



REJEnerAXion

Energy for a just and green recovery deal: the role of the industrial relations in the energy sector for a resilient Europe



## I RECOMMENDATIONS



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# FOREWORD

The aim of these recommendations is to **strengthen the role of the industrial relations systems and social dialogue at national and European level** to effectively manage the economic and social challenges posed by decarbonisation targets, as well as to promote a just energy transition fostering equity and social inclusion of regions, communities and citizens. Recommendations cover both the European national and local dimensions and are addressed to the respective institutions, social partners, key players in transition governance and civil society in its various forms (associations, professional and environmental organisations, research and university institutes, etc.).

These suggestions are the result of a comparative analysis of research activities, policies and measures that have been implemented to support energy transition in the eight countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Hungary) involved in the **REJEnerAXION** project (Energy for a just and green recovery deal: the role of the IR in the energy sector for a resilient Europe; European Union co-funded research project no. 101052341/SOCPL-2021-IND-REL).

The Just Transition principle, in line with the values of equity, democracy, justice and environmental sustainability of the European social model, aims to address the energy transition in a socially fair and balanced way, promoting the participation of workers and communities that are involved in decarbonisation processes.

Industrial relations can play a key role at European, national and regional level in accompanying and shaping transition processes while respecting the tenets of cohesion, social equity and inclusion enshrined in the 'European Pillar of Social Rights' (EU Commission, 2017) and the Commission Communication 'A Strong Social Europe for a Just Transition' (EU Commission, 2020). Governing substantial transformations of the economic model such as the twin - ecological and digital - transitions in a 'socially responsible' way, is all the more pivotal nowadays, not least in light of the new social risks posed by the succession of global crises: the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, the climate and economic crisis.

The REJEnerAXION project focused on the **Just Transition applied to energy**, the latter being a crucial sector given its vital role in the fight against climate change, its close correlation with digitisation processes and its deep interconnections with the economic system as a whole and the industrial policy in particular.

As highlighted by the research, the Just Transition is a complex and multidimensional concept that requires an intersectional view of emerging social issues, a multi-level governance system and a cross-cutting and integrated policy perspective.

A just eco-social transition also requires **public accountability with a new role for the State** to facilitate and support a transformation in the common interest, on the one hand, while **strengthening social dialogue, collective bargaining and the participation of workers and trade unions** as key actors in economic processes and active agents for a socially acceptable structural change, on the other hand.

However, the transformations of the development model brought about by the energy transition require a **reconfiguration of industrial relations systems and an adaptation of the social partners' capacity to take action**. It is therefore to social partners that some of the following suggestions are addressed.

The **recommendations made can be implemented at different levels** due to the diversity of national contexts, which are based on specific industrial relations models with several variables, such as the role of the State, the governance model, the attitudes and cultures of the social partners, collective bargaining mechanisms, workers' participation at company level, union density, type of worker representation and the enforceability of rights on the workplace.

The proposed recommendations are illustrated in a series of relevant actions - subdivided into **4 priority areas** concerning: 1) the basic requirements for the governance of the Just Energy Transition; 2) the conditions for an effective social dialogue to realize a Just Energy Transition; 3) the implications of the Just Transition for the employment, social protection and the local communities; 4) the role and action of trade unions in the Just Energy Transition.

# PART 1 - BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

## R1: LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS FOR A JUST TRANSITION

European institutions and Member States must develop **comprehensive and integrated policies and legal frameworks for a Just Transition**. The goal is to outline unambiguous, clear and shared regulatory strategies and strategic guidelines to transform the economy in a fair and inclusive manner for all parties concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the Just Transition Frameworks are offered as **policy tools** to manage the green transition by anticipating and managing the dynamics and effects of such transition, thereby overcoming the current fragmentation of initiatives, reaching out to the most vulnerable local communities, sectors, workers and their families – with positive spillover effects on social cohesion.

Setting up the Just Transition Frameworks requires the adoption of **participatory strategies**, so as to get stakeholders involved not only in the short term but also in the medium and longer term throughout the entire policy life cycle. The participatory approach makes it possible to outline strategies and directions in a fair and equitable manner. This allows, on the one hand, to maximise the economic and social benefits arising from the transition and, on the other hand, to ensure a fair redistribution of its social, economic and environmental costs throughout the society.

