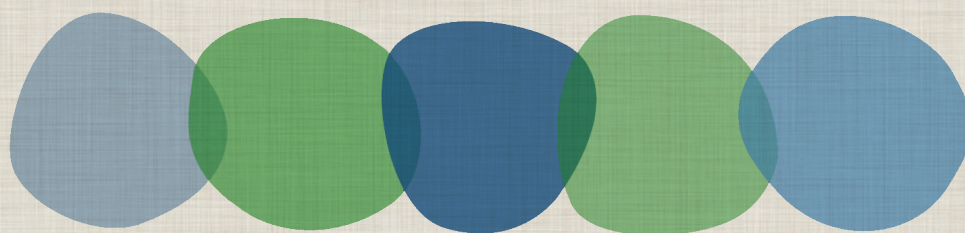


JUST TRANSITION AND HUMAN RIGHTS



VIEWS OF FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES



Franciscans International
A voice at the United Nations



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

Further contact:

Budi Tjahjono

Franciscans International

b.tjahjono@franciscansinternational.org

Elena Cedillo

Lutheran World Federation

elena.cedillo@lutheranworld.org

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change poses profound threats to ecosystems, economies, and human rights, demanding urgent and equitable action. In order to foster a deeper understanding of the challenges ahead, Franciscans International (FI) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) conducted this study to explore how faith-based communities perceive and engage with the ethical dimensions of climate change, particularly the concept of a “Just Transition” toward a low-carbon economy.

Faith-based organizations and communities, founded on values of justice, dignity, and human rights, have deep roots in the communities affected by climate change and among those disproportionately impacted, in particular Indigenous Peoples, women, children, and people living in poverty. As such, they are in a unique position to advocate for climate and environmental justice.

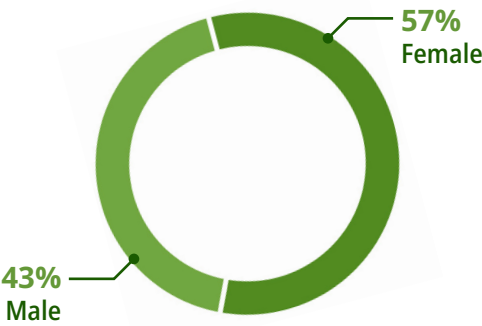
The study examines how these communities can help safeguard human rights during the shift away from a dependency fossil fuel and extractivism, promoting inclusive and sustainable solutions. It also addresses ethical challenges in climate action, such as the risks of embracing “false solutions” like carbon trading and geoengineering that may worsen inequality. By highlighting the importance of participation, the study underscores the need for marginalized voices to be actively involved in shaping climate decisions at all levels. Ultimately, it seeks to identify barriers to a Just Transition and how faith-based organizations can help overcome them, ensuring that effective climate responses are guided by compassion, equity, and respect for both people and the planet.



METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a combination of desk research, an online survey, and two in-depth interviews. The survey, distributed in August 2025, received 35 responses representing five world regions:

- 39% Western Europe and other States
- 23% Africa
- 21% Asia-Pacific Group
- 14% Latin America and the Caribbean
- 3% Identifying as international



Faith affiliation among respondents was predominantly Christian, as well as Bahá'í, Buddhist, and a member of the Brahma Kumaris. Two did not specify a religious affiliation. Despite efforts to reflect diverse international and interfaith perspectives, the survey was somewhat skewed toward Christian viewpoints. Future research could benefit from broader representation to deepen insights on Just Transition and human rights.



KEY FINDINGS

- Faith-based communities (FBCs) primarily associate a Just Transition with a transformation grounded in core ethical principles such as justice, equity, human dignity, and the protection of rights, emphasizing that no individual, community, or country should be left behind. Just Transition is therefore described not only as a technical shift in energy systems but as a holistic process that promotes social justice, inclusivity, non-discrimination, and ecological harmony. However, achieving this vision is hindered by structural global inequalities, a reluctance of historically high greenhouse gases emitting countries to take responsibility for this legacy, and a lack of shared vision among different stakeholders, as explained below.
- FBCs identify several key barriers to achieving a Just Transition. One of the concerns is the lack of accountability and transparency in the planning, implementation, and outcomes of transition-related projects such as wind or solar farms and critical mineral extraction. These initiatives are often primarily profit-driven rather than by the needs and rights of vulnerable communities. Consequently, mechanisms to ensure the meaningful participation of affected groups are weak or absent, leading to their exclusion from decision-making processes. Additionally, discussions around the Just Transition frequently focus on technical solutions while overlooking local contexts and realities as well as its ethical dimensions. This narrow framing risks reinforcing existing injustices and systemic inequalities, especially for women, young people, Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized groups by excluding them from shaping a Just Transition.
- A wide range of human rights are perceived to be at risk during the transition to a low-carbon economy, including environmental, economic, social, and procedural dimensions:
 - The right to life, health, food, water, sanitation, and a healthy environment are seen as especially vulnerable.
 - There are deep concerns about potential environmental degradation and biodiversity loss during this transition.
 - Economic and social security rights, including the right to work are also under threat, as the transition may disrupt employment and livelihoods.
 - There are concerns over the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the meaningful participation in decision-making processes, access to information, and protection of human rights and environmental defenders.
 - Vulnerable populations, including those living in poverty, communities in developing countries, women, and persons with disabilities are identified as being at risk.

