Policy Brief on Integrating Care Work into Just Transition Strategies

Recommendation for stakeholders involved in Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs), including donor country representatives (such as the EU and the UK) and recipient countries, particularly South Africa.

Key Messages:

- Care work is critical infrastructure, not invisible labor: The energy transition cannot be truly just without recognizing and funding unpaid care work, which disproportionately falls on women.
- Women face a dual burden in transitions: Women perform three times more unpaid care work globally while simultaneously being expected to participate in reskilling and new economic opportunities.
- Care gaps prevent women's participation: Despite the renewable energy sector seeking to hire more women, female participation in retraining programs remains low due to unaddressed care responsibilities.
- South Africa's JETP is a critical opportunity: As the first JETP recipient and most coal-dependent G20 nation, South Africa can pioneer integrating care work into transition frameworks
- Three-pillar approach is essential: A gender-just transition requires (1) recognition of care work in transition planning, (2) flexible and accessible reskilling programs, and (3) community care infrastructure near training centers and workplaces.
- Implementation requires multi-stakeholder collaboration: Government ministries, JETP donors, civil society organizations, and private sector actors must coordinate to fund and implement care solutions

I. Problem

There is a broad consensus within academic, scientific, and international organizational circles that climate change and the energy transition affect individuals in gender-specific ways, with women disproportionately burdened due to existing structural inequalities (Allwood, 2014; Heffernan, 2022; Lahiri-Dutt, 2022; WorldBank, 2023). Increasingly, international organizations and governments are integrating gender in their approach. However, there is a divide between an integrationist form of gender mainstreaming which focuses on solely integrating women into existing masculine institutional environments and a more transformative approach (Allwood, 2020; Arora-Jonsson & Sijapati, 2018). A gap remains between policy initiatives and research-based evidence - highlighting a crucial role for international organizations in bridging this divide (Interview conducted with Lahiri-Dutt, 2025).

In particular, there is a notable lack of gender-transformative initiatives addressing the unintended consequences of the coal transition on women. Although the coal transition is actively unfolding within the broader just transition, it has resulted in several unintended spillover effects:

- → Closure of coal mines has led to non-economic impacts, such as the increase in domestic violence, food insecurity, child marriage, and mental health issues (Lahiri-Dutt et al., 2022; Interview conducted with Rashi Agarwal, 2025; WorldBank, 2023)
- → Women have been disproportionately absorbing these social costs through unpaid care work (Lahiri-Dutt et al., 2022; Interview conducted with Rashi Agarwal, 2025; WorldBank, 2023)
- → Care gaps are undermining the success of the just transition, as deeper gender inequalities could arise if women continue to be excluded from transition benefits (Lahiri-Dutt et al., 2022; Interview conducted with Rashi Agarwal, 2025; WorldBank, 2023)

These three points raise the urgency of the issue. Consequently, and given the JETP's leadership in financing and leading the coal transition, it is crucial that these gendered impacts are addressed directly and actively by the JETP Committee.

Our recommendations for the JETP to take action also stems from existing gaps in its framework, which disproportionately prioritises energy infrastructure, technical skills, and technology upgrades (Tamasiga, 2024), while neglecting unpaid care work, leaving it unseen, unmeasured, and unfunded. This is particularly observed in the lack of gender-disaggregated data and data within households (Interview conducted with Lahiri-Dutt, 2025 & Interview conducted with Rashi Agarwal, 2025). We argue that this transition framework represents the continuation of neo-colonial and post-apartheid welfare policies, which have historically been gender-blind and have overlooked women's unpaid labor. Given JETP's structure, which operates around funding from the Global North and action in Global South countries, it should implement deliberate action to avoid reproducing these patterns. Specifically, JETP must adopt a feminist economics lens, recognizing care work as critical infrastructure that requires dedicated funding and support.

