



Building Momentum for a Just Transition in Canada:

Perspectives from civil society

IISD REPORT



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Building Momentum for a Just Transition in Canada: Perspectives from civil society

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Executive Summary

Widespread calls for a just and green recovery continue to underscore Canada's urgent challenge to transition to a low-carbon economy in a way that supports workers and communities. What are some of the paths forward to build momentum for this transition? Much potential lies in channelling and connecting existing efforts among civil society and organized labour, who have been calling for a just transition since far before the pandemic.

In this study, the International Institute for Sustainable Development sought to identify how these groups define the just transition they are working toward, including what their goals and strategies are and key opportunities that could further just transition implementation and collaboration in Canada. To do so, we conducted surveys and semi-structured interviews with 48 organizations in Canada, including organized labour, environmental, Indigenous, and social organizations.

We found that civil society organizations in Canada are committed to the core tenets of a just transition: employment security and good jobs. They are working in a wide variety of ways, from public awareness and education, network-building and bridge-building work to catalyzing investment in green tech, providing resources or training for communities and workers to transition, and working in government, industry, or worker relations.

We also heard broad consensus on the need to ensure the low-carbon transition furthers wider equity and inclusiveness goals, particularly for historically marginalized communities in Canada and beyond. Respondents told us that a just transition must look beyond Canada's borders to do no harm to workers in the Global South. We also heard that a just transition presents an opportunity to further reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples through upholding Indigenous rights in low-carbon policies, planning, and projects.

The pandemic has added further urgency to workforce transitions because both climate change and COVID-19 have significant impacts on inequality. COVID-19 shocked the Canadian economy and brought themes related to a just transition abruptly to the fore. Theoretical discussions on support for disrupted workers became pressing practical concerns overnight. It is clearer than ever that a poor or unplanned low-carbon transition will only exacerbate inequalities. By contrast, an inclusive, proactive just transition can help achieve equity goals while repairing historical harms.

Compared to other fossil fuel-producing countries, Canada has a high capacity to facilitate a just transition away from fossil fuels, in part due to its low overall dependence on fossil fuels as an economic driver. Yet, **our research underscores that far more just transition policies and investments are needed from Canadian governments.** Government action must have



tripartite processes (between unions and workers' organizations, employers' organizations, and government) and social dialogue at its heart. At a minimum, this includes:

- Implementing a Just Transition Act.
- Implementing all recommendations from the Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities.
- Mainstreaming just transition principles across climate policy.
- Developing green industrial policy.
- Ending fossil fuel subsidies.
- Providing greater support for municipalities to engage in just transition activities.
- Encouraging action at the provincial/territorial level, including public utilities.
- Providing support for Indigenous co-ownership of just transition-related projects.

Our research shows that civil society groups are ready and willing to build support for a just transition to complement official tripartite processes. **We heard the following key actions to further a just transition that civil society groups themselves could help move forward:**

- Alongside pushing for official tripartite processes, engage with non-tripartite groups that need to be better included in dialogues.
- Conduct research on the potential for green job creation.
- Support Indigenous co-ownership of just transition-related projects.
- Build leadership skills to further a just transition at the community level through capacity building, local partnerships, and mobilization in affected communities.
- Train and upskill workers, including displaced workers, marginalized workers, and youth entering the job market through tripartite efforts and others.
- Raise public awareness via solution-focused communications.
- Develop just transition network resources to facilitate knowledge-sharing between allies.
- Create a constituency for just transition policies, working with new partners such as artists, cultural and faith leaders, health experts, and more.
- Develop strategies to address the inhibiting role that cultural and occupational identities play in a just transition.

To do the above effectively, more support is needed from government and private funders to further just transition projects by actors already working in the space. We urge government to recognize the vital roles that civil society groups are playing and to leverage partnerships and resources to further a just transition in Canada.



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1.0 Introduction

This report examines how civil society groups in Canada can align their work to achieve just transition goals. Based on surveys, interviews, and online workshops with key labour, environmental, and social groups, we describe, compare, and contrast different approaches and objectives among groups working on just transition. Based on feedback from participants, we identify synergies and locate gaps in terms of what is needed to achieve a just transition in Canada.

Increased calls to elevate progress on a just transition reflect the urgent challenge Canada faces to transition to a low-carbon economy more generally, in particular, as the country recovers from the impacts of COVID-19. Catalyzed by a 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on the impact of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels,¹ numerous countries, including Canada, have now embraced a target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 (Tasker, 2020). Despite a commitment to net-zero, the federal government has continued to support the fossil fuel sector (Geddes et al., 2020; Corkal, Gass, & Levin, 2020). Yet compared to other fossil fuel-producing countries, Canada has a high capacity to engineer a just transition away from fossil fuels, in part due to its low overall dependence on fossil fuels as an economic driver (Stockholm Environment Institute et al., 2020).

Transitions are inevitable and a necessary part of the process, as economies and societies grow and shift, and as labour markets adjust to such changes over time. Key to managing transitions is utilizing ongoing market adjustments while they are occurring to facilitate a gradual transition from old to new industries (Stanford, 2021). Unfortunately, many transitions in the past two centuries, from mechanization to the decline or relocation of entire industries, have not been managed effectively by governments, resulting in job losses, regional economic decline, or, in some cases, political instability.² In some historical cases, governments took a laissez-faire approach, allowing markets to sort out winners and losers. In other instances, governments sought to minimize disruptions by propping up declining industries (Frey, 2019). Unfortunately, experience has shown that prolonging these industries instead of proactively supporting alternatives can lead to high social, economic, and environmental costs in the short, medium, and long terms (Frey, 2019). This includes increased pressure to provide ongoing financial support to declining industries, costs for worker retraining and unemployment benefits, and health and environmental costs, which add to the opportunity cost of delaying the diversification of an economy. In addition, there are very real social costs faced by workers and communities. We know from historical examples here in Canada, such as the collapse of the Atlantic cod industry, of the significant financial costs and human suffering that can occur if transitions are not carefully managed and planned for (Scott & Maiorana, 2016).

¹ See: <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

² For example, the Industrial Revolution's widespread mechanization was directly linked to increased economic inequality and stagnating wages (Frey, 2019).



Proactive support for communities and workers, on the other hand, can provide new opportunities to those who may be negatively impacted by transitions. The term “just transition” describes support systems to secure the livelihoods of those whose employment is impacted or who are otherwise negatively affected by transitions (Galgóczy, 2018). Within the context of a low-carbon transition, it emphasizes that economic, social, and environmental spheres are interrelated and must be addressed by a comprehensive and coherent policy framework.

COVID-19 shocked the Canadian economy and brought themes related to just transition abruptly to the fore. Theoretical discussions on support for disrupted workers became pressing practical concerns overnight. All the while, the threat of climate change has remained constant. A “just and green recovery” became the rallying cry for advocates of stimulus to restore the economy while advancing the climate agenda (Corkal, Gass, & Cosbey, 2020; Just Recovery for All, 2020; Task Force for a Resilient Recovery, 2020).

Organized labour in Canada is acting at the intersection of pandemic recovery, worker advocacy, and planning for the low-carbon transition. Notably, in September 2020, Unifor secured a deal with Ford that included CAD 1.8 billion for battery electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing in Oakville, Ontario (Fraser, 2020). With the added urgency brought by COVID-19, environmental, social, and other organizations are also increasingly adopting just transition principles into their mandates.

