



# Social protection for climate change adaptation and a carbon neutral transition by 2050

The Paris Agreement establishes a global goal of enhancing adaptive capacity and reducing vulnerability to climate change (Article 7.1). To achieve this goal, developed countries should support capacity-building actions in developing countries (Article 11.3). Social protection systems are a key aspect of strengthening adaptive capacity. As the world economy transitions rapidly towards carbon-neutrality, social protection can also help facilitate the transition, help build its social legitimacy, minimize negative disruptions in people's lives, and enable everyone to contribute to the transition.

In an earlier report, *"Harnessing the Future - Social Protection in East Africa"* [1], the EU-SPS presented insights on climate-proofing social protection. Some of those messages are repeated here. Additionally, the case is made that many of the policy principles that aim at reducing poverty, inequality and vulnerability, and enhancing people's life-opportunities also complement climate action. **Many of the EU-SPS key messages and approaches can promote successful adaptation and transition.** Such aspects include, among others, a comprehensive social policy approach, consideration of life-cycle risks, universal access to social protection, and individual rights to social protection for women, men, girls and boys. Focus here is on the circumstances of low and lower middle income countries, as that is where EU-SPS work took place.

## Social challenges raised by climate change

Three future pathways of global warming help clarify the discussion of climate change impacts and the scale of the transition. Current global climate action commit-



ments ('Nationally Determined Contributions' under the Paris Agreement) point towards 3-degree warming by 2100. In the Paris Agreement, parties agreed to limit global warming to 2 degrees while pursuing efforts to limit warming to 1.5 degrees. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) underlines that risks and damages associated with 1.5-degree warming are significantly lower than those associated with 2-degree warming. Limiting warming to 1.5 degrees is still achievable. [2]

## Climate change impacts and adaptation

Direct impacts of climate change are diverse and vary by region [3]. In general, climate change leads to more extreme weather events. Heatwaves will become more severe and extended. Areas already prone to droughts will experience more severe droughts more frequently. Meanwhile, areas prone to storms or flooding will experience more severe and frequent storms and floods. Climate change also increases disease transmission and puts species at threat of extinction thus harming essential ecosystem functions. These impacts imply **severe losses in human life, human health and wellbeing, livelihood security including water provision, fertile land, and built capital.** The intensity of damages rises rapidly with additional warming (see Box).



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### Box: Rising stakes

The intensity of negative impacts rises rapidly with additional warming. In East Africa, temperature extremes that would now be statistically expected *once every 50 years* would, at 1.5-degree warming, be expected *once a decade*. At 2-degree warming, those events would take place *once every three years*. The global average drought duration in a 1.5- to 2-degree world would be *about 10 months*, while in a 3-degree world the average drought would last *18 months*. Droughts that would now occur *once a century* would, at 3-degree warming, occur *once every two to five years* in most of Africa, in southern Europe, and many other regions. [4, 5]

Climate change impacts can lead to **high food prices**. Coastal erosion and inland damages will drive **migration**, including from rural to urban areas. Disasters can also undo the progress achieved by prior social protection actions. The drought in Ethiopia in 2008 seemed to have destroyed roughly the amount of assets that had been built up since 2005 through the Productive Safety Net Programme [6].

The EU-SPS report “*Harnessing the Future*” identifies climate change as one of the seven grand challenges facing East African social protection systems. Specific impacts in East Africa include cyclones, high temperatures, coastal erosion, health risk increase, agricultural losses, and poor water provision. Climate impacts will include both acute shocks and gradual degradation.