To this end, the EU and its Member State should rely on a **commonly accepted understanding and definition of the Just Transition**, as such a notion is yet to be developed to its relative novelty – not to mention the risk for its principles and characteristics to be downgraded.

## R2: COMPLEXITY OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION

The energy sector is at the heart of the green transition. Therefore, in order to properly address its shift towards a cleaner economy based on the principles of fairness and equity, it is essential to acknowledge:

- » its **dual nature**: the energy transition is a **global and complex process** (which goes well beyond the energy sector); however, at the same time, it is also markedly **context-dependent**, as it is shaped by local characteristics and specific needs due to its **local dimension**;
- » its **structure underpinned by two components**: the “outcome” component (i.e. the characteristics of the social and employment scenarios of the post-carbon economy) and the “process component” (i.e. the processes, initiatives and conditions that are needed to move away from the current situation towards a post-carbon economy and society);
- » its **broader social dimension**, i.e. the global and complex nature of the energy transition and its consequences on local communities, production processes, the labour market and employment conditions alike;
- » the **time mismatch** between the processes of decommissioning and closure of the plants, on the one hand, and the launch of reconversion and redevelopment projects on the territory, on the other, in order to reduce the out-of-job time between the loss of jobs (in the short term) and the creation of new ones (in the long term).

Against this backdrop it is all the more urgent to **overcome the tendency to measure only quantitative variables and the technocentric approach to energy transition**, which doesn't take into account the complexity and intersectional effects of the current transformations.

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1 ILO (2015), Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all, Geneva

### R3: MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE OF THE JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

In view of the complexity as well as the local and long-term nature of the energy transition, and in order to make the most of its potential as a lever for a more socially cohesive and equitable world, a **system of multi-level governance** (both at European and national level) is in order. Such a system must rest on clearly defined policies and regulatory frameworks, a global vision and a **common reference strategy** to be introduced following consultations and negotiations between national institutions, local authorities, social partners and civil society. Indeed, if poorly managed, the energy transition could exacerbate the existing **social risks** and generate new risks arising from the unequal redistributive effects that aggravate the economic, social and environmental inequalities of areas that rely heavily on fossil economies.

To properly face the energy transition, the multi-level governance system should:

- » rely on a strategic approach involving well-trained **planning and anticipation** instead of reaction-based management;
- » be **inclusive and democratic**, ensuring an appropriate and informed civil dialogue;
- » rely on **participatory mechanisms** to involve all key stakeholders in **public participation initiatives**;
- » **promote key actors' ownership** of implemented actions and measures, as well as accountability, monitoring and follow-up activities;
- » ensure an adequate **coordination and exchange of information** among the different actors and institutional levels involved;
- » **value and enable social dialogue as a central tool** for managing the just transition at all levels of governance (European, national, regional, local).

### R4: A POLICY MIX APPROACH TO THE JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

In order to address the multi-dimensional nature and complexity of ENERGY TRANSITION processes according to the JT principle, it is necessary to adopt a combination of both direct and cross-cutting **integrated policies**. For this **policy mix approach** to be able to anticipate and manage the energy transition, it is equally necessary to:

- » adopt a **rights-based, cross-sectoral and gender-sensitive approach** to policy development and analysis;
- » avoid **fragmentation in policy making**;
- » **integrate and improve consistency** among the different policies, i.e. macroeconomic and growth-enhancing policies, industrial and sector-specific policies, corporate policies, skills development, employment, safety, health and social protection policies, as well as active labour market and environmental policies;
- » make sure that **policies are based on** relevant and quality knowledge, data and information;
- » ensure that activities that support the just energy transition are funded with **adequate** public and private, national and international **financial resources**;
- » take into account that the **Just Transition Mechanism is limited in scope and size**, as it only concerns a small part of the broader energy transition processes;
- » plan an **ad hoc financing facility in view of the expiry of the deadline for the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)**, which is currently co-financing a major part of green transition investments in Member Countries.

