAN 2023.
- 45. United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022a.

Morningstar Sustainalytics <u>Low Carbon Transition Ratings</u> of some 4,000 large public companies showed that only 17 per cent have strategies and policies in place to achieve their greenhouse gas emissions and transition targets across their value chains, and only 8 per cent have robust greenhouse gas performance incentive plans—unsurprisingly in countries with stricter climate change mitigation regulations. 46 Promising accountability processes at the regional level include the <u>Parliamentary Observatory on Climate Change</u>

and Just Transition: For better environmental governance and transparency in Latin America and the Caribbean to monitor the Paris Agreement. However, in both processes, gender issues are yet to be targeted. Women's civil society organizations and gender equality advocates in government, academia and international organizations merit strong support so that they can fulfil their crucial roles in ensuring accountability.

## The way forward: Key recommendations

Gender-responsive just transitions to build economies that support the survival and flourishing of all people and the planet require immediate actions and investments by all actors. It is recommended that governments and other stakeholders take the following actions, with the support of UN agencies and civil society, to realize the above pathways to gender-responsive just transitions, giving priority to least developed countries and small island developing states:

- Ensure that gender considerations and human rights are fully integrated in climate action, as recognized by the Paris Agreement.
- Integrate gender equality perspectives in just transition plans, policies and programmes, including through NDCs, NAPs and NBSAPs.
- Promote the right to work and rights at work, including through the elimination of violence and harassment against women and gender-diverse people in the workplace, and ensure women's equal access to decent work in low-carbon, sustainable economies.
- Eliminate occupational segregation and gender pay gaps to level the playing field for women.
- Formalize jobs in the informal economy, supporting decent work and social protection for women.
- Address the crippling debt crisis in developing countries by calling for debt cancellation and an overhaul of the global debt architecture, to allow countries to make the investments necessary for gender-responsive just transitions.
- Invest in universal social protection systems to undergird just transitions.
- Invest in the care economy and expand quality public care infrastructure and services and create decent care jobs.

- Increase access to climate finance for women and women's organizations through targeted direct funding channels, prioritizing funding for women and girls most affected by climate change.
- Promote women's voice, agency and full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of just transition initiatives, policies and programmes.
- Support women's and girls' access to training, skill building and education towards their equal access to new quality jobs created in just transitions.
- Invest in the collection, analysis and generation of more and better gender data and statistics, including time-use surveys, with an emphasis on interlinkages between gender equality, climate change and environmental degradation.
- Facilitate the key role of civil society and gender equality advocates in ensuring accountability for gender-responsive just transition policies and initiatives and their implementation, by holding governments and other stakeholders, such as the private sector, to account.



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