

Policy Brief

Social Resistance and the Low-Carbon Transition in Türkiye

Governance Risks, Societal Dynamics, and Policy Recommendations for a Just Energy Transition

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Project Information

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Executive Summary

Türkiye's low-carbon transition has accelerated considerably over the past decade under the combined influence of energy security concerns, pressures on industrial competitiveness, climate commitments, and evolving European climate governance frameworks. Renewable energy investments, particularly in solar and wind power, have expanded rapidly, while new regulatory pressures linked to the European Green Deal and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) are shaping domestic energy and industrial policy discussions (European Commission, 2023; IEA, 2024).

At the same time, the transition is unfolding within a complex socio-economic environment characterised by regional inequalities, fossil-fuel dependency, industrial restructuring pressures, and uneven institutional capacities. Although decarbonization is often discussed primarily in terms of technological modernisation and infrastructure deployment, transition processes also reshape labour markets, local economies, territorial identities, and broader perceptions of fairness. In this context, societal responses to transition policies are becoming important for the long-term stability and legitimacy of climate governance.

This policy brief examines how social resistance emerges within Türkiye's low-carbon transition and why public institutions can no longer afford to treat societal dimensions as secondary policy concerns. The analysis demonstrates that resistance frequently emerges not from opposition to

climate action itself but from concerns about procedural exclusion, unequal distribution of transition burdens, weak institutional communication, limited opportunities for meaningful participation, and uncertainty about future livelihoods (Jenkins et al., 2016; Heffron & McCauley, 2017).

The findings further suggest that governance quality directly shapes transition outcomes. Projects and policies perceived as exclusionary, insufficiently transparent, or socially unequal are vulnerable to institutional distrust, implementation delays, local contestation, and broader public backlash. Decision-making structures that integrate participation, transparency, fair decision-making and socio-economic adaptation into transition planning are more likely to maintain long-term public legitimacy. Ignoring societal concerns does not accelerate the transition; in many cases, it undermines implementation capacity and slows the transition itself.

Drawing on both Turkish and European experiences, the brief develops a governance-oriented framework for understanding resistance across individual, community, and institutional levels. While the analysis focuses primarily on Türkiye, many of the governance challenges identified throughout the brief are equally relevant to coal-dependent and industrial regions across Europe facing similar decarbonization pressures.

The policy recommendations developed throughout the brief emphasise the importance of early-stage stakeholder engagement, region-specific just transition strategies, social vulnerability assessments, institutional transparency, and long-term trust-building mechanisms. Ultimately, the analysis argues that the success of low-carbon transitions will depend not only on technological modernisation and emissions reductions but also on whether governance mechanisms can maintain public trust and socially legitimate transition pathways amid profound economic and territorial transformation. Social resistance should therefore be understood not merely as an obstacle to decarbonisation, but as a governance signal revealing the quality of institutional responsiveness, procedural fairness, and societal resilience.

1. Introduction

The global low-carbon transition is reshaping not only energy systems but also industrial structures, governance models, and broader societal relations. Across Europe and beyond, countries are accelerating renewable energy deployment, phasing out coal-based electricity generation, electrifying transportation systems, and adopting ambitious climate policies. Türkiye is also undergoing a rapidly evolving energy transition shaped by energy security concerns, economic modernisation pressures, climate commitments, and changing international policy frameworks.

In recent years, Türkiye has significantly expanded its renewable energy investments, particularly in wind and solar power. At the same time, decarbonization pressures associated with the European Green Deal, carbon border adjustment mechanisms, sustainable finance frameworks, and global climate governance are increasing the urgency of transition policies (European Commission, 2019). Yet this transition is unfolding within a complex socio-economic environment

characterised by regional inequalities, uneven institutional capacities, industrial dependencies, and growing societal vulnerabilities.

Although energy transitions are often discussed primarily in terms of technological modernisation and economic transformation, they are equally social and political processes (Geels, 2014; Sovacool et al., 2021). Transition policies reshape labour markets, local economies, land-use patterns, and everyday consumption practices, while also influencing perceptions of fairness, inclusion, and institutional trust. In this context, transition processes may generate societal tensions and different forms of resistance, particularly when communities perceive decision-making processes as exclusionary, unfair, or disconnected from local realities.

Social resistance is becoming a visible dimension of low-carbon transitions globally (Wüstenhagen et al., 2007; Devine-Wright, 2007). Opposition to renewable energy projects, scepticism toward transition policies, distrust in public authorities, and concerns regarding fairness in decision-making are becoming more evident across many regions. Similar dynamics are also observable in Türkiye, particularly in coal-dependent regions, industrial areas, and communities directly affected by large-scale infrastructure investments.

Importantly, resistance frequently emerges not from opposition to decarbonization itself, but from perceptions that transition processes are insufficiently transparent, socially unequal, or disconnected from local realities. In many cases, resistance reflects broader concerns regarding governance quality, participation mechanisms, fair decision-making processes, institutional transparency, and socio-economic uncertainty. Ignoring these societal dimensions risks weakening not only public trust but also the long-term implementation capacity of transition policies themselves.

This policy brief, therefore, examines how social resistance emerges during Türkiye’s low-carbon transition, identifies the key governance-related drivers of these dynamics, and evaluates the risks of neglecting societal concerns amid accelerated transformation. Building on both Turkish and European experiences, the brief also develops governance-oriented policy recommendations and highlights transferable lessons for other coal-dependent and industrial regions facing similar decarbonization pressures. Rather than offering an exhaustive theoretical discussion, this brief seeks to inform the design of transition pathways that are socially legitimate, institutionally credible, and politically sustainable.

2. Türkiye’s Energy Transition Landscape

Key Energy Transition Indicators for Türkiye

Indicator	Latest Value
Non-hydro renewable share(2026-Q1)	> 36%
Solar installed capacity (2025)	~25 GW

Indicator	Latest Value
Wind installed capacity (2025)	~15 GW
Coal share in electricity generation (2026-Q1)	~34%
Combined solar + wind additions in 2025	~6.5 GW
Share of exports directed to EU markets	~41%
Geothermal installed capacity (2026-Q1)	> 1.8 GW

Sources: Ember (2026), IEA (2024), IRENA (2024), European Commission (2023).

