

SOCIAL GOALS FOR THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

How can we ensure a Just Transition?



In light of global warming, the occurrence of extreme weather events, the radically growing energy prices and the EU's dependence on oil and gas, now more than ever, we must strengthen all efforts to make the transition to a carbon-free and sustainable economy and society a reality in Europe and beyond.

However, the transition to a carbon-free Europe can only be successful if it also tackles the systemic socio-economic injustices at the root of the climate and environmental crises, such as inequalities based on income and wealth. Inequalities that are exacerbated by the disproportionate impact of climate change and environmental degradation on marginalised groups and people in vulnerable situations.

All actions aimed at advancing the green transition in Europe must, therefore, address environmental and socio-economic issues simultaneously and help achieve both true sustainability and social justice. Moreover, we must ensure that the transition as a process is fair, inclusive and democratic in nature, and that it is driven by the following values and principles:

- Solidarity among all social groups, countries and regions.
- Well-being and global justice for all, not just the few, within the planetary boundaries.
- Intersectionality, to address all the dimensions of socio-economic inequalities.
- Meaningful democratic participation to guarantee the voice of all in policy-making at all levels.

Since its launch in December 2019, the European Green Deal (EGD), the EU's strategy to reach climate neutrality by 2050, has led to a legislative firestorm and to the concretisation of several

initiatives aimed at making the transition “just and inclusive”.¹ The EGD is supposed to have a strong social dimension closely aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals.

But is the EGD social enough? Do policies and other actions under the EGD sufficiently consider their social impact? Do they tackle the root causes of climate change and environmental degradation? Are transition strategies and measures at national or local level fair and just?

It is against this backdrop and with these questions in mind that we have developed this document in the framework of the [*European Alliance for a Just Transition*](#), an informal coalition of like-minded European stakeholders.

What is the purpose of this document?

This document provides a value-based framework for the EGD and all other strategies on climate and environment in Europe. It highlights a number of social goals that should underpin all decisions around the green transition to ensure that it is just and inclusive. In addition, it provides a list of questions that allows the reader to verify whether a certain policy or other kind of measure meets the criteria outlined, this way facilitating analysis and participation at all levels. This set of criteria is in no particular order and is not exhaustive. It should be considered as a means to connect the EGD with existing social frameworks the EU has agreed, such as the [*European Pillar of Social Rights \(EPSR\)*](#) and its [*Action Plan*](#), the [*Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)*](#), the [*Council of Europe's European Social Charter*](#) and the [*UN's Economic, Social and Cultural rights \(ESCR\)*](#).

Who can use this document?

This text was drafted for a diverse group of stakeholders working on the green transition at different levels of governance:

- Policymakers at EU or national level can use it to assess a legislative proposal under the EGD they are currently developing or negotiating.
- Local policy makers may find it useful to test local-level initiatives to transition to greener solutions.
- Civil Society Organisations, think tanks and private actors can refer to it in their advocacy work for a more Just Transition in their country and at EU level.

How should it be used?

To help assess the social dimension of initiatives for the green transition, this document contains a list of eight main “Social Goals”, as well as a brief explanation and a few guiding questions for each. These questions are not supposed to impose grading systems or hierarchies among the policies of the EGD according to their social content. They are rather a reflection tool to support policy makers, advocates and other stakeholders in assessing how much the social dimension of sustainability is reflected in each strategy, policy or other measure they are working with.

Lastly, ensuring a Just Transition does not simply mean ticking one of the boxes below or focusing on one element, while disregarding the others. When assessing the social “strength” of a policy, funding scheme or other action, the reader must, therefore, take all rights and principles into consideration and avoid working in silos. It is a holistic exercise that requires a combined analysis and assessment.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1588580774040&uri=CELEX%3A52019DC0640>

PROMOTE EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION



EPSR Principles n. 2 and 3 / SDGs 1, 5, 10

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are at the heart of human rights, so policies promoting equality and the fight against discrimination are indispensable to the upholding of a sustainable future for all and the planet. Moreover, like all policy areas, climate policy is not neutral. Women, people with disabilities, younger generations, ethnic minorities and other underrepresented groups, as well as people in the Global South, undoubtedly bear a higher cost of the consequences of the climate crisis than others.

