Quarterly Tracker on Key Just Transition Policy Development and Debates

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Presentation layout

Part 1: Background and Rationale

Part 2: What is the Labour Tracker?

Part 3: Key Findings from Q3 2025

Background and Rationale for the Tracker

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Why a Quarterly Tracker?

- South Africa is undergoing an energy transition that will reshape its economy and labour market.
- Fossil fuel-dependent sectors (especially coal mining and coal-based energy generation) are experiencing contractions.
- Workers in these sectors face retrenchments, displacement, skill mismatches, and uncertain future livelihoods.

Why a Quarterly Tracker? (Cont'd)

- Existing Just Transition monitoring frameworks tend to emphasise technical issues: energy mix, emissions, finance flows.
- There is limited real-time data or structured reporting on how labour is impacted.
- A gap exists in providing accessible, regular, and worker-centred tracking of the human dimension of the transition.
- Union negotiators often face significant challenges in staying informed about fast-paced policy debates, particularly those that impact workers and working-class communities in South Africa and globally.

Intended purpose of the tracker

The tracker must provide clear insights into the implications of key policy developments, both domestically and internationally.

It must also anticipate upcoming debates and suggest strategic recommendations for negotiators.

The assignment places a premium on the ability to identify the actors, institutions, and engagement platforms across different levels of governance where policy shifts are being negotiated or implemented.

Scope of work

- Develop and populate a template for the quarterly tracker that outlines the structure, categories, and key issues to be covered.
- Provide a sectoral analysis that highlights which industries, provinces, and companies are likely to be impacted by these developments.
- Ensure that the report is presented in an accessible, worker-friendly format, with links to source materials and further reading.

Scope of work

- After the first completed tracker, assess the effectiveness of the tracker format and recommend whether to maintain the quarterly tracker or transition to a different format (e.g., briefing notes or less frequent publications).
- Establish connections with relevant trade unions and industry representatives to ensure the content is relevant and timely.

Methodology

- To capture relevant voices, interviews were conducted with selected key informants from:
  - Organised labour (e.g. shop stewards, union-linked research units)
  - Civil society organisations active in Just Transition advocacy
  - Experts working in various sectors concerning energy and labour

Themes that emerged from interviews

- **Job quality concerns**: Green jobs often lack benefits, security, and union protection.
- **Knowledge gap**: Many workers and stewards are not fully informed about what JET means.
- **Disempowerment**: Labour voices are often included symbolically in forums, with little influence.
- **Need for a worker-facing tool**: A Tracker that reflects lived realities, not just policy commitments.
- Their feedback directly shaped the structure, tone, and categories in the first Tracker template.

Explaining the Tracker

What is the Quarterly Tracker?

- The Tracker is a quarterly monitoring tool developed to document the human impacts of South Africa's energy transition.
- It centres workers, particularly those in high-carbon sectors such as coal, and tracks how they are affected by closures, policy shifts, reskilling efforts, and new opportunities.
- It is not a technical or infrastructure-based monitoring instrument. It is narrative-driven, with space for stories, alerts, and field-based observations.

What is the Quarterly Tracker?

- While grounded in data and policy events, it brings a social justice lens to what would otherwise be invisible developments such as informalisation, community exclusion, and job precarity.
- Ultimately, the Tracker is a tool to inform unions, support policy advocacy, and connect national developments with grassroots realities.

Tracker Structure

- Each edition of the Tracker is organised into the following thematic sections:
- *Policy and planning developments*: Captures government directives, legislation, funding plans, and institutional updates.
- *Workforce and employment changes*: Tracks job losses, new employment in green sectors, and workplace-level shifts.
- *Reskilling, training and support initiatives*: Documents new or ongoing efforts to prepare workers and communities for change.
- *Stakeholder and community developments*: Covers union actions, local responses, business moves, civil society campaigns, and research contributions.

What makes it distinct

- Bottom-up: Informed by workers, not just policy. Informed by interviews, and observations, rather than just ‘official’ data.
- Justice-oriented: Flags exclusions, poor working conditions, and retrenchments as much as successes.
- Accessible: Designed for unions, stewards, activists.
- Strategic: Can be used to shape union advocacy, policy submissions, and grassroots campaigns.