Given the issues raised, JETP can either choose to entrench inequalities or alleviate them. We encourage the Committee to invest in care systems within coal-transitioning communities, as we consider such action essential to achieving a truly just transition. We detail our threefold recommendations below in this policy brief.

II. Policy Recommendations

International Precedents

Even though several countries have established policies to ease the climate transition's impact on women, integrating care into these strategies is rare. In order to draft this policy recommendation, inspiration was mainly drawn from programs in Spain, Chile and Bolivia. The Just Transition Agreements in Spain finance the creation of eldercare and daycare centers for children under the age of three in the areas affected by the closure of mines. These new centers are also often repurposed buildings that were used by the mining industry before the transition (ITJ, 2020, 2022, 2023). Chile's Long-term Climate Strategy includes gender-responsive monitoring, which is another aspect that inspired our policy recommendation. Chile's Climate Strategy aims to mainstream gender in all their goals and actions and in order to assess if their goal is achieved, they developed a series of criteria to monitor their progress towards gender equality, including identifying all gender-focused initiatives taken within the climate transition and systematizing them every 10 years and evaluating the progress in all the goals that include a gender component (Government of Chile, 2021). Another Chilean policy that served as inspiration is the 4 to 7 Program, which offers after-school care for children between the ages of 6 and 13. The program runs from 16 until 19 (after normal school hours), giving mothers more time to work, continue their education or look for a job. Applying a program like this would be a great option for countries where free kindergartens already exist to offer women extra support in the green transition. Finally, The Program to Support Employment II in Bolivia offers stipends to workers that are getting on-the-job training. They are equivalent to one or two minimum wages for up to six months, depending on their category. Recognizing the challenges faced by mothers with young children, the program offers an extra subsidy of 1,000 Bolívares per child under five years old. It was designed to mitigate the risk of mothers withdrawing from the program due to childcare responsibilities. Even though the subsidy was meant to cover childcare expenses, an evaluation revealed that only 65% were utilizing it for this purpose, with the majority of them using it for covering essential necessities like food (85%), school supplies (33%), and housing expenses (7%) (Otazú et al., 2024). This example highlights that stipends can help lighten mothers' care burden, but also cover other basic necessities, showcasing the benefits of offering money directly, rather than just credits specifically used for childcare facilities

Based on these precedents, we recommend a policy that targets recognition, care and and enablement gaps in the JETPs:

Recognition of Care Work in Just Transition: Globally, women perform over three times as much unpaid care work as men, amounting to 12.5 billion hours of work each day—labor that would be worth \$10.8 trillion annually if paid (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2018). To make sure that care work is given due meaningful recognition in just transition policies, governments and other relevant stakeholders should begin by integrating care responsibilities into stakeholder diagnostics, impact-measurement tools and baseline assessments. This would entail collecting sex-disaggregated data on time spent on unpaid care and the number and type of dependents. While explicitly including care work as a category of labor in transition impact studies, a strategic eligibility criteria is required that could encompass informal workers and care-givers using community-based verification systems. Public messaging and government communication documents like government websites, labor reports, and transition updates should include references to unpaid care as part of the 'active' labor workforce. Local governments and grassroots organizations should

incorporate recognition into community-facing platforms such as newsletters, community bulletins and local honour programs.

Enable reskilling programs that are both flexible and accessible for women: The renewable energy sector has opportunities for women to engage, since it is not encumbered by the entrenched "male industry" frameworks that characterize the traditional energy sector. The majority of employment development in renewable energy occurs within the high-skilled labor sector (estimated at 68 - 80%), hence upskilling and advanced education are essential for women's participation in the energy transition.

