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Policy Brief

Chile's Multi-Dimensional Just Transition: Pursuing Continuity and Managing a Daring Agenda

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Executive Summary

The last ten years have been a decisive period for Chile's just transition (JT) policy, expanding the scope of its just transition proposals related to the energy sector towards a just socioecological transition agenda (JSET). In coherence with its international commitments and previous local transition experiences, whose planning and implementation started in 2014, a JSET has been integrated in different institutions and instruments, including an interministerial committee, a technical office, six governance bodies and local action plans, a national strategy, and as a social pillar in the last two NDCs.

Despite the efforts that Chile has undertaken, there are JSET implementation challenges mainly related to the measurement and monitoring of impacts; the different definitions and scopes across governmental and legislative initiatives; and mainstreaming the agenda among different governmental portfolios and scales, and with private and social stakeholders. As an incipient and promising proposal, Chile still needs to reinforce institutional, legal and financial mechanisms that could ensure the JSET's agenda continuity and efficacy. In relation to these challenges, international initiatives that could support the country in consolidating its path toward a just transition are mentioned.

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Introduction

Triggered by the inclusion of the just transition (JT) concept as a social pillar of the 2020 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), Chile has developed a JT pathway materialised through specific institutions, policies, local governance bodies, and action plans. Chile's JT vision was expanded in 2022 through the introduction of the concept of "Just Socioecological Transition" (JSET) in the NDC's strengthening annex (Ministry of Environment [MMA], 2022a). In 2023 an interministerial committee established the current definition of JSET:

Process of transformation and/or adaptation of sociocultural systems towards ecosystem balance, human well-being, and sustainable production models, within the framework of the triple crisis of biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution, ensuring a focus on human rights, gender equality, and decent work (MMA, 2025a).

As stated in the recently published JSET National Strategy (NS), Chile's JSET aims to "safeguard social and environmental justice in the context of the transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy" (MMA, 2025a, p. 47), while considering the correction of historical socio-environmental inequalities, particularly in 'transition territories'1. In this policy brief, the past ten years of the Chilean transition process are reviewed, and gaps and opportunities are recognised for the future JSET policy implementation.

National Just Transition Goals

Before the NS established the current objective, the national conceptions and goals had been evolving in accordance with the instruments and institutions that included this agenda.

After the 2020 NDC, Chile also integrated JT in its Long-term Climate Strategy (MMA, 2021), being one of the 24 countries that explicitly mentions the concept in both instruments (UNDP, 2022). These frameworks traced the pathway towards a "social and environmentally sustainable economy" through the promotion of decent jobs, social justice, and the eradication of poverty (MMA, 2021, p. 46), influencing policies in different sectors.

Among the sectoral policies, JT was first used in the Ministry of Energy's Just Transition Strategy (2021) because the 2020 NDC's social pillar outlined the commitment of "protect[ing] the rights of the most vulnerable in the decarbonization of the energy matrix while considering an active participation in its design and implementation" (MMA, 2020a, p. 27).

Under a new government, in 2022, two institutional milestones occurred: the creation of the JSET office under the MMA and the establishment of two ad hoc Interministerial Committees, one for the operationalization of a JSET (IC-JSET) and the other for a Just Hydric Transition. In November 2022, the NDC strengthening annex formalised the concept of JSET as a "process that, through social dialogue and collective empowerment, seeks the transformation of society towards a resilient and equitable one that could face the social, ecological, and climatic crisis" (MMA, 2022a).

[1] 'Transition territories' are the ones that have been recognised by the State as the ones that have been exposed to historical environmental injustice because of the concentration of coal generation plants for energy and other industrial activities.

This new concept was integrated as a cross-cutting topic in other policies, such as the National Strategy of Sovereignty for Food Security (Ministry of Agriculture, 2023, p. 31) and the National Strategy for the Implementation of Agenda 2030 (Government of Chile, 2023, p. 42).

In conjunction with its latest NDC, Chile published its NS under the aim of "protecting social and environmental justice within a framework of a transition towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy, providing guidelines to rectify historical socioenvironmental inequities while promoting opportunities for social welfare, quality employment, and ecosystem protection" (MMA, 2025a, p.35).

As a clear linkage between both policies, Chile has committed to implementing the NS as one of the NDC's eight JSET-based contributions. These also include integrating JSET principles into local climate action plans for transition territories; developing a methodology to monitor climate change impacts on jobs in order to generate procedures in compliance with the principle of decent work; and systematizing best practices that incorporate local and indigenous knowledge on climate change (MMA, 2025b, p. 17-18).