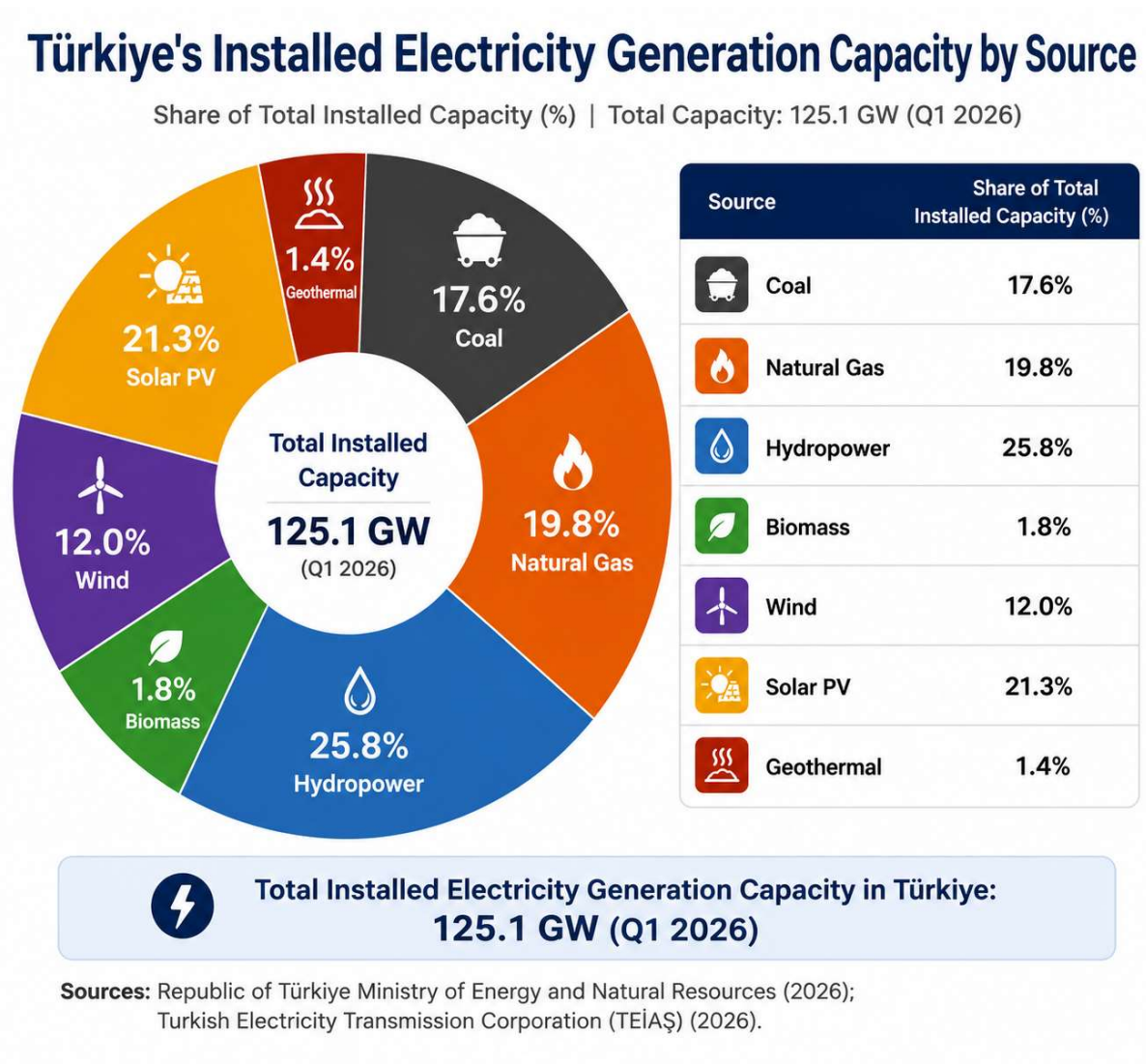


Figure 1. Türkiye’s Electricity Generation Capacity by Source (Q1-2026). Authors' elaboration with AI-assisted design support. The authors retain full responsibility for the data selection, analysis, interpretation, and final presentation.

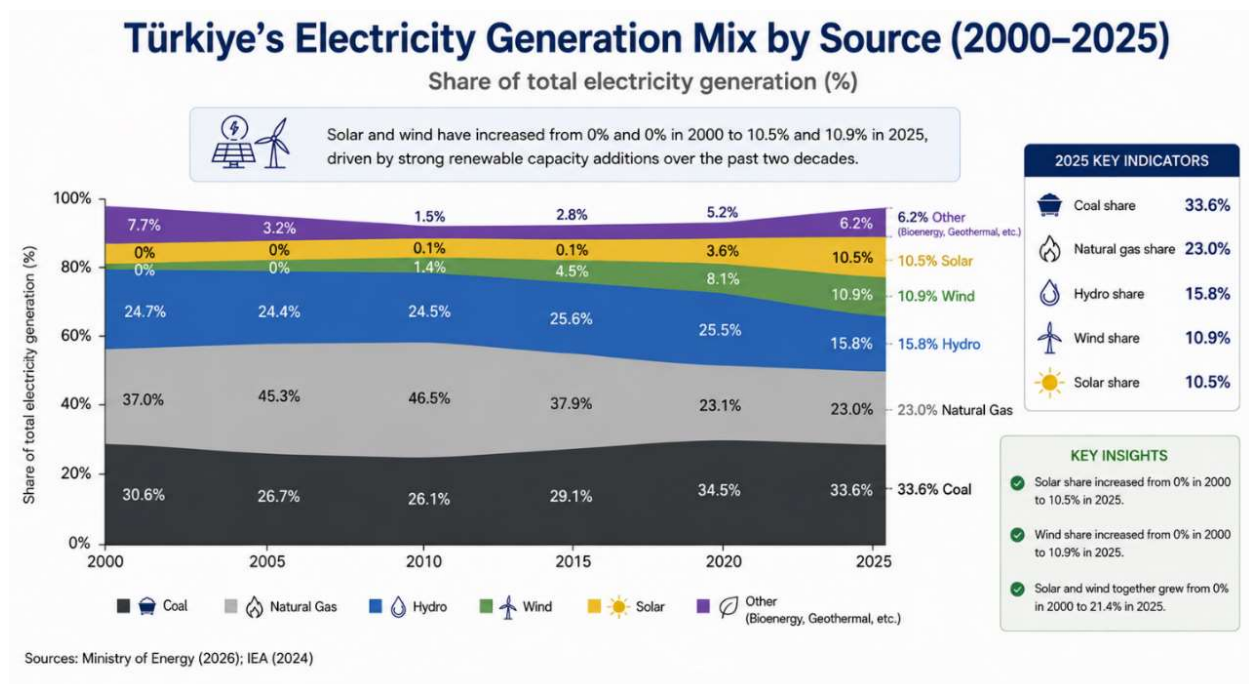


Figure 2. Türkiye's Electricity Generation Mix by Source (2000–2025). Authors' elaboration with AI-assisted design support. The authors retain full responsibility for the data selection, analysis, interpretation, and final presentation.