The significant changes Canada has witnessed since March 2020 were reflected in research participants’ responses for this report through both surveys and interviews. We present the feedback we heard from labour and civil society groups in two sections. The first section of the report seeks clarity on how groups define the transition they are working toward. We summarize how respondents articulate their approach to the topic of a just transition and describe what their goals and strategies are. We place particular emphasis on elements of social transition, including workers and impacted groups and communities. The second section identifies key projects, campaigns, or collaboration opportunities named by participants that could serve as potential means to achieve the goals outlined in Section 1. We end with the third section of recommendations based on our findings that could catalyze additional collaborative work by civil society on this topic in Canada.



2.0 Methodology

The research approach and methodology for this study were developed by IISD and guided by input from our project partners, Blue Green Canada and Green Economy Network. The study aims to build on previous efforts to develop a shared understanding and collaborative network on the just transition in Canada.

To compare and contrast different approaches and objectives among groups working on a just transition, we designed a survey (Annex 1) and interview (Annex 2). The survey was conducted online and through semi-structured interviews via video call. Answers to the survey were manually coded to identify common themes. Additionally, we conducted a peer learning call on October 29, 2020, discussing the impact of COVID-19 on progress toward a just transition. We also held a report-back learning webinar on March 3, 2021, presenting the results and recommendations from this summary report to project participants and giving attendees the opportunity to provide feedback.

2.1 Identification of Participants

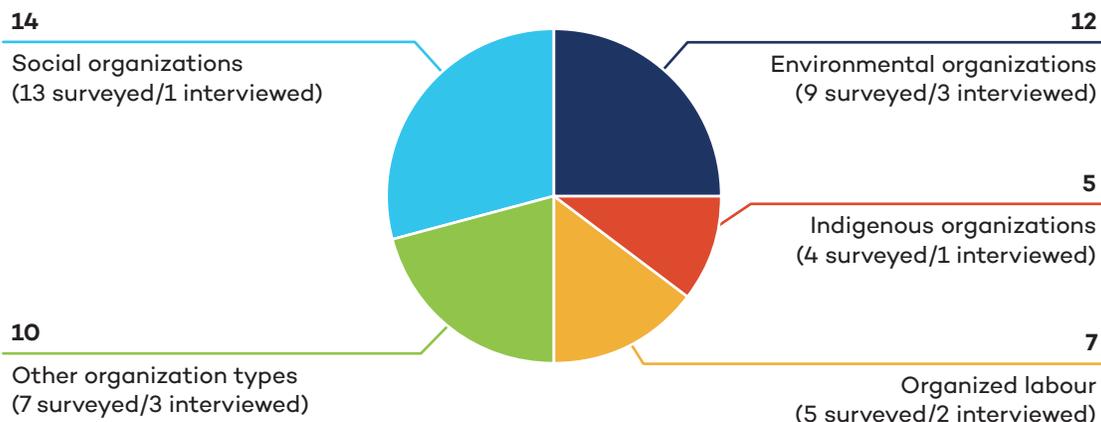
For our survey participation, we put together a longlist of over 60 organizations based on the participant list of McConnell Foundation's Transitions Places and Pathways Partnership (TP3) Gathering, as well as organizations referred by our project partners and by participants (snowball sampling). We also invited organizations that are part of the Just Recovery Canada network (currently over 500 signatories) to respond to the survey. All of the above organizations were invited to complete the survey on Google Forms (see Annex 1).

Participating organizations were categorized based on their main area of focus: environmental, Indigenous, organized labour, and social (see Annex 3). Organizations that did not fall clearly within one of the four types were categorized as Other. We used this categorization as a rough guideline to ensure representation from a diversity of organizations. However, many organizations work in more than one topic area, and there are also some who focus on education or training.

For our semi-structured interviews, we identified 10 prominent organizations actively working in the just transition space. With the aim of having a representative sample, roughly even numbers of organizations from the five types were selected for the shortlist. We received 38 survey responses and conducted 10 interviews. With 48 participating organizations, this small-scale study is not statistically significant but rather is intended as an informative entry into the discussion around a just transition.



Figure 1. Survey and interview respondents by type



Box 1. IISD’s research approach on a just transition

For previous research on just transition, IISD has conducted literature reviews on frameworks for policy change analysis. In IISD’s 2015 study *The End of Coal: Ontario’s Coal Phase-Out*, IISD drew on four frameworks to analyze the Ontario coal phase-out and implications for a just transition (Harris, 2015). These are the IISD-GSI’s framework for fossil fuel subsidy reforms, Advocacy Coalition Framework (Beaton et al., 2013; Sabatier, 1988; Weible et al., 2011), the concept of multiple streams by Kingdon (2003), and Ford Foundation’s theory of social change (Kim, 2014). The analysis relies on the concept of the “window of opportunity” and suggests that all elements critical to a sustainable energy transition can be clustered within four “panes” of this “window”—context, champions, concerns, or case for reform—as well as complementary and just transition policies. IISD later adopted this approach in an analysis of just transition in the study, *Real People, Real Change: Strategies for Just Energy Transitions* (Zinecker et al., 2018).





3.0 Findings and Analysis

3.1 Where Are We Now?

This section sets the groundwork for where Canadian civil society groups are currently positioned on just transition, in particular as the short- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 become clearer. First, we summarize how respondents approach the concept of just transition in Canada—that is to say, how groups frame the conversation. What definitions are groups using, and what do they see as core tenets of a just transition? Second, we summarize how groups articulate key goals for achieving it: what are their objectives, strategies, and main areas of focus?

3.1.1 Framing and Definitions

Framing and definitions around a just transition have evolved over time, and progress on developing shared and common understandings of the concept in recent years was illustrated by our respondents. Labour unions have always represented workers in disrupted industries, but the term “just transition” first came into use in the 1990s to describe support systems for workers unemployed due to environmental protection policies. The term was further defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in *Guidelines for a Just Transition Towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All* (ILO, 2015). While the document focuses on using tripartism³ to support unemployed workers, its vision also includes “decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty in the transition to sustainable economies” (ILO, 2015). In the Canadian context, just transition principles were applied nationally for the coal sector with the Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities. The evolution of the just transition concept is described in more detail in the IISD report, *Real People, Real Change: Strategies for Just Energy Transitions* (Zinecker et al., 2018). However, true and ongoing tripartite approaches in Canada continue to be uncommon, as noted by several organized labour respondents (see Section 3.1.5).

Environmental movements are now supporting the just transition framework, but their partnership with labour was not always assured in the past and is still developing. Some of our respondents reflected that when the environmental movement was gaining momentum in the 1970s, the idea of labour and environmental groups working together was hard to imagine. As described by one organized labour interviewee, the original insight for the necessity of environmental organizations and trade unions working together came out of conflicts over natural resources, namely trade unions in the forestry industry butting up against conservationists. We heard from both labour and environmental organizations that the relationship between both groups has gradually strengthened and is now far better.

³ The ILO (2020b) defines *tripartism* as “the interaction of government, employers and workers (through their representatives) as equal and independent partners to seek solutions to issues of common concern.” In Canada this would include federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous governments.



Our findings indicate that the evolving relationship between labour and the environmental movement in Canada has also been shaped by new disruptions to workers and the planet. Up until the past decade, the climate change imperative was far less acute; in labour, disruptions include automation and the rise of the gig economy. The organized labour groups we interviewed recognize that runaway climate change threatens workers' livelihoods, which has propelled them to adopt environmental objectives into their mandates.

Likewise, environmental groups recognize the necessity of having labour onside to present a united front against vested corporate interests and to effect political change. This pragmatic understanding is accompanied by growing concern for equity.

“Gone are days when [the environmental movement] can advocate for the dismantling of entire sectors without answering what will happen to the workers.”

