GENERAL STUDIES II

Just Energy Transition in India 2026: UPSC Analysis

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India's transition towards cleaner energy must balance climate commitments with affordable electricity, economic development, worker livelihoods and social equity. The concept of a just energy transition emphasises that emissions reductions should not disproportionately burden low-income households, coal-dependent communities or informal workers. It also calls for public participation in decisions involving renewable-energy projects, transmission infrastructure, land acquisition and industrial restructuring. India's federal structure makes state and local institutions crucial to implementation. For UPSC aspirants, this issue connects the Paris Agreement, nationally determined contributions, climate mitigation and adaptation, energy security, distributive justice, climate finance and intergenerational responsibility

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UPSC CIVIL SERVICES EXAMINATION PREPARATION

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS 2026 | ENVIRONMENT & INDIAN ECONOMY

Why climate ambition must be accompanied by affordable energy, social protection, worker reskilling and fair distribution of costs and benefits.

By Civil Service Gurukul Editorial Team | 28 October 2026

Executive Summary

India's climate transition involves more than reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Energy policy also determines whether families can afford electricity, whether workers retain livelihoods and whether vulnerable regions can finance adaptation.

The concept of a just energy transition requires climate mitigation to advance alongside affordability, participation, livelihood security and social equity.

For India, the challenge is to expand reliable modern energy access while reducing the emissions intensity of economic development.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Paris Agreement

CORE PRINCIPLE

Energy Justice

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS II, III & IV

UPSC Syllabus Mapping

Prelims: Paris Agreement, NDCs, mitigation, adaptation and energy justice.

GS Paper II: Welfare, federalism, public participation and governance.

GS Paper III: Climate change, energy policy, environment and economy.

GS Paper IV: Equity, intergenerational responsibility and ethical governance.

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Table of Contents

1. Why Is Energy Justice in the News?
2. What Is a Just Energy Transition?
3. Dimensions of Energy Justice
4. Paris Agreement and NDCs
5. Mitigation vs Adaptation
6. India's Development Challenge
7. Coal Workers and Livelihoods
8. Affordable Energy Access
9. Land, Water and Community Rights
10. Federalism and Climate Finance
11. Intergenerational Justice
12. Way Forward

13. UPSC Prelims Revision
14. UPSC Prelims MCQs
15. UPSC Mains Practice
16. Frequently Asked Questions
17. Conclusion

1. Why Is Energy Justice in the News?

Climate negotiations are often discussed through emission-reduction percentages, renewable-energy capacity and target years.

However, climate policies also influence electricity prices, employment, land use and public expenditure.

An October 2026 analysis of climate targets and energy justice highlights the need to evaluate India's energy transition through social and economic outcomes.

An energy transition cannot be considered fully successful if cleaner technologies expand while vulnerable households face greater hardship.

2. What Is a Just Energy Transition?

A just energy transition refers to the movement towards cleaner energy systems while protecting workers, communities and vulnerable consumers.

It seeks to distribute the costs and benefits of decarbonisation fairly.

Essential characteristics

- Affordable access to reliable energy.
- Protection of vulnerable households.
- Worker reskilling and social protection.
- Meaningful community participation.
- Fair treatment of affected regions.
- Protection of future generations.

> **Key Concept**
>
> A just transition is not an argument for abandoning climate action. It is an approach for making climate action fair, practical and durable.

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3. Three Important Dimensions of Energy Justice

A. Distributive Justice

Distributive justice concerns the fair allocation of benefits and burdens.

For example, cleaner energy may improve air quality, but upfront costs of grid modernisation or new technologies may disproportionately affect low-income consumers.

B. Procedural Justice

Procedural justice concerns meaningful participation in decisions.

Communities affected by renewable-energy projects, transmission corridors or industrial restructuring should have opportunities to express their concerns.

C. Recognition Justice

Recognition justice requires policymakers to acknowledge the distinct needs and vulnerabilities of different communities.

Coal-dependent districts, informal workers and low-income households may experience the transition differently.

Dimension	Central Question	Example
Distributive	Who gains and who pays?	Affordable electricity and fair cost sharing
Procedural	Who participates in decisions?	Consultation before major energy projects
Recognition	Whose needs are acknowledged?	Protection for coal workers and vulnerable communities

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4. Paris Agreement and Nationally Determined Contributions

The Paris Agreement operates through nationally determined contributions, commonly called NDCs.