## R5: SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY AND CONSENSUS FOR THE JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

In order to facilitate the deployment and acceptance of measures to anticipate and manage the effects of the Just Energy Transition and avoid potential conflicts, it is necessary to put in place actions and strategies targeting national and local institutions, workers and their families, communities, companies and employers, as well as other stakeholders involved in decision-making processes. This is to increase levels of **consensus** and **social acceptance**, thereby consolidating the cohesive approach of the main actors.

To this end, it is recommended that institutions, social partners and civil society:

- » **proof** the Just Energy Transition measures and agreements with **social and environmental conditionality**;
- » **disseminate information and knowledge** to increase understanding of transformations and their benefits, filling **knowledge gaps** and deconstructing **distorted representations**;
- » **analyse tensions and conflicts** stemming from the effects of the Just Energy Transition and its measures, so as to find shared solutions – first and foremost by identifying the underlying causes, drivers and triggers;
- » contribute to **fostering an inclusive culture** in social and organisational circles which cherish the values of equity, rights-based and leave-no-one-behind approaches to the challenges posed by ecological transition and the environment/work dilemma.

## PART 2 - CONDITIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE SOCIAL DIALOGUE FOR THE JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

### R6 - A TRULY TRIPARTITE AND MULTISTAKEHOLDER SOCIAL DIALOGUE

As the governance instrument of the Just Energy Transition, social dialogue represents the public arena in which the social partners chip in the policy dialogue and have their say on transition actions and measures. Since such dialogue depends to a large extent on the characteristics of industrial relations systems, ensuring its effectiveness means that **the State and national institutions must express a strong willingness, taking responsibility for and exercising leadership**. In those Member States lacking a solid framework for social dialogue, it will be essential to promote support or advocacy actions through specific recommendations and initiatives.

Furthermore, in order to ensure the quality and sustainability of the Just Energy Transition, it is essential to strengthen **the inclusive nature of social dialogue** as a form of governance through the promotion of a broad (multistakeholder) vision based on the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders (first and foremost, associations representing labour, business and public institutions, but also experts, professional and environmental organisations and civil society).

### R7 - STRENGTHENING SOCIAL DIALOGUE TO SUPPORT THE JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

**Social dialogue** plays a central role (both at European and national level) in ensuring fairness and social justice in connection with the Energy Transition as well as the governance of its transformations. It therefore allows social partners to fill the knowledge gaps (in terms of new risks, quality of work, new professional figures) and come to terms with the speed and the radical nature of decarbonisation processes. However, this instrument **needs to be strengthened** by:

- » **consolidating the cross-sector and multi-level interactions** of social dialogue, **on top of the sector-specific ones**. This is to foster learning, communication and the transfer of knowledge and information, not only from the top down but also vice versa, up to the European level, as well as across and within sectors;
- » ensuring **the full involvement of social partners in all stages of transition governance**, from decision-making and implementation to monitoring, evaluation and follow-up;
- » making sure that the inclusion of social partners and social dialogue result in **binding agreements between the parties**, overcoming the – albeit extensive – production of joint opinions, declarations and other non-binding instruments;
- » ensuring that social partners strengthen the skills necessary to tackle the Just Transition, consolidating the ability to: translate the results of the social dialogue into practices and policies (**instrumental effectiveness**); set the political and public agenda (**agenda effectiveness**); and critically analyse policies in order to formulate the recommendations necessary to achieve the objectives, taking into account all socio-economic aspects (**analytical capacity**);
- » ensuring that the activities and outcomes of the social dialogue and collective bargaining take a **knowledge**



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**management** approach, to capitalise on knowledge, experience, learning and good practices on interventions, actions and measures for the just transition, on the one hand, and to promote the collection of granular and reliable data and information, enhancing the knowledge of communities of practice (workers and companies), on the other hand;

- » based on the **exchange of good practices at national and local level, cross-industry and sectoral social dialogue** at European level should play a stronger and more active role in developing guidance for national level social partners as well as in shaping European level Just Transition and industrial policies and measures.

