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The green, just transition away from coal

A Greens/EFA working paper

What do we mean by a just transition?

People at the centre of the process

- The transition away from coal and other fossil fuels is not only about coal, energy and our climate.
- People have to be placed at the heart of the transition. They must feel empowered to act. The social and cultural aspects must not be neglected.
- The transition has to be inclusive. All stakeholders should be part of an active and participatory creation process.
- Ensuring gender balance is essential to helping quicken coal mining regions' transition.
- Fundamental rights (such as a right to equality, freedom, cultural and educational rights etc...) equal access to services and fight against poverty should be given as much importance as reducing carbon emissions.

A long-term strategy and a democratic process

- A vision and long-term strategy is necessary to provide direction, incentives, certainty and predictability for citizens, workers, communities and future businesses so that they may all actively involve themselves in the transition.
- Close cooperation and stakeholder dialogue are essential. Citizens and communities must have their say in all parts of the process (political commitments, predictable roadmaps, milestones and measures, financing opportunities and so on).
- For predictability and credibility a definitive end-date for coal is needed, as well a clear and detailed pathway for the transition that still maintains some flexibility.
- Carbon capture and storage, and other 'clean coal' technologies for coal-based electricity production require significant investments and do not support the transition process. They are therefore not a lasting solution but instead deviate money from investments in real alternative technologies that create jobs, produce green energy and allow for a sustainable transition away from coal.

Respect for mining heritage

- The economic, social and cultural heritage of mining regions need to be respected and appreciated.
- To work collectively to build a brighter more sustainable future, mining communities' values and traditional strengths such as solidarity and perseverance must be harnessed. Active effort should be made to maintain the communities locally.
- There must be an acknowledgement of the exceptional efforts and the costs coal regions must shoulder in order to achieve Europe's CO2-reduction targets, as well as their contribution to Europe's economic success in the past. These regions deserve special support at the European level.

A truly social dimension

- The transition away from coal presents opportunities for dealing with unfavourable demographic trends, promoting economic diversification and investment in the region, and for increasing regions' capacities for further change.
- It is not only about the current workers in the mines and plants but about the jobs for future generations in these coal regions.
- Coal companies should not be absolved of their responsibility for the regions where they operated and have to play their part in financing the long-term societal and environmental costs of their activities.
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A healthier environment

- Better air quality
- A major improvement in the quality of surface water in lakes and rivers as well as protection and proper management of ground water.
- Reconversion of sites into green areas and revitalisation of the local environment (landscape, biodiversity, water...).

More business opportunities

- New job perspectives in sectors that provide meaningful work and are adapted to the challenges and needs of today's world.
- Transitioning away from coal does not mean de-industrialisation: existing industrial structures as well as human and infrastructural potential will be further developed and strengthened in order to establish sustainable industrial activities.

The Greens/EFA Group's political demands

1. A phase-out of government subsidies for coal power. These funds should be redirected into support for sustainable energy sources and to the transition, including workers and communities.
2. A clear EU industrial strategy that takes into account the ecological limits of our planet.
3. An immediate ban on the opening or enlargement of coal mines.
4. A clear understanding of what is meant by a "coal region in transition", and an agenda that fully respects the pledges made by the EU under the Climate Agreement signed in Paris in Dec. 2015.
5. A clear timeframe. On average across the EU, coal mines and coal plants should be phased out by

2030, alongside with the NGO coalition Europe Beyond Coal.

6. The phasing out of coal includes the closure worldwide of all coal mines and coal plants by 2050. The import of coal from outside the EU must also be phased out.
7. An acknowledgment that the transition does not only concern coal but that eventually all fossil fuels will have to be phased out.
8. A ban on false solutions such as ‘Carbon Capture and Storage’ for energy purposes and so-called clean coal.
9. A coherent regulatory framework, and a coherent fiscal policy.
10. Private companies are to be held accountable. They should use their profits to fund a socially just phase-out of their operations, including the long-term costs of coal mining such as decommissioning, clean-up and reconversion of sites. Providing assistance to coal regions, including in the area of clean energy by providing training, upskilling and investments in infrastructure. The sharing of good practices and success stories to coal regions, for example by assessing the impact of EU funds as a learning exercise.
11. Better use of EU money that is made available for green and just transition purposes (structural funds) and a truly transparent process for accessing these funds, so that they can be closely monitored in order to ensure efficiency, consistency and inclusiveness.

A green and just transition is possible!

Example of a great success story in France:

Loos-en-Gohelle (Pas-de-Calais, Northern France) - “from black to green”.

Loos-en-Gohelle, a town of 7000 inhabitants has been transformed completely over the past two decades. Thanks to Green Mayor Jean François Caron, it managed, over the course of 20 years, to move away from coal while celebrating the region’s rich mining history and all the while engaging all of the town’s inhabitants. This example of a green and just transition is a major success story that proves the green and just transition is indeed possible, that people can be empowered, and that through a tailored sustainable development policy, a greener future with new green opportunities can emerge. Loos-en-Gohelle is today one of the foremost proponents of environmental innovation in France and a pioneer of the energy transition. At the last local election, the Green mayor won with more than 80% of the votes! Read more about this region which has risen from the ashes in English [here](#).

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