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JUST TRANSITION – A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Special Issue Guest Editor: Julia Eder,
Halliki Kreinin,
Florian Wukovitsch

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Research Project

KARIN KÜBLBÖCK, INES OMANN

ADJUST: Potential Pathways of a Just Energy Transition in Europe

Successfully addressing the challenges posed by climate change requires a comprehensive approach that places significant emphasis on justice and fairness. Climate change will affect countries, regions, generations, and individuals in unequal ways. Additionally, it is increasingly clear that vulnerable households and communities not only endure an undue share of the effects of climate change but also potentially bear a disproportionate burden of the costs of transition policies towards a carbon-free society. This imbalanced allocation of costs has the potential to worsen current disparities and give rise to additional social inequalities.

The costs associated with climate change mitigation policies are often more visible and immediately felt by the public, compared to the longer-term costs (and benefits) imposed by climate change itself. Hence, success of climate action heavily relies on the public's perception of these policies as fair and just. In an era of declining trust in governments and public institutions, designing climate policies that garner widespread social acceptance is crucial (Maestre-Andrés et al. 2019; Douenne/Fabre 2020).

The EU Horizon Europe project AdJUST addresses those challenges and aims to provide policy advice for achieving a fair energy transition in Europe. As the project is still in its first phase, here we provide an overview of its objectives, research components and methods. The authors are responsible for facilitating the stakeholder engagement process, conducted

in both Spain and Romania. The first phase of the engagement process has been completed in Spain, allowing us to present a synopsis of the outcomes below. For continuous updates, please visit the project's website (<https://adjust-project.eu>) or follow its developments on Twitter and in LinkedIn.

I. What is AdJUST?

AdJUST is a transdisciplinary European research project spanning a period of four years (2022-2026). It brings together a consortium that is committed to advancing the societal understanding of the distributive consequences of the transition towards climate neutrality. It combines research approaches from diverse disciplines such as economics, political science, business management, public administration, philosophy, as well as stakeholder involvement.

The project will explore a broad range of challenges associated with a just energy transition, by addressing technical, economic, and social dimensions for firms, workers, households, and public bodies. It ultimately aims to understand the various factors that promote or hinder support for climate transition strategies and hence to identify and suggest effective and actively supported policy interventions for climate action, emphasising feasibility, fairness, efficiency, and inclusivity.

While addressing the European economy as a whole, AdJUST will also conduct in-depth analyses of specific sectors in decline or transition. For instance, current activities related to stakeholder engagement are concentrating on topics of energy poverty in Spain and decent working conditions in coal mining regions in Romania. AdJUST's research spans the entire European continent while delving more deeply into three representative countries: Spain, Romania and Germany. They represent key locations for these sectors and exhibit varying degrees of vulnerability to climate change, distinct economic diversification levels and political and economic institutions.

Dimensions of Just Transition

The concept of Just Transition encompasses various aspects of the transition towards environmentally friendly societies, such as a fair distribution of benefits and costs, equitable decision-making processes, and the restoration of justice for those adversely affected. The project will primarily focus on two dimensions: procedural and distributional justice.

Distributional Justice: Focuses on ensuring a fair and equitable sharing of costs and benefits during the transition. It addresses issues such as income and wealth inequality, aiming to promote a more balanced distribution of social and economic benefits, particularly for disadvantaged or marginalised groups and individuals. A fair distribution should particularly consider aspects such as income, education, healthcare, energy access, infrastructure, and subjective well-being.

Procedural Justice involves meaningful and continuous consultation with affected parties. Engaging marginalised communities and those most impacted by policy decisions is essential for effective decarbonisation. The process must be just in the sense that it grants the right to participate in decision-making and policy formulation to groups disproportionately affected by the Just Transition.

A **Just Energy Transition** should aim to ensure sufficient and equitable access to renewable and sustainable energy for all. This shall improve living conditions for those in society who require it, including reducing existing inequalities.

Box 1: Definitions used in AdJUST

Source: Definitions based on Abram et al. 2022, Heyen et al. 2020, Sovacool et al. 2023, Wang et al. 2021.