3.1.1.1 CORE TENETS OF A JUST TRANSITION

We asked survey and interview respondents to identify what they saw as the core tenets of a just transition. Of the core tenets identified by participants, **the most cited were employment security and “good jobs.”** Descriptions of good jobs outlined by respondents aligned with the concept of “decent work,” defined by the ILO as “work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men” (ILO, 2020a). Respondents' descriptions of employment security also encompassed retirement security. For example, one respondent summarized:

“[A just transition] will ensure that a system is in place to help workers plan for their future, whether that means a way to bridge to retirement, training for a second-career, upskilling, services for issues like financial assistance, financial planning, counselling services (mental health related) and investments in the affected communities in order to offset potential negative impacts from plant closures, drop in property taxes and drop in business for companies who enjoy the spin-off of the economic impact from the major industry that is transitioning.”

The number of responses we received on this theme shows that participants, including non-labour participants, generally understand and agree with the ILO definition of just transition.

Equity for marginalized communities, Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC)—especially Indigenous inclusion—**was the second most cited tenet of just transition to a low-carbon economy overall.** When weighing the interests of workers and communities dependent on fossil fuel industries, one interviewee asked, “What groups will be disadvantaged the most if we let climate change run rampant?” These groups include migrant workers, who are often not



able to be part of policy conversations or who have fewer formal rights without permanent status (International Trade Union Confederation, 2020). A small number of organizations specifically identified the need to account for the gendered impact of climate change. Many participants argued that upholding Indigenous rights should be a key pillar of a just transition. Expanding framing on a just transition to do so would include the remediation of the destructive legacies of colonialism, self-determination for Indigenous communities, and the ratification of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Many participants spoke of the need to expand the definition of “green jobs” in policy conversations on a just transition and the low-carbon economy at large. Some of our respondents see care economy jobs as green jobs. Beyond jobs in the renewable energy and green tech sectors, participants argued that green jobs should include spillover jobs, such as zero-emission bus drivers, and low-emissions jobs not directly linked to energy and tech, particularly in care work. This tenet has become even more of an imperative in the wake of COVID-19, with evidence of employment and health impacts disproportionately affecting women and people of colour, many of whom work in the care economy (Department of Finance Canada, 2020). Some recovery-focused recommendations have foregrounded the care economy as critical to economic recovery (Canadian Women’s Foundation et al., 2020; YWCA Canada & Gender and the Economy, 2020), while others have argued that a green recovery cannot occur without emphasis on care work (Kaplan, 2020).

Community-based decision making,

including engagement with workers, was the most cited tenet for labour and other organizations. This ensures that just transition policies and programs are relevant and responsive to local contexts, reflecting similar findings from the Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities (2018). Our respondents felt that more engagement and formal consultation by governments with affected communities

would lead to “[an increased] percent of our economy that is democratically or locally controlled.” The ideal outcomes of a more cohesive federal policy approach to community-based decision making would be “nationally coherent, regionally driven, locally delivered actions.”

Other tenets identified by respondents included tax reform to create a more progressive tax system, allowing a greater degree of public investment in retraining and mentorship programs, clean energy, and other sustainable infrastructure. Lastly, participants generally agreed that a just transition must look beyond Canada’s borders, in particular, to **do no harm to workers in the developing world**, including as Canada develops industrial strategies to meet its low-carbon goals. Respondents argued that the COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that global issues cannot be solved without global cooperation. Some called for **supply chain solidarity** around the globe.

“International solidarity with movements in the Global South must be a priority as we face climate catastrophes and the pandemic’s unequal toll.”



3.1.2 Organizational Approaches

Survey respondents were asked what *specific approaches* their organization took when advocating for a just transition. In other words, what processes are they trying to ensure occur? We provided an initial list of seven approaches⁴ (see Annex 1) for participants to select from, but additional ones also emerged through other survey and interview answers.

Across environmental, organized labour, and Indigenous organizations, there was a broad consensus on the need to ensure that the low-carbon transition furthers broader equity and inclusiveness goals. This conviction was illustrated by one interviewee who stated that there can be “no solution to climate change or the inequality crisis without reference to the other.” Respondents’ second most cited approach was “ensuring social dialogue processes for transition are inclusive of non-tripartite groups (e.g., civil society, Indigenous NGOs [non-governmental organizations], non-unionized workers, broader community members, etc.)” Most groups, including all organized labour, strongly cited “supporting workers in high-carbon sectors and their communities through the transition to a low-carbon economy and minimizing negative impacts” as one of their organization’s approaches.

Approaches to ensure the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens of transition, ensure decision making for a just transition occurs through a tripartite process, and engage with government, labour, and industry on broader energy policy were all strongly weighted by survey respondents. For example, Climate Caucus focuses on engaging municipal governments by arming city councillors with specific plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their communities. They provide detailed briefing notes, draft resolutions, and references to case studies across Canada where plans have been successfully implemented.

Very few respondents described their approach as “ensuring energy consumers are not negatively impacted by transition policies.” This could indicate that consumer interests are generally not currently considered a priority by respondents or that there is space for more programs and organizations that advocate on behalf of consumers. We note that our survey and interviews did not include many Northern and rural respondents—two groups that are more strongly affected by high energy prices—or consumer associations.

⁴ The initial list included:

- Supporting workers in high-carbon sectors and their communities through the transition to a low-carbon economy and minimizing negative impacts
- Equitable distribution of benefits and burdens of the transition to a low-carbon economy across society
- Ensuring decision making for a just transition occurs through a tripartite process (unions and workers’ organizations, employers’ organizations, and government at all levels including federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous)
- Ensuring social dialogue processes for transition are inclusive of non-tripartite groups (e.g. civil society, Indigenous NGOs, non-unionized workers, broader community members, etc.)
- Engaging with government, labour, and industry for decision making on broader energy transition policy
- Ensuring energy consumers are not negatively impacted by transition policies
- Ensuring the low-carbon transition furthers broader equity and inclusiveness goals (including gender, Indigenous rights, migrant rights, etc.)



3.1.3 Specific Work Strategies and Activities

Survey respondents were asked how they saw their organization's role in furthering a just transition and what specific strategies and activities their organization has used to further their just transition policy goals.

When asked to describe their organization's role in furthering a just transition, participants from environmental and social organizations most often cited public awareness and education. Indigenous organizations most often described their role as network-building and, along with labour organizations, as government, industry, or worker relations. The least-cited role by all groups was skills and retraining; however, this is likely impacted by the fact that few respondents had skills and retraining as central to their mandate.⁵

The main strategies that organizations used in their just transition work included:

- **Calling on government and industry to engage with labour in a more structured way.** Some respondents expressed the opportunity to shift engagement with labour in Canada toward a model that is followed in many European countries (see Section 3.1.5 on Canada–Europe comparisons). For example, Unifor's Build Back Better campaign calls for Canada to “institute a tripartite model for advisory groups and oversight bodies in relation to green transition and climate issues” (Unifor, 2020). Collective agreements, by which unions can bargain for apprenticeships and skills training, as well as environmental stipulations, were identified as an important tool to embed just transition principles in practice. Organized labour argued for increased union membership to further their goals of building income security and other protections for workers in disrupted industries.
- **Carrying out bridge-building work.** Some organizations are actively working to ensure that social dialogue⁶ processes for transition are inclusive of non-tripartite groups. For example, the Youth Climate Lab creates social innovation labs where young people can learn from others' lived experiences, engage with other generations, and spark new connections. Iron & Earth focuses on building community by connecting supporters and members “as they navigate the complexities of diversifying their careers.” Other organizations facilitate dialogue between environmental and labour organizations, and bridge gaps between research areas, namely climate policy, economic policy, and social policy. Still others aim to act as a link between settler governments and Indigenous communities.
- **Advocating on behalf of workers or conducting worker-focused research and policy work.** It goes without saying that organized labour respondents are focused on

⁵ Additional research is needed to determine whether there are additional gaps in skills and retraining programs for other organizations to fill or how additional training and partnerships could be created to maximize access.

