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# THE POLITICS OF ECO-SOCIAL POLICIES

## TOWARDS A JUST TRANSITION IN SPAIN AND IRELAND

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social and environmental challenges are deeply interconnected: it is indeed becoming increasingly evident how both climate change and green transition policies are giving rise to a new wave of social risk for the welfare state to address. Therefore, the so-called eco-social policies could represent suitable tools for the state to simultaneously pursue social and environmental goals in a synergic manner. This study concentrates on a particular type of eco-social policies, which are the ones designed to address the social consequences of decarbonisation and to achieve a just transition. Despite the importance that just transition policies could have in accompanying European countries' net-zero transitions, these policies are not only still rarely diffused in reality but also undertheorized by political scientists, since the literature is currently dominated by prescriptive studies. Against this background, this Ph.D. thesis aims to contribute to the emerging debates about sustainable welfare and just transition by bringing in a so-far underdeveloped empirical-political perspective. Navigating a largely unexplored field, the thesis thus aspires to strengthen our analytical, theoretical and empirical understanding of just transition policies and related political dynamics. It does so, preliminarily, by proposing a novel conceptual-analytical framework; mapping existing just transition policies in European Union countries; and reflecting on the applicability of mainstream welfare state theories to potentially explain the emergence of just transition policies. Building on these preliminary insights, Spain and Ireland are selected as case studies for a comparison that aims to unveil the process culminating in the adoption and formulation of just transition policies in these two countries. The two cases are investigated through process tracing and qualitative methods, focusing on policy and politics analysis. In short, the thesis argues that national just transition policies are still relatively rare across the European Union and, with the notable exception of Spain, they are mostly formulated as narrow strategies, connected to investment-oriented instruments and to a governance that concentrates power in the hands of the government. The emergence of such policies can be explained as a result of a green-labour convergence among relevant socio-political actors engaging in political exchanges, with which political support for decarbonisation is traded for economic support to vulnerable societal groups.

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# List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AT | Austria |
| ACOM | Municipalities in a Just Transition (*Municipios en Transición Justa*) formerly known as *Asociación de Comarcas Mineras de España* |
| BE | Belgium |
| BG | Bulgaria |
| BNM | *Bord na Móna* |
| CAN | Climate Action Network |
| CAP | Climate Action Plan |
| CCOO | Workers' Commissions (*Comisiones Obreras*) |
| CEOE | Confederation of Employers' Organizations (*Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales*) |
| CY | Cyprus |
| CZ | Czechia |
| DCCAE | Department for Communications, Climate Action and Environment |
| DE | Germany |
| DK | Denmark |
| ESB | Electricity Supply Board |
| EE | Estonia |
| EGD | European Green Deal |
| EL | Greece |
| ES | Spain |
| ETS | Emission Trading System |
| EU | European Union |
| FF | *Fianna Fáil* |
| FG | *Fine Gael* |
| FI | Finland |
| FR | France |

| | |
|---|---|
| GAL-TAN | Green-alternative-libertarian/Traditional-authoritarian-nationalist |
| GP | Green Party |
| HR | Croatia |
| HU | Hungary |
| IBEC | Irish Business and Employers' Confederation |
| ICTU | Irish Congress of Trade Unions |
| IE | Ireland |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| ISTAS | Unions' Institute for Environment and Occupational Health (*Instituto Sindical de Trabajo, Ambiente y Salud*) |
| IT | Italy |
| JOCCA | Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action |
| JTA | Just Transition Alliance |
| JTAs | Just Transition Agreements (*Convenios de Transición Justa*) |
| JTC | Just Transition Commissioner |
| JTF | Irish Just Transition Fund |
| JTI | Just Transition Institute (*Instituto Para La Transición Justa*) |
| JTP(s) | Just transition policy(ies) |
| JTS | Just Transition Strategy (*Estrategia de Transición Justa*) |
| LP | Labour Party |
| LT | Lithuania |
| LU | Luxembourg |
| LV | Latvia |
| MDSD | Most Different System Design |
| MITECO | Ministers for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (*Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico*) |
| MRTT | Midlands Regional Transition Team |
| MSSD | Most Similar Systems Design |
| MT | Malta |
| NECP(s) | National Energy and Climate Plan(s) |
| NESC | National Economic and Social Council |
| NGO(s) | Non-governmental Organisation(s) |
| NL | The Netherlands |

| | |
|---|---|
| PBF | People Before Profits |
| PD | Progressive Democrats |
| PO | Poland |
| PP | People's party (*Partido Popular*) |
| PSOE | Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español)* |
| PT | Portugal |
| RO | Romania |
| SD | Social Democrats |
| SE | Sweden |
| SF | *Sinn Féin* |
| SI | Slovenia |
| SIPTU | Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union |
| SK | Slovakia |
| START | EU Secretariat Technical Assistance to Regions in Transition |
| TD(s) | Member(s) of the Irish House of Representatives (*Teachtaí Dála*) |
| UCD | Union of the Democratic Centre (*Unión de Centro Democrático*) |
| UGT | General Workers' Union (*Unión General de Trabajadores*) |
| UP | United We Can (*Unidas Podemos*) |
| USO | Workers' Union (*Unión Sindical Obrera*) |
| WWF | World Wide Fund for Nature |

# Introduction

**1. The research premises: theoretical and empirical puzzles**

The climate is changing. The "anthropocene" – so is called the geological era we are living in, where human economic activities are solely responsible for massive changes in the Earth's most fundamental biophysical processes – is giving rise to an unprecedented ecological crisis. Report after report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, we are learning about how the climate crisis is generating ecological catastrophes that could make human life on this planet unfeasible in just a few decades from now. The scenario is ever more worrisome if one considers that climate change is only one of nine planetary boundaries, which should be safeguarded not to worsen human well-being. To make matters even worse, we also know that environmental issues have considerable social implications: while the responsibilities for climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions are unevenly distributed within and between countries, as well as between current and future generations, climate change is also expected to exacerbate existing inequalities, since the most disadvantaged subsets of the population will likely be less capable to cope with the costs of global warming.

Not only climate issues in themselves, but also the policies put forward to mitigate their impacts might generate distributional injustices. This is the case of industrial decarbonisation, that is the shift from a carbon-intensive to a low-carbon productive system. While decarbonisation is often presented as an opportunity for job creation in a greener economy, in reality, it will also inevitably bring about some social costs. First and foremost, the workers of carbon-intensive industries are threatened by job losses and might hence need income support, as well as support for their relocation and for the development of the skills they need to be reinserted in a decarbonized labour market. Moreover, carbon-intensive industries are often nested in territories whose economies largely depend on the activity of these industries and, hence, their closure or reconversion, could worsen depopulation and generate losses of income and livelihoods especially for the most vulnerable members of these communities. To contrast such a negative scenario, in the past few decades, several prominent socio-political voices have started to advocate for a "just transition", hence a decarbonisation that should be socially just in both process and outcomes.

As a result, after the "old" social risks of the industrial era and the "new risks" that emerged with the demographic and socio-economic transformations of the 1990s, we might now be in front of a third wave of social risks generated by environmental issues and policies. For a few years now, a small but very proactive group of scholars has begun to investigate how this third wave of risks could be addressed through novel social policies, known as "eco-social policies". The main idea behind these sustainable welfare studies is to address what for years has been the "missing link of sustainable development", hence attempting to define how the welfare state could continue to satisfy human needs, while also respecting planetary boundaries. Sustainable welfare and eco-social policies point to the fundamental role of the state in making environmental and social policy goals mutually reinforcing by means of public policies. This emerging literature has the unprecedented merit to put the spotlight on an under-investigated topic and to make us reflect on the transformations that the welfare state might undergo to tackle the immense ecological challenges ahead. Nevertheless, a critical look at this literature reveals that it is currently dominated by a strongly normative tendency, hence by a preference for prescribing, rather than describing and explaining, ideal eco-social policies, with most authors advocating for a post-growth approach to the design of eco-social policies.

Against this background, both theoretical-analytical and empirical puzzles emerge. With respect to the former, a political perspective on the study of eco-social policies has been largely neglected this far. The only studies that adopt political science lenses either focus on whether and how welfare and environmental institutions interact, attempting to map varieties of "eco-welfare" states, or on public opinion's attitudes towards the eco-social nexus. Largely missing instead is a focus on the analysis of policies and of the policymaking process. The prescriptiveness of the reference literature prevents us from having suitable conceptual-analytical tools to empirically identify and classify eco-social policies. Moreover, the lack of ad-hoc political theories does not allow us to generate hypothesis on the possible institutional-political causal factors and mechanisms that constrain and enable policymaking in this field.

Second, empirically, while ideal eco-social policies are probably yet nowhere to be found, this does not mean that some prototypical (and less-than-ideal) policies do not already exist in reality. In particular, since European Union (EU) countries are more and more committed to achieve decarbonisation especially after the publication of the 2019 European Green Deal, we could expect a growing diffusion of one specific type of eco-social policies: just transition policies (JTPs). JTPs are meant to address the social consequences of industrial decarbonisation,

including job and income losses in economically disadvantaged territories. However, surprisingly, despite EU countries' discursive commitments and despite the growing social risks related to decarbonisation, examples of JTPs are still hard to find across the old continent. A few European countries like Spain and Ireland make exception, appearing as frontrunners in the development of JTPs. Nevertheless, studies systematically mapping the current empirical landscape are missing. Moreover, we also know very little about the content of such policies, which seems to be quite heterogenous across Europe. Finally, a question remains about what are the empirical conditions that have allowed a few, different, EU countries to adopt just transition policies, especially considering that most other states have not done the same.

Table 0.1 summarises the premises of the research, which are discussed more in details in the following paragraphs.

| **Table 0.1: The research premises** (source: author's own elaboration) | |
|---|---|
| **Object** | The emergence of just transition policies (JTPs) |
| **Research questions** | - RQ1 (policy): which EU countries have *adopted* JTPs? what is the *content* of existing JTPs?<br>- RQ2 (politics): what explains the *adoption* of JTPs? what explains the content *formulation* of JTPs? |
| **Research design** | - Mapping of JTPs in EU countries using the NECPs<br>- Comparative analysis: within-case observations & cross-case comparison<br>- Most Different Systems Design (MDSD)<br>- Inductive (yet theory-guided) research strategy |
| **Methodology** | - Policy analysis based on a novel conceptual-analytical framework<br>- Outcome-explaining qualitative process tracing, focusing on reconstructing the policy trajectory and socio-political actors' preferences and behaviours |
| **Data** | - Secondary literature<br>- Relevant policy documents<br>- Selected newspaper articles<br>- Thirty-nine semi-structured interviews |
| **Case selection** | Spain and Ireland's national JTPs |
| **Timeframe** | 2010-2022 |

**2. Research object and questions**

The object of this research (or explanandum) is the emergence of just transition policies, which can be defined as eco-social policies designed to address the social implications of industrial decarbonisation. Focusing on the emergence of JTPs means looking at both i) the adoption of these new type of public policies and ii) the way in which they are formulated, that is their content. The present study aims to contribute to the emerging sustainable welfare and just transition literatures by bringing a so-far underdeveloped empirical-political perspective, entailing both a mapping and analysis of just transition policies and the study of the political dynamics that favour their emergence. More specifically, the study aspires to provide four contributions to understand the politics of eco-social policies in the context of a just transition: i) to improve the *conceptual-analytical* understanding of these policies; ii) to empirically *map and analyse* these policies across Europe; iii) to empirically reconstruct the *political process* that led to policy emergence in selected cases; iv) to generate tentative *theoretical expectations* about the politics of just transition policies. The overarching objective is to navigate a largely-unexplored field, where conceptual-analytical and theoretical frameworks are missing and where empirical knowledge is arguably limited. Therefore, this study might be seen as an explorative attempt to provide a first systematic account of the politics of just transition policies in Europe.

Two are the main research questions that the study is concerned with, one analytical, regarding just transition *policies*, and the second explanatory, pertaining the *politics* behind these policies. The first question might be formulated as follows:

*RQ1: which EU countries have adopted JTPs? what is the content of existing JTPs?*

As evident, this first question sits in the realm of policy analysis. It implies both defining and identifying JTPs, as well as analysing their content. Given that the literature has so far been dominated by prescriptive definitions, a first response to this question would be to propose a novel definition and typology of JTPs suitable to capture empirical examples. Second, building on this novel framework, it would be possible to systematically map existing just transition policies in Europe. Furthermore, for a few selected cases where JTPs are present, the study aims to analyse the core characteristics of these policies, hence also checking for eventual cross-country variability. Therefore, responding to RQ1 implies both building a conceptual-analytical framework and empirically analysing JTPs in selected countries.

The second research question that this study is interested in pertains the politics of JTPs and it can be formulated as follows:

> *RQ2: what explains the adoption of just transition policies? what explains the content formulation of just transition policies?*

Unlike the first question, this has an explanatory-theoretical rationale, hence it has to do with the conditions that drive the emergence of JTPs. Studying the emergence of JTPs implies focusing on two phases of the policymaking process. First, and primarily, the aim is to unveil the process that culminates in the *adoption* of JTPs in different countries, hence a process with which a proposal surfaces, is discussed and finally approved by decision-makers. As a second sub-question, one should address the *formulation* of just transition policies, hence the specific content that they assume and the reasons why decision-makers choose certain characteristics over other possible alternatives. Responding to these two questions requires adopting both an empirical and theoretical strategy. First, an in-depth empirical reconstruction of the trajectory that led to the emergence of JTPs in selected cases is needed, with a particular emphasis on the role of relevant socio-political actors (inter)acting to influence the policymaking process. Second, this empirical analysis should be theory-guided and theory-generating, since the research also strives to be the cornerstone of a novel empirical political theory of just transition policies. Therefore, some tentative theoretical conclusions about relevant causal drivers and mechanisms behind just transition policies should be proposed, building inductively from selected cases and deductively from established theories.

## 3. Research design & methodology

This section illustrates the empirical strategy to respond to the two above-mentioned research questions. Staring from RQ1, in order to identify just transition policies across the EU, the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) are selected as reference documents to conduct a systematic mapping of both existing initiatives and announced commitments to address the social implications of decarbonisation. After a preliminary analysis of the EU policy framework in this field (presented in Chapter 2), the NECPs have been chosen for this mapping exercise for two main reasons. First, the NECPs allow for comprehensive cross-country analyses, given that all EU Member States were required to put forward their own Plan, and, second, through the NECPs, EU countries were invited to present national just transition measures, if any. The

twenty-seven NECPs are assessed through a manual qualitative textual analysis focusing exclusively on just transition aspects. As a cross-check, the Staff Working Documents with which the European Commission evaluated each NECP are also taken into consideration. More details about the methodology used to analyse the NECPs are provided in section 3.1. of Chapter 2. The results of this analysis will reveal which countries have put forward JTPs and it will also provide some preliminary hints on the content that these policies take in different countries. Two cases will be then selected for a more detailed policy analysis following the proposed analytical framework: Spain and Ireland. The choice of these cases is justified in light of the findings of the NECPs mapping exercise, which is why case selection is explained in detail in Section 5 of Chapter 2.

Spain and Ireland are also chosen as cases to comparatively respond to the second research question (RQ2), regarding the politics of just transition policies. To this end, this study adopts a qualitative comparative research design, comprising both within-case observations and cross-case analysis (Peters and Fontaine, 2020). At the basis of the comparison there will be two case studies, i.e. detailed investigations – conducted through a set of analytically-informed systematic and detailed observations of certain phenomena – of relevant instances that are regarded as worth studying (Levy, 2008). Generally, the goal of case studies is to craft a *minimally sufficient* explanation – hence one that comprehensively accounts for all the important drivers and discards redundant ones – of a specific outcome in a single case (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). Hence, unlike historical research that is descriptive in nature, case studies are guided by a theoretical rationale, since their ultimate ambition is to reveal a (set of) causal mechanism(s), i.e. processes that bring a certain outcome into being (Levy, 2008; Beach and Pedersen, 2013).

Comparative analysis should then bring together the results of case studies, allowing us to respond to our explanatory research questions by identifying those systematic mechanisms that are not case-specific (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). In comparative political research, there are two prototypical alternative research designs: the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) and the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) (Anckar, 2008; 2020). The MSSD is normally applied to the study of two or more cases that are as similar as possible at the systemic level, with the exception of the phenomenon under investigation, hence they are puzzling in that they show a variance at the level of the outcome. Conversely, applying a MDSD implies selecting two or more cases that are maximally different systems, yet converging in the outcome of interest. The logic

behind MDSD is that divergent factors cannot reasonably explain similarities in the outcomes and, hence, falsification is the principal strategy to test hypotheses under this research design. Falsification entails ruling out the independent variables that, being different across systems, cannot explain the similarities in the dependent variable[1] (Anckar, 2008; Meckstroth, 1975).

The MDSD is chosen here as the most appropriate research design for this study. When comparing two cases, the choice between MSSD and MDSD depends on three different factors: "(1) whether or not variable interactions are studied at a systemic level or at a subsystemic level; (2) whether we use a deductive or inductive research strategy and (3) whether or not we operate with a constant or varying dependent variable" (Anckar, 2008: 392). The MDSD method is particularly suitable to inductively explain phenomena at the sub-system level that are constant across systems (Anckar, 2008). Therefore, to answer the explanatory research questions that this thesis is concerned with, MDSD is particularly suitable. First of all, the *explanandum*, i.e. the emergence of just transition policies, has to do with a sub-system level phenomenon and, in particular, one that manifests at the intersection of two policy subsystem, that is climate and welfare policies. Second, the MDSD is a suitable strategy to answer our explanatory research question RQ2, since this question requires selecting cases that converge with respect to the outcome of the explanandum, hence instances where the explanandum takes a *constant* (in this case constantly positive) value across systems. In other words, we select Spain and Ireland as cases where just transition policies have actually been adopted. A MSSD would instead have been more appropriate if we were to ask "why countries do *not* adopt just transition policies?", a question that will not be addressed by this study, since it would have required selecting at least one case where JTPs have not emerged.

The third, and final, reason why MDSD is an appropriate design here relates to another important aspect of this study, which is its *inductive* research strategy. Given the absence of established theoretical hypotheses – as discussed more in depth in Chapter 3 – the primary focus cannot be but on the explanandum, which explains why the explanatory research questions are formulated as follows: "what explains the outcome?". In short, adopting an inductive approach means reconstructing what explains the outcome of interest, as opposed to checking whether a

[1] Although the reference literature in comparative policy analysis talks about "hypotheses" and "dependent" or "independent variables", this study refrains from adopting the jargon of quantitative research – which would not suit a research that is qualitative in nature – and hence prefers to use the following expressions: "expectations", "explanatory factors (*explanans*)" and "*explanandum*" (that is a phenomenon whose outcome requires explanation).

certain deductively-selected explanatory factor explains such an outcome (Anckar, 2008; 2020). Although a MDSD is compatible also with a deductive research design, it is more often used in inductive research (Anckar, 2008). An important consequence of combining an inductive approach with a MDSD is that cross-case comparisons can only lead us to identify *necessary* conditions and not sufficient ones. With such a research design, Anckar (2020:37) points out that we can "reach a result showing that in all cases where [the outcome] Y occurs, [an explanatory factor] X is also present. In such a situation X is a necessary condition of Y. However, we do not know if X always generates Y (since we have not included cases where Y is absent). Therefore, we do not know if X is a sufficient condition of Y".

However, one has to keep in mind that conducting a qualitative analysis with only two cases implies that the results of the study will not be fully generalizable to a wider number of instances. Therefore, with such few cases, it is never really possible to prove necessity. The aim would instead be the one to identify the case-specific minimally sufficient conditions that directly caused the outcome of interest in the selected cases, without implying that such conditions should necessarily lead to the same outcome in other cases. Although the potential for generalization remains limited, as stated, an MDSD research design could still allow us to identify some system-level factors that are common to the compared cases and to hypothesize that these are *potentially necessary* conditions for the outcome to occur. Ultimately, combining case-specific evidence with cross-case results, the study should generate some relevant theoretical insights about the politics of just transition policies in Europe. Finally, it should be specified that, despite the inductive research design, the analysis will be theory-guided. This means that existing theories should guide the analysis of the cases and the comparison, focusing attention on relevant aspects, while neglecting irrelevant ones.

To answer the explanatory research questions RQ2, this study relies on qualitative methods and, in particular, on detailed process tracing. The latter is a suitable methodology to reveal the causal chains behind a particular historical event (George and Bennet, 2005; Steinmo, 2008). It combines a focus on the "what" – hence reconstructing the sequential links that connect different factors, so as to understand what exactly caused the observed outcome and to discard useless explanations (George and Bennet, 2005) – with a focus on the "how", that is a yearning to interpret the circumstances (or contexts) under which a certain causal mechanism can be expected to manifest (Vennesson, 2008). All in all, process tracing is a historical reconstruction of the causal mechanisms that, in certain contexts, can link an explanatory factor (the explanans)

with the outcome to be explained (the explanandum). This research adopts a particular variant of process tracing, which is known as "outcome-explaining" (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). Starting from the outcome of interest – in this case the emergence of just transition policies – the idea is to trace the causal pathway behind the outcome in the specific contexts of the selected cases. Thus, explanatory factors are inductively retrieved through the empirical research, as opposed to being predetermined theoretically.

Concretely, the aims of process tracing for the Spanish and Irish cases are threefold. First, an in-depth and analytically-guided description of just transition policies in selected cases will be presented, applying the analytical framework presented in Chapter 1. Second, the focus will be put on mapping the constellation of relevant socio-political actors, which can be expected to have had an influence on the emergence of JTPs in the two cases. Actors' preferences and strategies will be systematically reconstructed, looking at their attitudes in favour or against the introduction of just transition policies and their specific preferences with respect to the content of such policies. Actors' preferences will be analysed along the categories presented in Section 4 of Chapter 3. Third, through a detailed historical analysis, the research will focus on the politics of JTPs. In particular, process tracing will aim to i) briefly illustrate the status quo prior to the introduction of JTPs; ii) reconstruct all the steps of the decision-making process that led to the emergence of JTPs; iii) trace eventual notable developments unfolding after the introduction of JTPs.

With respect to the timeframe of the research, since just transition policies in Spain and Ireland – as well as in other countries – qualify as novel types of public policies, process tracing does not need to go too far back. Thus, the timeframe considered in both countries will be from 2010 to 2022, coinciding with the years that led to the adoption of just transition policies in the two countries. However, most of the attention will but put on the exact years when just transition policies emerged, i.e. 2018 in Spain and 2019 in Ireland. For each of the two cases, the study will provide a detailed description of the trajectory of JTPs, preceded by a presentation of the overarching national institutional system.

Finally, regarding data, this research relies on i) relevant policy documents, which include legislation; governmental documents; parliamentary minutes; and publications by political parties and organized interest groups; ii) a careful selection of newspaper articles published during the research timeframe and pertaining the selected cases; iii) secondary literature

sources about the selected cases, where available; iv) and thirty-nine "semi-structured interviews" (Brinkmann, 2014) to key informants in the selected countries, including government members, bureaucrats and representatives of political parties or relevant organized interest groups at the national, but also supranational and regional-local levels. A complete list of these interviews is provided in the list of references, while Annex B contains the interview schedule, based on which semi-structured interviews in the two countries were conducted. For both selected cases, fieldwork was conducted by the author, including not only semi-structured interview, but also several additional informal interviews with observers and academics experts of the two cases, as well as a few participative experiences in public events dedicated to just transition in Spain and Ireland. The complete list of informal interviews and participated experiences is also contained in the List of References.

**4. Outline of the argument & structure of the work**

As a first step, the research delves into the sustainable welfare and just transition literatures, and, building on a critical review of the status quo, it proposes a novel conceptual-analytical framework applicable to just transition policies. In particular, this study advocates for an output-based – and hence descriptive – definition of JTPs as public eco-social policies that explicitly aim to systematically integrate a social dimension into low-carbon industrial restructurings, with the view to address the social implications of decarbonisation. These policies can be disentangled into three constitutive components: i) the *strategy* that sets overarching goals and rationales; ii) the *instruments* to deliver on strategic goals; and iii) the *governance* component, specifying procedural rules and implementation structures. Finally, each of these three components is associated to a dimension of variation, allowing us to distinguish varieties of just transition policies: these can comprise narrow or broad strategies, protection- or investment-oriented instruments and a participated or concentrated governance.

Applying this proposed definition, the study then proceeds to map existing JTPs, using the National Energy and Climate Plans as reference documents. This exercise has not only value in itself, given the widespread lack of empirical knowledge, but it will also culminate in the identification of two cases worth studying. The findings reveal that, despite decarbonisation and its social costs and opportunities are growing in salience nearly everywhere in the EU, only a few European countries have adopted just transition policies by now and only Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands have introduced comprehensive JTPs comprising all

the three above-mentioned components (strategy, instruments, governance). Among these six countries, Spain and Ireland are selected as cases for comparison. Following a MDSD logic, this choice is justified in that JTPs in these two countries are regarded as the most similar among all other possible cases, while Spain and Ireland can be seen as most different with respect to their systemic characteristics.

Although, as stated, given the lack of established political theories for the study of JTPs, the research strategy has to be inductive, the ambition is for the empirical investigation to be theory-guided and theory-generating. To this end, the study makes an attempt to derive theoretical expectations about the emergence of just transition policies. It does so by harnessing four established welfare theories: functionalism, historical institutionalism and actor-centred theories, both interest-based and ideas-based ones. Applying these theories to just transition policies suggests that the latter could be expected to emerge in strong eco states and in weak welfare states, where socio-political actors representing green and labour interests converge, or when they form advocacy coalitions around ambiguous socio-ecological ideas, such as "just transition". Although all four welfare theories allow us to shed light on relevant aspects in the politics of just transition policies, they also have major limitations which makes it difficult to pick any of them a priori as the preferable theoretical framework. Therefore, in order to identify a minimally-sufficient and parsimonious explanation for the phenomenon under investigation, the study adopts an actor-centred, yet inductive, approach, focussing on the empirically-observable policy preferences of socio-political actors. In this view, one can expect JTPs to emerge when relevant actors embrace just transition preferences, which integrate social and environmental objectives, as opposed to presenting them as inevitably conflictual, like Socio-economic Conservatists do, or disregarding their interconnections, like Green Progressivists do.

The research proceeds to compare Spain and Ireland by relying on qualitative outcome-explaining process tracing. The findings of this empirical investigation reveal that, between 2018 and 2019, in Spain, the Socialist government adopted a national Just Transition Strategy; an Urgent Action Plan for Coal built around two tripartite agreements with social partners from the coal mining and power sectors; and a governance based on Just Transition Agreements with affected local authorities, managed by an ad-hoc Just Transition Institute. In Ireland, just transition strategic objectives were adopted within the 2019 Climate Action Plan, while, in the same year, a Just Transition Fund and a Commissioner were introduced to accompany the phase-out of peat in the Midlands region. Despite converging in the adoption of just transition policies,

Spain and Ireland formulated the content of these policies quite differently: The Iberian country put forward a broader strategy than Ireland; it relied on a mix of protective and investment-oriented instruments, whereas Ireland only favoured the latter; and it set up a participated governance model, different from the Irish one that instead combined elements of governmentalism with a consultation of stakeholders.

In both cases, political exchanges between and within the supply (political parties) and demand (organised interest groups) sides of the political arena were crucial to drive a green-labour convergence, leading to the adoption of JTPs. In Spain, political exchange was driven by supply-side actors, with the Socialist minority government resorting to concertation with social partners and local governments affected by the coal phase-out, in order to gain their political support for decarbonisation in exchange for economic support. In Ireland, instead, political exchange was demand-driven: the first-mover was broad coalitions of national and regional actors successfully pressuring a consensus-seeking government to pay attention to the social dimension of climate policy. In both cases, a green-labour convergence was achieved through i) demand-supply political exchanges, following a neo-corporatist logic in Spain and a pluralist logic in Ireland; ii) within-supply political exchanges, comprising both intra-party territorial pressures and cross-party competition on climate policy. In sum, the analysis reveals that the minimally sufficient condition to explain the adoption of JTPs in the two countries under scrutiny was a convergence between green and labour interests, realised through the strategic behaviour of socio-political actors. However, other factors also played a role in the politics of JTPs in the two countries, including notably problem pressure from the social risks of decarbonisation, the presence of gaps or gates in existing welfare institutions and the diffusion of the just transition idea through the discourses of national and supranational political entrepreneurs. Finally, with respect to the formulation of JTPs, the divergence between the Spanish and Irish cases can be explained by simply looking at the prevalent decision-making rules, which promote pure governmentalism in Ireland and neo-corporatist coordination in Spain.

In terms of the structure of the thesis, Chapter 1 reviews the sustainable welfare and just transition literatures and presents a novel conceptual-analytical framework to define and classify eco-social and just transition policies. Chapter 2 presents a bird's-eye overview of the current empirical landscape by mapping and describing existing JTPs put forward by Member States of the European Unions. Building on the results of this mapping exercise, the Chapter also selects Spain and Ireland as cases to be compared. Chapter 3 features the theoretical

background of the thesis, attempting to deductively derive preliminary causal expectations about the emergence of just transition policies, building on established welfare theories. Ultimately, the Chapter argues in favour of an inductive approach based on the expressed preferences of socio-political actors. Chapters 4 and 5 delve into the selected cases with a descriptive approach: first, they outline the key characteristics of Spain and Ireland's institutional systems, then they present the empirical findings by reconstructing the policy trajectory – from the 2010s to 2023 – that led to the emergence of JTPs; providing an in-depth description of JTPs and, finally, presenting the preferences of relevant socio-political actors. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes by summarizing and comparatively discussing the findings of the two case studies, with a theory-generating rationale.

# Chapter 1 – Eco-social policies for a just transition: state of the art & conceptual-analytical framework[2]

**Introduction**

This Chapter focuses on the research object (explanandum), which is a peculiar sub-type of eco-social policies addressing the social implications of industrial decarbonisation: just transition policies. Given a widespread lack of policy analysis studies in this field, the chapter strives to construct an empirically-applicable conceptual-analytical framework for the identification and analysis of just transition policies. It does so by building on a thorough critical review of the state of the art of relevant scholarly debates where this concept is derived from: sustainable development, eco-social policies, decarbonisation and just transition.

Eco-social policies are emerging as suitable public policy tools to address the interconnections between complex social and environmental challenges, such as inequalities and climate change. The eco-social policies literature is nested in the broader debate about sustainable development, which, at its core, deals with the compatibility between the economic, social and environmental spheres. While sustainable development assumes that reaching this compatibility is both feasible and desirable, the "eco-social-growth trilemma" problematizes such assumption, showing how challenging it could be for policymakers to reconcile potentially-conflicting policy goals.

While the controversial role of economic growth has received considerable attention within the sustainable development debate, pitting supporters of de-growth versus growth-first or balanced approaches, the socio-ecological nexus has instead long represented the "missing link of sustainable development". Only relatively recently, some scholars have started to investigate the synergies and trade-offs between social and environmental policies, highlighting for instance that climate change and related policies can give rise to a "triple injustice", ultimately

[2] Parts of this Chapter have been published by the author and, hence, the Chapter heavily draws on the following sources: Mandelli, 2022a and Mandelli, 2022b.

exacerbating existing inequalities. Sustainable welfare is emerging as the dominant approach to tackle the socio-ecological nexus from a policy perspective. In this view, more and more studies attempt to prescribe, mostly from a post-growth perspective, eco-social policies that could reach certain normatively-predefined social and environmental outcomes.

Against this background, however, an empirically-applicable definition of eco-social policies is still missing in the literature, which is reflection not only of the lack of conceptual-analytical policy studies in sustainable welfare, but also of the normativity of existing studies that rely on prescriptive and outcome-based definitions. This Chapter instead proposes a descriptive, output-based and hence empirically-applicable definition of eco-social policies as public policies explicitly pursuing both environmental and social goals in an integrated way.

Among many possible eco-social policies, this research deals specifically with those reacting to the social implications of decarbonisation, which are hereby defined as "just transition policies". Decarbonisation consists in a socio-technical transition from climate-altering to low- or zero-carbon emitting production and consumption systems. This transition is expected to bring about considerable social implications, not only in the form of new opportunities (for instance for job creations), but also trade-offs, especially for workers and communities whose livelihoods crucially depend on carbon-intensive productive processes. Thus, demands for a just transition are increasingly emerging, calling for a decarbonisation accompanied by distributive and procedural justice. While just transition becomes a widespread and increasingly-contested concept, it has been so far rarely applied to the field of policy analysis. Thus, the Chapter aims to fill this gap, proposing an empirically-grounded definition and typology of just transition policies. As integrated public policies, just transition policies comprise a mix of three different components: a strategic component, which could entail broad or narrow scope and scale; an instrument component, which could be investment- or protection-oriented; and finally a governance component, which could provide for participated or centralised decision-making.

The Chapter is structured as follows. Section 1 reviews the literature on sustainable development and illustrates the eco-social-growth trilemma, as well as the different possible approaches to govern it. Section 2 summarises the state of the art in the emerging literature on eco-social policies and, building on the gaps in this literature, Section 3 proposes a (re)definition of eco-social policies and provides examples of these policies. Section 4 investigates the case of decarbonisation and just transition, surveying the studies that allows us to understand these

concepts. Finally, Section 5 concentrates on the specific object of this research, that is just transition policies, ultimately presenting the conceptual-analytical framework to describe this explanandum.

## 1. Sustainable development and the eco-social growth trilemma

### *1.1. The Sustainable development literature*

This research is nested in the broader debate about sustainable development, which points to the existence of an economic, a social and an environmental sphere. However, this long-lasting debate is reframed here through the so-called "eco-social-growth trilemma", which shows how the interconnections between the three spheres is not necessarily as synergetic as proponents of sustainable development argue.

Originating in the realm of economic studies, the concept of sustainable development was put forward initially as a way to address the limited capacity of scarce planetary resources to sustain human existence over time (Meadows et al., 1972). Developing in its wake, social and economic sustainability also gained increasing importance over time (Klarin, 2018). In an early definition provided by the Brundtland World Commission on Environment and Development, sustainable development was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987: par. 27). As prototypical as this definition was, it remains one of the most cited and influential to this day (Klarin, 2018), although several alternative conceptions have emerged over the years, making sustainable development an arguably contested concept.

At its core, sustainable development deals with the compatibility between economic, social and environmental goals (Uršič et al., 2014). The "system approach to sustainable development" and the "triple bottom line framework" (Purvis et al., 2019; Schweikert et al., 2018) frame these three goals as belonging to separate "spheres"[3], which are organisational forms relying on their own principles for performance and quality and giving rise to sphere-specific policy goals, while also inevitably and dynamically clashing in a way that makes it meaningless to treat them in isolation. O'Connor (2007) adds a fourth sphere, politics, that is the realm of systemic regulation

[3] Authors adopting a "system approach" or a "triple bottom line framework" often talk about "systems" rather than "spheres". However, the latter expression is preferred here since it does not necessarily entail a structuralist interpretation of sustainable development.

in which inputs from the social, environmental and economic spheres are channelled and transformed into policy outputs.

In the social sphere, the ultimate imperative to be satisfied is to (re)distribute resources and opportunities properly, preventing the individually unpredictable, yet collectively predictable, risks in which individuals may incur in the course of their lifetime. Coming in the form of social insurance, social assistance, public services and labour market policies, social policies typically cover traditional industrial-era risks, like sickness, unemployment or retirement, but also modern-era risks, such as those related to childcare or long-term care needs. Social policies, together with related institutions and normative frameworks, are central elements in the welfare state. This indicates a state that is supposed, at least in principle, to provide decommodification, i.e. guaranteeing individuals a socially acceptable standard of living regardless of their participation in the labour market, and de-stratification, i.e. distributing and redistributing resources and opportunities equally in the population (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

The goal in the environmental sphere is to preserve the natural environment. This means preventing the deterioration generated through the depletion of natural resources, the disruption of habitats, and pollution (Johnson et al., 1997). The environmental sphere, therefore, aims to safeguard so-called "planetary boundaries" (Rockström et al., 2009), critical thresholds for maintaining the dynamic biophysical systems in which human activities can operate safely (Raworth, 2017). Climate change, triggered by human-induced changes in atmospheric $CO_2$ concentrations, is perhaps the most politically salient planetary boundary nowadays and it has already reached the critical threshold (IPCC, 2021). Although less established than its welfare counterpart in both theoretical and empirical terms, the environmental state[4] supplies both market-based and regulatory policies[5] for environmental protection (Duit et al., 2015; Jahn, 2014; Koch and Fritz, 2014a; Meadowcroft, 2005). Building a clear parallel with the welfare state, we could thus say that the eco state seeks to achieve the de-commodification of nature, that is a process for which "environmental resources [are understood] as commodities requiring de-commodification to avoid self-destructive processes of the capitalist system" (Zimmermann and Graziano, 2020: 3). The commodification of nature

[4] In the literature, the environmental state is also referred to as the "ecological", "green" or "eco" state.
[5] In the environmental policy literature, market-based policies – which include price-based instruments like taxes, subsidies, or tradeable permit schemes – are typically distinguished from regulatory measures, also known as "command-and-control", that normally set standards and rules via legislation.

could end up hurting people and damaging the safe space where human activities take place, as a result of increasingly-frequent ecological disasters, such as the heatwaves, desertification and loss of biodiversity generated by climate change (IPCC, 2021).

Finally, the economic sphere promotes economic growth, i.e. the increase of production, consumption and exchange of goods and services in the market. In the original sustainable development definition, the Brundtland report did not necessarily assume a tension between economic growth and the social and environmental spheres. Nevertheless, since then, several studies have highlighted the contradictory role of growth in relation to the other two spheres (Gough, 2016; Meadowcroft, 2005). On the one hand, social policies have been traditionally designed as distributional adjustments to free markets and economic growth, yet not questioning the prevailing capitalist model. They have instead acted historically as a complement to growth, mitigating market impacts while also relying on growth to generate jobs and the financial resources needed to sustain public social expenditure. On the other hand, at least according to their original rationale (Meadows et al., 1972), environmental policies aim to challenge unlimited and unregulated patterns of growth, questioning their material throughput, i.e. the total amount of energy and matter involved in various economic stages, which is incompatible with the respect of planetary boundaries.

The key point here is that sustainable development is not neutral when it comes to the question of how economic growth relates to social and environmental sustainability (Ekins, 1993). It instead emerged with the specific intent to reconcile the contradictions between the three spheres, presenting this as a feasible and desirable goal. However, sustainable development is not the only possible approach when looking at the interrelationships between the three spheres.