Solutions to the climate and environmental crises that do not take non-discrimination and the different consequences on specific social groups into account will therefore not achieve the goals of the green transition. That is why the intersectional perspectives, experiences and expertise of underrepresented groups must be fully integrated into climate governance at all levels. The EGD explicitly aims to include all social groups that are left behind in the transition to a carbon-neutral economy.² However, environmental and non-discrimination policies, as well as equality measures, have long remained largely disconnected. Mainstreaming and redistributive policies are key, as they empower underrepresented groups to overcome the barriers to their full participation and be proactive actors in the transition to carbon neutrality.



Guiding questions to assess whether this goal is fulfilled include:

- Is the direct and indirect impact of the policy on underrepresented groups properly assessed?
- Are underrepresented groups equally consulted and integrated at every step of the design and implementation of the policy?
- Are underrepresented groups involved through the participation of representatives of civil society organisations speaking on their behalf?
- Are underrepresented groups equally represented in the decision-making level of your organisation and committees working on the just transition? Is there a focus group in place for each or some of them?
- Have you included the perspective of underrepresented groups into the policy to explore how climate change affects them differently and how stereotypes and unequal socio-economic status affect their consumption, living, and mobility habits?
- Is the policy responsive to the needs of underrepresented groups?
- Does the policy include data disaggregated by the demographics of underrepresented groups?
- Have you mainstreamed the financial tools of your policies for underrepresented groups? Is their perspective incorporated at all levels of the budgetary process? Are revenues and expenditures structured to promote equality?

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1588580774040&uri=CELEX%3A52019DC0640>

2 ERADICATE POVERTY AND SUPPORT INCOME AND WELLBEING



EPSR Principles n. 14, 15, 20 / SDGs 1, 8, 9, 10.

While climate change has a disproportionate impact on the poor, the green transition itself will have a cost in terms of new technologies and lifestyles that is harder to bear by the poorest people in European society. At the same time, the amount of investments that are going to be made in the context of the green transition have a strong potential to redistribute wealth, increase wellbeing and reduce poverty.

Thus, ensuring a fair and inclusive transition to carbon neutrality cannot ignore poverty eradication and fair income distribution as transversal social goals in the green transition. Here, poverty should not be understood in monetary terms only, but as a state that touches upon the general wellbeing of the people, who enjoy not only lower incomes but also lower living standards.

The European Green Deal only mentions poverty intended as “energy poverty”, which is the “[...] situation in which households are unable to access essential energy services such as cooling, as temperatures rise, and heating.” (p.15).³ However, the policies included in the Green Deal can do much for poverty eradication beyond the field of energy expenses. The cost of the living crisis already makes it clear that energy is just one of the factors affecting the income and well-being of the people who are already in poverty. As such,

operationalising the stated goal of “leaving no one behind” means giving priority to the worst off in the distribution of income and well-being in all the investments that are being planned.

A minimal safety net must be put in place in each European Green Deal measure so that the poor are not just shielded by the negative effects of the transition, but they are

also lifted out of poverty and empowered to take a proactive part in the implementation of green policies.



Key questions to understand if this is being done in a policy include:

- Does the policy explicitly assess its impact on people living in poverty?
- Are representatives of people in poverty included in the decision-making process of the policy?
- Is the policy aligned with existing poverty eradication measures?
- Does the policy mainstream poverty eradication by connecting its content with existing policy eradication policies?
- Does the policy contain measures to improve the income and well-being of people in poverty?
- Does the policy foster cooperation among social actors involved in poverty eradication, as well as their participation in policy and decision-making?
- Does the policy have the adequate funding to be successfully implemented and to make its measures contribute to poverty eradication?

³ European Union (2021). Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing a Social Climate Fund. EU:Brussels.

3 ENSURE DECENT WORK FOR ALL



EPSR Principles n. 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 / SDG 8

The green transition is profoundly impacting Europe's labour markets. The workforce in several carbon-intensive sectors, such as electricity, automotive and chemicals, are undergoing significant changes - with jobs lost, green jobs created, new skills needed and much more.