⁶ “Social dialogue” refers to an exchange of information, consultations, or negotiations between employers, governments, and workers policy issues of common interest and is a critical prerequisite for just transition policy making (ILO, n.d.).



worker representation. However, other civil society groups, including research groups, also conduct worker-focused research and advocacy campaigns with the goal of ensuring that all workers, including those in energy-intensive industries, have a future in a low-carbon economy. Strategies listed by these groups included: bringing low-carbon sectors, including care sectors, to the forefront of the climate movement; documenting worker experiences with disruption to replicate successful transitions; organizing unions and labour federations to deploy worker transition and support programs; retraining and education initiatives.

- **Catalyzing private investment in green tech to complement industrial policy.** Some organizations aim to provide information to the market to influence private investment decisions, while others advocate for government to make investments that “crowd in” green investment. For example, Corporate Knights described their organization’s strategy as driving investment to have the weight of our economy make a difference for the planet. As part of this strategy, they push to maximize pension funds and employee ownership of green companies. Some players in the private sector were seen as “innovating on implementation and commercial deployment in ways that are actually taking the transition forward.” Importantly, one interviewee cautioned, “We still need technology companies, but people in communities must see direct benefits.”
- **Providing resources for communities and workers to transition.** Although few respondents focus explicitly on skills and retraining, it is worth noting that select organizations do consider providing resources to those transitioning as central to their activities and strategies. Examples include Iron & Earth, which aims to provide training, road maps, and other resources to fossil fuel industry and Indigenous workers for careers in climate solutions; Indigenous Clean Energy, which, among other activities, provides training, networking, and advisory services for Indigenous inclusion in clean energy; and the Labour Education Centre, which delivers Employment Ontario programs and whose Working Green Program focuses on worker opportunities for climate change action.

3.1.4 Desired Outcomes

When asked what the most important concrete outcomes of a just transition were, participants overall cited a **reduction in inequality and poverty, along with decarbonization and recovery from COVID-19**. This finding was consistent with respondents’ high weighting of inequality when describing their approaches to and framing of a just transition. A majority of environmental groups cited job creation in low-carbon industries as an important outcome. Participants noted that **job creation should not only target the unemployed but also youth entering the job market**. A just transition would also be about “getting workers who have not participated (or struggled to [participate]) in the economy, into the new green economy. This would prioritize Indigenous youth.” Another participant called for “future-proofing” to “[prepare] young people to thrive and adjust to all different types of disruptions.” Participants noted the need to apply a just transition framework not just to the energy transition but also to other disruptions, such as the rise of the gig economy and automation.



A majority of Indigenous participants cited **reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples** as an important outcome. Specifically, a just transition would see Indigenous Peoples no longer sidelined from policy-making and planning on energy projects. Indigenous organizations also generally linked a just transition with improved health and well-being.

Other important outcomes included more **inclusive governance and community-led development**, following the principle, “nothing about us, without us,” and a **stronger social safety net**, with universal basic income put forward as a specific policy by several respondents. One outcome specific to the Canadian context was reduced polarization between the west and the rest of Canada. Although many respondents cited polarization as a significant challenge, they did not necessarily have solutions. Some felt that grassroots and community-level just transition efforts, such as town halls and other social dialogue processes, could help address this.

3.1.5 Political and Technical Gaps

Respondents were asked to identify the top obstacles, including technical and political gaps, to ensuring a just transition in Canada. Political gaps were overwhelmingly seen as more challenging than technical gaps by respondents. A participant summarized the problem as the “cost to progressive politicians in terms of spending political capital to challenge corporate power.” Political polarization, including regional alienation and a lack of political will, emerged as the top obstacles identified by environmental, social, and labour organizations.

We heard many respondents express frustration at **where Canada stands relative to European policy progress on a just transition**.⁷ In Europe, to a large extent, climate change has more bipartisan support, leading to more sustained action. In the view of one interviewee, “[Canada is] inching out of the basement. Europe, meanwhile, is building a tenth story on its just transition building.” By comparison, several labour respondents remarked that processes that adhere to principles of tripartism and social dialogue are weak in Canada, and the tripartite approach has yet to be effectively institutionalized. There is a strong sense that industry and government regularly engage with one another, while labour is often left out of the room. One participant pointed to the coal phase-out in Alberta, where the government negotiated immediately with utilities, while workers were largely left out of the discussion. Another remarked that in British Columbia, where the government has done some engagement with non-industry groups such as labour and Indigenous organizations, it was unclear whether they were acting on received input. Also noted was that countries that are most effectively transitioning to clean energy (such as Denmark) are also those that have strong collective bargaining abilities due to **high proportions of collective agreement coverage compared to Canada**.

Labour organizations are already responding, often in real time, to impacts on workers, including recent ones related to COVID-19. As one respondent noted, “the labour movement is an expert at closures, winding down, and negotiations.” They reflected on key gaps that are holding back a

⁷ For example, the European Union’s Just Transition Fund sets aside EUR 17.5 billion to help regions transition toward a climate-neutral economy and is an integral part of the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2020).



just transition, including public policy (such as industrial policy and public procurement strategies) and ensuring collaboration among all relevant stakeholders.

We heard from several respondents about the need for stronger and more **strategic industrial policy in line with net-zero commitments**, which in itself is technically challenging to develop (see Section 3.2.1.2). Canada's federal model and division of jurisdictional power between governments was named as a significant obstacle, as it enables provinces to oppose progressive federal initiatives. Whereas the Canadian constitution divides up power in such a way that it is difficult to have nationwide approval and coordination, Norway was given as a contrasting example where the unilateral national government has been able to amass a USD 1 trillion wealth fund. While respondents generally agreed that Canada's strategy must be cohesive across the country, they emphasized that it should still allow for localized decision making. In addition to jurisdictional politics, organized labour cited organizational politics as an obstacle in cases of large membership. With such a diverse membership, "you're not going to get everyone supporting all concepts, all ideas, all pillars that the union advocates for with the same degree of enthusiasm," said one interviewee.

Vested interests were the most cited obstacle by many respondents, including a majority of Indigenous organizations. Corporate interests were mostly referenced, but vested government interests that act as perverse incentives against a just transition were also noted. This includes federal investments or finance supporting fossil fuel production, such as the Trans Mountain and Keystone XL pipelines. A significant number of participants also argued that the oil industry has captured our political system. The feeling of politics being overly influenced by corporate power was coupled with the issue of transparency. In addition to levels of government, participants cited a lack of transparency from energy ministries across Canada. Manitoba Hydro and Hydro-Québec were named as especially opaque and inaccessible crown corporations that impede community-owned renewable energy projects. We heard that, in some cases, the size and governance structure of public utilities can pose a barrier to just transition actions.

Some organized labour respondents cited certain globalization and trade interests as a potential restriction. Ontario's requirement for local content in renewable energy expansion plans (in

“Many of the solutions required to power the transition are already available and ready to scale. Our challenge is to create and implement a blueprint to rapidly upgrade workforces, manufacturing facilities, businesses, infrastructure and environment to support these solutions and streamline the transition.”



the Green Energy and Green Economy Act⁸) was not legal under international trade rules, despite being perceived locally as a just transition-friendly initiative.

Another important point raised by organized labour was **people's pride in their work, illustrating the cultural element of transition**, which can also pose a barrier. One union representative said of its members, “they don't want to all start installing solar panels. They like the work they do, they've spent time investing in the work that they do, they feel strongly about it. We have to balance these two ideas.” Identity can play a critical role in creating resistance to transition (Mayer, 2018; Unroe, 2019), yet participants had few strategies developed to directly address this. Some participants also expressed concern about mental health impacts on workers and affected communities. For example, evidence from after the Alberta coal phase-out shows increases in rates of domestic violence in affected communities (Labour Education Centre, 2020).

