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CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A JUST TRANSITION: WHO SHOULD WE TELL, WHAT SHOULD WE TELL, AND HOW?

JUST TRANSITION COMMUNICATION GUIDE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY



IMPRESSUM

Just Transition Communication Guide for Public Institutions

SEPTEMBER 2026

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INTRODUCTION

This guide was written to facilitate the communication and advocacy efforts of individuals and organizations that are working on climate change and "just transition," planning to work in this field, or taking their first steps toward including this issue on their agenda, in both their current and future activities.

As YADA Foundation, in previous years we had the opportunity to support the work of various organizations active in the fields of climate change and ecology and to generate knowledge on the issue in different field contexts. Building on the knowledge we gained through these experiences, we implemented our **"Communication Roadmap for Just Transition in Türkiye"** project with the support of the German-Turkish Climate Cooperation: Strengthening Civil Society for Climate Action Project, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN), financed by the International Climate Initiative (IKI), and carried out under GIZ's (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) Climate Diplomacy Action Programme. Within the scope of this project, we conducted Just Transition Perception Research, which enabled us to comprehensively measure national and local perceptions regarding the issue. At the same time, we evaluated all interviews through the lens of recommendations and warnings related to communication on the subject. In addition, through other project activities, we had the opportunity to gather feedback from civil society organizations operating in different regions of Türkiye and working across different thematic fields. The guide you are holding is an output of this work, designed to be concise, accessible, and practical.

This guide aims to provide a shared roadmap for communication on the just transition and coal phase-out in Türkiye. Developed in light of research findings, field experience, discourse analysis, the study visit to Germany, and insights gathered from stakeholder meetings, this guide offers communication frameworks, narrative recommendations, and advocacy messages tailored to different target groups. The main objective of the guide is to contribute to the development of a common and inclusive communication language that moves just transition beyond being merely a technical topic of climate policy, enabling different actors, from climate, environmental, women, and youth organizations to trade unions, to use it within their own contexts. Accordingly, the guide proposes target-specific message sets and narrative frameworks for different stakeholders.

As a result of this process, which was a deeply instructive one for us, we hope that this guide, prepared as a product of learning, discussion, and collective production, will also serve as a useful resource for individuals and organizations working in the field of just transition and for those who believe the issues they work on are connected to just transition. We sincerely thank all stakeholders who contributed to the creation of this guide. We extend our gratitude to all participants who shared their experiences and opinions during the research process, to all stakeholders who enriched the guide with their ideas and recommendations during the Agora Meetings and workshops, and to the Climate Alliance team, whose knowledge, experience, and collaboration contributed throughout the project. We also especially thank the Kazdağları Protection Association, Deniz Yıldızı Women's Association, and the Youth Organizations Forum (GoFor) for their contributions to the section on communication recommendations for different actors through their feedback on climate/environment, gender equality, youth, and just transition content.

Brief Information About the Project

Through the **“Communication Roadmap for Just Transition in Türkiye”** project, we aimed to understand how the economic, social, and technological transformation processes accelerated by the climate crisis are perceived in Türkiye; to reveal how the just transition approach is evaluated by different social actors; and to contribute to the development of a more inclusive communication approach in this field. To this end, we carried out a comprehensive discourse analysis examining how just transition discourse is constructed on social media and how it is produced by different actors. In this research, we used the X platform (formerly Twitter) for social media discourse analysis. Since Meta's data access policies significantly limit researchers' ability to systematically analyze content shared in closed groups and content visible only to friends, X was chosen as the primary data source because it provides data suitable for comparable and quantitative discourse analysis.

In addition, we conducted in-depth interviews at the national level with civil society organizations, trade unions, academics, and political actors. Through field research in Soma, Tavşanlı, and İskenderun, we explored local experiences in coal regions and industrial cities.

After completing the research, we organized three separate **Agora Meetings** in İstanbul, İzmir, and Diyarbakır to collectively evaluate, develop, and consolidate the findings with different segments of society. We designed these meetings not simply as events where research results were presented, but as participatory dialogue spaces where participants from different cities and fields of work could discuss the findings in light of their own experiences and jointly evaluate needs, concerns, and recommendations regarding just transition.

With the “Communication Roadmap for Just Transition in Türkiye” project, we aimed to develop effective communication strategies that would shape public perception and narratives around just transition in Türkiye. In doing so, we sought to increase stakeholder participation, public support, and the responsiveness of policymaking processes to social demands throughout the energy and social transformation process required for climate action. Accordingly, by taking into account both the research findings and the issues identified through discussions with stakeholders during the Agora Meetings, we developed **a communication strategy and roadmap tailored specifically to Türkiye.**

Guide Roadmap

When designing this guide, we paid attention to the following principles:

The guide should:

- Provide a foundation for people who know nothing about the subject.
- Offer content through which people already working in this field can examine the results of our research and integrate them into their own work.
- Include recommendations tailored to the full diversity of civil society actors interested in the issue.

Based on this approach, the guide consists of two main sections:

- Common issues and points that individuals and organizations should consider in communication and advocacy work.
- Communication recommendations for different actors.

In the "Common Issues" section, you can find:

- **Conceptual Background:** How are the concepts of just transition and climate change/climate justice defined? What different approaches exist? Which conceptual approach may be more effective for communication on the issue?
- **Challenges, Barriers, Needs:** Challenges in working on the issue. How do we take the first step? What are the barriers to working on climate change and, more specifically, just transition? What is needed to overcome these barriers? Where does communication fit among these needs?
- **Communication 101:** What are the indispensable principles of communication on climate change, climate justice, and just transition? How should different audiences be addressed to make communication more effective?
- **Case Study:** Germany.

In the "Communication Recommendations for Different Actors" section:

We compiled tailored recommendations for:

- Civil society actors working in the field of environment and climate.
- Civil society actors not working in the field of environment and climate, with thematic priorities including gender equality, youth, and workers' rights.

Once you have this guide in your hands, even if you do not have time to read the entire document, you can still benefit from it by focusing on the section that is most relevant to you.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

What Exactly is “Just Transition”?

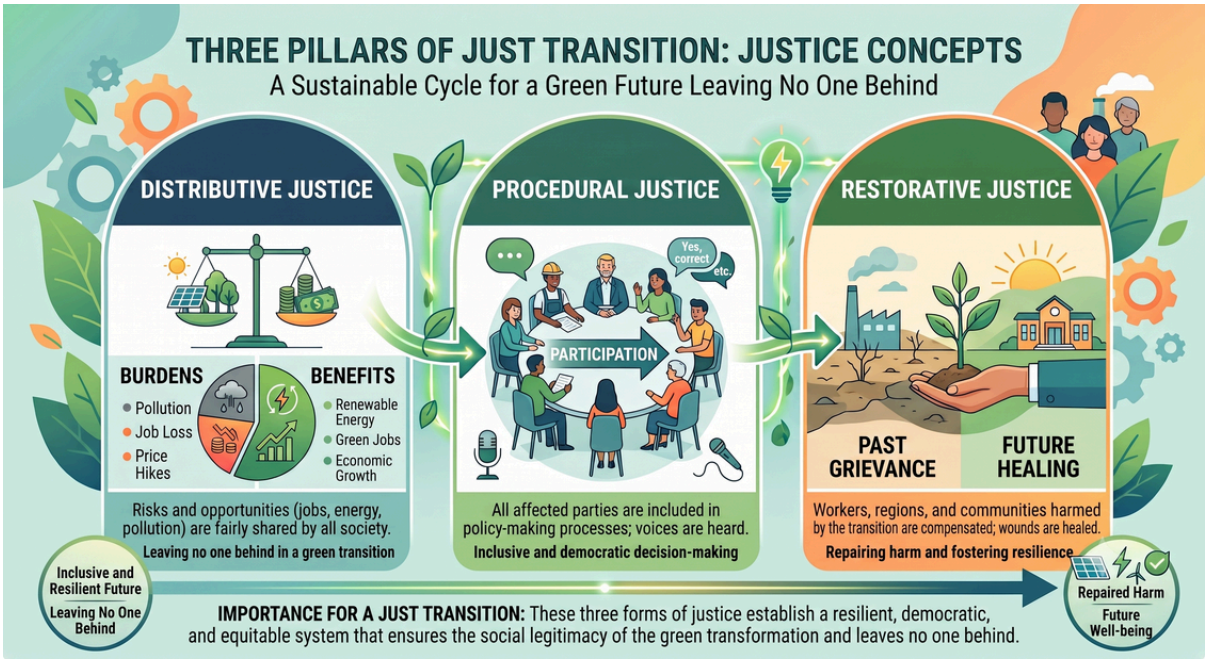
The foundations of the idea of just transition date back to the 1970s, when U.S. trade union leader Tony Mazzocchi argued that the costs of environmental policies should not be borne by workers. The term “Just Transition” began to be used in the 1990s to describe this approach and later became one of the fundamental concepts of international climate policy. As the concept evolved, distributive justice, procedural justice, and restorative justice emerged as the three core dimensions of justice within just transition (Wang and Lo, 2021).

In other words, understanding just transition requires understanding these three concepts:

Distribution of Resources: Refers to the fair distribution of the environmental, social, and economic risks arising from the transition to a low-carbon economy (such as job losses and rising electricity prices), as well as the opportunities created by green jobs and technological innovation, across different segments of society.

Inclusive Procedures: Advocates for democratic, transparent, and participatory decision-making processes in energy and climate policies, ensuring that the voices of local communities, workers, and especially vulnerable groups directly affected by the transition are included in these processes.

Restorative Characteristics of the Process: Focuses on implementing compensatory, supportive, and restorative policies, such as compensation, targeted assistance, or restructuring, for regions harmed by the phase-out of traditional energy industries, workers who lose their jobs, and disadvantaged communities that have long been exposed to fossil fuel pollution.



At its core, just transition means managing both the risks and the opportunities of the transition to a net-zero economy together, ensuring that no one is left behind (Bir Buçuk Derece, n.d.).