2.1 Accelerating Decarbonization Pressures

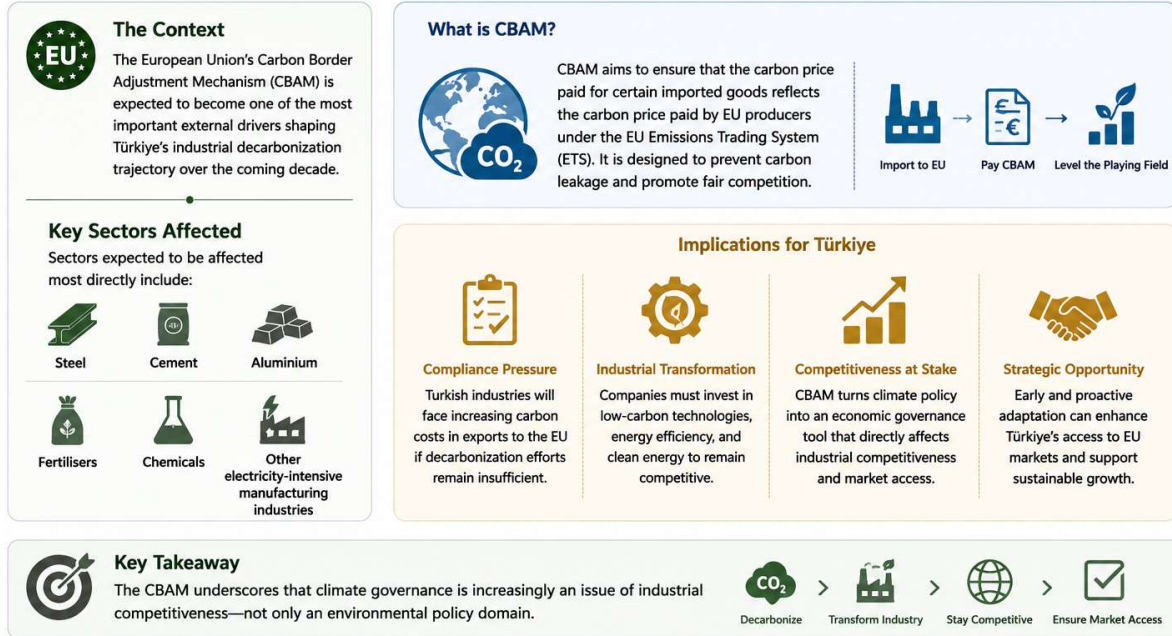
Türkiye's energy system has undergone a significant transformation over the past two decades. Rising energy demand, concerns about import dependence, industrial development priorities, and climate-related policy pressures have accelerated investments in renewable energy infrastructure and energy diversification.

Renewable energy capacity, particularly in wind and solar power, has expanded rapidly through mechanisms such as YEKA (Renewable Energy Resource Areas) auctions, feed-in tariffs, and growing private sector investments. According to Ember (2026), Türkiye added approximately 6.5 GW of combined solar and wind capacity in 2025 alone, marking the highest annual renewable energy expansion in the country's history. By 2026, installed solar capacity exceeded 25 GW, while wind capacity approached 15 GW, reflecting the accelerating pace of renewable energy deployment nationwide (TEİAŞ, 2026).

CASE STUDY

CBAM and Industrial Transformation

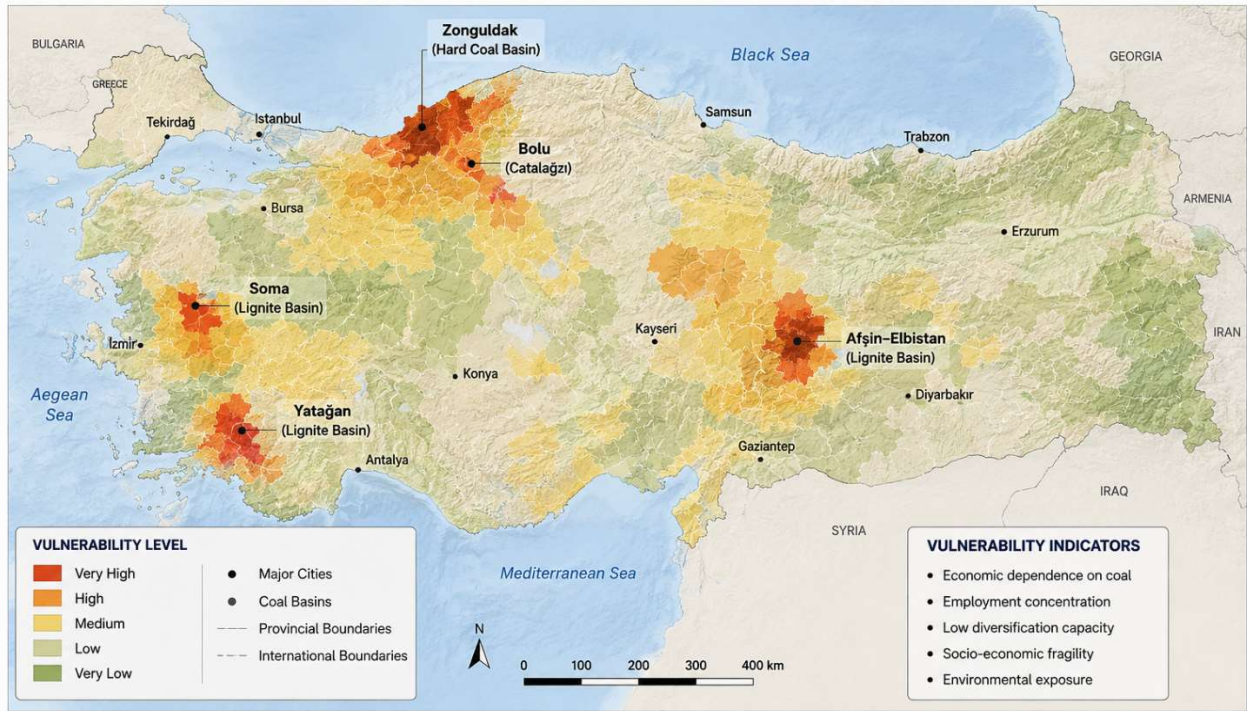
Climate Policy as Economic Governance



Sources: European Commission (2023); ICAP (2023)

At the same time, international pressures linked to decarbonization and climate governance are influencing domestic policy discussions. The European Green Deal and the CBAM are important for Türkiye due to the country's strong trade relations with the European Union (United Nations Comtrade Database, 2024; European Commission, 2022b). Approximately 40% of Turkish exports are directed toward EU markets, creating growing pressure on carbon-intensive sectors such as steel, cement, aluminium, and chemicals to accelerate industrial decarbonization and emissions reporting processes (European Commission, 2023). Under these conditions, climate policy is no longer discussed solely within an environmental framework; it is becoming part of broader debates on industry, trade, and competitiveness.

Territorial Vulnerability to Coal Transition in Türkiye



Source: Own assessment based on World Bank (2022); IEA (2024); TurkStat (2024); regional development plans.

Note: The assessment reflects relative territorial vulnerability based on the selected indicators and does not represent an absolute measurement.

Figure 3. Regions with Territorial Vulnerability to Coal Transition in Türkiye (Vulnerability levels represent indicative territorial patterns derived from the selected indicators and should not be interpreted as an official composite index) Authors' elaboration with AI-assisted design support. The authors retain full responsibility for the analytical framework and final presentation.

Türkiye continues to maintain coal within its energy mix, particularly due to energy security concerns and industrial policy priorities. Coal still accounts for roughly one-third of electricity generation in Türkiye. At the same time, thousands of jobs remain directly or indirectly linked to coal mining and coal-fired electricity generation in regions such as Zonguldak, Soma, and Afşin-Elbistan (IEA, 2024; World Bank, 2022). As a result, Türkiye's transition process reflects a complex dual structure in which decarbonization pressures coexist with continuing fossil-fuel dependency.