Respondents noted that conversations about clean jobs also have the potential to strain relations between labour and the environmental movement. An interviewee emphasized, “no one wants to be told they have a dirty job.” While relations have improved between environmental and labour organizations, tensions still exist. We heard “there are still trade union activists that chafe against the environmental movement,” while others felt that there are some individuals within the environmental movement who are dismissive of labour's concerns or believe they do not properly grasp environmental issues. We also heard concerns that urban people and organizations sometimes hold a condescending or stereotypical view of those in rural areas.

Other obstacles to a just transition identified by participants included a **lack of investment in the infrastructure and tech** required to move to a low-carbon economy, for example, charging stations for EVs and smart grids for decentralized power. In a similar vein, **locked-in high-carbon infrastructure**, especially in our energy grid and city design (i.e., suburbanization), was identified as an obstacle. Also mentioned were the **lack of accurate or sufficient information**

“The Green Energy and Green Economy Act was not perfect, but was an amazing start down the road to a green economy and local procurement policies. It was brought forward to WTO by Japan and ruled out of order. We saw a crash of businesses across Ontario. At the time, we had workers being retrained for new clean energy jobs, and contracts being opened daily from big business to invest in Ontario and create jobs in these green energy sectors. That came to a halt when the Act was ruled out of order.”

⁸ See: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/s09012>



(including information on the economic impact of moving away from fossil fuels, positive news stories about the benefits of a low-carbon transition, and challenges with misinformation from vested interests); a **lack of political representation** for affected and marginalized communities; **coordination failures** (between different levels of government, different government departments, and the public and private actors); and access for rural communities to training resources and infrastructure.

Participants showed a range of opinions in regards to whether technical gaps posed a significant obstacle to a just transition. Although the survey and interview questions did not explicitly define the term “technical gap,” this generally refers to gaps that remain regardless of existing fiscal, human, and policy resources. Whereas some participants dismissed technical gaps as trivial, others were less sanguine or felt there were significant unachieved technological advances required to meet climate change goals without causing mass disruption. “The magnitude of system change that we must go through to get close to net-zero is mind boggling,” an interviewee said. “It’s great to think about being as kind as we can, but if we try to solve all social problems while we make the energy transition within the timeline that scientists require, we may not make it—it’s daunting to the point of impossibility. Having said that we must try for both.”

Knowledge gaps were hardly identified as an obstacle in survey responses. However, interviewees mentioned some areas for additional research, including where Canada’s comparative advantages lie in emerging green tech and clean energy markets. Respondents also called for provincial and federal governments to provide data on where new job opportunities will be found in a low-carbon economy and which skills are needed for those jobs. A participant noted that it is harder to identify a discrete number of affected communities when discussing a complete energy transition as compared to the phase-out of coal (which is a more specific process). The prevailing view, however, was that we have most of the required knowledge but are not acting on it.

3.2 Where Do We Go From Here?

3.2.1 Opportunities

3.2.1.1 EVOLVING DYNAMICS POST-PANDEMIC

In the wake of the coronavirus, many Canadians feel that recovery should build a better Canada than existed before by repairing longstanding problems, including carbon emissions, inequality, and exclusion of marginalized groups (Just Recovery for All, 2020). When asked to identify the top opportunities to further momentum for a just transition in Canada, “green recovery” plans were the most cited by respondents. Participants noted that COVID-19 has increased the public appetite for deficits, which could allow for higher levels of public investment in green tech and infrastructure. Not only can infrastructure lower emissions once finished, but governments can boost green tech through its construction.

On a conceptual level, participants noted that the COVID-19 pandemic impacts have caused a shift in worldview. As one respondent wrote, “the pandemic has also afforded us new frames and



rhetorical tools. We can use them to remind ourselves of our common fate on a crowded and limited planet, and also of the nature of collective action to solve collective problems.” Besides the green recovery, a majority of social and Indigenous groups cited an **increase in public awareness** as an opportunity. This included both an awareness of the effects of climate change and an awareness of broader inequities that have grown as a result of the protest movement against anti-Black racism.

3.2.1.2 OPPORTUNITIES TO FURTHER A JUST TRANSITION

Respondents listed a range of opportunities to further just transition objectives, many of which could be carried out by civil society groups, organized labour, local industry, other non-government actors, and municipalities. We heard that groups are ready to move on concrete actions and that there are many examples of successful initiatives that could be replicated or scaled up. However, to do so requires increased financial and political support from governments, including increasing the capacity of non-government actors to carry out work on the ground.

The **role played by municipalities could be better capitalized on** in future just transition work. An interviewee noted that as a majority (60%) of spending on infrastructure is funded by municipalities, provincial and federal governments should provide greater funding and regulatory authority for local governments, who will need to do most of the work to shift buildings and transportation to low-carbon options.⁹ More funding to municipalities was proposed as a way of creating jobs, including more municipal jobs focused on climate resiliency. “Have them be public-sector, unionized jobs, at the same time helping achieve climate goals,” said one interviewee.

Other proposed areas for green recovery spending with benefits for jobs and a just transition include retrofits, industrial innovation, and EV manufacturing. **One proposal was a federal industry innovation fund** to invest in core natural resource and electrification opportunities,

“When governments use their public infrastructure dollars to prioritize environmentally sustainable, low-carbon construction materials, they’re participating in a growing movement called ‘Buy Clean’—and it’s a crucial component in our economic recovery. Buy Clean also makes sense from an economic perspective. Low-carbon, clean building materials are often produced domestically, which means support for Canadian manufacturing and workers.”

⁹ 60% of spending on Canadian infrastructure is funded by municipalities (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2020).



including batteries, hydrogen, geothermal, activated carbon, and more (Bak & Heaps, 2020).¹⁰ Iron and Earth's Prosperous Transition Plan calls for investments in four priority elements (workforce, business, infrastructure, and environment) to upskill workers, support businesses to pivot to net-zero-compatible industrial activity, and incent climate-friendly economic activity in key sectors (Iron and Earth, 2020).

“Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have an opportunity to build a prosperous transition together, one that is based on a principled, rights-based approach.”

In particular, participants identified EV manufacturing, and especially medium- and heavy-duty zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs), as a sector where Canada could enjoy a comparative advantage for exports, as well as being an engine for job growth. “A robust, domestic manufacturing of EVs/ZEVs including batteries, new fuels, charging stations/fuelling stations is right there for the taking if government, industry and workers work together to make it happen,” wrote one respondent. “We definitely have the existing vehicle manufacturing capacity; we need the political will.” A respondent also cited legislation in Europe that, since 2001, has required all automakers to recapture and disassemble vehicles. The legislation provides “not only environmental benefits, but can assist workers transitioning out of traditional jobs. Auto disassembly could be something situated across all regions of the country, and create tens of thousands of jobs.”

Survey respondents were asked what existing government programs and policies should be scaled up or replicated to further just transition. The two most cited government initiatives overall were carbon pricing¹¹ and the Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities.

Notably, the Task Force started only after the government adopted a policy to phase out the coal industry. For a wider energy transition, one participant underscored that **it would be more effective to have an iterative task force that informs oil and gas phase-out policy**. On carbon pricing, respondents felt that this policy is necessary but not sufficient on its own to tackle climate change, as the market measure does not provide targeted support to disrupted workers and communities. They argued that, in addition to carbon pricing, we must have significant public spending on a range of climate change programs, with just transition as the “overlying principle.” In some cases, respondents felt that many current government programs could be modified or scaled up to better address just transition objectives.

