

Eco-social Synergies: Legal Challenges at the Intersection of the Environmental and Employment Realms

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PANEL 2. The Key stakeholders in Environmental Protection in the Labour Market and Best Practices

ABSTRACT

Assessing the development of trade union strategies and capacities for just transition in climate policy contexts.

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References to ‘just transition’ are increasingly commonplace in climate policy, and new institutions for social dialogue on decarbonization are developing in many countries, yet in practice workers and their organizations are frequently excluded (ETUC, 2019). At the same time, trade unions face multiple challenges in developing proactive, pro-climate approaches. Proactive union approaches to climate change are associated with the development of union power resources and organizational capacities to secure worker gains from the energy transition (Kalt, 2022). The paper develops a theoretical framework to underpin comparative research on union responses to decarbonization policy in the UK, Spain and Germany, as part of the Horizon Europe project ‘Advancing the understanding of the challenges, policy options and measures for a Just EU energy transition’ (AdJUST). Building upon the developing literature on union responses to climate change, and insights from power resource theory, the paper describes 4 strategic challenges facing unions in developing a proactive approach to climate change. These are: *Developing a forward-looking knowledge regime; Coordinating multi-level union organization; Horizontal coordination across unions, sectors and supply chains; Creating cooperation and securing credible commitment of policymakers and company managers*. Meeting these challenges is both a matter of internal capacity building and organization, and the development of effective institutional mechanisms to shape outcomes. The research proposes to uncover the ways in which climate policy approaches and new and existing institutional mechanisms for ‘just transition’ shape union power resources, strategies, and capacities to meet the challenges posed by climate change and decarbonization. This includes the ways in which union structures and identities, and political and institutional contexts, shape union’s organizing priorities and industrial and social policy preferences for just transition. The paper will conclude by outlining preliminary research findings from empirical case studies of British unions organizing in fossil fuels, renewables and automotive sectors.