

Call to Action

Just Transition: A New Social Contract for the Wellbeing of People and the Planet

Valladolid, 11 July 2023

We, civil society organisations, trade unions, social economy enterprises, think tanks and other stakeholders, call on European Ministers for Environment and Energy, as well as other EU and national level decisionmakers, to complement the implementation of urgently needed, ambitious environmental and climate policies with robust social policies that protect marginalised people primarily and the regions suffering disproportionately from the transition, whilst guaranteeing access to high-quality essential services for all. We call on them to show bold and forward-thinking political leadership by prioritising the promotion of climate action and social justice as one coherent and mutually reinforcing agenda.

A broken social contract is threatening our democracies

The social contract in which our democracies are rooted is breaking down in the face of multiple crises and is failing to secure societal welfare. First, the promise of a liveable future is not guaranteed: humanity has surpassed six out of the nine planetary boundaries,¹ and current global policies are projected to result in a 2.8°C warming above pre-industrial levels,² threatening disastrous consequences for humanity, nature and biodiversity.

We cannot afford to let European welfare state systems become obsolete. A welfare state that does not protect and empower every person breaks the social contract and jeopardises the very core of our democracies, thus undermining people's confidence in the European project. The role of the welfare state is more crucial than ever: as we live through crises, transitions and transformations, the welfare state represents a lifeline that secures social, health and employment rights, enhances equal access to opportunities and ensures the well-being of all. Thus far, welfare models in Europe have been built upon the false assumption of infinite material growth, leading to austerity measures, environmental pressures and an excessive demand for continuous productivity. It is now necessary to build solid welfare models on different premises.

To foster a sense of community and unity and to get everyone on board with the systemic transformations needed to face the climate and environmental emergency, **Europe needs a *New Social Contract* in which social and environmental sustainability go hand in hand. This must be built on policies that accelerate the climate and environmental transition at the same time as they tackle structural socio-economic inequalities and gender, racial, disability and other forms of discrimination, promote inclusion and social and territorial cohesion, ensure respect for fundamental human rights, and alleviate poverty.** The success of this approach relies on collaboration with and the active involvement of social and civil partners through robust social and

¹ <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>

² https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2022?gclid=Cj0KCQjwnMWkBhDLARIsAHBOfr51x_SHLK9lxMC8jZ5CmAmID-ILM4Afj-e2nnWqHWjWyHNUSok68QaApSDEALw_wcB

civil dialogue, and the creation of an inclusive and bottom-up system of governance, involving actors and constituencies at European, regional, national and local level.

A socially and environmentally Just Transition must be at the heart of a New Social Contract

Environmental and climate policy and social policy are two sides of the same coin. Protecting the environment and mitigating climate change must contribute to reducing inequalities and, equally, fighting inequalities must strengthen environmental protection and climate action. This logic should underpin “Green and Social” or “Just Transition” deals established at all levels of governance and aiming to:

- **Forge a socio-ecological welfare state defined by wellbeing within planetary boundaries.** Our welfare states should ensure universal access to high-quality essential services such as clean, affordable and energy-efficient housing and mobility, as well as strengthened social protection systems that mitigate the devastating consequences of climate change and environmental degradation. By implementing social policies that tackle socio-economic inequalities, reduce our carbon emissions and limit our environmental impact, socio-ecological welfare states will improve people’s quality of life and strengthen their resilience to shocks.
- **Guarantee decent, meaningful, sustainable, inclusive and quality jobs accessible to all.** This means supporting the transformation of the labour market towards clean jobs and liveable wages, giving a stronger voice to workers, addressing labour shortages, precarious employment and zero-hour contracts, protecting workers from the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation, promoting circular economy activities such as reuse and repair, supporting inclusive lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling schemes, and fighting gender stereotypes and discrimination. The protection of workers’ rights, through strong social dialogue and sectoral collective bargaining, and the respect of information and consultation rights of workers at company level are at the centre of a Just Transition. This remains relevant for all jobs that contribute to the wellbeing and sustainability of societies, such as care and education, which are often female-dominated and excluded from Just Transition schemes and measures.
- **Recognise and invest in the role of formal, non-formal and informal learning in the process of ensuring a Just Transition.** Education and training policy for a Just Transition should move beyond a labour-market oriented approach to prioritise the acquisition of transversal competences, and the right to quality education should evolve into the right to quality lifelong learning opportunities for all. This can be achieved by promoting a learner-centred whole-community approach that includes all stakeholders to provide transformative education.
- **Set up the future European Green Deal as a holistic legislative and financial framework based on the premise of systemic change and prioritising wellbeing over GDP growth.** Social and green agendas must be on an equal footing with the aim to build sustainable economies, meet the climate and environmental objectives and address social inequalities and injustices. Every environmental and climate policy and the way they are funded must contribute significantly to the achievement of all three 2030 targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, and similarly, every social welfare policy measure must contribute to the EU’s goals for reaching carbon neutrality and protecting and restoring nature.
- **Build this future European Green Deal with a strong external dimension that ensures policy coherence for development and guarantees a fair distribution of the cost of the transition between Europe and partner countries.** If not planned and implemented in a coherent and inclusive manner, the energy transition can lead to environmentally and socially harmful

impacts in the Global South. Marginalised communities are being severely impacted by global warming and require grants-based funding for loss and damage, mitigation and adaptation. Countries with a higher historical responsibility for climate change and with greater capacity to tackle it should contribute more, including by revising trade and economic relations and the global financial architecture with this in mind, as well as increasing incentives such as technical and financial support for partner countries to undertake their own Just Transitions.

- **Reflect the climate and social priorities of Just Transition in the EU's economic policy, including within the economic governance rules.** The current fiscal framework of the EU restricts Member States' ability to meet the challenges of today. It should be redesigned to give them enough flexibility to carry out counter-cyclical measures and use both national and European fiscal capacities to support a systemic transformation of the economy, guided by strong social and environmental standards. The European economic governance reform should also provide Member States with the appropriate capacity to increase territorial justice.
- **Provide massive and long-term investments for a Just Transition.** The EU must lead the way by providing sufficient resources for this transformation. Financing for the green transition should be based on taxation that holds polluters accountable, reduces inequalities and tackles past and present dependencies. This means adopting green and fair taxes that shift the tax burden away from labour and towards the wealthiest and actors and activities that harm the environment, while fostering redistribution and avoiding any socially regressive effects upon the most marginalised.

We need a paradigm shift, and the time is now. A Just Transition is not only possible, but the only acceptable way forward. While the transition to sustainable economies and societies will be disruptive and structurally transform our societies, keeping to the status quo will guarantee disaster. People across Europe have already made their voices heard in social and environmental movements. They show a strong interest in all the elements that would make the green transition just and fair. They are demanding social rights and justice and expect results from their political leaders. There is a need and a great potential to unite people in Europe behind a common project capable of delivering the changes so urgently needed.

We hope that you will support our vision and show political leadership and commitment to ensure a socially Just Transition in Europe and beyond!

Yours sincerely,

Find here the [List of organisations endorsing this Call to Action.](#)