- → Evening and Weekend Courses: To make reskilling more accessible to women and working parents, programs should be offered during evenings and weekends. These programs should focus on high-demand green skills, such as renewable energy technologies and environmental management.
- → Mobile Training Units for Rural Areas: In many transitioning regions, especially rural women with unpaid care responsibilities—face limited access to training due to distance and time constraints. Mobile units can travel to remote communities, offering hands-on training in sustainable agriculture, solar energy, and other green jobs, reducing the need for long travel times to training centers
- → On-the-Job Training and Apprenticeships: Partnering with businesses in the renewable energy, construction, and manufacturing sectors to provide on-the-job training and apprenticeships can bridge the gap between theory and practice. This will help individuals gain experience while earning an income.
- → Focus on Gender-Specific Programs: Reskilling programs must be tailored to address the specific needs of women, especially those who have been employed in high-carbon sectors like coal mining. Creating female-friendly training environments and mentorship programs can help women successfully transition into the green economy.

Provide community care hubs in proximity to training centers and workplaces: Workplace day-care centers would significantly enhance the renewable energy sector's family-friendliness, with the establishment of nursing stations at power plants. In practice this means:

- → Opening or re-adapting buildings previously used in the mining industry into care hubs where workers can leave their children or elderly to be taken care of while they work and/or attend reskilling courses.
- → Collaboration with existing private sector care facilities to have them accept children/elderly people. In some cases, it might be less expensive for the state to pay for the children/elderly people's fees in a private facility than to open more new facilities.
- → Access to these spaces should not be limited to mothers. Fathers and sons that are the main care-givers for their young or elderly should also be allowed to access this policy for free.
- → If kindergartens already exist and are free, further additions that can improve women's situation during the green transition could be an extended period of free childcare, like they have in Chile with the 4 to 7 Program, where children can attend an after school program from 16 until 19.

Provide care stipends for mothers with children: Inspired by Bolivia's PAE II, we propose to offer caregivers a stipend for 6 to 12 months (depending on the context of the country and its needs and resources) after the closure of a mine. The money is expected to help with the costs of childcare, but it can also help cover other necessities like food or housing expenses, as it did in Bolivia. This means:

- → Setting strategic conditions: have at least one child under the age of 13. Having lost their job (be it formal or informal) due to the mine closure or having a partner/father of the child that lost their job for the same reason.
- → Using local verification models or community peer networks for enrollment: Because it is important to not exclude women who work or worked in the informal market, the documentation to be provided as proof should be less strict. It's also important to create mechanisms that ensure access to stipends, skilling, and entrepreneurship grants are not blocked by missing documents, like IDs or birth certificates to prove parenthood (this has shown to be an access problem for different programs around the world, including the PAE II in Bolivia).
- → Men should be able to access this policy if they are the main caregiver of the child. It's also important that the credit is not dependent on the woman getting reskilled. Stay-at-home mothers

should be able to carry on with childcare as their main occupation if they wish to do so. Reskilling should be a viable option, but not an obligation.

Monitoring Progress: In order to make care infrastructure a central pillar of focus in the gender-just transition, systemic monitoring and evaluation through a multi-dimensional framework is required. A key starting point would be to track the availability and scope of care services - such as childcare centres, eldercare support and disability assistance - within communities undergoing transition. When services are located within a reasonable proximity of 5-10 kms, there is an increased likelihood that women with limited mobility or time can make efficient use of them. Local government data, community consultations as well as JETP stakeholder surveys can be mobilised for mapping out these discrepancies.

Affordability is equally critical in many transition regions, with monetary barriers being significant deterrents in women participating in reskilling programs and employment opportunities. Monitoring subsidized care services will help assess their efficiency through usage of household aggregated survey data and budget tracking. A gender disaggregated approach will also reveal distributional job outcomes for women in the green sector through JETP initiatives. A steady rise in women labor force participation in green employment would indicate the success of supportive care infrastructure. Another essential dimension is the reduction in unpaid care work such as dependents' care and household chores, they gain more time to pursue education, employment and civic participation with available quality services that can be tracked through feedback surveys.