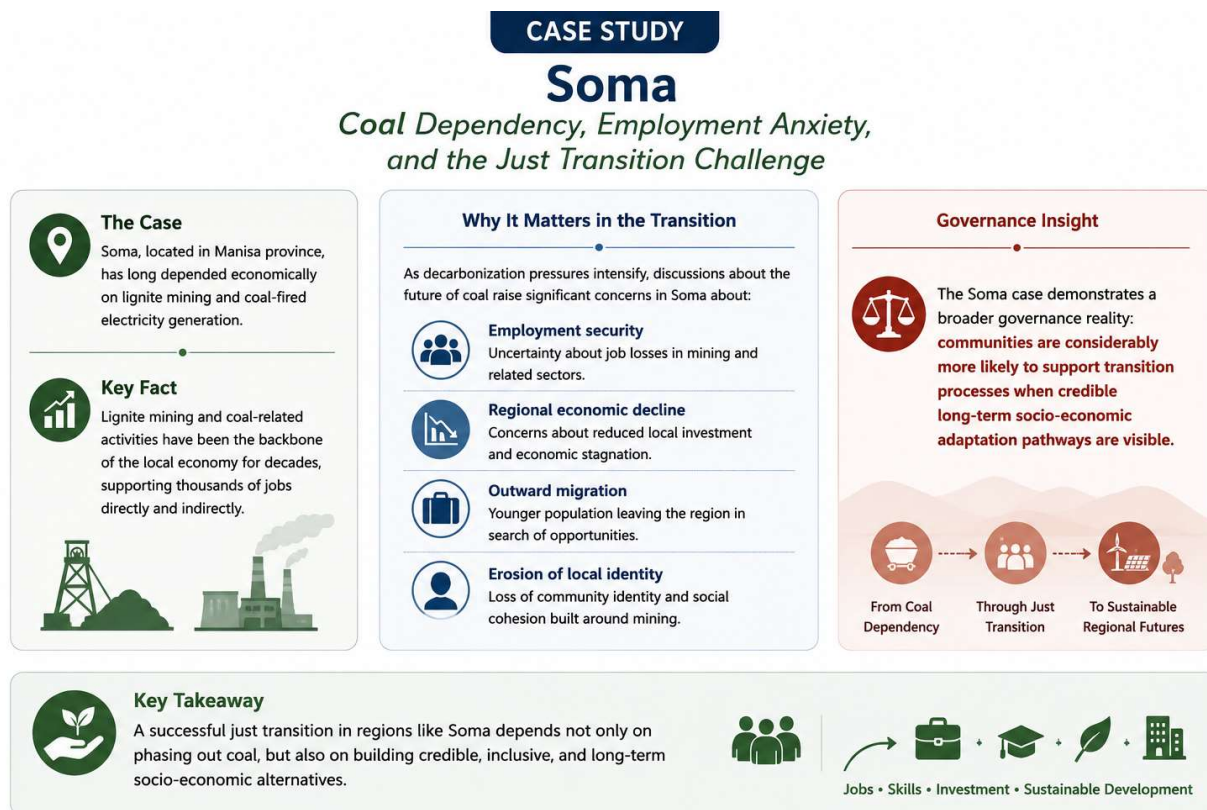
2.2 Coal-Dependent Regions and Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities

Several regions in Türkiye remain economically dependent on coal mining, coal-fired electricity generation, and energy-intensive industrial activities. In these regions, decarbonization policies intersect with concerns regarding employment security, regional economic resilience, and long-term socio-economic adaptation. Coal-related industries in Türkiye often extend beyond direct employment, supporting wider local economic ecosystems through subcontracting networks, transportation services, municipal revenues, and small-scale businesses.

For this reason, debates surrounding the low-carbon transition raise concerns about employment losses, regional economic decline, outward migration, and the weakening of local identity

structures. These vulnerabilities become particularly visible in regions where economic diversification remains limited and institutional capacity for adaptation is comparatively weak.

Crucially, such dynamics are not unique to Türkiye. Similar tensions have emerged across coal-dependent regions in Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, and other European industrial regions undergoing decarbonization processes. International experience demonstrates that transitions perceived as socially unequal or economically unmanaged are significantly more likely to generate resistance, distrust, and governance tensions (Newell & Mulvaney, 2013; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019). In this respect, debates emerging in Türkiye reflect broader governance challenges associated with balancing climate objectives, socio-economic stability, and regional resilience.



Sources: ILO (2015); World Bank (2022)

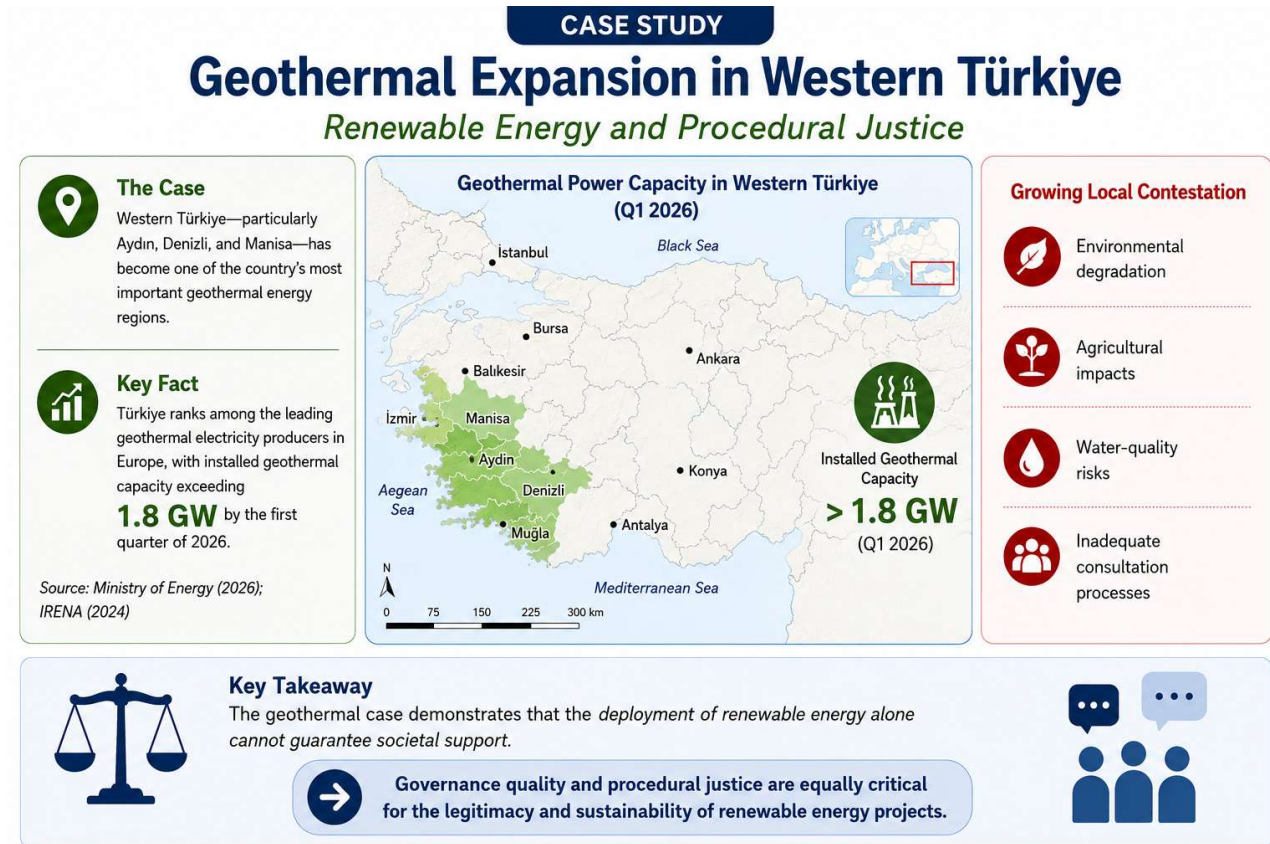
2.3 Expanding Renewable Energy and Local Contestation

Renewable energy expansion is generally associated with broad public support due to its environmental and climate-related benefits (Wolsink, 2007). However, both international experience and the Turkish case demonstrate that renewable energy deployment may also generate significant tensions at the local level, particularly when governance processes are perceived as exclusionary or insufficiently transparent.