The green transition is only going to be possible if it leads towards a world where all work is environmentally sustainable, and everyone has decent wages and decent working conditions. Adequate social protection and training programmes to assist workers in their transitions are necessary. Moreover, to be just, the transition must be based on social dialogue among workers and workers' representatives (trade unions and organisations of informal workers), employers and sometimes governments; and it must have robust and continuing stakeholder engagement. It should make use of existing tripartite structures or establish similar ones, should they not exist.

Moreover, many people in the EU are employed informally and, over the last few decades, big changes in the means of production have generated less safe and poorly paid jobs, and many marginalised communities are locked out of decent work. Therefore, we must address issues such as contractualisation, privatisation, restructuring and worsening of jobs, and job security, to generate a just economy.

The EGD, through the Just Transition Mechanism and the Just Transition Fund, aims to support

employment in the regions most negatively affected by the green transition. Nevertheless, all jobs everywhere must be environmentally sustainable and decent, and large parts of the labour market will be affected, one way or the other, by the transition or the effects of the ongoing climate and environmental crisis.



Guiding questions to assess whether this goal is fulfilled are:

- Are you taking into account the [ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition?](#)
- Is the direct and indirect impact of the policy on labour conditions properly assessed?
- Does the policy clearly assess the skills that will be required for its implementation? Is it aligned with the existing training and reskilling opportunities for workers?
- Does the policy include or connect to skilling opportunities reserved to lower-income groups?
- Are workers and trade unions equally consulted and represented at every step of the design and implementation of the policy?
- Is the policy aligned with existing labour conditions, laws, collective agreements, and welfare policies?
- Does the policy mainstream decent work conditions for all workers?
- Does the policy encompass a variety of policies (economic, social, environmental) that can tackle irregular jobs and lack of respect for labour standards?
- Does the policy foster and facilitate cooperation among state authorities, workers, employers and other relevant stakeholders in the labour market?
- Does the policy have the adequate funding to be successfully implemented and contribute to ensuring decent work conditions in the European labour market?

4 ENSURE ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE QUALITY EDUCATION



EPSR Principles n. 1, 4 / SDG 4

Education in all its forms (formal, non-formal and informal⁴) is fundamental in the process of ensuring a Just Transition. The green transition will not have the necessary social understanding and support in European society unless all people and communities have universal access to quality education, training, and learning opportunities across their entire life. For this to happen, it is pivotal to embed education in all relevant policies put forward by the EGD, so that lifelong learning becomes the norm in our societies.

In practice, this means that all policies in the European Green Deal must be constantly accompanied by opportunities to, on the one hand, skill, reskill and upskill learners from all age groups with relevant occupational as well as transversal competences. On the other, by accessing learning opportunities that go beyond employability and that address issues such as active citizenship, sustainability, digitalisation, social cohesion as well as personal fulfilment. Only holistic learning can make citizens both ready for new jobs and markets as well as aware and engaged in the transition itself, and such engagement should be maintained constantly throughout a person's life.

Education and training can support sustainable and resilient societies only if they are inclusive; for this they must be designed in a way that prevents early and inequitable favouring of certain backgrounds. To benefit all groups at risk of exclusion, it is essential that all learning opportunities, including digital ones, are universally accessible and

affordable for people with different ability levels and socio-economic backgrounds.



To know if a policy of the Green Deal takes education and training into due account, one must ask:

- Does the policy explicitly refer to education and training and acknowledge their value for a successful transition to resilient and sustainable societies?
- Is the policy aligned with existing education policies? And does it advance them?
- Does the policy consider the lifelong and life-wide⁵ learning approach, covering all sectors of education (formal, non-formal, informal) and all age groups? Does it mainstream education for sustainability?
- Is the policy built on and centred around learners' needs?
- Does it encompass opportunities on technical, civic and social competences? Does it include transversal and sustainability competences?
- Does the policy foster cooperation and support among different sectors in education, including different generations and different stakeholders?
- Are all stakeholders (including learners and educators) included in the decision-making process of the policy?
- Does the policy have the adequate funding to be successfully implemented and to make education and training systems more inclusive and accessible?
- Are educators being appropriately supported with initial training and the continuous professional development opportunities necessary to implement the policy reforms?
- Are the upskilling and reskilling opportunities accessible to all adult learners regardless of background? Are they inclusive of underrepresented groups in society?
- Are learning outcomes, especially those gained outside formal education, recognised, valued and validated?