- FBCs recognize that climate action aimed at achieving a Just Transition can take many forms, ranging from technological or market-based solutions to community-centred initiatives. Below is a summary of the opinions gathered during the study on geoengineering, carbon trading, renewable energy, net zero, and nature-based solutions:



Geoengineering viewed as a deeply concerning, unethical, and false solution that relies on unproven technologies, diverts attention away from addressing the root causes of the climate crisis, and reinforces power imbalances by enabling wealthy countries to continue polluting. FBCs are calling for the precautionary principle to be applied and for real, equitable climate solutions to be prioritised over risky and unproven technological fixes.



Carbon trading is generally criticized as a mechanism that allows major emitters to evade genuine greenhouse gas reductions and substantive climate action. This mechanism deepens global inequalities and fails to reduce emissions at their source. While it is considered as potentially useful under conditions of strict transparency and regulation, the prevailing opinion is that carbon trading primarily enables a form of greenwashing rather than as a genuine climate solution.



Renewable energy is recognized as a vital part of the Just Transition and core pillar for phasing out fossil fuel, offering environmental and economic benefits, new job opportunities, and a concrete pathway to a low-carbon future. Solar and wind energy in particular are considered viable and promising solutions. However, it is important to emphasize that the transition to renewable energy must be

inclusive and community-centered, ensuring affordability, land rights, decent working conditions, and environmental protections. This is also seen as an opportunity to democratize access to energy. A holistic approach is required to ensure that renewable energy is socially just, economically sustainable, and adapted to local contexts.



Net zero is widely seen as an important and pragmatic goal; however, among respondents, it was often criticized for being misused to justify continued emissions through offsets and accounting loopholes. To ensure a Just Transition, the focus must be on substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions, advancing community-centred renewable energy strategies, and establishing robust accountability mechanisms. Without these conditions, net zero becomes another form of greenwashing that perpetuates the same economic and development system which has led to the climate crisis in the first place. A Just Transition must not neglect social, environmental, and justice dimensions.



Nature-based solutions (NBS) are considered as sustainable and effective approaches to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing resilience, and protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, particularly when they are community-driven and respect human rights. They offer significant ecological, social, and economic benefits by conserving and restoring ecosystems and supporting livelihoods. However, the success of NBS depends on local ownership, equitable participation – particularly of Indigenous Peoples, protection of human rights, and government support through financial resources, technology, and capacity building. Crucially, NBS must complement rather than substitute real greenhouse gas emission reductions.

- Fundamentally, a Just Transition is defined by FBCs as a systemic and inclusive shift from a high-carbon, environmentally damaging economy to a low-carbon and sustainable one. It implies a real transformation of our economies and societies based on justice and equity for all.

This transformation must:

- Protect the human rights and dignity of all people, ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable are heard, and guaranteeing meaningful participation in decision-making processes.
- Promote decent work and reduce inequalities: Create fair employment opportunities while addressing poverty and social disparities.
- Aim to create decent work opportunities while reducing inequalities and poverty.
- Ensure that no one is left behind, prioritizing support for the most vulnerable workers, women, Indigenous Peoples, and those disproportionately affected by climate change.
- Embrace integral ecology, recognize and respect the interconnectedness of all creatures, and acknowledge the rights of nature.
- Adopt a decolonized approach and be deeply rooted in local wisdom, spirituality, and Indigenous knowledge systems.

The above responses indicate that, although FBCs understand the Just Transition as a broader transformation of society and the economy based on ethical principles, community well-being, and ecological harmony, the realization of this vision is still hindered by significant structural, political, and economic barriers.

Persistent global inequalities, limited accountability in transition-related initiatives, inadequate participation of affected communities, and the continued prioritization of profit-centered capitalism, are all factors that prevent a just transformation model. Meanwhile, groups such as Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, workers, and those on the frontlines of climate impacts continue to face risks to their rights and livelihoods.