### *1.2. The eco-social-growth trilemma and approaches to address it*

To illustrate the interrelationships between the economic, environmental and social spheres of sustainability, we can refer to the "eco-social-growth trilemma" (Mandelli et al., 2021; Schøyen et al., 2022; Sabato and Mandelli, 2018). This provides a useful heuristic for analysing potentially incompatible policy goals. At the three corners of a hypothetical triangle, we find the three spheres, each with its own inner policy goal: economic growth, social protection and environmental protection. The trilemma addresses their eventual reconciliation. More specifically, it refers to the situation of socio-political actors confronted with a decision about which of the goals arising from the three spheres are to be respected. Instead of taking for granted that a compatibility between the three spheres can and should always be reached – as sustainable development does – the eco-social-growth trilemma points to the role of politics in (eventually) acknowledging and governing inter-spheres linkages. The trilemma is hence a suitable analytical construct to understand and problematize the governance of the interconnections between the three spheres of sustainability. Figure 1.1 illustrates this trilemma.

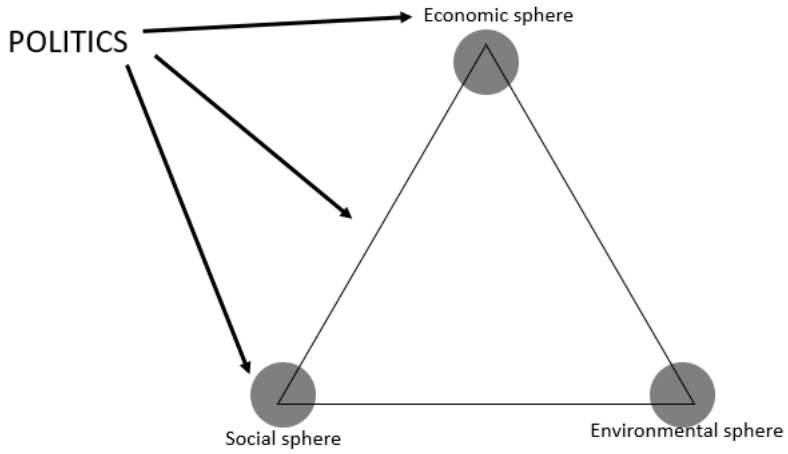


**Figure 1.1:** ***The eco-social-growth trilemma*** (adapted from Sabato et al., 2021)

As already pointed out, various alternative approaches can be used by socio-political actors to frame and govern the eco-social growth trilemma (Mandelli et al., 2021; Sabato and Mandelli, 2018). They are based on different assumptions: i) cognitively, on whether and how (i.e. negatively or positively) environmental, social and economic goals are interrelated; and ii) functionally, on whether these three goals should be governed in "silos", hierarchically ordered, or integrated. At the cognitive level, logically speaking, between two policy objectives called A and B, there could be three possible links: neutrality, for which the two are seen as unrelated to

one another; synergy, for which, by default, progress in achieving one goal promotes progress in reaching the other (Pradhan et al., 2017), making the goals mutually complementary (Granaglia, 2012); and, finally, trade-off, for which the extent to which A could be achieved is inversely related to the potential for achieving B (Granaglia, 2012).

At the functional level, if goals A and B are viewed as unrelated, it is reasonable to assume that a "silo logic" to policy-making will prevail, i.e. the two goals are pursued independently of one another. Hierarchical ordering occurs when A and B are connected by a trade-off that is perceived as inevitably unsolvable. In this scenario, one of the two goals assumes normative pre-eminence, hence either certain priority rules are established, or A completely substitutes B (Granaglia, 2012). Third, and finally, there is policy integration. This can be expected to take place in two circumstances. The first entails a trade-off between A and B that is seen as – at least partially – solvable, hence not necessarily inevitable. In this case, synergies do not arise automatically, but can be achieved through *policy integration*, which strives to turn trade-offs into synergies. The second possibility is for policy integration to be pursued, more simply, when A and B are positively related by default. In such a scenario, integration simply aims to boost existing synergies.

Only approaches based on policy integration assume that solving the eco-social-growth trilemma is feasible and desirable. Such balanced approaches aim to reconcile social, environmental and economic objectives. As already pointed out, the current notion of sustainable development promoted by the United Nations could be considered a prominent example of a balanced approach (Koehler, 2016). Sustainable development defines a galaxy of other sub-approaches focusing on different aspects of the trilemma. For instance, with respect to the economic-environmental nexus, green growth fosters the idea of "ecological modernisation", seeking to sustain growth through innovation and technological progress (Dryzek, 2013) and to achieve "decoupling", i.e. to "divorce economic growth from its ecological impact" (Fletcher and Rammelt, 2017: 450).

Policy integration – and ultimately finding a solution to the eco-social-growth trilemma – might not always be possible, nor even desirable. Two opposite families of approaches stand as alternatives to the balanced ones, promoting policy silos or hierarchical orderings. On the one hand, there are the purely "growth-first" approaches, based on a silo logic pursuing neoliberal growth, free markets and unconstrained technological innovations, regardless of their

externalities. The excessively optimistic reliance on market mechanisms of pure neoliberalism (Ridley, 2010) has been stamped as "irrational optimism" by several critics (Gough, 2011), precisely because the uncontested prioritisation of economic growth would result in a severe disregard of its socio-ecological consequences.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, "post-growth" approaches fundamentally question not only the supremacy, but also the overall desirability of economic growth, as this is regarded to lead to both rising inequality and severe natural disruptions (Asara et al., 2015; Büchs and Koch, 2019). Among these approaches, perhaps the best known is degrowth, understood as "an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long term" (Schneider et al., 2010: 512). Post-growth approaches do not really aspire to solve the eco-social-growth trilemma. The underlying idea is rather to establish hierarchical orderings, hence de-prioritising growth to the benefit of social and ecological objectives. However, unlike their growth-first counterpart, post-growth approaches often go hand in hand with the promotion of "sustainable welfare", hence seeking to integrate social and environmental objectives.

**2. Eco-social policies: a literature review**

While historically the economic-social and economic-environmental linkages have received considerable attention in both political and academic circuits, until recently, the socio-environmental nexus arguably merely represented "the missing link in sustainable development" (Laurent, 2015). Scholars have now started to address this gap, by highlighting that the social and environmental spheres, with their own peculiar challenges and policies, are connected by a bi-directional arrow. On the one hand, social logics can cause environmental damage (Laurent, 2015). In particular, the welfare state has a considerable "ecological footprint" (Matthies, 2017), with its distributional consequences enabling many individuals to engage in environmentally harmful behaviours (Koch and Fritz, 2014a). On the other hand, environmental protection is critical to long-term social welfare, since it affects prosperity (Koch and Fritz, 2014b), while environmental degradation may incur significant social costs.

One key example for understanding the bi-directional nexus addressed by eco-social policies is the intertwinement between inequality and climate change. On the one hand, social inequality exacerbates climate change through various mechanisms: it unnecessarily increases the demand

for economic growth; it increases the ecological irresponsibility of the richest; it reduces the socioecological resilience of societies; it hinders the collective capacity for action; and it reduces the sensitivity of the least affluent to climate action (Gough, 2019; Laurent and Pochet, 2015). On the other hand, climate change has notable implications for inequality. Evidence shows how responsibilities for and impacts of climate-altering emissions are unevenly distributed between and within countries – the world's richest 10 per cent accounts for half of the global consumption emissions (Gough, 2017) – leading some to talk about a "double injustice" (Walker, 2012). This highlights how the most vulnerable are the least responsible for climate change, while being more exposed to ecological risks and less financially equipped to deal with the adverse consequences of such risks (Gough, 2017). This injustice becomes "triple" when we consider that climate policies can further contribute to existing inequalities, due to their socially regressive nature (Büchs et al., 2011; Gough, 2019).

Therefore, ecological issues and policies are expected to alter the nature and distribution of social risks (Gough et al., 2008; Johansson et al., 2016), giving rise to new "eco-social risks" (Hirvilammi et al., 2023). New social risks of environmental origins are characterized by substantially different features, if compared to other social risks, since they are expected to be much less observable and bring about more ambiguous effects (Hirvilammi et al., 2023). First, they are expected to be unpredictable not just individually, but also collectively, as in the case of climate change, which would lead to "uncertainties over the probability distributions of likely outcomes" (Gough et al., 2008). Moreover, social risks of environmental origin are also peculiar in their scale and scope, in that they are almost paradoxically both distant in time and global in space, while also being more severely-felt by some societal groups and in certain territories and moments (for instance when a sudden ecological catastrophe outbreaks). These eco-social risks are generated not only directly – as by-products of ecological disasters – and indirectly – including through greater distress migration – but also from the regressive effects of environmental policies, which tend to place a higher (financial) burden on the most vulnerable people (Gough et al., 2008).

Despite the existence of eco-social risks, traditionally, the governance of environmental and social policies has followed a silo logic. Nevertheless, the two policy sectors are arguably similar: both are responses to long-term societal problems; both have to do with managing and distributing scarce resources; both operate within certain political and economic constraints; and both are delivered by political institutions through dedicated structures, known as the

welfare and the eco states (Gough et al., 2008). Despite this, the welfare and environmental policy literatures only recently started to cross-fertilise, addressing their mutual implications. Climate justice, energy justice and environmental justice are frameworks that attempt to introduce a social dimension into environmental policy studies. Specifically, "(1) climate justice concerns sharing the benefits and burdens of climate change from a human rights perspective; (2) energy justice refers to the application of human rights across the energy life cycle (from cradle to grave); and (3) environmental justice aims to treat all citizens equally and to involve them in the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies" (Heffron and McCauley, 2018: 74).

In the field of social policies, some scholars have started to explore how the welfare state is being – or rather ought to be – transformed to incorporate environmental risks and concerns. It is precisely within the welfare literature that the concept of eco-social policy first came up. These policies represent a solution to address the missing link of sustainable development and tackle eco-social risks, overcoming the vicious circle between inequality and climate change, as well as other similar challenges. In his seminal book, Gough (2017) advocates for a three-stage gradual process to reconcile welfare with planetary boundaries, progressing from equitable green growth, via "recomposing consumption", to a final "postgrowth" stage, i.e. a global steady-state economy. Gough's work, which in turn built on studies advancing green critiques of the welfare state (Fitzpatrick and Cahill, 2002), inspired a whole new range of research within the social policy field united under the umbrella term of *sustainable welfare* (Hirvilammi and Koch, 2020). The latter "[. . .] is oriented towards satisfying human needs within ecological limits, from an intergenerational and global perspective" (Koch et al., 2016: 704). Sustainable welfare calls for the equal distribution of welfare between rich and poor countries, between the poorer and richer subsets of the population, and between current and future generations. Overall, it aims to contribute to the construction of a "safe and just space" for human activities within planetary boundaries (Raworth, 2017).

Key themes in this emerging literature include the redefinition of societal well-being (Laurent and Jouzel, 2018), human needs (Gough, 2015; Lindellee et al., 2021), capabilities (Bonvin and Laruffa, 2022) and relational paradigms (Helne and Salonen, 2016; Hirvilammi and Helne, 2014). However, what is perhaps the most investigated aspect in sustainable welfare studies is the growth-dependence of the welfare state, which is largely regarded to be unsustainable (Büchs, 2021b; Koch, 2022; Bailey, 2015; Dukelow and Murphy, 2022; Meadowcroft, 2005). In this view,

sustainable welfare scholars aim to *prescribe* eco-social policies that would make the welfare state independent from economic growth, ultimately lowering its ecological footprint. Looked at through the lens of the eco-social-growth trilemma, we could then say that most studies in the sustainable welfare literature endorse a post-growth approach, assigning pre-eminence to the socio-ecological nexus, while deprioritising economic growth. Nevertheless, more recently, other scholars have underlined that, beyond what is desirable –real-life eco-social policies might actually rely on a balanced approach to the eco-social growth trilemma[6], rather than on the more transformative post-growth approach (Sabato and Mandelli, 2018; Sabato et al., 2021; Galgóczi and Pochet, 2022; Schøyen et al., 2022).

Surveying existing studies, we find several examples of policies labelled as eco-social. Bohnenberger (2020), for instance, focuses on universal basic income, services and vouchers and on whether these can bring about environmental benefits. In the same vein, other studies propose a participation income as an eco-social post-productivist measure (McGann and Murphy, 2021); others advocate in favour of universal basic services to combine universality with sufficiency (Coote, 2021); or compare universal basic services with universal basic income (Büchs, 2021a). In the field of energy consumption, another example of an eco-social policy derived from the literature are social energy tariffs designed to increase in line with energy use and hence incentivising needs-based consumption, while at the same time lowering the level of domestic emissions by high-income households (Gough, 2019). Other studies investigate how eco-social policies can be integrated into urban planning (Khan et al., 2020), or highlight that regeneration programmes for sustainable housing and communities can have considerable social and environmental benefits (Winston, 2022; Machline et al., 2018).

Turning to more traditional welfare policy areas, few examples of eco-social policies in other studies concern pensions and labour market policies. With respect to the latter, some papers attempt to identify the challenges for pension systems undergoing a green transition (Natali et al., 2022), while others investigate how pension funds can be used to finance low-carbon and climate-resilient investments (Della Croce et al., 2011). With respect to employment policies, particularly interesting are the eco-social proposals that aim to reduce working time as a way to lower individual income – and hence consumption and carbon emissions – while also improving

[6] Such a balanced approach to the formulation of eco-social policies is also referred to by some authors as a "Green New Deal", or "egalitarian green growth" approach (Bridgen and Schøyen, 2022; Gough, 2022).

individual well-being by freeing time – (Brandl and Zielinska, 2020). Also on the employment side of welfare, there are proposals that strive to "bring labour market activation policy into the orbit of eco-social policy" from a post-productivist perspective (Dukelow, 2022: 496). Empirical examples of real-life eco-social policies are rarer if compared to normatively-constructed examples. So far, only a few explorative studies have focused on eco-social policies at the national level – both in European countries (Schøyen et al., 2022) and the Global South (Carmi, 2016) – the supranational level – in the EU (Petmesidou and Guillén, 2022; Sabato et al., 2021) and international (Kaasch and Schulze Waltrup, 2021) arenas – and the local level (Brandl and Zielinska, 2020).

### 3. (Re)defining eco-social policies

Sustainable welfare sheds light on the otherwise largely forgotten socio-ecological nexus. However, a critical analysis of this literature reveals a widespread tendency towards normativity (Cotta, forth.), with scholars seemingly more interested in prescribing which policies should be pursued, rather than empirically analysing actual policies. As a result, eco-social policies are most often defined in light of their ability to achieve certain outcomes, often relying on post-growth approaches. In reality, however, eco-social policies can also be oriented towards other goals, for instance by being based on a balanced approach to the eco-social-growth trilemma. While, as they stand, studies on eco-social policies are fundamental in providing creative tools to normatively reorient the currently prevailing "growth-first" silo logic to policymaking, they also leave little space to identifying existing eco-social policies. As noted by Gugushvili and Otto (2021), an empirically applicable definition of eco-social policies is still missing in the literature.

Building on the reference literature, yet taking a more empirical approach, this study proposes the following definition of eco-social policies: they are public policies *explicitly* pursuing both environmental and social policy goals in an *integrated* way. This definition presents integration and explicitness as the two defining features of eco-social policies. A few examples of eco-social policies in different areas of public interest are reported in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1:** ***Examples of eco-social policies*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| **Area of public interest** | **Eco-social policy** |
|---|---|
| Healthcare | Universal sustainable healthcare |
| Pensions | Green investments through pension funds |
| Labour market | Working time reduction |
| Education and training | Re-skilling for green jobs |

| | |
|---|---|
| Housing | Energy efficiency investments for social housing |
| Poverty | Energy bill reductions for vulnerable consumers |
| Food consumption | Green vouchers for sustainable and healthy food |
| Energy production | Renewable energy communities |

The *explicit* element of the proposed definition is meant to provide a non-normative conceptualisation of eco-social policies. As previously said, most existing definitions are outcome-based, meaning that they evaluate policies in light of their expected social and environmental impacts. Outcome-based definitions rely on authors' own arguments about which policy impacts are the most desirable. We hereby argue instead in favour of an output-based definition of eco-social policies, hence relying on the declared objectives and, overall, on the explicit features of the policy output. All in all, an output-based definition would facilitate policy analysis since it allows, first, analytical mismatches or confusion to be avoided (certain policies might be considered eco-social by some and not by others, depending on their own normative definitions of desirable policy outcomes) and, second, even those policies to be captured that, despite attempting to do so, are unsuccessful in reaching ideal socio-ecological outcomes. This is important for empirical studies to be able to identify and ultimately evaluate eco-social policies, even when their outcomes are deficient.

The second fundamental element of the definition proposed above is *policy integration*. In general, policy integration "entails policy measures that bring together different policy goals" (Trein et al., 2019: 333). An integrated policy, in this view, is "a design in which, first, multiple policy goals can be coherently pursued at the same time, and, second, policy instrument mixes are consistent, in the sense of being mutually supportive in the pursuit of policy goals" (Rayner and Howlett, 2009: 100). Thus, integration aims to unify or coordinate different policies (Candel, 2017), hence challenging silo policy-making, while also preventing hierarchical ordering. Policy integration is cited as a core constitutive element of eco-social policies by most of the existing studies, even though several of these studies remain quite hasty when it comes to specifying what integration concretely means in this context (Cotta, forth.). In the specific case of eco-social policies, this research argues that integration aims not to address environmental or social objectives by themselves, but rather to reconcile them by addressing their interconnections. In

this view, eco-social policies aim to solve the trade-offs or boost the synergies that arise in the pursuit of ecological and social policy goals.

As clearly highlighted by the sustainable welfare literature, not all of eco-social policies are equal. Besides defining these policies, one then also needs to be able to differentiate them, not just with respect to their expected outcomes, hence normatively, like most existing studies do, but also with respect to their actual formulation, or content, hence empirically. First, it is important to assess the *direction of eco-social policy integration*. Accordingly, integration could either occur by adding a social dimension to environmental policies, or the other way around, by adding an environmental dimension to social policies. In the former scenario, the welfare state plays a *reactive* role, since social policies intervene after environmental challenges or policies are already in place, with a view to tackling their implications, i.e. social risks and opportunities. Reactive eco-social policies can be useful for instance for addressing the social costs of ecological catastrophes, as well as in the context of decarbonisation, which is the specific focus of this research. By contrast, eco-social policies may be constructed by adding an environmental dimension to social policies, hence "greening" the welfare state and reorienting it in a way that takes its environmental externalities into account. In this scenario, the welfare state performs a more *preventive* function with respect to environmental issues and policies, striving to contribute to reducing environmental degradation. Preventive eco-social policies can be useful for addressing the ecological footprint of the welfare state, or for promoting environmentally sustainable practices and behaviours. Notable examples include low-carbon social housing, green vouchers and green pension funds.

A second dimension to differentiate eco-social policies is their link to economic growth, which has long been identified as an important, almost inescapable, aspect by sustainable welfare studies. Since eco-social policies deal with the connection between the social and the environmental spheres, they are never per se growth policies. However, in their formulation, these policies can either incorporate an objective to contribute to growth (hence pursuing a balanced approach to the eco-social-growth trilemma), or not do so, either because they are presented as unrelated to growth or openly anti-growth, as advocated by most sustainable welfare scholars. As discussed below, when they are not growth-oriented, eco-social policies simply aim to *protect* from eco-social risks, whereas growth-oriented eco-social policies normally pursue socio-ecological *investment*. Figure 1.2 illustrates different possible types of eco-social policies.

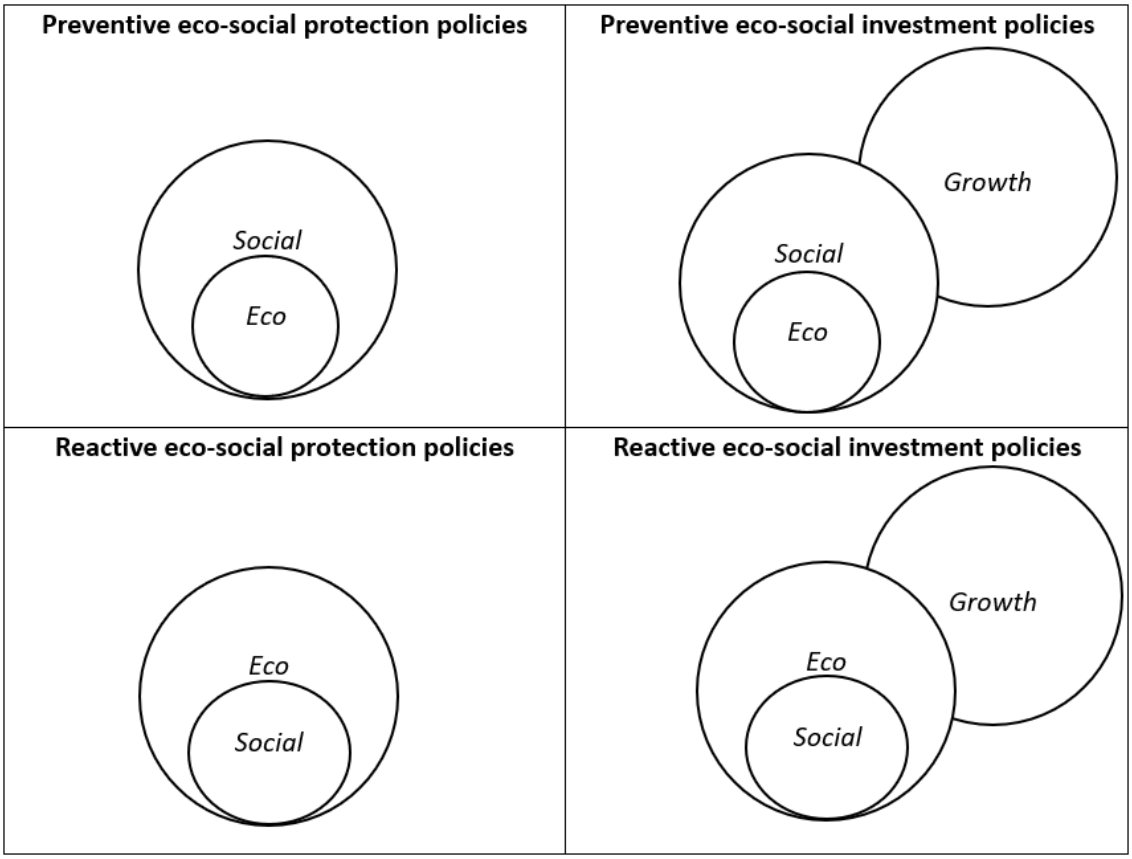


**Figure 1.2:** ***Typology of eco-social policies*** (source: author's own elaboration building on Mandelli, 2022a)

**4. The case of just transition: addressing the social consequence of industrial decarbonisation**

As already highlighted, eco-social policies could represent particularly useful instruments in the fight against climate change and, even more specifically, they could be suitable tools to accompany climate mitigation policies and low-carbon energy transitions, addressing their socially regressive implications and preventing a triple injustice. As more and more countries around the world and in Europe commit to reducing their carbon emissions, demands for a *just transition* are becoming increasingly salient in both the political and scholarly debates. For this reason, among the wide array of possible eco-social policies, this research concentrates specifically on the so-called "just transition policies", hence those addressing the social implications of industrial decarbonisation. Before defining and analysing more in depth these just transition policies, the present paragraph preliminary summarises the current knowledge

about decarbonisation and just transition, in order to comprehensively reflect on the meaning of such complex concepts.

### *4.1. Defining decarbonisation*

Climate change is increasingly becoming a globally prominent political issue as a result of its potentially catastrophic ecological consequences, which include heat waves, loss of biodiversity, desertification and rising sea levels (IPCC, 2021). Scientists have long argued that we are close to transgressing a planetary boundary for permissible changes in atmospheric $CO_2$ concentrations, above which the safe operating space for human activities would be irredeemably damaged (Rockström et al., 2009). The international community is therefore mobilising to stop this continuous increase in global temperatures, generated as a by-product of human economic activities. In particular, through the 2016 Paris Agreement, countries around the world have committed to limit the global temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level, aiming at 1.5 degrees (United Nations, 2015: Article 2). To that end, under the Paris Agreement, states are expected to set national targets to cut their greenhouse gas emissions.

At the industrial level, curbing climate-altering emissions is mainly effected through a process referred to as “decarbonisation”, or “low-carbon energy transition”. Although this expression has now become popular in both academic and political circles, its meaning is not necessarily immediately clear and, hence, needs to be clarified. Decarbonisation could be seen as a particular kind of energy transition which, in turn, constitutes a peculiar type of “socio-technical transition”. Socio-technical systems are networks of multiple interconnected elements – particularly including actors, institutions and technologies – that provide certain services to societies and individuals, such as energy, transport, housing and food (Markard et al., 2012; Kuzemko et al., 2016; Köhler et al., 2019). These systems are said to be transitioning whenever a process consisting of interconnected, multi-level changes gradually, but continuously, modifies their core structures (Rotmans et al., 2001; Kuzemko et al., 2016). Thus, an energy transition is defined as “a change in sources of energy supply, conversion, infrastructure, or energy use from one technology to another” (Sovacool et al., 2021: 2). It is a co-evolutionary process that occurs not only at the technological level, but also at the socio-political and socio-economic levels, hence involving changes in energy markets, as well as in related policies and institutions (Cherp et al., 2018).

If oriented towards achieving some environmental goals, energy transitions can be labelled as "sustainability transitions", that is to say processes where "established socio-technical systems shift to more sustainable modes of production and consumption" (Markard et al., 2012: 956). However, as seen above, the term "sustainability" has arguably grown into a contested concept over the years, so much so that this expression is now lacking universal conceptual clarity. Although not exactly a synonym for a sustainability transition (Cherp et al., 2018), "decarbonisation" provides a more precise term to refer to an environmentally-oriented energy transition, which occurs at industry level and aims specifically to cut climate-altering emissions (Sovacool et al., 2021). Decarbonisation hence entails replacing carbon-intensive technologies and practices with low-carbon ones across several economic activities (Green and Gambhir, 2020). A notable feature of decarbonisation is its pronounced political dimension, which has traditionally received relatively little attention in the reference literature (Meadowcroft, 2011; Kern and Rogge, 2018; Cherp et al., 2018; Lindberg et al., 2019). Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, "transitions are inherently political processes, in the sense that different individuals and groups will disagree about desirable directions of transitions, about appropriate ways to steer such processes and in the sense that transitions potentially lead to winners and losers" (Köhler et al., 2019: 6).

Summing up, decarbonisation entails by definition an environmental dimension[7] and it also has considerable economic implications. Indeed, as discussed in the following Chapter, the decarbonisation model currently promoted by the EU not only strives to cut greenhouse gas emissions, but is also supposed to rely on a green growth approach, hence relying on technological modernization to decouple growth from its environmentally-disruptive throughput (Laurent, 2021; Sabato et al., 2021). Far less investigated than the economic and environmental dimensions, are the social implications of low-carbon transitions and how welfare state can react and prevent to decarbonisation (Gough and Meadowcroft, 2011). This social dimension of decarbonisation is addressed by the literature on just transition.

[7] For the sake of simplicity, decarbonization is hereby treated as an environemntal policy goal, in that it aims at mitigating climate change. However, it is important to specify that contradictions might still arise in the pursuit of decarbonization, making it diffult to predict what its net outcome will be in terms of environmental protection. This is for intsance the case of substituting fossil fuels with nuclear energy, which helps reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but it could also potentially create new environmental risks and externalities.

### *4.2. Just transition: a literature review*

Different societal groups are predicted to be affected by decarbonisation, including workers and companies undergoing industrial restructurings, but also low-income households and marginalized communities (Galgóczi, 2022; Green and Gambhir, 2020). In the context of low-carbon energy transitions, addressing the social implications of climate change primarily means tackling the "jobs versus environment dilemma" (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2013). This expression, coined within the field of industrial relations studies, refers to the challenges faced by workers employed in industries undergoing decarbonisation or other environmentally-oriented industrial transitions[8]. While according to the OECD the aggregate net employment impact of decarbonisation is expected to be limited worldwide (Botta, 2018), the structural changes it brings about are likely to affect some social groups, workers, and communities disproportionately (Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020). Job reallocations and redundancies will be faced by workers employed in emission-intensive sectors, which are normally concentrated in peripheral and often economically-disadvantaged areas. For instance, in the coal sector alone, potential job losses from phasing out in Europe could amount to 35.000 units employed in coal mining and 15.000 units employed in power plants for the period between 2020 and 2025 (Galgóczi, 2019). Energy-intensive industries and their employees are also facing a similarly harsh reality, but a different kind of challenge: "although some energy-intensive industries will not be completely displaced, tighter environmental regulations may require changes in production, possibly affecting employment or leading to an offshoring of emission-intensive activities" (Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020: 386).

Beyond carbon-intensive sectors, the labour market as a whole will undergo structural changes due to decarbonisation, potentially leading to unforeseen vulnerabilities and new needs, for instance in terms of skills and access to opportunities. Finally, besides employment challenges, other social risks generated by decarbonisation include "the need for enterprises, workplaces and communities to adapt to climate change to avoid loss of assets and livelihoods and involuntary migration", as well as "adverse effects on the incomes of poor households from higher energy and commodity prices" (ILO, 2015: 5). Therefore, the groups most exposed to new

[8] While this research concetrates on decarbonisation, hence on energy transitions aiming to contribute to climate mitigation, industrial restructurings could actually have other environemntal rationales, such as curbing pollution or limiting waste.

social risks brought about by decarbonisation might end up becoming the "losers" of decarbonisation.

Against this backdrop, the concept of "just transition" is now becoming increasingly popular in both academic and political debates addressing the above-mentioned "jobs versus environment divide" and, more generally, the social implications of decarbonisation. This concept first originated within the North American trade union movement, although with a slightly different meaning if compared to the one most widespread today. In point of fact, American trade unionist Tony Mazzocchi is credited with coining the expression as a way of demanding financial support for workers employed in polluting firms (Galgóczi, 2020; Stevis et al., 2020). Thus, in its genetic phase, just transition was not yet associated with decarbonisation, nor with climate or energy policies, but it rather concerned the occupational consequences of localised environmental issues – such as toxicities – with a view to put workers at the forefront of the environmental debate (Stevis et al., 2020).

In the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, the idea of a just transition underwent a resurgence and a global diffusion (Stevis et al., 2020). Especially in the past decade, this concept has found its way into the climate policy debates within the United Nations. One early milestone in this respect was the final agreement of the Conference of the Parties in Cancún in 2010, which stressed the need to ensure a just transition with decent, high-quality jobs for workers undergoing low-carbon transitions (United Nations, 2010). A further, defining moment in the history of the concept came through the work of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which, in 2015, published the "Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all", a set of principles and recommendations for the implementation of a just transition framework (ILO, 2015).

Shortly afterwards, the Preamble of the Paris Agreement stated that the international effort of reducing global warming should take into account "the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities" (United Nations, 2015). More recently, the Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration was signed by the Heads of State and Government at the 24th Conference of the Parties in Katowice (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate, 2018). This declaration, besides referring to the International Labour Organization's Guidelines, "reaffirms the political commitment towards just transition already taken in Paris and highlights

the need to work further in that direction" (Sabato and Fronteddu, 2020: 9). In its global expansion, the just transition debate has gained the support of a number of different civil society actors (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013). Yet again, trade unions and, in particular, the International Trade Union Confederation have placed themselves at the forefront of this debate at the international level, so much so that the ITUC even launched a dedicated Just Transition Centre in 2016 (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013).

At its core, just transition is meant to challenge the jobs versus environment dilemma and to turn the spotlight on the social justice implications of sustainability transitions. In the specific context of decarbonisation, just transition has been defined as "a fair and equitable process of moving towards a post-carbon society" (McCauley and Heffron, 2018: 2). This implies considering both "'outcomes' (how the new employment and social landscape in a decarbonised economy should look) and 'process' (how we get there from present socio-economic realities)" (Galgóczi, 2020: 369). Since the concept has been developed and reworked by several different actors over time, defining what actually constitutes a just transition can be a difficult task, and the reference literature mirrors this difficulty. As was the case for sustainable development, the risk is that, with increased popularity, just transition may become a contested concept, i.e. one to which different actors assign different meanings (Stevis et al., 2020). The contested nature of just transition is related to its multifaceted and multidimensional essence.

Just transition constitutes a *multifaceted* concept in that it has been framed in numerous different ways and applied to different contexts. In this respect, Wang and Lo (2021: 1) identify five principal "faces", or themes, of the just transition literature: "(1) just transition as a labour-oriented concept, (2) just transition as an integrated framework for justice, (3) just transition as a theory of socio-technical transition, (4) just transition as a governance strategy, and (5) just transition as public perception". The first theme reflects the importance of trade unions as core ideologists and promoters of the concept. It is investigated through environmental labour studies (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2013), which focus on trade unions' climate positions (Thomas and Doerflinger ,2020; Clarke and Lipsig- Mummé, 2020) or just transition visions (Tomassetti, 2020; Stevis and Felli, 2015). The second theme instead frames just transition as a normative concept, presenting the latter as a suitable framework to bring together the energy, climate and environmental justice scholarships (McCauley and Heffron 2018). The third research strand links just transition to the socio-technical literature, hence focusing on assessing the actual – just or unjust – outcomes of socio-technical transitions (Sareen and Haarstad, 2018). The fourth face of

just transition concerns its governance. Studies in this field are especially interested in the (lack of) engagement of stakeholders and citizens in the management and politics of transitions (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013; Cha, 2020). Fifth and finally, we find studies that explore people's and stakeholders' attitudes towards decarbonisation (Gugushvili and Otto, 2021), presenting public opinion as a crucial driver to ensure the political legitimacy and fairness of decarbonisation itself.

Besides being multifaceted, just transition is also a *multidimensional* concept. This means that different interpretations can stem from the same concept. First, several authors tend to distinguish narrow and broad conceptions of just transition (Pinker, 2020; Eisenberg, 2019; Galgóczi, 2020, 2022; Sabato and Fronteddu, 2020; Krause et al., 2022), depending on the scale and scope – i.e. the spatial-temporal reach and the breadth – of the challenges considered (Stevis and Felli, 2020). *Narrow* conceptions, closer to the original demands by American trade unions, concern the management of the most urgent consequences of transitions, for instance those faced by coal regions and workers. *Broad* approaches to a just transition, instead, are closer to the more recent ILO Guidelines, which promote a whole-economy approach that is intended to target long-term and often global social risks, hence beyond the most urgent low-hanging fruits of decarbonisation like fossil fuel phase-out.

Just transition conceptions can also be differentiated according to the depth of the justice demands they bring forward (Stevis and Felli, 2015, 2020; Krause et al., 2022; Galgóczi, 2022). Accordingly, studies often distinguish between "affirmative" and "transformative" approaches, depending on whether or not they assume that a just transition can be attained within the limits of the current socio-economic model, based on capitalist and growth-intensive modes of production and consumption. This second distinction allows us to differentiate between various just transition demands, which can range "from a simple claim for jobs creation in the green economy to a radical critique of capitalism and refusal of market solutions" (Barca, 2015: 392). In this vein, other similar studies (Krause et al., 2022; Just Transition Research Collaborative, 2018) go beyond dichotomous categorizations, and identify four different approaches to just transition in a scale from the most affirmative to the most transformative: first, there are purely "neoliberal" approaches, which aim to maintain the status quo and foster market-driven mechanisms; second, "managerial reforms", in which equality and justice are sought within the current socio-economic model; third, "structural reforms", that aim to modify the rules of the

political economy through more significant social reforms; and, finally, purely "transformative" approaches, that represent the most ambitious just transition views.

Third, and finally, most authors recognize how social justice in the just transition concept comprises at least two separate dimensions: *distributive* justice, which is concerned with how the transition (re)shapes the allocation of resources; and *procedural* justice, which is concerned with participation and engagement in the policymaking and governance procedures behind the transition (McCauley and Heffron, 2018; Sovacool et al., 2021). Other dimensions are sometimes added to these two[9], but the distinction between distributive and procedural justice remains the most acknowledged. Procedural justice is rooted in the trade unions' understanding of just transition as a vehicle to boost the political legitimacy of low-carbon transitions. In this view, the perceived legitimacy and fairness of decarbonisation, which in turn affects the support for such processes, is expected to increase if engagement mechanisms are in place (Steg et al., 2021).

## 5. Just transition policies: a conceptual and analytical framework

### *5.1. Defining just transition policies*

The objects of this research are *just transition policies*, which are presented as a peculiar type of eco-social policies that explicitly aim to systematically integrate a social dimension into low-carbon industrial restructurings, with the ultimate view to make decarbonisation socially just. For the sake of avoiding the fuzzy and prescriptive definitions that are dominant in the reference literature, some specifications are needed to precisely delineate the JTP concept here proposed.

Among the various aspects of the multifaceted just transition concept (Wang and Lo, 2021), just transition as a type of policy has so far received little attention, with only few exceptions, which include Cha (2020) and Mertins-Kirkwood (2018), who refer to "just transition policies", and Green and Gambhir (2020), who similarly talk about "transition assistance policies". Although under-investigated, the policy aspect of just transition is highly relevant, given that a just transition is by definition intentional and, hence, heavily driven by public policies. This research deals with the political aspect of just transition, hence with the public policies that tackle the

[9] Besides "distributive justice" and "procedural justice", other dimensions that are oftentimes identified as components of the just transition concept include "recognition justice", which stresses the impact on marginalised groups, and "restorative justice", which points to the reparation of damages and costs. However, some authors subsume these dimensions into the more-established "distributive" and "procedural" dimensions.

social implications of *industrial decarbonisation*. The present study hence limits its scope to energy transitions that take place within the productive sectors of the economy, with the ultimate goal to contrast climate change by cutting greenhouse gas emissions. This notably implies that changes in the consumption side of the economy are not considered here. While other aspects of sustainability transitions would deserve equal attention[10], the choice to restrict the scope of the study to industrial decarbonisation allows us to control for the vast variance between different transition-related social risks, which would require diverse policy responses. Moreover, at the moment of writing, industrial decarbonisation represents arguably the most salient topic in the European climate debate, which justifies the choice to focus on energy transitions as opposed to other socio-technical transitions.

Finally, as stated, just transition policies can be defined as peculiar types of eco-social policies, since they aim to integrate a social (social justice) and an environmental (industrial decarbonisation) objective. Following what has been said in Section 3, the direction of integration with which JTPs are created is *reactive*. Indeed, JTPs are constructed by adding a social dimension to already-existing environmental goals, hence reacting to the (positive and negative) consequences generated in the pursuit of decarbonisation. Simply put, unlike preventive eco-social policies, which aim to integrate an environmental dimension into existing welfare measures, just transition policies instead presuppose the existence of industrial decarbonisation policies and they are meant to systematically "socialize" the latter, by integrating some social objectives.

Figure 1.3 illustrates, through a Venn diagram, where the object of this study has been derived from. Just transition policies lie at the intersection between three concepts: eco-social policies, industrial decarbonisation and just transition.

[10] Sustainability transitions may cover issues that go from mobility to food consumption; from housing to industrial emissions; etc.