Countries communicate their climate commitments according to the agreement's framework rather than following one identical emissions target.

The global climate agenda also includes adaptation, finance and equitable transition.

Why this matters for India

- India has substantial development needs.
- Reliable energy is essential for economic activity.
- Climate policy must consider affordability.
- Climate finance can support implementation.
- Transition outcomes differ across regions.

India's climate strategy must therefore consider both environmental outcomes and developmental priorities.

5. Climate Mitigation vs Climate Adaptation

Basis	Mitigation	Adaptation
Meaning	Reducing greenhouse gas emissions or enhancing sinks	Adjusting to actual or expected climate impacts
Objective	Limit the causes of climate change	Reduce vulnerability and damage
Examples	Cleaner power generation and energy efficiency	Flood preparedness and heat-resilient infrastructure

Mitigation and adaptation are complementary components of climate policy.

A just transition must consider both the costs of emissions reduction and the distribution of climate impacts.

6. India's Distinctive Energy Transition Challenge

India must expand access to reliable modern energy while reducing the emissions intensity of economic growth.

This creates a complex policy challenge because the needs of industrial regions, urban households and rural communities are not identical.

Key considerations

- Reliable electricity for development.
- Affordable household energy.
- Industrial competitiveness.
- Employment and livelihoods.
- Environmental sustainability.
- Climate resilience.

Counting installed renewable-energy capacity alone does not reveal whether the benefits are equitably distributed.

7. Coal-Dependent Districts and Worker Livelihoods

Coal-dependent regions may face employment and revenue challenges as energy systems evolve.

Workers may require new skills, social protection and access to alternative employment.

Important policy responses

- District-level transition planning.
- Vocational education and reskilling.
- Support for alternative industries.

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- Social protection for affected workers.
- Local economic diversification.

The objective should be to reduce emissions without creating avoidable economic distress in vulnerable regions.

8. Energy Affordability and Household Welfare

The energy transition may require investment in grids, new technologies and infrastructure.

These investments can create upfront costs that affect household energy bills.

Without appropriate safeguards, low-income consumers may experience disproportionate burdens.

Possible policy measures

- Well-targeted support for basic energy needs.
- Improved distribution efficiency.
- Transparent tariff design.
- Reduction of avoidable system losses.
- Protection against energy poverty.

Affordable energy access should be considered a central outcome of climate policy.

9. Land, Water and Community Rights

Renewable-energy projects and transmission infrastructure can create land-use and environmental challenges.

Large projects may affect agriculture, water resources, biodiversity and local livelihoods.

Why procedural safeguards matter

- Meaningful community consultation.
- Transparent land records.
- Fair compensation where applicable.
- Assessment of environmental impacts.
- Accessible grievance mechanisms.

Better participation can reduce conflict and strengthen the long-term durability of clean-energy investments.

10. Federalism and Climate Finance

India's federal structure makes climate-policy implementation a shared governance challenge.

Electricity distribution, land use, urban transport and adaptation involve states and local institutions.

Therefore, national targets must be supported by appropriate financing and local implementation capacity.

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Important governance priorities

- Coordination between Union and state governments.
- Financial support for affected regions.
- Strengthening local institutions.
- Transparent monitoring of expenditure.
- Community-level accountability.

11. Intergenerational Justice and Climate Ethics

Intergenerational justice concerns fairness between present and future generations.

Delaying climate mitigation may transfer greater environmental harm to younger and future generations.

However, abrupt economic restructuring without adequate support may harm workers and communities today.

A credible transition must therefore protect both present livelihoods and long-term environmental security.

> **UPSC Ethics Perspective**
>
> Climate justice involves responsibility, fairness, accountability and concern for vulnerable populations.

12. Policy Priorities and the Way Forward

1. Develop district-level transition plans for coal-dependent regions.
2. Provide reskilling and social protection for affected workers.
3. Protect affordable basic electricity access.
4. Improve the efficiency of electricity distribution.
5. Assess land, water and biodiversity impacts.
6. Strengthen community consultation.
7. Improve access to climate finance.
8. Support state and local implementation capacity.
9. Track employment and household energy burdens.
10. Measure social outcomes alongside emissions reductions.

Climate policy should be assessed not only by the quantity of clean energy installed, but also by the quality and fairness of the transition.