Just Transition Efforts to Date

The JT/JSET pathway[2] was preceded and built upon another initiative of the MMA, known as the "Program of Social and Environmental Recuperation" (PRAS). This program was launched between 2014 and 2015 and concentrated on three territories (Huasco, Quintero-Puchuncaví, and Coronel) that bear considerable historical burdens and impacts resulting from coal plants and industrial activities. These areas are characterized by numerous socio-environmental conflicts involving local communities, the State, and private companies (OECD, 2016; UNGA, 2024).

To implement this program, in 2015

the MMA created legally recognized Councils for Environmental and Social Recuperation (CRAS) in each territory, with each integrating 24 to 38 members of the public, private, and civil society sectors. These councils had the mandate to make a socioenvironmental diagnosis and elaborate a local action plan, a process that was technically supported by the regional offices of the MMA. The three plans[3] were launched between 2016 and 2017 and began to be implemented by the regional offices, with CRAS acting as an accountability space with no influence in the prioritization nor reporting of the activities.

When the JSET office was created in 2022, MMA decided to include in its functions the "coordination, support, and oversight" of the implementation of the PRAS and the elaboration of the NS (MMA, 2022b). This act initiated the merging of both agendas, which included the transfer of technical personnel, budget, and activities, and resulted in the later official recognition of PRAS as "JSET experiences" (MMA, 2023, p. 39).

Under the JSET office, with support of a UNDP project, the efforts were focused on improving the monitoring and measurement reports of the local action plans, assessing and reinforcing CRAS, and creating three new governance bodies in the Antofagasta region. These governances have action plans in different stages of progress[4].

The second focus of the JSET office—the elaboration of the NS—was initiated in late 2022 and ended with its publication in September 2025. Although this target was formally mandated as part of the Office's functions, it was further strengthened through political endorsement by the IC-JSET, which defined the objectives, scope, and procedures throughout the elaboration. Additional institutional backing was provided by the National Council on the 2030 Agenda (Government of Chile, 2023, p. 42).

Moreover, the former President approved that the NS be subject to a Strategic Environmental Evaluation (SEE)[5], a legally binding mechanism that ensures interministerial and interinstitutional collaboration and expands opportunities for public participation. Additionally, the MMA is exploring the possibility of using a Supreme Decree to formally institutionalize the NS's proposed governance framework.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

From the efforts of the last ten years, there are several insights that warrant consideration for the 10-year timeframe of the NS (2025-2035). Among these, the inclusion of JT/JSET in the NDCs is relevant because it marks the main trigger for the process and facilitated its political continuity. Despite changes in government, this continuity has been possible due to the pre-existing budget and subnational personnel, which allowed the regular meetings and follow-up of the local, multi-stakeholder governance bodies (CRAS). The integration of these governances into the subsequent JSET agenda also made it possible to avoid duplication of structures and to leverage existing resources.

However, merging the PRAS with the JT agenda under this "socioecological"

[2] Detailed pathway evolution can be seen at UNDP & MMA, 2025, p. 26.
[3] PRAS Huasco, PRAS Quintero-Puchuncaví, and PRAS Coronel.
[4] The Tocopilla's JSET plan was published in December 2023; Mejillones' JSET plan was approved by the IC-JSET in December 2025; and Calama's JSET plan has not been elaborated yet.
[5] This mechanism needs official approval of another ministerial council and the President. https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navgar?idNorma=1204676&idVersion=2024-07-03

approach generated concerns among local members of CRAS, who argued that the modification of governance bodies and action plans was overly top-down. Indeed, the national office and the IC-JSET decided on the implementation of JSET at the local level.

Beyond these tensions between the local and national levels, the establishment of the IC-JSET was key in promoting a more tangible integration at the national level. The committee's decision to apply the SEE ensured the formal involvement of 18 ministries and institutions in the NS' elaboration. A key outcome of this process was the commitments assumed by 12 ministries and 4 additional public institutions in the five-year action plan, which includes 101 national and local measures.

In terms of public participation, environmental law and the SEE allowed the realization of a national consultation on the NS draft, which led to 16 in-person workshops (one in each region) and online means for participation. Both mechanisms involved more than 700 participants and led to more than 300 observations on the draft. Moreover, the creation of an Expert Panel allowed the involvement of 30 academic and civil society organizations, which gave recommendations during the NS' elaboration.