**The rural poor are particularly at-risk.** This is because of a combination of factors including reliance on agriculture and informal work (with no social protection), and poverty. Compared to other groups the rural poor are 1) more exposed to negative climate change impacts, 2) more vulnerable, 3) less able to avoid and cope with negative impacts, 4) prone to long-lasting negative impacts due to negative coping strategies (such as needing to sell assets), and 5) less likely to invest in future security. [1]

**Climate change impacts will likely be gendered.** This is due to the combined effects of gender roles, gendered division of economic resources, higher poverty rates of women, women’s higher reliance on sensitive resources, gendered violence after disasters, and gendered inequalities in accessing aid and assistance. [7]

For instance, in cases of water scarcity, the heavy labor of carrying water from alternative sources will most often fall on women. Such work far away from the community may place women at higher risk of sexual violence. Increased household responsibilities contribute to keeping women away from formal employment. Women are also overrepresented in agricultural work. An essential consideration of climate change impacts must therefore be the **compounding of risks** on specific groups. [7]

### Just transition to carbon neutrality by 2050

To limit global warming to 1.5 degrees, human-caused CO<sub>2</sub> emissions would need to reach net-zero by 2050. The two-degree target implies net-zero emissions by 2070. [2]

The scale of the transition is immense. To take the example of energy, about 80% of global energy demand is currently met by fossil fuels. Speed is also key. The slower emissions begin falling, the sharper and deeper net emissions need to later decline. [2]

The Paris Agreement assigns leadership in absolute emission reductions to developed countries. The bulk of transition actions will necessarily be in these wealthier countries with higher per capita emissions. Nonetheless, the impacts of the transition will extend everywhere due to economic interdependencies such as international trade, supply chains, energy sourcing and capital flows.

The Paris Agreement also requires developing countries to continue enhancing their own mitigation efforts and move toward economy-wide emission reduction targets. This effectively means that developing countries will not develop along the same fossil-fueled pathway as did OECD countries and currently emerging economies.





The takeaway is that the necessary transition is fast, unprecedented in scale [2], and novel in quality. Therefore **deep uncertainties** exist regarding what a carbon neutral world economy - and national economies - would look like. It is also unknown how associated positive and negative impacts will be divided between and within countries.

Some general characteristics of the transition can however be outlined. A rapid transition to carbon neutrality implies **changes to employment structures** [8]. Some jobs may simply transform in quality. Certain jobs or sectors will be phased out or disappear abruptly while others emerge in response to the demand of carbon-neutral economic development. Overall, it is essential that workers have the sufficient protection, risk tolerance and capacity to take on new tasks or transition to new sectors. The UNFCCC [9] identifies the following sectors as particularly critical to climate stability: agriculture, forestry, resource-intensive manufacturing, energy, buildings and transport. Globally, these sectors employ about 1.5 billion people.

Economic disruptions risk **increasing poverty, vulnerability and inequality**, which feed into other social problems. Where fossil energy sources are substituted, **higher energy prices** may be anticipated. A transition that disrupts people's lives severely can be a source of **anxiety and feelings of injustice**. Negative impacts on workers can have indirect impacts on other groups too. Male discontent could increase domestic violence, or the threat of violence, particularly when women have few personal resources or poor access to formal livelihoods and economic independence. Antipathies against ethnic minorities may take new more aggressive forms when dominant groups are left unemployed. As in the case of direct climate change impacts, at-risk groups would see

### Box: Just transition

The Paris Agreement states that a just transition is an imperative of climate action. A just transition combines a clear future strategy, a comprehensive social policy framework for achieving it, and meaningful social dialogue throughout the transition process [10]. A just transition also implies that inequality, vulnerability and poverty do not increase in the process and that negative outcomes do not fall on some groups disproportionately. Though the concept of a just transition emerged from the labor union movement, social dialogue can be expanded to involve civil society groups, local affected communities, indigenous peoples, and other non-union-members. The ILO considers social protection systems a key policy tool for advancing a just transition towards decent jobs in greener sectors [11].

their **risks compound** in the face of a poorly managed transition.

Perceptions of justice are important for the legitimacy of transition actions and thus their success. One response to the multitude of social risks associated with economic transitions is the notion of a **just transition**. Social policies are an essential part of a successful just transition (see Box).

## How social protection can respond to the needs of adaptation and transition

Social protection instruments are key in reducing inequality, vulnerability and poverty, promoting the life-opportunities of all, securing good health and wellbeing, and promoting gender equality. They increase resilience by offering positive means of coping with and mitigating losses when livelihoods and assets are lost or prices suddenly rise. Building resilience is preferable to on-the-spot disaster relief which may be slow, costly, or require evacuation. Social protection also increases people's agency in society and their ability to contribute to community goals.

