

A Just Energy Transition

Getting Decarbonisation Right in a Time of Crisis

OVERVIEW

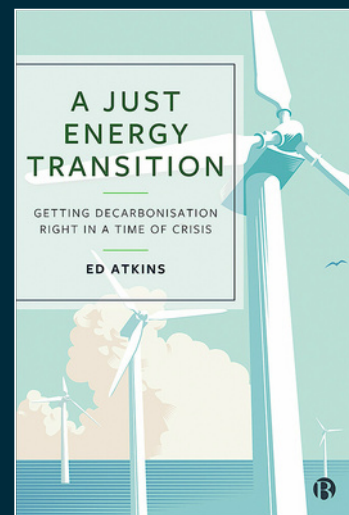
Rising energy prices in the UK have revealed the importance of energy transitions. The prevalence of gas central heating in 78 per cent of UK households highlights the urgent need for a transition to renewable energy. This shift is no longer solely about combating climate change but also addresses the cost of living and national energy security. Renewable energy investments are now not only greener but also more cost-effective and reliable.

The existing energy model must do more to support those vulnerable to change. Energy price increases have disproportionately affected already vulnerable groups, including the elderly and low-income households. Energy transitions can also impact communities, landscapes, households, and lines of work. A 'just energy transition' must understand and address these impacts – allowing any transition to be fair, inclusive and empowering for all.

CONTEXT

Energy transitions occur within specific contexts, being shaped and experienced by local communities with first-hand knowledge of the impacts. This book focuses on the concept of a just energy transition, emphasising that it should offer a better future for people. An energy transition is not solely a technical matter measured in gigawatts and emissions reductions; it is a political and social process. It involves investment decisions, distribution of benefits and the formation of new energy landscapes.

What can often be missed in energy transition policies is that the low-carbon alternatives need to be as good – and preferably better – than what they set out to replace. A just energy transition entails restructuring the energy system, sharing benefits and acknowledging the costs involved. While immediate concerns like energy affordability are important, the transformative potential of an energy transition should not be overlooked. It presents an opportunity to address climate change while empowering communities. Ultimately, an energy transition should be a collaborative endeavour, done with and for the people, households and communities it affects.



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FINDINGS

UK leaders aim to position the country as a renewable energy frontrunner, promising a transition to clean energy. However, the focus remains on supply expansion, with tensions arising between national benefits and local impacts. To achieve a just energy transition, inclusivity is crucial. This book outlines six rules for a community-centred approach to reduce emissions, support vulnerable households and empower communities across the electricity grid.

Rule 1 – Push for community-scale energy projects:

Climate action demands large-scale efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, often leading to expansive renewable energy projects in rural areas. However, a just energy transition can also include smaller facilities that directly benefit local communities. To support such initiatives, financial and technical assistance should be provided, fostering community investment in energy infrastructure and facilitating knowledge-sharing for place-based energy justice approaches.

Rule 2 – Elevate and emphasise the participation and voices of communities:

A just energy transition extends beyond equitable distribution of benefits and burdens. It requires empowering people and communities in decision making. Shallow consultations and compensation can perpetuate injustice – and local communities should have more than merely a hosting role, being empowered by policy to shape and benefit from future renewable energy projects.

Rule 3 – Foreground community energy schemes in local economies and wealth building:

Direct ownership of wind turbines can generate significantly higher income for communities compared to support from energy companies. Empowering communities to utilise these funds and invest in local economies can democratise and transform regions. Community Municipal Investments offer opportunities for residents to connect with new energy infrastructure and a low-emission electricity grid.

Rule 4 – Prioritise those most vulnerable to energy poverty:

Rising energy prices highlight the need for mass retrofitting schemes that prioritise restorative justice. Future energy policies should target vulnerable households, especially those on low incomes or with limited resources. Geographically targeted interventions, such as in interwar housing estates, can be supported through innovative financing and community-focused initiatives.

Rule 5 – Ensure the participation and inclusion of workers:

Decarbonisation should prioritise better livelihoods and working conditions for workers. A long-term vision must focus on green skills, inclusion and diversity, providing opportunities in the renewable energy sector. Worker-led action and voices must be central to a just energy transition.

Rule 6 – Recognise that a just energy transition in the UK must equal justice everywhere:

Future policies must prevent shifting the impacts of energy transitions to other countries and communities. Such an approach requires reframing decarbonisation globally, addressing unequal exchange and providing climate finance to affected countries. International Just Energy Transition Partnerships should be expanded to offer context-specific support.