With respect to actors and sectors, the governance structure proposed in the NS offers important lessons on efficiency and institutionalization. The two interministerial committees (Socioecological and Hydric) were merged into a single high-level governing body—the IC-JSET—expanding ministerial representation from 12 to 15 ministries. The integration of the Ministry of the Interior in IC-JSET is also an innovation in the political weight given to the JSET agenda. In addition, the new structure introduces a regional body in charge of facilitating the intersectoral coordination and a national JSET Consultative Council, a tripartite space composed of civil society, the private sector, and public institutions of the national, regional, and local levels.

Challenges and Barriers

Overall, mainly domestic challenges and barriers have been present in the first ten years of the JT/JSET pathway, with some of them inherited from the PRAS period; external ones are less notable.

Regarding planning and design phases, the Directorate of Budgeting (2023) technically objected to the PRAS because of a lack of information on indicators, verification methods, and critical assumptions (ex ante assessment). Particularly about indicators, they were developed after five years of local plans' implementation, and most of them are based on measuring management actions and realization of diagnostic studies. These indicators lack crucial considerations such as social impact or number of beneficiaries and have not been updated under the JSET agenda. Similarly, the NS did not include progress indicators for its 2030 Action Plan; instead, measures include a brief description of the expected outcome and a general timeframe for compliance.

Another PRAS-derived barrier is the lack of timeframes and responsibilities in the local action plans, which has implied significant tracking and reporting limitations. On one side, implementation timeframes have been responding mainly to budgetary and technical resource availability, without following a mid- or long-term plan. On the other hand, when action plans were designed between 2015 and 2016, they did not consider an agreed-upon or legally binding distribution of responsibilities among competent institutions. As a result, public institutions often failed to incorporate PRAS or JSET activities into their planning or the designation of stable focal points, which adversely affected reporting, political alignment, and the effectiveness of cross-cutting implementation.

Some differences remained regarding the very concept of JSET: the last NDC uses the definition from the 2022 strengthening annex, while the NS used the definition mentioned in the introduction. This difference can be interpreted as a design inconsistency regarding JSET's purpose and scope and has implied communication barriers.

In terms of implementation, the main barrier is that lead institutions at the subnational level (Ministry of the Environment's regional offices) deeply lack the resources, technical personnel, and normative capacities to involve or coordinate other institutions in the implementation of local JSET agendas. This could be worsened by the new institutions and bodies proposed in the NS.

Regarding the number of personnel for the implementation and monitoring of action plans, as well as the management of local governance bodies, until September 2023 there was 1 officer in Huasco (~10.000 population), 1 in Quintero-Puchuncaví (~50.000 population) and 2 in Coronel (~130.000 population). They were directly supported by 2 officers at the national level, resulting in 6 people for implementing the JSET agenda in 3 territories with almost 200.000 inhabitants.

Between 2023 and late 2025, a UNDP project[6] improved the existing conditions by adding 13 people to personnel for both local implementation and NS elaboration. However, the establishment of 3 new governances and action plans during this period created a new burden by adding territories that represent almost 230.000 inhabitants.

These ambitious decisions could be considered a challenge in themselves because the expansion of the agenda occurred during a period when its budget was significantly reduced. Between 2019

[6] "Support for the development of the Just Socioecological Transition Strategy by the Chilean State".

and 2024, the budget for PRAS-JSET activities decreased by 75%, from nearly USD 1 million to 250.000 per year (MMA, 2020b; MMA, 2024). It is uncertain if the incoming government, set to take office in March, will continue this trend or reverse it.

Another barrier refers to the relationship between the executive and legislative spheres. All the efforts described were planned and implemented by the executive power, mainly through the MMA, but there are no records of coordination or collaborations with the Congress (Chamber of Deputies and Senate). This situation is problematic for two reasons: first, a lack of legislative support makes the JSET vulnerable to weakening or dismantling if the priorities of future governments change significantly; second, there is a clear disconnection between the MMA and Congress regarding JSET, as the MMA promotes the objectives and guidelines outlined in the NS, while Congress is discussing a law project that builds upon the objectives of the 2020 NDC and remits the JSET to reduction of GHG (Chamber of Deputies, 2022). Should this project receive approval, it remains unclear how it will interact with or influence the existing JSET institutions and policies.