In Türkiye, local contestation surrounding wind farms, hydroelectric projects, geothermal investments, mining activities, and transmission infrastructure has become visible in recent years. These tensions are rarely driven by opposition to renewable energy itself. More often, they

emerge around concerns related to land use, environmental degradation, agricultural livelihoods, inclusive decision-making, and limited opportunities for meaningful local participation.

In many cases, communities support renewable energy and climate action at the national level while simultaneously opposing specific projects perceived as disconnected from local realities or implemented without adequate consultation. Such dynamics demonstrate that public acceptance is becoming a central condition for successful transition governance.



From this perspective, the Turkish experience reflects a broader challenge visible across many European transition contexts: renewable energy deployment alone does not automatically generate public acceptance (Walker & Devine-Wright, 2008; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). Institutional trust, transparency, fairness, and governance quality shape how communities respond to transition-related infrastructure projects.

3. Understanding Social Resistance in Energy Transitions

3.1 Resistance Beyond Simplified Explanations

Public opposition to energy infrastructure projects has traditionally been interpreted through relatively narrow frameworks such as the “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) approach, which tends to reduce resistance to localised self-interest or irrational opposition (Devine-Wright, 2009).

However, contemporary transition research demonstrates that such approaches fail to capture the broader governance and socio-economic dynamics shaping societal responses to low-carbon transitions.

In practice, public contestation often reflects deeper concerns about institutional trust, transparent and inclusive governance, land-use conflicts, unequal burden-sharing, and uncertainty about future livelihoods. Resistance, therefore, cannot be understood solely as opposition to specific technologies or infrastructure projects. In many cases, it reflects broader concerns about how transition processes are governed, who participates in decision-making, who bears the costs of transition, and who ultimately benefits from these transformations.

This distinction is especially relevant in the Turkish context, where support for climate action often coexists with strong opposition to specific projects perceived as procedurally unfair or insufficiently responsive to local concerns. Such tensions demonstrate that public support for decarbonization does not automatically translate into unconditional acceptance of all transition-related investments.

The growing literature on energy justice and social acceptance emphasises that transition processes are evaluated not only by their environmental outcomes but also by the distribution of costs, benefits, risks, and decision-making power across society (Jenkins et al., 2016; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). In practice, institutional capacity becomes a central determinant of whether transition policies are perceived as legitimate or exclusionary.

3.2 Resistance as a Multi-Level Process

Resistance against low-carbon transition policies rarely emerges from a single source. Instead, it develops through the interaction of economic, social, territorial, and institutional dynamics operating simultaneously at multiple levels.

At the individual level, resistance is often shaped by economic insecurity and uncertainty regarding future livelihoods. In regions dependent on coal mining, energy-intensive industries, or agricultural production, transition policies may raise concerns about unemployment, declining incomes, or the loss of long-term economic stability. These anxieties may become even more visible during periods of inflationary pressure and broader macroeconomic uncertainty.

At the community level, resistance frequently becomes connected to questions of place attachment, regional identity, and collective memory. Energy infrastructure projects do not function merely as technical interventions; they also reshape landscapes, local economies, and social relations. In this respect, local contestation often reflects attempts to protect existing forms of territorial and socio-economic stability.

In Türkiye, geothermal conflicts in Western Anatolia, mining-related protests, and resistance to large-scale energy infrastructure projects demonstrate how local mobilisation may emerge when environmental risks, inadequate consultation processes, or the unequal distribution of project burdens become more visible to affected communities.

Institutional factors also play a decisive role in shaping societal responses to transition processes. Communities are more likely to tolerate disruption and uncertainty when institutions are perceived as transparent, responsive, and accountable. Conversely, weak communication, limited opportunities for participation, and inconsistent decision-making processes may deepen distrust of both public authorities and private-sector actors.

Importantly, resistance rarely emerges suddenly. In many cases, it develops progressively over time. Initial uncertainty or dissatisfaction may gradually evolve into broader distrust and organised contestation when communities feel ignored, excluded, or politically marginalised during decision-making processes. Once institutional distrust becomes entrenched, rebuilding legitimacy becomes significantly more difficult.

Consequently, ignoring early signs of societal dissatisfaction may ultimately increase long-term governance risks, implementation instability, and social tensions.

4. Governance Risks of Ignoring Social Resistance

4.1 Delays, Uncertainty, and Implementation Instability

One of the most immediate consequences of unmanaged social resistance is the slowing down of transition processes (Wüstenhagen et al., 2007; Carattini et al., 2019). Across Europe and beyond, opposition to renewable energy projects, mining activities, transmission infrastructure, and industrial transformation initiatives has resulted in legal disputes, prolonged permitting processes, administrative delays, and rising implementation costs.

In the Turkish context, these risks are becoming more visible as renewable energy deployment accelerates and industrial decarbonization pressures intensify. Large-scale infrastructure projects require major land-use changes, environmental approvals, and local adaptation processes. When communities perceive such processes as exclusionary or insufficiently transparent, contestation may gradually weaken implementation capacity and undermine project stability.

Importantly, delays associated with social resistance are not merely technical or administrative problems. Repeated conflicts may reduce investor confidence, weaken policy predictability, and complicate long-term transition planning (OECD, 2019; World Bank, 2022). In practice, poorly governed transition processes may ultimately undermine the very decarbonization objectives they are intended to support.

International experience demonstrates that governance shortcomings and institutional inadequacies often generate far greater long-term costs than early-stage participatory planning mechanisms would have required. For this reason, participation should be viewed not as an additional procedural requirement, but as a strategic investment in implementation stability and long-term policy credibility.

4.2 Institutional Trust and Governance Legitimacy

The long-term effectiveness of climate governance is closely linked to institutional trust (Tyler, 2006). Communities are considerably more likely to tolerate uncertainty, short-term disruption, and economic adjustment when public institutions are perceived as transparent, accountable, and responsive.

Conversely, when transition processes are perceived as unfair or exclusionary, distrust may gradually extend beyond specific infrastructure projects and begin to affect broader climate and sustainability policies. This dynamic is a key issue because institutional distrust tends to accumulate over time. Communities repeatedly exposed to non-transparent decision-making processes or weak consultation mechanisms may become sceptical toward future transition initiatives, regardless of their specific content.

In Türkiye, these dynamics intersect with broader socio-economic pressures, including inflation, regional inequalities, industrial restructuring, and uncertainty regarding future livelihoods. In many cases, the quality of decision-making is important for maintaining policy credibility and public legitimacy.

The central challenge, therefore, is not simply whether societies support renewable energy or climate action in principle. It is whether policy frameworks are perceived as capable of managing transition costs, risks, and uncertainties fairly across different social groups and regions.