The Spectrum of Approaches to "Just Transition"

Since the concept is open to different interpretations by different actors at every stage, the Wuppertal Institute (2022) classifies approaches to just transition into four categories along a spectrum between preserving the existing system and transforming it:

- **Status Quo Approach:** Limits the transition to compensation and vocational training programs for workers without questioning the existing system.
- **Managerial Reform:** Adds standards and social dialogue based on negotiations among governments, trade unions, and employers.
- **Structural Reform:** Focuses on guaranteeing the fair distribution of benefits and participation in decision-making processes.
- **Transformative Approach:** As the most radical perspective, argues that solving the climate crisis requires a complete transformation of the current economic and political system.

In practice, a significant share of just transition policies is positioned between managerial reform and structural reform. These approaches focus on issues such as social dialogue, institutional coordination, employment policies, and participation in decision-making, while debates about the broader economic and social system envisioned by the transformative approach receive relatively limited attention (Wuppertal Institute, 2022).

This demonstrates that just transition should be understood not only as a technical or administrative transformation, but also as a question of justice, specifically, of how the costs and benefits of transformation are distributed among different segments of society.

Therefore, just transition is not only a technical or managerial issue; it is also a matter of justice, and more specifically, climate justice.

What is Climate Justice?

Climate justice is an ethical, political, and rights-based framework that argues that the risks, costs, and responsibilities arising from the global climate crisis should be addressed fairly, taking historical inequalities and structural power dynamics within the international system into account (Okereke, 2010).

The climate crisis does not affect everyone equally. Different regions of the world and different social groups experience its impacts in different ways. This injustice appears both internationally and nationally. Countries classified as "developed," which have contributed more to creating the climate crisis, are significantly less affected by its consequences than "less developed" countries. Similarly, vulnerable groups with much smaller carbon footprints become even more vulnerable when facing the negative impacts of climate change.

So, what exactly do we mean by justice? Research identifies five fundamental dimensions of justice (Parsons et al., 2024). Some overlap with the dimensions of just transition. Here, the traces of a broader global discussion are particularly evident.

1. **Distributive Justice:** Seeks the fair distribution of the socioeconomic and environmental burdens of the climate crisis, such as pollution, risks, and costs, as well as the benefits of climate action, including green jobs and renewable energy, among different social groups. It focuses particularly on the present and future needs of marginalized communities.
2. **Procedural Justice:** Advocates for inclusive, democratic, and transparent decision-making mechanisms in climate governance and planning processes. It aims to overcome structural barriers such as language barriers, institutional racism, ableism, caste systems, homophobia, and gender injustice, ensuring the proactive participation of historically excluded groups.
3. **Recognitional Justice:** Recognizes different identities, local and Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural worldviews, and values as legitimate. Moving beyond Western-centered paradigms requires that women, Indigenous peoples, and forms of invisible care work be recognized as rights-bearing actors in climate solutions.
4. **Corrective / Compensatory Justice:** Focuses on historical responsibilities and past rights violations, including apologies, compensation, and financial reparations. Based on the "polluter pays" principle, it argues that the Global North should provide climate finance to the Global South because of its historical emissions and compensate for lost development opportunities.
5. **Temporal and Intergenerational Justice:** Aims to protect the health and well-being of both present and future generations. It involves planning for the long-term impacts of decisions, embedding mitigation measures within a fair process, and moving beyond a human-centered perspective to also consider the well-being of non-human beings (other species and ecosystems), now and in the future.

If we wanted to summarize all of this in a single sentence: "The climate issue is a rights issue." And within that issue, just transition holds a critical place. Why?

CLIMATE POLICIES and JUST TRANSITION IN TÜRKİYE



CLIMATE POLICIES AND JUST TRANSITION IN TÜRKİYE

Türkiye ratified the Paris Agreement in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye in 2021 and subsequently announced its target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2053. The Green Deal Action Plan, National Energy Plan, Renewable Energy 2035 Roadmap, Long-Term Climate Strategy, 12th Development Plan, Medium-Term Pprogram and the Climate Law that entered into force in 2025 indicate that Türkiye has entered a policy trajectory where climate and energy policies increasingly intersect.
During this process, just transition has also become a policy area that appears more frequently in different policy documents and was defined legally for the first time through the Climate Law. However, the current climate and energy policies still do not present consistent emission reduction targets or plans aligned with achieving the country's 2053 net-zero target. Similarly, while policy instruments related to just transition are evolving, their connection to coal phase-out and the economic and social transformation of coal regions has not yet been established.

In its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) submitted to the UNFCCC Secretariat in 2015, Türkiye announced that it would reduce the increase in greenhouse gas emissions by 21% compared to the reference scenario. In the updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) announced in 2022, this target was increased to 41%, and it was declared that emissions would peak in 2038 before beginning to decline.

Therefore, Türkiye still does not have an absolute greenhouse gas emission reduction target. Yet phase-out projections compatible with the 2053 net-zero target indicate that Türkiye needs to shut down its last coal-fired power plant within the next 15 years, in other words, it needs to phase out coal.

Transformation Taking Place Without a Coal Phase-Out Policy

The absence of a coal phase-out policy in Türkiye also creates an obstacle to implementing just transition. Although there is no decision to eliminate coal consumption in electricity generation or industry, the coal economy is already shrinking due to market mechanisms, local resistance movements, and legal processes. Employment in the coal sector has decreased by 33% over the last 15 years. Thermal power plant tenders often fail to attract buyers, while some existing plants are closing because of profitability problems and debt.

In other words, even though a coal phase-out has not been officially declared, a silent transformation is taking place because of global policies, their effects on trade, and technological developments. This creates the risk that transformation in coal regions will begin before a planned policy process is established, while the instruments needed to manage its economic, social, and spatial consequences still do not exist.

The Development of Just Transition Within the Policy and Legal Framework

Just transition efforts began to take concrete shape within public administration from 2021 onward. Initially, they focused largely on the green transformation of sectors engaged in trade with the European Union and on its effects on employment. Following the European Union's announcement of the European Green Deal in 2019, the Ministry of Trade published the Green Deal Action Plan in 2021 and established the Just Transition Specialized Working Group under the Green Deal Working Group. However, the group's approach was employment-oriented and did not include a detailed action plan specifically addressing coal mining and coal-fired thermal power plants.

The 12th Development Plan (2024–2028) was the first to include the concept of a just transition. It envisaged establishing just transition mechanisms to protect the workforce from the negative effects of the green transition, preparing a national just transition strategy, and conducting needs assessments for regions most affected by the green transition. The Climate Change Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan (2024–2030) expanded this framework by setting objectives to prepare a National Just Transition Strategy, strengthen social dialogue, prepare the workforce for transformation, increase the participation of groups requiring special policy attention, and reduce the risk of energy poverty.

With the Climate Law, which entered into force in 2025, the concept and principle of just transition were legally defined for the first time. It became mandatory to consider just transition requirements in greenhouse gas mitigation activities and local climate change action plans. Articles 12 and 13 of the law also created the legal basis for developing mechanisms to finance just transition activities and enable relevant actors to benefit from support mechanisms.

These developments show that just transition in Türkiye has begun to evolve from a conceptual topic into a legal and institutional policy field. However, current efforts are still largely shaped around: the green and digital transformation of industry, Compliance with the Emissions Trading System (ETS), preparing the workforce for transformation, and protecting employment. Although the Long-Term Climate Strategy foresees the development of just transition policies at national, regional, and sectoral levels, the phase-out of coal and the economic and social transformation of coal regions remain outside the center of this policy framework.

The Place of Coal Regions in Emerging Just Transition Policies

A similar situation can be observed with the National Just Transition Strategy, which is currently being prepared. The strategy is expected to cover different policy areas, including employment, social protection, social assistance, occupational health and safety, and migration, through sectoral and regional analyses. However, the current preparation process focuses primarily on the green and digital transformation of industry and compliance with the Emissions Trading System (ETS). How an approach centered on the economic and social transformation of coal regions will be incorporated into the strategy remains unclear.

Therefore, one of the main challenges of the just transition in Türkiye today is not only ensuring that it appears in public policy, but also determining which sectors, regions, and social groups this emerging framework will actually include.

On the one hand, just transition now has a legal basis, a national strategy is being prepared, and policy instruments for sectoral transformation are being developed. On the other hand, the impacts of the existing and anticipated contraction in coal mining and coal-fired thermal power plants on employment, local economies, and regional development are not at the center of these efforts. It is still not clearly defined how economic diversification, social protection, local governance, and financing mechanisms will be established in coal regions. These issues are not being communicated transparently to the public. Coal regions are not being adequately included in policymaking processes.

The secondary legislation to be prepared under the National Just Transition Strategy and the Climate Law presents an important opportunity to develop just transition policies that explicitly include coal regions.

Within this legislation, planning, governance, and financing tools for coal regions need to be clearly defined. Also, policy instruments for economic diversification, employment transformation, local development, and the management of the social impacts of transformation need to be established.

As a result, although Türkiye's policy framework on just transition has developed significantly in recent years, this development still does not amount to a comprehensive transformation framework for coal phase-out and coal regions. While the coal sector continues to shrink without an official phase-out decision, the absence of place-based planning, governance, and financing tools to manage the transformation of these regions creates a significant gap. For this reason, one of the central issues in the coming period will be expanding the emerging national and sectoral just transition framework so that it encompasses the specific needs and transformation dynamics of coal regions.

CASE STUDY: GERMANY



CASE STUDY: GERMANY

One of the essential components of conceptual work on just transition is a detailed examination of examples from around the world. In Türkiye, many different studies have also been written in this context. The experiences of Germany, Spain, South Africa, Poland, and Chile have been discussed and analyzed in detail in various reports from different perspectives. As part of the project that produced this guide, we had the opportunity to explore the German case in depth through a study visit and meetings with various experts.

Throughout the study visit, we had the opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge, observe good practices in climate governance, just transition, climate communication, and civil society participation, and exchange experiences. As part of the visit, we organized a workshop in Berlin with leading civil society organizations working on climate policy and advocacy in Germany, as well as organizations active in environmental protection, energy transition, labor, gender equality, and public policy. During the workshop, participants were invited to reflect and discuss the following guiding questions together:

- What processes made just transition a public issue in Germany?
- Was there a central conflict around concepts such as climate action and development?
- How did public demand for a just transition emerge?
- How was trust built, and how were workers and other segments of society included in decision-making processes?
- What were the roles of local governments, the central government, national policies, and other stakeholders during the transition process?
- How were gender equality and youth participation addressed throughout these processes?

