

## **Legal challenges at the end of the fossil fuel era: Shaping energy futures through legal intervention**

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### **PANEL 3. Environmental and social energy justice**

## **A citizen-centric approach to evidence-based decision-making under the European Green Deal**

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The European Green Deal (EGD) is an ambitious plan that envisions a profound transformation of the economy of the European Union (EU) to achieve climate and sustainability objectives. It aims to achieve net zero emissions of GHGs by 2050 and a decoupling of economic growth from resource use. Its 'deeply transformative policies' will have widespread impacts on communities and industries across Europe, from energy supply, production and consumption, to large-scale infrastructure, transport, food and agriculture, construction, taxation and social benefits. The EGD has already met with fierce criticism ranging from concern over whether it can meet its environmental and economic objective to allegations that it prioritises private investment over the public interest and increases regional inequality. Thus, the broad mandate is likely to exacerbate pre-existing tensions and contribute to societal conflicts. The EGD recognises the need for careful attention to potential trade-offs between economic, environmental and social objectives, stating that it will be guided by the European Pillar of Social Rights in ensuring that 'no one is left behind.' However, this raises important questions about how policymakers will strike the appropriate balance. How will the social and human rights impacts of these sweeping new laws be taken into account in the decision-making process? With the emphasis of the EGD on scientific data relating to climate change, how do we ensure that policymakers do not place undue reliance on exclusive, 'authoritative' sources? In other words, how can we avoid technocratic styles of decision-making that risk jeopardising the democratic ideals of the EU? This paper argues that evidentiary requirements need to be re-framed to include social impact assessments (SIAs) and human rights impact assessments (HRIAs), to ensure that EU institutions properly assess and weigh the impacts of these sweeping changes on public stakeholders when implementing the ambitious objectives of the EGD.