Plastics' injustice

A just transition to address an unjust pollution

PLASTIC POLLUTION IMPACTS SOME PEOPLE MORE THEN OTHERS, CREATING AND REINFORCING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

EUROPE

SHIPPING

MORE THEN 1 MILLION TONS OF EU PLASTIC WASTE IS EXPORTED ANNUALY TO LOWER INCOME COUNTRIES.

Plastic proliferation and pollution fuel the triple planetary crisis : climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. They impact us all, but not equally; thus they exacerbate injustice.

A just transition, commonly described as ensuring that the much needed green transition is happening in a fair and inclusive way and leaves no one behind, can both put an end to plastic pollution, guarantee human rights and bring social benefits.

Plastic and a Just Transition

Plastic production, use and disposal, and its associated pollution impacts some people more than others, creating or reinforcing social inequalities. And what's more, impacted people have had no say in the decisions that impact their human rights.

The plastic we use and consume in Europe began its life in other parts of the world, where fossil fuels were extracted and where petrochemicals were created. From the beginning of the supply chain, workers in the petrochemical industry and their communities, who often live near production facilities, are exposed to high levels of pollutants. This has an effect on their health and on the quality of the air, soil and water around them. In the United States, facilities producing the building blocks to make plastic are typically located in 'sacrifice zones' where Black, Indigenous and People Of Colour communities live, exacerbating existing inequalities.

When it comes to plastic waste, in many European countries incinerators and landfills are established close to low-income and/or marginalized communities. As a result, levels of air, soil and water pollution are higher for these communities.
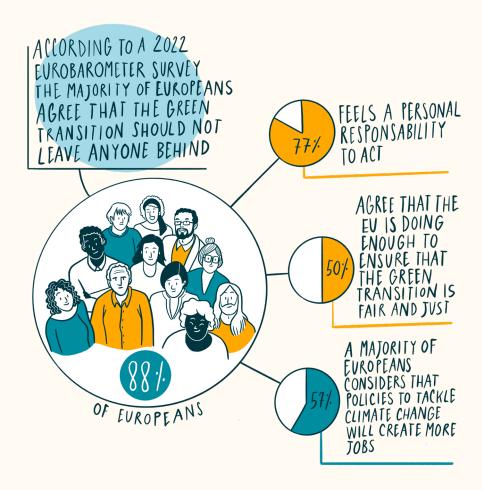
More than 1 million tonnes of EU plastic waste, most of it low value plastic packaging waste, is exported annually to lower income countries, where it often ends up mismanaged, dumped or openly burned, with negative impact on communities and the environment in the recipient countries.

The path to a plastic-pollution-free-future, if it is to bring both environmental and social benefits, must be just and fully involve impacted people and communities, as well as typically under-represented groups. It must acknowledge the different levels of responsibilities in the current plastic crisis and recognize the higher burden carried by affected communities and address structural inequalities to contribute to systemic change.

What does it mean for Europeans?

According to a 2022 Eurobarometer survey the vast majority of Europeans (88%) agree that the green transition should not leave anyone behind and most (77%) feel a personal responsibility to act, but only half of Europeans agree that the EU is doing enough to ensure that the green transition is fair and just.

ACCORDING TO A 2022 EUROBAROMETER SURVEY THE MAJORITY OF EUROPEANS AGREE THAT THE GREEN TRANSITION SHOULD NOT LEAVE ANYONE BEHIND

88%
OF EUROPEANS

77%
FEELS A PERSONAL RESPONSABILITY TO ACT

50%
AGREE THAT THE EU IS DOING ENOUGH TO ENSURE THAT THE GREEN TRANSITION IS FAIR AND JUST

57%
A MAJORITY OF EUROPEANS CONSIDERS THAT POLICIES TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE WILL CREATE MORE JOBS

The EU needs to develop a comprehensive and systemic approach to the just transition.
It also must ensure that any decision-making around the green transition (including moving away from disposability and ending plastic pollution) is inclusive and participatory, and facilitates a full and informed participation of impacted communities as well as formal and informal workers. It also needs to support appropriate mechanisms, including but not limited to the reskilling and upskilling of workers that may be impacted by the phasing-out or redesigning of certain activities and industries.

A just green transition is not only needed for environmental and human health, it can also contribute to protect social rights, end inequalities and create better jobs.

According to the same Eurobarometer, a majority of Europeans considers that policies to tackle climate change will create more jobs (57%) and good quality jobs (61%).

Resources to go further

Human Rights Watch - "We're Dying Here" - The Fight for Life in a Louisiana Fossil Fuel Sacrifice Zone - 2024

SOLIDAR - 2024 EU Elections Manifesto - We need Systemic Change - Six progressive proposals to deliver a Just Transition

Support the campaign with #PlasticsAndEU
Find out more at www.breakfreefromplastic.org/plastics-and-EU