

# THE SOCIAL CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE :

An international perspective  
for a national roadmap

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Florence  
**Allot**

Eve  
**Erpelding-Parier**

—  
Members of the general  
inspection for social affairs



RAPPORT

# SUMMARY

As part of its work programme, IGAS decided to conduct an international comparison of the ways in which social issues relating to vulnerable populations and to workers are incorporated by countries into their climate policies on both climate-change adaptation and greenhouse-gas-emission mitigation. There were several aims: to aggregate the sparse knowledge available on this eminently transversal subject, to situate France in relation to other comparable countries, and to identify best practices to be included in our climate policies and governance. Without claiming to be exhaustive, this report gathers sufficient information to establish two main findings: (1) France, like other countries, is making progress on incorporating social issues into its climate policies, and the research community has identified further opportunities to do so; (2) there is an urgent need to organise for the major social challenge of adaptation, for which no country appears to have developed an exemplary model of sustainability. In this context, the mission proposes working guidelines and concrete measures, forming a roadmap to defining a national eco-social policy.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE AS A KEY ISSUE FOR ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION POLICIES: AN AWARENESS THAT IS NOW SCIENCE-BASED AND INCREASINGLY REFLECTED IN THE POLICIES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

**It is now firmly established at global level that climate change is already exacerbating and is likely to further exacerbate existing inequalities**, whether linked to socio-economic level, gender, physical vulnerability or membership of minorities. This applies to low-income households in particular, as they emit less greenhouse gas but are hit hardest by the effects of climate change, in terms of both environmental exposure and the burden of transition policies on their budgets. The green transition and climate-change adaptation therefore seem likely to have major social impacts if they are not accompanied by measures to take account of social inequalities and the specific vulnerability of certain groups.

**At the international level, the social framework for the green transition is gradually emerging.** Despite the longstanding use of the “just transition” concept since the 1980s, efforts have focused primarily on mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and achieving international climate targets to limit global warming by implementing energy transition policies developed mainly by the technical and environmental professional sectors, ultimately taking little account of their human dimension. However, the need for social support in rolling out these policies is now emerging, as the social limitations associated with their implementation become apparent. In this context, the “just transition” concept takes on a new, broader meaning than that initially reserved for workers. The growing awareness of the social dimension of the adaptation challenges to be overcome in order to address the direct impacts of climate change, which will become impossible to avoid, is also a recent phenomenon, especially in the world of work.

**The research community has therefore highlighted the need to define “eco-social” policies, i.e. climate policies that take social issues into consideration.** Social scientists have also raised the need for more detailed analysis of the social risks associated with climate change and the most vulnerable social profiles. The direct effects of climate change have a greater impact on the

poorest people and differ from the indirect effects linked to transition policies, which penalise low-income households whose lifestyles are characterised by a high level of carbon consumption. **The mission recommends providing greater support for research in this field and improving the incorporation of the different levels of social vulnerability (including for workers) into existing climate-change adaptation and mitigation planning.**

#### **FOUR AREAS STAND OUT FOR PROGRESS MADE IN THE SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL ISSUES INTO CLIMATE POLICIES: STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING, TRANSPORT, ENERGY EFFICIENCY RENOVATION OF HOUSING, AND PROTECTION OF WORKERS**

In accordance with international recommendations, the ILO and OECD emphasise that studies carried out by a large number of stakeholders have determined the skills that workers will need to acquire for a wide range of sectors in the context of a low-carbon economy. **France stands out as one of the countries that are leading in their work to anticipate the necessary skills**, involving a broad range of stakeholders and all sectors of activity, and reflected in the national strategy entitled “Emplois et compétences pour la planification écologique” (“Jobs and Skills for Ecological Planning”).

**In the transport sector, France introduced an innovative “social leasing” measure in January 2024**, designed to enable low-income households that rely on their car for work to acquire an electric vehicle. Other countries are also developing public transport solutions, mainly at local level, to meet the needs of their most vulnerable citizens and limit the use of private vehicles.

**With regard to housing renovation and the fight against fuel poverty, which is another major decarbonisation issue, support schemes and the targeting of low-income households have generally been developed, but vary from one country to another**, illustrating the widespread desire to tackle this issue and the difficulties in developing systems that meet the differing needs of the population groups concerned.

In addition, significant **trends in the employment sector are being observed in many countries**. For example, although **social dialogue**, which is one of the ILO's guiding principles for a just transition, **remains underdeveloped, it has been reinforced in recent years**, particularly in the sectors most affected by the green transition (fossil-fuel-based electricity production and coal extraction, automotive industry) **in Europe**. **In terms of occupational health and safety**, the impact of climate change is a recent concern for which further studies are required in order to improve our understanding. **It is with regard to the risk of workplace exposure to extreme heat that the most advanced responses were observed in several countries, including Spain and Greece**. Finally, as far as adaptation issues are concerned, **mapping tools are being developed at different levels – both global and territorial – in order to cross-reference social vulnerabilities with exposure to the direct effects of climate change, and thereby improve prevention and resilience**. If similar approaches are considered in France, the coordination of these activities at national level would seem necessary.

**The mission recommends a change in the targeting of schemes such as the social leasing and “MaPrimRénov” (housing energy renovation) programmes**, taking into account an improved understanding of social vulnerabilities and followed, if necessary, by a review in order to adjust the measures of the Social Climate Plan to be defined for France in 2025. **The use of the “Wet Bulb Globe Temperature” heat exposure index for workers**, associated with maximum

temperature thresholds for activity depending on the intensity of the work and the preventive measures put in place by employers, is also worthy of consideration.