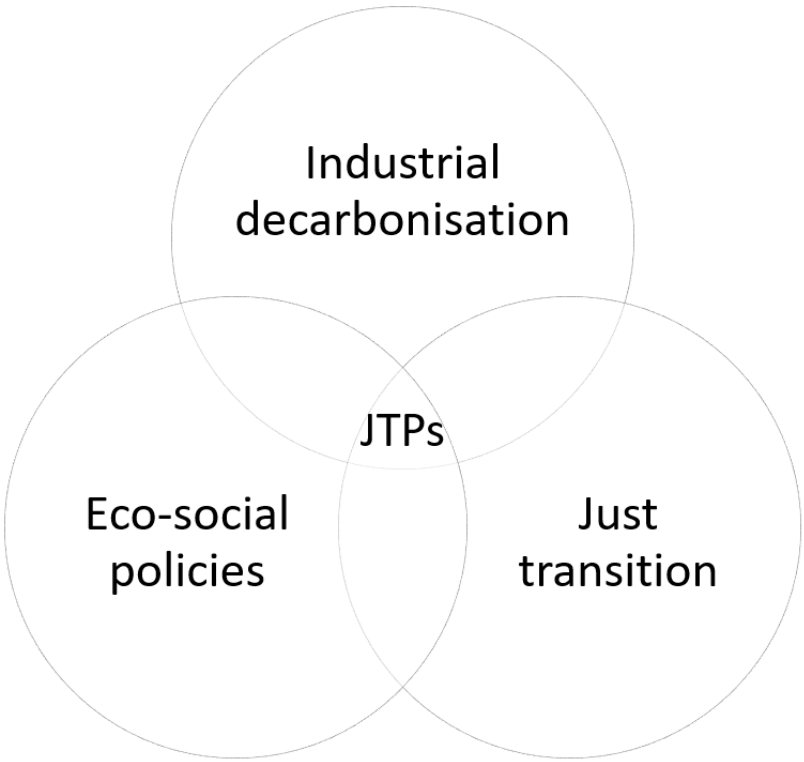


**Figure 1.3:** ***Just transition policies (JTPs)*** (source: author's own elaboration)

As any other eco-social policy, JTPs are by definition integrated and policy integration normally requires a high degree of complexity. Integrated policies indeed often come in the shape of policy mixes, that is complex arrangements of public policies that dynamically interact with one another in order to create a comprehensive set of different interconnected components (Candel and Biesbroek, 2016; Geels, 2019; Rogge et al., 2017; Rogge and Reichardt, 2016). Three are the fundamental components of any policy mix (Rogge and Reichardt, 2016): (i) a *strategy* component, i.e. a plan comprising the overarching and specific policy goals, as well as the justifications behind them; (ii) an *instrument* component, entailing a set of policy measures to achieve the strategic goals; and (iii) a *governance* component, establishing institutional structures and procedures for the delivery of the policy mix. For an integrated policy to be comprehensive, it should comprise all three of these components, since these constitute the interactive building blocks that keep together the whole policy mix (Rogge and Reichardt, 2016).

To understand more in-depth what is contained precisely in each of the three components of JTPs, we refer to Schneider and Ingram's "policy design framework" (1990, 1997), which enlists

six “core empirical elements […] found in virtually all examples of policy” (Schneider and Ingram, 1997): goals or problems to be solved; rationales and assumptions; rules; agents and implementation structures; target populations; and policy tools. In the case of complex policy mixes, policy design is not condensed in just a single policy unit, but rather spread across the three above-mentioned components. Thus, we can associate each element of the policy design framework to one of the three components of the policy mix. At the strategic level, we should find *goals and problems to be solved*, that is “what is to be altered or attained as a result of policy” (Schneider and Ingram, 1997: 82); as well as the related *rationales and assumptions*, i.e. “the explanations and reasons given that justify, legitimate, and explain the policy”, based on some cognitive, normative and behavioural assumptions (Ibid.). The instrument component should comprise the *target populations*, that is the people, groups or organizations that are affected by the policy either in a coercive or enabling way; and the *policy tools*, which “provide incentives or sanctions, persuasion, education, and other means” (ibid.) to the target populations. Finally, the governance component should be composed by *agents and implementation structures*, hence the governmental and non-governmental actors “that are part of the formal governance structure and are responsible for the development and delivery of policy” (Ibid.); and the *rules*, which specify “the procedural aspects of policy design and indicate who is to do what, where, and when” (Ibid.).

### *5.2. A typology of just transition policies*

After looking at the components that constitute the architecture of JTPs, we now turn to the core characteristics of these policies, in order to derive, for each component, the key dimensions of variation to distinguish different types of JTPs. The lack of policy studies in the just transition field and the predominantly normative focus of eco-social policy studies makes it so that there is no established analytical framework to refer to for the assessment of JTPs and this calls for the creation of a novel typology. In spite of the lack of an established analytical framework, we may derive categories for policy analysis by building on both the just transition and to the eco-social policy literatures.

First, several authors tend to differentiate *narrow* from *broad* conceptions of just transition, depending on their scope and scale – i.e. their spatial and temporal reach. The distinction between narrow and broad just transition conceptions can be expected to reflect in the formulation of JTPs, since the scope and scale of just transition dictates the level of state

intervention needed to steer a just low-carbon transition (Galgóczi, 2022). Although we have assumed that JTPs are by definition reactive eco-social policies, whenever state intervention is broad, policies go beyond a mere reaction to urgent challenges, by fostering instead a whole-economy and forward-looking, hence partly preventive, vision.

Second, various studies distinguish between *affirmative* and *transformative* approaches to just transition, depending on whether or not they assume that the capitalistic economic paradigm should be fundamentally questioned. While the affirmative-transformative distinction might be too normative to be relevant for the purposes of empirical policy analysis, it brings attention to the key aspect of the linkage between just transition and economic growth, which is also crucial in the eco-social policies debate, as discussed in Section 3. Beyond normative considerations, what matters for an empirically-operationalizable typology is whether policy outputs explicitly aim to contribute to economic growth. Taking inspiration from the literature on social investment (Morel et al., 2012), we can distinguish two possible JTP types, based on two opposite links to economic growth. First, mirroring a more traditional understanding of the welfare state as a vehicle for decommodification, *protection-oriented* JTPs aim at cushioning or compensating for the eco-social risks borne by individuals, or at equally (re)distributing the resources and opportunities arising from climate mitigation. As such, these protective eco-social policies do not per se willingly contribute to economic growth[11]. Second, JTPs can instead be investment-oriented, hence aiming to enhance individuals' capabilities to participate in a green economy and society. In this sense, investment-oriented JTPs not only attempt to leverage existing socio-ecological challenges – as protective measures do – but also to turn them into economic opportunities, hence actively contributing to (green) growth.

If the broad-narrow and investment-protection dimensions have clearly to do with resource distribution, the just transition literature has also stressed that justice, in the context of low-carbon transitions, is not merely distributive, but also procedural. For procedural justice what matters the most is that low-carbon transitions are perceived as fair, especially by those groups that are most affected by them. In this respect, decision-making – and, in particular, the institutions and procedures behind it – should engage and give power to a wide set of actors

[11] Although protective JTPs, much like other compensatory social protection tools, do not per se directly aim to contribute to economic growth, they might still indirectly and implicitly do so. This is because protection-oriented measures provide material resources to marginalized individuals, allowing them to enhance their consumption patterns, and ultimately sustaining a growing demand of goods and services in the economy.

beyond the state. Consequently, we can distinguish *participated* decision-making, where governments take decisions in coordination with a wide range of non-governmental actors, from exclusive and *concentrated* decision-making.

Once we have derived from the literature the key analytical dimensions that are most relevant to discern different types of JTPs, we now have to operationalise these dimensions, first, by associating them with one of the three components of JTPs – strategy, instruments and governance – and, second, by providing criteria to empirically assess variation. We derive two opposite ideal-types of JTPs for each of its three components and two mixed models, which incorporate elements from the two ideal-types.

We can operationalize the broad-narrow dimension by looking at the *strategy* component, because the latter has to do with the scope and scale of the goals and problems to be solved (as well as with the rationales and assumptions behind such goals). Thus, the first two operationalizable criteria are the (time) scale and (sectoral) scope of a just transition strategy. First, the *scope* assumes a broad value when strategies promote a whole-economy approach and a narrow value, if they instead address only sectoral problems. Second, the *scale* of just transition strategies should be considered broad when their timeframe is limited and narrow when it is instead unlimited or long-term. Table 1.2 summarizes the operationalization of the strategic component of JTPs, identifying the characteristics of the broad and narrow ideal-types, as well as two mixed models: one entailing a sectoral and long-term just transition strategy and the other a whole-economy but short-term strategy.

**Table 1.2:** ***The strategic component of Just Transition policies*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| | **Broad scope** | **Narrow scope** |
|---|---|---|
| **Broad scale** | Purely broad strategy: whole-economy and long-term | Mixed-model strategy: sectoral and long-term |
| **Narrow scale** | Mixed-model strategy: whole-economy and short-term | Purely narrow strategy: sectoral and short-term |

The distinction between investment and protection JTPs is measured at the level of the *instrument* component. Although several studies in the social investment literature (Morel et al. 2012) – where this protection-investment dimension is rooted in – also address strategic and

governance-level aspects, we assume it is exhaustive to operationalize this dimension by just focusing on the features of policy instruments. More specifically, we can distinguish protective from investment-oriented JTPs depending on whether they provide active (hence enabling) or passive (hence compensatory) *policy tools*; and whether these instruments are supplied to the *target populations* directly, or rather indirectly, in which case the benefits are supposed to trickle down to the final targets through the actions of some intermediate agents[12]. Active-enabling policy tools include active labour market policies, skills development, job creation and social cohesion policies, while passive-compensatory tools are typically monetary transfers and in-kind benefits. Protection-oriented instruments are traditionally directly-targeted, while investment-oriented measures normally require transferring resources to some intermediate agents in the present, so that there will be inter-temporal returns for the ultimate beneficiary targets in the future. Thus, as summarized in Table 1.3, we can distinguish two ideal models: purely protection-oriented instruments, such as direct buffers, and purely investment-oriented instrument, such as indirectly-targeted active labour market policies. Also in this case, mixed models may exist, entailing a combination of investment and protection characteristics: this is the case of direct monetary transfers attached to an activating conditionality for the ultimate recipient, or indirect investments in public services that do not aim to enable individuals' participation to the labour market.

**Table 1.3:** ***The instrument component of Just Transition policies*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| | **Passive-compensatory tools** | **Active-enabling tools** |
|---|---|---|
| **Direct targets** | Purely protection-oriented instruments: e.g. monetary compensation | Mixed-model instruments: e.g. monetary compensation with active conditionality |
| **Indirect targets** | Mixed-model instruments: e.g. public services without enabling rationale | Purely investment-oriented instruments: e.g. active labour market policies |

Finally, turning to the governance component, this has to do with procedural justice and hence with the state's role in engaging agents in the structures – that is both institutions and procedures – for the implementation of JTPs. Accordingly, to operationalize this component, we build on insights from the literature on multistakeholder policymaking (Streeck and Hassel, 2003; Cawson, 1978). We should first check for the voice that non-governmental stakeholders

[12] Intermediate agents usually include firms, civil society organizations, or administrative bodies.

are given in the implementation of JTPs, distinguishing an *exclusive/selective* model, for which their engagement remains limited or none, from an *inclusive* model, in which a wide range of non-governmental agents is instead involved in institutions and procedures. Furthermore, one has also to check for the attribution of powers provided by the rules regulating the implementation of JTPs. On the one hand, rules can provide for a concentration of power in the hands of government, hence ultimately favouring *governmentalism*. On the other hand, rules can instead foster *coordination*, hence formally obliging the government to share part of its decision-making powers with other non-governmental actors. While participation and concentration constitute the two polar opposite ideal types of JTP governance, we could also identify mid-range models, somewhere in between the two extremes. This is the case of inclusive governmentalism – which entails a multistakeholder governance, but with mere consultation of non-governmental agents – or selective coordination, where the government shares decision-making powers with only a limited number of stakeholders. Table 1.4 summarises the operationalization of the governance component of JTPs.

**Table 1.4:** ***The governance component of Just Transition policies*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| | **Inclusive implementation structures** | **Exclusive/selective implementation structures** |
|---|---|---|
| **Coordination by rules** | Purely participated governance: inclusive coordination | Mixed governance model: selective coordination |
| **Governmentalism by rules** | Mixed governance model: inclusive consultation of stakeholders but concentration of powers | Purely concentrated governance: exclusive/selective governmentalism |

Building on the analysis of the three separate components, we can now derive a comprehensive analytical framework for the assessment of just transition policies. Table 1.5 summarizes this framework, which comprises the ideal-types identified in Tables 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4. Therefore, it proposes a typology of JTPs that allows us to distinguish them according to whether they entail a broad or narrow strategy, investment- or protection-oriented instruments and participated or concentrated governance.

| **Table 1.5:** ***Analytical framework (policy) – the three components of just transition policies*** (source: author's own elaboration) | | |
|---|---|---|
| **COMPONENTS** | **DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION** | |
| **Strategy**<br><br>*Goals & problems to be solved / Rationales & assumptions* | **Broad** | **Narrow** |
| | Whole-economy scope & long-term time scale | Sectoral scope & limited time scale |
| **Instruments**<br><br>*Target populations / Policy tools* | **Investment** | **Protection** |
| | Active (enabling) tools & indirectly benefitting targets | Passive (compensatory) tools & directly benefitting targets |
| **Governance**<br><br>*Agents & implementation structures / Rules* | **Participated** | **Concentrated** |
| | Inclusive coordination | Exclusive/selective governmentalism |

In the following Chapters, this analytical framework will be applied empirically to study the content formulation of the actual JTPs found in the selected cases. Since this framework has been constructed deductively, hence building on insights derived from the reference literature, other scholars should be able to apply it to cases and context different than the ones hereby considered. However, this framework might also conceal a couple of notable limitations, which would be worth pointing out. First, in reality, the analytical dimensions proposed here might not be as rigidly mutually-exclusive as presented: empirical analyses might instead reveal that JTPs can actually combine narrow with broad characteristics, as well as a mix of investment and protection elements, or coordinated and concentrated governance frameworks. Moreover, while table 1.5 only includes two ideal-typical models for each component, mixed models JTPs can also exist, as shown in tables 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4. Second, the entries of this analytical grill are not necessarily collectively exhaustive and other studies analysing JTPs might decide to investigate some additional aspects that are not comprised here, as well as to disregard some aspects of this framework, in case they will consider them irrelevant to their research goals.

# Chapter 2 – Mapping Just Transition Policies across Europe: a bird's-eye view on the empirical landscape[13]

**Introduction**

Through the 2019 European Green Deal, the European Union and its Member States are more than ever committed to transitioning towards an economic model that should be more "sustainable" or, at least, less carbon-intensive. In this scenario, novel social opportunities and risks are expected to emerge, making it reasonable to expect that just transition policies are emerging across the EU to tackle such opportunities and risks. Nevertheless, with the exception of a few studies at the supranational level, little is known about how the empirical landscape of just transition policies in Europe currently looks like.

Against this background, the present Chapter seeks to contribute to the just transition literature by concentrating on its hitherto overlooked policy dimension and, specifically, it attempts to fill existing knowledge gaps about the diffusion and characteristics of just transition policies in Europe. The Chapter provides a mapping and analysis of key policy documents relevant to just transition in the European Union – at both the supranational and national levels – focusing on whether and how these documents refer to a just transition and/or addressing the social consequences of decarbonisation. To meet its goals, the Chapter relies on qualitative methods, notably on a systematic manual textual analysis of several policy documents. To identify national policies, in particular, the National Energy and Climate Plans have been used as reference sources. Identified just transition policies are presented by disentangling their three constitutive components – strategy, instrument and governance – and then analysed along the dimensions of the analytical framework presented in Chapter 1.

Results show that the decarbonisation policy framework that the EU has put forward is quite complex and articulated, with different initiatives targeted to different economic sectors. A wide

[13] Parts of this Chapter have been published by the author and, hence, the Chapter heavily draws on the following source: Mandelli, 2022b.

heterogeneity also characterises Member states' performances in the pursuit of climate mitigation and decarbonisation. The addition of a social dimension to decarbonisation policies is instead still relatively rare. The EU has put forward a peculiar policy framework in this field, comprising the strategic objective of "leaving no one behind" in the green transition stated in the 2019 European Green Deal, as well as instruments and governance structures connected to the Just Transition Mechanism. At the national level, instead, the analysis of the National Energy and Climate Plans reveals that most countries recognise that decarbonisation could lead to some negative social trade-offs and hence commit, in many cases, to put forward just transition policies in the future. Nevertheless, results shows that only six EU countries – Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands – have already actually adopted comprehensive just transition policies including strategy, instrument and governance components.

With respect to what kind of just transition the EU and its Member States are promoting, a bird's-eye view on the current empirical landscape reveals that, with rare exceptions, just transition policies most often have a narrow scale and scope, mainly targeting the urgent "low-hanging fruits" of decarbonisation, that is coal and other fossil fuel extraction sectors; they often overstate the role of investment-oriented measures, which are preferred to protection-oriented ones; and they provide inclusive governance structures for stakeholder engagement, even though non-governmental agents' power is almost always limited to consultation. Against this empirical puzzle, Spain and Ireland are chosen as two cases that, despite their considerable systemic differences, have similarly adopted just transition policies with relatively close contents.

With respect to the structure of the Chapter, Section 1 is dedicated to sketching the policy framework for decarbonisation that binds EU members states, as well as these states' decarbonisation performance. Section 2 goes on to present the just transition policy framework set up by the European Union. After a short methodological premise, Section 3 maps and describes national just transition policies, using the National Energy and Climate Plans as reference sources and disentangling the strategic, instrument and governance components. Finally, Section 4 discusses the findings, shedding light on the empirical state of the art of just transition policies in Europe, while Section 5 builds on these findings in order to justify the selection of Spain and Ireland as cases to be compared.

**1. Decarbonisation in the EU: an overview**

Since the 2016 Paris Agreement, the European Union has been committed to curb greenhouse gas emissions and, currently, the European Green Deal (EGD) represents the reference framework in the European Union to achieve decarbonisation by 2050. This Section presents the EU decarbonisation strategy, as well as how different Member States are performing with respect to decarbonisation.

### *1.1. The EU decarbonisation policy framework*

Proposed in 2019 by the von der Leyen Commission, the EGD is the current growth strategy of EU: it sets long-term objectives for the Union in different policy fields and enlists the measures and sectoral plans to implement such objectives[14]. The ultimate aim is "to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use", as well as "to protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts" (European Commission, 2019a: 2). In stark contrast with previous EU grand strategies, the EGD gives high priority to environmental objectives, which should be pursued in line with economic growth. Indeed, this strategy aims to achieve an absolute decoupling of economic growth from its climate-altering impacts, hence the "key ambition is to increase the EU's gross domestic product (GDP) while reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions" (Laurent, 2021: 99). In short, the EGD endorses a green growth approach to the low-carbon transition, boosting economic-environmental synergies (Mandelli et al., 2021; Sabato et al., 2021).

In connection with the EGD, the European Commission proposed a roadmap of key policies and measures (European Commission, 2019b) to deliver on the main strategy, some of which are particularly relevant when it comes to decarbonisation. One notable initiative is the European Climate Law (European Commission, 2020e), intended to enshrine a couple of climate targets into legislation: carbon neutrality by 2050 and a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by

[14] The EGD has eight principal areas for action: a) increasing the EU's climate ambition for 2030 and 2050; b) supplying clean, affordable and secure energy; c) mobilising industry for a clean and circular economy; d) building and renovating in an energy and resource-efficient way; e) accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility; f) from "Farm to Fork": designing a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system; g) preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity; and h) a zero pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment. Moreover, the EGD also comprises other cross-sectoral priorities, including financing the transition and "leaving no one behind" through a just transition (European Commission, 2019a).

2030. Also interesting in the area of industrial decarbonisation are: the EU New Industrial Strategy for Europe, which is intended to provide the conditions for "Europe's industry to lead the twin transitions and drive […] competitiveness" (European Commission, 2020f: 1); and the new Circular Economy Action Plan for a "regenerative growth model" (European Commission, 2020g: 2). Together, these strategies represent the EU's main plans for the low-carbon transition of European industrial facilities[15], fostering once again a green growth approach in an attempt to decouple production growth from its ecological footprint. In this view, technological innovations are seen as fundamental in finding a balance between economic growth and climate mitigation.

More recently, two other key initiatives have been put forward, advancing the EU's policy framework for decarbonisation. First, the Next Generation EU – a strategy for the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis (European Commission, 2020h) – and the related Recovery and Resilience Facility (European Union, 2021) are intended to contribute to the climate and energy objectives of the EGD[16]. Accordingly, the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, detailing Member States' reforms and investments related to the Recovery and Resilience Facility, are to allocate a minimum of 37% of the resources in support of climate objectives, and they must also comply with the so-called "do no significant harm" principle, in an attempt to prevent any further negative environmental impact (Sabato et al., 2021). Second, the 2021 "Fit for 55" package "consists of a set of inter-connected proposals, which all drive towards the same goal of ensuring a fair, competitive and green transition by 2030 and beyond" (European Commission, 2021b: 3). The "Fit for 55" package cross-cuts different sectors and policy areas, and it encompasses several types of policy instruments, including carbon pricing, regulations and support measures.

The "Fit for 55" package proposes five new initiatives and a reform of eight existing legislative measures to reduce emissions by 55% by 2030. The "Fit for 55" package entails notable step forward in the area of industrial decarbonisation, improving, first, some of the provisions already

[15] Other strategies connected to the EGD, which might also be relevant for industrial decarbonisation, include the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy and Renovation wave for Europe, respectively addressing the food, transport and buildings sectors (Sabato et at., 2021).

[16] The six pillars of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which represent the key focus areas for investment, are: "green transition; digital transformation; smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including economic cohesion, jobs, productivity, competitiveness, research, development and innovation, and a well-functioning internal market with strong small and medium enterprises (SMEs); social and territorial cohesion; health, and economic, social and institutional resilience with the aim of, inter alia, increasing crisis preparedness and crisis response capacity; and policies for the next generation, children and the youth, such as education and skills" (European Union, 2021: recital 10).

contained in the 2016 “Clean Energy for all Europeans” package and, second, the European Emission Trading Scheme. Adopted before the EGD specifically for the decarbonisation of the energy sector, the “Clean Energy for all Europeans” legislative package sets up EU-wide climate targets and regulations for decarbonisation and for energy efficiency and renewable energy (European Commission, 2016). It also established a governance framework to coordinate Member States’ activities in this field through instruments known as National Energy and Climate Plans (discussed in more detail below) (European Union, 2018b). First established in 2003 (European Union, 2003) and later amended (European Union, 2018a), the Emission Trading Scheme has been the principal instrument for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from industrial facilities in Europe for decades. This economic instrument for climate mitigation is based on annually decreasing and tradeable permits for greenhouse gas emissions provided to industries either for free, in the case of sectors prone to carbon leakage, or via auctions.

### *1.2. Member states’ climate and decarbonisation performances*

At the national level, EU Member States’ climate and decarbonisation policies differ considerably. While it is outside the scope of this research to identify and analyse these policies in detail, it would be important to at least provide a bird's-eye view of how EU countries are performing in this field. For decades, a considerable number of studies in environmental politics have ranked the policy performance of different countries, distinguishing “environmental leaders and laggards” (Knill et al., 2012). Along these lines, a 2018 report by the Climate Action Network (CAN) (CAN, 2018) ranked from 0 to 100 where EU countries stand in the fight against climate change, in terms of both their ambition and progress in reducing carbon emissions and in complying with the targets of the Paris Agreement. The scores – in percentage terms – attributed to each EU country by the CAN report are reported in the second column of Table 2.1, as well as graphically in Figure 2.1. While the CAN report warns that all EU countries are off-target, it also shows a high heterogeneity across Europe. Indeed, we can distinguish countries according to their relative climate policy performance, which is found to be (i) good (score higher than 50) for Portugal, France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Sweden, the highest ranking state; (ii) mid-to high (score between 40 and 50 in DE, DK, FI, HR, IT, LT, LV); (iii) mid-to-low (score between 30 and 40 in AT, BE, CZ, EL, ES, HU, RO, SI, SK); and, finally, (iv) low score – less than or equal to 30 – for Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Malta and Poland, which is the lowest-ranking state in the whole of the European Union.

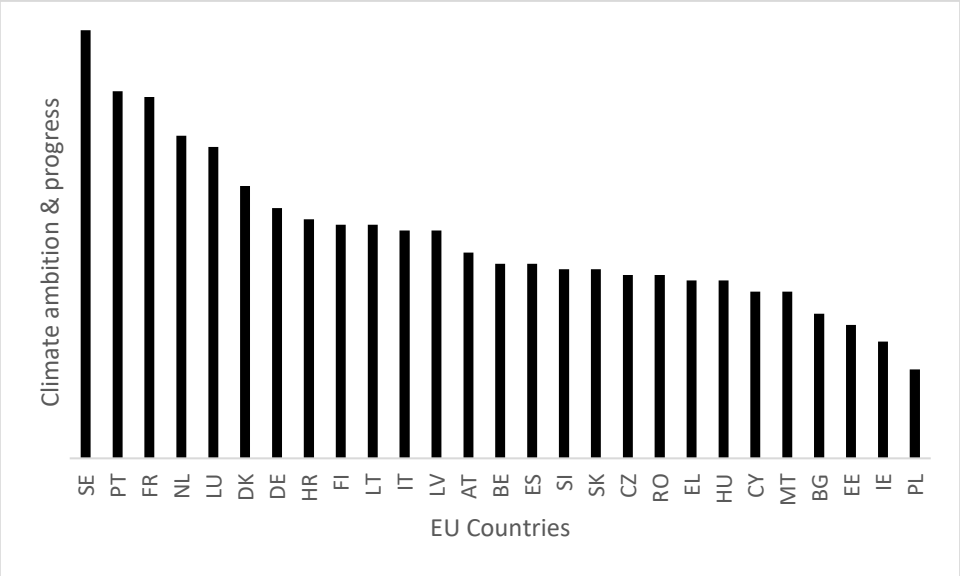


**Figure 2.1*: EU Countries' ambition and progress in fighting climate change***
(adapted from: CAN, 2018)

While EU countries' climate policy performances differ considerably, these performances can be expected to undergo significant changes in the coming years, due to both the increasing political salience of climate change and the role of the EU in promoting upward convergence in climate policies across the EU. The National Energy and Climate Plans, in this respect, can provide an indication of the dynamic evolution of climate policies across the EU. Maris and Flouros (2021: 11) have measured the evolution in countries' climate and energy strategies, by assessing "each Member State's level of compliance with the European Commission's directions and recommendations in their NECPs". The results of their analysis are reported in the third column of Table 2.1. Countries are divided into three categories according to their NECPs evaluation. First, there are "Pace-Setting" countries showing to be either consistently in line with EU-set standards, or to have made significant improvements in their NECP. These include: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden. Conversely, "Foot-Dragging" countries like Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Poland perform poorly when it comes to the transposition of the European Commission's standards. The rest of the Member States are categorized as "Fence-Sitting". Maris and Flouros' NECP analysis shows that countries' climate policy performance is constantly evolving. Indeed, "some Member States that were initially characterised as foot-dragging, such as Greece, Portugal, and Spain, can now be considered as fence-sitting, and others that were seen as fence-sitting, can now be perceived as either foot-dragging (e.g., Luxembourg) or pace-setting (e.g., France and Italy)" (Maris and Flouros, 2021: 14).

Besides their general climate policy performances, EU countries also widely differ, particularly, in their efforts to decarbonize the productive sector of their economies, which is the component of climate mitigation that this research is specifically interested in. In this respect, different sectors are expected to undergo different decarbonisation experiences. At the forefront of the energy transition in Europe right now is the coal sector. Although increasingly lower – with a fall of 24% in total use from 2010 to 2018 – hard coal and lignite still represent major components of electricity generation (19.2% in 2018), and hence emissions, in the EU (Galgóczi, 2019). While coal is evidently playing a central role in decarbonisation, other fossil fuels are also being phased out across the old continent, including Estonia's oil shale and Irish and Finnish peat. Furthermore, beyond energy generation, energy-intensive industries, like iron and steel, should also undergo processes of low-carbon restructuring. The EU is the biggest steel producer worldwide after China and hence a major contributor to global emissions from this sector (Skoczkowski et al., 2020). A low-carbon transition for the iron and steel industries, for instance, might prove to be extremely challenging, not only because their production processes and technologies are often heavily dependent on fossil fuels, but also due to the peculiar characteristics of their market "characterised by strong economies of scale, high upfront capital intensity, high global concentration and a low degree of vertical integration compared with many other commodity industries" (Skoczkowski et al., 2020: 2).

The distribution of fossil fuels differs a lot from country to country (and actually from region to region). In a recent publication, McCauley et al. (2023) ranked from 0 to 1 EU countries with respect to their "fossil fuel energy dependency", an indicator given by "the aggregation of [the International Energy Agency] data on coal products, natural gas, oil products and oil shale and sands, exports, imports, production and consumption, and heat and electricity output" (McCauley et al., 2023: 3). McCauley et al.'s data is reported in the fourth column of Table 2.1, as well as illustrated in Figure 2.2. The most fossil fuels-dependent country is Germany, followed by the Netherlands, France, Italy, Poland and Spain (scores higher than 0.75). Countries in the middle-high side of the ranking (scores from 0.5 to 0.75) include Belgium, Czechia, Austria, Greece, Romania, Sweden and Hungary; while those in the middle-low side (scores from 0.25 to 0.5) are Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Ireland and Lithuania. Croatia, Slovenia, Estonia, Luxembourg, Latvia, Cyprus and Malta are the lowest-ranking countries (score lower than 0.25), with Malta being the least dependent on fossil fuels.

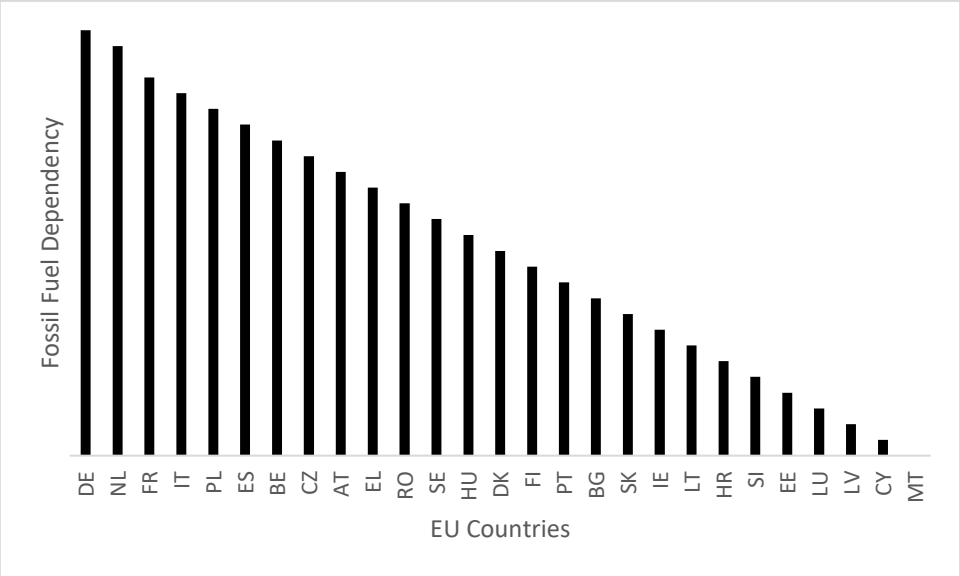


**Figure 2.2*: Fossil Fuel Energy Dependency*** (adapted from McCauley et al., 2022)

Several European countries have committed to decarbonising their energy sector by phasing out coal. These commitments, however, are very heterogeneous across Europe. Building on data by Europe Beyond Coal (2022), the fifth column of Table 2.1 shows the date of announced coal phase-outs across the EU. As is evident, most countries have pledged to phase out coal before or by 2030, while Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia have set late phase-out targets. Table 2.1 also reports which countries are already coal-free. Among them, Austria, Belgium, Portugal and Sweden stand out, since they managed to phase out coal from their energy mixes after signing the Paris Agreement, hence relatively recently. Poland is once again a negative outlier here, as the only remaining EU Member State where a coal phase-out is not even under discussion.

**Table 2.1: *Decarbonisation across the EU*** (sources reported below)

| **EU Countries (& acronyms)** | **EU Countries' ambition and progress in fighting climate change –** rank from 0 to 100 (source: CAN, 2018) | **NECP evaluation - energy and climate strategies** (source: Maris and Flouros, 2021) | **Fossil Fuel Energy Dependency** – rank from 0 to 1 (source: McCauley et al., 2023) | **Coal phase-out targets –** dates (source: Europe Beyond Coal, 2022) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Austria (AT) | 37 | Pace-Setting | 0,667 | Free |
| Belgium (BE) | 35 | Fence-Sitting | 0,741 | Free |
| Bulgaria (BG) | 26 | Foot-Dragging | 0,370 | 2038 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cyprus (CY) | 30 | Fence-Sitting | 0,037 | Free |
| Czechia (CZ) | 33 | Fence-Sitting | 0,704 | 2033 |
| Germany (DE) | 45 | Pace-Setting | 1,000 | 2038 |
| Denmark (DK) | 49 | Pace-Setting | 0,481 | 2028 |
| Estonia (EE) | 24 | Fence-Sitting | 0,148 | Free |
| Greece (EL) | 32 | Fence-Sitting | 0,630 | 2025 |
| Spain (ES) | 35 | Fence-Sitting | 0,778 | 2030 |
| Finland (FI) | 42 | Fence-Sitting | 0,444 | 2029 |
| France (FR) | 65 | Pace-Setting | 0,889 | 2024 |
| Croatia (HR) | 43 | Foot-Dragging | 0,222 | 2033 |
| Hungary (HR) | 32 | Fence-Sitting | 0,519 | 2025 |
| Ireland (IE) | 21 | Fence-Sitting | 0,296 | 2025 |
| Italy (IT) | 41 | Pace-Setting | 0,852 | 2025 |
| Lithuania (LT) | 42 | Fence-Sitting | 0,259 | Free |
| Luxembourg (LU) | 56 | Foot-Dragging | 0,111 | Free |
| Latvia (LV) | 41 | Foot-Dragging | 0,074 | Free |
| Malta (MT) | 30 | Foot-Dragging | 0,000 | Free |
| Netherlands (NL) | 58 | Fence-Sitting | 0,963 | 2029 |
| Poland (PL) | 16 | Foot-Dragging | 0,815 | - |
| Portugal (PT) | 66 | Fence-Sitting | 0,370 | Free |
| Romania (RO) | 33 | Fence-Sitting | 0,593 | 2032 |
| Sweden (SE) | 77 | Pace-Setting | 0,556 | Free |
| Slovenia (SI) | 34 | Fence-Sitting | 0,185 | 2033 |
| Slovakia (SK) | 34 | Fence-Sitting | 0,333 | 2030 |

## 2. The European Union's policy framework for a just transition

After a brief presentation of the strategies and instruments for decarbonisation, the focus is now put on the just transition policies that the EU set up to address the social implications of industrial decarbonisation. The European Green Deal represents the reference framework for a just transition in the European Union. Although the European Commission presents the areas of action of the European Green Deal as mutually reinforcing, synergies are not taken for granted or seen as automatic. The EGD itself instead recognises how "careful attention will have to be paid when there are potential trade-offs between economic, environmental and social objectives" (European Commission, 2019a: 4). This is in part also valid for the interweaving of social and environmental issues. Specifically, the European Green Deal and related documents highlight the challenges of the transition for vulnerable consumers and for employment.

Focusing on the social challenges of decarbonising industries primarily entails, for the EU, a focus on the territories, sectors and workers that are deemed to be the most exposed to the structural changes of the transition. While decarbonisation is repeatedly presented as an opportunity for job creation, the EGD acknowledges that workers employed in carbon-intensive firms –mainly coal, other fossil fuels and heavy industries – might be exposed to risks such as job losses and displacements. Moreover, the communities that these workers belong to, which are often highly dependent on carbon-emitting firms, are also regarded as vulnerable to industrial restructurings, with potential side effects on local socio-economic development (European Commission, 2020b). Therefore, to respond to the foreseen social implications of decarbonisation, in recent years, a dedicated just transition policy framework has been adopted at the EU level, entailing a strategic, an instrument and a governance component. These components will be presented and assessed below, following the analytical framework presented in Chapter 1.

With respect to the *strategic* component of the EU's just transition policies, the European Green Deal defines the main EU priorities and objectives in addressing the social implications of industrial decarbonisation. In this respect, the EGD envisages a social dimension, since it explicitly endorses a just transition approach, in an attempt to leave "no one behind" (European Commission, 2019a). This specifically implies addressing the social risks arising from the low-carbon transition, while also ensuring that the transition itself enjoys high social acceptance. Therefore, the scale and scope of just transition, as understood by the European Green Deal, are arguably *narrow*, hence targeting the urgent sectoral and territorial challenges identified above. The socio-ecological trade-offs that the EGD gives emphasis to are especially those related to cuts in fossil fuel production, which represent concentrated and relatively short-term challenges. The social costs of the transition in other sectors – where decarbonisation is likely to unfold for a longer period of time – are largely disregarded or at best optimistically expected to bring about social synergies, mostly in terms of job creation.

Nevertheless, the scale and scope of the EU just transition strategy might potentially be broadened in future years thanks to the EGD's connection to another relevant EU grand strategy: the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission, 2017). The latter was issued in 2017 by the Juncker Commission and it comprises a set of 20 rights and principles[17] jointly providing

[17] The 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights are: 1. Education, training and life-long learning; 2. Gender equality; 3. Equal opportunities; 4. Active support to employment; 5. Secure and adaptable

a common compass to steer Member States' social and employment policies. The 2020 Commission Communication, "A strong social Europe for just transitions" (European Commission, 2020a), and the 2021 European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (European Commission, 2021a) explicitly build a bridge between the Pillar and the EGD. The Pillar, in fact, is presented as the core EU "social strategy to make sure that the transitions of climate neutrality, digitalisation and demographic change are socially fair and just" (European Commission, 2020a: 2), hence it provides general principles on the social standards that should be guaranteed in the decarbonisation process. All in all, the European Pillar of Social Rights is presented as the social "benchmark" of decarbonisation, promoting a general attention to universal social principles, which might provide an opportunity for the future broadening of the EU just transition strategy (Sabato et al., 2021).