During our study visit to Germany, we held meetings with public institutions, academics, and civil society representatives in **Berlin, the Ruhr Region, and Lausitz (Cottbus)**. We also visited the **Inden-Lucherberg open-pit lignite mine, the Bergheim-Niederaußem thermal power plant area, the Zollverein Industrial Heritage Site, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Cottbuser Ostsee transformation site**, to examine Germany's coal phase-out and regional transformation practices on site. These examples demonstrate that, thanks to long-term planning in former coal regions, mining sites have been transformed into lakes, recreational areas, and industrial heritage sites, while environmental restoration has been addressed together with economic diversification, infrastructure investment, and new investment opportunities.

At the same time, one of the most important outcomes of the study visit was our observation that discussions on just transition in Germany are, in practice, conducted primarily around spatial transformation, environmental restoration, and economic restructuring. By contrast, the long-term social impacts of the coal phase-out on workers, women, local communities, and other affected groups occupy a comparatively limited place in public debate and expert assessments. We did not interpret this as a shortcoming of the study visit, but rather as an important observation showing that just transition in Germany is largely framed through physical and economic transformation.

This experience offers an important lesson for Türkiye. Focusing only on the technical, environmental, and economic dimensions of just transition is not enough. There is also a need for an approach that makes visible how workers, women, young people, and local communities experience transformation, placing lived experiences and social impacts at the center.

In this section of the guide, we aim to reinforce the concept of just transition by sharing the main findings of this study visit and examining its central issues through the German example.

The discussion paper shared with us during the study visit (Schoen and Wältring, 2023) summarizes the process as follows:

"Compared to Türkiye, coal phase-out entered Germany's political agenda at a much earlier stage. Although texts written today analyze Germany's energy transition through a climate lens, it would be too strong a claim to say that climate was the primary motivation behind coal phase-out when the process first began."

The paper identifies the initial motivations behind the process under two headings:

- **Competitiveness Crisis:** In Germany, especially in the Ruhr Region, coal could no longer be extracted from open pits or shallow depths. Mining had to be carried out at depths of up to 1,500 meters, which dramatically increased production costs.

- **Global Market and Energy Diversification:** Following the liberalization of the energy sector, cheap imported coal from countries such as the United States, South Africa, and Australia replaced domestic production. At the same time, the diversification of the energy mix toward inexpensive imported oil, natural gas, and nuclear energy reduced demand for domestic coal.

Today, however, the slogan of Germany's ongoing energy transition has changed, and the process is now discussed under the following headings:

- **Climate Change and Sustainability:** Since the 2000s, the motivation for coal phase-out has become fully centered on the climate crisis, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and environmental protection.

International Commitments and Legal Targets: The European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), established in 2005 to implement the Kyoto Protocol, compelled polluting industries to reduce emissions. Later, following the 2015 Paris Agreement and the EU's 2050 net-zero target, Germany legally committed to becoming greenhouse gas neutral by 2045. This made the complete closure of coal-fired thermal power plants and lignite mines, responsible for a major share of electricity sector emissions, mandatory.

Germany began its coal phase-out process in the 1960s and has gradually set the goal of becoming completely coal-free by the late 2030s. The discussion paper divides this long transformation into three main periods:

- **1960s–1970s (Centralized / Protective Period):** Large government subsidies (such as the Kohlepfennig) were provided to the sector to prevent economic collapse, while early retirement schemes and social compensation mechanisms were introduced for workers.
- **1980s–1990s (Bottom-Up Period):** A fundamental paradigm shift took place. The focus moved toward endogenous local potential, SMEs, and university-industry cooperation. Through the IBA Emscher Park model, former mining sites were transformed into industrial heritage tourism areas and technology parks.
- **2000s and Beyond (Regulatory / Sustainable Period):** The transformation became integrated with climate targets and legally established coal phase-out timelines (Kohleausstieg).

According to the paper, one of the core principles of just transition, “leaving no one behind”, includes socioeconomic measures designed to protect workers, vulnerable populations, and affected communities during the transition. The main measures implemented in Germany under this objective were:

- **Social Security and Protection Safety Net (Baseline Policies):** Workers and businesses were provided with unemployment insurance, income support, and access to a professional public healthcare system as a safety net during periods of crisis.
- **Early Retirement Incentives:** State-supported early retirement plans were introduced to protect the socioeconomic status of mine workers during the transition (for example, retirement at age 50 for underground miners and 57 for surface miners).
- **Reskilling and Vocational Training:** Career counseling infrastructure was expanded, specialized skills training was financed, and dual vocational education programs were supported to help young people and workers transition into new sectors.
- **Employment Support and Job Creation:** While major infrastructure investments and construction projects created temporary employment, employers received subsidies for hiring workers transitioning into sectors such as automotive manufacturing, light industry, and electronics.
- **Regional and Urban Development Investments:** Roads were modernized, and hospitals, parks, and new university networks were established to improve the attractiveness and quality of life of mining-affected cities.
- **Transformation of Former Industrial Sites:** Coal mines and industrial areas were converted into startup hubs, business parks, cultural heritage sites, and tourism destinations through IBA projects, creating new livelihoods for local communities.
- **Social Dialogue and Workers' Rights:** Legal co-determination mechanisms (Mitbestimmung) that allow workers to participate in company management and sectoral collective bargaining were preserved, ensuring that transition compensation was negotiated fairly.

This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of Germany experience while also making its fundamental challenges visible.

The motivation behind the coal phase-out changed over time: Germany's coal phase-out process was initially driven by economic motivations. The cost of producing coal became so high that continuing production no longer made economic sense. Coal phase-out, therefore, became an essential part of an unavoidable transformation. The transformation was not limited to abandoning coal. It also involved moving away from the heavy industrial sectors historically associated with Germany toward industries aligned with the needs of a new economic era. Transforming energy effectively meant transforming the country's entire economic strategy.

Social issues were not at the center: Over time, these transformation efforts became incorporated into Germany's climate agenda. However, because the transition process was not originally designed around social issues, the most critical social objective became preventing the loss of workers' rights. Although measures were taken to prevent rights losses, the intersectional dimension of the issue does not occupy a central place in Germany's transition narrative. Systematic data, policy instruments, and communication narratives about how women, young people, children, care work, and vulnerable groups experience the transition remain comparatively less visible. This makes it more difficult to understand the broader social impacts of a transformation that has unfolded over many years. In this sense, it is possible to say that the transition was just in terms of protecting workers from losing rights. However, there is no clear answer to the question: “Can we speak of justice for all segments of society?” This observation demonstrates that the social dimension of just transition should not be evaluated only through employment and workers' rights. Instead, there is a need for a more inclusive communication approach that makes visible the needs, experiences, and inequalities of different social groups.

What can we learn from this?

- Climate is not always the starting point of a just transition. Transitions driven by economic realities, such as coal production becoming financially unsustainable, can later become framed within climate and justice discussions.
- The social dimension of just transition must be part of the process from the very beginning. When social impacts, inequalities, and the needs of different social groups are ignored at the outset, it becomes extremely difficult to address these gaps later.
- Gender equality, youth, workers' rights, and other intersecting inequalities should be incorporated into decision-making processes and communication strategies from the start. Although the framing of transition may evolve over time, from economic concerns toward climate needs, a transition that is not inclusive from the beginning cannot easily become inclusive later.
- The economic, environmental, and technical dimensions of transition may evolve over time, but inclusivity is not something that can simply be added afterward. It must be established as a foundational principle from the outset.
- Cultural tools and places of memory are important communication instruments for explaining just transition and strengthening public dialogue. As illustrated by the Ruhr Museum, preserving coal history and making it visible is valuable. However, these spaces should not reduce transformation into a symbolic success story; they should also make labor struggles and the social costs of the past visible, keeping collective memory alive.

Of course, Germany's example is one in which the European Union and Germany's own financial resources were mobilized, and where strong political commitment sustained the process over a long period. It also offers inspiring lessons in areas such as governance. However, in this guide, we have deliberately focused on those aspects of the analysis that can serve as references for communication on the just transition in Türkiye.

THE CURRENT STATE OF PERCEPTIONS OF JUST TRANSITION IN TÜRKİYE



THE CURRENT STATE OF PERCEPTIONS OF JUST TRANSITION IN TÜRKİYE

In this section, based on the findings of our research and the discussions held during the Agora Meetings, we compiled the issues that all stakeholders should jointly place on their communication agenda regarding just transition.

What Do We Understand by Just Transition?

How is Just Transition Discussed on Social Media?

As part of the research, we conducted a discourse analysis to identify the narratives developed by social media users (actors) in Türkiye around coal phase-out and just transition, and to map the dominant discourse frames, actor profiles, and discourse producers. The study was conducted using the following methodology:

- Tweets posted on the X platform[1] during the past year were collected. A total of 5,101 tweets were screened based on keywords and contextual relevance criteria. Among these, 362 tweets were selected for analysis according to contextual relevance and diversity criteria.
- The tweets included in the sample were tagged according to profile, content, and engagement characteristics under seven separate categories.
- The analyzed tweets were coded into five main discourse groups and thematic concepts within those groups according to their content (Table 1).

DISCOURSE GROUP	CODED CONCEPTS
1. Core Concepts	Coal phase-out, just transition, just transformation, climate justice, climate crisis, energy transition, green energy, fossil fuels, health.
2. labor Discourses	Privatization, mine workers, thermal power plant workers, unemployment, trade unions, workplace deaths, Çayırhan.
3. Resistance Discourses	Western narrative, domestic coal, energy independence, foreign imposition, concerns about unemployment, critical narratives around the Climate Law.
4. Political / Institutional Discourses	Net zero, Climate Law, ETS (Emissions Trading System), Paris Agreement, COP processes, carbon neutrality, fossil fuel policies, Green Deal, CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism), thermal power plant closure policies.
5. Local / Regional Discourses	Akbelen, Muğla, Soma, Amasra, Zonguldak, Tavşanlı, Kangal, Afşin-Elbistan.

Table 1. Discourse groups and coded concepts

[1] X (formerly Twitter) was chosen for social media discourse analysis because Facebook data is subject to significant technical and administrative restrictions imposed by Meta on research access. Since much of Facebook's content is produced within closed groups or private posts, it could not be systematically and comparatively analyzed. These conditions significantly limit the possibility of conducting quantitative discourse analysis on Facebook.

