



THERE ARE NO JOBS  
ON A DEAD PLANET:

WHAT A **JUST  
TRANSITION**  
MEANS FOR WORKERS

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# What you need to know: Climate Change, Trade Unions and the Just Transition

Climate Change is happening. The Earth is predicted to warm by up to 6 degrees this century, with severe consequences, unless we take action.

Climate Change is caused by the release of Carbon Dioxide (Co<sub>2</sub>) into the atmosphere by human activity such as burning fossil fuels for transport and electricity, and methane from large scale agriculture. This Co<sub>2</sub> traps heat in the atmosphere and warms the Earth.

Already it has caused increases in flooding, droughts and other extreme weather events. Millions have been made refugees. As global warming increases, its effects are predicted to become more severe.

The world's scientists say we have to greatly reduce the Co<sub>2</sub> levels in our atmosphere in order to avoid extremely dangerous levels of global warming. Without action, warming could accelerate, affecting ecosystems and farming and making large parts of the Earth less hospitable to humans.

Working through the United Nations, the world's governments have signed up to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (aka the Paris Agreement, 2015). This sets out all countries' responsibilities to keep global warming to under 2 degrees of average temperature increase.



Climate change threatens to undo all the gains that have been made against poverty over recent decades. It is the single biggest threat to humanity but yet the political system has refused to move quickly enough to address it.

*Eamonn Meehan,  
Trocaire Executive Director*

Climate Change is a political and economic issue: most of the warming is caused by just 90 companies such as BP, Exxon Mobile and Statoil. Most of the harm caused is felt by the poor. In addition, younger generations stand to be the most impacted.

To solve this global crisis we must transition from an economy dependent on fossil fuels to one which relies on clean energy sources such as wind, solar, etc. In addition, public transport, energy conservation and sustainable agriculture must all play a role in the transition.

Past economic transitions – such as under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s – have left behind communities devastated by unemployment, industrial decline and poverty. This is why the international trade union movement is calling for a “Just Transition”.

A Just Transition means that no one will be left behind. Governments must co-operate with unions, industry and local communities to ensure that good quality jobs are available to workers in the new economy.

At the national and international level, states must ensure training and funds are available for workers to transition to new industries. New jobs must have good quality terms and conditions and union recognition. The process of transition must involve consultation with workers.

SIPTU, with the international trade union movement is working to ensure that as we take steps to protect the climate, we do so in a way that is just and fair to working people.



# Climate Change: No Jobs on a Dead Planet

## WHAT IS GLOBAL WARMING?

Global warming refers to the recent and ongoing rise in global average temperature near the Earth's surface, which can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution. It is caused mostly by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Greenhouse gases are mainly caused by burning fossil fuels or using intensive agricultural methods such as heavy cattle

farming. Global warming is causing climate patterns to change.

Due to these changes, the Earth has heated by over 1 degree celsius. If the global economy continues to burn fossil fuels at the present rate, by the end of the 21st century, the Earth's temperature is likely to increase by around 2-6 degrees celsius. Heating the planet by 2 degrees celsius alone will mean mass desertification and the loss of island states and coastal regions. A temperature rise of 4-6 degrees celsius will result in mass extinctions of other species, severe flooding/drought, and increasingly extreme climate events like Hurricane Katrina in the US and other such disasters.



## HOW DOES THIS IMPACT WORKERS?

The majority of the climate changes over the last 200 years have been linked to just 90 entities, such as Exxon Mobile, Norway's Statoil and BP. Climate change is a political choice and action is stalled because there is a small minority who benefit from it. Existing inequalities will also determine who suffers most from climate change's effects. The death rate of working class African Americans and the elderly in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, for example, was six times higher than the rest of the population.

When it comes to climate change, it is front-line workers and their communities who bear the brunt of the blame and of the damage it will cause, environmentally, physically, financially. The miner or the peat-plant worker on the front-line should not be held responsible for the damage done by those who profit most from a fossil fuel economy.

However, the times when climate change was raised as a job killer are behind us. Ambitious emissions reduction and adaptation policies are now recognised as vital to protect jobs, people and communities from the impacts of climate change, and investment is creating jobs in renewable energy, public transport, energy efficiency in building, sustainable agriculture, forestry, water and more.

We know millions of workers and families still depend on a fossil-fuel-based economy for their jobs and livelihoods. They have generated the energy required for today's prosperity. Governments and employers, with workers and their unions must sit together and commit to protect our future through a just transition strategy- a plan which guarantees decent work for all.