⁴ Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). LLLGlossary: Review of Lifelong Learning Terminology, [here](#).

⁵ Lifelong and life-wide learning encompasses the whole life of a person and covers all learning spaces from formal, non-formal and informal.

5 PROVIDE ACCESS TO DECENT AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL



EPSR Principle n. 19 / SDG 11

Housing and the green transition have strong ties, as residential buildings are responsible for a high share of emissions for heating, cooling, and everyday consumption. The residential buildings of the future will need to cut their consumption and be redesigned, but this cannot come without a deep reflection on how this will impact the quality and affordability of housing in Europe.

Although the EU does not have a specific competence on housing policy, several of its policies are able to strongly influence it, from energy efficiency to fiscal law and competition law. The EGD is no exception. Particularly through its measures to improve the energy efficiency of buildings, it is changing the scenario for housing affordability in the EU.

As highlighted by a recent report by FEPS⁶, housing affordability and social housing have suffered greatly in the EU since the financial crisis of 2008. While urbanisation has continued to grow, the number of social housing units has not increased, resulting in phenomena like overcrowding, decreased quality, more homelessness, gentrification and touristification. The social groups that suffered the most from these phenomena are those that were already particularly vulnerable: low-income families,

immigrants, refugees, homeless people. While the EU has called on its Member States to invest more on social and affordable housing to support these groups, much is still to be done, and progress could now be hindered by the energy crisis.



The transition to carbon neutrality cannot be just if the strong and increasing inequalities determined by the lack of housing are not addressed across all the policies of the Green Deal. That is why for each policy one must ask themselves:

- Does the policy assess its direct or indirect impact on housing conditions (buildings quality, energy efficiency, prices of houses, cost of utilities...)?
- Is the policy aligned with principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which states that:
 - Access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need.
 - Vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction.
 - Adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless in order to promote their social inclusion.
- Are representatives of owners and tenants consulted in the design and implementation of the policy?
- Does the policy encompass a variety of measures (economic, social, environmental) that can directly or indirectly affect housing in a way that is favourable to vulnerable groups?

⁶ FEPS (2021). *Concrete actions for social and affordable housing in the EU*. FEPS: Brussels.



6 PROTECT AND IMPROVE OUR HEALTH



EPSR Principles n. 16, 18 / SDG 3

The European Green Deal was launched just a few months before the start of the COVID 19 pandemic, and such an unfortunate situation has been the context of its implementation ever since. The pandemic has highlighted the fragility of the healthcare system in the Member States of the EU and called for unprecedented support from the EU through its SURE, Next Generation EU and the Health Union.

While not dealing with health from a healthcare point of view, the European Green Deal does aim to achieve a healthy environment by improving the quality of air, water, soil, forests and reducing pollution. Environmental measures can actually be expected to have a positive impact on the physical and mental health of European citizens. However, such an easy equation should not be taken for granted to the point of underestimating health considerations in all measures of the European Green Deal. The physical and mental health of citizens is a complex issue that can be influenced by a variety of socio-economic factors.

The fact that the Green Deal aims to change production and consumption patterns should take into account how the new sectors and products that will emerge are going to impact the health of citizens. The principle of precaution that has animated the environmental policy of the EU so far must remain a pillar of the European Green Deal as well, and there should be a strong alignment between the content of the Green Deal and that

of the health pillar of Next Generation EU. A truly just transition must put the health of the citizens at its core and do so with the aim to improve not only the environmental factors that affect health, but also the economic and social ones.