**IN OTHER KEY AREAS, APART FROM OCCASIONAL GOOD PRACTICES IN FRANCE AND ELSEWHERE, NO ADAPTATION POLICIES APPEAR TO BE COMMENSURATE WITH THE SOCIAL ISSUES AT STAKE**

The direct effects of climate change are likely to affect **employment dynamics at the local level**, whether as a result of drought and rising temperatures in agricultural areas or warming in mountain areas, for example. Little seems to have been done to anticipate these risks, and the mission did not find any convincing examples of advance support for vocational retraining in areas that will be undergoing these changes in the short or medium term. However, recent examples of local support for employment changes linked to the energy transition in countries that remain dependent on fossil fuels for electricity production show that governments can encourage local conversion initiatives in conjunction with the private sector, in order to develop new economic activities that create jobs. The mission recommends:

- identifying the areas that will experience the most serious economic impacts of the direct effects of climate change in the short, medium and long term,
- and initiating local consultation processes in each area on employment trends, in conjunction with the work of the regional Conferences of the Parties (COP).

France is highly exposed to the effects of climate change with increasingly frequent and intense climate phenomena both in Metropolitan and Overseas France. It can lead to landslides in the mountains, alternating periods of drought and intense rainfall which intensify clay shrinkage and swelling phenomena, as well as flooding and submersion, for example. All countries struggling with the challenges of adaptation are now considering how to implement sustainable solidarity mechanisms to **limit the inequalities caused by slow- or fast-onset climate-related disasters**, while ensuring the resilience of their population and ultimately of their economy. Compensation schemes and insurance coverage systems are under pressure, even in countries already at risk. **Ways of striking a new balance between prevention and compensation need to be found.** This is a societal choice that must involve all stakeholders.

**Difficulties in accessing food and drinking water** can hardly be managed by relying only on subsidiary compensation systems, such as help with paying bills, and monetary or in-kind subsidies to the most disadvantaged households. These issues require broader reflection on production models and access to resources, in order to avoid conflicts of use over water or of a societal nature over access to healthy and sustainable food. The organisation of the healthcare system also needs to be better prepared to meet growing needs and address potential regional imbalances.

The mission recommends organising a wide-ranging debate on **striking new balances in preventing and compensating for losses associated with climate-related disasters. The links between social assistance for food and the agro-ecological transition, as well as the territorial analysis of health (and occupational) risks linked to the impacts of climate change**, also seem worthy of further study.

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GLOBAL ECO-SOCIAL POLICY REQUIRES REDEFINING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ESTABLISHING A GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK THAT INTEGRATES SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE GREEN TRANSITION.**

The cumulative effect of rising costs, declining asset values and redistributive effects needs to be studied in detail, to avoid the likelihood of developing solutions that are neither economically efficient nor socially just. **The role that social protection can play in supporting the green transition and contending with extreme weather events warrants in-depth consideration.** Firstly, because social protection systems make a positive contribution to the resilience of the population to climate emergencies, particularly in countries that have developed an adaptive dimension. Secondly, given that subsidy schemes may be difficult to target and stigmatising for their recipients, and that their complexity may be a factor in non-take up, more general measures may prove more effective during the transitional period.

**The economic cost of the transition – particularly in terms of carbon taxation – and of adaptation, will only be accepted both politically and socially if it is fairly distributed.** Transparency concerning the use of revenues from carbon taxation systems, communication on **quid pro quos** and notably on the financing of low-carbon alternatives, their **perceived fairness and effectiveness**, and the **gradual nature** of their implementation, are prerequisites for their social acceptability, which should be developed.

**Seeking a consensus** on climate equity and appropriate social protection mechanisms seems necessary, and the mission recommends that France Stratégie and the social ministries steer efforts in these areas.

Finally, based on the developments observed in other countries, **national governance of the green transition must take greater account of the social dimension, whether by the French General Secretariat for Environmental Planning (SGPE) or the social ministries, while encouraging local and participatory initiatives.** Different just transition governance systems were observed, attached to ministries or in the form of independent authorities, but all are pro-active drivers of the inclusion of social issues – whether relating to employment, working conditions or the integration of impacts on vulnerable populations – from the drafting of climate policies through to their monitoring. **For France, the mission does not propose the creation of additional forums for consultation, but considers it important to reinforce the role and increase the participation of existing bodies in the social field, notably the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (Conseil Economique Social et Environnemental – EESC) and the National Council for Policies to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion (Conseil national des politiques de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale – CNLE).**

Based on the current situation in France and in the light of these findings, **the mission recommends measures in three main areas.** It highlights the need to develop **research and expertise** to improve the characterisation of social risks associated with climate change, in order to improve their management and preventive measures. With regard to steering the **development and monitoring of climate policies**, the mission has identified ways of improving current green transition policies or those currently being defined (targeting, global approach to aid, accessibility), and guidelines on how to define models that take better account of vulnerabilities. Finally, in terms of **governance**, the mission recommends enabling the social field to play a greater role in the bodies that coordinate and develop climate policies. It also recommends organising a framework for

steering the just transition and broadening the participation of the most vulnerable parties and social bodies in order to strengthen and enhance the inclusion of social issues in environmental planning.