As for the *instrument* component, the main EU just transition policy measures intended to address the social implications of industrial decarbonisation is the Just Transition Mechanism[18]. This was proposed as part of the 2020 Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, which was meant to mobilise, enable and support private and public investments to deliver on the just transition strategic objectives of the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2020b). The Just Transition Mechanism aims to mobilise financial resources to address the social costs of the low-carbon transition for the sectors and regions that the EU Commission presents as facing the most serious challenges. It comprises three pillars. The first is the Just Transition Fund. As its name indicates, it consists of a fund for "the economic diversification of the territories most affected by the climate transition and the reskilling and active inclusion of their workers and

employment; 6. Wages; 7. Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals; 8. Social dialogue and involvement of workers; 9. Work-life balance; 10. Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection; 11. Childcare and support to children; 12. Social protection; 13. Unemployment benefits; 14. Minimum income; 15. Old age income and pensions; 16. Health care; 17. Inclusion of people with disabilities; 18. Long-term care; 19. Housing and assistance for the homeless; and 20. Access to essential services (European Commission 2017).

[18] Since this research focuses exclusively on industrial decarbonisation, it does not address consumption-side eco-social risks. However, in the framework of the EGD, the EU is also spending considerable efforts to tackle the issue of raising energy and transport costs as a consequence of increasing climate ambition. To this end, in July 2021, the European Commission proposed a Social Climate Fund within the Fit for 55 package. The Social Climate Fund is meant to acompany the reform of the Emission Trading Scheme, using revenues from this scheme to address the distributional impacts on households, micro-enterprises, and transport users vulnerable to increasing prices in the buildings and road transport sectors. The Fund can be used to finance measures promoting building renovation and access to affordable energy-efficient housing, contributing to the decarbonisation of buildings, as well as access to zero and low-emission mobility and transport. Moreover resources can be used to finance temporary direct income support for vulnerable households and transport users, with a view to absorb the impact of higher prices.

jobseekers" (European Commission, 2020c: 2). Its geographic scope identifies eligible areas according to the share of employment in fossil fuel – namely coal and lignite, but also oil shale and peat – and energy-intensive industries. The initial Commission proposal envisaged a €7.5 billion envelope coming from the EU budget. After an attempt to increase the Fund to €40 billion, the interinstitutional negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council ultimately led to an agreement on a €17.5 billion budget, with €10 billion additional resources coming from the Next Generation EU programme (European Commission, 2020l).

The other two pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism are (i) a "public sector loan facility" mobilising public investments, including through loans from the European Investment Bank (European Commission, 2020i); and (ii) the "InvestEU Just Transition scheme" dedicated to the mobilisation of private investment (European Commission, 2020b). In addition to the three pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism, other EU funds are indicated as suitable tools to address the vulnerabilities generated by decarbonisation, including cohesion funds, as well as the Modernisation and Innovation Funds. All in all, the Just Transition Mechanism could be seen as the main just transition policy instrument at the EU level.

Some soft-law recommendations also accompany the EU Just Transition Mechanism. In December 2021, the European Commission came out with a new Proposal for a Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality, which underlined how different sectors, regions and groups – not just coal and carbon-intensive industries – are going to face challenges in the green transition. This Proposal aims "to ensure that the Union's transition towards a climate-neutral and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050 is fair and leaves nobody behind" by inviting Member States "to adopt and, in close cooperation with social partners as relevant, implement comprehensive and coherent policy packages, addressing the employment and social aspects to promote a fair transition across all policies" (European Commission, 2021c: 24). Another soft-law instrument contributing to just transition is the European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience (European Commission, 2020j). This Agenda, which comprises a set of targets and guidelines, explicitly acknowledges the need to provide people with "green" skills as a way to enable their participation in a decarbonised labour market, advocating the development of a "European competence framework on education for climate change, environmental issues, clean energy transition and sustainable development" (European Commission, 2020j: 13).

The financial resources mobilized through the Just Transition Fund – and by extension the Just Transition Mechanism – should be allocated to two principal priorities. First, it may support the creation of new jobs in the green economy, as well as the parallel economic diversification and green transition of industries in carbon-intensive economies. Second, it should also finance active labour market policies, hence facilitating people's employment and skills development, with a particular attention to jobseekers and redundant workers of carbon-intensive facilities. In sum, analysing the Just Transition Mechanism and related EU measures, we can conclude that these instruments are markedly *investment-oriented*. The main rationale behind EU just transition instruments is to enhance people's participation in the green economy, as opposed to concentrating on compensating for decarbonisation-related social risks through more traditional social protection measures, which are noticeably absent among EU just transition instruments (Sabato et al., 2021).

Finally, when it comes to the *governance* component of EU JTPs, existing procedures and institutional structures were designed in connection to the above-mentioned policy instruments. The Territorial Just Transition Plans are intended to underpin the delivery of the Just Transition Fund, which functions under the principle of "shared management", that is one for which the European Commission and Member States must jointly specify the governance mechanisms for allocated funds. The Territorial Just Transition Plans should be the main outcome of a multilevel governance process, involving supranational, national and regional/local authorities, as well as different stakeholders. Through these Plans, Member States are required to identify beneficiary territories, assess their vulnerabilities and outline the characteristics of the projects that they wish to finance (European Commission, 2020c). The European Commission has provided Member States with some tailored guidelines on the preparation of the Territorial Just Transition Plans through Annexes D to the 2020 Country Reports of the European Semester (European Commission, 2020d). Reading these Annexes, it becomes apparent that the focus is once again mostly on regions and territories highly dependent on fossil fuel mining, extraction and energy production. However, territories dependent on carbon-intensive industries have also been identified as potential beneficiaries of the Just Transition Fund in several countries. These include sectors such as metals (AT, FR, IT, SE, SK, RO, EE, LU); chemicals (DE, AT, RO, HR, FR, CZ); cement (DK, LU, DE, CY, HU, HR, RO, SK); and fertilisers (RO, LT).

Also relevant to the governance component is the Just Transition Platform. This is intended to assist local and regional governments in gaining access to the resources of the Just Transition Mechanism, supporting Member States in preparing their Territorial Just Transition Plans and providing different stakeholders – including civil society organizations, social partners and local authorities – with a platform to exchange best practices and build capacity. This Platform is built upon and enlarges the scope of the previous experience of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition, established in the context of the Clean Energy for all Europeans package to provide technical assistance and capacity-building to regions across Europe undergoing a transition away from fossil fuels, such as coal, peat and oil shale (European Commission 2016).

All in all, the governance component of EU just transition policies lies somewhere in between a *participated* and a *concentrated* model. Formalized procedures through the Territorial Just Transition Plans and the Just Transition Platform enable an inclusive governance process, which should give voice to different non-governmental actors in the implementation of EU funds. However, stakeholders can merely be engaged for consultative purposes, but they are excluded from decision-making, as the power to allocate financial resources remains a remit of national governments in a multilevel coordination with the European Union. Table 2.2 summarises the three components of EU JTPs, providing a short description, as well as an assessment of each component based on the analytical framework presented in the previous Chapter.

**Table 2.2: *European Union's Just Transition Policies*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| **JTP Components** | **Description** | **Analysis** |
|---|---|---|
| *Strategy* | Just transition to "leave no one behind" as an objective of the European Green Deal, in connection with the European Pillar of Social Rights | Narrow: sectoral-territorial scope and short-term scale, although the connection with the Pillar might allow a broadening of this strategy in the future |
| *Instruments* | Just Transition Mechanism and related Fund (+ related soft-law recommendations) | Investment-oriented: financial resources are to be allocated primarily for economic diversification, green jobs creation and active labour market policies |
| *Governance* | Territorial Just Transition Plans & Just Transition Platform | Mixed model: inclusive multistakeholder procedures and structures, but the rules concentrate decision-making powers in the hands of |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | national governments and EU institutions |

## 3. Mapping just transition policies in the National Energy and Climate Plans

Under the European Green Deal and with its pledge to reach climate neutrality by 2050, EU countries should all be undergoing a process of industrial decarbonisation. This, as stated, is inevitably expected to bring about some social consequences, both positive and negative. The EU is addressing such consequences through the European Green Deal and the Just Transition Mechanism, which should partially help accompanying Member States' decarbonisation efforts. However, besides implementing funds and facilities set up at the supranational level, little is known about whether and how national governments have adopted their own just transition policies ate the domestic level. This is unsurprising if one considers the widespread lack of empirical policy analysis studies in this field. While some studies have already investigated EU-level JTPs (e.g., Petmesidou and Guillén, 2022; Sabato et al., 2021; Sabato and Fronteddu, 2020), a focus on the national level is instead largely missing, preventing us from fully grasping how the empirical landscape of European just transition policies currently looks like. This Section is dedicated to filling this gap, through a mapping of EU Member States' JTPs , which is performed by systematically analysing how the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) address the social implications of decarbonisation.

### *3.1. Methodological premises*

Introduced under the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union as part of the Clean Energy for all Europeans package (European Union, 2018b), the NECPs are integrated multiannual plans covering the period between 2021 and 2030. They are intended to monitor national performances with respect to the targets of the Energy Union, mainly in the areas of decarbonisation, energy efficiency and renewable energy. Member States were asked to submit draft NECPs by the end of 2018 and a final version in late 2019, taking stock of the European Commission's recommendations. The NECPs have been chosen here as the reference documents for the analysis because they are supposed to contain – among other things – indications about how Member States address, or are planning to address, the social impacts of their climate/energy policies, mainly in terms of employment, skills and distributional challenges. In this respect, recital 19 of the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union

states that “a socially acceptable and just transition to a sustainable low-carbon economy requires changes in investment behaviour, […] taking into consideration citizens on whom and regions on which the transition to a low-carbon economy could have adverse impacts”, and, hence, the final NECPs should “address the social and territorial implications that the clean energy transition can have” (European Commission, 2020k: 14). Specifically, subsection 5.2. of each NECP contains an analysis of “employment and education, skills and social impacts, including just transition aspects (in terms of costs and benefits as well as cost-effectiveness)” (e.g. Government of Ireland, 2020a: 255). Thus, we expect the NECPs to mention existing and foreseen national just transition policies, if any.

A systematic mapping of both existing initiatives and announced commitments, cited in the NECPs as a means to address the social implications of decarbonisation, has been performed through a manual qualitative textual analysis of the final NECPs. This was done first by analytically reading subsections 5.2., and, second, by searching for keywords such as “employment”, “jobs”, “education”, “training”, “skills”, “social”, “just(ice)”, “fair(ness)”, “equal(ity)” in the NECP of each Member State. As a cross-check, this was complemented by an analytical reading of the 27 Staff Working Documents with which the European Commission assessed each final NECP, with a special focus on the parts regarding Member States’ responses to the Commission’s invitation “to develop clearer strategies and objectives through a crosscutting approach to identify and measure the social, employment and skills consequences and other distributional impacts of the energy transition and give proper consideration on how to address these challenges” (European Commission 2020k: 14). A complete list of the documents analysed could be found in the “Policy documents & press sources” section of the List of References.

The NECPs analysis was meant to map existing or proposed national just transition policies. Any eventual other public policy identified in the mapping exercise, but not responding to the definition of just transition policy here provided, was discarded[19]. Afterwards, identified JTPs were organized along the three components of the analytical framework presented in the previous Chapter, that is separating strategies, instruments and governance mechanisms. This

[19] As stated multiple times, this research focuses specifically on the social implications of industrial decarbonisation, hence disregarding other possible eco-social risks connected to climate and energy policies. One key example, which could be found in nearly all NECP, is the eco-social policies put forward to fight energy poverty.

was done for each EU Member State by assigning positive, negative and uncertain scores to the following three criteria, expressed in the form of questions: i) does the NECP mention existing/proposed strategies (i.e. comprising goals, as well as a plan of actions to achieve them)?; ii) does the NECP mention existing/proposed policy instruments (i.e. tools targeted to affected agents)?; iii) does the NECP mention existing/proposed governance structures (i.e. institutional structures and formalised procedures for stakeholders engagement)?

The NECPs are appropriate documents to identify national just transition policies because, as stated above, they invite Member States to illustrate what they are doing to tackle the social consequences of decarbonisation. Nevertheless, an assessment limited solely to these documents inherently entails some major shortcomings, which is worth keeping in mind. First, despite having been published only a few years ago, the NECPs might already be outdated in some respects, hence not capturing more recent developments in a policy field that is evolving at a very fast speed. Second, since the European Commission did not give precise binding guidelines to Member States on how to draft their NECPs – especially with respect to their social dimension – it is possible that the information reported in the NECPs is not exhaustive, potentially lacking important details or omitting relevant information. Third and finally, the mapping exercise performed here only considers national initiatives and proposals as described in the NECPs. Therefore, the information reported here has not been cross-checked by reading the actual national documents mentioned in the NECPs.

The results of the cross-country mapping exercise are reported in more detail in Annex A and summarized in Table 2.3. For each component of JTPs, a positive score ("+") was given to a country when its NECP mentions just transition policies that have already been adopted, while a negative score ("-") signifies that these policies are missing in that country. Finally, an uncertain score ("?") was attributed when the NECP mentions the country's intention to adopt JTPs in the future, but it also states that these policies remained merely provisional commitments[20]. The following Sections provide more details about EU countries' just transition strategies, instruments and governance frameworks.

[20] Although several NECPs mention generic commitments to address the social implications of decarbonisation, an uncertain score ("?") was attributed only insofar as some details are provided to make sure that a proposal can actually be defined as a provisional JTP. Where no detail is provided on a country's commitment, the NECP was attributed a negative score ("-").

**Table 2.3:** ***EU Member States' just transition policies (by component)*** (source: author's own elaboration based on the NECPs analysis)

| EU Countries (& abbreviations) | STRATEGY | INSTRUMENT | GOVERNANCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Austria (AT) | - | - | - |
| Belgium (BE) | - | ? | - |
| Bulgaria (BG) | - | - | - |
| Cyprus (CY) | - | - | - |
| **Czechia (CZ)** | **+** | **+** | **+** |
| **Germany (DE)** | **+** | **+** | **+** |
| Denmark (DK) | - | ? | - |
| Estonia (EE) | ? | ? | - |
| **Greece (EL)** | **+** | **+** | **+** |
| **Spain (ES)** | **+** | **+** | **+** |
| Finland (FI) | - | - | ? |
| France (FR) | ? | ? | ? |
| Croatia (HR) | - | - | - |
| Hungary (HU) | ? | ? | - |
| **Ireland (IE)** | **+** | **+** | **+** |
| Italy (IT) | - | **+** | ? |
| Lithuania (LT) | - | ? | - |
| Luxembourg (LU) | - | - | - |
| Latvia (LV) | - | ? | - |
| Malta (MT) | - | - | - |
| **Netherlands (NL)** | **+** | **+** | **+** |
| Poland (PL) | ? | **+** | - |
| Portugal (PT) | ? | ? | ? |
| Romania (RO) | - | **+** | - |
| Sweden (SE) | - | - | - |
| Slovenia (SI) | ? | ? | - |
| Slovakia (SK) | **+** | **+** | - |

### *3.2. The strategic component of JTPs*

The strategic dimension is measured by checking whether countries have explicitly integrated social objectives (as well as plans of action) into their national climate and/or decarbonisation policies. Only seven out of 27 NECPs (CZ, DE, EL, ES, IE, NL, SK) mention just transition strategies. References to a "just" – or "fair", or "equitable" – transition are mentioned by 13 NECPs, although some countries (DK, FI, LV, RO) have not explicitly translated this objective into any

strategy. Conversely, Spain, Greece and Ireland are the only three countries that have adopted a strategy that is explicitly making reference to “just transition” as its core objective, whereas other countries (EE, HU, FR, PT, PL, SI) have committed to do the same in the future. Although they have integrated social objectives into their climate or energy strategies, Czechia, Germany, the Netherlands and Slovakia did it without relying expressly on the just transition notion.

We can divide existing just transition strategies into two categories. First, some countries (CZ, DE, EL, ES, SK) adopted plans specifically dedicated to coal phase-out, integrating there a social dimension. In Germany, the Final Report of the Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment provides recommendations on how to phase out coal-fired power generation by 2038 in a socially responsible manner. When the final NECP came out, the German Federal Cabinet was in the process of converting these recommendations into a bill (Government of Germany, 2020). In Czechia, Greece and Slovakia just transition strategies are dedicated to specific territories. The 2015 Czech RESTART Programme is described in the NECP as a “comprehensive framework for the restructuring of the Ústí, Moravian-Silesian and Karlovy Vary regions, which should contribute to the fair transformation of coal regions” (Government of Czechia, 2019: 314). This RESTART Programme sets the government’s long-term objectives for the restructuring of the lignite sector, including for “Social Stabilisation”, and provides for region-specific periodic Action Plans. The Just Development Transition Master Plan, adopted by the Greek government in 2020, is described as an “integrated, multi-faceted and front-loaded” (Government of Greece, 2019: 6) plan with financial and non-financial initiatives for workers and communities of territories experiencing lignite phase-out in Western Macedonia and Megalopolis. The objectives of such a Plan include “investment and tax incentives, new infrastructures, new technologies, utilising local natural resources, supporting agricultural production and tourism, retraining workers, securing existing jobs and creating new ones through flexible developmental transformation and through growth in all production sectors” (Government of Greece, 2019: 97). Finally, in Slovakia, The Upper Nitra Development Action Plan was approved in July 2019 to address, among other challenges, the employment impacts of coal mining reduction, as well as local development issues (Government of Slovakia, 2019).

A second set of countries that adopted just transition strategies include Ireland, Spain and the Netherlands. Unlike the other strategies described above, these countries constructed theirs by adding a social dimension to climate policies, hence going beyond the mere issue of fossil fuels phase-out. In the Netherlands, the Social and Economic Council issued recommendations in

2018 to boost the opportunities and absorb the social risks of the transition, which were then transposed into the national Climate Agreement (Government of the Netherlands, 2019). Also in the context of the Dutch national Climate Agreement, the government committed to establish sectoral (including in the electricity and industry sectors) educational and labour market agendas to be updated regularly (Government of the Netherlands, 2019). In Ireland, "just transition" is an explicit objective of the 2019 Climate Action Plan, which sets a series of objectives and actions so that "the burdens borne [from the Climate Action Plan] are seen to be fair and that every group is seen to be making an appropriate level of effort" (Government of Ireland, 2020a: 122). Furthermore, the Irish NECP contains a proposal to put forward five-years Just Transition Strategies. Throughout Europe, Spain is the only country where a just transition is pursued with an ad hoc Just Transition Strategy connected to climate policies, as opposed to being mainstreamed into climate policies. According to the Spanish NECP, this Strategy adopted in 2019 "[is] based on the criteria of equity and solidarity [and] designed to anticipate and manage the impact on regions that host technologies that will be progressively displaced as a result of the transition promoted by this Plan and for people directly involved in them" (Government of Spain, 2020a: 8).

Although only seven EU countries adopted actual just transition strategies, several other NECPs feature general commitments to promote a socially just decarbonisation. This is the case of proposed plans for the fossil fuel sectors in Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. The Estonian NECP commits to supplement the phase out from oil shale mining in the Ida-Virumaa County with a just transition approach (Government of Estonia, 2109). The Hungarian NECP pledges to pay attention to economic diversification and just transition aspects in the revitalisation of the lignite-powered Mátra power plant, including through dedicated just transition strategies or agreements for women and vulnerable social groups (Government of Hungary, 2019). The Polish NECP makes several references to the concept of a just transition and commits to develop a "restructuring plan for hard coal and lignite mining areas" (Government of Poland, 2019a: 94) entailing an in-depth social, employment and skills impact assessment of the transition in mining regions. Finally, the Slovenian NECP mentions the government's intention to draft a strategy for abandoning coal use and restructuring coal regions in accordance with the just transition principle (Government of Slovenia, 2020). The French and Portuguese NECPs also contain commitments to deliver on a just transition, going beyond the fossil fuel sector. The French NECP mentions that "a fair transition for everyone" (Government of France, 2020: 87) will be included

among the cross-sectoral guidelines of the National Low-Carbon Strategy, whereas "Action Strategy No. 8.1." of the Portuguese NECP is intended to develop a "'Fair Transition Strategy" in the future, with a view to highlight opportunities and risks associated with decarbonisation (Government of Portugal, 2019: 107).

### *3.3. The instrument component of JTPs*

With respect to the instrument component, it can be clearly seen from Table 2.3 that, almost everywhere in Europe, governments have developed, or are at least planning to develop, some measures to address the social impacts of decarbonisation. Notable exceptions include Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta and Sweden. This result seems to indicate a positive trend with respect to the spreading of just transitions policies across Europe. Nevertheless, not all the instruments identified are described with much detail in the NECPs, nor do all NECPs cite existing measures, but often rather general commitments, which is why many countries have been attributed only an uncertain score ("?") in Table 2.3. As predictable, countries that score positively on the strategic dimension also do so on the instrument dimension, meaning that their NECP mentions policy instruments to deliver on the objectives set at the strategic level. However, the cases of Italy, Poland and Romania show how policy instruments to address the social consequences of decarbonisation can exist also in the absence of a strategy.

The type of tools identified in the mapping exercise varies considerably. They include (i) active labour market policies targeted at workers made redundant by decarbonisation; (ii) passive labour market policies targeted at workers made redundant by decarbonisation; (iii) funds for the socio-economic development of regions particularly badly affected by decarbonisation; and (iv) education and training measures fostering the development of skills for green jobs in the whole population or workforce, hence beyond redundant workers. Table 2.4 classifies just transition policy instruments identified in the NECPs into these four types[21].

[21] Like for Table 2.2, countries in Table 2.3 are attributed a positive score ("+") when the instruments mentioned in the NECPs are already in place, an uncertain score ("?") when the NECP features a policy committment and a negative score ("-") when no just transition instrument is mentioned in the NECP.

**Table 2.4:** ***EU Member States' just transition instruments (by policy tool types)*** (source: author's own elaboration based on the NECPs analysis)

| EU Countries (& abbreviations) | Active labour market policy | Passive labour market policy | Socio-economic development fund | Education & training |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Austria (AT) | - | - | - | - |
| Belgium (BE) | - | - | - | ? |
| Bulgaria (BG) | - | - | - | - |
| Cyprus (CY) | - | - | - | - |
| Czechia (CZ) | - | + | + | ? |
| Germany (DE) | - | + | + | - |
| Denmark (DK) | - | - | - | ? |
| Estonia (EE) | ? | - | ? | - |
| Greece (EL) | + | - | + | ? |
| Spain (ES) | + | + | + | ? |
| Finland (FI) | - | - | - | - |
| France (FR) | ? | - | - | ? |
| Croatia (HR) | - | - | - | - |
| Hungary (HU) | ? | - | - | - |
| Ireland (IE) | + | - | + | ? |
| Italy (IT) | + | - | - | - |
| Lithuania (LT) | - | - | - | ? |
| Luxembourg (LU) | - | - | - | - |
| Latvia (LV) | ? | - | - | - |
| Malta (MT) | - | - | - | - |
| Netherlands (NL) | + | - | - | ? |
| Poland (PL) | ? | - | + | - |
| Portugal (PT) | - | - | - | ? |
| Romania (RO) | - | + | ? | ? |
| Sweden (SE) | - | - | - | - |
| Slovenia (SI) | - | - | - | ? |
| Slovakia (SK) | - | + | - | - |

Education and training measures[22] are the most prevalent across EU Member States (BE, CZ, DK, EL, ES, FR, IE, LT, NL, PT, RO, SI). Nevertheless, noticeably, these countries all put forward only generic proposals to improve education curricula or to develop training facilities for green skills

[22] Education and training instruments do not entail reskilling measures for jobseekers and workers made redundant by industrial decarbonisation, since these are included among active labour market policies.

in the future. It should also be pointed out that a number of other NECPs (AT, BG, CY, DE, EE, HR) do take into account the importance of green training and education. Nevertheless, they do not set out any specific proposals, which is why they have been attributed a negative score ("-"). Therefore, besides vague commitments, the NECPs analysis indicates that no EU country has put forward education or training measures to accompany industrial decarbonisation yet.

Active labour market instruments aim to improve or reorient redundant workers' skills and to facilitate jobseekers' relocation in a transformed labour market. Greece, Spain Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands allocate financial resources to this end, while other countries (EE, FR, HU, LV, PL) pledge to do so in the future. Among existing active labour market instruments, only the Netherlands provides funds that are not limited to workers of the fossil fuel sector but targeted also at those employed in electricity, industry, agriculture, the built environment and mobility. The Dutch NECP states that the government has decided to create a €22 million facility to address the employment effects of the energy transition by providing "from-work-to-work" guidance and reskilling (Government of the Netherlands, 2019: 79). In Italy, "Decree-Law No 101 of 3 September 2019 established that from 2020 to 2024 the amount exceeding €1,000 million of the proceeds from the auctions for the allocation of EU [Emissions Trading Scheme] quotas, for a maximum of €20 million per year, will be channelled to the 'Fund for vocational retraining in areas in which coal-fired power plants are located'" (Government of Italy, 2019: 313). In Ireland, a national Just Transition Fund has been set up, among other priorities, to provide support for the retraining and reskilling of workers (Government of Ireland, 2020a). In Spain and Greece, active labour market policies for coal and lignite workers are provided respectively in the framework of an Urgent Action Plan for Coal-mining Regions and Power Plant Closures (Government of Spain, 2020a) and a Just Development Transition Master Plan (government of Greece, 2019).

Passive labour market instruments can be found in coal- or lignite-intensive countries (CZ, DE, ES, RO, SK), where governments provide – as part of state aid to the fossil fuel sector – direct monetary compensation to workers. In many of these cases, state aid was originally meant to address the economic crisis of the coal sector, hence, it was not initially meant to achieve decarbonisation, but it was later recalibrated to this purpose. This is the case of Czechia, which in 1992 put forward a plan to end coal mining in uneconomic underground mines and quarries, covering the social costs of phasing out mining activities for workers and communities in lignite regions, for instance through health benefits for miners (Government of Czechia, 2019). State

aid was also put forward in 2014 and 2017 in Slovakia "to cover extraordinary costs associated with the Hornonitrianske bane Prievidza a.s. Cigel' mine" (Government of Slovakia, 2019: 220). With a 2019 Government Emergency Order for the Valea Jiului region, Romania granted "monthly supplementary income […] as a social protection measure, which is received by the persons made redundant from the companies for which the granting of State aid was approved in order to facilitate the closure of uncompetitive coal mines" (Government of Romania, 2020: 206). Finally, the German NECP mentions that the government will guarantee "transition monies to workers employed in the hard-coal mining sector", i.e. "subsidies for the early retirement of employees leaving the hard-coal mining industry" (Government of Germany, 2020: 84) provided in the context of the arrangements for ending hard-coal mining.

Another widespread just transition policy instrument implemented by some countries (CZ, DE, EL, ES, IE, PL) and soon to be implemented in Estonia and Romania is development funding for economic diversification and job creation (away from fossil fuels) in coal-dependent regions or territories. The Polish government put forward a national development Programme for Silesia in 2017, as well as other regional strategies for the transformation of coal regions, including the Sudety Strategy 2030 in Lower Silesia; the Clean Air Programme in Małopolska; and a transition strategy for the Wielkopolska region, which was still under preparation when the NECP was published (Government of Poland, 2019a). In Czechia, there are periodic territorial development action plans for the implementation of the RESTART Programme in the Ústí, Moravian-Silesian and Karlovy Vary regions, as well as financial envelopes attached to them (Government of Czechia, 2019). National Just Transition Funds are put forward in Greece, targeting lignite regions with the revenue from the auctioning of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme allowances (albeit reduced) (Government of Greece, 2019), and Ireland, targeting the Midlands region undergoing peat phase-out (Government of Ireland, 2020a). Finally, the German NECP mentions the existence of a Structural Development Act for the Coal Regions, put forward in 2019 to channel funds to regions affected by the phasing-out of coal-fired power generation (Government of Germany, 2020).

Finally, it would also be important to stress that several NECPs acknowledge EU funds and facilities as key sources to address the social consequences of decarbonisation at the national level (BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, HU, IE, LV, PL, PT, RO). Mentioned EU measures mainly include the financial resources provided by the EU Just Transition Mechanism and Fund, as well as the soft-law Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition, providing technical assistance to fossil fuel-intensive

territories. Although these EU facilities cannot be counted as proper national instruments (and hence they are not included in Table 2.3), they are nonetheless presented in the NECPs as important tools complementing – or in some cases even substituting – national just transition policies.

### *3.4. The governance component of JTPs*

Besides strategies and instruments, governance structures are another fundamental component of any just transition policy mix, as they are key to increasing social consensus and reducing conflicts around decarbonisation. To measure this governance dimension, one has to check whether the NECP mentions established or planned governance structures set up to address the social implications of decarbonisation. Most NECPs score nil in this measurement. Perhaps unsurprisingly, wherever there are no just transition strategies, governance schemes are also lacking. Conversely, Slovakia lacks any governance structure, despite having a just transition strategy in place. With respect to the governance component, two aspects were considered in the NECPs mapping exercise in order to attribute positive scores (or uncertain scores, in case of an announced commitment) to European countries: the presence of formalised procedures for stakeholder engagement and the presence of dedicated institutional structures for the governance of just transition policies.

With respect to stakeholders' engagement, several countries have put forward multi-stakeholder platforms dedicated to decarbonisation and just transition. In Czechia, a Coal Commission was established in 2019, chaired by the Minister of Industry and Trade together with the Minister of the Environment with the aim of "assessing the future needs of lignite" and analysing "the possibilities of future diversion from coal" (Government of Czechia, 2019: 315). The Czech Coal Commission and its three working groups are composed of 19 members, including ministries and governmental offices, trade unions, industrial associations, non-profit organisations, regions, members of the Chamber of Deputies and academics. A similar governance structure was put forward in Germany, with the Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment, established in 2018 by the government and comprising several stakeholders tasked with formulating recommendations on German energy policies and, more specifically, on coal phase-out (Government of Germany, 2020). Similarly, yet relying on already-existing institutions and involving stakeholders for consultative rather than decision-making reasons, Ireland and the Netherlands mandated their national Economic and Social Councils to

provide the government with participated recommendations on the social dimension of decarbonisation.

To enable the preparation of their just transition strategies, Greece, Ireland and Spain have established ad-hoc institutional structures and formalized rules. In Spain, a Just Transition Institute was created within the Ministry for Ecological Transition. This Institute is responsible for the creation and implementation of Just Transition Agreements, which are targeted at sectors or territories facing the greatest risk from decarbonisation and which aim to involve local authorities, business organisations, trade unions and other social organisations (Government of Spain, 2020a). The fact that stakeholders are not just involved in the governance of JTPs, but also given decision-making powers (through the Just Transition Institute and Just Transition Agreements) makes the Spanish case stand out among all others, where non-governmental agents are merely consulted. In Greece, there is an Inter-ministerial Committee coordinating and laying down the priorities for the Just Development Transition Master Plan and there were also coordinated procedures for the drafting of this Master Plan, open to local communities – i.e. regions, municipalities, chambers – and other stakeholders (Government of Greece, 2019). Finally, the Irish government appointed a Just Transition Commissioner, with the specific duty to engage with all relevant stakeholders in the Midlands (Government of Ireland, 2020a; Government of the Netherlands, 2019).

The French, Italian, Portuguese and Finnish NECPs mention these countries' intention to put forward governance structures for a just transition. The French NECP states that the National Council for Ecological Transition, which includes "representatives of each group within civil society, e.g. representatives of workers and employers, consumer rights activists, environmental NGOs, local authorities and members of parliament" (Government of France, 2020:47), has issued an Opinion in 2019 highlighting "the importance of the economic and social impacts of the guidelines outlined in the [National Low-carbon Strategy] and the need for supporting measures" (Government of France, 2020: 50). The Italian NECP pledges to organise sectoral working groups withing the Ministry of Economic Development to assess the technical and regulatory conditions, the necessary infrastructure and the best means to safeguard jobs in industrial and carbon-intensive regions particularly affected by decarbonisation policies (Government of Italy, 2019). In Finland, a broad-based Peat Industry Working Group will be established to ensure that the government's upcoming effort to halve the use of peat by 2030 are delivered with geographic and social fairness (Government of Finland, 2019). Finally, in the

Portuguese NECP, the government commits to ensure that the foreseen Fair Transition Strategy will be designed through a multi-stakeholder process (Government of Portugal, 2019).

**4. Summing up: the limited diffusion of just transition policies in Europe**

Just transition is becoming an increasingly popular narrative at the EU level, but deriving public policies remain arguably limited. At the EU level, the European Green Deal, together with the European Pillar of Social Rights, constitutes the main strategic framework for a just transition, that is implemented primarily though instruments and governance procedures related to the Just Transition Mechanism. Although the European Pillar of Social Rights provides a broad social rulebook that should inform the EU's climate mitigation efforts, in reality, the European Union is promoting a narrow understanding of just transition, which focuses solely on the most pressing challenges of phasing out fossil fuels and, to a less, extent, decarbonisation in hard-to-abate sectors. The EU is also endorsing a strikingly investment-oriented understanding of just transition – with the Just Transition Mechanism channelling funds for active labour market policies and economic development – an approach that should not only address the social risks arising from decarbonisation, but also ultimately contribute to promote green growth. Governance mechanisms such as the Just Transition Platform and the Territorial Just Transition Plans should ensure an inclusive – multilevel and multistakeholder – implementation of just transition in the EU, but the engagement of stakeholders is limited to consultative purposes.

At the national level, the comparative analysis of the National Energy Climate Plans has brough to light some puzzling results when it comes to the diffusion of just transition policies in Europe. The first and most notable result of the NECPs mapping exercise is that national just transition policies are still relatively rare across Europe. Only six EU countries – Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands – have adopted comprehensive JTPs, comprising strategies, instruments and governance mechanisms. Four other countries (IT, PL, RO, SK) have adopted policies that do not comprise all the three components of a just transition policy, but rather just some policy instruments without a governance, nor a strategic component, while in Slovakia only the governance component is missing. Therefore, only in 10 NECPs we can detect measures that are already in place to face the social risks of decarbonisation. Figure 2.3 and the second column of Table 2.5 indicate these 10 countries, distinguishing those that have adopted JTPs that are comprehensive of all the three key components (indicated with a "+" sign in Table 2.5

and coloured with dark green in Figure 2.3), from those that introduced partial JTPs (indicated with the "+/-" sign in Table 2.5 and coloured with light green in Figure 2.3).

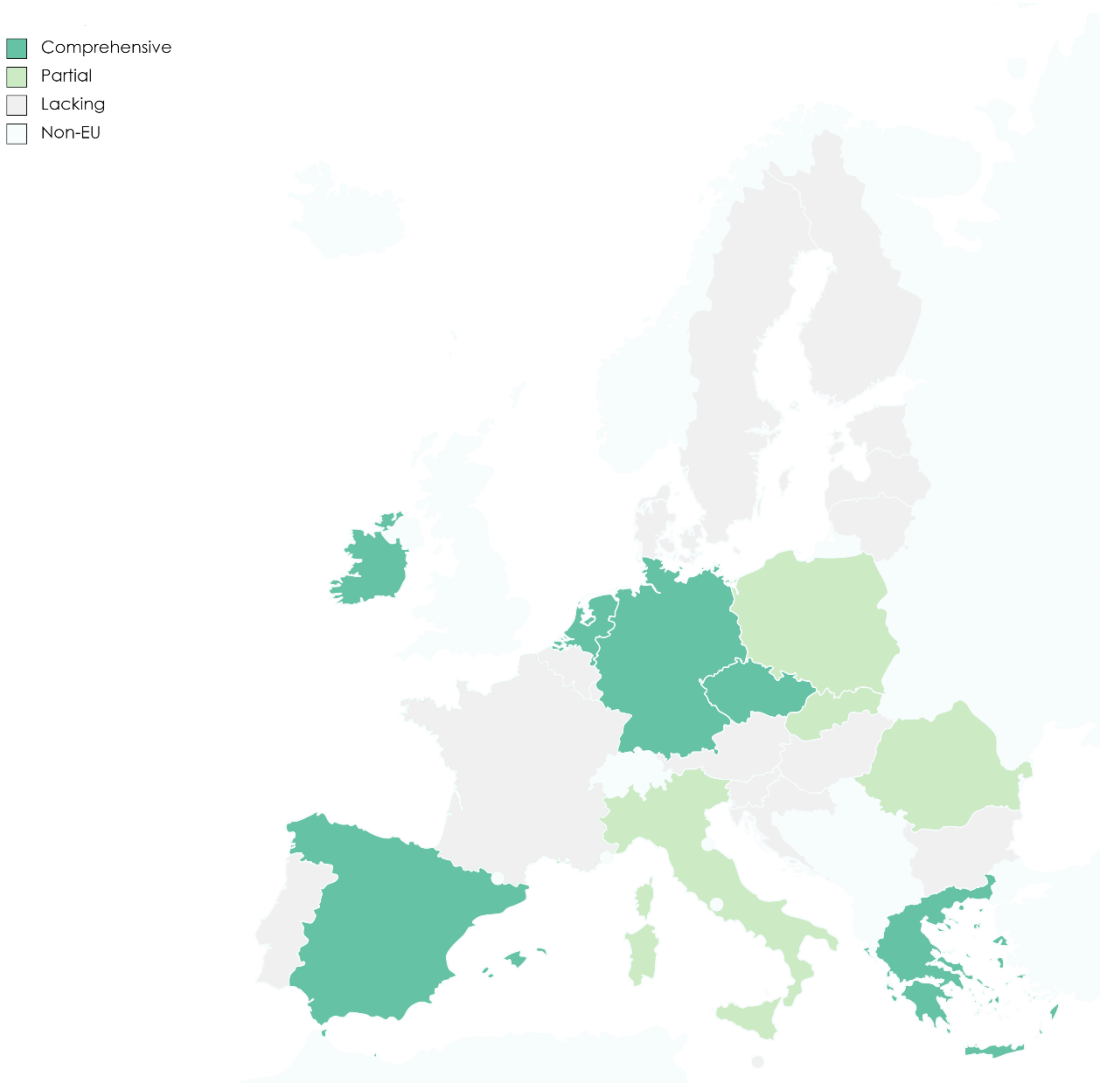


**Figure 2.3*: Just Transition Policies in the EU*** (author's own elaboration based on the NECPs analysis)

The scarcity of just transition policies observed in the mapping exercise can be expected to change soon, since several countries have put forward commitments in their NECPs to develop JTPs in the future. Moreover, considering that the EU has now been profusely promoting the just transition narrative for a few years, we can expect that new policies have already emerged since the publication of the NECPs. Nevertheless, in many cases, countries' commitments to introduce just transition policies are arguably vague and not attached to any strict timeline. Furthermore, the NECPs analysis also shows that seven out of out of twenty-seven NECPs (AT, BG, CY, HR, LU, MT, SE) do not even mention any commitment to develop policies addressing

the social consequences of decarbonisation. This last result is particularly puzzling since the seven countries are largely different: the group includes a Nordic Member State, alongside Western and Centre-eastern European countries, as well as a couple of small or peripheral states.