At the external level, in 2024 Chile signed a cooperation agreement with Spain that aims to “exchange information, share practices, experiences, and models, and provide technical and/or training assistance” (Government of Spain, 2024) in areas like “climate change, energy transition, and water transition” (Government of Chile, 2024). There are no public reports or information about the impact of this agreement on the JSET agenda implementation. In the same sense, the NS does not describe the relationship with international initiatives, such as the Just Energy Transition Partnerships or the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP). Therefore, an external barrier could be the disconnection between international JT dynamics, in particular those of the UNFCCC, and the national agenda.

Gaps and Opportunities for International Support

Beyond the efforts in integrating the PRAS, the cross-cutting nature of JT has led to overlaps and duplications with other Chilean policy frameworks. This issue is particularly evident in the sectors of climate change, energy, and sustainable development as detailed by UNDP & MMA (2025, p.34), which have numerous other strategies, governance structures, action plans, and participation processes being implemented. Besides the challenges in the efficient use or reorientation of public resources, these duplications have created knowledge and credibility gaps that have affected the incorporation of the JSET agenda among institutions, local governance bodies, and the general public.

Considering the uneven progress in design and planning phases across intervened territories, and that the NS has outlined implementation for the next ten years, international support should be useful for addressing three cross-cutting gaps.

First, the identification of the critical policies and binding mechanisms that could enable a multisectoral, multidimensional, and long-term agenda such as JSET. Mapping relevant institutions and norms would be appropriate for this purpose. Regarding knowledge and communication gaps (related to the sociocultural dimension of JSET definition), support is needed to improve the dissemination of JSET's implications and benefits among civil and private sectors, focusing on stakeholders associated with the six local governance bodies and action plans. Thirdly, the absence of diagnosis, indicators, and verification methods interferes, among others, with the NS goal of correcting socio-environmental inequalities.

About the latter, the diagnosis could inform the specificities of each territory; the technical and financial resources required for the objectives and timeframes of the NS; and the domestic and cross-border impacts of JSET actions. Moreover, the elaboration and updating of national indicators and verification methods for the intervened territories could improve the ex-ante gaps that caused the negative assessment of the PRAS/JSET programs. Having this information could improve accountability and demonstrate the social and environmental impacts of JSET, thus promoting its political continuity and budgetary increases.

To address the previous gaps, some international initiatives could be considered. For instance, the Global Accelerator, launched in 2021 and integrated by 17 countries, is currently the largest initiative providing support to national JT initiatives. While the six participating UN agencies could technically support the implementation of the NS and NDC actions, the initiative's scope and focus on the labor dimension may exclude some of Chile's main NS and NDC's actions. Moreover, Chile's classification as a "high-income country" may limit its access to financing.

For this financial gap, another opportunity could be the Strategic Plan for the Green Climate Fund (GCF) 2024–2027, which has prioritised "projects and programs that help advance just transitions" in sectors like energy, transport, infrastructure, ecosystems, and food systems (GCF, 2023, p. 104). The NS refers to all these sectors, but the GCF's understanding of just transitions, and thus the eventual project approval, depends on the discussions "within the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement."

The previous makes the JTWP decision adopted at COP 30 particularly important, because it politically reinforces principles and approaches followed by Chile, such as multi-stakeholder, participatory,

and multisectoral ones. The further development of a "just transition mechanism" could support the formulation of nation-specific diagnoses, indicators, and verifiers, as well as the development of technical and institutional capacities to implement the NS and JSET-related NDC actions.

Conclusion

Three main outcomes can be highlighted from the Chilean JSET pathway. First, the country has developed a transition that goes beyond the energy dimension and addresses issues like ecosystem restoration, water management, and infrastructure. Second, the six local governance bodies and the 17 institutions involved in JSET[7] represent an important alignment with the multistakeholder, participatory, and multisectoral approaches recognised by JTWP's COP30 decision for JT, which could help engagement with international opportunities. Third, recognizing PRAS as a JSET experience enabled the reallocation of resources and capacities toward new international commitments and national policies.

In contrast, some inconsistencies are limiting the efficacy of JSET, starting with its three different definitions, as seen in the NS, the last NDC and the law project. The latter expresses the disconnection between the governmental and legislative efforts, which may imply new challenges and barriers in the near term. Furthermore, the planning and design barriers are affecting the monitoring and accountability of the agenda, undermining its political and social impacts. International support could help to address these gaps and improve the implementation of national JSET policies.

Finally, considering the alignment with internationally recognised principles, approaches and sectors, Chilean JSET experience could serve as reference or be replicated in other national JT pathways that goes beyond energy dimension.

[7] Considering the 16 institutions that assumed commitments in the NS's action plan and the IC-JSET.

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