Snapshots from 1st draft Tracker

June to August 2025

Policy and planning developments

- Draft Carbon Budget and Mitigation Planning Regulations (DFFE, August 2025) introduce binding budgets for large emitters (above 30,000 tCO_2e).
- Non-compliance attracts heavy penalties (up to R10 million and up to 10 years' imprisonment for executives), signalling a tougher stance on private industry.
- Draft Second NDC (2026–2030 and 2031–2035) keeps the 2026–2030 range but tightens the 2031–2035 emissions range by about 10 percent, reaffirming a peak-plateau-decline path.

Policy and planning developments

- Civil society and advisory bodies argue the NDC is not ambitious enough, and criticise a weak and rushed consultation process.
- The draft NDC is largely silent on labour, skills and communities, raising questions about how “just transition” is being integrated into core climate planning.

Finance & partnerships

- In March 2025 the US withdrew its JETP pledge (about US$1.56 billion), raising concerns about long-term funding certainty and political risk.
- The Accelerated Coal Transition (ACT) programme (around US$2.6 billion) began rolling out, focusing on repurposing legacy coal plants (Komati, Camden, Hendrina) with renewables, storage and local economic support.
- The EU pledged about US$35 million in grants to support green hydrogen enabling infrastructure (ports, pipelines), signalling diversification beyond electricity and coal.
- Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (dtic) launched a R1 billion incentive for local EV production, battery assembly and related value chains.

Institutions for implementation

- National JET Skills Advisory Forum and JET Skills Desk established under the HRDC, to coordinate skills for the transition and close the green skills gap.
- Their mandate includes labour market intelligence, curriculum alignment, and coordination of adult retraining programmes, especially for vulnerable workers.
- South African Cities Network issued guidance to clarify the role of municipalities in implementing the JET-IP

Workforce and employment changes

- Retrenchments in the coal value chain (mining, transport, generation) in Mpumalanga and parts of Limpopo fuel perceptions that decarbonisation is directly driving job losses, even when causes are mixed.
- Examples this quarter:
  - Ford South Africa: around 470 layoffs at Silverton and Struandale plants.
  - Beeshoek iron ore mine: about 688 jobs at risk if closure proceeds.
  - Over 4,000 automotive jobs lost over the past two years, though not confined to this quarter.

Stakeholder and community developments

- NUM issued strong statements on potential mine closures and job cuts at Beeshoek, Glencore and Samancor, signalling deep concern about livelihoods.
- NUM also backed Eskom’s legal challenge and criticised political interference in the energy sector.
- COSATU called for a national strike against unemployment, wage cuts and perceived policy failures, with a Section 77 certificate to protect participating workers.
- Overall, unions are not rejecting transition outright, but they are contesting the pace, sequencing and social protection gaps.

What this quarter’s Tracker tells us

- Implementation is ramping up, but often in ways that prioritise energy security and macro-stability over rapid decarbonisation and deep social protection.
- Policy signals are mixed: coal plant life extensions and delayed decommissioning on one side, tighter carbon budgets and more ambitious NDC targets on the other.
- Workers feel the transition through job losses, plant closures and weak job creation, even when causes extend beyond climate policy.
- Skills and institutional frameworks are taking shape, yet hard evidence on delivery and outcomes is still thin, particularly for vulnerable groups.

What this quarter's Tracker tells us

- Social protection lags behind, creating a risk of training people into unstable, low-quality work without an adequate safety net.
- Power imbalances are visible in financing flows and knowledge production, with a significant share of JET grants flowing to international firms rather than local institutions.
- Unions, communities, researchers and civil society are active and vocal, but their concerns about justice, equity and participation are not yet fully reflected in core policy instruments like the NDC.

Way forward

- Finalisation of the Tracker
- Dissemination
- Recommendations on what works and what doesn’t work
- Handover to the JLT team for adoption

Thank you

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