The main findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

Demands are more visible; resistance remains in the minority.
Of the 362 tweets analyzed, 41% (148 tweets) belonged to the Core Concepts discourse group, producing information and awareness content around coal phase-out, just transition, and climate justice. Resistance Discourses accounted for only 32 tweets (8.8%). This is not a methodological limitation of the dataset but rather reflects the discourse environment: on Turkish-language X, voices advocating coal phase-out are much more numerous and organized, while opposing voices are fragmented and receive relatively low engagement. This does not mean there is broad public consensus around coal phase-out. Rather, it indicates that the climate movement is more organized and visible than other actors on X.

Local and regional narratives receive higher engagement than other discourse groups.
Concrete local crises such as Akbelen, Amasra, and Soma attract significantly more attention than abstract climate narratives. The Akbelen tag alone appeared in 22 tweets and generated the highest engagement figures. Abstract policy frameworks do not attract people's attention; concrete cases and local stories do.

Resistance to just transition is generally associated with right-wing narratives, but there is common ground between the political right and left.
Resistance to just transition and coal phase-out creates an interesting space where right- and left-wing narratives converge. Motivated by nationalist and sovereignty concerns, right-wing discourse frames the coal phase-out as “a Western plot”[2]. Left-critical discourse opposes the process because workers will bear the cost.

The existing positive discourse is produced by a relatively homogeneous group.
Tweets supporting just transition and coal phase-out are predominantly posted by middle-aged men with medium or high socioeconomic status.

Platforms, initiatives, and coalitions produce discourse, but their engagement is low.
Most content comes from platforms, initiatives, and civil society coalitions. However, these institutional actors receive relatively little engagement. Posts shared by opinion leaders generate much higher engagement.

The discourse clusters identified in the analysis can be summarized as follows:

- **Core Concepts Discourse Group:** Content framing the main concepts of just transition and coal phase-out, and different approaches to these issues.
- **labor Discourse Group:** Content focusing on miners' rights, privatization, unemployment, and labor-related issues.
- **Resistance Discourse Group:** Content expressing opposition or resistance to just transition and energy transition.
- **Political / Institutional Discourse Group:** Content discussing the issue from the perspective of national politics, legislation, and international climate policy.
- **Local / Regional Discourse Group:** Content situated at the intersection of local resistance movements and the energy transition.

[2] The expression “a Western plot” refers to a resistance narrative identified during the research. Within this narrative, just transition and coal phase-out policies are framed as agendas imposed on Türkiye by Western countries or international organizations rather than arising from Türkiye's own needs.

Table 2 illustrates the prevalence of these discourse groups within the analyzed hashtags and the keywords under which content was categorized. The percentages represent each group's share of the total discourse.

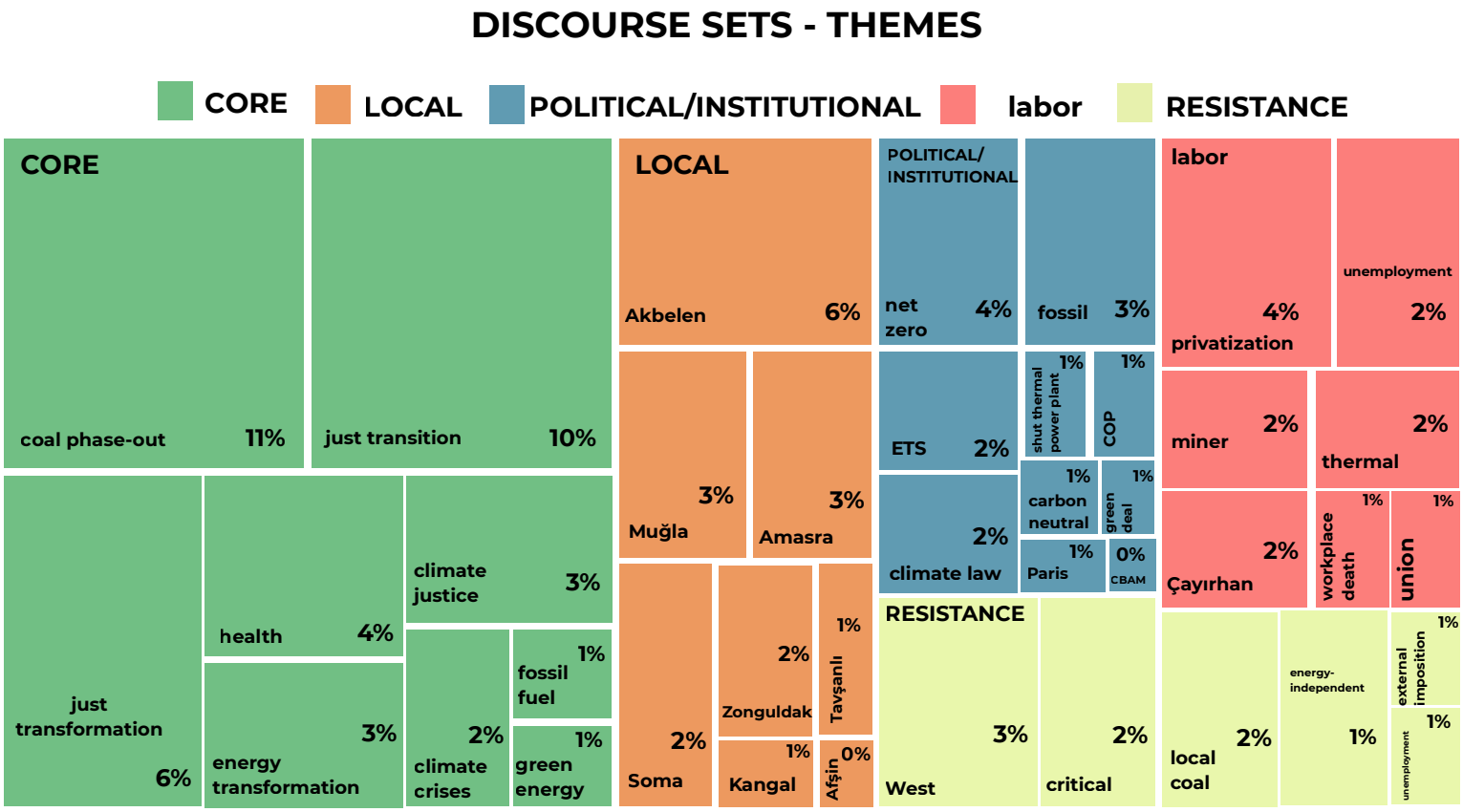


Table 2. Share of each discourse set in total social media discourse

Key findings for each discourse group are as follows:

Core Concepts Discourse Group: The discourse analysis shows that over time, concepts such as “just transformation” and “coal phase-out” have largely been replaced by the rhetoric of “just transition.” The narratives generating the greatest reach and engagement are not abstract climate arguments, but rather technical and economic frames such as current account deficit, dependence on imports, and energy security. By contrast, the health frame, including premature deaths and air pollution, has almost completely lost its influence over time. The findings also show that CSOs, platforms, initiatives, and coalitions are the primary producers of this discourse, yet their reach remains limited. Individual voices and opinion leaders receive three times as much visibility, making them much more effective at spreading the discourse. Finally, this conceptual field is politically concentrated almost entirely within a left-liberal spectrum, while it receives almost no support (around 1%) from right-wing or nationalist audiences.

labor Discourse Group: Because the Climate Law coincided with the Çayırhan privatization, 2025 became the period when labor discourse was discussed most intensely. Within this group, opposition to privatization and miners' identity became the dominant themes. At the same time, concerns such as “national wealth” and “energy independence” enabled the discourse to cross ideological boundaries, bringing together actors from the far left, center left, secular far right, and conservative groups. Meanwhile, the unemployment frame produced the highest engagement per post across the entire dataset, despite being discussed relatively rarely, a striking paradox. Similarly, workplace deaths frame spikes during crises but do not become a sustained agenda item. Looking at actor distribution, civil society organizations remain relatively invisible in this group. The discourse is driven primarily by individual accounts, followed by political accounts, which receive the highest engagement (an average of 234.9 likes).

Resistance Discourse Group: Resistance discourse develops in two distinct waves rather than from a single ideological source. The first wave in 2022 emerged around the Russia–Ukraine war through narratives such as: “Western hypocrisy,” “Europe has returned to coal.” The second wave in 2025 focused directly on criticism of the Climate Law. Criticism of the law brought together an unusual coalition of liberal, conservative, and far-right actors who opposed it for completely different reasons. The only neutral argument shared across ideological divides was that hard coal is strategically important to industry. Although right-wing and nationalist actors dominate engagement within this discourse group, the narrative itself does not spread widely enough to represent a broader public consensus. At the actor level, unlike just transition discourse, individual voices are almost absent. Instead, news accounts dominate the conversation, receiving 836 times as many views as individual accounts. The theoretically powerful argument “we will lose our jobs” and direct worker voices from coal regions are almost completely absent from X discourse.

Political / Institutional Discourse Group: This group speaks through highly technical policy language, including concepts such as net zero, ETS, CBAM, Paris Agreement. It is the most specialized, but also the least accessible, discourse group for the general public. The discourse peaks during two policy cycles: Türkiye's official climate policy steps (Paris Agreement ratification/COP26 in 2021 and the Climate Law in 2025), and civil society and experts documenting the shortcomings of those policy steps. Regarding the Climate Law specifically, the political left criticizes it because it does not include a coal phase-out; the far right criticizes it as a global slavery project. At the same time, narratives emphasizing the responsibility of global fossil fuel companies are among the few themes that bridge ideological divides between right-wing nationalist perspectives and left-wing arguments for institutional accountability. Platforms, initiatives, and coalitions constitute 35% of this discourse group. Although they monitor and document policy processes, they receive an average of only 11.9 likes, remaining confined to a narrow expert audience. Institutions and political accounts speak less frequently but reach much wider audiences, averaging 270.8 likes and 144 reposts.