With respect to the content of the just transition policies, the mapping exercise shows that the ten EU Member States where JTPs have been identified promote an understanding of just transition that is not so distant from the EU's own understanding. First, just transition in these countries most often has a narrow scope, with deriving policies mainly targeting challenges that are identified as the most urgent. This translates into an almost exclusive attention to what can be regarded as the "low-hanging fruits" of decarbonisation – i.e. mostly coal, with a more marginal role for other fossil fuels and for energy-intensive industries. As a consequence, in most countries, just transition policies are constructed by adding a social dimension to decarbonisation policies and, in particular, to policies for the phase out of fossil fuels. Only Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands have adopted a different approach, putting forward strategies that aim to add a social dimension to climate mitigation policies, hence potentially addressing – at least on paper – broader issues beyond the most urgent challenges arising from cutting coal, peat or oil shale out of national energy mixes.

Second, the comparative assessment of EU Member States' National Energy and Climate Plans shows that most countries overstate the role of investment-oriented measures as the preferred means to address the new social risks generated by decarbonisation. This implies that several European countries have formulated JTPs as active labour market policies, training and education policies and development funds. All in all, in Europe, investment-oriented instruments outnumber protection-oriented ones, since the main logic is primarily to enhance people's participation in a new decarbonised economy and society – hence directly contributing to green growth – as opposed to compensating people for the losses they might unfairly experience in decarbonisation. More traditional protection-oriented instruments are less diffused and they are relegated to traditional passive labour market policies for the redundant workers of coal mines. These passive instruments were originally conceived to accompany state aids to the coal industry and, hence, they were just recently recalibrated as tools to deliver on a just decarbonisation.

Third, and finally, when present, the governance component of JTPs enables various European countries to provide inclusive procedures, engaging multiple stakeholders in the implementation of just transition strategies and instruments. Besides formalised procedures, dedicated institutional structures for the implementation of JTPs can be found in three countries (ES, EL, IE). Inclusive governance procedures prevent – at least partially – power concentration and contribute to delivering on procedural justice, especially for the societal groups most affected by decarbonisation. Nevertheless, in most cases – with the exception of Spain – non-governmental agents are merely consulted through ad-hoc procedures and/or institutions, whereas implementation powers remain exclusively in the hands of governmental agents.

The most relevant finding of the NECPs analysis is that a considerable number of EU countries has not put forward any just transition policies to tackle the social challenges of decarbonisation. This might be explained by the fact that not all countries necessarily expect to face these challenges. Therefore, to test this claim, as a final step in the analysis, a new Table 2.5 juxtaposes the results of the JTPs mapping exercise with a new criterion measuring whether the NECPs acknowledge the negative social trade-offs of decarbonisation. As evident, most EU Member States at least partially expect that the energy transition will bring about some negative consequences (denoted with an "X" in Table 2.5). Conversely, most Nordic and some medium-to-small-sized European countries (AT, DK, FI, HR, LT, LU, MT, SE) do not expect significant negative social impacts worth addressing, which most likely explains why none of these countries has adopted any eco-social policies. In the rest of the EU, trade-offs are expected to arise especially in the extractive sector, in fossil fuel-based energy production, in energy-intensive industries and, less frequently, in other economic sectors, such as automotive, transport, agriculture and land use. Finally, it is important to highlight that the mere acknowledgement of the social risks of decarbonisation is not necessary for JTPs to emerge, since many countries (BE, BG, CY, EE, FR, HU, LV, PT, SI), despite expecting some negative social impacts, have yet to adopt eco-social policies to tackle such impacts.

**Table 2.5:** ***EU Member States' just transition policies & the social risks or decarbonisation*** (source: author's own elaboration based on the NECPs analysis)

| EU Countries (& abbreviations) | Just transition policies | Trade-offs recognised |
|---|---|---|
| Austria (AT) | - | - |
| Belgium (BE) | - | X |
| Bulgaria (BG) | - | X |
| Cyprus (CY) | - | X |
| **Czechia (CZ)** | **+** | X |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Germany (DE)** | **+** | X |
| Denmark (DK) | - | - |
| Estonia (EE) | - | X |
| **Greece (EL)** | **+** | X |
| **Spain (ES)** | **+** | X |
| Finland (FI) | - | - |
| France (FR) | - | X |
| Croatia (HR) | - | - |
| Hungary (HU) | - | X |
| **Ireland (IE)** | **+** | X |
| Italy (IT) | +/- | X |
| Lithuania (LT) | - | - |
| Luxembourg (LU) | - | - |
| Latvia (LV) | - | X |
| Malta (MT) | - | - |
| **Netherlands (NL)** | **+** | X |
| Poland (PL) | +/- | X |
| Portugal (PT) | - | X |
| Romania (RO) | +/- | X |
| Sweden (SE) | - | - |
| Slovenia (SI) | - | X |
| Slovakia (SK) | +/- | X |

The current application of the just transition concept in Europe is starting to raise some eyebrows, since it is often endorsed by fossil fuel-intensive climate stragglers, whose decarbonisation policies are among the least ambitious in Europe. While this may seem like a nonsensical result, it can actually be explained by looking at the contested nature of the just transition concept, which can assume different meanings for different actors. In the case of climate stragglers, just transition is used as a pretext to slow down decarbonisation efforts, with the allegation that abandoning fossil fuels would be too socially disruptive. Thus, in these cases, there is going to be a mismatch between the declared eco-social intentions of just transition policies and their actual non-ecological – and sometimes also unjust – impacts. Perhaps this is nowhere as evident as in Poland, a country that is endorsing a just transition (as shown in this Chapter) without actually even committing to phase out coal or to increase its poor climate aspirations. Interestingly, in the group of six countries that have adopted a comprehensive policy mix for a just transition, there are climate leaders (the Netherlands and, to a lesser extent, Germany), but also stragglers (Czechia, Greece, Spain and, above all, Ireland) (CAN, 2018). Moreover, several countries that are laggards in coal phase-out commitments – Czechia,

Germany, Romania and Slovenia – have adopted or committed to adopt JTPs to accompany coal exit (Europe Beyond Coal, 2022).

Finally, it should also be recognised how EU countries do not enter the low-carbon transition from the same starting point. With the notable exceptions of Ireland and Slovakia, the ten EU countries having introduced partial or comprehensive JTPs, are in the top half of the most fossil-fuel dependent countries in the EU – with Germany and the Netherlands leading the ranking – which may lead us to deduce that JTPs are more likely to be needed wherever fossil fuels are more diffused (McCauley et al., 2022). While most countries expect to face some kind of social trade-offs from decarbonisation as shown in Table 2.5, these trade-offs are not equal anywhere. For instance, with respect to coal phase out, Poland has 56.8% of the total EU share of employment in coal and lignite, followed by Romania (14.5%), Czechia (9.6%) and Germany (7.0%) (European Commission, 2020m), all countries which have adopted JTPs for their coal sectors. However, facing a risk is not sufficient per se to adopt JTPs, which is evident in Bulgaria, where we find 6.1% the total EU employment in coal and lignite (European Commission, 2020m), a coal phase-out target set up in 2038 (Europe Beyond Coal, 2022), but no corresponding just transition policies this far. Moreover, coal is not the sole sector where JTPs are put forward: the focus for Irish JTPs, for instance, is peat, which in Ireland represents 46.6% of the total share of peat production in the EU (European Commission, 2020m).

In sum, a bird's eye view on the current empirical landscape shows that just transition policies are still very much under development across Europe and, relying solely on the results of the NECPs mapping exercise, it remains difficult to interpret why certain countries, instead of others, have adopted JTPs, as well as why these take a certain content.

**5. Empirical puzzle and case selection: why Spain & Ireland?**

The mapping exercise presented in this Chapter has revealed a proper empirical puzzle linked to the diffusion of just transition policies in Europe. Despite decarbonisation - and its social costs and opportunities – is growing in salience, the comparative analysis of the National Energy and Climate Plans shows that only ten EU countries have actually integrated a social dimension in their industrial decarbonisation policies, and only six of them have introduced comprehensive JTPs – i.e. comprising strategies, instruments and governance structures. Furthermore, while some common trends can be detected – such as the prevalence of narrow strategies, investment

instruments and consultative governance structures – JTPs seem to assume different contents across European countries. Therefore, a question remains about what are the conditions that have allowed these few EU countries to adopt just transition policies and what drives the content formulation of these policies. The following Chapters are precisely dedicated to explain the emergence of JTPs. In order to do so, as specified in the Introduction, a comparative research design based on a Most Different Systems approach is adopted. Building on the results of the NECPs mapping exercise presented in this Chapter, Spain and Ireland are chosen as the two cases for the comparison. This choice is justified for different reasons.

Following the prescriptions of the MDSD, we need to select two cases that are the most different with respect to their systemic features, but show a similar outcome in the explanandum. This implies selecting one of the ten EU countries that have actually adopted just transition policies (CZ, DE, EL, ES, IE IT, NL, PL, RO, SK). Although several other countries have put forward commitments to introduce similar policies in the future, what matters to investigate policymaking dynamics is whether just transition policies are already in place. Intentionality per se is not only often too vague, but also little indicative of countries' concrete policy efforts, which might end up differing from discursive resolutions. Moreover, studying policies introduced at the national level before 2020 enables us to – at least in part – control for the effect of europeanisation[23], given that, since the publication of the National Energy and Climate Plans, the EU has put a lot of effort to steer policy convergence at the domestic level in the field of just transition and, hence, national policy developments might now be dependent on supranational ones, as opposed to be driven by domestic dynamics.

As a further step, among these ten countries, we can discard the four that have adopted non-comprehensive just transition policies, hence lacking one or two of the three constitutive components of JTPs: strategy, instrument, or governance. This further selection choice is justified for two reasons. First, to allow for comparability in a MDSD, it is important that the policies under scrutiny are the most similar, hence it is better to select countries that have adopted policies with the same architecture. Moreover, by restricting the choice to comprehensive just transition policies, we can make sure that these policies were *explicitly* put forward to integrate environmental and social policy goals, as our definition of eco-social

[23] Europeanisation generally refers to a transformation at the national level that occurs as a consequence of a change at the EU level. Europeanization here specifically refers to the EU's domestic policy influences in the field of just transition.

policies requires. Countries like Italy, Poland or Romania have introduced instruments that certainly address the social risks of decarbonisation, but, without a strategy behind them, we cannot make sure that these instruments fully qualify as eco-social. The case of Poland is striking here, since the country is providing aid to workers in the coal sector, but it still lacks a strategic commitment to coal phase-out, which makes us question the overall environmental rationale of Polish just transition policies.

Finally, in a third step, among the six countries that introduced comprehensive just transition policies – CZ, DE, EL, ES, IE, NL – we select Ireland and Spain as the two displaying the most similar JTPs. Ireland and Spain, together with the Netherlands, constructed their just transition strategies by adding a social dimension to climate policies, whereas in the case of Czechia, Germany and Greece JTPs are dedicated merely to coal phase-out. However, when it comes to the instrument and governance components, unlike the Netherlands and similarly to the other three countries, both Spanish and Irish JTPs target primarily the social risks in the power sector and, hence, they display similar characteristics. Moreover, unlike any of the other four countries, Ireland and Spain are also similar in that they both rely explicitly on the "just transition" concept, which both governments are discursively committed to achieve. In light of all these similarities, we can consider the Irish and Spanish JTPs to be comparatively closer to one another than any other possible combinations and we can consequently expect JTPs in these two countries to have been determined by similar causal dynamics.

While they converge in the occurrence of the phenomenon under investigation, Spain and Ireland are typically divergent systems, in terms of their politico-institutional settings, as well as models of capitalism, welfare states and environmental states, as it will emerge in the following Chapters. While Spain, from the transition to democracy to recent years, has been a two-and-a-half party system where the left-right cleavage structuring political competition, Ireland has been a moderately multi-party system with a dominant party and a centripetal political competition since the 1980s (Siaroff, 2018). Interest representation in the two countries is also different: although before the 2008 financial crises the two were often equated due to their tendency to promote policy concertation (Baccaro and Lim, 2007), Ireland is now a pluralist model of interest representation (Murphy, 2018), whereas Spain is still an example of competitive neo-corporatism (González Begega and Luque Balbona, 2014). Also, with respect to welfare regimes, Spain is often regarded as a Southern-European model (Guillén and León, 2011) and Ireland is typically described as a liberal welfare system (Hübscher, 2018). Finally, when it

comes to climate policies and decarbonisation, the two countries also differ considerably: Spain's performance is deemed average in most EU-wide rankings (CAN, 2018), whereas Ireland has often been regarded as a climate laggard (Torney, 2020). The two countries also display different vulnerabilities to decarbonisation: Spain is the seventh most fossil fuel-dependent country in the EU and coal is the principal energy source undergoing decarbonisation, whereas Ireland is among the mid-to-low dependent countries and decarbonisation there is primarily impacting the peat sector (McCauley et al., 2023).

Summing up, the two countries have vastly different institutional systems, but, in spite of this, they have both similarly adopted just transition policies in years when most EU countries were not doing it. Furthermore, as stated above, among the few existing JTPs in Europe, Spanish and Irish policies appear to be the closest with respect to their content. A closer look to these policies in the next Chapters will reveal that actually considerable differences still exist in the way in which Spain and Ireland formulated their JTPs, seemingly contradicting the assumptions of the MDSD. However, we can argue that the findings of the following Chapters do not invalidate the assumptions of the MDSD and that we can allow selected cases to slightly diverge on JTPs formulation for both practical and functional reasons. First, given the scarcity of just transition policies across the EU, it would have been nearly impossible to find two countries that not only converge in having adopted JTPs, but also in having formulated them in the exact same way. The aim of case selection was to choose two cases with the most similar JTPs among possible alternatives, and hence there is no strict need for JTPs to be perfectly equal. Second, explaining JTPs formulation is hereby treated a sub-question. Thus, what matters the most is that selected cases converge with respect to policy adoption, which is the object of the principal explanatory research question. Actually, allowing a little divergence could even help strengthening the theoretical ambitions of this research: as it will be discussed in Chapter 6, it is insightful to investigate why two countries that similarly adopted just transition policies, then diverged in the way that they formulated these policies.

# Chapter 3 – Explaining the emergence of just transition policies: a tentative theoretical framework[24]

**Introduction**

The mapping exercise presented in the previous Chapter leads us to a puzzling result. In particular, it remains to be clarified why only a few EU countries, vastly different from one another, have adopted just transition policies at the time when the final National Energy and Climate Plans came out, whereas most others (17 out of 27) have not put forward any measure to tackle the social consequences of decarbonisation. Although they are still rarely diffused, the emergence of just transition policies across Europe appears to be a novel phenomenon, which calls for an appropriate explanation. Specifically, to interpret the puzzling results of the mapping exercise, it would be necessary to investigate more closely the processes that leads to the introduction of JTPs. Nevertheless, not only empirical knowledge is limited, but ad-hoc theoretical frameworks that can be used to interpret the emergence of just transition policies are also missing. As noted in Chapter 1, existing studies in the sustainable welfare literature have so far concentrated more on normative, rather than empirical, research goals, thus largely neglecting the institutional-political factors that may drive or hinder the adoption and formulation of just transition policies.

Against this background, the present Chapter aims at laying the foundations of the empirical investigation that will be presented in the following Chapters. Given the absence of established empirical theories in this new field, the study of the Spanish and Irish cases will follow an inductive approach. Nevertheless, the empirical investigation will be both theory-guided and theory-generating, with the ultimate view of shedding light on the minimally sufficient conditions that favoured the emergence of JTPs in the two countries.

[24] Parts of this Chapter are currently under review for publication.

Starting from the assumption that there is "no need to reinvent the wheel", this Chapter attempts to overcome the lack of political theories in the field of JTPs by building a bridge between sustainable welfare and the mainstream theories of the welfare state. To this end, it harnesses welfare theories reflecting on their potential (and limit) to be applied to the study of just transition policies. These theories are structural-level functionalism and (historical) institutionalism, and actor-centred theories, both based on interests and ideas. From each of these four theoretical approaches, the Chapter *deductively* derives four original expectations on possible causal factors and mechanisms behind the adoption of just transition policies. The same is done, although less extensively, for the formulation of JTPs in the very last Section. After the theoretical discussion, the Chapter ultimately argues in favour of adopting an actor-centred, yet empirical-inductive, approach to the study of JTPs. Therefore, in the final section, the Chapter proposes an analytical framework to empirically assess relevant socio-political actors' policy preferences, taken as key determinants of JTPs.

Concerning the structure of the Chapter, Section 1 reviews the state of the art of studies focusing on the institutional-political dimension of sustainable welfare and it consequently identifies the theoretical puzzle and a strategy to overcome it. Sections 2 and 3 are dedicated to the four welfare state theories, respectively structural ones – functionalism and neo-institutionalism – and actor-centred ones – interest-based and ideas-based ones. First, each theory is generally reviewed and then applied to the study of just transition policies. Finally, Section 4 sums up the theoretical expectations and their limitations, and proposes an actor-centred analytical framework to inductively respond to the main explanatory research question concerning the adoption just transition policies. Furthermore, Section 4 also focuses on how to explain the formulation of the content of such policies, which is the secondary explanatory research question.

## 1. Explaining the emergence of just transition policies: in search for a theoretical framework

### *1.1. The state of the art: eco-welfare states & eco-social divides*

As stated in Chapter 1, sustainable welfare studies are characterized by a strong tendency towards normativity, hence by a preference for prescribing ideal eco-social policies, as opposed to empirically describing and explaining such policies. By extension, the same is valid for just transition policies. However, normative projects exist only in the framework of the institutional-

political processes by which they are designed, legitimized and implemented (Meadowcroft, 2011). Thus, attention should also be paid to the institutional-political drivers (or barriers) for the emergence of just transition policies. To the author's knowledge, no study has yet explored this theoretical question in depth and, hence, there is a need to complement existing normative-oriented research with a more empirical approach. Although existing studies do not deal specifically with the object of this research – that is they cannot explain the emergence of just transition policies – some publications can still provide us with useful insights. Thus, it is worth reviewing the existing scholarly knowledge about the politico-institutional dimension of the eco-social nexus, which include studies about eco-welfare institutions and those investigating eco-social divides in public opinion.

A first group of notable studies drives attention to the sets of institutions, policies, ideas and practices known as welfare and environmental states. The former is defined a state that aims to provide decommodification, i.e. guaranteeing individuals with socially acceptable standards of living regardless of their participation to the labour market – and destratification – i.e. distributing and redistributing resources and opportunities equally among the population (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 2008). The environmental – or "eco" or "green" or "sustainability" (Meadowcroft, 2005; Dryzek at al., 2003; Mathis et al., 2022) – state could instead be defined as "a state that possesses a significant set of institutions and practices dedicated to the management of the environment and societal–environmental interactions" (Duit et al. 2015: 5). Building a clear parallel with the welfare state, we could say that the eco state seeks to achieve the "de-commodification of nature". The latter understands "environmental resources as commodities requiring de-commodification to avoid self-destructive processes of the capitalist system" (Zimmermann and Graziano, 2020: 3).

Compared to the environmental state, the welfare state concept is much more established in both theoretical and empirical terms. In welfare studies, there is a widespread tendency of classifying states' performances with respect to decommodification and destratification, so as to identify different regime types (Van Kersbergen, 2019). In this respect, the most used typology remains Esping-Andersen's (1990) "three worlds of welfare capitalism". This classification famously distinguishes liberal regimes, in which the state does not interfere much with the market and only supplies limited and means-tested benefits; conservative-corporatist regimes, where social rights are employment-related and benefits derive from contributions rather than taxes; and social-democratic regimes, where social rights are universal and the state

achieves high levels of destratification and decommodification. While Esping-Andersen's typology is still arguably the most popular in welfare state studies, it has also generated a long-lasting debate, where several scholars have proposed to integrate or modify such categorization (Van Kersbergen, 2019). A notable example of this trend is the introduction of a Mediterranean or Southern-European model, as a hybrid empirical type incorporating different elements of Esping-Andersen's social-democratic and conservative-corporatist regimes (Ferrera, 1996).

Conversely, in the study of environmental states, no classification has yet emerged as consensual. A first set of studies theoretically distinguishes "environmental" from "green" states (Eckersley, 2004; Meadowcroft, 2005, Dryzek at al., 2003), or, similarly, "weak" from "strong" environmental regimes (Christoff, 1996). The former are technological, technocratic, neo-corporatist and mostly state-led regimes, whereas the latter are ecological, systemic, democratic and global. Thus, strong green states represent a normative ideal (Dryzek at al., 2003), while, in reality, environmental states only promote "lifeworld", rather than "systemic", sustainability (Hausknost, 2020). Alongside these qualitative classifications, more quantitative attempts to identify typologies of environmental states can also be found. Koch and Fritz (2014) measure countries' ecological performances in two different years (1995 and 2010), ultimately identifying "established", "deadlocked" and "failing" eco states. Another possible approach is the one put forward by Jahn (2014), who combines environmental performance with prevailing economic regimes. Finally, some studies focus on the characteristics of environmental policies, rather than states' performances. Liefferink et al. (2009) pay attention to environmental policy strength, distinguishing between "leaders" and "laggards", while Duit (2016) provides a classification of environmental governance regime types – "weak", "partial", "emerging" and "established" – based on countries' regulations, fiscal provisions, administrative bodies and knowledge production.

Recently, scholars have attempted to build a bridge between the welfare and the environmental state traditions, providing insights about the structural-institutional dimension of the socio-ecological nexus. Meadowcroft (2005), for instance, highlights the overlaps and connections between the welfare and the eco state. Both extend the state's authority to new areas of social life; both represent responses to market failures, while still being strongly constrained by economic (and political) barriers; and both raise complex normative claims, which can generate conflicts between different societal groups. The main differences between the welfare and the eco states instead have to do with the socio-political actors involved in institutional

development; the connection with democratization; the spatial-temporal reach of the challenges addressed; and the relationship with economic growth. Importantly, while the welfare state has been historically developed as a complement to growth, environmental policies arose as a quest to limit production and consumption and, specifically, their ecologically-detrimental material throughput. Despite such difference, as Gough (2016) recognizes, the environmental state likely originated by layering on top of the welfare state and, consequently, welfare regimes may influence the development of environmental policies.

Beyond similarities and differences, other scholars have checked for possible correlations between countries' institutional configurations for social and environmental protection. The starting point of this debate was the so-called "synergy hypothesis", that is an expectation of a correlation in the state's performance in the two policy areas. Accordingly, strong social-democratic welfare models could be expected to also be more established when it comes to environmental policies (Dryzek *et al*., 2003; Gough *et al*., 2008). Koch and Fritz (2014) tested this hypothesis empirically by running a correspondence analysis based on macro-structural welfare and sustainability indicators in thirty countries. The two authors found no evidence that environmental performances are systematically related to welfare regimes and, thus, they reach the conclusion that other factors besides welfare institutions should explain countries' environmental performances. Along these lines, Zimmermann and Graziano (2020) attempted to map so-called "worlds of eco-welfare states", relying on a cluster analysis at the European level based on the dual concept of de-commodification of labor and nature. By classifying countries according to their social and ecological performances, the authors found some evidence to confirm the synergy hypothesis, but they also found no significant systematic correspondence between countries' performances in the two policy fields. They concluded by stating that national economic models, production systems and energy consumption patterns play the strongest role in determining countries' clusters, as eco-welfare states only partially overlap with welfare regimes. Finally, against the contradictory results of previous studies, García-García et al. (2022) apply a novel set of social, environmental and intermediate variables to check for an eventual correspondence between social and environmental performances and ultimately reject the synergy hypothesis. All, in all, these tentative results show that not only the synergy hypothesis – which deals specifically with social-democratic welfare states – might be rejected, but also that, more in general, it might be too early to speak about proper (or even emerging) eco-welfare states. Therefore, while promising, the "eco-welfare" concept still cannot

lead us to derive any theoretical hypotheses regarding the development of eco-social policies in different countries.

Less attention in the literature on eco-social and just transition policies has been given to actors' behaviour and preferences. Preferences have been the object of a number of recent publications focusing on public opinion and attempting to identify "eco-social divides" in the population (Gugushvili and Otto, 2021). These contributions have basically aimed to juxtapose public support for social and environmental policies, as a way to map varieties of eco-social attitudes. Most of them argue that the more supportive people are for both social and environmental policies, the more likely is a coalition supporting eco-social policies to form. Several of these studies find that people tend to be more supportive for both social and environmental policies in advanced welfare and eco states (such as Nordic European countries) (Otto and Gugushvili, 2020; Fritz and Koch, 2019; Fritz et al., 2021), hence seemingly confirming the above-mentioned synergy hypothesis. Similarly, Jakobsson et al. (2018) investigate whether attitudes towards welfare and environmental policies substitute or complement one another: they find no significant evidence of a synergy and a vast heterogeneity between countries. Finally, Armingeon and Bürgisser (2021) attempt to look for eventual trade-offs in people's attitudes towards the two policy areas by investigating people's responses when forced to choose between spending public money on redistribution or environmental protection. They found evidence supporting a self-interest argument, for which high-income people prefer environmental policies over redistribution, while for low-income people the opposite is true. Thus, much like the emerging eco-welfare literature, studies on people's attitudes towards eco-social policies provide interesting insights about the political dimension of these policies. Nevertheless, importantly, by focusing merely on the electorate and disregarding the organised groups of actors involved in the policymaking process, existing studies fail to unveil the key causal factors and mechanisms in the politics of just transition policies.

### *1.2. Theoretical puzzle: overcoming the lack of an empirical political theory*

As shown in the previous Chapter, several countries have already adopted just transition policies. In spite of this, most existing studies do not focus on real-life policies and when they do so, they adopt an explorative or descriptive approach. Therefore, an evident mismatch is emerging between the widespread normativity of sustainable welfare studies and the growing empirical diffusion of just transition policies in the real world, which calls for appropriate

explanations. The relatively scarce empirical studies investigating eco-welfare institutions and eco-social divides in public opinion fall short of providing theoretical explanations of the politics of eco-social policies, including, importantly, JTPs. Therefore, relying merely on the limited scholarly knowledge generates a confusing theoretical puzzle, which does not permit us to understand why different countries like Spain and Ireland converge in introducing just transition policies.

The theoretical puzzle has four main drivers. First, given that the sustainable welfare literature has emerged in relatively recent times, concepts and operationalizations are at best non-consensual and, at worst, largely underdeveloped. This has led to inconclusive empirical knowledge and to contradictory findings, for instance when it comes to confirming or rejecting the "synergy hypothesis". Consequently, the explanatory power of concepts like eco-welfare states or eco-social divides is not so straightforward. Second, despite their ground-breaking pioneer efforts, existing studies fall short of accounting for what the state is actually doing – i.e. for the policy outputs that it supplies – since they are primarily interested in what the state is or should be achieving – i.e. its policy outcomes, or its performance in the welfare and environmental fields. However, policy outputs and outcomes do not necessarily coincide and, in order to grasp how the welfare and the eco state interact, it would be crucial to study the policymaking processes with which the state concretely attempts to pursue simultaneously social and environmental policies and to make them mutually reinforcing though eco-social policy outputs.

This brings us to the third theoretical limitation of existing studies, which is a lack of attention to politics. In this respect, existing knowledge is largely limited to the electorate's preferences, thus disregarding political "elites", namely the political parties and organized societal groups, which, in representative democracies, are fundamental to channel citizens' preferences in the political system and to (eventually) transform them into public policies. Forth and finally, the literatures on eco-welfare and eco-social attitudes cannot be applied to explain the emergence of just transition policies because both these literatures treat the welfare and the environmental state as two separate entities, only to check for eventual correspondences (or lack thereof) in countries' performances and/or public opinion in the two fields. To study JTPs and other eco-social policies, instead, we need to understand specifically the mechanisms through which social and environmental policies *actually* interact, generating integrated policies that can address socio-ecological trade-offs and synergies.

Against this multifaceted theoretical puzzle, this study aims to fill the gaps in the literature, contributing to generating an empirical political theory of just transition policies and hence shedding light on the potential drivers that can explain the emergence of such policies. The lack of ad-hoc theoretical frameworks forces us to study JTPs by following an *inductive* research strategy, with a theory-generating ambition. However, even with such a research design, , a preliminary theoretical discussion on the potential causal factors determining the emergence of JTPs is needed, for at least two reasons. First, we need to make sure that the analysis is theory-guided, and hence it should not only entail a thick description of the selected cases, but also a causal ambition, striving to contribute to broader theoretical debates. Second, existing theories can help us guiding the analysis of the cases and the comparison, by focusing our attention on relevant aspects, while allowing us to neglect others. For these reasons, even though no theoretical framework will be adopted a priori – hence no specific hypothesis will be tested – before delving into the empirical investigation, this Chapter provides a preliminary set of *deductively-derived* expectations that point to potentially important aspects for the emergence of just transition policies.

Despite the literature gaps, the underlying assumption here is that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Instead, this research resorts to established welfare state theories and it harnesses them to derive expectations on the adoption of just transition policies (which is the main explanandum here). These theories are functionalism, neo-institutionalism (especially historical institutionalism), and actor-centred theories based on interests and ideas. Each of these theories was originally developed to explain different aspects, or phases, of the development of the welfare state and each traditionally pointed to the explanatory power of different factors and causal mechanisms. We assume that these mainstream theories of the welfare state, if duly adapted, could also be applied to the emergence of just transition policies[25]. This assumption is justified because JTPs can be seen as a novel type of social policy, emerging at the intersection with environmental policies. As outlined by Gough (2016), the main causal factors identified by welfare theories – socio-economic factors, institutions, interests and ideas[26] – are also presented

[25] While this Chapter concentrates specifically on just transition policies, the theoretical expectations presented here might also apply to other eco-social policies. However, a more in-depth discussion would be needed to fully grasp whether and how the theoretical expectations should be refined in order to fit other types of eco-social policies

[26] Gough actually also adds a fifth explanatory factor, i.e. "international influences". However, this is not related to any specific theoretical framework. Actually, as discussed below, international influence (including, importantly for this research, EU's influence) could be integrated into the other theories.

as crucial in the environmental state literature, which justifies the choice of resorting to welfare theories.

In the following Sections, first, the state of the art for each welfare theory – grouped into structural-level and actor-centred ones – is shortly presented. Then, for each of the four mainstream welfare state theories, a causal expectation about the adoption of JTPs (main *explanandum*) is deductively derived, entailing both a causal factor (*explanans*) and a mechanism. Subsequently, the four theoretical approaches are compared, identifying their limits and potential in explaining the adoption of JTPs. While the formulation of JTPs is hereby treated as a sub-question and hence given less space if compared to the principal explanatory research question, a short theoretical discussion about this sub-question is presented in the last Section. Table 3.2 below briefly summarizes the principal welfare theories that this Chapter is interested in.

**Table 3.1:** ***Summary of the main theories of the welfare state*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| **Theoretical approaches** | ***Explanans*** | **Mechanism** |
|---|---|---|
| *Structural-level theories: functionalism* | Socio-economic factors | Problem pressure from social risks |
| *Structural-level theories: (historical) institutionalism* | Institutions | Path dependence from past policy choices |
| *Actor-centred theories: interests* | Actors' power resources | Strategic interaction |
| *Actor-centred theories: ideas* | Actors' discourses | Policy learning |

## 2. How structural-level welfare theories can apply to the adoption of just transition policies: functionalism & (historical) institutionalism

### *2.1. Functionalist theories in the welfare state literature*

Functionalist theories in the welfare state literature traditionally underline the causal power of socio-economic factors (Myles and Quadagno, 2002) and the consequent problem pressure. Functionalism has been mostly used to interpret the expansion of the welfare state. In short, functionalists explain welfare state changes as the result of a growing pressure for the state to meet the evolving needs for destratification and decommodification that arise from the (mal)functioning of industrial capitalism. In this sense, policy changes do not generate within

the political system, but they rather originate externally. Namely, change is driven by socio-economic shifts, mainly in the demographic composition of a population and in the prevalent modes of production and consumption. In this sense, then, the state, as well as socio-political actors, are expected to play a merely passive role, simply reacting to external pressures (Gough, 1978).

Developed during the so-called "golden age" of the welfare state, functionalist theories were originally linked to the "logic of industrialization" (Wilensky, 1975), which basically explains the unprecedented expansion in welfare state provisions that occurred in Western countries between 1945 and 1975 as a function of industrialization that generated new social needs. In this view, the expansion of the welfare state should be interpreted as a necessary and sort-of automatic spillover of capitalist industrialization. The transition from an agricultural to an industrialist economic model resulted in several social distortions, often referred to as the "externalities" of the market. By itself, the market was not able to provide social safety nets to the whole population, like the church and the family had done before, and so the state was called into action. Therefore, economic growth, with its social (including demographic) and bureaucratic outcomes, is functionally presented as the root cause of the growing social expenditure observed in the golden age (Wilensky, 1975). Moreover, in this period of time, industrial capitalism did not just raise the need for expanding social policies, but it also provided, through economic growth, the necessary resources to deliver on this expansion. Production growth and related employment growth resulted in an increase in the population's wealth and it also raised financial resources for the government to sustain public social expenditure (Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1958). For this reason, scholars have argued that the welfare state has historically developed as a complement to economic growth (Meadowcroft, 2005).

Compared to the "golden age" of the welfare state, social risks have changed considerably in the past forty years. Beyond "old risks", a new wave of unprecedented social risks emerged in the 1990s (Bonoli, 2005). This wave was related to interconnected changes in economic and societal conditions (Bonoli, 2005). First, the shift to a post-industrialist service-based economy, coupled with growing globalization and markets integration (like the one occurring through the European integration), has generated new vulnerabilities, via phenomena like the increase in precarious and atypical contracts, increasing labour market deregulation and systematic weakening of collective bargaining. Second, new social risks also came as a result of changes in demographic and family structures, as well as in gender relations. These societal and cultural

transformations have questioned the ability of the nuclear family to cope with economic problems and care needs - as it used to do during the golden age - hence generating pressures on the welfare state to address these new risks.

Adopting a functionalist perspective implies assuming that welfare state changes do not generate within the political system, but rather exogenously, and that countries with similar economic and social-demographic contexts are expected to have similarly-developed welfare institutions (Quadagno, 1987). Political preferences and institutional features, as well as historical and cultural heritages do not play a significant role in a functionalist explanation of welfare state change. Critics of this framework argue that it can only explain quantitative expansion of the welfare state (i.e. increases in public expenditure), while it would fail to account for qualitative aspects, such as differences in policy content and in welfare state models (Graziano and Jessoula, 2018).

Furthermore, the mere presence of social risks, although necessary to trigger policy emergence, is not enough by itself to explain it, as functionalism falls short in providing sufficient causal inferences (Natili, 2019). Indeed, the emergence of new and uncovered risks undoubtedly results in pressures for a "functional recalibration" of the welfare state, that is a call to reorient its provisions and to meet new needs (Ferrera et al., 2000). However, beyond the expectations of functionalism, the response to the new risks of the 1990s – at least in Europe – has differed considerably across countries (Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006) and functional pressures have not always resulted in policy recalibration or in the adoption of new policies (Hemerijck, 2013).

### *2.2. A functionalist explanation of just transition policies: a third wave of eco-social risks*

Since functionalism has been quite useful to explain the genetic and expansionary phase of the welfare state, it can also prove equally suitable for the study of just transition policies, which are currently slowly and timidly emerging in different countries. Significantly, exogenous structural drivers, especially those related to the functioning of industrial capitalism, seem to be relevant not only in the field of social policy, but also in the environmental policy area. As Gough (2016: 33) puts it, "rising levels of socio-economic development and incomes can serve as relevant indicators of structural 'problem pressures' in the environmental field". Nevertheless, since they are integrated policies by definition, the problem pressure that JTPs are determined by can also

be expected to be complex and interconnected and, hence, further reflections are required to understand how functionalism might be applied to the emergence of such policies.

A novel functionalist theory of eco-social policies would predict that the latter are likely to emerge as a consequence of the "problem pressure" from social risks of environmental origin, or "eco-social risks", as seen in Chapter 1 (Hirvilammi et al., 2023). Eco-social risks have so far received relatively little attention in the welfare state literature if compared to other risks currently affecting the welfare state, such as those related to the transition to a service economy or to changing gender roles. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that, at least in the short term, ecologically-induced social risks can appear residual if compared to more established "old" risks, like sickness or old age, or even to other new risks. However, as the social consequences of environmental crises – including, notably, the climate crisis – are expected to become more and more salient as time passes, eco-social risks could potentially soon generate an inescapable problem pressure. Another reason for welfare state scholars' resistance to pay attention to environmentally-driven social risks could be that these risks are characterized by substantially different features, if compared to other social risks, as shown in Chapter 2. Eco-social risks are unpredictable not just individually but also collectively (Gough *et al*., 2008; Johansson et al., 2016) and they entail an intertemporal problem pressure (Pierson, 2000; Jacobs, 2011), with both salient short-term and less-salient long-term consequences, as well as global yet locally-differentiated implications.

This research is interested in the social risks brought about by climate policies and, more specifically, by industrial decarbonisation. As shown also in Chapter 2, while representing an opportunity for instance in terms of job creation, decarbonisation is also expected to be the catalyst for new social risks, including job losses and displacements in transitioning industries; the need to provide the workforce with new and more adequate skills; increasing social and territorial exclusion for communities whose economies highly depend on carbon-intensive productive processes; and other unjust implications for vulnerable groups (Galgóczi, 2022). Hence, importantly, among eco-social risks, we do not find just those that are generated directly from ecological distresses but also, *indirectly*, as by-products of the regressive effects of environmental policies (Gough et al., 2008) like decarbonisation. Therefore, if compared to traditional functionalist theories, which mainly attribute explanatory power to exogenous

factors, the revisited version presented here argues that exogenous risks can, in turn, be driven by endogenous developments in the political system[27].

More specifically, a novel functionalist theory to explain the emergence of just transition policies would predict that the latter are likely to emerge as a consequence of a high or increasing decarbonisation ambition. The argument goes as follows: a government's strong or growing commitment to fight climate change can modify existing socio-economic conditions due to the regressive effects of decarbonisation policies. These can ultimately alter the existing distribution of social risks, generating new "winners" and, especially, new "losers" or exacerbating existing inequalities. As a result, the new eco-social risks generated by decarbonisation can be expected to exert a functional problem pressure on the state to intervene with novel dedicated public policies. In sum, in this functionalist theory of just transition policies, the strength of the environmental state[28] – understood in terms of the robustness and amount of public policy resources devoted to environmental protection – is the *explanans*, the adoption of just transition policies is the *explanandum*, while the causal mechanism consists in the creation of new eco-social risks and in the consequent problem pressure that they unleash. We can thus deductively derive the following

> *Expectation #1: a (increasingly) strong environmental state favours the adoption of just transition policies because it generates new social risks, which exert a pressure for policy intervention.*

As stated above, *per se*, functionalism is not sufficient to explain the adoption of JTPs, because it completely disregards the process with which problem pressure is channelled in the political system and transformed into policy outputs. Besides this general critique, another possible limitation of Expectation #1 is that it only emphasises the indirectly regressive social implications of a strong environmental state. However, an environmental state that engages in considerable efforts to mitigate ecological harms might actually presumably manage to reduce some of the

[27] While a functional pressure is by definition exogenous – since it is generated by socio-economic factors that are external to the political system – it might still be rooted in endogenous events. This is likely to be the case for integrated policies like JTPs, adopted in response to endogenous changes in climate policies.
[28] To simplify the argument, this Chapter refers to the strength of welfare and environmental states as whole systems. However, one should consider the strength of single policy sub-systems (e.g., on the one hand, healthcare, pensions, labour market policies, etc.; and, on the other hand, climate, biodiversity, energy, natural conservation, etc.), which might have different strengths even though they are part of the same system.

adverse direct social risks associated with environmental decline. Thus, if we factor in the role of the environmental state not only in producing eco-social risks, but also in possibly preventing these risks, then it does not seem so obvious anymore what the ultimate net effect in terms of problem pressure is going to be. However, we could at least argue that eco-social risks are necessary factors to trigger the adoption of JTPs: in absence of such risks, it would be unlikely for socio-political actors to have reasons to adopt ad-hoc policies.