4.3 Social Tensions and Transition Backlash

Energy transitions are intertwined with broader economic, political, and social debates. Climate policies may become significantly more difficult to implement when transition-related costs are perceived as socially unequal or when vulnerable communities feel excluded from decision-making processes (Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019).

International examples such as the “Yellow Vest” protests in France demonstrate how climate-related measures may trigger broader societal reactions when questions of fairness and socio-economic inequality remain insufficiently addressed. Similar tensions have also emerged across several European coal-dependent regions where decarbonization policies have become associated with fears of regional decline and economic marginalisation.

Although the Turkish transition context differs considerably from these cases, comparable governance risks remain relevant. In regions economically dependent on coal mining or energy-intensive industries, rapid decarbonization pressures may intensify concerns regarding employment security, regional resilience, and long-term economic stability.

If such concerns remain unaddressed, transition policies may gradually become linked to broader socio-economic grievances extending beyond environmental policy itself. As a result, climate governance may become vulnerable to declining public trust, weakened societal support, and long-term policy instability.

4.4 Risks for Just Transition Objectives

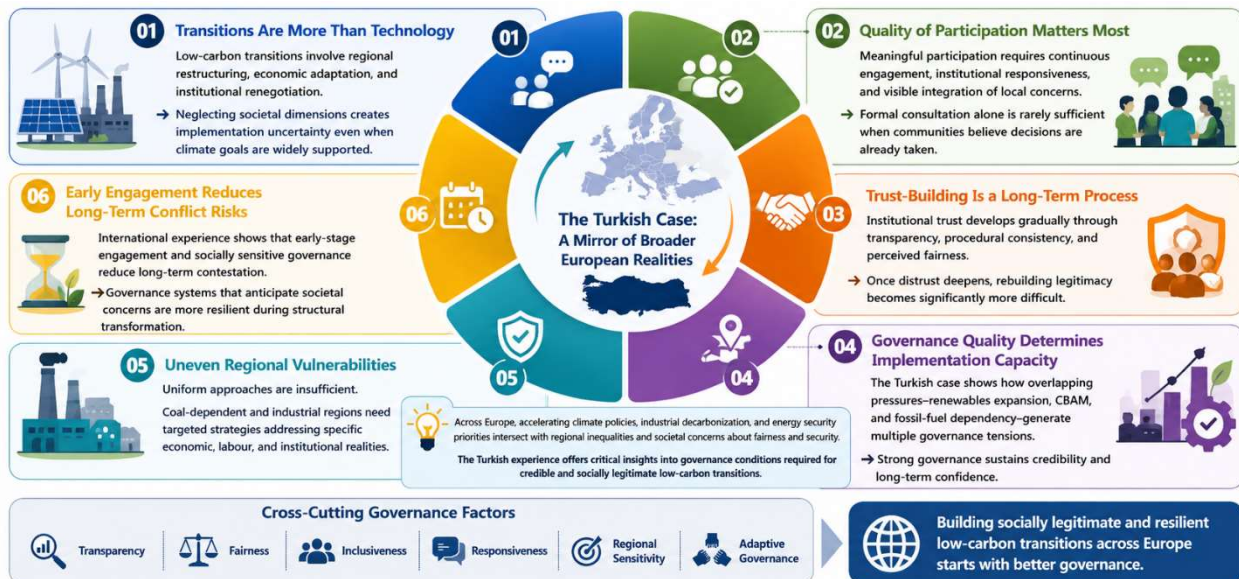
The concept of just transition has become central within international climate governance discussions (ILO, 2015; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). However, the findings presented throughout this brief suggest that justice considerations cannot remain limited to broad policy narratives or rhetorical commitments alone.

Communities experiencing unequal transition burdens may perceive climate policies as socially unfair even when environmental objectives are widely accepted. This becomes crucial in regions characterized by fossil-fuel dependency, weak economic diversification, or limited institutional adaptation capacity.

From this perspective, perceptions of injustice may deepen societal dissatisfaction and further weaken institutional trust.

Maintaining the legitimacy of just transition agendas, therefore, requires more than compensation mechanisms alone. It requires governance approaches that integrate participation, regional adaptation, institutional transparency, and long-term socio-economic resilience directly into transition planning processes.

5. Transferable Lessons for European and Coal-Dependent Regions



Sources: European Commission (2023); IPCC (2023); Walker & Devine-Wright (2008); Tyler (2006); Heffron & McCouley (2017) and others.

Figure 4. Transferable lessons emerging from the Turkish case. Authors' elaboration with AI-assisted design support. The authors retain full responsibility for the conceptual design and final presentation.

Although this policy brief focuses primarily on Türkiye, many of the governance dynamics identified in the analysis are evident across Europe and other coal-dependent regions undergoing accelerated decarbonization. From this perspective, the Turkish case should not be viewed as an isolated example but rather as part of a broader set of governance tensions emerging during the low-carbon transition.

Across Europe, governments are simultaneously attempting to accelerate renewable energy deployment, reduce industrial emissions, strengthen energy security, and maintain economic competitiveness under rapidly changing geopolitical and regulatory conditions (European Commission, 2023; IPCC, 2023). Yet these objectives intersect with uneven regional development patterns, labour market vulnerabilities, territorial inequalities, and growing societal concerns regarding fairness, participation, and economic security.

Experiences from coal-dependent regions in countries such as Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Romania demonstrate that technological modernisation alone cannot guarantee socially stable transition pathways. Even where broad societal support for climate action exists, local contestation may still emerge when transition policies are perceived as economically unequal, procedurally weak, or disconnected from regional realities.

The Turkish case reflects these dynamics particularly clearly. Rapid renewable energy expansion, industrial decarbonization pressures associated with the CBAM, and continuing fossil-fuel dependency are generating overlapping transition pressures across multiple sectors and regions simultaneously. In this context, institutional responsiveness plays a larger role not only in maintaining implementation capacity but also in sustaining institutional credibility and long-term confidence.

Several broader lessons, therefore, emerge from the analysis.

First, low-carbon transitions cannot be understood solely as technological or infrastructural transformations. They also involve processes of regional restructuring, economic adaptation, and institutional renegotiation. Processes that neglect societal dimensions may therefore generate implementation uncertainty even where climate objectives themselves are broadly supported.

Second, the quality of participation matters more than the quantity. Meaningful participation requires continuous engagement, institutional responsiveness, and visible incorporation of local concerns into decision-making processes (Walker & Devine-Wright, 2008; Tyler, 2006). Formal consultation mechanisms alone are rarely sufficient when communities believe that major decisions have already been taken.

Third, trust-building should be approached as a long-term governance process rather than a short-term communication strategy. Institutional trust develops gradually through transparency, procedural consistency, and perceptions of fairness (Tyler, 2006; Heffron & McCauley, 2017). Once distrust becomes deeply embedded, rebuilding legitimacy becomes considerably more difficult.

Fourth, transition vulnerabilities remain uneven across regions. Uniform policy approaches may therefore prove insufficient in contexts shaped by different economic structures, labour

dependencies, institutional capacities, and territorial identities. Coal-dependent and industrial regions frequently require more targeted governance approaches to address region-specific adaptation challenges and socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Finally, international experience demonstrates that early-stage engagement and socially sensitive governance approaches may significantly reduce long-term conflict risks. Systems capable of proactively integrating societal concerns are generally more resilient during periods of structural transformation.