Local / Regional Discourse Group: With renewed mobilization around Akbelen and increasing visibility of Muğla and Soma, 2025 became the most productive period for local discourse. Events such as Limak's move into the olive groves and the appointment of a defendant in the Soma trial demonstrate that this discourse remains alive due to current developments, not merely anniversaries. The Akbelen timeline shows that local struggles become nationally visible only when amplified by external actors, for example, Nejla Işık being included in the BBC 100 Women list and opposition political leaders sharing the issue. Institutions, political actors, and opinion leaders dominate engagement in bringing local struggles onto the national agenda. Politically, hashtags related to Soma, Amasra, and Zonguldak are virtually devoid of right-wing or nationalist accounts, remaining entirely within left and far-left political spaces. Meanwhile, major lignite basins such as Afşin-Elbistan, Kangal, and Tavşanlı, despite holding Türkiye's largest lignite reserves, receive almost no visibility in X discourse, highlighting a significant imbalance in regional representation.

What does this analysis tell us about communication?

- Social media is already a space where positive narratives are more visible. This represents an opportunity. Investing effort into amplifying these narratives is both appropriate and likely to be effective.

- The significantly higher engagement received by opinion leaders demonstrates how important it is for platforms, initiatives, and coalitions to provide them with simple, accessible content they can share.

- Everyday stories, and especially local struggles, are critical. Connecting communication to people's daily lives significantly increases visibility. At the same time, this regional imbalance should be kept in mind. Communication should maintain a focus on coal regions while also presenting just transition as part of Türkiye's broader transformation agenda so that the needs, experiences, and priorities of different regions become part of the conversation.

The Concept of Just Transition is Not Being Embraced! What Should Be Done?

The field research component of the study was conducted using qualitative methods to understand regional experiences of just transition in Türkiye and identify stakeholders' communication needs. The research included field visits to coal production regions (Soma and Tavşanlı) and the iron and steel industrial region (İskenderun), as well as interviews with experts working nationally across different fields. Interviews were conducted with workers, trade union representatives, local governments, civil society organizations, women's organizations, youth representatives, professional chambers, academics, and local opinion leaders.

As the field research indicates, the concept of just transition itself has become a barrier to communication. The reasons can be grouped under four headings: Comprehensibility and awareness, cognitive disconnect, locality/legitimacy, and trust crisis.

- **Comprehensibility and Awareness:** The concept entered Türkiye very recently. There is also a serious problem of comprehensibility. It currently exists mainly within an expert terminology. Climate change and climate crisis are more widely recognized, but people do not have a clear understanding of what a just transition means.
- **Cognitive Disconnect:** The causal relationship between everyday life and climate remains weak. There is an effort to frame climate as a rights issue, but this understanding is not yet well established. The clash between coal phase-out and local economic realities creates one of the biggest communication challenges for just transition.
- **Locality / Legitimacy Problem:** The concept is perceived as Western in origin. Because existing fossil fuel resources are perceived as domestic and national, moving away from them creates political tension.
- **Trust Crisis:** The word “just” itself is viewed skeptically in Türkiye's current context. There is also concern that the just transition is being instrumentalized as a way to make an inevitable transformation appear more acceptable.

Whose Issue is Just Transition?

During the field research, when we asked, “Whose issue is just transition?”, experts overwhelmingly pointed to coal regions, workers employed in coal mines, and workers employed in thermal power plants. However, the issue is not limited to coal regions and workers. An unjust transition affects Türkiye's entire economic and social structure. This is because:

- If mines and thermal power plants close, unemployed workers will migrate to other parts of Türkiye. This will produce significant social and economic transformation in both abandoned and rapidly growing regions (see the Ermenek example on p.33).
- The families of unemployed miners will also be directly affected. Young people who imagined their future in mining will face uncertainty, while women will experience new forms of isolation.
- The energy agenda will affect all sectors, especially energy-intensive industries, and the transformation will have high economic costs.

Despite these challenges, a just transition also creates opportunities. If the transition is just:

- conditions will be created for new employment opportunities,
- new sectors have the potential to bring a new economic model,
- unlike mining and thermal power plant employment, new sectors may become more accessible to women,

in the long term, this can contribute to broader social transformation.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS: HOW IS JUST TRANSITION PERCEIVED IN TAVŞANLI, SOMA, AND İSKENDERUN?



Regional Analysis: How is Just Transition Perceived in Tavşanlı, Soma, and İskenderun?

Field Findings from Coal Regions (Soma and Tavşanlı)

The local economy, based on coal, is already shrinking in both employment and production volume due to market conditions, even before clear climate policies have been introduced. In these regions, where thermal power plants and mining activities continue, privatizations are increasing rights violations and deepening social, spatial, and infrastructural inequalities. Interviews conducted with national-level experts indicate that the local ecosystem, built around wages and coal assistance, reinforces dependence on coal. However, in coal regions themselves, there is a quiet, shared acceptance that the coal sector is coming to an end. People no longer see their future in this sector. This situation increases the likelihood that the just transition will be perceived by local opinion leaders as an opportunity to address inequalities.

Needs and Expectations of the Region: Local communities want economic diversification that prioritizes nature-friendly agriculture and tourism, as well as a new industrial structure compatible with human dignity. For the process to succeed, communities need participatory mechanisms to determine their own future, preferential access to financing, and a national political commitment capable of building regional policies through legal planning. It is critically important for the communication strategy to adopt an approach that makes these expectations visible and places the voices and demands of local actors at the center.

Field Findings from the Iron and Steel Region (İskenderun)

In İskenderun, the concept of just transition is completely unknown and is not on the agenda of any stakeholder. At the local level, neither the climate crisis nor the green transition has yet become a public agenda item. Discussions in the region are primarily focused on livelihoods and economic hardship. In addition, the post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction process remains the region's highest priority. As a result, environmental activists and civil society organizations are almost non-existent; those that do exist feel under pressure and threatened. One of the biggest obstacles to transformation is the erosion of the sense of justice. There is a widespread belief that public support is not distributed fairly and that political proximity provides advantages.

The Situation in Industry and Concerns About the Future: Although the energy transition has technically begun in industry, it is progressing very slowly and on a limited scale because of high energy demand, high costs, and overall economic conditions. For facilities operating continuously, renewable sources such as wind and solar are not considered technically sufficient in the short term. Companies do not view global climate policies and carbon border adjustment mechanisms as fully fair for developing countries, yet they are still trying to adapt within their own capacities.

Employment and Working Culture: Trade unions, civil society organizations, and local communities are concerned that technological and sectoral transformation will increase production while reducing employment, creating a major wave of unemployment in the future. Young people prefer quick income opportunities rather than labor-intensive jobs. The transition process is becoming more difficult not only because of state policies but also because established working habits and expectations of easy access within society are changing.

What Does This Tell Us About Communication?

Use of the concept: Using just transition as a standalone concept is a communication dead end. The concept should always be communicated alongside another concept that is meaningful to the target audience.

Communication on just transition can only become socially meaningful to the extent that it addresses not only climate but also people's lives, livelihoods, and shared future.

Communication Actor	Which concept?	Target Group	Why?
Local public administrators and other relevant local authorities **Experts promoting the climate agenda**	**Development, well-being, and just transition** **Employment, health, the local economy, and just transition**	**Local stakeholders**	Because the climate agenda is not an agenda that is widely owned at the local level, particularly in coal regions. Public institutions are already under pressure to respond to existing local challenges. Therefore, positioning the issue within a development narrative will be more effective. For certain stakeholders, the climate agenda itself can become a barrier to communicating the issue. The issue needs to be understood not only as an environmental agenda but also as a matter of social well-being and development, and it should be framed as a rights-based issue. There is a need to move away from the “abstract” language of climate and build a language that connects with social values and everyday concerns (employment, health, the local economy), linking the issue to everyday stories without romanticizing them.
National agenda setters	**Sectoral transformation, moving beyond old industries, new opportunities, and just transition**	**National stakeholders** **Workers and their families**	Just transition is not an issue that concerns only specific regions. Therefore, presenting it as a nationwide transformation that highlights sectoral transition opportunities across Türkiye, while honestly addressing both the challenges and the opportunities of the future, will increase the likelihood that it is embraced.

The Relationship Between Coal Phase-Out and Just Transition, and Expanding the Conversation

At the same time, making just transition a topic for broader audiences solely through the lens of coal phase-out is quite challenging. Today, we no longer live through winters when coal smoke makes it impossible to see outside. Coal no longer has the same clearly negative image in people's everyday lives. For this reason, keeping the discussion within the broader context of sectoral transformation will create more space for the issue to be discussed more widely.

An Honest Language That Talks About Both Opportunities and Challenges

It is easy to say that the transition should be just; it is much harder to explain what that means. Throughout our research, we observed that the energy transition, the phase-out of fossil fuels, and industrial transformation do not create a sense of “an unquestionably brighter future” for many people, especially amid deepening economic uncertainty. For this reason, when communicating just transition to the public, it is essential to clearly explain what this transition will bring. For example:

- Unemployment is a risk. To prevent this risk, training opportunities aligned with people's skills will be provided for new employment sectors, and new investments will be made.

- Relocation is a risk. However, a sectoral transformation that takes new technologies and current needs into account also has the potential to create more sustainable employment opportunities in both the short and long term.

COMMON ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED DURING THE AGORA (MEYDAN) MEETINGS



Common Issues Highlighted During the Agora (Meydan) Meetings

Easy from a Distance, Difficult Up Close

The concepts of just transition and climate justice are not actually unfamiliar to institutions working on rights-based issues or to decision-makers taking steps for the public good. However, when it comes to taking action on these issues, things become much more difficult. For this reason, we opened the Agora Meetings held within the scope of our project activities with the following question: "What is the biggest challenge you face when working, or when you want to work, on climate change and/or just transition?" At the opening of the events, before discussing the issue together in any detail, we encountered a picture that closely paralleled the findings of the research we had conducted as part of the project.

1. Language, Communication, and Conceptual Challenges

Being Trapped in Technical Language and Disconnecting from Everyday Life: One of the most frequently emphasized issues was that the climate crisis and just transition are discussed in a highly technical and scientific language. This makes it difficult to explain these concepts to shopkeepers, young people, and the broader public in their own language and to connect them with everyday life.

Conceptual Ambiguity and the Difficulty of Explanation: Since the concept of "just transition" is still not sufficiently understood in our country, it is difficult to communicate what it means both to people who have recently joined organizations and to broader segments of society.

Awareness Does Not Turn into Behavior: Although there is awareness of climate change in society, this awareness does not translate into lasting behavioral change. The perception of "what difference will it make if I do something?" and conspiracy theories constitute significant obstacles.

