

Results of the Round Table on Kazakhstan's Just Energy Transition

On April 24, 2025, the University of Central Asia, together with Nazarbayev University, organized a roundtable discussion to discuss the results of a recent study on public perceptions of the energy transition among citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan to achieve a “just transition.” The term “just transition” refers to both the environmental benefits of moving to green energy and the socio-economic benefits for the population. At the roundtable, key stakeholders expressed their views on the study and shared recommendations. To maintain a constructive dialogue, moderators divided participants into three groups: (1) residents of communities economically dependent on the fossil fuel industry; (2) representatives of extractive companies; and (3) representatives of the national government. During the discussion, participants were asked to answer a series of questions regarding a just transition. Based on their responses, the following conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

Question 1: How do local communities understand the concept of just transition and what guarantees can strengthen trust between residents and public institutions?

Participants representing local communities described a just transition as a process in which the closure of coal mines or the transition to other industries does not lead to the socio-economic marginalization of workers and the population. The main concerns were related to job losses, reduced incomes and general uncertainty about the future. In addition, participants emphasized the desire for greater participation in decision-making. According to the “residents”, governments should provide specific social support mechanisms, including the possibility of early retirement, support for relocation, and the creation of new jobs. They expect the private sector, in particular mining companies, to invest in retraining programs that would allow them to adapt to the conditions of the new economy.

Mining representatives noted the need to develop a long-term strategy (20-30 years) for the gradual replacement of extractive industries to provide confidence in the availability of alternative jobs. They said regular and transparent communication with local communities, including timely and clear updates on government policy, was key. Participants stressed that companies should take the fate of the city as their own and work together with residents to find sustainable solutions.

Government officials acknowledged that the carbon neutrality strategy lacks specifics on how to implement a just transition and effective channels for communicating public policy with the public. It was emphasized that the state needs to develop meaningful and realistic plans that include sustainable mechanisms for engaging with the public and platforms for two-way feedback. Participants paid special attention to the budget component: according to their data, only 4% of the state budget is currently allocated for a just transition. In their opinion, limited funding undermines public trust and reduces the perception of the transition as a priority public policy.

Among the proposals was the creation of a digital platform that allows residents to evaluate and comment on local energy initiatives. Such an information and communication system should be directly linked to local Akimats to ensure accountability and adaptability at the regional government level.

Question 2: How can local strategic planning enhance the effectiveness of just transition implementation?

Local community representatives expressed support for a bottom-up approach to decision-making, emphasizing the need for a clear division of roles and responsibilities between different levels of government. The importance of regular city council meetings as a tool for engagement and accountability was also emphasized.

Representatives of mining companies expressed support for the idea of developing and implementing local development strategies. In their opinion, each community should assess its strengths and weaknesses to develop an individual plan for economic diversification. The city of Ekibastuz was cited as an example, where, according to the participants, there are significant existing conditions for the development of wind energy.

Government officials noted the need to link national goals with regional development strategies developed over a ten-year period. Such plans, they argued, should contain a clear description of vulnerable employment sectors, potential sources of local energy, and possible trajectories for transforming the workforce. An initiative was also put forward to create targeted local funds financed by environmental charges that would support sustainable development and just transition initiatives in specific regions.

Question 3: What elements are missing in current national decarbonisation policies to ensure a just transition, particularly in vulnerable regions?

Participants representing local communities pointed out the lack of effective mechanisms to support the most vulnerable categories of citizens, including the elderly. It was proposed to focus on developing employment guarantees and launching targeted professional retraining programs for residents of coal-mining regions.

Mining sector representatives expressed concern about the limited horizon of current government policies, which mostly cover 5-10 years. They stressed that long-term targets covering at least 20-30 years are needed to build trust and strategic planning. Additional concerns were raised by the inconsistency of government policies, with green energy targets being declared on the one hand, and permits being issued for new coal-fired power plants on the other, which undermines trust and increases uncertainty among stakeholders.

Government officials acknowledged that current funding for a just transition is insufficient. A solution proposed was to create enabling market conditions that would encourage companies to voluntarily transition to green sectors. In addition, representatives emphasized the need to improve

feedback mechanisms to ensure that citizens' opinions and needs are reflected in decision-making processes at the national and regional levels. Among the proposals was the creation of a digital platform that would allow local governments to directly receive and analyse proposals and complaints from local residents, which would increase the transparency and accountability of transition policies.

Recommendations

1. Develop a comprehensive and inclusive national plan for a just energy transition that clearly sets out the stages, implementation mechanisms and expected outcomes of the transition.
2. Strengthen strategic planning at the local level by synchronizing regional and municipal strategies with the national sustainable development agenda.
3. Introduce employment guarantees and targeted vocational retraining programmes as key elements of a just transition policy, especially in vulnerable sectors.
4. Ensure interdepartmental coordination through the creation of sustainable channels of interaction between relevant ministries to formulate a coordinated and predictable state policy.
5. Establish specialized funds, financed from both national and local budgets, to promote economic diversification in affected regions.
6. Develop digital and institutional communication mechanisms between different levels of government, including citizen feedback, to increase transparency, accountability and responsiveness of policies.