Social protection systems can also be designed in ways that anticipate and effectively respond to the specific challenges posed by climate change as outlined above. Below, it is discussed how many of the policy approaches promoted by the EU-SPS also serve the needs of adaptation and transition in low and lower-middle income countries.





## Comprehensive social policies

The EU-SPS has advanced the comprehensive social policies or “whole-of-government” approach. This ensures that social protection is effectively delivered through an integrated and synergetic interplay of macro and sector policies, addressing multiple layers of disadvantage. Opening a new health clinic, for instance, is of little use if no safe and affordable transport to the clinic exists.

Just as effective social protection needs to involve cooperation between different government departments, so does effective adaptation and transition policy. Comprehensive social policies can respond to the uncertainty relating to how exactly climate change impacts and adaptation and transition needs fall on different groups. Comprehensiveness builds certainty that protection is delivered effectively. It also allows synergies between social protection policies and other climate policies.



## Universal access to social protection

Universal access to social protection has been promoted by the EU-SPS as a way to ensure that coverage gaps are averted. An example of a coverage gap is when informally employed workers do not qualify for targeted poor-relief, yet they do not receive social protection through their employment as would the formally employed.

Many of the informally employed work in agriculture, and will be subject to extreme weather, prolonged droughts and thus losses in yields. Bringing informal workers within the scope of social protection would therefore dramatically increase climate-resilience particularly in rural areas. Access to some form of unemployment assistance, public works or employment guarantees facilitates the movement of workers between sec-

tors and reduces harm to households when assets are destroyed or sectors phased out. Disaster events or migration may also disrupt essential social networks which communities have earlier relied upon, making access to formal social protection even more important.

The uncertainties involved with the climate change and transition impacts can undermine non-universal approaches. This is because the accuracy of targeted approaches to social protection may diminish, and premiums of insurance instruments could become unaffordable. [7]

## Individual rights to social protection, gender-responsiveness, and life-course risks

Individual rights to social protection are promoted by the EU-SPS as a means of promoting women’s economic self-sufficiency and agency. This enables women to make life-choices at an equal footing with men. Social protection cannot be gender blind, yet it should not generalize the needs of women. Instead, the EU-SPS has recommended targeting social protection means and benefits to individuals going through periods of life with specific risk factors (eg. adolescence, pregnancy, maternity, old age). Furthermore, to ensure the effectiveness of policies that affect women, women should be involved in their design.

When climate change impacts compound risks on women, individual rights become that much more important. Furthermore, individual access to social protection allows women to participate fully in the actions required for adaptation and transition. Promoting women’s ability to contribute is inherently important. It also helps ensure that adaptation and transition actions are as effective and suitable to the social context as possible.

For instance, it is not enough for transportation infrastructure to be developed if it is not tailored safe for women. In some cases, due to their roles in the community, women may possess specific skills related to e.g. agriculture that are important for adaptation actions. Institutional changes and social policies in general operate in fields that are already gendered, and their reforms can hardly avoid having gender impacts. [7]



## Country ownership of social protection policies

Throughout the EU-SPS programme, partner countries have decided which aspects of social protection capacity development they wish to prioritize. The practical work of capacity development has also been in the hands of local experts and social protection professionals. This approach ensures the legitimacy of projects and their suitability for the local context.

Developing country ownership is also expected by the Paris Agreement (Article 11.2) when developed countries provide assistance for climate change adaptation and mitigation capacity development projects.

## Strengthening urban social protection and portability

The EU-SPS report “*Harnessing the Future*” recommends strengthening urban social protection systems in anticipation of higher demand due to migration from rural to urban areas. Likewise, countries may wish to investigate options of social protection portability between municipalities or countries, or even assisted migration [12], in anticipation of catastrophic weather events that force people to move.

## Anticipatory disaster response instruments

When Kenya was hit by a drought in 2015, its Hunger Safety Net Programme was able to scale up rapidly to an additional 100,000 households. This is because those households had registered their bank account information to the system earlier, even though they were not eligible for benefits then. These kinds of Management Information Systems (MIS) and other anticipatory arrangements can benefit from being linked to the monitoring of early-warning signs of food insecurity.