2. Barriers Related to Ownership, Participation, and Institutional Capacity Within Public Institutions

Lack of Institutional Ownership in the Public Sector: Discussions during the Agora Meetings showed that just transition and climate policies have not established a clear area of institutional ownership within public institutions. Since climate is not treated as a foundational pillar of development policy, the issue progresses in a fragmented way across different institutions, weakening implementation capacity at the local level.

Differences in Knowledge and Capacity Within Public Institutions: Public institutions are not a uniform structure. Different institutions and different levels of administration have varying levels of knowledge, priorities, and approaches regarding just transition and climate transformation. This demonstrates the need for a common language, capacity-building efforts, and knowledge alignment processes within public institutions as well.

Limited Participation of Civil Society in Decision-Making Processes: Participants stated that civil society is not sufficiently included in decision-making processes and has difficulty finding counterparts within public institutions. The limited and selective functioning of participation mechanisms makes it difficult for different experiences and recommendations to be reflected in policy processes.

Gaps in Public Policy and Legislation: Climate Law No. 7552 established an important framework by incorporating the concept of just transition into national legislation for the first time[3]. However, the law includes just transition mainly as a principle and a definition; rights-based implementation mechanisms, participation processes, financing instruments, and regional transformation plans for workers, women, young people, and local communities who will be directly affected by the transition are not presented in detail. For this reason, the law contains significant uncertainties regarding the implementation framework of just transition. In addition, shortcomings such as national public policies on just transition focusing primarily on sectoral measures while excluding the groups that will be most affected by the energy transition cause those working in this field to remain disconnected from the broader context.

3. Lack of Resources, Financing, and Capacity Within Civil Society

Financial Difficulties and the Challenge of Finding Ethical Financing: There is a lack of resources and networks needed to sustain ongoing work. Participants also stated that accessing ethical financing, funding that is aligned with the values of climate and just transition work, does not undermine organizational independence, and does not come from the fossil fuel sector or other sources that may create conflicts of interest, is a significant challenge.

Lack of Experts, Data, and Institutional Capacity: There is limited access to qualified human resources, experienced experts, and data collection opportunities in this field. Since expertise largely has to be maintained through project-based work, it is difficult to build institutional knowledge and continuity.

Difficulty Entering the Field and Starting Work on Just Transition: Organizations that do not consider climate change their primary area of work, as well as individuals and organizations that are just beginning to work in this field, stated that they do not know where to begin with just transition. The lack of inclusive guidance mechanisms, shared learning spaces, and networks that can establish connections between institutions emerged as a major need.

[3] Climate Law No. 7552 entered into force after being published in the Official Gazette No. 32951 dated 9 July 2025. Article 2 of the law defines just transition, while the details regarding its implementation are left to secondary legislation.

4. Disconnect Between Macro Policies and Local Contexts

Failure to Recognize the Specific Needs of Local Contexts: Participants criticized the fact that existing strategies and communication language do not establish sufficient connections with local contexts. The failure of concepts and arguments related to just transition to connect with local needs, everyday life, and social values renders the specific conditions of different regions invisible. Every region needs different solutions based on its own scale, economy, and social structure.

The Problem of Prioritization and Scale: In an environment where economic crisis, social inequalities, and destructive mining practices are intensifying, the climate crisis is not accepted as a priority issue at either the institutional or societal level, making work in this field more difficult. Participants stated that there is a mismatch of scale and priorities between the climate agenda discussed at the national level and the urgent problems experienced at the local level.

5. Lack of Coordination Between Trade Unions, labor Organizations, and Environmental Organizations

Inability to Meet on Common Ground: The inability of labor organizations (trade unions) and organizations working on ecology and the environment to come together on common ground leaves unanswered the question of how a just transition can be carried out without victimizing anyone.

Weak Organization and Lack of Inclusiveness: Coordination gaps among existing environmental organizations, together with difficulties in creating structures that include and facilitate the participation of new individuals and organizations entering the field, stand out as major internal barriers. Participants also emphasized the need for more shared discussion spaces between climate/environment-focused CSOs and CSOs working in other thematic areas. An institutional ownership that can build this bridge is needed.

This guide aims to respond to the first of the problem areas identified so far: Language, Communication, and Conceptual Challenges. We hope that this effort will also contribute to the steps that need to be taken to overcome the other challenges. In the remainder of this section, we begin by sharing definitions, common communication issues, and recommendations that apply to all stakeholders.

COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT ACTORS





COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT ACTORS

Civil Society Actors

Civil Society Actors Working in the Field of Environment and Climate

Our concern is not distinguishing between right and wrong statements; it is building a common language of communication that different target groups can understand and connect with.

Moving Away from Expert Jargon, Simplifying the Language, and Understanding the Social Context

Technical and specialized policy jargon, such as “net zero,” “ETS,” and “CBAM,” confines civil society to a narrow circle of experts and completely disconnects it from the broader public. Instead of using technical terms people are unfamiliar with and that are criticized as “of Western origin,” it is necessary to adopt an approach that more effectively analyzes the social structure, local sensitivities, cultural fabric, and the search for justice. Simplifying narratives so that they speak to people's everyday lives and translating just transition not as a technical legislative debate but as every citizen's demand for equal rights, well-being, and a dignified life, is the primary requirement.

Examples of Expressions That Are Not Easily Understood	Suggested Example Messages
Türkiye must achieve its net-zero target.	We need a transformation that allows us to breathe cleaner air and live more safely in the future.
We must comply with the ETS and the CBAM.	Transforming industry is essential for sustaining production and creating new employment opportunities.
The phase-out of fossil fuels must be accelerated.	A transformation should be planned that protects people's livelihoods, creates new opportunities, and leaves no one behind.
We must reduce carbon emissions.	For cleaner air, healthier lives, and a safer future, we need to transform the way we produce together.

Example expressions that can define just transition in this context:

- Just transition means enabling people to become part of the transformation without losing their livelihood.
- Just transition is an opportunity for cleaner air, healthier lives, and more livable cities.
- Transformation is not only about the environment; it is also about the future of the places we live and their economic diversity.
- Just transition means sharing the costs of transformation across society instead of placing them on a single group, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Talking About Today and Economic Realities Instead of Abstract Future Scenarios

A common mistake in climate communication is relying on narratives about a distant future and abstract climate crises, which do not resonate locally. People's urgent concerns today are economic crisis, cost of living, unemployment, and debt. For this reason, communication needs to move away from abstract visions of the future and anchor itself in today's economic realities, recognizing current hardships and responding directly to them. In response to fears such as “We will lose our jobs when the mines close,” it is essential to develop and make visible concrete, realistic, and alternative ideas for new jobs starting today, jobs based on nature-friendly agriculture, tourism, and industries that respect human dignity.

Examples of Messages Pointing to Abstract Future Scenarios	Suggested Example Messages
Transformation is necessary for the 2053 net-zero target.	Today we need a transformation that protects our livelihoods and enables us to build our future together.
We must phase out coal to stop the climate crisis.	We need to plan together a transformation that creates new livelihood opportunities in coal regions.
Green transition is inevitable.	We need a path that protects livelihoods, creates new jobs, and builds the region's future together.
The climate crisis will cause even greater problems in the future.	We need a transformation that produces solutions together for the economic and environmental problems we face today.

Example expressions that can define just transition in this context:

- Just transition is not about waiting for the future; it is about planning transformation together while solving today's livelihood problems.
- Every region has its own path of transformation according to its own needs; one solution does not fit everyone.
- Just transition is the way to build the future together without ignoring today's economic hardships.
- Just transition is not about choosing between livelihoods and climate; it is about securing both together.

Not Limiting the Conversation to Coal Regions: Building a National Vision from Local Interventions

Local struggles and regional interventions in coal regions such as Soma, Tavşanlı, and Akbelen are at the heart of just transition. However, talking about just transition only as a local problem affecting certain regions prevents the issue from being integrated into national policies. While drawing on concrete rights violations, inequalities, and demands emerging from local contexts, communication should also build a holistic language that demands a national transformation vision encompassing all of Türkiye, legal reforms affecting macro-level decisions, and a commitment to long-term planning.

Examples of Advocacy Language Limited to Local Problems	Suggested Example Messages
The mines in Soma should be closed.	Coal phase-out in Soma can only be achieved through a just transition policy that plans together the rights of workers and their families, new employment opportunities, and the region's future.
The mining project in Akbelen should be stopped.	Decisions protecting nature in Akbelen should also include policies that guarantee local people's right to a livelihood.
The energy transition is only relevant to coal regions.	Just transition should be a national policy that plans the transformation of all of Türkiye, from industry and agriculture to energy and regional development, not just coal regions.
Each region should deal with its own transition on its own.	Every region has different needs, but those differences should be addressed through a shared national just transition strategy and a legal planning framework that leaves no region behind.

Example expressions that can define just transition in this context:

- Just transition is an approach that connects local struggles to national policies.
- Just transition means producing policies for Türkiye's shared future while taking into account the needs of different regions.
- Just transition is a development vision that encompasses the transformation of all regions, not only coal regions.
- Just transition aims to strengthen national decision-making processes by making local experiences visible.

Building Genuine Partnerships Across Different Thematic Fields and Supporting Capacity Development

Just transition is too multidimensional to be confined within the boundaries of environmental CSOs alone. Organizations working in the environmental field already recognize the importance of building sincere, non-hierarchical, and long-term partnerships with gender equality organizations, rights-based organizations, youth movements, and, most importantly, labor rights advocates and trade unions. However, there is a labor-intensive process between recognizing this need and actually implementing it. Institutional bridges are needed so that organizations working in different thematic fields can establish connections with the climate and just transition agenda. Supporting mutual capacity development and knowledge-sharing processes should also be considered part of stakeholder communication. In this context, CSOs working on women's rights, children's rights, youth, poverty, and other rights-based issues can develop joint communication campaigns with climate and environmental organizations. Shared message sets can be created that connect just transition with different rights areas rather than presenting it solely through an environmental narrative. Communication strategies can diversify by making different stakeholders' voices and experiences visible instead of relying on a single organization's spokespeople.