¹⁰ To offset the natural resource losses from battery production (depleted lithium and bitumen for carbon fibre), proceeds from battery sales would be put into a sovereign wealth fund to invest in next opportunities.

¹¹ After the survey and interviews were completed for this report, the federal government announced an increase to the federal carbon pricing system to CAD 170 per tonne by 2030 (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2020).



Several respondents also called for **government to follow through with a Just Transition Act** that would add an equity component to climate legislation targeting emissions. The act could be tied to the recently tabled “Act respecting transparency and accountability in Canada’s efforts to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050” (House of Commons of Canada, 2020). One respondent advocated for the need to **mainstream just transition principles across policy** “to become a reflex action to build it into all of our planning and thinking on industrial transformation.”

Participants argued that government should play a role in shaping the market through industrial policy to create green jobs. Analysis by the Brookfield Institute shows that Canadian efforts on industrial policy have been uncoordinated to date and require a conscious effort to ensure it is inclusive and sustainable (Mendelsohn & Zon, 2021). The lack of a strong industrial policy was cited by respondents as a key reason for Canada lagging far behind Asian and American EV manufacturers, disadvantaging Canadian workers. While purchase subsidies exist for EVs in Canada, some participants pointed out that there is no complementary federal policy to support the increased supply of EVs either in number or availability. Zero-emissions medium and heavy transport was identified as an area where Canadian manufacturers could still become market leaders through strategic industrial policy. Similarly, an interviewee asked, “For batteries: how do we create the most clean and ethical minerals in the world? How do we produce in a low-emissions mining approach, and one that respects human rights?”

Next, participants advocated **expanding existing job retraining and education programs**. For example, the MaRS Data Catalyst was named as a successful program identifying opportunities for young people in climate jobs and low-carbon pathways for employment (MaRS Discovery District, 2020). Green energy programs were also cited, especially **community-owned renewables**. For example, the 20/20 Catalysts program is designed to support Indigenous communities embarking on clean energy projects (Indigenous Clean Energy, 2020a). Indigenous respondents noted that these projects provide spillover benefits to Indigenous communities “such as local food production—to help in places where communities are dependent on fly-in food.”

A number of participants called for **pilot projects at the local level** to showcase what can be done to decarbonize while ensuring no one is left behind. One existing pilot is the Alberta Industrial Heartland Hydrogen Task Force, which aims to set up a hydrogen hub with Indigenous and rural participation, providing jobs in a fossil fuel area (The Transition Accelerator, 2020). Besides regional pilot projects, **test programs targeting groups of workers currently facing severe disruption** in key industries impacted by COVID-19 were proposed. Respondents stressed that these projects should take Indigenous perspectives into account and reduce employment barriers for BIPOC.

The Alberta Narratives Project was cited by a number of participants as a compelling example of what can be achieved through **community-based initiatives for bridge-building**. In the project, Albertans, including oil sands workers, hosted “Narrative Workshops” to voice their concerns around the energy transition. The privately funded project was seen as a model to be replicated in other provinces (Alberta Narratives Project, 2020). Documenting case studies can



also be useful to learn best practices from other regions and identify otherwise unanticipated impacts. For example, the Labour Education Centre carried out four case studies documenting just transition programs for workers affected by coal phase-outs in Canada and Australia, identifying seven categories of assistance needed for workers.¹²

Other government programs and policies mentioned by respondents included: Employment Insurance and social security programs, including extending or implementing a permanent version of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB); better industry regulation, such as the ban on single-use plastics that links to circular economy-related jobs; and using public procurement at all levels of government to drive the market for green tech. Municipalities purchasing ZEVs for public transit was a popular example of the latter. Respondents also advocated an **end to fossil fuel subsidies**, which unfairly disadvantage green technologies and undermine Canada's policies to reduce carbon emissions. Fossil fuel subsidy reform was seen as key to both reducing unfair market distortions and helping to finance the transition. Many respondents expressed the need to continue strengthening Indigenous rights, with many referencing the UNDRIP.

3.2.2 Future Work by Civil Society Groups

This section identifies future work that could be completed to further progress on a just transition in Canada.

3.2.2.1 TYPES OF FUTURE WORK

In the future, participants would like to see **more research on the potential for green job creation**, as well as better tracking of employment to gain insights into skills gaps, labour shortages, and the types of job transitions that are most successful. Regarding advocacy programs, participants would like to see more unified messaging and a change in tone to solution-focused communication to better garner taxpayer support.

“The moment is now to illuminate pathways for low-carbon employment.”

When asked what avenues can best connect organizations working on a just transition to avoid siloed work and ensure a coordinated approach, **the most cited program categories were joint projects, workshops and conferences, and communities of practice**. Participants were highly interested in better knowledge-sharing between organizations. One recommendation was a centralized information platform, with one organization or online hub serving as a secretariat for individuals and NGOs to stay up-to-date on everything happening in the just transition space.

¹² See: https://www.laboureducation.org/greener_future_for_workers



Lastly, participants spoke of the potential for **global, and especially North–South, collaboration and sharing of successes**. For example, the Three Island Energy Initiative links Indigenous communities in Canada with Indigenous, island, coastal, and off-grid communities across the world to accelerate the development of microgrids (Indigenous Clean Energy, 2020b). “This is not just a Canadian issue – it’s a global issue,” said one interviewee. “One of the main things we can do is to share Canadian stories worldwide.”

3.2.2.2 EVOLVING WAYS OF WORKING AND DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to continuing to engage civil society groups, respondents identified key types of groups that need to be brought into just transition conversations. Respondents noted that **journalists and academics play critical roles in terms of research, advocacy, and audience reach**. Many environmental, social, and Indigenous groups cited the importance of including BIPOC voices. As one participant noted, “many urban BIPOC communities have effective models for community engagement and development but are disconnected from resources and platforms to be leaders in the transition.” Indigenous communities are already successful partners in many clean energy projects, yet participants felt the success of these projects was underreported. “I fail to understand why this good news story [...] isn’t popular knowledge,” said one interviewee. “[Indigenous communities are] producing almost a fifth of all Canadian electricity.”

Community associations, municipal governments, and financial institutions were also mentioned as groups that need to be better engaged with. One role for financial institutions, complementary to their increased investment in green sectors, could be to help businesses adopt climate risk assessment methods. One recommendation was for Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA Canada) to create a more robust risk assessment framework for Canadian business sectors and train their constituents to articulate it through auditing processes.

Opinions differed over to what extent the civil society activities on just transition should further involve industry associations and private firms. The involvement of major oil and gas companies was controversial. Some organizations, including some labour groups, expressed frustration and skepticism at whether working with industry would be fruitful or criticized large energy companies for not acting in the public interest. Others argued progress toward a just transition could not be made without their involvement, as per the principle of tripartism (ILO, 2020b), and without leveraging their considerable resources (including human capital). For example, one participant stated, “Industry talks to government and government talks to industry... Discussions are going to happen anyway, so the best move forward [for labour] is to engage with industries and move these discussions into a tripartite setting.”

Some participants argued that industry alone would not coordinate systemic change, as the shareholder model incentivizes short-term thinking. Conversely, government decision making is a “recipe for incremental change,” opined one interviewee, where rapid transformation is needed. That said, working with “green industry” may have potential. Canadian green tech companies such as Hydrogenics, Ballard, and Corvus were named as potential industry partners, and Project



Arrow, led by the Automated Parts Manufacturer's Association, was cited as an example of an industry association-led just transition project. There is potentially a strong role for independent non-profits to use their expertise to propose strategies and encourage the development of and investment in new technology.