Ultimately, these improvements should translate into tangible gains in women employment and long-term earnings that can be monitored and studied as explained changes through quantitative techniques such as Difference-in-Difference methods and regression discontinuity designs. At the same time, qualitative data must not be overlooked, as it is important to account for psychosocial understanding of benefit accrual through community-based monitoring, focus groups and personal interviews. To institutionalize this approach, immediate action should focus on integrating a "Care Work Checklist" into the Social Inclusion criteria of JETP project assessments. This would ensure that accessibility, affordability, and gender responsiveness are considered from the outset. In the longer term, care infrastructure must be recognized as a core eligibility requirement for funding approval under JETPs. Embedding these measures into the formal architecture of the transition process is essential to building a low-carbon future that is not only sustainable, but truly inclusive.

III. Case of South Africa

"The country is transforming. It is a good time to make a positive change for women in the power sector" – Bertha Dlamini

"Our women are capable. For far too long, they have been disadvantaged. I advocate for women to be at the centre of the energy transition." - Prime Minister of Mpumalanga, Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane

Status Quo

South Africa is one of the most coal-dependent nations, using coal for roughly 85% of its energy supply (Nel et al., 2023). In 2021, it became the first country to enter the **Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP)**. If successful, the first initiative of its kind, is anticipated to serve as a paradigm for others. However, existing issues of unemployment and poverty exacerbate transition's socio-economic risks (Xaba, 2023) while the social component in the JETP has not been addressed to the same degree as the technical and economic aspects. Funding allocations and JETP agreements **do not address care work**, despite the JETP's emphasis on "just" outcome for communities and workers. Energy transition is already posing considerable risks at the local level in significantly affecting coal mining communities inside **Mpumalanga** province, where 80% of coal mining operations are concentrated (Hermanus and Montmasson-Clair 2021). The progressive shutdown of 13 coal-fired power facilities by 2050, 11 of which are located in Mpumalanga, would affect over 150,000 jobs in coal and energy production which has a substantial danger of intensifying already elevated rates of poverty and unemployment (Cole et al., 2023).

Call for action

In South Africa, women mostly fulfill the position of primary caregivers—on average, they allocate almost twice the time to childcare, elder care or home maintenance. A significant challenge for women is thus the need to reconcile the demands of work and care responsibilities. Due to the elevated poverty rate among the less qualified in South Africa, women are compelled to work full-time and often bear the care responsibility while traveling great distances to childcare facilities alone. The lack of the gender agenda in the discourse and planning of the energy transition has resulted in women being excluded from training and skill development opportunities due to their minority status in coal mines and power plants. The province of Mpumalanga specifically exhibits a significant adolescent pregnancy rate, posing a difficulty in closing the skills gap between genders. Women without dependent children have greater labor participation rates compared to those with dependent children. Energy sector employers inform they would not hire young women due to the possibility of pregnancy and subsequent absenteeism (IASS, 2022). Consequently, due to this absence of support, several women forfeit either their careers or their personal lives by opting not to have children.

Gaps in Current Implementation

- <u>Underfunded Care Infrastructure:</u> South Africa's social cash transfers are associated with positive effects on poverty and inequality (Patel 2023). Yet, the monetary value of the Child Support Grant (established at R530 monthly per child in 2024) is inadequate to support or sufficiently compensate for the fact that women facilitate care on behalf of the state (Goldblatt 2005). Owing to gendered caregiving norms, women who lack employment or finances are expected to provide childcare services to society without any compensation, yet they often lack the resources to sustain themselves. The marketization of South Africa's care facilities has resulted in dependence on private providers, who often impose excessive costs, rendering care centers unattainable for low-income families. Subsidized Early Childhood Development programs impose reduced fees, averaging around R208 per month, but non-subsidized centers levy a much higher average of R649 per month (Metelerkamp 2022). Household's financial capacity to pay fees significantly influences children's access to ECD programs, thus approximately 55.5% of children aged 0-4 years stay at home with a parent (General Household Survey 2024). Austerity policies have exacerbated the burden on public resources, diminishing both the availability and quality of state-supported ECD programs (IEJ, 2024). Consequently, the caring duty has escalated for women.
- Gender-Blind Reskilling: Reskilling is specifically mentioned in the JET Implementation Plan (JET-IP) and South Africa has current reskilling infrastructure via organisations such TVET, SARETEC, and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). However, present initiatives are neither adequately gender-responsive nor accessible to women with care obligations or those in rural areas.