Corporations who refuse to diversify their energy base instead set out to frighten workers. But fear will not deliver for working families in communities dependent on fossil fuels. Fear will just increase the costs of action and make the prospect for organising the transition we need to build together more difficult.

## WHAT IS THE MEANING OF "JUST TRANSITION"?

The Just Transition concept recognises that we need to transition from a fossil fuel economy to a climate-friendly one as fast as possible, in the fairest way possible.

On 12 December 2015, global leaders committed to the legally binding UN Paris Agreement on Climate Change to phase out fossil fuels and limit global warming to below 1.5 degrees celsius.

The Paris Agreement is the culmination of 21 years of tense negotiations between 197 countries under the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international treaty that seeks to limit dangerous climate change and share out equitably the burden of reducing global emissions.

Fought for by a coalition of environmental NGOs and trade union groups, the term "Just Transition" in the Preamble of the Paris Agreement recognises that "there are no jobs on a dead planet". Just Transition also recognises workers are at the interface between society and nature. Past economic transitions, such as moving from post-war consensus to deregulation under Margaret Thatcher, resulted in the devastation of communities and worker's rights.

In this transition, the 175 country signatories to the Paris Agreement must take into account the effect of climate action, or inaction, on workers and their communities.

## **WE WILL LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND**

The international trade union movement's engagement on climate change is based on the belief that trade unions have a vital role to play in improving the quality of jobs, in protecting jobs in existing workplaces and industries by demanding sustainable industrial transformation, organising workers in new decent jobs, emerging from environmentally sound investments and policies and fighting for the just transition measures that will ensure we leave no one behind.



"We have a responsibility to move in the direction that Paris has given us – well below 2C as far as possible to 1.5C – a world that leaves no one behind. A world that is fair and inclusive ... We can do it. And we will have a much better and more equal world if we do."

*Mary Robinson,  
The Guardian, 16 March 2016*

# HOW DO WE SAVE THE CLIMATE WHILE PROTECTING WORKERS?

Industrial transformation is an imperative. The industries of today are the foundations for the industries of tomorrow. The opportunities for jobs are significant but so too are the challenges.

In order to have a chance to stay within the 2 degrees celsius limit, and even more for the internationally agreed 1.5 degrees Celsius objective, emissions should be reduced to zero as soon as possible, and no later than between 2055 and 2070.

Entire economic sectors must transform their carbon footprint to reach that goal. All jobs must be made climate-compatible.

While all sectors hold opportunities, the key to the transformation of our industries and our communities is energy-reliable, renewable energy. The estimates vary, but studies show that at least 80 per cent of current fossil fuel reserves will need to be left in the ground to meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement. Opponents of the transition to the alternative energy sources cite their relative cost but ignore health and pollution costs in our current energy dependency on fossil fuels, not to mention the hefty subsidies these fossil fuel businesses enjoy.

Universal access and democratisation of energy is needed if we are to achieve ambitious climate action.

- New models of renewable energy driving decentralised systems of power generation and distribution are needed.

“The challenge of industrial transformation is both an imperative and an opportunity.”

*Sharan Burrow,  
General Secretary,  
International Trade Union  
Confederation*





- Co-operatives established to meet community energy needs are increasingly seen as an option and often assisted by local government.
- Energy transition plans at the national and local level need to be developed in ways that serve the public good, meet science-based emissions reduction targets, reduce energy poverty and facilitate cross-border co-operation in research and development. These plans should involve communities in decision making while ensuring that the energy transformation is equitable and sustainable according to the principles of a just transition and participatory democracy.

Despite the opportunities for jobs, there will be significant challenges for many workers and their communities. SIPTU is determined that no one will be left behind and

that the energy revolution should be supported by just transition measures.

In addition to sustainable industrial transformation, we must ensure that the energy costs for private households and companies remain affordable in the transitional phase and that the burden must be distributed fairly taking into account pressures on low-income households and energy intensive industries where change will be felt most.

## WHAT ARE UNIONS SAYING?

Unions want a clear vision of future industrial energy options and the impact on workers. It is our job to fight for a transition that is just. In sectors where job losses are unavoidable, social partners (unions and employers) need to develop



“The Green Economy should not just be about reclaiming throw-away stuff. It should be about reclaiming thrown-away communities. It should not just be about recycling things to give them a second life. We should also be gathering up people and giving them a second change.”