Guiding questions to assess whether this goal is fulfilled are:

- Does the policy consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector it is going to impact?
- Does the policy create global equality in the provision of substantial services for all people to overcome the pandemic such as vaccine equality?
- Is the direct and indirect impact of the policy on the physical and mental health of people properly considered?
- Is the direct and indirect impact of the policy on the national healthcare systems properly quantified and considered?
- Is the policy aligned with the health pillar of Next Generation EU?
- Does the policy mainstream high health standards and the principle of precaution?
- Does the policy encompass a variety of measures (economic, social, environmental) that can enhance health protection and improve the well-being standards of citizens?

7 TACKLE INEQUALITIES IN DIFFERENT TERRITORIES AND AMONG DIFFERENT REGIONS

When embarking on the transition away from fossil fuels, regions and territories within the EU Member States do not begin from the same starting point. A carbon neutral economy will put at its core new resources, new value chains and new economic sectors from which not all territories are expected to benefit equally. In particular, the regions that already enjoy the highest levels of employment, income, quality services and advanced industry are expected to be better equipped and positioned for the benefits of the new green economy. This leaves the regions that are already socio-economically disadvantaged at risk of further marginalisation and distress. This includes urban peripheries, rural and coastal areas, which already struggle to keep pace with wealthy urban areas and industrial regions.

The European Green Deal acknowledged the importance of balancing interregional inequalities as a fundamental measure to make the transition successful and socially accepted. However, these inequalities go well beyond the carbon-intensive regions that current Just Transition policies focus on. That is why the different impact of policy on territories with different characteristics should be assessed for every measure of the Green Deal. That is the only way to achieve a just transition across all territories of the EU.



To know if a policy of the European Green Deal takes in due account interregional inequalities, one must ask:

- Does the policy explicitly refer to the different capacities of regions and acknowledge their value for a successful transition to resilient and sustainable societies?
- Is the specific impact of the policy on different local realities properly assessed?
- Are local stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, included in the decision-making process of the policy?
- Does the policy favour the equal representation of local governments, with particular attention to underrepresented ones?
- Is the policy aligned with existing territorial cohesion policies and plans?
- Does the policy identify ways in which its measures can contribute to tackle interregional inequalities?
- Does the policy have the adequate funding to be harmoniously implemented in all territories despite their differences?
- Does the policy adequately support local governments and local stakeholders with capacity-building, policy support and appropriate funding mechanisms?

8 ENABLE A GLOBAL JUST TRANSITION



It is no news that climate action can be successful only if it does not further widen global divides, but it is not always clear to what extent the European Green Deal acknowledges the past and present responsibilities of Europeans in climate change and environmental degradation. Europe has not only been historically responsible for a huge share of the emissions that are altering climate, but it continues to be directly and indirectly responsible for most of the emissions coming from developing countries. That is because even when CO₂ is emitted outside the EU, it is often the result of industrial processes to produce goods that will be consumed by Europeans or other OECD nationals or produced by European industries operating in other countries.

The European Green Deal has dedicated the entire Chapter 3 to its international dimension, stating that the EU recognises the global dimension of climate change and will strive to increase the climate ambition of other global actors.

However, the transition envisaged by the European Green Deal will not have consequences abroad only through the measures that are explicitly international. The changes in the energy

sources, consumption patterns, trade and finance will all have consequences on other global actors. Because of this, it is fundamental that every policy of the Green Deal be assessed with a view on its direct and indirect impact on third countries. The goal should be to foster a just transition not just inside the EU, but also well beyond its borders, to make sure that there is policy coherence to this effect since climate. Climate action is global by definition, and so should be the just transition.



Guiding questions to assess whether this principle is fulfilled are:

- Does the policy explicitly recognise the historical and present responsibilities of the EU for the emissions in the sector it addresses?
- Is the direct and indirect impact of the policy on public and private actors outside the EU considered?
- Are representatives of other global actors, especially civil society and local communities, consulted in every step of the design and implementation of the policy?
- Is the policy aligned with the existing international legal and development policy frameworks of the EU?
- Does the policy encompass corrective measures to make sure its impact on other global actors takes account of the climate responsibilities of the EU?
- Does the policy foster cooperation among relevant international stakeholders?
- Does the policy aim at poverty reduction for people in the Global South and overcoming of global inequalities?

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