### *2.3. Historical institutionalism (and beyond) in the welfare state literature*

While functionalism is concerned with the explanatory power of socio-economic conditions, neo-institutionalism, as the label suggests, is interested in the causal role of institutions. Building on previous more descriptive institutional studies, neo-institutionalism arose in the 1980s (March and Olsen, 1984) as a theoretical plea to pay attention to the constraining and/or enabling role of institutions in shaping the policymaking process. Institutional settings, in this view, affect actors' cognitive and normative positions and they structure the process in which these positions are channelled (Hall and Taylor, 1996). The neo-institutionalist school of thought denotes various sub-approaches, ranging from rational choice institutionalism (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992), to sociological institutionalism (Hall and Taylor, 1996) and to discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2006). Among these approaches, historical institutionalism has emerged as a particularly popular variant for the study of social policies.

The main argument behind historical institutionalism is that any political development should be understood as a process that unfolds over time (Pierson, 2004). The kernel of historical institutionalism is presenting public policies as institutions (Pierson and Weaver, 1993) and using path dependence as a core concept to understand their (limited) evolution. In its purest form, the latter implies that previous policy choices in a certain direction induce future evolutions in the same direction (Pierson, 2000). This is based on the idea, borrowed from the realm of economic studies, of increasing returns, also known as positive feedbacks, for which each new policy step in a certain direction increases the probability that the next step will also follow the same trajectory. Path dependence comes a result of the fixed costs of reversing the policy chosen initially. These costs induce politico-institutional actors to stick with their original choices (Myles and Pierson, 2001).

From a traditional historical institutionalist perspective, policy change is rare. Actually, scholars in this field draw a line between "critical junctures" when a new path forms (Capoccia, 2016), to a subsequent period, when this becomes self-reinforcing through path dependence (Pierson, 2000). All in all, historical institutionalism has traditionally been more suited to explain institutional resilience and policy inertia than policy change (Jessoula, 2004; 2009; Streek and Thelen, 2005). Change, in this perspective, comes only under certain circumstances. Until recently, the only mechanism of institutional change envisaged by historical institutionalism was "punctuated equilibrium" (Krasner, 1984), for which substantial institutional reconfiguration could only result from exogenous shocks. Accordingly, in the absence of external shocks, policies can only change *incrementally*, hence endogenously and gradually, yet without any possibility to substantially alter the prevailing path-dependent paradigm (Pierson, 2000). However, against an increasing body of empirical evidence showing how welfare states have actually changed substantially over the years, more recently historical institutionalists have started to question their own assumptions.

Beyond the assertions of punctuated equilibrium, incremental *transformative* policy change was identified by more recent studies as a fundamental mechanism for endogenous institutional change in a historical institutionalist perspective (Streeck and Thelen, 2005; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). In this view, incrementalism is still gradual, but it can lead to a change of considerable magnitude, produced by the behaviour that institutions themselves generate within a policy subsystem. An important takeaway from transformative incrementalism is that, when institutions are less resistant to change, an institutional "gate" can open for socio-political actors to drive policy change (Jessoula, 2004; 2009). Therefore, away from the original conception of institutions as constraints, this new branch of historical institutionalism has started to frame them also as opportunity structures.

Consequently, the attention of historical institutionalists has more recently shifted towards the relationship between agency and structure, hence to how socio-political actors' behaviour and preferences play out within the range of possibilities offered to them by the structures they operate in (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Indeed, most scholars adopting a neo-institutionalist perspective, currently embrace an "actor-cantered" variant, presenting actors as the only possible sources of change within institutional constraints and opportunities (Scharpf, 1997). In this view, one does not have to assume anymore that policy choices are necessarily and inevitably locked in by path dependence and that the politics of the welfare state is

deterministically constrained by past choices, but also by agents exploiting institutional opportunity structures to promote reforms, that despite non being paradigmatic, can still incrementally lead to long-term changes.

### *2.4. A (historical) institutionalist explanation of just transition policies: institutional opportunities*

Institutions have been regarded as key explanatory factors not only for the welfare state, but also for the environmental state (Gough, 2016), especially in the decarbonisation literature (Andrews-Speed, 2016; Geels *et al*., 2016; Lockwood *et al*., 2017). Unlike other neo-institutional approaches, the historical variant has the merit to present policy legacies as institutions and, hence, it forces us to evaluate policy phenomena in light of the previous developments within a certain policy subsystem. At its core, historical institutionalism has mostly been used to explain policy inertia, since it presumes the existence of a consolidated policy subsystem. As such, at first glance, a theoretical approach so concerned with stability might seem inappropriate to explain just transition policies, or eco-social social policies in general. First, as shown in the previous chapter, most welfare states have not yet developed any JTPs and, second, the few JTPs that exist across Europe are still in their infancy, hence far from constituting a consolidated policy subsystem. Moreover, as seen above, we cannot refer to a well-established eco-welfare regime theory that would have allowed us to predict policy developments as a function of entrenched institutional configurations.

Nevertheless, historical institutionalism can still provide major insights in understanding the adoption of just transition policies. One should not take for granted, just because a social risk emerges as new – such is the case with the eco-social risks of decarbonisation – that existing welfare institutions, despite having been designed for other purposes, cannot by themselves effectively cover such risk. The literature on the second wave of social risks has insisted that stronger welfare states, such as those resembling a social-democratic model, with universal coverage and generous benefits, have been comparatively more effective in coping with new risks (Hemerijck, 2013). The main argument was that stronger welfare states are in a relatively better position to effectively pursue functional recalibration, which was needed to address the second wave of social risks. However, with respect to the third wave of emerging eco-social risks and, more specifically, with the risks associated to decarbonisation, the story might be a little different. If we think about job displacements, skills needs and losses of income – which are the

typical challenges that we can expect to arise from decarbonisation – these are not necessarily risks that are new in nature. Nonetheless, they might still alter the incidence and distribution of already-existing risks. Therefore, one should not *a priori* assume that existing welfare subsystems are unfit to address new eco-social risks, nor that new policies are always necessarily required.

Even in absence of a policy legacy and path dependence, existing welfare institutions, despite having been designed for other purposes, might already be suitable by themselves to adequately cover the new social risks arising from decarbonisation. If this is the case, then we can expect that there would be no need for just transition policies in stronger welfare (sub)systems. This expectation seems to be confirmed by the results of the NECPs mapping exercise presented in the previous chapter: just transition policies are nowhere to be found in strong Nordic welfare states. Another example that seems to support this argument empirically is given by the Swedish NECP, which, with reference to a different eco-social risk – that is raising energy poverty as a consequence of climate policies – explicitly asserts "Sweden makes no distinction between energy poverty and poverty in general. As a result, the term energy poverty is not used, and there are no targeted policies to deal with it. The issue is addressed within social policy" (Government of Sweden, 2020: 39). Furthermore, responses to other recently-emerged social risks – such as those related to the Covid-19 crisis – have demonstrated that countries with strong welfare systems tended to face risks by relying on existing policies (with few adjustments), while novel, more creative, instruments were adopted in countries where social policies were not by themselves strong enough to respond to new risks (Béland et al., 2021).

Thus, we can hypothesize that the stronger a welfare system is – in terms of coverage and generosity – (*explanans*) the less likely it will be for existing institutions to offer opportunity structures (mechanism) for the adoption of new policies. institutional opportunities may instead surface when the strength of the welfare state is low or decreasing, which is expected to occur in two circumstances. The first, more intuitive, is given by the presence of an "institutional gap", for which no existing policy is fit by itself to respond to new eco-social risks. The second circumstance is given by the opening of an "institutional gate": in this case, the emergence of new risks jeopardises the resistance of some old policies, which are threatened to become functionally redundant and, thus, it generates opportunities to substitute old policies with new, more appropriate, ones.

In sum, against the expectations of the synergy hypothesis, this revisited historical institutionalist theory of just transition policies might explain why Nordic European Countries, with advanced eco and welfare states, have not yet develop any JTPs. The argument is the following: while their climate ambition is high, hence potentially giving rise to huge new social risks for the welfare state to cover, the social provisions that these countries already have in place are characterised by such a high coverage that they are already capable by themselves to meet new risks. Thus, the opportunity for potentially supplying new JTPs is missing. In sum, if we imagine the welfare state as a box, the idea is that the less this is already filled up, the more space there will be for new policies to enter the box:

> *Expectation #2: a (increasingly) strong welfare state hinders the adoption of just transition policies because it prevents the existence/formation of institutional opportunities, that is gaps or gates.*

One limit of Expectation #2 is that it treats the strength of the welfare state as whole systems. However, when operationalizing this concept, one should probably consider the strength of single welfare policy sub-systems (e.g., healthcare, pensions, labour market policies, etc), so as to account for eventual within-system difference, which can be found for instance in fragmented welfare states. More importantly, much like functionalism, historical institutionalism can at best provide necessary arguments for the development – or lack thereof – of public policies. Indeed, while a policy gap or gate can be seen as a condition in absence of which just transition policies have no reason to emerge, it is not enough in itself to explain why vastly different countries have actually put forward these policies. Therefore, following the actor-cantered criticism to traditional historical institutionalism (Scharpf, 1997) one has inevitably to stress the importance of socio-political actors, as the only possible agents of change within institutional constraints and opportunities. In this view, it is always up to the actors to (eventually) politically exploit institutional gates. It follows that even a small institutional opportunity, where the welfare state is not too weak, could actually lead to the adoption of JTPs, if key actors have the incentive/willingness to politically exploit it. Conversely, we can expect that JTPs will not emerge where agents of change are missing, even if the welfare state is strongly uncapable to respond to eco-social risks and, hence, even in presence of a wide institutional gap or gate. Actually, where welfare institutions are strong, it might even be easier for socio-political actors to promote a process of incremental or cumulative changes (Streeck and Thelen, 2005), since we can assume pro-welfare actors to be more powerful in stronger welfare states. Therefore, the

presence of an institutional gate might not even be necessary for eco-social policies to emerge, as instead predicted by Expectation #2.

## 3. How actor-centred welfare theories can apply to the adoption of just transition policies: interests & ideas

### *3.1. Interest-based theories in the welfare state literature*

While functionalist and neo-institutionalist theories focus on how socio-economic and institutional structures drive policy change, actor-cantered theories in the welfare state literature show that agency, and hence politics, matters (Myles and Quadagno, 2002). These theories normally focus on elite actors in the political arena and on their role in influencing policymaking. They investigate the explanatory power of actors' interest and ideas. In their initial stage, actor-centred welfare theories were primarily concerned with partisan politics framing political parties as catalysts for the interests of their constituencies, hence adopting an interest-based perspective. At its core, an interest consists in an expectation to meet a certain demand (Stoppino, 2001), which triggers actions, the success of which is related to the power resources – economic and/or organizational – controlled by interested actor(s) (Korpi, 2006). For this reason, in a partisanship-based view, the outcome of policymaking – i.e. policy outputs – depends primarily on the government's partisan composition (Hibbs, 1977; Lenski, 1966). Political parties are presented as capable to transfer diverging societal interests into the political arena, through the political activation of societal "cleavages" (Rokkan, 1970).

The class cleavage was the first to receive attention in the welfare literature, notably with Korpi's (1983; 2006) "power resource theory", which famously understands the presence of a leftist government, backed by powerful trade unions, as the principal driver behind the expansion of the welfare state. Behind this theory is the view that parties' preferences generate through class mobilization, hence by bringing into the political arena (or "politicizing") the cleavage between labour and capital. The power resource theory is based on theories of distribution in capitalist democracies, according to which "for those of modest means (workers), the only compensating power resource is their numbers, but this requires mass organization in unions and parties to be effective" (Myles and Quadagno, 2002: 37). Hence, through left-wing parties and trade unions, the distributive struggles between capital and labour are moved to the political arena and masses of people sharing a similarly disadvantaged socio-economic position would have the

possibility to overturn a normally-unfair distribution of power. It follows, from a social policy perspective, that welfare states would be expected to expand when left-wing parties are in government and, thus, that government colour matters.

Beyond traditional partisanship-oriented approaches, more recent interest-based approaches have presented political parties as important players in a bigger game. Following Stoppino (2001), we can view the political arena of modern democracies as constituted not just by parties, but also by the electorate and by social groups. Thus, political parties would constitute the "supply-side" of politics, strategically competing for government offices, while also holding the power to supply policy outputs once in office. The other side of the arena - the "demand-side" - comprises societal groups that have an interest in the content of public policies. In particular, groups of individuals might be interested in welfare policies when they expect to benefit or loose from their adoption. Since, in many cases, societal groups (especially the so-called "losers" of capitalism) are dispersed and do not have sufficient capacity for political mobilization, the demand of public policies often remain weak[29]. Instead, when social groups organize around formal - yet non-partisan – structures, we talk about proper "interest", or "pressure", groups that systematically act with the intent to exert influence on policy content. Interest groups are non-partisan in that they orient their support towards political parties depending on the decisions that the latter take.

This dynamic creates a bi-directional relationship between the two sides, with political parties seeking consensus through the means of the policies they supply, while demand-side groups attempt to influence policymaking by advocating in favour of the interests that they represent (Stoppino, 2001; Natili, 2019). Going beyond the power resources theory – for which partisan linkages would be the privileged channels for interest groups to effectively exert an impact on social policymaking – industrial relations studies have long shown that there are at least two alternative ways with which these groups can influence changes in social policies (Streeck and Hassel, 2003). On the one hand, there is *concertation*, a bargain between the state and large interest groups where policymaking takes the form of a consensual pact between the state and demand-side actors (Baccaro, 2003; Molina and Rhodes, 2002). On the other hand, interest

[29] Although we assume here that the electorate's preferences have higher chances to influence the policymaking process if they are mediated by political parties and/or organized interest groups, this does not mean that public opinion is irrelevant, nor that it is impossible for it to *directly* influence policymaking, which could happen for instance when mechanisms of direct democracy (such as referenda or citizens' assemblies) are set up.

groups can instead exert pressure through *lobbying* activities, hence freely competing with other demand-side groups to provide key information to decision-makers (Streeck and Hassel, 2003). Institutional features are often deemed crucial to determine the prevalent mode of interest representation, with concertation being typically associated with neo-corporatist systems and lobbying being widespread in pluralist states[30] (Siaroff, 1999; Schmitter, 1974; Cawson, 1978). Nevertheless, governments might resort to concentration also when neo-corporatist structures are weak, notably if interest groups and governmental parties have a mutual strategic interest in engaging in negotiated policymaking. This is the case of strategic *political exchange* (Pizzorno, 1977; Molina, 2006; Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick, 2010; Natili, 2019).

By concentrating on the agents that are directly involved in policymaking, interest-based approaches, unlike functionalist and neo-institutional accounts, could lead to sufficient (rather than just necessary) explanations for social policy change (Natili, 2019). Nevertheless, despite providing convincing causal arguments to understand social policies, different studies over the years have identified key limitations to interest-based approach. First and foremost, as evident, the power resource theory presents parties' preferences as a linear reflection of the capital-labour cleavage. It follows that left-wing parties should always represent the interests of the working class (demanding generous welfare benefits), while the right should be expected to give voice to high-income voters (demanding lower taxes and lower social expenditure) (Schmidt, 1996). However, more recent studies have started to criticize these claims by highlighting how actors' preferences and behaviours are more complex and less linear than predicted by Korpi's theory and, hence, one should not take for granted parties' preferences about the level and type of public policy intervention (Sartori, 1990; Jensen, 2014).

In particular, and crucially for this research, class is not the only societal divide that can be politicized in the partisan arena, inducing conflict and then policy changes. Political scientists have long underlined that other cleavages should be equally regarded as relevant (Rokkan, 1970). Actually, the presence of a heterogenous constellation of cleavages has been indicated as a key determinant for social policy emergence and expansion. Ferrera (1993; 2005) argues that the fragmentation of the political space – where ethnic, linguistic, or religious cleavages cross-cut the party system beyond class division – hinders the development of universal social policies. Several other scholars have also stressed the importance of cleavages other than the

[30] A definition of both neo-corporatist and pluralist systems of interest representation is provided in the last Section of the present Chapter.

capital-labour– especially the church-state cleavage – in the expansion or retrenchment of social policies (Van Kersbergen, 1995). Along these lines, Natili (2019) distinguishes between "moderate" and "fragmented" pluralism. "The former is characterized by a limited number of relevant parties, the presence of only one political cleavage, and a limited amount of within-pole competition" (*Ibid*.: 48) and should favour the emergence of an overlapping consensus on welfare reforms. Conversely, fragmented pluralism can "allow the emergence of additional cleavages and competition within the right and left poles" (*Ibid*.: 48), ultimately hindering change.

Finally, with respect to demand-side groups, while it seems logical to assume that organized interests can exert a much more effective influence on policymaking if compared to dispersed interests, when mapping interest groups, one should not *a priori* discard the (lack of) influence of less-organized societal groups. While economic interest groups (the so-called "social partners") have traditionally held relatively more power resources to influence policymaking, as feminist and intersectional theories have long thought us (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Armstrong and Bernstein, 2008), the (lack of) engagement of ethnic minorities, women and other marginalized groups should be taken into consideration alongside economic interests, so as to fully understand the (im)balance of power in the policy process and, consequently, its outcomes.

### *3.2. An interest-based explanation of just transition policies: the "green-labour" convergence*

A very important insight from interest-based welfare theories is the relevance they attribute to political cleavages, in light of their ability to structure the preferences of political parties on the supply side and the constellation of (organised) societal groups on the demand side. This approach has also been applied to the study of environmental politics (Gough, 2016), for which the appearance of new actors representing green interests enabled the emergence of environmental policies (Dryzek *et al*., 2003).

Studies on the politics of the environment could be divided in two groups. The first group views environmentalism as the result of an emerging societal divide, pitting material against post-material interests, the latter typified by environmentalism itself (Inglehart 1984; 1990) and normally ascribed to more affluent and educated people (Gough, 2016). This would result in the creation of a new cleavage that is often described through the acronym "GAL-TAN", separating green-alternative-libertarian from traditional-authoritarian-nationalist cultural values (Hooghe

*et al*., 2004). Conversely, other studies have argued that, rather than emanating from a novel cleavage, environmentalism should actually be absorbed within the leftist political family (Inglehart 1990), hence reflecting a mono-dimensional cleavage structure (Thomassen, 1999). The first set of studies has had the merit to explain why environmentalism initially did not find a place in the left-right political spectrum, with green parties often facing opposition from an unlikely alliance between labour and capital (Müller-Rommel, 1989; Dalton, 2009). The second group of studies instead proves useful in showing that environmental politics is often shaped by material interests connected to "brown" vs. "green" capitalism, and not just post-material interests (Gough, 2016; Falkner, 2008). At their core, all these studies point to the societal formation, and consequent political activation, of a new *green* interest, regardless of whether this stems from a novel post-materialist cleavage or from the "old" capital-labour divide.

To build an interest-based theory of just transition policies, we first and foremost need to understand which actors could be *interested* in the adoption of these policies. Given that JTPs entail, by definition, a social and an environmental objective, we can expect them to emerge as a consequence of the actions of two groups of actors, representing respectively pro-environment (or "green") and pro-welfare (or "labour") interests. Regarding the former group, environmentalism should be found both on the supply side of the political arena – represented especially by single-issue green parties (Folke, 2014; Müller-Rommel, 1989), as well as left-libertarian parties (Huber et al., 2021) – and on the demand side – primarily environmental movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Carter and Little, 2021), but also green businesses (Falkner, 2008). As outlined above, the entry of these actors in the political arena would result from the societal activation of a green interest, which, in turn, is driven by the increasing salience of environmental issues in voters' preferences (Carter and Little, 2018). Therefore, unlike for social policies, the polarization and fragmentation[31] of a party system may actually be instrumental to environmental policy change (Dalton, 2009).

Besides green interests, JTPs can also be expected to capture a pro-welfare interest, which, as seen above, is rooted in the "labour" side of the class cleavage. From this perspective, the societal groups that expect to face the harshest risks from decarbonisation – the so-called "losers" of decarbonisation – can also be expected to have a high stake in the adoption of JTPs and to play a crucial role in the politics of JTPs, demanding not to pay the social costs of

[31] "Polarization" refers to a high within-pole and low between-poles competition in the partisan arena, while "fragmentation" indicates a high number of relevant political parties in the parliament.

decarbonisation. These groups primarily include the marginalized communities, workers and companies undergoing low-carbon industrial restructurings (Galgóczi, 2019; 2022; Green and Gambhir, 2020). Following the power resources theory, these disadvantaged societal groups should be represented in the partisan sphere by left-wing political parties (Korpi, 1983). However, it is important to note that, currently, the left in many Western countries identifies a heterogeneous constellation of different parties, ranging from the pro-environment "new left", to the so-called "old left". The latter should be deeply connected to the interests of the working-class voters typically found in territories with carbon-intensive economies (Siderius, 2023). Also part of this second pro-welfare group of actors, on the demand side, there are the trade unions that may see their interests particularly jeopardized by low-carbon industrial restructurings. Therefore, unsurprisingly, unions often mobilize their multifaceted power resources in response to decarbonisation, frequently opposing climate policies (Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020; Kalt, 2021; 2022; Wissen and Brand, 2021; Tomassetti 2020).

As long as actors representing green and labour interests operate in silos or are in conflict with one another, then we cannot reasonably expect JTPs to emerge. From an actor-centred interest-based perspective, we can instead predict that the adoption of JTPs is driven by the *convergence* between green and labour interests (*explanans*). This convergence can only occur if *both* green and pro-welfare interests are expressed by actors that hold sufficiently-strong *power resources*. Indeed, if either one of the two groups of actors has power resources that are considerably higher than the other group, then we can hypothesise that the former's interests will prevail over the latter. If the two groups instead hold too weak power resources, we can instead predict them both to lack the voice needed to effectively promote their claims.

Provided that power resources are sufficient, we can expect a green-labour convergence to occur through two *mechanisms*. First, within the supply-side of the political sphere, this convergence may manifest when an *eco-socialist government* form, typically a partisan coalition between a green party and a socialist party, or a government led by a left-libertarian or a leftist green party. In this case, the government coalition itself represents both green and labour interests and, thus, government colour matters the most for the adoption of JTPs. Second, a green-labour convergence may arise within the constellation of relevant interest groups on the demand side, leading stakeholders to demand just transition policies. Notably, studies on labour environmentalism (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011; 2013) have shown numerous examples of trade unions embracing environmental stances and demanding a just transition (Felli, 2014; Thomas

and Doerflinger ,2020; Thomas and Pulignano 2021; Clarke and Lipsig- Mummé, 2020; Tomassetti, 2020; Stevis and Felli, 2015). In many cases this occurs when unions start collaborating with the green movement. A green-labour convergence on the demand side should be facilitated by the strategic coordination or by formalised coalitions between trade unions and green NGOs, which coalesce to promote shared demands (Jessoula and Mandelli, 2022). If they become powerful enough, these green-labour alliances are able – either through concertation or lobbying – to put pressure on governments, ultimately leading them to translate their demands into policy outputs. Summing up, we can derive

> *Expectation #3: The convergence between green and labour interests, represented by sufficiently-strong socio-political actors, favours the adoption of just transition policies through one of the following mechanisms:*
>
> > *a) within the supply side, through an eco-socialist government;*
> >
> > *b) within the demand side, through alliances between green and labour interest groups.*

Building on the critiques to the power resource theory, a major possible shortcoming of Expectation #3 is that actors' policy preferences are often more complex and less linear than predicted by interest-based accounts. For instance, one should not assume a priori that promoting ambitious environmental reforms is just the remit of green or new left parties. Studies have actually shown that, with growing polarization and fragmentation of the party system, not only can single-issue parties enter the partisan arena, but party competition around environmental issues can also increase, potentially leading several parties to promote environmental reforms (Dryzek et al., 2003; Spoon et al., 2014), even including conservative ones (Hess and Renner, 2019; Lim and Duit, 2018). Furthermore, power resources and sectoral interests cannot always comprehensively explain policy preferences, since other factors, such as ideological orientations, are also proven to count in explaining actors' behaviours, which is evident for instance in the case of trade unions' reactions to the climate crisis (Kalt, 2022).

### *3.3. Ideas-based theories in the welfare state literature*

Beyond the assumption that socio-political actors are only driven by their strategic incentives and power ambitions, in the past few decades, several welfare scholars have started to

investigate the explanatory role of ideas as drivers of policy change (Béland, 2005), ultimately constructing an alternative strand of neo-institutionalism, known as "discursive" or "ideational" institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008). Ideational approaches to the welfare state focus more on policy evolution than stability and put the spotlight on actors' evolving discursive framing of policy problems and solutions (Schmidt, 2008). At the basis of such approaches is the assumption that political actors are not only driven by power-seeking incentives but also by their "puzzling" activities, that is their cognitive and normative orientations towards social problems and their possible solutions (Heclo, 1974).

In this view, change is a product of "policy learning", hence an endogenous process of knowledge construction and re-construction which often occurs in a situation of uncertainty (Heclo, 1994; Hall, 1993). Ideas can lead to policy change when political actors' perceptions of a certain societal problem are modified, normally as a consequence of an anomaly in old policy solutions (Hall, 1993), or of periods of crises (Blyth, 2002). "Policy learning" is often actively steered by political "entrepreneurs", influential agents within the policy process that invest their resources in order to make sure that a certain idea is diffused within the political system, hence that a set of socio-political actors endorse and promote this idea (kingdon, 2014).

One important variation of ideas-based theories is the one that concentrates on policy learning not as a domestic process, but rather as a process of "international benchmarking", where national actors discover new policy solutions by borrowing them from the – negative or positive – experiences of others (Hemerijck, 2005). In this view, policymaking would be influenced by "policy diffusion", i.e. either by emulation of previous choices taken by other countries or by an international actor effectively exerting discursive pressure on national policymakers to enact a policy reform in a certain direction (Arriba and Moreno, 2005). Particularly relevant for social policy changes in European countries is the role of the European Union as an ideational instigator of national reforms in the welfare field (Graziano, 2004; Jessoula and Madama, 2018; Moreno and Palier, 2005). Accordingly, through a process referred to as (ideational) "Europeanisation", supranational institutions promote convergence, that is policy harmonization and coordination across different countries in employment and social policies, so as to render them consistent with the Union's priorities.

While ideas-based approaches allow us to focus on puzzling processes, this does not imply disregarding power dynamics. Actually, several scholars have argued that ideas can structure

the power relations between actors in the policymaking process (Schmidt, 2008; Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016). In particular, what matters in this respect, is the power of ideas in coalition building. The diffusion of ideas through the discourses of domestic or international policy entrepreneurs has the potential to bring "together actors whose perceived interests or policy preferences had previously placed them at odds with one another" (Béland and Cox, 2016), hence forming what could be called an "advocacy coalition" (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). For ideas to become "coalition magnets" (Béland and Cox, 2016), hence for different actors to coalesce around such ideas, related narratives have to possess certain characteristics. Building on Palier (2005), Béland and Cox (2016) importantly hypothesize that "polysemic", or ambiguous, ideas have higher potential than others to become coalition magnets, since they are vague enough to appeal to a wide variety of actors, assigning different meanings to the same concept. This has been the case, for instance of "sustainable development", a polysemic idea that has been endorsed by both actors promoting economic and environmental interest, which were previously at odds with one another.

All in all, ideas-based theories, unlike interest-based ones, have the merit to frame policy preferences as dynamic phenomena, not necessarily bounded by predefined interests. Nevertheless, they are also characterised by important limitations (Natili, 2019). Empirical evidence has shown that, despite international pressure to do so, several countries often fail to enact reforms in line with "international benchmarking". This is the case of Europeanization: despite the EU's efforts in coordinating policies across its Member States, we are still far from cross-European convergence, as most national welfare models still maintain their own peculiar characteristics (Jessoula and Madama 2018). Moreover, ideas-based theories do not tell us much about the dynamics of coalition building, nor do they reflect much on how, concretely, ideas are transformed into public policies, especially when such ideas are contested and can be declined in different ways. This is because the main empirical object of ideas-based studies is not really the policymaking process, which this study is concerned with, but rather the discursive struggles that accompany the policymaking process.

### *3.4. An ideas-based explanation of just transition policies: the diffusion of the just transition narrative*

Much like in welfare studies, ideas have been regarded as powerful drivers of policy reforms also in the study of environmental politics. In particular, Gough (2016: 34) asserts that "the

degree of hegemony of neo-liberal ideas in a country will constrain the scope and depth of environmental states". Consequently, at their core, the ideas that initially guided the emergence of environmentalism wanted to challenge the paradigms of growth and productivism (Eckersley, 2004; Dryzek at al., 2003). Nevertheless, while in some cases neo-liberal beliefs still optimistically disregard the ecological implications of capitalism (Koch, 2018), in most Western countries the diffusion of the idea of "sustainable development" has permitted to promote a cognitive-normative reconciliation between economic growth and environmental protection, through the narratives of "ecological modernization" and "green growth" (Dryzek, 2013). As Béland and Cox (2016) underline, sustainability was initially promoted by environmental activists as a critique to economic growth, but, later on, international entrepreneurs intentionally redefined the original conception of sustainability, by stretching its applicability and transforming it into a "valence idea". This made sustainability appealing to a wide array of actors holding different preferences and it ultimately even resulted in the business community – which was the original target of sustainability advocates' critiques – almost-paradoxically appropriating this concept and making use of it for its own goals.

What the idea of sustainable development did to reconcile environmental and economic objectives, "just transition" could do for the socio-ecological nexus. As seen in Chapter 1, first elaborated by the North-American trade union movement in the 1980s, in the mid-2000s the idea of a just transition underwent a resurgence and a global diffusion and its meaning was stretched beyond the mere context-specific demands of the trade union movement. Now, just transition is promoted by powerful international epistemic entrepreneurs, like the International Labour Organization, the United Nations and the European Union, all of which refer to just transition so as to put emphasis on the social justice implications of climate change and policies. As already argued, with increased popularity, just transition is also growing into a *contested* concept (Stevis et al., 2020), with multifaceted applications in different contexts (Wang and Lo, 2021) and multidimensional interpretations (Stevis and Felli, 2020).

Precisely in light of its contested, or polysemic, nature – and through the discursive influence of powerful epistemic entrepreneurs – just transition has the potential to become a "coalition magnet" (Béland and Cox, 2016), that is to make a variegated range of actors coalesce around a single narrative that presents social and environmental challenges as interrelated and mutually-reinforcing. This is what occurred, for instance, in the case of the "Right to Energy for All Europeans Coalition" at the EU level, which brought together social NGOs and trade unions, as

well as environmental NGOs, under a shared just transition agenda. Such agenda disregarded the specificity of each organization' s demands in order to avoid possible conflict among coalition members and it instead merely concentrated on building a common narrative based on a few generic messages that all organizations were able to agree upon (Jessoula and Mandelli, 2022).

All in all, we can expect that the diffusion of *convergent* ideas about the socio-ecological nexus through the discursive action of national or international entrepreneurs (*explanans*) will form an advocacy coalition (mechanism), effectively pushing for the adoption of just transition policies. Convergent ideas about the socio-ecological nexus are those that present social and environmental goals as positively interconnected. These ideas, we can assume, have to be neither too vague nor too specific in order to become coalition magnets. Ideas that are too vague about the socio-ecological nexus might lead actors to ignore the interconnections between social and environmental policy goals, which could be why, for a long time, this nexus has represented the "missing link" of sustainable development (Laurent, 2015). Conversely, the "jobs vs. environment dilemma" example[32] (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011; 2013) shows that, when actors' narratives are too specific, they are unlikely to expand beyond their conceptual limits so as to integrate other ideas. In this situation, discursive struggles are likely to become *contentious*, pitting environmental ideas against labour ones (Kalt, 2021). For just transition policies to emerge, actors' narratives should be unambiguous enough for them to perceive social and environmental goals as connected, yet vague enough to disregard eventual socio-ecological trade-offs and conflicts. In sum, convergent ideas about the socio-ecological nexus are likely to be polysemic, that is framed differently by different actors.

> *Expectation #4: The (national or international) diffusion of ambiguous, yet not too vague, convergent ideas about the socio-ecological nexus, such as just transition, favours the adoption of just transition policies, because these ideas serve as coalition magnets.*

All in all, ideas-based theories could help us understand power *through* the just transition idea. This could be relevant to explain the development of JTPs in Europe, where the European Union – alongside other influential socio-political actors, such as energy companies, trade unions and

[32] Coined in the field of environmental labour studies with reference to trade unions' narratives in the climate crisis, the "jobs vs. Environment dilemma" refers to a situation in which unions perceive that preserving jobs should have priority over environmental protection, even if the latter might be damaged by such a choice.

environmental NGOs – is spending considerable resources to present just transition as a suitable solution to effectively address the social consequences of decarbonisation. Nevertheless, ideas-based approaches have little explanatory power when it comes to accounting for the dynamics of the policymaking process, if not indirectly so. Indeed, rather than focusing directly on the determinants of public policies, ideas-based theories concentrate on how narratives shape actors' preferences, without telling us how these are transformed into public policies. Moreover, Expectation #4 cannot fully explain why, looking at the national JTPs put forward by EU countries (see previous Chapter), some countries explicitly endorse the just transition narrative but have adopted no JTPs, while others have adopted JTPs without relying on a just transition narrative.

## 4. Explaining just transition policies through an actor-centred analytical framework

### *4.1. Explaining the adoption of just transition policies*

This Chapter has sought to lay the first stone in the generation of a political theory of just transition policies. Specifically, the aim has been to deductively propose a series of theoretical expectations suitable to explain the adoption of JTPs, by harnessing four mainstream welfare state theories. Table 3.2 summarizes the four expectations derived from established theories, pointing out, for each of them, a causal factor (*explanans*) and a causal mechanism. Although the four theories have been presented here as autonomous and self-standing frameworks, this does not imply they have to be taken as competitive or mutually-exclusive: they can actually rather complement one another, shedding light on different relevant institutional-political drivers behind the emergence of JTPs. Functionalist and historical-institutionalist theories both provide structural-level expectations about just transition policies: in this view, the adoption of JTPs would depend positively on the strength of the eco state (through the creation of eco-social risks) and negatively on the strength of the welfare state (through institutional gaps or gates). Actor-centred theories instead predict that JTPs are likely to emerge when a convergence in key socio-political actors' policy preferences is reached either between green and labour interests or via the diffusion of a just transition discourse.

| **Table 3.2:** ***Welfare theories explaining the adoption of just transition policies*** (source: author's own elaboration) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Theoretical approach** | ***Explanans*** | **Mechanism** | **Limitation** |
| ***Functionalism*** | (Changes in the) strength of the eco state | Problem pressure from new eco-social risks | Insufficient explanation |
| ***Historical institutionalism*** | (Changes in the) strength of the welfare state | Presence/creation of institutional gaps/gates | Insufficient explanation |
| ***Interest-based theories*** | Convergence between green and labour interests | - Supply-side: Eco-socialist government<br>- Demand-side: green-labour alliance | Spurious explanation |
| ***Ideas-based theories*** | Diffusion of convergent ideas on the socio-ecological nexus | Creation of an advocacy coalition | Spurious explanation |

While all four theoretically-derived expectations provide relevant hints on the politics of just transition policies, they also all present major limitations, which make it hard to pick the most appropriate theoretical framework identifying the minimally sufficient conditions for the adoption of JTPs. Both functionalist and historical institutionalist arguments can, at best, just lead us to identify *necessary* conditions for the adoption of JTPs. Indeed, even in presence of eco-social risks and institutional gates or gaps, without key actors taking actions to channel functional pressures and to politically exploit institutional opportunities, we cannot reasonably expect JTPs to emerge by themselves. Necessary conditions are tricky because with a small number of cases it would not be possible to prove necessity and generalise necessary arguments.

Only actor-centred theories can lead us to a *sufficient* explanation, since they concentrate on the agents that can directly influence policymaking. As outlined above, we can expect JTPs to emerge when an eco-social convergence is reached either between the interests or the discourses of key socio-political actors. This said, however, neither ideas nor interests have a *direct* causal effect on the adoption of just transition policies, but they should rather be considered indirect determinants of JTPs. What actually matters, from any actor-centred perspective, is to analyse the *policy preferences* of socio-political actors, which could be shaped by ideas, interests or by some combination of the two. Put differently, the causal relationship between interest, ideas and the adoption of JTPs is *spurious*, since it is mediated by actors'

preferences. Furthermore, whether ideas and/or interests are the main determinants of political behaviour should be observed inductively with the empirical analysis, as there is no way to preliminarily ascertain it theoretically.

Summing up, this research adopts an actor-centred inductive approach, that is not oriented towards testing any of the expectations outlined in the previous Sections, but rather to empirically trace the process that led to the introduction of JTPs in selected cases and, then, to derive theoretical implications. Adopting an actor-centred approach thus becomes, first and foremost, an analytical strategy. This strategy implies concentrating on socio-political actors' observable policy *preferences* and the consequent *(inter)actions* with which such preferences are expressed. The study assumes that elite actors' preferences and behaviours can be expected to matter the most in the politics of JTPs. Consequently, the focus should be on agents with decision-making powers in both the supply and demand sides of the policymaking arena. On the one hand, there are the political parties and elected officials who are in charge of supplying (or refraining from doing so) public policies to face the eco-social risks of decarbonisation. This side normally includes governmental actors. However, opposition parties' positions often also count, as they can indirectly influence the governments' decisions through partisan competition. Moreover, local and regional branches of political parties – and especially local administrators and/or elected officials – should also be considered, given that just transition policies can be expected to have relevant multilevel implications. On the other hand, some organised societal groups can be expected to take action in order to demand the adoption of JTPs. These mainly include trade unions, business organizations, environmental NGOs and movements.