These dynamics are likely to become even more important as European climate policies intensify through carbon pricing mechanisms, industrial decarbonization requirements, and expanding renewable energy targets. In this respect, the Turkish experience offers broader insights into the conditions necessary to maintain governance credibility during accelerated low-carbon transitions.

6. Policy Recommendations

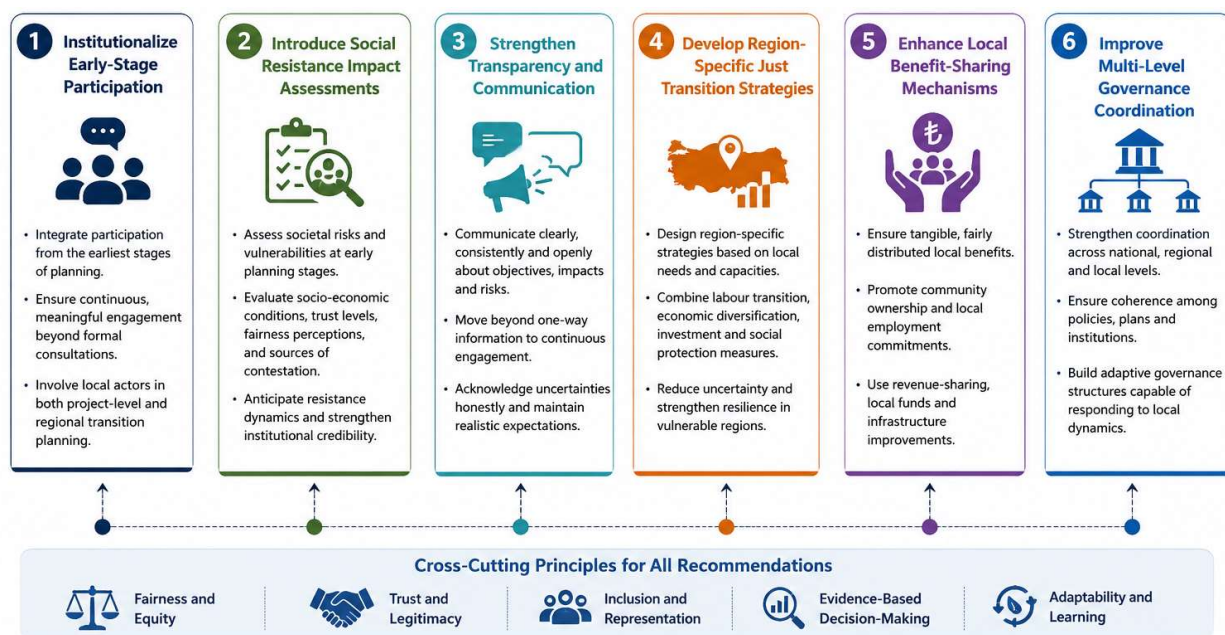


Figure 5. Policy recommendations for socially resilient low-carbon transitions. Authors' elaboration with AI-assisted design support. The authors retain full responsibility for the conceptual design and final presentation.

6.1 Institutionalize Early-Stage Participation

Participation mechanisms should be integrated into transition planning from the earliest stages rather than introduced only after conflicts emerge (Gross, 2007; Walker & Devine-Wright, 2008). In many contested projects, consultation processes begin only after major investment and planning decisions have already been finalised. Participation is often perceived as symbolic rather than meaningful, which may deepen distrust and local opposition.

Effective participation requires considerably more than formal consultation meetings. Communities are far more likely to support transition-related projects when governance processes are perceived as transparent, responsive, and inclusive. This requires continuous stakeholder engagement, accessible communication channels, and visible incorporation of public feedback into decision-making processes.

Particularly in coal-dependent and industrial regions, local actors should be involved not only in project-specific discussions but also in broader regional transition planning processes. Transition governance becomes considerably more resilient when affected communities are treated as active stakeholders rather than passive recipients of policy decisions.

Dimension	Recommended Action
Who?	Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change, municipalities, regional development agencies, project developers, local civil society organisations, and community representatives.
When?	Before permitting procedures, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) approvals, project siting decisions, and major investment commitments are finalised.
How?	Conduct stakeholder mapping exercises; establish public consultation forums and local dialogue platforms; create accessible grievance and feedback mechanisms; publish consultation reports demonstrating how stakeholder inputs have been incorporated into final decisions.
Expected Outcome	Increased institutional trust, reduced conflict risks, improved project legitimacy, and greater long-term public acceptance of transition-related investments.

Early-stage participation should be approached not merely as a procedural requirement, but as a strategic governance instrument for building legitimacy and reducing long-term implementation risks.

6.2 Introduce Social Resistance Impact Assessments

Environmental impact assessments are already standard components of major infrastructure projects. However, the societal dimensions of transition-related investments are often insufficiently addressed, despite their direct influence on project legitimacy and implementation stability.

Transition governance frameworks should therefore incorporate structured Social Resistance Impact Assessment mechanisms to identify societal vulnerabilities and potential conflict dynamics during early planning stages. Such assessments should evaluate local socio-economic conditions, levels of institutional trust, employment dependencies, perceived fairness, regional inequalities, and possible sources of contestation.

Integrating societal risk analysis into planning processes would improve policymakers' and investors' ability to anticipate resistance dynamics before conflicts escalate. Beyond strengthening institutional credibility, such approaches may also reduce long-term implementation risks by improving responsiveness and public trust.

Social resistance should be treated as a strategic governance risk rather than a secondary social consideration. Anticipating societal concerns at an early stage can substantially improve implementation stability and reduce long-term conflict costs.

Dimension	Recommended Action
Who?	Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change; Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources; Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) authorities; regional development agencies; project developers; independent social scientists and local stakeholders.
When?	During project feasibility studies and prior to permitting, licensing, and final investment decisions. Assessments should be updated throughout project implementation where substantial social or economic changes occur.
How?	Integrate Social Resistance Impact Assessments (SRIAs) into existing planning procedures by evaluating institutional trust, local socio-economic vulnerabilities, employment dependencies, perceptions of fairness, place attachment, distributional impacts, and potential sources of contestation through surveys, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and participatory workshops.
Expected Outcome	Early identification of governance risks, reduced implementation delays, improved responsiveness to local concerns, enhanced institutional credibility, and greater social legitimacy of low-carbon transition policies.

The proposed Social Resistance Impact Assessment should complement, rather than replace, existing Environmental and Social Impact Assessment procedures by explicitly focusing on governance legitimacy, societal acceptance, and conflict prevention.

6.3 Strengthen Transparency and Communication

Transparency remains one of the most important determinants of institutional legitimacy, particularly during periods of structural transformation (Tyler, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2016).

In many contested transition projects, weak communication and limited information-sharing deepen perceptions of exclusion and unfairness. For this reason, communication strategies should move beyond one-directional information campaigns and prioritise continuous engagement, accessible communication channels, and transparent decision-making processes.

Equally important, governance approaches should acknowledge uncertainties openly rather than presenting transition processes as entirely risk-free or conflict-free. Maintaining long-term credibility requires realistic communication regarding both the opportunities and socio-economic challenges associated with decarbonization.