Insurances are one avenue for responding to climate-related risks. Insurance payouts can be linked to weather data, as is done with the Ethiopian HARITA micro-insurance scheme. This approach can be easier and quicker to administer than travelling to each community to directly observe the damages and needs.



## Training and public works programmes

A holistic understanding of social protection encompasses individual capacity development through skills development and education as well as active labor market policies. Public works combined with professional and life skill training programmes have the generic benefit of creating (the preconditions for) productive jobs and reducing poverty. Often they intend to create a multiplier effect, where injections of money into productive activity remain circulating in the local community or national economy.

The UNFCCC [9] and ILO [11] encourage governments to provide social assistance in ways that promote successful job transitions to climate-proof sectors where necessary. Public works programmes could be targeted to sectors and projects that are critical to adaptation and carbon-neutral transition. Such projects could include building renewable energy infrastructure or restoring ecosystems. To ensure that the assets generated by public works programmes are truly useful and suit the skill-sets of local workers, the local community should be involved in the selection of projects.

The EU-SPS supported the public works programme of the Tanzanian Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) programme through an Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessment (ISPA) [13]. In the context of Ethiopian Productivity Safety Net Programme (PSNP) the EU-SPS has supported the curriculum development and deployment of most local level social workers for case management that also supports climate change adaptation. This was done by linking the poorest and most vulnerable households to the public benefits and services that they have a right to – but not always awareness about.



- 1 OECD (2017) “Social Protection in East Africa: Harnessing the Future”
- 2 IPCC (2018) “Global Warming of 1.5C: Summary for policymakers”
- 3 For plain-language discussions of climate change impacts, reviewed by climate-scientist-editors, see [carbonbrief.org](http://carbonbrief.org). For an overview of climate change impact in different regions, see: [https://interactive.carbonbrief.org/impacts-climate-change-one-point-five-degrees-two-degrees/?utm\\_source=web&utm\\_campaign=Redirect](https://interactive.carbonbrief.org/impacts-climate-change-one-point-five-degrees-two-degrees/?utm_source=web&utm_campaign=Redirect)
- 4 Kharin et al. (2018) “Risks from Climate Extremes Change Differently from 1.5°C to 2.0°C Depending on Rarity” Earth’s Future, 6(5).
- 5 Naumann et al. (2018) “Global Changes in Drought Conditions Under Different Levels of Warming” Geophysical Research Letters, 45(7).
- 6 Béné (2011) “Social protection and climate change”. IDS Bulletin, 42(6).
- 7 ODI (2011) “Gender, generations, social protection & climate change: a thematic review”
- 8 ILO (2016) “Technical paper: A just transition to climate-resilient economies and societies: Issues and perspectives for the world of work”
- 9 UNFCCC (2016) “Just Transition of the Workforce, and the Creation of Decent Work and Quality Jobs”
- 10 For a collection of cases where just transition approaches have (and have not) been planned or implemented, see ILO (2018) “Just Transition Towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All”
- 11 ILO (2015) “Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all”
- 12 Johnson and Krishnamurthy (2010) “Dealing with displacement: Can “social protection” facilitate long-term adaptation to climate change?” Global Environmental Change, 20.
- 13 See: [www.ispatools.org](http://www.ispatools.org)

### **EU-SPS: co-operation with 11 countries and regional organizations in Africa and Asia**

The EU Social Protection Systems (EU-SPS) Initiative supports national, regional and international expert institutions in 11 mainly low income countries in their efforts to develop inclusive and sustainable social protection (SP) systems.

#### **Partner countries:**

Cambodia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kyrgyz Republic, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Togo, Vietnam and Zambia.

#### **Funding:**

the EU, OECD and Government of Finland.

#### **Implementation:**

OECD Development Centre and Government of Finland’s National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). The four-year initiative was launched in 2015. Germany joined the initiative in 2016, with parallel funding through GIZ on behalf of BMZ.

For more, please visit our website at: [www.thl.fi/eu-sps](http://www.thl.fi/eu-sps)

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