



NESCC Presentation to Joint Oireachtas Climate Action Committee

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1.1 Introduction

We would like to thank the Chairperson and members of the Committee for this invitation to the NESCC, to speak on NESCC's recent work on just transition.

NESCC is a government body which advises the Taoiseach on strategic policy issues. The members are appointed by the Taoiseach and represent business and employers, trade unions, agricultural and farming organisations, community and voluntary organisations, and environmental organisations; as well as heads of Government departments and independent experts. Its composition means it plays an important and unique role in bringing different perspectives from civil society together with Government. Jeanne Moore and I are members of the Secretariat and we are attending in that capacity.

1.2 NESCC Just Transition Work

The points we make today stem from a body of recent work produced by the Council and Secretariat including the NESCC report No. 149, *Addressing Employment Vulnerability as Part of a Just Transition in Ireland*.¹ This work was a response to a request in *Future Jobs Ireland 2019* and the *Climate Action Plan* for NESCC to identify steps that could be taken to address the vulnerability arising from the transition to low carbon and more digital and automated future.

The Council recognise that transitions to a low carbon and more digital, automated Ireland are complex, interconnected and generate significant uncertainty. This includes uncertainty about where and how greatest vulnerability will fall in terms of the impact on employment. There are risks to some employment from both

¹ The Council report, Secretariat and Research papers can be found here
<https://www.nesc.ie/work-programme/transition-teams/>



transitions in agriculture and food, transport, and parts of industry. Despite their inherent complexity and uncertainty, there are economic and social benefits to adopting a proactive, managed approach. There are job-loss risks for vulnerable sectors and within job roles, but these are coupled with opportunities for new jobs and enterprises, which need to be planned for and managed as part of a just transition approach.

Such a proactive and planned response was also highlighted in earlier work on building community engagement and social support in relation to wind energy. This identified the importance of an intentional, participatory and problem-solving State-led process to underpin transition.²

1.3 Just Transition Approach

In a background paper supporting the Council report, we note that a just transition approach is increasingly recognised but still not fully understood in practice. While there are different perspectives, we have approached it as one that seeks to ensure transitions are equitable and participative in both the process and outcome at national, regional and local levels. A just transition approach explicitly names principles, goals and values and facilitates societal engagement, while also seeking to ensure that the costs and benefits of the transition are equitably shared.

That paper outlines that there is growing consensus that such an approach has to be built into climate action, to achieve both equitable solutions and public support. Achieving a transformation of the scale necessary in a relatively short period of time is a considerable political challenge, requiring policies that share both the burden and the benefits and opportunities. However, it is not yet clear which particular policy, regulatory and legal measures are most effective.

Nevertheless, without action on a just transition, it is important to reflect on the alternative to a just transition – economic and technological progress coupled with environmental protection and possibly restoration, but without social equity or consideration of rights and protections. The social and political challenges that approach would create could make the transition unachievable or delay its progress.

² NESCS (2014) Wind Energy in Ireland: Building Community Engagement and Social Support
<https://www.nesc.ie/publications/wind-energy-in-ireland-building-community-engagement-and-social-support/>

1.4 Applying Just Transition to Policy and Practice

While the debate on values and principles remains a live one, practical approaches to achieving a just transition are where policy debates are now shifting, as is the case currently in Ireland. Aligning just transition policies with decarbonisation measures is necessary to ensure emissions are radically reduced, but in a way that is fair, inclusive and equitable. However, there is no blueprint or fixed set of rules to achieve this. Our work included international case study research as well as a review of key approaches to transition that have been applied regionally and nationally.³ While many of these are place-based and process-oriented, focusing on skills development, social protection and the labour market, targeting and supporting jobs in key sectors, others focus on a purposeful, participative and multi-faceted approach to transition governance. Five key areas of relevance on governance are:

- i) **Preparation:** For a just transition, purposive and proactive planning and governance is required at national, regional and local levels involving government, regional and local/community-based actors, combined with government support.
- ii) **Process:** Participative social dialogue based process as part of public governance that considers the sharing of costs and benefits and champions principles of fairness, justice, equality and social inclusion- this can be a mechanism for fostering trust and adopting a problem solving approach to transition;
- iii) **People:** Focusing on decent/good jobs, pay and conditions, training and appropriate social protection for those at risk;
- iv) **Place:** Place-based regeneration of local communities and infrastructure- the potential of a place-based approach to enabling transition, with bottom-up local action and networks of practice to complement any overarching national just transition framework; and
- v) **Outcomes:** Fair, inclusive and equitable outcomes in which no-one is left behind.

³ Mercier, S. (2020) Four Case Studies on Just Transition: Lessons for Ireland. NESC Research Series. http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_research_series/Research_Series_Paper_15_TTCasestudies.pdf; Moore, J. (2020) Approaches to Transition. NESC Secretariat Paper. http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_secretariat_papers/No_20_Approaches_to_Transition.pdf



Scotland provides a valuable case study given it has taken a national focus (rather than the more common regional one) to examine just transition opportunities and challenges. The Interim Report of the Just Transition Commission echoes the above and outlines the need to: (i) plan ahead and develop clear transition plans; (ii) the need for proactive and ongoing dialogue to help understand society's expectations relating to the transition; and (iii) bring equity to the heart of climate change policies including addressing existing inequalities in relation to work, housing, and transport.⁴

1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the NESC work points to the critical part a just transition plays in transition, but that practices, policies and governance approaches are still unfolding, with no off-the-shelf solutions. Combining a focus on both fair and inclusive processes and outcomes will be key to Ireland's effective decarbonisation and societal transition.

⁴ Just Transition Commission (2020) Interim Report
<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2020/02/transition-commission-interim-report/documents/transition-commission-interim-report/transition-commission-interim-report/govscot%3Adocument/transition-commission-interim-report.pdf>