Country-specific Recommendations:

→ Integrate Care Funding and Expand Care Infrastructure

On-Site Childcare: subsidize ECD centers to be affordable and accessible by co-locating care hubs near training centers and repurposing mining buildings.

Care Stipends: expand CSG funding and coverage for caregivers in transitioning households. The grant could incorporate informal workers without complete documentation by using community verification tools.

→ Facilitate Gender-Responsive Reskilling

Flexible Training: scale flexible training options, including weekend courses and mobile units in partnership with GreenCape and SARETEC, prioritizing renewable energy certifications.

Country-specific Implementation and Stakeholders:

JETP Donors and Funders: Financing Care Infrastructure:

Major funders of JETP must embed care work into their funding criteria — for example, requiring that a part of the public policy loans via their respective public development banks towards the JETP project go towards supporting care initiatives.

- → KfW Development Bank (Germany): Already deeply involved in South Africa's JETP funding, can lead in financing community care pilots.
- → European Union Delegation to South Africa: A major donor that can push for care inclusion in grant guidelines.
- → AECID (Spanish Cooperation Agency): With their experience funding community-driven projects, they can help replicate Spain's successful public participation models focused on care.

International Labour Organization (ILO): provide technical assistance, funding, and expertise in designing gender-sensitive reskilling programs and track its female participation

Government: Integrating Care into the JET Implementation Plan

The South African government must explicitly recognise care work as a pillar of the Just Transition, which includes adding specific care-related line items to the JET Implementation Plan.

- → Presidential Climate Commission (PCC): Lead the coordination of care integration across ministries.
- → Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD): Push for gender-responsive budgeting that funds creches, childcare hubs, and reskilling for women.
- → Department of Social Development (DSD): Expand community care centres and link them to new economic zones created by the transition.
- → Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET): scale flexible training options, including weekend courses and mobile units

Civil Society: Grounding Care in Communities

Civil society must be at the centre of designing and implementing care initiatives. This means moving beyond consultation into genuine co-creation, particularly with grassroots women's groups.

- → Ilifa Labantwana: Advocates for quality early childhood development at scale across South Africa.
- → National ECD Alliance (NECDA): A network that can mobilise thousands of community-based ECD centres
- → Mothers Unite (Cape Town): A grassroots movement creating safe spaces for children in vulnerable communities.
- → Women on Farms Project (Stellenbosch): A rural women's rights organisation that could lead community-based models of care linked to new economic activities.
- → GreenCape: non-profit organization offering reskilling programs, particularly in renewable energy can expand their focus to include inclusive programs for women and rural communities, linking them to job opportunities in green sectors
- → SARETEC (South African Renewable Energy Technology Centre): SARETEC has experience in providing renewable energy training and can increase their outreach by incorporating mobile training units and online platforms, targeting women and underrepresented groups in remote regions

Private Sector / CSR: Investing in Community Care

Private companies — especially those benefiting from energy or mining projects — must see childcare and care hubs as essential parts of their corporate responsibility. This includes funding new creches, upgrading existing ones, and integrating care into local economic development plans.

- → South Suez Capital: Already committed to ESG principles; could pioneer private funding models for care initiatives.
- → Anglo American Zimele: Has a strong track record in local economic development; can integrate care hubs into reskilling and small business programmes.
- → Sibanye-Stillwater: Operating in coal-heavy provinces; a prime candidate for piloting childcare-linked reskilling hubs.
- → Mainstream Renewable Power South Africa: Active in building renewable energy projects; can set a new norm by building community care facilities as part of new energy infrastructure.

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