The following recommendations are intended to contribute constructively to discussions about shaping a Just Transition as a just transformation, and to help us develop concrete policies and action plans that uphold human rights and human dignity.



FOR THE EARTH IS
JUSTICE FOR THE POOR
FRANCISCANS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

CARE
FOR
OUR
COMMON
HOME

MAKE POLLUTERS
PAY

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

Transitioning toward a sustainable economic system that protects human rights and human dignity

- Just Transition is a transition toward a sustainable economic system where the well-being of people and the planet is central. It requires reimagining the dominant capitalist model, which drives relentless extraction and exploitation. This system must give way to an economy rooted in ecological sustainability, social equity, and collective care. Climate action must be embedded within a framework that values human dignity, community resilience, and the rights of nature, rather than its commodification.
- Just Transition is a transformation and shift that calls for systemic change – moving from growth-driven metrics to holistic indicators of well-being, redistributing power and resources, and fostering democratic participation in economic decision-making. Only by challenging the structural foundations of profit-centered capitalism can we build a regenerative economy that serves both humanity and the earth.
- Just Transition is a transition toward climate actions that must be rooted in a robust ethical framework that prioritizes justice, fairness, and equity for all – especially for those who are disproportionately affected by the shift to a low-carbon economy. Central to this transition must be an unwavering commitment to human dignity and human rights for all, and the guarantee of a healthy environment for present and future generations.



Recommendation 2:

Transition toward a defossilized economy

- Just Transition is a transition toward the phase out of fossil fuels while guaranteeing access to affordable and sustainable energy for all. This process must include the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies, through a deliberate and transparent approach that is participatory and just. Redirecting these subsidies toward climate finance and social welfare initiatives can help mitigate adverse impacts on vulnerable populations and accelerate the shift to clean energy.
- Just Transition should ensure the democratization of access to renewable energy. This means moving beyond centralized, profit-driven energy systems toward inclusive models that empower communities – especially those historically marginalized – to produce, manage, and benefit from clean energy. Policies must prioritize decentralized renewable infrastructure, such as community-owned solar and wind projects. They should also provide financial and technical support to low-income households and rural areas. By reimagining energy planning and governance, it is possible to dismantle energy poverty, foster local resilience, and ensure that the shift to renewables uplifts all segments of society – not just the affluent or urban.
- Just Transition should include the imperative of defossilizing our economy, as a critical step in the transformation toward a just society. This must be pursued in alignment with existing international human rights obligations. Governments and institutions should accelerate fossil fuel phase-out through inclusive and transparent multilateral negotiations that address climate change, tax justice, plastic pollution, and corporate accountability. These negotiations must center the voices of affected communities and prioritize equity, ensuring that the burdens and benefits of transition are fairly distributed. By embedding defossilization within broader systemic reforms, we can catalyze a global shift toward sustainability that honors human rights, protects nature, and builds a resilient future for all.
- Just Transition should ensure the defossilizing of the knowledge system by rejecting the fossil fuel industry's influence, research, policy and media. It must elevate Indigenous wisdom, feminist perspectives, labor insights, and youth-led innovation to challenge extractive paradigms, promote alternatives, and foster climate justice.



Recommendation 3:

Ensuring inclusive and right-based participation and decision-making processes

- Just Transition is a transition toward inclusive, participatory processes where communities are not only protected but empowered as fellow decision-makers. Marginalized groups, including women, Indigenous Peoples, youth, children, and workers at every stage of decision-making processes. They are not only disproportionately affected by climate change and economic shifts but also hold important knowledge and perspectives that can shape equitable and sustainable solutions. A participatory approach that ensures all voices are heard, respected, and reflected in policy drafting and implementation strengthens and builds trust in transition processes.
- Just transition is a transition that engages communities early and continuously, from policy design to implementation, and establishing clear mechanisms for accountability. The voices of Indigenous Peoples, frontline communities, and workers in carbon-intensive sectors must be centered – not merely consulted – with real decision-making power. Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) must be a non-negotiable standard for any initiative impacting Indigenous lands.
- Just transition should ensure an informed transition. Communities must be equipped with the knowledge and tools to understand the implications, opportunities, and responsibilities created by the Just Transition. This requires capacity-building initiatives – such as public education campaigns, local workshops, and accessible resources – that explain technical processes into understandable concepts and foster climate literacy. Engaging communities in co-designing these programs ensures relevance and accessibility, while empowering them to take active roles in shaping their futures. When people understand the transition, they are more likely to support and sustain it.
- Just transition should consider the needs of older workers, particularly those in advanced working age. Many have spent decades in carbon-intensive industries and face significant barriers to re-entry if their roles are phased out. Just Transition policies should employ employment pathways suited to their experience and capacities. Recognizing their experience and supporting their adaptation not only upholds social justice but can also leverages their institutional knowledge to guide younger generations through the transition.