Religious leaders, artists and cultural leaders, and the public health sector also came up as groups with the power to shape public opinion that have not been sufficiently engaged. Religious leaders, especially, appear to be an untapped opportunity, as religious organizations already have information networks in place to share knowledge and advocacy.



4.0 Research Takeaways

This research project gathered a set of views among various types of civil society groups on what a just transition to a low-carbon economy should look like in Canada and what is needed to achieve it. The transition to net-zero by 2050 will be spurred by government policies, but also by market trends that will heavily affect high-carbon sectors and by technological innovations. The impacts will be disruptive, with some workers, communities, and businesses experiencing significantly more impacts than others. There are also many other factors impacting jobs, livelihoods, and economies, including ongoing digitalization and the precariousness of work. Ultimately, the transition to net-zero is occurring within the context of other trends and forces.

4.1 Consensus on Just Transition Approaches

Our research found that there is broad consensus among respondents that a just transition in Canada must take place through processes of social dialogue and should result in affected workers having opportunities for decent work that are consistent with ILO guidelines. We also heard that equity for marginalized communities must be centred in just transition efforts, particularly as Canada recovers from COVID-19. Though not cited by all respondents, principles of international solidarity also featured strongly with an acknowledgement that transition efforts in Canada should endeavour to do no harm to workers and communities in the Global South.

4.2 The Role of Government

It was generally agreed by respondents that much more scaled-up action and concrete just transition policies and investments are needed by governments, with tripartite processes and social dialogue at their heart. At a minimum, we heard that the federal government should:

- Implement a Just Transition Act.
- Implement and fund all recommendations from the Task Force for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities.
- Ensure that just transition principles are mainstreamed in the implementation of federal climate policy.
- Develop green industrial policy to expand prospects for green jobs
- End fossil fuel subsidies.
- Provide greater mandates and funding for municipalities to engage in a just transition, including for sustainable infrastructure projects that can provide good jobs to impacted workers.
- Encourage or convene provincial/territorial governments to set stronger accountability and transparency rules for electric utilities to enable partnerships with community-based initiatives and Indigenous governing bodies.



- Support Indigenous co-ownership of just transition-related projects.¹³

Given the COVID-19 recovery context, we also heard the need for governments to provide a stronger social safety net and approach all just transition policy decisions through an equity lens. When developing just transition policy, the disparate impacts of historical policy and social marginalization on various communities (BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, etc.), as well as the varying needs of different groups (youth, people with disabilities, language minorities, etc.), must be taken into account, and relevant groups must be engaged.¹⁴

4.3 Civil Society Pathways to Further a Just Transition

Our research shows that civil society groups are ready and willing to build support for a just transition to complement official tripartite processes. We heard that there is significant potential for civil society groups and NGOs to support just transition-related projects through training, capacity building, networking, and public awareness-building. To do so, **just transition-related work by civil society groups requires more financial support from both governments and private funders**. We heard from numerous respondents that organizations working in the just transition space have already demonstrated success with programs that could be scaled up, but some face significant financial capacity gaps. Supporting these organizations and their existing engagement and research activities will help bring short-term wins that can be replicated, accelerating momentum toward a just transition.

Table 1 lists key actions to further a just transition that were mentioned by respondents that **civil society groups could move forward** and highlights potential groups to carry them out. We list these in order of the number of times the action was mentioned by respondents, but this should *not* be interpreted as a ranking of priority, given the open-ended nature of our survey questions. Rather, all of the key actions will be important to embark on in order to increase the momentum on a just transition in Canada.

¹³ Suggested pathways to co-ownership named by our respondents included establishing targets for Indigenous involvement in projects, set-asides from electric utilities for community-owned power, and profit-sharing partnerships between power producers and Indigenous governments and communities. Many of these can be enabled through complementary government policies.

¹⁴ This would be above and beyond the necessity for tripartite social dialogue that is a core tenet of a just transition.

**Table 1.** Actions for civil society groups to further a just transition in Canada

Action or activity	Potential actors from civil society	Number of mentions by respondents
<p>Alongside pushing for official tripartite processes, engage with groups that need to be better included in dialogues. Civil society-led just transition research and projects can engage both tripartite and non-tripartite actors such as community associations, labour organizations, municipal governments, financial institutions, Indigenous organizations, renewable power and green tech companies and industry associations, public health organizations, community and faith-based organizations, Global South-based organizations, and more.</p>	<p>Research groups, environmental groups, labour, academics, social and grassroots/local, Indigenous groups</p>	<p>Very high</p>
<p>Research on the potential for green job creation, including on skills gaps, viable pathways to minimize employment gaps, potential comparative advantages in green sectors in Canada, impacts on developing countries of Canadian just transition policies, linkages between the care economy and a just transition, and employment barriers for youth and marginalized groups.</p>	<p>Research groups, environmental and social groups, academics, labour, Indigenous groups</p>	<p>Very high</p>
<p>Support Indigenous co-ownership of just transition-related projects, moving beyond tokenism. Advocacy, research, and partnerships are some ways that civil society groups can support a just transition.</p>	<p>Indigenous organizations to lead, support from other civil society organizations</p>	<p>Very high</p>
<p>Build leadership skills to further a just transition at the community level through capacity building. For just transition programs to be successful, community organizers must have the leadership skills to build local partnerships and mobilize people in affected communities.</p>	<p>Training-focused civil society groups, social, grassroots/local groups, labour, Indigenous groups</p>	<p>Very high</p>



Action or activity	Potential actors from civil society	Number of mentions by respondents
<p>Train and upskill workers, including displaced workers, marginalized workers, and youth entering the job market, to fill the jobs of tomorrow. This should be a collaborative tripartite effort with government, the private sector, and workers.</p>	<p>Labour, educational institutions, training-focused civil society groups</p>	<p>Very high</p>
<p>Raise public awareness via solution-focused communications by communicating lessons from successes and failures of just transitions in other countries and in pilot phases in Canadian communities/sectors.</p>	<p>Research groups, journalists, academics, labour, environmental groups, Indigenous groups</p>	<p>High</p>
<p>Develop just transition network resources, such as regular events or a conference, a community of practice, or an online hub to facilitate knowledge-sharing either within Canada or with international allies.</p>	<p>Research groups, labour, environmental groups, with involvement of other groups</p>	<p>High</p>
<p>Create a constituency for just transition policies. Many groups have untapped resources that could be leveraged, as well as social capital to strengthen advocacy activities and increase public buy-in for programs and policies.</p>	<p>Research groups, labour, journalists, academics, public health, artists and cultural leaders, religious leaders</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Develop strategies to address the inhibiting role that cultural and occupational identities play in a just transition, for example, through participatory projects. A strong occupational identity may inhibit career change, as transitions that conflict with one's identity can cause emotional distress or mental health impacts beyond the material consequences of the disruption.</p>	<p>Research groups, academia, grassroots/ community groups, labour</p>	<p>Medium</p>



5.0 Concluding Remarks

A just transition in Canada requires the integration of tripartite processes and social dialogue to further policy progress and program implementation that will support workers and communities affected by the low-carbon transition. However, there is a wider network of knowledge and potential support that can be tapped into to increase policy momentum on a just transition, build public support, and assist official tripartite actors with implementation.

This research illustrates the diverse expertise on a just transition held among civil society groups and the potential for such groups to help advance policy discussions, implement just transition-related projects (including research, training, and communications), and work collaboratively on solutions. To do so effectively, more support is needed from government and private funders to further just transition projects by actors already working in the space. There is significant potential for respondents to develop new partnerships and collaborations among each other to pool resources, replicate successful projects, and combine advocacy efforts to achieve just transition policy wins. We hope that the results from this research inspire civil society groups in Canada to keep working on just transition projects and continue to advocate for just transition implementation by policy-makers in innovative ways.