Examples of Single-Issue Climate Language	Suggested Example Messages
Climate change affects women more.	Just transition can become possible through policies that reduce women's invisible care burden and increase opportunities for safe employment and economic empowerment.
Women should be part of the green transition.	The green transition is just when it shares care responsibilities, includes women in decision-making, and enables access to new employment opportunities.
The climate crisis increases poverty.	Just transition should be considered together with social policies that protect low-income households against rising living costs and energy poverty.
Young people should take action for the climate.	Just transition is also a way of building secure jobs, new professions, and livable cities for young people.
Climate is everyone's problem.	Clean air, secure jobs, affordable energy, and healthy lives are not separate struggles; they are shared demands of just transition.

Example expressions that can define just transition in this context:

- Just transition is an approach that makes women's care burden visible and considers the care economy as part of the transformation.
- Just transition should be considered together with social policies that reduce energy poverty and take the cost of living into account.
- Just transition is an approach that does not simply reduce young people's anxieties about the future but creates spaces where they can build that future together.

Just transition brings together struggles related to the environment, labor, equality, and poverty within a shared story about the future.

Pointing to Existing Realities Instead of Assuming Responsibility for the Process

The closure of thermal power plants or the decommissioning of mines is not a decision made or implemented by civil society alone during the just transition process. However, environmental organizations, partly because of their long-standing efforts in this field, may carry the risk of being overly eager to celebrate climate-positive developments when they occur. For this reason, adopting a reactive language that directly confronts local communities and workers worried about losing jobs creates a significant communication risk. It is critically important to stand against disinformation that shifts responsibility onto civil society and clearly point out the reality that the coal sector is already moving toward a structural decline because of market conditions. In this context, there is a need to clarify civil society's role, not as the decision-maker, but as a rights advocate and policy proposer. Civil society should make the economic and political context of transition decisions visible and reframe narratives that place responsibility on a single actor. Mine or power plant closures should not be communicated as a success story, but through the need for a planned and just transition. Disinformation should be answered quickly through clear, data-based, and simple messages, while channels such as public service announcements should be used to make information accessible to broader audiences.

Reactive / Risky Example Messages	Suggested Example Messages
The thermal power plant closed, we won.	The closure of a power plant alone is not a just transition. The real issue is how workers' futures and the future of the region are planned throughout this process.
The coal sector is ending.	The coal sector is changing because of shifts in economic and energy policies. Coal phase-out must proceed together with plans that secure workers' rights and the region's livelihoods.
These power plants harm people; they must be shut down.	We need solutions that protect public health while also guaranteeing people's right to a livelihood.
We are fighting against coal.	We advocate energy and development policies that leave no one behind and create secure employment opportunities for people.
Closing power plants is a major victory for the climate.	Every step taken for the climate must also produce just outcomes for the people living in the region.

Example expressions that can define just transition in this context:

- Just transition is not about celebrating coal phase-out; it is about planning together how this process can be fair for people.
- Just transition is not about creating winners and losers of transformation; it is about producing solutions that leave no one behind.
- Just transition means securing rights, livelihoods, and lives together during an unavoidable economic transformation.
- Just transition is a transformation approach that builds trust, participation, and shared solutions instead of increasing fear and uncertainty.
- Just transition means planning people's lives, labor, and the future of their region together, beyond energy policies.

Civil Society Actors Not Working in the Field of Environment and Climate

WORKERS' RIGHTS AND JUST TRANSITION

"Working people are on the front lines of environmental degradation. They shouldn't be the ones made to pay the price for cleaning it up." Mazzocchi, Tony, A Superfund for Workers: How to Solve the Jobs vs. Environment Dilemma

For Trade Unions Organizing Mine Workers, This is More Than a Transition!

Just transition, especially when it is not communicated correctly, carries the risk of being perceived, as some trade union representatives and experts in this field have expressed, as "an illusion created by capital to soften structural transformation and dampen the resistance of the working class." To prevent this, it is vital that trade unions demand to become an active part of the process. If transformation is inevitable, unions should adopt an active, constituent language rather than a passive language of victimhood that merely accepts conditions imposed by others. Rather than simply saying, "We do not accept this transition that will eliminate us," trade unions should advance the argument: "We demand an independent just transition program in which workers are recognized as legitimate subjects and their rights are protected, rather than a program financed on the terms of capital." Therefore, trade unions need to frame just transition not as a support package that compensates for job losses, but as a new chapter in the struggle for workers' rights.

Examples of Expressions to Avoid	Suggested Example Messages
Just transition is a project that will leave workers unemployed.	Just transition should be a program in which workers do not lose their jobs, their rights are protected, and new employment is guaranteed.
This transition is capital's project.	No transformation is just if workers have no voice in it. Trade unions should be founding actors of just transition.
Workers are paying the price of climate policies.	The cost of climate policies should not be placed on workers; the state and employers should establish social protection mechanisms together.
If the mine closes, this town will die.	If a mine closes, a plan for new employment, education, and economic diversification for that town should be announced at the same time.
Workers are victims of the transformation.	Workers are not victims of transformation; they are legitimate actors who should shape its conditions.

Example expressions that can define just transition in this context:

- The right to workers' livelihoods and climate policies can be planned together; just transition is the tool for doing so.
- Just transition is an approach that treats workers' rights not as a matter for negotiation, but as a precondition for transformation.
- Just transition is possible not at a table without workers, but through negotiation processes in which workers have a voice.
- Just transition is not about managing job losses; it is about planning secure employment together.
- Just transition is a program in which labor, social protection, and collective bargaining are at the center of transformation.
- Just transition is not a sacrifice demanded from workers; it is a demand for rights, security, and participation.

Not Presenting the "New Skills and Competencies" Narrative as a Standalone Solution

The discourse of vocational training, reskilling, and new competencies, which frequently appears in discussions of just transition, does not, on its own, create a communication framework that inspires confidence. Stakeholders state that this narrative is not considered realistic unless it presents a concrete plan for the future of existing jobs and regional economies. For this reason, communication should focus not only on individuals acquiring new skills, but also on which employment sectors these skills will correspond to, how the regional economy will diversify, and what responsibilities the state and employers will assume throughout this process. Vocational training should be presented not as the sole solution for just transition, but as one part of a comprehensive transformation plan that protects the employment ecosystem, supports SMEs, creates local investment opportunities, and strengthens regional development.

Examples of Expressions to Avoid	Suggested Example Messages
Vocational training will prepare everyone for green jobs.	Vocational training should be designed together with concrete plans showing what kinds of jobs will be created in each region.
The green transition will create thousands of new jobs.	It should be explained clearly where new jobs will be created, for whom, and under what guarantees.
We need to adapt to the green economy.	Investments that strengthen the regional economy, SMEs, and new production sectors should be part of the transformation.
Miners can move into green jobs.	New employment options should be planned through an approach that protects workers' existing rights and income security while recognizing the value of their experience and professional knowledge.

Example expressions that can define just transition in this context:

- Just transition is not only about providing new skills; it is about creating secure employment opportunities that correspond to those skills.
- Just transition treats vocational training not as a solution by itself, but as part of a regional development plan.
- Just transition is an approach in which the state and employers take responsibility alongside workers instead of expecting adaptation only from employees.
- Just transition is not only about promising new jobs; it is about transparently planning where those jobs will be created and for whom.
- Just transition is a vision for the future that strengthens regional economic diversity while supporting local production and SMEs.

Civil Society Actors Not Working in the Field of Environment and Climate

GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN, AND JUST TRANSITION

“Will the dream of an ecological world become a reality in a society where men build wind turbines while women quietly listen, bake bread, and shake out rugs?” (Petra Kelly, Co-Founder of the German Green Party)

What Changes in Women's Lives When the Transition Is Not Just?

The Association for Spatial Justice's report “Lessons from Ermenek for a Just Transition” provides important evidence on this issue. The unplanned, sudden exit from the coal economy in Ermenek has disrupted household balances and has affected, and continues to affect, women's lives and responsibilities more than anyone else's. When men lose their jobs because mines close, fall into debt, or are forced to migrate to other cities, unpaid care work within households (childcare, elder care, care for sick family members, and household management) is transferred almost entirely onto women. Women trying to compensate for the household's economic crisis are pushed into insecure, informal, low-paid, and seasonal agricultural or livestock work. At the same time, local transformation practices, such as alternative employment initiatives or agricultural cooperatives, often ignore women's demands, experiences, and needs. These findings require communication to make women visible not merely as a group affected by transformation, but as rights holders and decision-makers within the transformation process. The care burden, insecure work, and invisible labor experienced by women should be communicated not simply as stories of victimhood, but as concrete issues of justice that require policy change.

Going Beyond “Women are the Most Affected by the Climate Crisis”

It is a fact that women are among those most affected by the consequences of the climate crisis. Research and the increasingly visible impacts of climate change provide abundant evidence for this reality. However, when discussing the just transition and the energy transition, this argument alone is not enough to shape demands related to the transition. Talking about gender equality in the context of just transition requires emphasizing equal rights to all resources. At the center of a just transition is minimizing the harm experienced by people who lose their jobs. This means creating new employment opportunities and developing new skills. The question is: Will only the men who worked in mines benefit from these new jobs? Will these new sectors create equal employment opportunities for women? Women's organizations, women working in this field, and institutions that prioritize gender equality need to place women's equal access to these new opportunities at the center of their communication. Communication should therefore go beyond saying “women are more affected.” It should make visible women's right to benefit equally from the transformation. New employment opportunities, entrepreneurship support, access to finance, energy cooperatives, and participation in decision-making mechanisms should all be presented as opportunities in which women have an equal place.

The Care Economy: The Just Way to Imagine a New World, or "A green economy is not enough. We need a green and purple economy!

The current market system severely limits the time devoted to unpaid care work, one of the fundamental pillars of human well-being, including caring for children, older people, and sick family members. Meanwhile, as we discuss all of this, we are also living through a global care crisis. The current system continues to reproduce inequalities based on gender, class, and ethnicity in order to sustain care work, relying on the international migration of care labor and the exploitation of migrant women's labor. In this context, the purple economy advocates a radical transformation of the system that places the value of care work at the center of sustainable social reproduction, a just transition, and genuine well-being, while promoting gender equality (İlkkaracan, 2015).