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13. UPSC Prelims Quick Revision Notes

- **Mitigation:** Reduces emissions or enhances sinks.
- **Adaptation:** Manages actual or expected climate impacts.
- **NDC:** Nationally Determined Contribution.
- **Paris Agreement:** International climate framework using NDCs.
- **Just Transition:** Fairness for workers and communities during decarbonisation.
- **Energy Justice:** Fair distribution, participation and recognition.
- **Distributive Justice:** Fair allocation of costs and benefits.
- **Procedural Justice:** Meaningful participation in decisions.
- **Recognition Justice:** Acknowledgement of differing needs and vulnerabilities.
- **Intergenerational Justice:** Fairness between present and future generations.

14. UPSC Prelims Practice MCQs

Question 1.

With reference to a just energy transition, consider the following statements:

1. It considers the distribution of costs and benefits.
2. It includes protection of affected workers and communities.
3. It evaluates success only through installed renewable-energy capacity.

Which statements are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Correct Answer: (a).

A just transition considers social and economic fairness alongside environmental outcomes. Installed capacity alone is not a sufficient measure.

Question 2.

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What does NDC stand for under the Paris Agreement?

(a) National Development Council
(b) Nationally Determined Contribution
(c) National Decarbonisation Commission
(d) New Development Commitment

Correct Answer: (b).

NDC means Nationally Determined Contribution.

Question 3.

Which of the following best represents procedural energy justice?

(a) Excluding local communities from project decisions
(b) Meaningful consultation with affected communities
(c) Measuring only national emission totals
(d) Ignoring land-use impacts

Correct Answer: (b).

Procedural justice concerns fair and meaningful participation in decision-making.

Question 4.

Consider the following statements:

1. Climate mitigation aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or enhance sinks.
2. Climate adaptation aims to manage climate impacts.
3. Mitigation and adaptation are identical concepts.

Which statements are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 2 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Correct Answer: (c).

Mitigation addresses the causes of climate change, while adaptation addresses its impacts. They are complementary, not identical.

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15. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question 1 — GS Paper III

India's climate commitments cannot be separated from questions of energy justice. Discuss. (250 words)

Suggested Answer Framework

Climate action requires reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and stronger resilience to climate impacts.

However, the costs of transition may affect low-income households, coal-dependent districts and informal workers.

A just transition must therefore combine mitigation with affordability, social protection and participation.

India's federal structure makes state and local institutions important for electricity distribution, land use and adaptation.

District-level planning, worker reskilling, climate finance and transparent monitoring can improve outcomes.

The objective is to ensure that environmental sustainability advances alongside economic and social justice.

Question 2 — GS Paper IV

Explain how intergenerational justice and distributive justice should influence India's climate policy. (150 words)

Answer Approach

1. Define intergenerational justice.
2. Explain distributive justice.
3. Discuss future climate risks.
4. Highlight present livelihood concerns.
5. Suggest balanced and accountable policy measures.

16. Frequently Asked Questions

What is energy justice?

Energy justice concerns who receives energy benefits, who bears the costs and who participates in decisions.

What is a just energy transition?

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It is the shift towards cleaner energy systems while protecting vulnerable workers, communities and consumers.

Does a just transition mean delaying climate action?

No. It means implementing climate action with appropriate social and economic safeguards.

Why are coal-dependent districts important?

They may face employment and economic challenges during energy-sector restructuring.

What is the role of states in India's energy transition?

States and local bodies influence electricity distribution, land use, transport, employment and adaptation.

What is the difference between mitigation and adaptation?

Mitigation addresses the causes of climate change, while adaptation addresses its impacts.

Why is energy justice important for UPSC?

It connects environment, economy, governance, welfare, federalism and ethics across multiple UPSC papers.

17. Conclusion: A Fair Transition Is a Durable Transition

India's energy transition must advance climate ambition while protecting economic development and social equity.

Affordable electricity, worker livelihoods, public participation and regional fairness are essential to long-term policy success.

A credible transition should measure jobs, energy access, household costs and community participation alongside emissions.

For UPSC aspirants, the central lesson is that environmental sustainability and social justice must be pursued together.

Just Energy Transition | Climate Justice India | Energy Affordability | Paris Agreement | NDC | Coal Transition | Climate Finance | UPSC GS Paper III | Civil Service Gurukul

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Educational analysis for UPSC preparation. Climate commitments and regulatory developments should be checked against their latest authoritative versions before professional reliance.

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