*Van Jones,  
American writer and activist*

binding transition plans and strategies that offer new opportunities to employees and actively shape structural change.

Unions represent workers employed in the energy and fossil fuel sectors and in other areas that are affected. While companies make necessary changes to compete in an environmentally sustainable economy, we must recognise the fears of people who believe they will lose their jobs. These workers are the backbone of many communities and they must be guaranteed a future. Redeployment and the chance to further develop their skills and make a contribution in new sectors and secure pensions must be an integrated package of guarantees.

An economic conversion of this magnitude will require very robust research, innovation and training policies in order to facilitate adequate labour market adaptation. Vocational training and the package of transition policies should not be limited to a few wealthy countries. Decisions should be made in co-ordination with workers and trade union representatives. Trade unions should demand that financial support be made available so that developing countries can deploy just transition measures.

## **TRANSFORMING BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIES: A WORKERS' RIGHT TO KNOW**

All industries must use technologies and processes that contribute to a zero-carbon economy. All workers have a right to know what their employer is planning to ensure their jobs are secured through this transformation. Unions will support dialogue in existing industries and organise workers in new industries. The formula for decent work includes mature industrial relations, fair wages, safe and secure work and respect for workers rights, including dialogue.

This transformation of sectors and industries must be supported by just transition measures. Unions have played our role in UN negotiations and fought for these commitments. Now these are enshrined in the Paris Agreement. This means that carbon-dependent communities and workers must not be forced to bear the costs of change and that plans for industrial transformation in all sectors are developed. We have a right to a seat at the table as we act to stabilise the worlds climate by moving toward a zero-carbon emissions future.

The challenge for unions is to be part of the dialogue that drives investment, shapes industries for

sustainability and ensures decent work. Social dialogue, consultation, collective bargaining-workers have a right to be involved in the design of their future.

Workers and communities are on the frontlines of climate change. They must lead the transition to a zero-carbon world. If the transition is to be fast and fair, they will need to see concrete plans to be involved in the design of the future, notwithstanding the threats, that can ensure both security and opportunity.

Transformation, however, is not only about phasing out polluting sectors. It is also about creating new clean industries, new jobs, new investment and the opportunity for a more equal and just economy. It is about community revitalisation and development so that, for example, the closing of a mine brings new

investment, jobs and infrastructure, rather than leaving workers and their families jobless and stranded.

Concrete and transparent plans are necessary to give everyone certainty, from communities and workers to investors and employers. Workers have the right to know what these plans are and to help shape them.

These plans must be built on social dialogue involving workers, communities, businesses and governments, so people feel some power in shaping their working lives and communities.



“Trade Unions want to be fully involved in drawing up regional plans for a socially fair transition to low-and no-emissions industry.”

*Montserrat Mir*  
*ETUC Confederal Secretary*

## RIGHTS MUST BE AT THE HEART OF ANY CLIMATE RESPONSE

Climate policies-both those aimed at reducing emissions or those aimed at building resilience and adaptive capacity-must contribute to the realisation of human rights. This is a prerequisite for achieving the sustainability of climate polices: people will always stand with measures that improve their overall quality of life and their chance to live with dignity on our planet. Having rights integrated in climate policies is a condition for communities to contribute to broader social progress. Respect for gender equality, workers rights and migrant rights are fundamental for climate policies to support those who need them the most.

## WHAT DO WE WANT?

The global transition to a low carbon economy is now underway. Ireland must cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 30% compared to 2005 levels. Following EU targets, the Irish Energy White Paper (December 2015) requires the energy sector to reduce its carbon emissions by 80-95% by 2050.

The question is whether this transition is moving fast enough to protect people and other species. There are also questions around how the change is being implemented and whether it will simply intensify existing inequities. To solve these problems, the Just Transition movement calls on governments to ensure the following:

- **Engage and involve workers in the transition:** Workers have a wealth of knowledge that can be

“Climate Change is a planetary crisis. We’ve got to act, and we’ve got to act boldly.”

*Bernie Sanders*



poured into creating a new economy. They are also best placed to know what works and how businesses and communities can actively engage in securing a just transition.