What brings together both interest-based and ideas-based actor-centred approaches is that, in both interpretations, for JTPs to emerge, there needs to be some kind of *convergence* in relevant actors' preferences on the socio-ecological nexus and, more specifically on the social consequences of decarbonisation. However, just transition is not the only possible preference that actors can promote when confronted with eco-social risks. Therefore, we need to construct an analytical framework that can guide us in empirically assessing actors' preferences in this field. To this end we should, first, look at their *cognitive* framing of the socio-ecological nexus, that is whether and how (that is positively or negatively) they acknowledge the socio-economic consequences of decarbonisation. Second, we should assess actors' *functional* framing of the eco-social nexus, thus distinguishing a silos logic that keeps social and environmental policy

goals separated; a hierarchical logic that gives priority to one goal over the other; and an integrated logic, which leads to JTPs

On these bases, actors can be grouped in three categories. First, we can call *Green Progressivists* those who promote decarbonisation without acknowledging its social implications and, hence, fostering a silos logic to policymaking. Conversely, we can label as *Socio-economic Conservatists* the actors that strive to oppose the low-carbon transition precisely in light of its foreseen negative social consequences, hence giving priority to socio-economic considerations over ecological ones[33]. Finally, *Just Transitioners* promote a convergent policy preference, framing the socio-ecological nexus as a positive relation and consequently aiming to address the social consequences of decarbonisation by boosting synergies and solving trade-offs. Table 3.3. summarises the analytical framework for the assessment of socio-political actors' policy preferences on the socio-ecological nexus.

**Table 3.3:** ***Analytical framework (politics) – actors' preferences on the eco-social nexus*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| **Policy preference** | ***Green Progressivists*** | ***Socio-economic Conservatists*** | ***Just Transitioners (convergence)*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Cognitive framing* | No socio-ecological nexus: the social consequences of decarbonisation are not acknowledged | Negative socio-ecological nexus: the social consequences of decarbonisation are acknowledged. These consequences are framed as unsolvable trade-offs. | Positive socio-ecological nexus: the social consequences of decarbonisation are acknowledged. These consequences are framed as synergies and/or solvable trade-offs. |
| *Functional framing* | Silos logic: decarbonisation should be pursed regardless of its social consequences | Hierarchical logic: decarbonisation should be hindered because of its socio-economic consequences | Integrated logic: the social consequences of decarbonisation (synergies and trade-offs) should be addressed through JTPs |

[33] By extension, we can include among the Socio-economic Conservatists those actors who oppose decarbonisation for reasons different than its negative social implications, notably including actors that advance economic arguments against decarbonisation.

### *4.2. Explaining the formulation of just transition policies*

Up to this point, this chapter has focused solely on the *adoption* of just transition policies. However, to fully account for the emergence of JTPs, one also has to question why these policies assume a specific content instead of other eventual possible alternatives. More specifically, following the analytical framework presented in Chapter 1, JTPs can entail a broad or narrow strategy, investment- or protection-oriented instruments and a participated or concentrated governance. This Section is dedicated to seek some tentative theoretical answers to a sub-question regarding the reasons behind the content formulation of JTPs. It does so by building, once again, on insights from the four established welfare theories presented above.

Functionalism can tell us very little about the formulation of just transition policies. In a functionalist perspective, the content of public policies should be determined by the nature of the risks to which these policies respond. It follows that different policies should correspond to different risks. However, when it comes to the eco-social risks connected to decarbonisation, these have multifaceted implications, which makes it difficult to relate them to a single specific type of just transition policy. In matter of fact, the social implications of decarbonisation are both long-term and short-term; they will be hardly felt by some vulnerable groups, while also affecting the population as a whole; and, overall, they come with a high level of uncertainty. Therefore, in principle, narrow and broad strategies, protection- and investment instruments, as well as coordinated and concentrated governance structures could all be suitable to respond to different eco-social risks. However, as pointed out by Jacobs (2011), who studied the conditions under which governments put forward long-term investment policies, a government's *choice* with respect to a set of different policy alternatives is not determined by the existence of a policy problem, but rather by institutional and political drivers and barriers.

Although historical institutionalism and path-dependence were not really helpful in explaining the adoption of JTPs, they can instead contribute to account for their formulation. The integrated nature of just transition policies makes it reasonable to assume that, unlike most other policies, these likely develop at the intersection of existing policy sub-systems and, hence, they might be influenced by institutional legacies. In this view, path dependence can affect the range of policy options available to decision-makers for the formulation of eco-social policies. Consequently, the distribution of actors' preferences about the content of JTPs can vary from country to country, depending on how the institutional environment has shaped and shifted

actors' positions over the years (Beramendi et al., 2015). Therefore, context matters. For instance, a centre-left party in one country can hold a different policy position than a similar party in another country (Lim and Duit, 2018).

Two are the principal dimensions that constitute what Beramendi et al. (2015) call the "institutional constraints" that determine the feasibility set of decision-making in contemporary Western democracies: i) whether state intervention is generally weak or low and ii) whether policy legacies are oriented towards investment or consumption. These two dimensions can be predicted to also affect the formulation of just transition policies, since they can affect, respectively, whether decision-makers prefer broad or narrow strategies, entailing different degrees of state intervention, and whether they prefer investment- or protection-oriented (consumption) instruments. With respect to the formulation of the governance component of JTPs, we can instead expect this component to be affected by a path dependence from the institutions that regulate social dialogue. The literature typically distinguishes neo-corporatist institutional structures, where organized societal groups (normally trade union confederations and business representatives) are given privileged, frequent and formalized access to decision-making for instance through tripartite collective bargaining (Molina and Rhodes, 2002; Siaroff, 1999), from pluralist models, where interest groups freely compete to exert political influence (Schmitter, 1974). Interest representation models are related to varieties of capitalism (Hall and Soskice, 2001), since neo-corporatist structures are typically found in Coordinated Market Economies and pluralist structures are normally associated with Liberal Market Economies, while several mixed models also exist (Molina and Rhodes, 2007).

Besides neo-institutionalism, actor-centred theories can also provide useful insights on the formulation of JTPs. From an interest-based perspective, the classic power resource theory connects actors' policy preferences with the interest of their underlying societal constituencies (Korpi, 1983). However, as noted by Häusermann et al. (2022: 69) "the economic-distributive dimension of party competition pitting state interventionist left-leaning parties against market liberal right-leaning parties was not only complemented by a salient 'second dimension' of sociocultural politics debating individual and societal organization and liberties; in most countries, this second dimension has clearly surpassed the economic one in terms of both salience and polarization". This novelty, which resulted from ontological changes in the traditional electoral constituencies of left and right-wing parties, has brought socio-political actors in the past few decades to conflict not only over the quantitative expansions of social

expenditure, but also over the quality, or content, of social policies (Häusermann et al., 2022). Therefore, in this view, the content of JTPs should be determined by the power distribution of different interests.

Finally, Ideas-based theories can also offer some hints about influential factors for the formulation of just transition policies. In particular, the ideational approach in the study of social policies has been regarded as key to unveil the cultural determinants behind different welfare regimes (Kaufmann, 2013), which contribute to the emergence of a wide variety of social policies. Cultural determinants are actively steered by the discourses of domestic and international epistemic entrepreneurs (Häusermann et al., 2022). In recent times, for instance, the diffusion of post-Keynesian ideas through the discourses of international organizations influenced several countries' turn to a "productive social policy", or social investment, paradigm (Gough, 2016), which deeply impacted the formulation of welfare reforms in the last thirty years. A similar discursive influence might be expected to also play a role in the formulation of JTPs.

Once again, although different theories of the welfare state provide useful suggestions on the possible causal drivers behind the content of JTPs, this research adopts an empirical-inductive approach. Accordingly, it assumes that the content of public policies is determined by socio-political actors' preferences and, so, in order to empirically explain JTPs formulation, one should analyse actors' preferences about the content of JTPs. It instead falls outside the scope of the present research to test whether such preferences are determined by institutional legacies, interests, or discursive influences. The bundle of possible preferences that agents can adopt with regards to the content of just transition policies is given by the analytical framework for the analysis of JTPs proposed in Chapter 1.

Although it focuses specifically on JTPs, this framework resembles more established frameworks to capture actors' welfare preferences. In this respect, Beramendi et al. (2015) identify two principal dimensions. The first is quantitative and derived from the class-based industrial-era understanding of social policies, which allows us to distinguish pro-welfare positions – entailing a predilection for a strong welfare state– from more hesitant preferences that instead favour minimal state intervention and a high reliance on the market as welfare supplier. The second dimension is qualitative and it is related to the more recent social investment turn of the welfare state (Hemerijck, 2013; Morel et al., 2012). Along this second dimension, we can distinguish preferences for public policies affecting "the size and certainty of citizens' resource flows either

immediately, as a consequence of current transfers and consumer services, or in the future, as the payoff accruing to individuals from public policies that help them gain the capacity to participate in markets, where they can earn an income" (Beramendi et al., 2015: 15).

Beramendi et al.'s bidimensional space can be adapted to explain actors' preferences on the content of just transition policies, since it captures well the first two dimensions of the analytical framework presented in Chapter 1. Indeed, actors who prefer a strong rather than weak state intervention can also be expected to favour *broad* JTP strategies over *narrow* ones, since the former are wider in scale and scope and hence require a higher degree of public intervention. Actors' preferences for immediate or intertemporal resource distribution instead translates into preferences respectively for *protection*- or *investment*-oriented JTP instruments. Finally, to these two dimensions, the analytical framework proposed in Chapter 1 adds a third dimension, which has to do with the governance of just transition policies. This dimension is not included in Beramendi et al.'s framework, but it can be derived from other studies investigating multi-stakeholder policymaking (Streeck and Hassel, 2003; Cawson, 1978). In this respect, socio-political actors might prefer a *participated* governance, with inclusive implementation structures and coordinated decision-making, or a *concentrated* one, with exclusive governmentalism.

We can expect that the formulation of just transition policies will reflect the preferences of the agents who are responsible for policy formulation. Thus, first and foremost, we can predict that the government's preferences will matter the most. However, the government does not always have monopoly over the formulation of public policies and other actors might also count. For instance, in presence of neo-corporatist institutional structures, policy content is normally determined by the government in agreement with some selected stakeholders. Consequently, in order to assess which actors matter the most in formulating the content of JTPs, the empirical analysis should go beyond the government, accounting also for the preferences of other political parties and relevant interest groups.

# Chapter 4 – Just transition policies and politics in Spain

**Introduction**

This Chapter presents the first of the two cases selected to study just transition policies and politics: Spain. First, relying on a selective review of the secondary literature, the Spanish overarching institutional-political architecture is presented. This implies, on the one hand, focusing on the main democratic and economic institutions, with a particular attention to the party system and the model of interest representation. On the other hand, the Chapter digs deeper into the two policy fields that just transition policies are most concerned with, that is the welfare and the environmental state. This politico-institutional overview should not only allow to contextually situate the case study, but it should also provide knowledge on the potential institutional-political drivers behind the politics of just transition policies in Spain, which will be then reprised in the comparative discussion of the findings in Chapter 6.

Second, this Chapter aims to extensively present the main pieces of evidence collected through the empirical investigation, which was based on a qualitative analysis of policy document, selected press articles and secondary literature, as well as on a set of semi-structure interviews with key informants. While the interpretation of the findings is left to Chapter 6, this Chapter instead adopts a descriptive register. This entails i) chronologically tracing the trajectory that, from 2010 to 2022, brough to the emergence of just transition policies in Spain; ii) describing in depth these policies; and iii) thoroughly reconstructing the policy preferences of relevant supply-side actors – namely political parties holding a significant share of seats in the parliament, as well as the regional and local government most affected by decarbonisation – and demand-side actors – namely trade unions, business organisations, but also green NGOs and movements.

With respect to the structure of the Chapter, Sections 1 and 2 are dedicated respectively to Spain's overarching institutional-political characteristics and to the Spanish welfare and eco state. Section 3 provides a historical reconstruction of the policy trajectory with which JTPs were adopted and formulated, while Section 4 concentrates specifically on describing Spanish JTPs

and Section 5 addresses the politics behind such policies, mapping relevant socio-political actors and their preferences.

## 1. Spanish institutions and politics: an overview

### *1.1. Spanish political and economic institutions*

With over 47 million inhabitants, Spain is the fourth most populous EU Member State. In terms of political institutions, the country is, by constitution and since 1978, a "socio-democratic" State, with the political form of a Parliamentary Monarchy (Magone, 2008; Colomer, 2020). The consolidation of democracy in Spain occurred relatively recently, since the first three quarters of the Twentieth Century were characterized by tumultuous regime changes (Magone, 2008): it started "as a constitutional Monarchy and went through a military dictatorship (1923–31), a very unstable democratic Republic (1931–36), a civil war (1936–39) and a lengthy autocracy (1939–77)" (Chulia, 2007: 501). The transition to modern democracy started with the death of Dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, who, prior to passing away, appointed Juan Carols, of the dismissed royal house of Bourbon, as his successor. Once ascended to the throne, contrary to Franco's willingness, the newly-appointed King actively steered a regime-change process, which led in 1977 to the first open democratic elections and in 1978 to the adoption of the current Constitution (Magone, 2008; Colomer, 2020).

Since 2014, the Head of State, succeeding his father Juan Carlos after abdication, is King (*Rey*) Felipe V. While the monarchy is attributed mere formal powers, it is also the symbol of unity and permanence for the country. However, the two democratic Kings have been more closely tied to the political system and to the functioning of institutions than royals in other Parliamentary Monarchies, like the UK (Colomer, 2020). The King's duties "include the accreditation of ambassadors and the representation of the state in some international gatherings"; "to summon and dissolve parliament, to propose to parliament a candidate for president of government, and to sanction and promulgate laws and decrees" and, finally, the Monarch is also "the supreme commander of the Armed Forces" (Colomer, 2020: 154).

The executive power is held by the President of the Government (*Presidente del Gobierno*), who is nominated by the Congress of Deputies either by absolute majority, in a first ballot, or plurality, in a second ballot. The selected *Presidente* is then appointed by the King (Chulia, 2007). This model of "positive parliamentarism", for which the Prime Minister's entry into office is

subjected to a formal vote of investiture in the Parliament, implies that the choice of Ministers forming the cabinet is commonly left to the *Presidente* (Field, 2021), which contributes to a so-called "presidentialisation" (Magone, 2008), a phenomenon that systematically benefits the Prime Minister vis-à-vis other Ministers (Flores Juberías, 2003). With such rules for government formation, "an early dissolution of the chambers can be avoided if no candidate gets majority support and a minority government is formed thanks to sufficient abstentions by deputies" (Colomer, 2020: 161). This said, even with frequent minority governments, government stability is guaranteed by the stringent rules regulating the overthrown of a government, which can occur only through a "constructive vote of no confidence", hence one for which an absolute majority of Deputies have to vote in favour not only of the motion of censure, but also of an alternative candidate and programme (Colomer, 2020; Field, 2021; Magone, 2008). The other peculiar characteristic that makes the Spanish executive stand out in a comparative perspective is that, since democratization and with the sole exception of the current Government, Spain only ever had single-party Governments, hence no cross-party governmental coalition (Field, 2021). With respect to its competences, the Government holds right of legislative initiative (*Proyect de Ley*) and also the one to legislate through non-ordinary procedures like Decree-Laws (*Decreto-Ley*), Legislative Decrees (*Decreto Legislativo*), Decrees (*Decreto*) and Ministerial Orders (*Orden Ministerial*) (Chulia, 2007).

The legislative power lies in the hands of a bicameral Congress (*Cortes Generales*), comprising a lower house, the Congress of Deputies (*Congreso de los Diputados*), and an upper house, the Senate (*Senado*). The former comprises 350 Deputies, while the latter 259 Senators (208 directly elected and 51 designated by the Autonomous Communities), all of whom serve for a 4-year term (Chulia, 2007; Field, 2021). While the Senate was originally meant to be a territorial chamber, it actually ended up functioning only for secondary legislative approval: the Senate's powers are considerably limited if compared to the Congress, as the former can only raise an objection to a Congress' decision, which the Congress can then decide to overrule. The Congress instead holds the proper exercise of legislative power – though Organic Laws (*Ley Orgánica*) or ordinary Laws (*Ley*) – as well as the right to approve the budget and the responsibility to supervise and potentially destitute – through the above-mentioned vote of constructive no-confidence – the Government and President (Chulia, 2007). While the senate has no effective veto power, the *Congreso de los Diputados* is often an actor with veto power, especially in the frequent cases when the government is minoritarian (Chulia, 2007).

On paper, the Spanish electoral system is an example of proportional representation. It emerged in the years following the transition to democracy and it was later institutionalized by Article 68 of the 1978 Constitution and by a subsequent Electoral Law approved in 1985 (Bosch, 2020). "There are six noteworthy components of this electoral system: a relatively small assembly, some districts of remarkably small magnitude, combined apportionment[34], the d'Hondt formula[35], a 3 per cent legal threshold, and a closed-list ballot structure[36]" (Bosch, 2020: 391). Despite being a proportional system, if one measures how seats are transformed into votes, it turns out that proportionality is arguably low, since the Spanish electoral system has consistently favoured the two largest national parties, due to the small magnitude of several districts (Bosch, 2020). Linked to this, the other notable feature of the Spanish electoral system is that it was successfully designed by law to "avoid inconvenient fragmentation" (Bosch, 2020: 390): consequently, smaller parties, until recently, have historically found it hard to survive and to challenge the two-party system . Other features that denote the outcomes of the electoral system in Spain are strong governability; "malapportionment", which gives higher value to the votes casted in smaller districts; a diffused, but altered, perception that regional parties are given excessive weight in the *Congreso*; and a closed-lists system, which gives stronger power to political parties vis-à-vis their individual candidates (Bosch, 2020).

With its 17 multilingual regions – known as Autonomous Communities (*Comunidades Autónomas*) – Spain is one of the most decentralized countries in Europe (Chulia, 2007). The necessity for devolution was already recognized in the 1978 Constitution. Over the years, Spain's peculiar model of federalism – known as the *Estado autonómico* – has resulted in the increasing autonomy and diversification of the Autonomous Communities and it has given rise to both centrifugal and centripetal political dynamics (Colino, 2020). The Spanish federal system is characterized by the predominance of shared and concurrent competencies and by a solidaristic fiscal system – with high autonomy in regional spending, but generally low regional autonomy with respect to the management of revenues (Colino, 2020). Policy areas for which the central state has increasingly devolved considerable competences to the sub-national level include education, healthcare and social services, whereas defence and social security remain federal

[34] The "combined apportionment" method guarantees 2 fixed seats to each province and distributes the remaining 248 seats among provinces on the basis of population (Bosch, 2020).
[35] The so-called "d'Hondt electoral formula" is one of the most common ways used in proportional electoral systems to distribute seats according to vote shares (Bosch, 2020).
[36] Spain is one of the few electoral systems in Europe where no expression of preference for a candidate is allowed (Bosch, 2020).

remits to this day (Chulia, 2007). Autonomous Communities have their own councils and legislative assemblies and a Government Deputy (*Delegado del Gobierno*) represents the national executive in each region (Chulia, 2007). Table 4.1 enlists Spain's governments in the last 20 years.

**Table 4.1:** ***Governments in Spain in the last 20 years*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| ***Starting date*** | ***President of the Government*** (political party) | ***Governing parties*** (n. of votes in the Congreso) | ***Type of government*** (total n. of votes in the Congreso) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 28.04.2000 | José María Aznar (PP) | PP (183) | Majority (202/350) |
| 18.04.2004 | José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (PSOE) | PSOE (164) | Minority (183/350) |
| 14.04.2008 | José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (PSOE) | PSOE (169) | Minority (169/350) |
| 22.12.2011 | Mariano Rajoy (PP) | PP (185) | Majority (187/350) |
| 04.11.2016 | Mariano Rajoy (PP) | PP (134) | Minority (170/350) |
| 06.06.2018 | Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) | PSOE (84) | Minority (180/350) |
| 13.01.2020 | Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) | PSOE (120); UP (35) | Minority coalition (167/350) |

Much like political institutions, economic institutions in Spain developed dramatically since its transition to democracy. The country's economic modernization unfolded quickly since the 1950s, from an agricultural economy lagging considerably behind in Europe to nowadays' service economy (Requena, 2020). Spain began to industrialize in the 1950s, with a process that was interrupted by economic stagnation in the years of the transition towards democracy. In the 1980s, economic growth reprised with an expansion affecting especially the service and construction sectors, which lasted – with the exception of a few periods of contained contraction – until 2007, when the global financial and economic crisis stopped growth in the country for circa seven years (Requena, 2020). These economic developments have been accompanied by a parallel evolution in the Spanish labour market (Requena, 2020). A new middle class, primarily composed by professionals and managers, gradually replaced the petty bourgeoisie of small-business owners. The number of manual workers, especially skilled ones, has shrunk over time and so did the overall size of the working class. Finally, the combination between socio-demographic changes – such as the growing participation of women in the labour market, ageing and increasing migration – and technological advancements also contributed to fuel the current service economy. Despite these economic and occupational changes have affected the whole country, a vast sectoral and territorial heterogeneity still exists.

Against this backdrop, Spain has developed peculiar economic institutions, which cannot be simply captured by the dichotomous distinction between Liberal and Coordinated Market Economies (Royo, 2007). For this reason, several studies classify Spain, alongside other Mediterranean EU countries, as a "Mixed Market Economy" (Molina and Rhodes, 2007). This implies that the country has a fragmented production system; logics of coordination that vary from sector to sector; fragmented, yet politicized, interest associations and cross-class coalitions; and, finally, a pervasive role of the state as regulator, producer of goods and market corrector (Molina and Rhodes, 2007). As explained below, this mixed model has notable implications on the modes of interest representation, especially when it comes to the nature and power resources of trade unions and business associations.

### *1.2. Parties and cleavages in Spain*

The core features traditionally denoting the party system that formed in Spain after democratisation have been the prevalence of two cleavages, i.e. class and centre/periphery; the relative stability of the distribution of political preferences; and an elitist political culture modelled after the authoritarian era (Flores Juberías, 2003). Nevertheless, in the past few years, this system changed immensely, going from a two-and-a-half-party system to the current moderately multi-party system (Siaroff, 2018), hence with a considerable increase in partisan fragmentation (Méndez Lago, 2020). Major changes in 2015 and, prior to that, in 1982 made it so that the average electoral volatility in Spain since the transition to democracy is one of the highest in Europe, making the Spanish party system a relatively unstable one (Méndez Lago, 2020). Changes in this party system lately resulted also in increasing ideological differences between political parties – i.e. increasing polarization – which have substituted the traditional centripetal patterns of competition (Méndez Lago, 2020).

The evolution of the party system in Spain was, as already stated, characterized by different phases. The first democratically competitive elections were held in 1977 and resulted in the formation of a moderate pluralist system, with two ideologically-close parties: Union of the Democratic Centre (*Unión de Centro Democrático*) (UCD), a centrist party guided by Adolfo Suárez that won both the 1977 and 1979 elections and then disappeared after Suárez's resignation in 1981; and the Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) (PSOE). These two dominated the electoral scene in the first years of modern democracy, giving rise to a centripetal and moderately-polarized political competition, at the expense of more extremist parties (Linz

and Montero, 1999; Méndez Lago, 2020). The 1982 elections brought about a first significant shift, due to the high electoral volatility and the substantial electoral disappearance of the incumbent party UCD. By adopting a more centrist view, the PSOE was able to win three consecutive elections in 1982, 1986 and 1989, with a large advantage over the only other party that managed to collect a competitive number of votes, the centre-right People's Alliance (*Alianza Popular*). Therefore, "the period between 1982 and 1993 can be characterized as a predominant party system as defined by Sartori, that is, one in which alternation in power through elections is not ruled out, but the same party, in this case the PSOE, wins a majority of seats in three or more consecutive general elections" (Méndez Lago, 2020: 336).

After a decade of uninterrupted PSOE-led governments, the 1993 general elections inaugurated a new phase in the history of partisan politics in Spain. In this new phase, electoral competition became moderate and purely bi-partisan, with PSOE running against the party formerly known as *Alianza Popular* and then renamed the People's Party (*Partido Popular*) (PP). The two together were dominating the political scene with alternate governments, and they were competing at the centre of the Spanish electoral distribution. Minority governments, where the two major parties sought the support of regional parties, were typical in this phase of a moderate bipolarism (Linz and Montero, 1999; Méndez Lago, 2020). Seeds for a further transformation of the party system were already planted in the final stage of the bi-partisan era, when the detrimental socio-economic consequences of the 2008 Great Recession and new forms of critical political protest, such as the so-called *Indignados*, sparked political discontent for both PSOE and PP (Méndez Lago, 2020). As a consequence, the 2011 elections reflected this discontent, with the incumbent PSOE government being punished heavily to the advantage of PP and with growing abstention. Soon, also PP, which came out as the winner of the 2011 elections, had to face electoral dissatisfaction, which was aggravated by criticism surrounding a corruption case involving key figures of the centre-right party (Méndez Lago, 2020).

These years of political distrust brought a new dawn for the Spanish party system, which manifested first with the 2014 European and regional elections and, then, even more so, with the 2015 general elections. Paradigmatic change occurred through the emergence of two populist parties breaking the consolidated institutional barriers that had favoured bi-partisanship up to that point. These were the radical left-wing and populist United We Can

(*Unidas Podemos*) (UP)[37] – constituted through a coalition between *Podemos*, the United Left (*Izquierda Unida*) and other left-wing parties – and the centre-right libertarian *Ciudadanos*. Both presented "themselves as a new way of doing politics different from the established parties, emphasizing the old politics/new politics divide" (Méndez Lago, 2020: 338). Compared to 2011, in 2015 the concentration of votes for PP and PSOE decreased by more than 20%, leading to an inability of elected parties to form governments (Méndez Lago, 2020). The new 2016 elections slightly strengthened the votes for PP, which was ultimately able to form a minority government with the then-smallest-ever percentage of votes in the *Congreso*. This government was substituted in 2018 by an even less-supported PSOE minority government, formed after a constructive vote of non-confidence was successfully undertaken in response to the corruption scandal that invested PP's President Mariano Rajoy (Siaroff, 2018; Field, 2021). The subsequent April 2019 elections failed again to secure a clear majority for any political party and the incumbent Sánchez government remained in charge as caretaker. A second round of elections hence took place in November the same year, this time resulting in the re-election of Pedro Sánchez as *Presidente* and in formation of Spain's first-ever coalition government since democratization, emerging from an agreement between PSOE and UP.

As already stated, for years, the Spanish political scene has been dominated by two adversarial parties. Founded in 1879, PSOE is the oldest national political party in Spain, where it had been active either electorally or as an underground party across different regime changes (Siaroff, 2018; Magone, 2008). PSOE was originally conceived to represent the working class and it even founded its own affiliated trade union confederation back in 1888, the General Workers' Union (*Unión General de Trabajadores*) (UGT). After the transition to democracy, PSOE abandoned its original Marxist ideology and became a more moderate socio-democratic mass party, making an ideological shift that ultimately allowed it to secure continuous wins in the general elections between 1982 and 1996, under the leadership of Felipe González (Magone, 2008). When PP finally took over in 1996, PSOE was in an organizational turmoil and only the election of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero as leader of the party in 2000 restored an internal equilibrium, which eventually led PSOE to winning another general election in 2004 (Magone, 2008). Nowadays, the party is led by President Pedro Sánchez. PSOE could be characterized a liberal centre-left

[37] Before adopting its current denomination, this coalition initially went under the name of *Unidos Podemos*. For the sake of simplicity, it will be referred to here always as *Unidas Podemos*.

party, although it has often endorsed centre-right positions over the years, including on economic and foreign policy (Siaroff, 2018).

After the electoral disappearance of UCD, the main rival of POSE has historically been the *Alianza Popular*, founded in 1977, and then renamed *Partido Popular* in 1989. Originally a conservative party, PP has developed into a proper "catch-all centrist party after 1989" (Magone, 1989: 150), although still maintaining some socially-conservative stances. This evolution was also accompanied by a significant growth in PP's electoral support. While *Alianza Popular* was never really able to challenge the dominium of PSOE and it stagnated at around one quarter of the total votes until the 1990s, new leader José María Aznar "was able to take the [renamed] PP above a third of the votes in 1993, to the plurality of votes and seats and then government in 1996, and finally to a single-party majority in 2000" (Siaroff, 2018: 434). PP governed the country again under the leadership of Mariano Rajoy between 2011 and 2018, who was then dismissed by a vote of non-confidence.

Among the political parties that have managed to challenge bipartisanship in Spain since 2015 we find, on the left and decentralist side, *Izquierda Unida*, which is historically allied with the Initiative for Catalonia Greens (*Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds*) –gaining, from 1989 onwards, constantly considerable votes but only few seats – and *Podemos* – which, in 2014, "arose in reaction to the economic crisis of 2008 onwards, building on the Spanish anti-austerity movement" (Siaroff, 2018: 433). Since the 2016 elections, *Podemos* and IU-ICV have run together with other smaller parties, such as *Equo*, under the coalition name *Unidas Podemos*. On the right-hand side – supporting first PSOE in 2015, in reaction to the corruption scandal investing former President Rajoy, and then PP after the 2016 election – we find *Ciudadanos*, a liberal party founded in 2006 in Catalonia as a centralist-unitarian response to the raising movements for Catalan independence (Siaroff, 2018). Finally, since the 2019 elections, the far-right conservative party *Vox* has also entered the Spanish parliament, surpassing both UP and *Ciudadanos* as the current third most represented party in the *Cortes Generales* (Field, 2021).

Another peculiarity of the Spanish party system is that, alongside the national parties described above, several regional parties have always managed to elect candidates in the national parliament, with the Basque Country and Catalonia being the most successful Autonomous Communities in doing so (Siaroff, 2018). Among nationally-represented regional parties, on the centre-right side, we notably find the Basque Nationalist Party (*Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea*), the

Catalan Convergence and Union (*Convergència i Unió*) – from which later came Democracy and Freedom (*Democràcia i Llibertat*) – and the Canarian Coalition (*Coalición Canaria*). On the left-hand side instead, we find the Republican Left of Catalonia (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*) and the Galician National Bloc (*Bloque Nacionalista Galego*) (Siaroff, 2018). Despite differences in their ideological positions on socio-economic matters, many regional parties have supported PSOE-led governments in light of the latter's more decentralist positions if compared to PP.

Spain is characterized by "an authoritarian political culture which explains low party membership ratios, negative views of politics—especially at the national level—and a preference for a strong, paternalistic State", a culture with "parties characterized by low levels of social penetration and party identification, a party membership with more interest in paid jobs in public administration than grassroots activity, and the development of elitist and vote-seeking electoral strategies" (Flores Juberías, 2003: 576). In such a context, Spanish parties have been found to be more tied to the state than to society in general, which is evident when we consider how low are parties' membership levels and mobilization capacities, and how weak is people's political trust (Méndez Lago, 2020).

Partisan polarization in Spain revolves around two main cleavages: class and centre-periphery. The former cleavage, separating left- and right-wing parties, has not only allowed parties to channel class conflicts, but, in Spain, it mostly absorbs also the liberal–conservative cleavage, that has to do with civil liberties (Field, 2021). With the exception of *Ciudadanos*, indeed left-wing parties –notably PSOE and UP – have taken libertarian position, while PP and *Vox* have positioned themselves on the conservative side (Siaroff, 2018). The religion cleavage was also active in the past in Spain, but secularization has progressively weakened its strength (Bauluz et al., 2021). The second principal dimension of political competition in Spain pertains the territorial distribution of power between the State and the Autonomous Communities and it has become increasingly relevant since the 2000s and even more so from 2012 onwards, with the raise of Catalan nationalism (Méndez Lago, 2020; Bauluz et al., 2021). This territorial cleavage manifests in the presence of regional parties, that obviously tend to be more pro-periphery. State-wide parties, instead, assume various positions on this matter, depending on their level of territorial ramification, with PP being much more of a pro-unity advocate if compared to PSOE and *Unidas Podemos* (Méndez Lago, 2020; Field, 2021). Finally, before *Vox* entered the Parliament after the latest election, nationalist far-right parties have historically been weak in Spain (Bauluz et al., 2021), since "unlike in other countries such as Greece or Italy, no new anti-

immigration or anti-European cleavages have emerged with the economic and political crises associated with the Great Recession" (Méndez Lago, 2020: 344).

### *1.3. Interest representation in Spain*

Interest representation in policymaking in Spain can be described as a peculiar form of a neo-corporatist model, in which few powerful and organized interest groups are formally involved in various phases of the political process (González Begega and Luque Balbona, 2014). By constitution, trade unions and employers' organizations are attributed a prominent role in promoting socio-economic interests (Chulia, 2007). However, within the framework of Spain's Mixed Market Economy, the social partners, while politically powerful, are organizationally fragmented and weakly-articulated (Molina and Rhodes, 2007). As a result, "while they are unable to deliver the same collective goods or create strong autonomous forms of coordination (in collective bargaining, for example) they frequently do have the power to veto change and/or demand compensation from the state" (Molina and Rhodes, 2007: 228). Industrial relations in Southern-European Mixed Market Economies are characterized by the pre-eminence of state coordination, an alternative to both strategic and market coordination, typical respectively of Coordinated and Liberal Market Economies (Molina, 2014). In Spain, "[institutional] change will be more responsive to exogenous shocks and contingent upon government colour and the veto power of other actors" (Molina, 2014: 375), namely the social partners.

Despite several changes have occurred over the years, neo-corporatism is still present in Spain to this day and it has evolved relatively quickly from a Fordist-industrial to a competitive model (González Begega and Luque Balbona, 2014). Spain's current competitive corporatism is characterised by the fragmented and incomplete institutionalization of social dialogue structures; the decentralization of corporatist practices; and social partners' weakness and dependency on the government (González Begega and Luque Balbona, 2014). Policy concertation – i.e. the formal involvement of social partners in policymaking – is the key instrument of Spanish corporatism and it is normally evoked by the government opportunistically, i.e. it is used more "as a legitimating instrument rather than a mechanism to boost policy effectiveness" (Molina and Godino, 2022).

The first interest groups in Spain emerged already between the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, with the creation of business and trade union

confederations, such as UGT in 1888 (Aguilar, 2020). When Franco took power, free association was forbidden and political participation could only occur by means of a Fascist-inspired model of corporatism, with vertical and regime-friendly social partners. With democratic consolidation, the modern corporatist system emerged, together with the re-establishment of UGT and the legalisation and formalisation of the Communist union Workers' Commissions (*Comisiones Obreras*) (CCOO) in 1976. The years between 1977 and 1986 were constellated by a series of social pacts, signed even in absence of stable neo-corporatist institutional structures (Molina and Miguélez, 2014). Such pacts were meant to provide political stabilization and conflict mediation during the regime shift, by complementing the process of industrial restructuring with a redistributive rationale (González Begega and Luque Balbona, 2014). After this first collaborative era, the general strike of 1987 marked the beginning of a more conflictual phase, where bipartite and tripartite social dialogue were suspended in favour of a more unilateral regulation of labour affairs by the state (Molina and Miguélez, 2014).

Between 1992 and 2000 Spanish corporatism was reoriented towards a competitive rationale, so as to adjust it to the process of convergence with the Economic and Monetary Union (González Begega and Luque Balbona, 2014). During these years, a permanent mechanism for bipartite social dialogue between trade unions and employers was created, to the expenses of tripartite concertation, which remained weak in spite of the creation in 1991 of the Social and Economic Council (*Consejo Económico y Social*) - that is a tripartite forum with consultative powers (Molina and Miguélez, 2014). After a relatively short period of conflict at the beginning of the 2000s, from 2004 to 2007 social concertation resurfaced and was re-centralised through a higher level of state intervention in industrial relations, while keeping constant the competitive rationale (González Begega and Luque Balbona, 2014).

The 2008 economic and financial crisis took the Spanish neo-corporatist system by storm (Molina, 2014). While bipartite agreements showed vitality and resilience, tripartite social dialogue suffered from severe discontinuities. Molina and Miguélez (2013: 11) distinguish two separate post-crisis phases: "the period of stimulus response in 2008-2009 was characterized by a significant involvement of social partners, though with little results in terms of agreements signed. The 2010 debt crisis led to the adoption of a more unilateral approach to policymaking with less room for social partnership". Since 2014, with the dawn of the economic recovery, there has been a slight resurgence of social dialogue – although still fragmented and

discontinuous - as a result of trade unions and employers' organizations urging the government to restore concertation mechanisms (Molina and Miguélez, 2017).

As evident by now, the principal actors in the Spanish system of interest representations are trade unions and business associations. With respect to the former, UGT and CCOO, with almost one million members between the two of them, form a national duopoly of workers' representation (Chulia, 2007). Trade union density in Spain is relatively low, specifically 13.9% in 2015 (Fernandez Rodriguez et al., 2019). However, the capacity for mobilization of both union and non-union members by UGT and CCOO is high and so is their representativity, given that collective agreements – in a country with relatively high collective bargaining rate, at 77% in 2016 (Fernandez Rodriguez et al., 2019) – are valid for all workers, not just unionized ones (Campos Lima and Artiles 2011). Indeed, collective agreements at the national and regional levels can only be signed by the most representative unions elected in work councils. Since UGT and CCOO have consistently managed to gain around two-thirds of the votes in such councils (Fernandez Rodriguez et al., 2019), they can be considered particularly powerful. Significant organizational and ideological differences exist between UGT and CCOO. The former has adopted a more centralized structure and a consensus-seeking strategy of cooperation with the government, which derives from its historically-strong ties with PSOE, while CCOO is more decentralised, as well as confrontational and critical of policy concertation, mirroring its roots in the communist ideology (Molina and Godino, 2022). While CCOO and UGT have developed as adversarial entities, since the 1980s, the two confederations have reached more unity and convergence, due to a newly-found and growing autonomy from their ideologically-close parties (Molina and Godino, 2022).

With respect to employers' associations, only two organizations enjoy the status of national representatives for this category in social dialogue structures: the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations (*Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales*) (CEOE), which was founded in 1978 and represents around 200 employers' organizations, and the Spanish Confederation of Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises (*Confederación Española de la Pequeña y Mediana Empresa*), which is itself a member of the CEOE (Campos Lima and Artiles 2011). Employers' association rate is quite high and stable: it is estimated at 75% (Fernandez Rodriguez et al., 2019). The CEOE serves as a proper socio-political actor, putting pressure on Spanish institutions on behalf of the whole business world (Medina, 2022). Besides umbrella organizations, sectoral interest groups have also grown into more complex and fluid entities,

which are autonomously able to influence policymaking. This is the case, for instance, of renewable energy organizations that "have created new organizations and broken away from the representational monopoly of the old ones" (Aguilar, 2020: 441).