## PART 3 – THE JUST TRANSITION AND ITS EFFECTS ON EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

### R8 - SOCIAL PROTECTION AND DECENT WORK

Institutions and social partners should strive to **promote universal access to comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social protection systems and decent work** to:

- » ensure the **creation of new and decent jobs** in terms of contract type, social security, wages and working conditions, in line with the ILO's decent work agenda and the European pillar of social rights;
- » **expand the social safeguards of collective bargaining** to indirect and ancillary workers affected by the transition, through: a. mapping (production and employment) value chains of fossil and renewable sources and b. strengthening site-level bargaining and the transferability of bargaining entitlements;
- » put **the reskilling and upskilling of workers** at the centre of collective bargaining in light of the reshuffling of positions and the demand for greater flexibility, whereby workers must now be able to work with different technologies and process control systems;
- » ensure that the **assessment of risks to workers' health and safety** also includes new risks emerging from energy transition processes. Such risks must be addressed by identifying appropriate prevention and protection measures based on the principle of hazard elimination and control;
- » include measures to address the **effects of transition on gender and intersectional discrimination** in the European Just Transition frameworks and national plans, so as to support the most vulnerable groups.

### R9 - LABOUR POLICIES, TRAINING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

To ensure **policies and measures related to employment, training and skills development** are on par with the Just Transition, collaboration between institutions and social partners at European, national and local level should be strengthened. More specifically, this means:

- » enhancing **active labour policies** to manage skill mismatch, foster inter-sector mobility, reduce labour-shredding, and encourage the inflow of skilled labour;
- » fostering **policy coordination** mechanisms to adapt skills development policies to macro-economic, industrial, sectoral, employment, digital, labour mobility, climate and environmental changes, as well as to corporate policies;
- » encouraging the creation of **specific institutional bodies or monitoring mechanisms for skill identification**;
- » **improving systems aimed at anticipating skills needs**, involving the social partners in skills-intelligence activities (forecasting needs, updating job profiles);
- » extending social dialogue to training institutions to help consolidate **labour market information systems** for skills anticipation and monitoring;

- » ensuring that **training of new workers and reskilling** of mobile or in-house workers take into account strategic and cross-cutting skills, in addition to technical ones;
- » facilitating the **transfer of specific skills** from highly qualified workers to those entering the labour market;
- » making sure **time spent in training is considered as working time in order** to encourage participation and provide access to paid training leave and career guidance;
- » promoting **lifelong learning in order** to foster personal development and meet the identified needs of the labour market through *on-the-job* training.

## R10 - JOB TRANSITION PATHWAYS

In order to effectively manage employment transition pathways, institutions and social partners must cooperate to:

- » **reinforce social protection measures** so they better address the needs of workers during employment transition through economic support and the provision of social safety nets for workers;
- » consolidate and strengthen the **tools of active and passive labour policies**, so as to support workers losing jobs' reintegration into – or exit from – the job market (early retirement, leaving incentives, etc.);
- » promote **the territorial mapping** of workers' skills in coordination between companies, trade unions and training institutions, i.e. by identifying of job profiles and using a **common skills certification system**, with the participation of trade unions;
- » enhance the territorial perspective of energy transition in order to enable workers to access **mobility paths that take into account** their skills and life expectations;
- » invest more in **improving local vocational education and training systems** and – more specifically - develop training programmes for those job profiles that will become more relevant in the future;
- » reinforce **controls on occupational safety and well-being during the transition** by analysing the impact of the transition on occupational health and safety, as well as promoting measures aimed at identifying new emerging risks or the potential exacerbation of existing risks, identifying prevention and protection measures, updating safety protocols, and scheduling appropriate training for control bodies and workers;
- » tap into **good practices from other sectors** to support and finance job transitions, also through corporate and inter-sectoral social dialogue;
- » introduce monitoring, evaluation and follow-up mechanisms to **track the effectiveness of employment transition programmes**.