2. Key research components

(1) *Modelling and Surveys – Quantifying and understanding impacts of decarbonisation policies on workers, firms, and households*: AdJUST seeks to assess the distributional and competitiveness impacts of climate mitigation policies and transitional assistance measures on workers, firms, and households. To achieve this, it employs modelling and econometric methods, as well as surveys. The project assesses the impacts of climate mitigation policies on workers with different skill and occupation types. Consequently, it identifies vulnerable segments of the workforce, and evaluates effective transition support mechanisms. To gain deeper insights into the responses of businesses to decarbonisation policies, the project will conduct cross-country comparative surveys at the firm level. AdJUST also employs modelling to understand the influence of climate policies on distinct household segments, with particular emphasis on vulnerable low-income groups. Additionally, the project investigates the possible distributional outcomes of EU climate policies on trade partners.

(2) *JTCAT – a novel Just Transition Analytical Tool*: One of the key components of AdJUST is the development of an innovative tool called the Just Transition Conceptual Analysis Tool (JTCAT). This tool will map and analyse various conceptions of just transition found in academic research, EU policies, and stakeholder groups across Europe, and offer an understanding of normative commitments related to the just transition. JTCAT will take into account distributive justice and procedural justice, offering a comprehensive understanding of normative commitments related to just transition.

(3) *Stakeholder engagement – creating a shared and actionable vision of Just Transition for Europe*: AdJUST aims to increase societal support for climate transition strategies by engaging stakeholders, e.g., labour unions, industry representatives, public bodies, civil society organisations, and researchers. These stakeholders will contribute to the development of a shared and actionable vision of the EU Just Transition. The vision shall inspire collective action towards achieving climate neutrality, coupled with co-designing transitional assistance measures that not only compensate potential losers but also empower vulnerable groups to embrace change and reduce pre-existing inequalities.

This approach ensures that stakeholders co-create and shape the research, thus making it more relevant and feasible, in particular by offering a vision that is not only valid for the two casestudy countries, but can be upscaled to the European level. It will contain elements of a carbon neutral Europe and also frame conditions which are necessary to make such a vision viable.

Two countries, Romania and Spain, which face significant distributional challenges in their decarbonisation efforts, will be the focus of participatory stakeholder workshops. These workshops will provide insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by various groups and inform the development of context-specific policy measures. For Germany, the third focus country of the project, AdJUST will cooperate with Ariadne, another research project, and build on the results of this project.

This stakeholder engagement process consists of the following steps:

(a) Participatory stakeholder workshops in Romania and Spain to develop a vision for their countries, focussing on energy poverty in Spain and on decent work and living in coal-mining regions in Romania. In addition, the active involvement of stakeholders enhances the dissemination of research results and facilitates their effective utilisation across different user communities through accessible and policy-relevant outputs.

(b) Feasibility and reality checks of the visions with other stakeholders, such as citizens, scientists, regional planners, companies or NGOs experts help to revise and concretise the visions.

(c) By consolidating elements from different visions present in the sample countries, AdJUST aims to create a shared vision for the EU Just Transition, together with selected stakeholders. By identifying areas of agreement and disagreement or contradictions, dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders to shape a coherent and effective strategy for the just transition will be fostered.

(d) Presenting the pre-final vision to the stakeholders, as well as the modelling results, and discussing them to make them more legitimate and feasible.

Steps (a) and (b) have already been conducted in Spain (workshop June 2023, focus group with citizens July 2023). The agenda, methods

and results (vision, policy packages) can be found on the project's website (<https://adjust-project.eu>).

(4) *Identifying capacity, motivation and credibility gaps within public bodies*: An essential component of the AdJUST project relates to public bodies responsible for driving a just transition. The project will employ a combination of methods, including quantitative text analysis, survey experiments and interviews to evaluate the capacity, motivation and credibility of public institutions within the focal countries (Germany, Romania and Spain). The objective is to determine these institutions' preparedness to effectively carry out their transformative roles and suggest measures for enhancing their effectiveness.

3. Dissemination of results

To ensure widespread impact, AdJUST places a strong emphasis on dissemination and active involvement with diverse user communities. Research results and insights gleaned from stakeholders will be widely shared, guaranteeing that research outcomes remain pertinent and accessible to policymakers, industries, and society as a whole. The participatory methodology embraced by ÖFSE ensures that the concept of a just transition is not solely theoretical but firmly rooted in the real-world challenges and aspirations of stakeholders.

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Karin Küblböck

Austrian Foundation for Development Research

k.kueblboeck@oefse.at

Ines Omann

Austrian Foundation for Development Research

i.omann@oefse.at