

POLICY BRIEF

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Foreign Policy and the Just Transition

Dimensions. Challenges. Opportunities.

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Executive Summary

- For the global community, transitioning to a more sustainable energy system is a must. But change requires challenging existing norms, and social and economic institutions. Some will be affected or will benefit more than others. A just transition acknowledges that **the social, environmental and economic aspects matter**, and are a crucial component of the energy transition.
- The decarbonisation of economies worldwide requires a managed structural transition. Without active guidance, structural change in unregulated market economies is likely to cause and exacerbate inequalities. The resulting socio-economic inequalities might further contribute to the current surge in populism, and to the political exploitation of climate change as an identity issue (“them against us”). Thus, **the guiding principle for a structural transition to a low-carbon economy must be a just transition**.
- Foreign policy will play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. It can foster international dialogue and bring stakeholders with (real or apparent) antagonistic interests to the table. It can help set

a policy agenda that shares the benefits of change more equally. **As the main driver of multilateralism, foreign policy can play a key role in shaping international energy and climate policy.** It has the potential to facilitate global decarbonisation through energy and climate diplomacy. Foreign policy is therefore very well equipped to initiate, coordinate and streamline policies around a just transition, thus becoming a vehicle for sustainable development and facilitating the implementation of just economic and social policies.

- This Policy Brief builds a bridge between foreign policy and the underlying economic and social changes which arise as part of the challenges of the energy transition. It provides the reader with a set of clear policy recommendations for the foreign policy community. Measures proposed here include, firstly, **the empowerment of foreign policy as an actor of change in the just transition discourse** through the emphasis on multilateralist approaches, efficient governance structures and smart regulation. Secondly, by analysing existing practices and identifying possible common approaches to a successful and fair energy transition, foreign policy can help **stabilise and reinforce institutional structures**. Thirdly, foreign policy can help develop a **convincing narrative for the debate** on a just energy transition to effectively mainstream policy measures, tools and good practices.

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