## R11 – LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND VALUE CHAINS

Interventions for the **protection and development of territorial social and economic structures** - which should be implemented by responsible public institutions and supported by social partners - should be aimed at:

- » focus in particular on the protection of **structurally weak regions** (which rely heavily on fossil-based industries) to avoid the risks of industrial desertification, loss of skilled workers, depopulation and forced processes of emigration and impoverishment. This can be ensured by:

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- \* supporting labour market with **active and passive policies**,
  - \* encouraging **economic diversification**, while also supporting supply chains with a high added value or a high innovation value,
  - \* using **fiscal policies** as a tool to tackle the effects of transition at the local level by strengthening social policies (health, education, care policies) to support affected communities,
  - \* **coordinating** actions undertaken and measures proposed at sectoral and territorial levels to effectively and efficiently address the challenges of the Just Energy Transition,
  - \* extending services and support measures to **all workers in the area, taking into account sector- and area- specific characteristics**;
- » strengthen **the role of regional actors** and their **coordination role** also through the reinforcement of **local social dialogue committees**;
  - » apply a **place-based approach to Just Energy Transition measures**. This means coupling local development policies with measures that enhance territorial vocations, without neglecting the needs of local communities whose resources are linked to energy assets;
  - » promote **the integration of Territorial Just Transition Plans into spatial development plans and other policies** affecting transition regions, so as to maximise the effective use of resources;
  - » promote **the upgrade of – and link between - territorial** employment services, training establishments and social partners. Employment services can propose specific job-search solutions as well as learning courses, while protecting in particular people in vulnerable situations for them to be able to stay in the labour market.

## PART 4 - THE UNION'S ROLE AND ACTION IN THE JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

### R12 – RECONFIGURATION OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN LIGHT OF THE CHANGES BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE ENERGY TRANSITION

Social partners, supported by the government, should expedite the implementation of measures to **reconfigure the characteristics, functions and instruments of industrial relations** in order to maintain the safeguards and social protection guarantees of direct and indirect workers affected by changes in production processes and work organisation (uncertain status of new borderline professionals, fragmentation of employment contracts, increased exposure of workers to new, unfamiliar or less-known risks, worsening wage conditions, instability and precariousness of new jobs, etc.). In this connection, given the rapidly changing labour market, particular attention should be paid to **gaps in workers' representation**.

### R13 - ROLE OF THE UNION

In order to strengthen the **role of trade unions and their ability to have a say** in industrial relations, unions should consider the following aspects:

- » the need to involve workers in tackling the challenges that will arise when anticipating and managing the effects of the energy transition, through their participation in social dialogue as an **instrument for the multilevel governance**;
- » the involvement of trade unions at different levels (national, sectoral, local) in restructuring and anticipating change to **protect and promote the interests of workers**;
- » the need to consolidate **cross-sectoral bargaining** in order to extend membership and strengthen the union's representative capacity;
- » the need to take on a **pro-active role**. This would allow trade unions to truly shape energy transition processes, anticipating changes and ensuring the participation of workers and their representatives from the planning stages of strategic decisions, with efforts aimed at signing agreements and formalise the role of trade unions.

### R14 - RENEWAL OF UNION ACTION

In order to support the **renewal of trade union action by tapping into the Just Transition opportunities**, actions at European, national and territorial level should be aimed at:

- » **consolidating the capacity of trade unions** to participate effectively in the different levels of negotiations and decision-making (both at the political level and in corporate strategies), by investing in lifelong training and awareness-raising of trade union representatives. This, in turn, will reinforce their understanding of the complex issues involved in the energy transition and the tools to overcome them;

- » **promoting, enhancing and coordinating the articulation** of trade unions intervention on the energy transition issues;
- » **encouraging exchanges with other categories** involved in the energy chain to foster the sharing of bargaining best practices in bargaining at national, local and company level;
- » **strengthening the relations with civil society (in its various forms), research institutions and experts** to promote environmental sustainability and innovation vis-à-vis energy transition.

## R15 - EXTENSION OF THE AREAS FOR UNION ACTION

The Just Transition represents an opportunity to broaden the areas of union action and collective bargaining, which could cover the following issues:

- » environmental sustainability of workplaces, through the legal recognition of **employee representatives with environmental skills, roles and functions** and the creation of the relevant professional role at company level;
- » the close **interconnection between digital and demographic transition**, with the resulting changes having a major impact on the future of workers' job profiles;
- » **quality of life and work-life balance**, from the perspective of the centrality of the person and the elimination of intersectional discrimination, through the strengthening of sectoral and company bargaining.



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