Recommendation 4:

Transitioning toward accountable governance

- **Just Transition is a transition toward climate governance that is transparent, inclusive, and rooted in democratic participation.** This demands that climate policies and projects actively involve all stakeholders – especially those most affected – at local, national, and international levels.
- **Just Transition should ensure the accountability of private sectors for their impacts on climate and environment.** Businesses and other private sector actors should identify, prevent, and remedy environmental harm and human rights violations, particularly in regions most vulnerable to climate impacts and exploitation. It is imperative to establish robust business accountability frameworks that encompass transnational value, production, and supply chains. These frameworks must mandate comprehensive environmental and human rights due diligence, and seek to strengthen and expand on existing internationally recognized standards such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- **Just Transition should ensure sustainable peace and prevent resource-related conflicts.** The current exploitation of resources, in particular critical minerals, for the so-called sustainable energy transition has triggered conflicts in resource rich regions, especially Indigenous territories. Rights-based governance must guide the development of transition supply chains, ensuring transparency, community consent, and environmental stewardship. By embedding justice and a right-based approach into the sourcing of critical minerals and renewable infrastructure, it is possible to avoid replicating extractive models that fuel displacement and violence. Building and transforming supply chains to respect human rights and ecological limits will not only stabilize regions but also strengthen the legitimacy and durability of the global climate transition.
- **Just Transition should put global solidarity at the center of climate action.** By putting the focus only on energy transition, the current multilateral negotiation falls short by overlooking other critical dimensions of justice, such as human rights – in particular Indigenous and labor rights, the right of nature, social equity, and intergenerational dimensions. International cooperation must prioritize not only decarbonization but also the socio-economic restructuring necessary to leave no one behind.
- **Just Transition must confront and rectify systemic injustices** revealed by the climate crisis, addressing intersections of race, gender, colonialism, and historical power imbalances.
- **Just Transition should include financial justice as a cornerstone of climate resilience.** Climate-vulnerable countries continue to bear the brunt of environmental degradation while grappling with unsustainable debt burdens. Supporting debt restructuring and cancellation is essential to create fiscal space for climate adaptation and social investment. Simultaneously, progressive taxation – both domestically and through multilateral frameworks – should be implemented to ensure that major polluters contribute proportionately to the cost of climate mitigation. This “polluter pays” principle reinforces accountability and redistributes resources toward those most affected.





Recommendation 5:

Enhancing global solidarity toward Just Transformation

- Just Transition should ensure the protection of our common home – including the environment, biodiversity, ecosystems, livelihoods, and the rights of future generations. Climate action must be rooted in a deep ethical commitment to sustainability and justice. This means recognizing the interconnectedness of ecological health and human well-being, and prioritizing policies that restore biodiversity, safeguard natural resources, and promote regenerative practices. Just Transition must uphold the principle of intergenerational equity, ensuring that today's decisions do not compromise the ability of future generations to thrive.
- Just Transition must be a transition that embrace a holistic and integral ecology, recognizing the intrinsic value, interconnectedness, and rights of nature.

Recommendation 6:

Just Transition that protects human rights and environmental defenders

- Just Transition must ensure and guarantee the safeguard of human rights defenders and ensure a safe, inclusive civic space where their voices and actions are protected and valued. These individuals and groups play a vital role in advocating for environmental justice, exposing harmful practices, and championing the rights of marginalized communities. Their contributions are essential to shaping equitable climate policies and holding institutions and private actors accountable.
- Supporting their work through funding, capacity-building, and participatory platforms strengthens democratic engagement and ensures that the transition to a sustainable future is grounded in justice, transparency, and human rights.



Franciscans International

A voice at the United Nations

Geneva

37-39 rue de Vermont • P.O. Box 104 • CH-1211 Geneva 20 • Switzerland

+41 22 779 4010 • geneva@franciscansinternational.org

New York

246 East 46th Street Apt. #1F • New York, NY, 10017-2937 • United States

+1 (917) 675 1075 • newyork@franciscansinternational.org

www.franciscansinternational.org



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

Chemin du Pavillion 2 • 1218 • Geneva • Switzerland

+41 22 781 6000 • info@lutheranworld.org

www.lutheranworld.org