Lastly, the research underscored that much more attention is needed from government to mainstream a just transition in federal policy and to further social dialogue, including by implementing a Just Transition Act and ensuring a green and just recovery from COVID-19. We urge government to recognize the vital roles that civil society groups are playing in supporting a just transition and to leverage partnerships and resources so that successful work can be replicated and scaled up to support the tripartite efforts and social dialogue necessary for a just transition to be successful.



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Annex A. Survey

Introduction

IISD is conducting a small scoping study to describe, compare, and contrast different approaches and objectives among groups working on just transition; identify synergies; and locate gaps in terms of what is needed to support workers and achieve just transition objectives in Canada. The project aims to leverage existing momentum on a just transition among Canadian labour groups and civil society organizations to identify common goals and opportunities for collaboration and increased synergy among groups.

The research process is being guided by Blue Green Canada and Green Economy Network. Results from this survey will feed into a summary report. The report will be disseminated directly to project participants and will be used as the basis for a webinar to discuss research findings.

Participation

Your name:

Your email:

What organization do you belong to?

Would you like to remain anonymous? (Please note: If IISD is interested in attributing specific quotes or answers by organizations in the summary report, we will reach out to you for consent first.)

1. Yes, you can include my organization's name in the List of Respondents in the summary report
2. No, I prefer to remain anonymous

Approach and Framing

While there is an internationally recognized clear definition of the principles of the term “just transition” as developed by the labour movement (see [ILO guidelines](#)), we recognize that different groups in Canada approach their work on the issue in different ways—and that a determination of what is “just” can differ with different geographical, cultural, and community considerations.

1. What do you see as the core tenets of a just transition to a low-carbon economy?



2. How does your organization approach a / the just transition to a low-carbon economy? What does achieving a just energy transition in Canada mean to your organization? (select all that apply)
 - a. Supporting workers in high-carbon sectors and their communities through the transition to a low-carbon economy and minimizing negative impacts
 - b. Equitable distribution of benefits and burdens of the transition to a low-carbon economy across society
 - c. Ensuring decision-making for a just transition occurs through a tripartite process (unions and workers' organizations, employers' organizations, and government at all levels including federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous)
 - d. Ensuring social dialogue processes for transition are inclusive of non-tripartite groups (e.g., civil society, Indigenous NGOs, non-unionized workers, broader community members, etc.)
 - e. Engaging with government, labour, and industry for decision-making on broader energy transition policy
 - f. Ensuring energy consumers are not negatively impacted by transition policies
 - g. Ensuring the low-carbon transition furthers broader equity and inclusiveness goals (including gender, Indigenous rights, migrant rights, etc.)
 - h. Other (specify)
3. What do you see as the most important concrete outcomes of a just transition in Canada? List up to 3.

Steps to a Just Transition

Our economic reality and the policy landscape have shifted rapidly in the past six months because of the pandemic and the growth of the global anti-racist movement calling for an end to systemic racism. The following questions are meant to gauge your organization's perspective on just transition in the current context (including calls for a just and green recovery).

4. What would you identify as the top obstacles (including technical or political gaps) to ensuring a just transition in Canada? List up to 3.
5. What would you identify as the top opportunities to further momentum for a just transition in Canada? List up to 3.
6. What policies need to be put in place in the short term for a just transition to be effective, and who would enact/implement them? List up to 3.
7. Are there existing government programs or policies in Canada to support a just transition that you think could be scaled up or replicated?



Role of Organizations

8. How do you perceive the role of your organization in furthering a just transition in Canada? (select your top 3 answers)
 - a. Research
 - b. Public awareness and education
 - c. Government, industry, or worker relations
 - d. Network-building
 - e. Grassroots-level community organization and development
 - f. Skills and retraining
 - g. Member-based advocacy
 - h. Other (specify)
9. What do you see as your organization's unique contribution(s) or strategies to further progress on a just transition?
10. If your organization is actively working on just transition initiatives, what are the top 1–3 projects or areas of work that you are focused on for the coming year?
11. What organizations do you see as key “champions” of a just transition in Canada and why? List up to 3.
12. Outside of the tripartite process (unions and workers' organizations, employers' organizations, and government), how do you perceive the role of other stakeholder groups in furthering the momentum for a just transition and social dialogue? Are there key groups that could assist in furthering just transitions that are not currently engaged?
13. What avenues can best connect organizations to avoid siloed work and ensure a coordinated approach to a just transition? (select up to two)
 - a. Workshops and conferences
 - b. Communities of practice
 - c. Informal collaborative network (e.g., listserv)
 - d. Virtual informational events (i.e., webinars)
 - e. Joint projects
 - f. Other (specify)
14. What types of projects (research, communications, events, etc.) would you like to see on just transition in Canada that are not currently being done?
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?



Annex B. Interview script

1. While there is an internationally recognized definition of “just transition” from the labour movement (see International Labour Organization [guidelines](#)), we are documenting how different groups approach their work on the issue in Canada. With that in mind, what does achieving a just transition to a low-carbon economy in Canada mean to your organization?
2. What does your organization consider the most important concrete outcomes of a just transition to a low-carbon economy?
3. What are your organization’s specific goals for achieving a just transition? What do you see as your organization’s specific strategies and contribution(s) to a just transition coming into being?
4. What would you identify as the top obstacles (including technical or political gaps) to ensuring a just transition? How can your organization play a role in closing these gaps?
5. What would you identify as the top opportunities to further momentum for just transition in Canada? How can your organization leverage these opportunities?
6. What key organizations do you see as the “champions” of just transition in Canada, and why?
7. What other types of groups or organizations need to be reached out to and involved, and what could be their respective contributions?
8. What types of projects (research, communications, events, ways to connect organizations, etc.) would you like to see on just transition in Canada that are not currently being done?



Annex C. Respondents

Table C1. Interviewed organizations

Organization	Type
Broadbent Institute	Social
Clean Energy Canada	Environmental
Climate Action Network Canada	Environmental
Climate Caucus	Environmental
Corporate Knights	Other
CUPE	Organized Labour
Indigenous Clean Energy	Indigenous
Transition Accelerator	Other
UNIFOR	Organized Labour
Youth Climate Lab	Other

Table C2. Surveyed organizations

Organization	Type
350.org	Environmental
Anonymous*	Social
Anonymous	Indigenous
Anonymous	Other
BC Federation of Labour	Organized Labour
Blue Green Canada	Other
Canada Council for the Arts	Social
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives	Social
Cascade Institute	Other
Centre for Future Work	Social
Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources	Indigenous



Organization	Type
Centre Oblat - A Voice for Justice	Social
Citizens for Public Justice	Social
Climate Legacy	Environmental
Climate Reality Project Canada	Environmental
Community Foundations of Canada	Social
Creating Healthy and Sustainable Environments (CHASE)	Social
Environment Network, Anglican Diocese of NS & PEI	Other
Environmental Defence	Environmental
Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)	Organized Labour
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW Canada)	Organized Labour
International Centre of Art for Social Change (ICASC)	Social
Iron & Earth	Social
Labour Education Centre	Social
Manitoba Metis Federation	Indigenous
Métis National Council	Indigenous
MiningWatch Canada	Social
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour	Organized Labour
Pembina Institute	Environmental
Shift: Action for Pension Wealth & Planet Health	Environmental
Smart Prosperity Institute	Environmental
Student Energy	Other
Tamarack Institute	Social
The Atmospheric Fund and Low Carbon Cities Canada	Environmental
The Leap	Other
United Steelworkers	Organized Labour
Waterloo Global Science Initiative	Other
West Kootenay EcoSociety	Environmental

*Three organizations requested their participation and answers from the survey to remain anonymous.

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