6.4 Develop Region-Specific Just Transition Strategies

The evidence presented throughout this brief demonstrates clearly that the impacts of transition are geographically uneven. Coal-dependent and industrial regions often possess distinct labour market structures, economic dependencies, institutional capacities, and social vulnerabilities. Uniform national transition strategies may therefore fail to adequately address region-specific adaptation needs.

Türkiye consequently requires region-specific just transition strategies to support long-term socio-economic adaptation in vulnerable regions. Such strategies should combine labour transition policies, economic diversification mechanisms, regional investment planning, and social protection measures.

International experience consistently shows that emissions reduction targets alone do not secure public support; communities also need credible and visible socio-economic futures. Regions economically dependent on coal mining and energy-intensive industries require long-term planning frameworks that reduce uncertainty and strengthen local resilience during periods of structural transformation.

Dimension	Recommended Action
Who?	Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Ministry of Industry and Technology, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, regional development agencies, municipalities, labour unions, and local business associations.
When?	Before major coal phase-down decisions, industrial decarbonisation requirements, and large-scale regional restructuring measures are implemented.
How?	Develop region-specific transition roadmaps based on socio-economic vulnerability assessments, labour market analyses, economic diversification strategies, reskilling and upskilling programmes, and participatory regional transition platforms.
Expected Outcome	Reduced regional inequalities, improved socio-economic resilience, enhanced policy legitimacy, and stronger public support for long-term decarbonisation pathways.

Just transition strategies should recognise that transition vulnerabilities are geographically uneven and therefore require differentiated governance responses tailored to local economic structures, institutional capacities, and community needs.

6.5 Enhance Local Benefit-Sharing Mechanisms

International experience also demonstrates that communities support transition-related projects when tangible local benefits are visible and distributed fairly (Wolsink, 2007; Walker & Devine-Wright, 2008). Perceptions that transition costs are imposed locally while economic gains remain concentrated elsewhere frequently intensify resistance dynamics and weaken institutional trust.

Consequently, benefit-sharing mechanisms should become a more central component of transition governance in Türkiye. Renewable energy and industrial transformation projects should be designed not only around national climate objectives, but also around strengthening local socio-economic resilience and improving perceptions of fairness.

Possible approaches include community ownership models, local employment commitments, municipal investment funds, revenue-sharing arrangements, and infrastructure improvements directly benefiting affected communities. Such mechanisms may strengthen public acceptance while simultaneously contributing to regional development.

6.6 Improve Multi-Level Governance Coordination

Low-carbon transitions involve complex interactions across national, regional, local, and sectoral governance levels. Fragmented institutional structures frequently create inconsistencies between climate policy objectives, industrial strategies, regional development priorities, and local implementation processes.

Improved coordination between central government institutions, municipalities, regional development agencies, industrial actors, labour organisations, and civil society actors is therefore essential (OECD, 2019; European Commission, 2022a). In the absence of stronger coordination mechanisms, governance fragmentation may weaken implementation capacity, increase institutional uncertainty, and reduce the effectiveness of transition policies.

International experience demonstrates that successful transition governance depends not only on policy ambition but also on institutions' ability to align climate objectives with labour market adaptation, territorial resilience, and broader socio-economic planning processes.

6.7 Build Long-Term Institutional Trust

Institutional trust functions as a strategic governance resource during periods of structural transformation (Tyler, 2006). Transition processes inevitably generate uncertainty regarding employment structures, regional economies, investment priorities, and future socio-economic conditions.

Trust cannot be established through short-term communication strategies or temporary crisis-management efforts alone. It requires long-term institutional consistency, transparent decision-making and continuous engagement with affected communities.

In the Turkish context, strengthening institutional trust will become a key issue as carbon governance reforms, industrial decarbonization pressures, and renewable energy deployment

continue to accelerate over the coming decade. Systems capable of maintaining credibility, responsiveness, and societal confidence are likely to prove considerably more resilient in managing transition-related tensions.

7. Conclusion

Türkiye's low-carbon transition is entering a critical phase shaped by decarbonization pressures, industrial restructuring, energy security concerns, and evolving climate governance frameworks. Renewable energy deployment continues to accelerate, carbon governance mechanisms are becoming more institutionalised, and industrial sectors are facing growing adaptation pressures associated with the European Green Deal and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

The findings presented throughout this policy brief demonstrate that the transition cannot be understood solely as a process of technological modernisation. It is equally a societal, economic, and political transformation affecting regional economies, labour markets, territorial identities, institutional trust, and broader perceptions of fairness.

The analysis also demonstrates that social resistance frequently emerges not from opposition to climate action itself, but from concerns regarding procedural exclusion, unequal burden-sharing, economic uncertainty, and weak institutional responsiveness. From this perspective, resistance should not be viewed merely as an implementation obstacle. More often, it reflects deeper governance tensions regarding how transition processes are designed, communicated, and managed.

The Turkish case reflects several dynamics that are becoming visible across Europe and other coal-dependent regions undergoing accelerated decarbonization. Rapid transition pressures may intensify societal tensions when public authorities fail to integrate participation, transparency, regional adaptation, and socio-economic resilience into transition planning processes. Conversely, transition pathways that prioritise fair and transparent decision-making, trust-building, and meaningful local engagement are more likely to maintain long-term legitimacy and implementation stability.

Crucially, the evidence discussed throughout this brief suggests that governance quality directly shapes transition outcomes. Projects lacking public trust become vulnerable to delays, institutional distrust, declining public support, and long-term policy instability. If these tensions remain unmanaged, they may ultimately slow decarbonization efforts.

The policy implications emerging from the analysis are clear. Low-carbon transitions require governance approaches that combine climate ambition with democratic legitimacy, institutional credibility, and social inclusion. This includes strengthening early-stage participation mechanisms, developing region-specific just transition strategies, improving institutional transparency, integrating social vulnerability assessments into transition planning processes, and supporting long-term socio-economic adaptation in coal-dependent and industrial regions.

As climate policies continue to accelerate globally through carbon pricing systems, industrial emissions regulations, and expanding renewable energy targets, political sustainability will

become increasingly important for successful transition governance. The central challenge for policymakers is no longer simply how to accelerate decarbonisation, but how to govern transformation in ways that preserve public trust, strengthen institutional resilience, and maintain social cohesion during periods of profound structural change. (Sovacool et al., 2021; Jenkins et al., 2016).

Ultimately, the success of the low-carbon transition will depend not on how rapidly societies decarbonise, but on whether they can do so while preserving trust, fairness, and social legitimacy.

Policy Highlights

Policy Highlights		
	1	Transitions succeed when people are part of the process. Early and meaningful participation builds trust, improves policy legitimacy, and reduces resistance.
	2	Social resistance is a governance risk, not just a social issue. Assessing societal concerns early through Social Resistance Impact Assessments can prevent delays, conflict, and higher long-term costs.
	3	One-size-fits-all policies do not work. Region-specific just transition strategies are essential to address local vulnerabilities, economic dependencies, and community needs.
	4	Governance quality shapes transition outcomes. Transparency, fairness, and accountability strengthen institutional credibility and long-term public support.
	5	Just transitions require long-term and integrated approaches. Combining economic diversification, social protection, skills development, and multi-level coordination ensures more resilient and inclusive outcomes.

Transparency Note

Some visual elements and graphic layouts contained in this policy brief were developed with AI-assisted design support. All data selection, analysis, interpretation, and final content remain solely the responsibility of the authors.

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