In short: What place will care have in new economies? Can care responsibilities become a new field of employment? Can care become part of sectoral transformation? Can care work become one of the respected professions of a new era? Organizations working at the intersection of gender equality and climate should continue asking these questions and insist on making care a respected and visible component of new economic models. For this reason, care work should become another central pillar of communication. Care work should no longer remain an invisible topic in climate communication. Communication on just transition should present childcare, elder care, and care for sick people not merely as responsibilities within the household, but as fundamental components of public well-being and economic transformation.

Examples of Expressions to Avoid	Suggested Example Messages
The most important issue in just transition is workers' employment.	A just transition requires policies that address women's care burden, economic security, and everyday lives just as much as they do employment.
Women are affected more by the climate crisis.	Women's care work, livelihood strategies, and participation in decision-making should be at the center of just transition policies.
We should include women in green jobs.	The green transition should create equal access for women to secure employment, entrepreneurship, cooperatives, and production opportunities.
The transition will create new opportunities for everyone.	New opportunities become just when they guarantee women's equal access to finance, education, land, energy, and new economic sectors.
Women should benefit from new employment fields.	Just transition should bring women new rights and new opportunities, not new burdens.

Example expressions that can define just transition in this context:

- Just transition is a transformation approach that makes women's invisible care work visible and recognizes it as a public responsibility.
- Just transition advocates women's equal access to new economic opportunities and equal representation in decision-making processes.
- Just transition builds climate policies together with gender equality, not separately from it.
- Just transition is a transformation approach that does not shift the costs of the energy transition onto women's unpaid labor.
- Just transition means a transformation that creates new economic opportunities without creating new burdens of care, livelihood insecurity, and precarity for women.

Civil Society Actors Not Working in the Field of Environment and Climate

YOUTH AND JUST TRANSITION

“Young people were already working informally; now they are dying in waste sites, and this is being called green employment.” (Civil Society Representative, Youth Organization)

Opposing the Objectification of Young People Both in Decision-making and in Outcomes

Young people's participation often remains at the level of symbolic and numerical representation, simply so that it can be said that “young people were included in the process.” The mere presence of young people at meetings, on panels, or on participant lists does not constitute meaningful participation on its own. In communication on just transition, young people should be seen not merely as those who are listened to or represented, but as rights holders who set the agenda, develop proposals, and have real influence over decision-making, implementation, and monitoring processes. At the same time, insecure, flexible, and low-protection forms of work that may emerge under the discourse of “jobs of the future” and “digital jobs” often remain invisible, while young people are once again presented as the natural subjects of this transformation. However, young people and youth organizations possess significant knowledge and experience in recognizing and challenging the risk that new forms of insecurity may emerge under the discourse of green transition. The communication strategy should make this critical body of knowledge visible and position young people not as objects of transformation but as equal actors shaping its direction. Youth communication should move from the narrative of “we included young people in the process” to “we make decisions together with young people.” In communication efforts, young people should not be treated as a target audience, but as co-creators of campaigns, policy proposals, and advocacy messages.

Changing the Center of the Narrative: Not “Creating Green Jobs,” but “Using the Green Transition to Solve Unemployment”

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK) 2025 data, 23.3% of young people aged 15–24 are neither in education nor employment (NEET). This figure rises to 30.9% among young women. In the same age group, the youth unemployment rate is 15.3%. When youth is defined as the 18–35 age group, this picture becomes even more serious. Therefore, the green transition should be treated not simply as a policy area that increases the number of jobs, but as one that strengthens young people's economic security and access to decent work. At the same time, restricting the climate vision to narratives about “new sectors,” “green jobs,” and “jobs of the future” does not resonate strongly with young people. The fundamental issue young people face is not simply finding a job. It is also insecure employment, low wages, the housing crisis, lack of social security, and uncertainty about the future. For this reason, the way the problem is framed in communication must change.

Just transition should be communicated not merely as an employment policy that increases the number of new jobs, but as a public transformation tool that strengthens young people's economic security, access to decent work, and long-term security in life. In youth communication, the promise that “green jobs are coming” is not sufficient on its own. It should be clearly explained in which sectors, under what conditions, with which rights, and in which regions new employment opportunities for young people will emerge. The real question should be: “How can we turn the green transition into a public transformation tool that reduces youth unemployment and insecurity, creates decent jobs, and strengthens young people's economic security?”

As Climate Becomes Individualized, Talking About Just Transition Becomes Impossible

In communication on just transition aimed at young people, it is necessary to move away from romantic language that praises individual consumption habits or glorifies recycling. Instead, governance models that surrendered to market conditions should be criticized, and a state-centered, interventionist, and public planning-based economy should be demanded. If “young people are our future,” then expanding young people's voice in building that future is an indispensable agenda at the intersection of youth and just transition. Communication that reduces responsibility for the climate crisis to individual choices makes the structural problems facing young people invisible. Communication on just transition should build a language that makes public responsibility visible in areas such as energy, transportation, housing, education, and employment. Rather than asking young people only to become “responsible consumers,” communication should support them as citizens who demand rights and as organized actors participating in policy processes. Communication efforts should make young people's public policy demands visible instead of placing individual behavior change at the center.

“Which Young People?” Making Inequalities Within Youth Visible

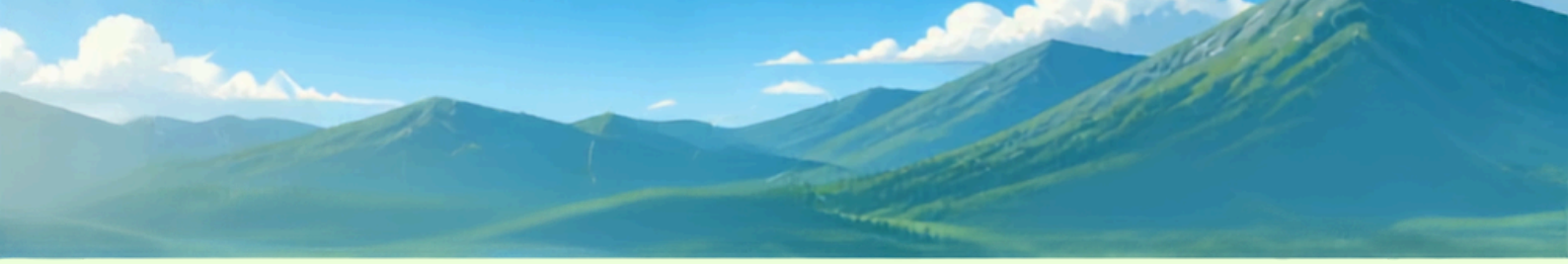
Young people are often discussed as though they were a single, homogeneous social group. However, young people's positions within the just transition process vary by socioeconomic conditions, region, education, employment status, and gender. For example, a young worker living in a coal region and a university student living in a metropolitan city may have very different needs and face different barriers during the transition. Likewise, the experiences of a young woman and a young person with disabilities or a refugee background may differ significantly. The fact that the proportion of young women who are neither in education nor employment (NEET) is significantly higher than that of young men also shows that youth policies must be approached through an intersectional perspective.

The needs and risks experienced during the just transition process differ for low-income young people, young women, LGBTQI+ young people, young workers, apprentices, interns, students, young people living in coal and industrial regions. Rights-based communication and advocacy on just transition should make these differences visible and demand participation and social protection mechanisms that do not reproduce existing inequalities among young people.

Examples of Expressions to Avoid	Suggested Example Messages
Young people are our future.	Young people are rights holders in today's climate, employment, housing, and life policies, not only tomorrow's future.
We also included young people in the process.	Young people's participation means not only representation, but real influence in decision-making, implementation, and monitoring processes.
Green jobs are a great opportunity for young people.	The green transition is "just" only to the extent that it creates secure, decent, and rights-based employment opportunities for young people.
If young people gain new skills, they will adapt to the transition.	New skills alone are not enough; education, social protection, and secure employment must be planned together.
Young people are the voice of the climate movement.	Young people are not one single group; inclusive climate policies should make different youth experiences and inequalities visible.
Young people should fight climate change.	Just transition is not about asking young people to make sacrifices; it is about demanding policies that guarantee their rights, livelihoods, and future.

Example expressions that can define just transition in this context:

- Just transition is a transformation that improves not only young people's future, but also their living conditions today.
- Just transition guarantees young people's meaningful and equal participation in decision-making processes, not merely symbolic participation.
- Just transition means demanding not only new jobs for young people, but also secure employment, housing, social security, and the right to a decent life.
- Just transition is a transformation approach that does not leave the burden of the climate crisis on young people's shoulders but expands public responsibility and collective solutions.
- Just transition is an inclusive transformation that makes different youth experiences visible, recognizing young women, young workers, students, apprentices, and young people living in coal regions together.
- Just transition recognizes young people not only as a generation affected by the climate crisis, but as rights holders with a voice in designing, implementing, and monitoring the transformation.



CONCLUSION: BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER, STARTING TODAY

The perception research, discourse analysis, and field findings presented throughout this guide all point to one fundamental reality: In Türkiye, treating just transition merely as a technical energy transformation, a narrow field of expert jargon, or an open-ended financing negotiation leads us into a social dead end. If the transition remains only a commercial reaction imposed by external dynamics such as carbon border adjustment mechanisms or emissions trading systems, it cannot gain legitimate acceptance among local communities, civil society, or the labor movement. For civil society actors, trade unions, local governments, and central public institutions, the only way to make a just transition possible is to redefine the issue as a plan for social welfare and development. We must place today's pressing economic realities, not abstract scenarios about the future, at the center of our communication strategies. In short: “The struggle to make it to the end of the month and the struggle to prevent the end of the world are not independent from one another.”

The central argument of this guide is that communication on just transition is not simply a matter of using the correct concepts. Communication is a political choice about whose story is told, whose voice is heard, which inequalities are made visible, and what kind of future is presented as possible. Just transition can become a shared social agenda only to the extent that it places the experiences of workers, women, young people, and local communities at its center and builds a common language for the future that leaves no one behind. Communication on just transition is an invitation to discuss not only the climate crisis, but also how we will live together, how we will produce together, and how we will share the burdens of transformation. For this reason, the issue is not simply about delivering the right message. It is about creating a shared language capable of building a more just, participatory, and equal future together.

We designed this guide to support all of today's central actors working on communication around just transition. We hope it can make a lasting and positive contribution to the field.

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