- **Preserve Job Quality:** High quality, well paid jobs must be preserved and normalised as much as possible. The necessary shift to a new economy cannot be used as an excuse to further erode worker security. Reduction in working conditions to short-term or zero-hour contracts, unpaid apprentices are not acceptable.
- **Up-skill and Retrain:** Invest in the retraining and up-skilling of workers. The transition will largely result in transfers of jobs from power generation to energy efficient construction, from peat plants to biomass use, goods transport to public transport and centralised city-based employment to stable, local economic diversification.
- **Social Welfare Support:** Communities dependent on high carbon industries will be hardest hit by a shift to clean energy. Governments and industries must support a strong social protection system to ensure communities are supported as their workforce retrain and builds new clean industries.

- **Support Low Carbon Employment:** Care-work, community-work, the arts, journalism, education and are all low-carbon sectors of the economy yet increasingly under-funded. Galvanising growth in these sectors of the economy makes for better livelihoods and a safer planet.
- **All fossil fuel exploration needs to stop immediately:** There can be no more searching for new fossil fuel reserves. Further fossil fuel exploration, such as fracking, not only increases the risk of entering dangerous temperature levels but threatens a secure transition to a low carbon economy. Funds and subsidies must be diverted to worker retraining, up-skilling, education and community support.

## WHAT SIPTU IS DOING ON THE JUST TRANSITION

- SIPTU's involvement in the Global Climate March on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2015 aligns with the union movement's long history of solidarity with the Global South. The Global South will suffer most from climate inaction and "greenwashing" such as offsetting.

- The union contributed to the public consultation on the National Adaptation Plan outlining a number of recommendations mirroring those of the Just Transition movement. SIPTU also called for the meaningful engagement of workers and their communities on the planned National Dialogue on Climate Change.
  - SIPTU is working with our colleagues at European level in the ETUC to create a 'Just Transition Structural Fund' which would oblige the EU to provide funding to cushion the social impact of climate policies in regions with a high share of workers in carbon-dependent sectors such as peat excavation.
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- SIPTU has supported the creation of the ICTU Energy and Natural Resources Sub-Committee which aims to build a formal social partnership with government and employer representatives to bring about a Just Transition.
  - SIPTU campaigns to prevent the privatisation of Dublin Bus, Irish Rail and Irish Water. Public goods in public ownership are central to the concept of a just, low-carbon transition as publicly are pivotal to low emissions as well as energy and resource security.



# Climate Governance needs to be strengthened

A sound global climate regime is a critical part of the solution. regulations, timelines, shared objectives, common rules – these are fundamental for ensuring that there are no free-riders, that a level playing field is built and that the most vulnerable are protected.

We must ensure :

- National contributions are comprehensive and incorporate aspects related to employment and just transition.
- Clear standards for measuring progress and reporting ensuring promises are realised.
- Funds are committed for financing just transition measures at the national, sectoral and regional levels.
- Technology and knowledge transfer becomes a reality. Support for research and innovation in developing countries, including a substantial increase for research

and development (R&D) budgets, is needed to ensure ownership and appropriateness of innovations, as well as preventing new forms of dependency.

## CLIMATE ACTION – PART OF AMBITIOUS ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In 2015 the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) gives the international community a chance across policy areas. Every effort must be made to avoid silos in national implementation. From a union perspective, ensuring Goal 8 on ensuring “Decent Work for All” requires alignment with climate



objectives, so that every job contributes towards climate protection and resilience.

The adoption by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and its three constituents (governments employer and worker organisations) of the "ILO Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all " is a major landmark in providing international guidance to governments and social partners willing to make a just transition in their countries.

Social dialogue and planning are needed at the national level, in particular in developed countries to close the gap in emissions that prevent us from being on a safe emissions trajectory. Unions are conscious that each decision on investment, infrastructure, employment, trade and taxation policies, among others, matters for the climate transition. Our commitment is to support these policies going in the right direction.

The struggle for climate justice touches all aspects of our societies. Therefore, working in co-operation with social movements, environmental, gender-based and indigenous groups as well as with progressive allies in local governments and among employers, is crucial if we are to win this battle.

The union movement is committed to strengthen alliances which support a deep transformation of our economic system into a fair, truly sustainable one.

SIPTU and ICTU through its membership of Ireland's Coalition 2030 for sustainable development is fostering these alliances.



## **RESOURCES AND CONTACTS:**

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 **SIPTU**

This booklet is a guide for SIPTU members on what a "Just Transition" to a low carbon economy means for workers and trade unions.

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