

COST Action 16232

**European Energy Poverty:
Agenda Co-Creation and Knowledge Innovation
(ENGAGER 2017-2021)**

Short report

Helsinki workshop

September 9-12, 2021

After two years of meetings online, a small group of ENGAGER members met in person in Helsinki. The main aim of this 4-day-meeting was to stimulate a brainstorming on the conclusions of the Energy Rights Forum that took place online in March 2021 and to discuss one of the sub-projects of WG4 about “Just Transition in Europe.”

Energy Rights Forum

A brainstorming session took place in a hybrid format with people in Helsinki and a colleague online. The discussions were very lively and focused on the need to shift priority from energy being seen as a commodity traded on the market to energy seen as a common good/public good that is part of life in society. It means rethinking the priorities, the values and the social contract where people are no longer considered as passive consumers put in a vulnerable position but where people are seen as citizens participating in society. Analogy with other rights was used to discuss the specificities of energy needs (minimum) and values.



Just Transition

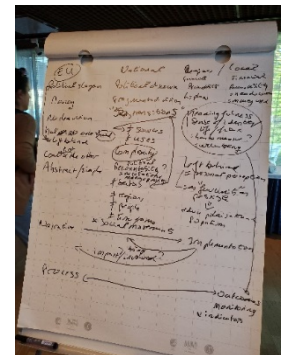
The first part of the discussion aimed to understand how the term “just transition” and “no one should be left behind” was used in different national contexts.

In France, the term “just transition” is present in the discourses, in policy and academic documents. It has been regularly used since the Paris Agreement in 2015 and has spread even quicker since the yellow vest movement in 2018. However, the understanding of a “just transition” is fragmented depending on who is talking: government has a more technological perspective on it based on different energy technology scenarios, social actors have a more democratic focus to it, private investors see it from a more economic perspective, local and regional actors as well as energy networks consider it from the innovation perspective able to create jobs and boost regional development. The main concern is about households and how to combine the green and climate

transition while not aggravating existing vulnerabilities or creating new ones. In France it is summarized with the key motto used during and since the yellow vest movement, ie how to combine “end of the world and end of the month”. The word “solidarity” is increasingly associated with the ecological transition.

In Germany, there is a translation issue. Is “sozialgerechte Energiewende” the adequate German terminology? Leave no one behind has been googled. It appears mainly in the narratives related to SDGs from 2015 but mainly focuses on children in the education system and inclusion of disabled people. Everything else concerns third world developing countries and bringing energy to those who don't have access to electricity. The notion in Germany is very fragmented and is now used in the coal phase out to enhance regional justice and in the discussion about CO2 taxes. In the German NECP the just transition comes twice and focuses on employment and changes in the coal mining sector. Mining regions are hotspots of populist votes where the narrative of “we are left behind” is quite widespread. There is no joint lobby for a social-ecological transition. Tenants' protests demonstrated against rising rents because of energy refurbishment and raise awareness on another perspective on “just transition”.

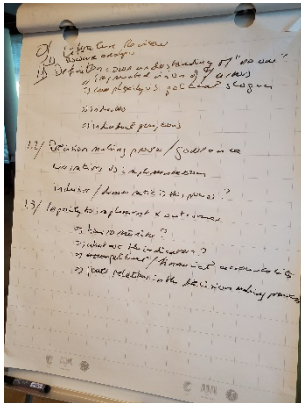
In Finland, the notion of “just transition” is mainly used in academic spheres. The government rather uses “no one should be left behind” in the carbon free energy strategy for Finland by 2035. Although Finland doesn't produce coal it used a lot of exported coal triggering a lot of discussions about a coal phased out. 250,000 buildings are heated with oil mainly in rural areas. Switching to gas boiler costs a lot and replacement and renovation programmes have been put in place to support mainly old people and low-income people living in detached homes in rural areas. Peat represents 4% of Finnish energy production but it became visible in the political discussions at national level because of big demonstrations organised in 2020 by peat producers (mainly farmers) forcing government to discuss how to support them. Mobility is another issue because of the long distances in Finland. Taxation on gasoline has not increased over the past years because the Central party wants to keep the price decent. Regarding “no one left behind”, energy poverty is not an issue because of the social welfare system. But oil heating and the transition to new energy sources will increase energy prices and vulnerability would affect people and this has to be taken care of. A lot of attention gained by the peat producers because of the visible action they took.



In Romania, “just transition” entered the agenda through a debate on how much Romania could get from the EU via the just transition mechanism. It is not about what we are going to do with the money, the focus was first get the money. The language is borrowed from the EU documents and the “no one left behind” was translated in Romanian. In the government documents, the idea of a just transition occurs very little but refers to “transitions to something”. A Romanian specificity linked to history must be underlined: people are fed up with the idea of transition. Romania has been transitioning since the 90s and the word is rather badly perceived. Now there is a new transition, and making it just is something even unclear. Often digital innovation is attached to this new transition. There is a debate about gas in Romania: urban cities try to get away from gas, while support is granted to gas in rural localities to avoid using wood. The other question concerns coal since there are three main mining areas where the question on how we replace coal and what we do with the

people is raised. Currently, the aim is to provide money and guidance on developing a just transition but there is a lack of understanding of the implications of this process.

At EU level, it is emphasized that the contract between the EU and the Member States was designed in a democratic way. However, “just transition” covers also different representations. Aware that people may lose, the EU designed the “no one should be left behind” precisely to make sure that no one is going to lose but the focus is more on sectors and regions than on people. While the trade unions defined it following the ILO guidelines, some other considered that it is a pure political slogan that doesn’t fix injustices.



To conclude, the EU has its own narrative. However, they tend to overlook the complexity of implementing a just transition while the national level starts to see the complexity. But everything seems to be pushed to the local level required to produce territorial plans, which means that the success of the EU just transition depends on visions of people in local municipalities, thus questioning how democracy functions. A just transition is not about money only, it is about how to produce a meaningful transition, a sense of use in the future (identity, pride, social recognition). Giving money to local municipalities to invest in the creation of jobs that are far away from the jobs lost by people is not a solution. This means the gaps between the EU narratives and the concrete implementation at local level need to be examined.

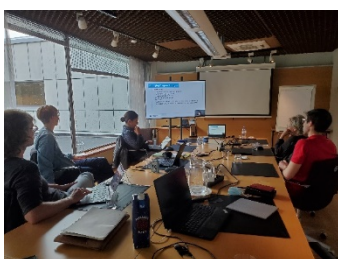
A EU-US debate

Finally, a last session allowed us to compare the notion of just transition in Europe with the concept of energy justice in the US where energy justice or energy equity is preferred to the term energy poverty. Nuria Casquero-Modrego, from Berkeley Lab, joined us online to present a research they carried out in the US on “Emerging pathways to decarbonise the US housing stock”.

According to the survey energy justice focuses on ethnic groups, gender, vulnerable communities and helping people get access to electricity. The aim of the survey was to examine how these vulnerable groups can benefit and be part of the decarbonisation pathways. It underlines the necessity to switch from energy efficiency to low carbon. The aim is to implement large scale integrated approaches starting with degraded neighbourhood.



Obstacles and barriers have been underlined. The main difficulties include the motivations of



homeowners, the lack of strategies, the lack of metrics and energy skills in the workforce, the costs (including hidden costs and problems). The main opportunities are promising and existing technologies, seen as an opportunity by the industry. The main question being how to include disadvantaged communities and how to drive customer demands. Based on this presentation the group had stimulating discussions on the comparison between the EU and US context.