

# Job quality side of climate change

## Introduction

Climate change will have a profound impact not only on living conditions but also on Europe's labour markets, working conditions and job quality. To understand the implications of climate change for working life, it is important to distinguish between its direct impact and the impact of climate change policies.

This report aims to contribute to the discussion by examining national-level research and debate on the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on job quality, in particular in occupations likely to be impacted by greening.

## Policy context

EU policies on climate change are not new, but policy ambitions and mitigation policies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions have significantly ramped up and are combined with financial investment to support a green transition and growth strategy. The European Union has committed to a series of targets and linked policy measures under the European Green Deal, adopted in 2019. They seek to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy based on the binding target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. As an intermediate step, the EU has raised its 2030 climate ambition, committing to cutting emissions by at least 55% by 2030 under the Fit for 55 package. To align legislation with these ambitions, a new European Climate Law entered into force in July 2021. The regulation strengthens emission reduction targets for buildings, transport, agriculture, waste management, and small and medium-sized enterprises, and requires the restructuring of the car industry and energy sector to meet climate targets, among other things. The European Green Deal will absorb one-third of the €1.8 trillion investment from the NextGenerationEU recovery package.

To support the European Green Deal's objective of ensuring that no one is left behind, in 2020 the European Commission introduced the Just Transition Mechanism. Its aim is to support the regions and people worst affected by the transition to climate neutrality, with financial aid of €19.2 billion to be allocated between 2021 and 2027 to policy interventions aimed at supporting employment and the diversification of the local economy. The European Commission has emphasised the importance of social dialogue in designing and implementing these measures.

Given the huge impact of climate change and climate change policy on society, the economy and the labour market, related considerations are increasingly mainstreamed into other EU policies, such as industrial policy, research frameworks, education and skills strategies and indeed the European Pillar of Social Rights, which has a key role to play in supporting the transition through education, employment, and safe and healthy work environments.

## Key findings

- Climate change impacts, such as rising temperatures, increased air pollution and greater frequency of extreme weather events, have demonstrable negative effects on workers' job quality and productivity. They make work harder. At particular risk are workers who spend a lot of time outdoors (for instance, in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, horticulture, construction and tourism) and those working with heat-generating machinery. Workers in the emergency services are also directly impacted by adverse weather events such as wildfires and floods.
- Employment in these sectors is dominated by men and high numbers of seasonal, migrant and self-employed workers, who tend to lack legislative protection and often have lower levels of trade union organisation and workplace representation.

- Many of these sectors also face change because working methods need to be adapted, which may reduce job security and require training, retraining or job transition.
- Climate change policies (and mitigation policies in particular) are set to contribute to sectoral and occupational shifts, particularly in sectors contributing the most to greenhouse gas emissions. Analysis of European Working Conditions Telephone Survey data confirms that high shares of the workforces in these sectors are in occupations that are likely to be impacted by the green transition. Overall, 40% of workers in the EU are in occupations that will be directly impacted by the green transition.
- In terms of job quality, jobs that are likely to experience greater demand (crop growers, carpenters and insulation workers) tend to have higher job demands (such as physical risks and physical demands) while lacking job resources (such as social support, autonomy and access to training). New and emerging jobs (for example buyers, policy planning managers and wastewater engineers) show the most positive balance of demands and resources, and enhanced skills jobs (construction managers, meteorologist and electrical engineering technicians) are more in line with European average job quality.
- The balance of occupational change, resulting in new job profiles, greater demand or new skills requirements, varies across sectors. The implications for job quality will be determined not only by the precise task profile of individual jobs (including exposure to climate change risks) and workplace practices but also by measures taken to address the impacts of climate change and how the green transition is implemented at all levels.
- While greened occupations embody the lifelong learning efforts that will support the transition, companies are also engaging in actions and workplace practices that support decarbonisation. The involvement of workers in the development and implementation of these practices can enrich job quality.

## Policy pointers

- Research on the effects of climate change on workers and workplaces is still patchy. More knowledge and solutions are needed to reduce the risks to workers.
- There is no level playing field in the EU in relation to the protection of workers from risks directly associated with climate change. National-level provisions on working in heat vary significantly.
- Decarbonisation processes impact many sectors, going beyond energy production and heavy industry. Workers in the most affected sectors should receive priority support for skills renewal and job transitions. Additionally, a more detailed analysis of the implications for other sectors is necessary, along with providing support for these companies and their employees.
- More attention should be paid to the job quality implications of the green transition, and more systematic research is required. Monitoring of the quality of greened jobs and those most exposed to climate change risks (often the same jobs) is needed as climate change is a dynamic process. Policy measures should aim to level up job quality.
- The development of industrial strategies and related skills forecasting and the design of relevant training developed with social partners will be vital, particularly if skills and labour shortages are to be prevented from limiting progress towards decarbonisation.

### Further information

The report *Job quality side of climate change* is available at <https://eurofound.link/ef23032>

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