Besides social partners, other civil society organization also operate in the Spanish political arena. The access to institutions for non-industrial interest groups remains limited if compared to other Western-European countries, but it has grown over time (Aguilar, 2020). Serving as information providers for political parties, it is estimated that around 2.000 sectional groups managed to gain access to parliamentary hearings between 1996 and 2000, 16% of which were corporations, 7% unions, 8.4% professional associations and 36% NGOs (Aguilar, 2020). Due to the heritage of the Francoist period, the NGO sector was historically underdeveloped in Spain and, consequently, NGOs' involvement in policymaking had been marginal and mostly consultative (Márquez and Guerrero, 2022). Since the 1990s, however, the demand for political participation through NGOs has increased, and the latter have been more and more recognized and engaged in policymaking, primarily due to their involvement in the development of the welfare state (Márquez and Guerrero, 2022). Spanish NGOs have lately become more similar to other European NGOs, with respect to their focus on social services provision, their functional specialization and their funding through the social economy (Márquez and Guerrero, 2022).

Beyond organized sectional groups, political participation often also occurs through social movements. As Romanos (2020: 466) puts it, "Spaniards are among the Europeans who participate the most in street protests, although their social movements have been understood as deploying a less radical repertoire of protest and weak organizational models". Recently, in the aftermath of the Great Recession, an important wave of mobilization was driven by a widespread distrust in political parties and in the institutional system and resulted in the emergence of the *Indignados* movement, also known as "15M". This movement's aim was to demand the respect of basic civil and social rights, as well as to criticize the poor quality of the Spanish democracy. The *Indignados* brought novel ways of participation and active citizenship, by promoting forms of deliberative democracy, massive marches and other types of unconventional and confrontational political actions (Romanos, 2020). Moreover, the 15M also promoted a novel model of non-partisan and non-ideological inclusiveness, open to newcomers and based more on emotional, rather than rational, political attachment (Romanos, 2020).

**2. The Spanish eco-welfare state**

### *2.1. The Spanish welfare state*

Classifying Spain in the welfare regimes literature is not necessarily a straightforward task, since different authors have proposed alternative categorizations (Guillén and León, 2011). Under Esping-Andersen's (1999) threefold typology, Spain is classified as a Conservative-Corporatist welfare model, hence rooted in the Bismarckian tradition and characterized by corporatist status segmentation and conservative familism. However, since the mid-1990s, and in particular after Ferrera's (1996) seminal article, Spain – alongside Italy, Greece and Portugal – is often regarded to be part of a fourth alternative welfare model, that is the Southern-European family. Originally departing from a Bismarckian tradition, but with a much more influential role of familism rather than corporatism, Mediterranean welfare states have become more and more hybrid over time, leading to a "functional distortion", for which some social policy areas– notably healthcare and pensions – have developed more than others – especially social assistance and care (Natili and Jessoula, 2022; Guillén and León, 2011). Particularly noteworthy in the peculiar development of Southern-European welfare states were the establishment of universal healthcare systems and the absence, for a long period of time, of minimum-income schemes, against a low level of social expenditure (Natili and Jessoula, 2022). All these elements combined brought a high level of stratification – with low potential for poverty reduction – and the reinforcement of familism, especially as a source of care provision in strongly gender-biased societies (Natili and Jessoula, 2022).

Summing up, the Spanish welfare state, much like its other Mediterranean counterparts, has become a "peculiar syncretic version of three principles à là Esping–Andersen" (Guillén and León, 2011: 7): it "has combined within it three different logics for welfare protection: universal healthcare, education, and to some extent long-term care have become social-democratic; income maintenance policies (contributory pensions and unemployment benefits) have remained corporatist; and social services and social assistance have become liberal or means-tested" (Del Pino, 2020: 529). Therefore, the result is an arguably hybrid system difficult to encapsulate in a fixed category: most authors describe it with the lenses of Ferrera's Southern-European regime type, others just consider it a more conservative variant of the Bismarckian tradition (Guillén and León, 2011) and, finally, some authors even identify pathways of transformation that have partially rendered the Spanish welfare state similar to a Nordic model (Moreno, 2008).

The history of the Spanish welfare system shows how profoundly this system has transformed over the years, to the point that Guillén and León (2011: 8) call such transformations "spectacular". The origins of the Spanish welfare state could be traced back to the authoritarian era, when, in 1963, Franco introduced the first social security law, establishing a precarious welfare state with weak fiscal bases (Del Pino, 2020). Much like the other Mediterranean welfare systems, also the Spanish one is affected by the legacies of dictatorship and the related delay in industrialization (Natili and Jessoula, 2022). The 1978 constitution laid the legal foundations of the current Spanish social protection system (Del Pino, 2020) and the first timid reform efforts were oriented towards closing protection gaps (Guillén et al., 2022). A paradigmatic shift occurred in the years between 1982 and 1992 when PSOE enjoyed an uninterrupted absolute majority as governing party and was able, thanks to the pressure exerted by confederal trade unions and some Autonomous Communities, to implement progressive welfare reforms (Del Pino, 2020). The modernization of the welfare state followed a universalistic logic – for instance with the introduction of national healthcare and education systems in 1986 and 1985 respectively – which was coupled by the rationalization of other welfare areas – namely through the tightening of eligibility criteria in the pension system in 1985 and the cut in unemployment benefits in 1989 – and increasing decentralisation especially of social assistance (Del Pino, 2020; Guillén et al., 2022).

After this period of expansion and consolidation, the years between 1993 and 2004 were characterized by cost-containment and liberalisation – although with some exceptions – which were coupled with the flexibilization of the labour market (Del Pino, 2020). The main drivers behind this retrenchment were the fiscal requirements imposed by the Maastricht Treaty in the framework of Spain's entry into the European Monetary Union, a worsened economic performance in the early 1990s and the election of a PP government in 1996 (Del Pino, 2020). An inversion of this downward trend came with the centre-left Zapatero government from 2004 to 2007. Although Zapatero kept combining restrictive and expansive social protection reforms, the real novelty he introduced was represented by attempts to recalibrate the welfare system so as to meet the so-called "new social risks", including through childcare and long-term care (Del Pino, 2020; Guillén et al., 2022). In the field of childcare, Spain has invested considerable resources to pursue de-familiarisation, for instance by promoting female employment and fathers' participation to care (León et al., 2021).

In the social policy field, the years following the Great Recession were characterized by a mix of retrenchment – hence cost containment and rationalization – and, more marginally, recalibration (León et al., 2015). As stated, Spain, much like other Southern-European welfare states, was severely hit by the financial – and later sovereign debt – crisis and, in this context, reforms were heavily influenced by international actors and, specifically, by EU conditionalities (Guillén et al., 2022). León et al. (2015: 186) identify two reform phases in this crisis era: "a first one, from 2008 to mid-2010, which can be characterised as a 'mild expansion' phase; and a second one starting in mid-2010, which can be defined as the 'harsh austerity' phase". Mild expansion – especially in the realm of unemployment protection – occurred under the Zapatero PSOE-led government, while the subsequent PP-led Rajoy government made substantial cuts to social protection (León et al., 2015; Del Pino, 2020). Retrenchment-oriented reforms impacted both the universalistic pillar of Spanish welfare, especially healthcare, and the more liberal and residual component centred around income maintenance schemes, whereas the reform of the pension system was "parametric and phased-in" (Guillén et al., 2022).

The recovery from the crisis began already in 2014 and it was accompanied by a reinforcement of expenditure in different social policy areas (Del Pino, 2020). Despite Spain eventually managed to restore welfare expenditure, as well as to ensure fiscal rigour, it anyways started "losing ground vis à vis the rest of the EU" with respect to both social policy outputs and outcomes (Natili and Jessoula, 2022: 111). However, since 2018, after decades of PP-led governments, the new Sánchez government has introduced several expansive reforms in the welfare state field – including the restoration of universal healthcare, increases in pension and minimum wage schemes, and reform in the area of care policies – accompanied by a progressive tax increase (Del Pino, 2020). A key area of public spending that was severely affected by the austerity years, but then restored since 2014, was social investment (Luque Balbona and Guillén, 2021).

The social investment paradigm has especially influenced the development of labour market policies in Spain. While the Spanish government has introduced active employment policy reforms since the 1980s, it was only through Europeanisation in the mid-1990s – and in particular through the 1997 European Employment Strategy and the use of the European Social Fund – that the activation paradigm grew stronger (López-Santana, 2020; Moreno and Serrano, 2011). This "activating" recalibration of labour market policies in Spain was also accompanied by a growing decentralisation of the administrative powers over active labour market policies

(although the bulk of it remained managed by the central level) and by increasing liberalisation, with the entry of private actors in the realm of employment policies (López-Santana, 2020). During the Great Recession, in part guided by supranational pressures, both PSOE and PP governments embarked in an unprecedented liberalization of labour market policies, characterised by deregulation, austerity and decentralisation of collective bargaining (Picot and Tassinari, 2017). This represented a critical juncture in the evolution of employment policies in Spain, which resulted in the strengthening of "workfare" as the Spanish approach to activation (López-Santana, 2020).

When it comes to the politics of the welfare state in Spain, scholars have highlighted that, historically, there has been an atypically weak partisan conflict among the two principal political parties PSOE and PP, conflicting especially on the size of the welfare state (Fernández-Albertos and Manzano, 2012). This is coherent with the general features of the Spanish party system, where the left-right cleavage remains the only determinant of partisan interactions over social policies, making policymaking in the welfare field largely non-contentious. This is true unless the territorial cleavage is also activated, awakening a conflict between the central and the regional levels over the distribution of competences (Natili, 2019). The Great Recession brought about several notable changes in the politics of the welfare state in Spain, including an increasing concentration of power in the hands of the government and especially the Prime Minister, at the expense of the Parliament, sub-national governments and social partners (Guillén and Pavolini, 2015; León et al., 2015). Moreover, the ideological differences between the centre-left and the centre-right have been further levelled out by the financial crisis, since "the Zapatero's Socialist government acted not that differently from 2010 to 2012 from Rajoy's Centre-right majority government from 2012 onwards" (Guillén and Pavolini, 2015: 154). The ideological proximity on welfare policies between PSOE and PP during the years of austerity ultimately contributed to the entry of new parties into the party system, shifting partisan competition from between-poles to within-pole, as exemplified by the PSOE and *Unidas Podemos* interaction.

As stated above, Spanish corporatism has been characterised by politically strong, yet fragmented, unions and business organizations and by a strong role played by the government in steering concertation (Molina and Rhodes, 2007). In recent years, social dialogue in the field of social and labour market policies has come under strain as a result of the Great Recession, which led to decentralised collective bargaining and unilateral decision-making by the government (Picot and Tassinari, 2017; Balbona and Begega, 2015). Nevertheless, while in other

Southern-European countries like Italy corporatism did not resurface in the aftermath of the financial crisis, in Spain there have been attempts by the Government to engage in social dialogue about welfare reforms (Balbona and Begega, 2015). Finally, beyond the social partners, social NGOs and civil society organizations have also proved capable to mobilize a strong demand for social policy reforms in Spain (Natili, 2019).

### *2.2. The Spanish eco state*

Unlike welfare models, when it comes to the eco state, there is no consensual typology to classify countries into different regimes. As a result, when it comes to Spain, many different interpretations co-exist in the few studies that have attempted to cluster countries according to their typology of environmental state. Duit (2016) concentrates on the governance resources allocated to environmental protection and labels Spain as a "partial environmental state" with both underdeveloped administrative capacities and weak policy responses to environmental problems. Adopting a completely different interpretation, Koch and Fritz (2014), who checked the evolution of countries' environmental performance over time, instead clustered Spain among the top-performing or "established" eco states, consistently scoring above average between 1995 and 2010.

A more moderate view is proposed by Zimmermann and Graziano (2020), who also looked at environmental performances by combining several indicators. According to these authors, although Spain does not have fully-developed policies, it is improving its environmental regulation, which justifies the country's placement among the "not-so-bad" eco state cluster. Similarly, Jahn (2014) combines countries' environmental performances with their prevailing economic regimes and places Spain – alongside other Southern-European countries, as well as the UK, the Netherlands and Ireland – slightly above the average in terms of environmental performance and almost in between a "productionist" and a green growth regime.

These classifications reflect differences in the indicators that scholars have used to measure the strength of the eco state. In spite of the differences, they all point to an average environmental policy performance of Spain among other European countries. However, for the purpose of this research, instead of analysing environmental policies as a whole, it would be more informative to look specifically at climate policy performance. Spain is often considered a mid-fielder in existing climate policy rankings (Camargo et al., 2020; CAN, 2018; Knill et al., 2012). While the

country was conventionally classified as a laggard in environmental protection, among the 24 European and OECD countries analysed by Knill et al. (2012: 42), "Spain significantly improved its policy performance and ranked as a leader in 8th place in 1990 and 7th in 2000. Clearly scoring above all other commonly depicted laggards in the last two observation points, Spain occupies the overall average position of 12$^{th}$".

This is an indication of the increase in climate ambition that Spain has been actively promoting in the last few years. The Climate Change Performance Index – tracking the performance of 59 countries around the world in terms of climate policy, renewable energy, energy use, and carbon emissions – asserted that in 2022 "Spain improve[d] its performance in all four CCPI categories, vaulting it 11 spots to 23rd, though still performing at a medium level" (Burck et al., 2022). This recent upgrade in the country's climate policies is evident also when looking at the Spanish NECP, which brought Spain from being classified among "foot-dragging" EU Member States, to becoming "fence-sitting" (Maris and Flouros, 2021). Policy progress resulted in achievements with respect to Spain's fight against climate change, since, between 2005 and 2019, the Iberian country managed to cut its emissions by almost 27%, well above the 19% EU average (Morgado Simões and Andreo Victoria, 2021). Despite these progresses, Spain still represents a huge greenhouse gases emitter, responsible, in 2019, of circa 9 % of the EU total (Morgado Simões and Andreo Victoria, 2021).

Spain was originally regarded as a climate laggard not only for its record on emissions reduction, but also for its climate policies, which for a while could not keep up with EU-set standards (Costa, 2006). Nonetheless, over time, the position of the Spanish government in the climate policy field has changed substantially, with the country becoming an active player at the European level in the mid-2000s (Costa, 2006). At the national level, a key reform came in 2006 with the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan, comprising a series of priorities and related activities organized in work programmes and covering an 8-year time span (Camargo et al., 2020). While this Plan covered the issue of climate adaptation, the policy framework for climate mitigation remained instead fragmented – with both national initiatives for emissions reduction coexisting alongside regional measures like the Catalan Law on Climate Change – ultimately creating conflicts of competencies between different levels of government (Camargo et al., 2020).

The core policy instruments in Spain's climate policy mix are the EU Emission Trading Scheme and a renewables feed-in tariff (Del Río P, 2009; González-Eguino et al., 2016). The latter has

been in place since 1997 and has represented the main instrument for the development of renewable energy sources in Spain (González-Eguino et al., 2016; Sorman et al., 2019). The EU Emission Trading Scheme is instead a supranational measure, which overtime became the main carbon pricing measure in Spain, complemented by other national initiatives, such as excise taxes on oil products, electricity, and natural gas (González-Eguino et al., 2016). Another important measure to achieve reductions in carbon emissions is the cut of subsidies to the coal production industry. In this respect, González-Eguino et al. (2016: 612) note that "from 2005 to 2011 subsidies for the coal sector decreased from €503 million (€61,200 per employee) to around €380 million, while coal production decreased from 6,626 Ktoe to 2,287 Ktoe. Council Decision 2010/787/EU stipulates the phase-out of subsidies by 2018 and Spain will have to progressively reduce its support to meet this target".

In recent years, the Spanish policy framework to fight climate change has evolved considerably. Since 2017, the country has committed to comply with the objectives of the Paris Agreement in the broader framework of the European Union's climate efforts (Sorman et al., 2019). With the PSOE-led Government taking power in 2018, Spain's ambition in the fight against climate change was upgraded even more, as exemplified by Sánchez's decision to appoint Teresa Ribera as Spain's first-ever Ministers for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (*Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico*) (MITECO) (Sorman et al., 2019). Under the Sánchez administration, several new policy initiatives were taken in the climate field. In February 2019, Ribera presented the Strategic Energy and Climate Framework (*Marco Estratégico de Energía y Clima*) (Government of Spain, 2019a), an initiative comprising different elements, including a proposal for Spanish just transition policies (Nieto Sáinz et al., 2020; Morgado Simões and Andreo Victoria, 2021). The proposal for a Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition (*Ley de Cambio Climático y Transición Energética*) was presented by the Government in the Parliament in May 2020 as the first of thirty priorities to address the declared "climate and environmental emergency" (Government of Spain, 2020b). The Law was finally approved in the Parliament in May 2021 (Cortes Generales, 2021), putting into legislation a set of objectives, targets and actions to promote the progressive decarbonisation of the Spanish economy, mirroring the country's NECP (Grangel, 2021).

Comparing the climate policy position of the four principal parties in the Spanish Parliamentary system – *Ciudadanos*, *Partido Popular*, PSOE and *Unidas Podemos* – Averchenkova and Lázaro Touza (2020a; 2020b) note that all of them share the need to have 2030 and 2050 emissions

reductions targets and an overlapping consensus exists among the four parties on the main features of the Climate Change and Energy Transition Bill, although with different grades of ambition. *Unidas Podemos* holds the most ambitious climate policy views (Averchenkova and Lázaro Touza, 2020a; 2020b), since climate mitigation has been given a prominent place in the party's electoral manifestos since the mid-2010s (Huber et al., 2021). Conversely, the other three parties only partially agree with the need to upgrade Spain's climate objectives, with PSOE particularly stressing that the low-carbon transition should be gradual in order to allow economic stakeholders to cope with its socio-economic consequences (Averchenkova and Lázaro Touza, 2020a; 2020b).

Stronger differences between parties' positions can be detected when we address specific instruments. Among the four above-mentioned political parties, PP is shown to hold the least ambitious positions on issues like the stringency of carbon pricing, state aid to the fossil fuel sector and the phase-out of nuclear plants (Averchenkova and Lázaro Touza, 2020a; 2020b). Generally speaking, as Camargo et al. (2020: 158) put it, "there is a clear political divide over climate change policies in Spain with the more left-wing leaning parties favouring more progressive action". This is particularly true for UP that, as expected for a left-wing populist party, gives high salience to the fight against climate change (Huber et al., 2021). With respect to conservative parties, while PP has historically supported climate mitigation, it has done so by giving priority to economic liberalisation, cost containment and energy security, hence pointing to energy efficiency as the preferred policy measure to deliver on climate objectives (Hess and Renner, 2019). The principal far-right populist party in Spain, *Vox*, although giving very low priority to climate change, has so far not rejected climate science, like ideologically-similar parties all over the world have done, and it has overall held a very close position to the PP's one on climate mitigation (Hess and Renner, 2019).

Concerning interest representation in the Spanish eco state, there are few NGOs that hold privileged access to the government as information providers in different advisory bodies. These mainly include *Ecologistas en Acción*, Greenpeace Spain, the World Wildlife Fund, and SEO Birdlife (Márquez and Guerrero, 2022; Jiménez, 2007). Since the 1990s, environmental movements in Spain were indeed able to adopt a "pragmatic attitude towards political opportunities, but without discarding social mobilization" (Jiménez, 2007: 372). Nevertheless, environmental NGOs' potential to influence policymaking still remains arguably limited to this day. As Tabara (2003: 27) highlights, "the lack of an environmental movement able to overcome

the level of action of the [Autonomous Communities] and even less to deal with global problems, as well as the weakness of national epistemic communities, and the low level of importance placed on environmental issues by the mass media can explain partly the lack of collective action in this area". Similarly, the absence of a strong Green Party in the Spanish political spectrum has been attributed to the historically low salience of environmental issues in the national public debate, a pattern that is only recently starting to change with the advent of the climate crisis (Tabara, 2003). Conversely, industries seem to have a high influence on environmental policymaking in Spain, which is exemplified by the "revolving door" phenomenon, for which high-ranking politicians often end up getting appointed in major positions within private energy companies (Reyes, 2018).

Finally, it is also important to stress that the politics of climate policies in Spain has been denoted by a particularly pronounced multilevel nature. On the one hand, the European Union is a key actor steering policy reforms at the national level and Spain has increasingly become active in the Brussels-level interinstitutional negotiations regarding climate policies (Costa, 2006). Nevertheless, even though recently this trend seems to be shifting (Maris and Flouros, 2021), Europeanisation has not necessarily always resulted in a convergence between Spanish and European policies (Costa, 2006). Moreover, several scholars have pointed to a lack of effective coordination between climate policies at the national and regional levels, which has led to uneven regional developments (Presicce, 2020; Camargo et al., 2020).

### 3. The Spanish policy trajectory: the emergence of just transition policies

The present Section summarises the trajectory leading to the emergence of just transition policies in Spain. Table 4.2 contains a list of the main events that make up this trajectory, presented in chronological order.

**Table 4.2:** ***The policy trajectory of Spain's Just Transition Policies*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| Month/year | Short description of major developments |
|---|---|
| September 2010 | A so-called "Black March" is held in coal territories to protest against the foreseen reduction in state aid for the coal sector |
| December 2010 | The EU puts forward Decision 2010/787 to facilitate the closure of uncompetitive coal mines by the end of 2018, later transposed into Decree-Law 134/2010 by the Zapatero government |
| Summer 2012 | Spanish trade unions march from Asturias to Madrid to protest against President Rajoy's intention to close national mines |
| October 2013 | The "Framework Plan for Coal Mines and Mining Communities in the |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 2013-2018 period" is signed through a tripartite agreement, providing decreasing aid to coal mines and social schemes for coal workers |
| 2017-2018 | - The PP government expresses its intention to maintain coal in the national energy mix against the will of the main utility companies<br>- Pedro Sánchez's programme for the PSOE primaries incorporates a "just transition" objective<br>- Several parliamentary initiatives are presented to accompany the closure of coal-fired power plants by 2020, as well as to preserve national coal production |
| June 2018 | - Rajoy is ousted through a vote of no confidence and the Sánchez I government forms, with Teresa Ribera as Spain's first-ever Minister for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge<br>- Ribera announces her intention to pursue a decarbonisation agenda & CCOO and UGT send her an open letter to request a meeting |
| July 2018 | - During a CCOO conference, Ribera announces her intention to put forward a Just Transition Strategy<br>- The government signs a strategic partnership with the ILO to implement the ILO's Just Transition Guidelines |
| October 2018 | The government signs the Framework Agreement for a Just Transition in Coal Mining and Sustainable Development of the Mining Communities for the Period 2019-2027 (with unions CCOO, UGT, USO and Carbunion) |
| December 2018 | - The government converts the Coal Mining Agreement into Decree-Law 25/2018<br>- The government ratifies the Silesia Declaration on Just Transition at the Katowice Climate Summit in Poland<br>- The last Spanish coal mine ceases to operate, in line with EU Decision 2010/787 |
| January 2019 | Decree Law 25/2019 is discussed in a Plenary session of the *Congreso de los Diputados* and ultimately approved |
| February 2019 | The government presents its proposal for a Strategic Energy and Climate Framework, comprising the NECP, a draft Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition confirming Spain's intention to phase out coal, and the drafts **Just Transition Strategy and Urgent Action Plan for Coal** |
| April 2019 | The parliamentary term expires and general elections are held, resulting in the formation of no government |
| July 2019 | *Unidas Podemos* presents a legislative proposal for a Climate Change and Energy Transition Law including just transition measures (which will not be approved) |
| November 2019 | - A second round of elections takes place, resulting in the successful investiture vote of the Sánchez II government, supported by a PSOE-UP coalition<br>- Royal Decree-Law 17/2019 envisages the closure of coal-fired power plants. This is met with protests in affected Autonomous Communities |
| January 2020 | The investiture vote for the Sánchez II government takes place and Teresa Ribera is confirmed as Minister |
| April 2020 | - The final version of the Just Transition Strategy, comprising the Urgent Action Plan for Coal-mining Regions and Power Plant Closures is published<br>- The government signs a tripartite agreement "for a Just Transition for |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Coal Power Plants" with energy companies Endesa, Iberdrola, Naturgy (EDP joins later in March 2021) and trade unions CCOO and UGT<br>- The former Institute for Restructuring Coal Mining and Alternative Development of Mining Regions is transformed into a **Just Transition Institute**, with Laura Martín Murillo as Director<br>- The Just Transition Institute begins negotiating **Just Transition Agreements** with affected territories |
| May 2020 | The government declares a climate and environmental emergency and finally submits the legislative proposal for the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law, featuring a whole section on just transition. |
| May 2021 | The **Climate Change and Energy Transition Law** is approved after 758 amendments from opposition parties |
| June 2021 | - Spain's National Recovery and Resilience Plan is approved, allocating novel financial resources to "a just and inclusive energy transition" |
| December 2022 | The European Commission approves Spain's Territorial Just Transition Plan, providing financial resources through the EU Just Transition Fund to Spanish coal-intensive territories |

### *3.1. The socio-economic premises: the Spanish energy sector and the coal industry in transition*

Spain's National Energy and Climate Plan, submitted to the European Commission in a draft version in February 2019 (Government of Spain, 2019b) and in a final version on January 2020 (Government of Spain, 2020a), envisages a number of actions for the country to become carbon neutral by 2050, as well as to achieve a 23% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to 1990-levels by 2030. To this end, measures in the NECP tackle different areas, from energy efficiency to renewable electricity development, applying to the national context the targets set up at the supranational level (International Energy Agency, 2021). With respect to decarbonisation, the NECP states that its measures aim "at reducing the use of fossil fuels and promoting renewable energy sources in the three uses of energy – transport, heating and cooling and electricity – [while] renewables will account for 42% of the total energy end-use in 2030" (Government of Spain, 2020a: 41).

The Spanish NECP indicates a clear increase in the country's climate ambition, which brought Spain from being among "foot-dragging" countries to a more average position as a "fence-sitter" in EU-wide climate policy rankings (Maris and Flouros, 2021). As already outlined above, the objectives and measures in the NECP are also complemented by several other national climate policies, including notably the 2021 Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition(Cortes Generales, 2021) and the 2020 Long-term Decarbonisation Strategy (*Estrategia de Descarbonización a Largo Plazo*) (MITECO, 2020b), coupled with a Declaration of Climate

Emergency (Government of Spain, 2020b). All these recent climate policy developments were accompanied by a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, which fall by 25% from 2007 to 2018 (International Energy Agency, 2021).

While the transport sector is the largest emitter (41% of total emissions in 2019), greenhouse gas emissions in Spain are highly driven by the electricity and heat generation sectors (23% of the total), followed by industry (14% of the total) (International Energy Agency, 2021). Among energy sources, "oil accounted for 61% of total energy-related CO2 emissions in 2019, followed by natural gas (31%) and coal (8%)" (international Energy Agency, 2021: 41). However, the Spanish energy mix – as well as the nature and amount of related greenhouse gas emissions– has changed considerably over the years as a consequence of both national and supranational reforms, including subsidies and incentives that resulted in a "remarkable" growth in wind and solar energy production (Villaverde et al., 2022).

Needless to say, the most used sources for electricity generation do not necessarily correspond to the ones that are more climate-altering. Indeed, in 2020, the technologies representing the highest share of electricity generation were "nuclear (23%), wind (22%) and combined cycle (16%), followed by hydro (13%) and cogeneration (11%)" (Villaverde et al., 2022: 73). Nevertheless, "most of Spain's energy supply and demand is met with fossil fuels, which accounted for 72% of total energy supply […] and 68% of total final consumption […] in 2019" (International Energy Agency, 2021:19). A large part of such energy is imported, while domestic production consists primarily of nuclear, although the latter was recently surpassed by the aggregate production of renewables (including bioenergy, solar, wind and others), which now represent more than half of the domestic energy production (International Energy Agency, 2021).

A notable place in Spain's decarbonisation policy framework is taken by coal. This fossil fuel represented only 2% of the energy mix in Spain in 2020, confirming a downward trend that, in spite of some fluctuations, had been going on for years (Villaverde et al., 2022; International Energy Agency, 2021; Del Rio, 2017). The share of coal in primary energy production in Spain went from 31% in 1990 to 4.7% 2014 (Del Rio, 2017), a fall that was mainly due to national coal being uncompetitive in the international market (Sanz-Hernández, 2020). Nevertheless, it was only from 2018 onwards, as discussed below in detail, that the coal sector experienced its final decline, as a result of the national government announcing a phase-out target by 2030 in the

NECP (Government of Spain, 2020a). Indeed, the phase-out of coal – together with incentives for the penetration of renewables in the national energy mix – is the principal policy with which Spain is planning to decarbonise its power sector. Moreover, coal phase-out is also expected to generate emission reductions in the industrial sector, through changes in the sources of industrial combustion (International Energy Agency, 2021).

While the NECP predicts that the net employment impact of the measures that it proposes will be positive in all sectors of the economy (with a foreseen aggregate increase of 1.7% in employment by 2030), including the electricity sector (with circa 1.700 new jobs awaited by 2030), it also asserts that occupational and income losses should be expected in the extractive sector (Government of Spain, 2020a; González-Eguino et al., 2019). Indeed, 700 redundancies are estimated by the NECP in the extractive sector alone (Government of Spain, 2020a; González-Eguino et al., 2019). Employment in the coal sector has been declining steadily for decades: while coal employed circa 100.000 people in the 1950s, this figure declined to 45.000 in the late 1980s (Sanz-Hernández et al., 2020) and it reached 3.715 jobs in 2004 (Del Rio, 2017) and 1.562 in 2019 (Sanz-Hernández et al., 2020).

At the end of 2018, when just transition policies were put forward, twenty-six coal mining units were still present across the Country (Del Rio, 2017; Barreira and Ruiz-Bautista, 2020), while fourteen coal-fired power plants were employing circa 3.300 people (European Commission, 2020d), nine of which destined not to be operational anymore already by 2021 (International Energy Agency, 2021). The coal industry in Spain has strong territorial roots, since the remaining mines in 2018 were "geographically concentrated in three areas: Aragón, Castilla y León and Asturias" (Del Rio, 2017: 7), while "four [coal-fired power plants were situated] in Asturias, four in León and Palencia (Castilla y León), three in Cádiz, Almería and Córdoba (Andalucía), two in A Coruña (Galicia), and one in Teruel (Aragon)" (European Commission, 2020d). Therefore, the socio-economic consequences of coal phase-out in Spain are territorially heterogeneous, with some regions and municipalities significantly more affected than others. In Asturias, for instance, the European Commission estimated that job losses will be more hardly felt in peripheral mining municipalities, which are already experiencing depopulation, "downturn of economic activity and lack of employment opportunities" (European Commission Platform for coal regions in transition, 2020).

### *3.2. 2010-2018: Key events preceding the adoption of just transition policies*

The Spanish coal sector had been declining for almost 30 years. The history of coal policies in Spain was characterised by a neo-corporatist governance approach and by a considerable involvement of the State, directly intervening in the market to protect employment (Rentier et al., 2019). For this reason, the government has been supporting utility companies since the mid-1970s, as well as buying domestic coal at a guaranteed price (Sanz-Hernández et al., 2020). Moreover, the state is also co-owner of big electricity companies, including the biggest one in the country, Endesa (Rentier et al., 2019). A severe economic decline for the coal sector started when Spain joined the EU in 1986, which generated a supranational pressure to boost the competitiveness of the domestic electricity market and to promote renewable energy (Rentier et al., 2019; Barreira and Ruiz-Bautista, 2020; Rabanal, 2009). As a response, the Spanish Government immediately adopted a policy approach that was meant to discriminate "against the private sector, providing greater financial support to the public sector" (Rabanal, 2009: 4378). The EU initially accepted such a position through "Council Regulation of July 2002 (EC 1407/2002) [that] discouraged state aid to coal mining but made an exception for Spain, because of the importance of coal to Spain's electricity production" (Rentier et al., 2019: 627).

To deliver on its coal policy approach, Spain put forward several periodic "restructuring and modernization plans" for coal mining over the years, all of which were based on agreements between the state and affected social partners (Del Rio, 2017)[38]. All of these coal plans were aimed primarily to support and strengthen the coal industry and, hence, decarbonisation was far from a political priority at the time. These plans envisaged financial support for public infrastructure, training, and the development of business projects creating employment in coal-dependent areas. Moreover, importantly, the periodic coal plans were also aiming to support mining firms in coping with the reduction of staff, by providing them with monetary resources to be distributed among redundant workers in the form of early retirements or voluntary redundancy schemes (Del Rio, 1997). Finally, in 1997, the Government created an autonomous institute, which will be later renamed Just Transition Institute, to promote the restructuring of the coal mining sector and to develop measures for the alternative economic development of mining municipalities (JTI, 2023b).

[38] These plans were: Restructuring Plan of Coal Sector 1990-1993; Modernization, Rationalization, Restructuring and Reduction Plan for Activity of the Coal Industry 1994-1997; 1998-2005 Coal Mining Plan and Alternative Development of the Mining Communities; the National Coal Strategic Reserve Plan 2006-2012 and New Model of Integral and Sustainable Development of the Mining Communities; and, finally, the Framework Plan for Coal Mines and Mining Communities in the 2013-2018 period (Del Rio, 2017).

Therefore, in the 1990s and 2000s, when some coal mines were starting to shut down, the EU was increasingly pushing Spain to close uncompetitive mines, while the state intervened repeatedly to re-absorb workers in other activities, as well as to promote the re-industrialization of mining territories via social dialogue with unions and companies (interview ES6; Interview ES15). This approach started to crumble in the early 2010s. When both the above-mentioned 2002 EU Regulation and the exception granted to Spain were about to expire, former PSOE Prime Minister Zapatero confirmed the government's intention to boost again the production of domestic coal and use it to fuel national thermal plants (Rentier et al., 2019). However, in 2010, Zapatero's intention was blocked by the EU's Decision 2010/787 (Council of the European Union, 2010), which called for Member States to immediately cease financial support to uncompetitive coal mines, or, alternatively, to set up a plan for the closure for such mines by the end of 2018, hence allowing state aid to take place only for a limited amount of time (Del Rio, 2017). As a result of the foreseen lack of state aid, the two largest mining companies, Alonso and Viloria, stopped paying their workers (Abend, 2010). In response to this decision, in September 2010, a series of protests by mining workers known as the "Black March" outburst in the Spanish coal territories, with miners pressuring the government to keep up with the state aid (Abend, 2010; Interview ES15).

These protests culminated with the European Commission authorizing "a compensation which Spain intend[ed] to grant to electricity generators to meet the costs of fulfilling a public service obligation, namely producing certain volumes of electricity out of indigenous coal" (European Commission, 2010). This mechanism of financial compensation to thermal plants in return for their consumption of national coal was approved with Royal Decree 134/2010 (Ministerio de Industria, Turismo y Comercio, 2010), allowing an extension in state aid to the sector until the end of 2014 (European Commission, 2010). This extension "benefitted the coal producing regions of Asturias, León and Teruel", while "electricity companies Endesa, Iberdrola and Natural Gas Fenosa as well as the region of Galicia appealed against the Royal Coal Decree unsuccessfully" (Rentier et al., 2019: 627). In sum, the electoral incentives for the PSOE government to meet the demands of trade unions and coal regions resulted in a revival of national coal production in the early 2010s.

Spain's coal trajectory changed again soon after, due to both the advent of a conservative Government led by Rajoy in 2011 and the implications of the global financial crisis and related austerity measures, which led the new government to signal its intention to put forward a mine

closure plan with progressive cuts in state subsidies (Sanz-Hernández et al., 2020). This generated the immediate response of highly-unionised coal workers, who, in the summer of 2012, organized a march from Asturias to Madrid to protest against Rajoy's new coal policies (De Pablo, 2012). Ultimately, the government sought to appease the mining communities and trade unions, by resorting once again to social concertation. The outcome was a new tripartite agreement for the coal sector, known as the Framework Plan for Coal Mines and Mining Communities in the 2013-2018 period (*Marco de Actuación para la minería del carbón y las cuencas mineras en el periodo 2013-2018*), which was signed on October 1st 2013 by the government, the principal labour unions in the sector and the federation of mining companies Carbunion (Government of Spain et al., 2013).

This plan "envisages a decreasing path of aid granted to the production of national coal through annual decisions. It states that, all the mining production units which are not competitive without receiving support should be closed after December 31st 2018 and that all those units which continue their activity after 2018 will need to give back the aid received" (Del Rio, 2017: 13). Thus, unlike past plans, this was meant to lead to the irreversible closure of *uncompetitive* coal mines in line with the 2010 EU decision, yet still no environmental rationale was included, nor was the government planning to cut imported coal from Spain's energy mix. The 2013 Plan was described as an instrument for the reorganization of the coal mining sector and the promotion of an alternative economy in mining areas and it also included social support to cushion the costs experienced by coal workers in the form of compensation for the voluntary termination of jobs; support for early retirement; placement of workers; and training support (Government of Spain et al., 2013; Del Rio, 2017). This way, twenty-six uncompetitive companies and, indirectly, their workers who were about to lose their jobs due to the closures were supported. In 2016, the European Commission declared that the Spanish government's state aid to the coal sector was "in line with EU state aid rules, in particular Council Decision 2010/787/EU", but reiterated that 2018 was the imperative deadline for the closure of uncompetitive mines (European Commission, 2016).

Between 2017 and 2018, when the EU-set deadline was approaching, Rajoy's Minister responsible for energy (*Ministro de Energía, Turismo y Agenda Digital*), Álvaro Nadal, declared that the government was actively preventing the closure of profitable power plants (Energìa Renovables 2017;2018), against the requested by the largest Spanish utility company Iberdrola (Arévalo, 2017; Proctor, 2018), as well as against the EU's provisions (Monforte and De Miguel,

2017). Unlike PP, the positions of PSOE and other opposition parties in those years were starting to change. In October 2017, PSOE, as well as *Ciudadanos*, voted favourably to a UP initiative in the Congress of Deputies for the closure of coal-fired power plants by 2020 (Baquedano, 2017; Álvarez, 2017). This was met with harsh reactions by PSOE members in five autonomous communities (Asturias, Galicia, Castilla y León, Aragón and Castilla-LaMancha) (Baquedano, 2017; Álvarez, 2017), as well as by trade unions, accusing Secretary Sánchez of being ambiguous with respect to PSOE's coal agenda. It also sparked the reaction of a few PSOE deputies in the *Congreso de los Diputados*, who, in November 2017, presented a legislative proposal to safeguard the reserves of national coal (PSOE, 2017a).

The history of the Spanish coal sector intersected with Spain's broader climate policy trajectory. As stated above, in the mid-2000s, Spain went from being a climate laggard to actively increasing its climate ambition, both at the European Union level (Costa, 2006) and domestically through the 2006 National Climate Change Adaptation Plan (Camargo et al., 2020). This was accompanied by an increase in the salience of climate change among Spaniards (Averchenkova and Lázaro Touza, 2020a; 2020b). It is notable to point out that, much like it happened with the coal transition, climate policies were also approached through neo-corporatist social dialogue. As pointed out by Gómez and Nieto (2022: 84), "when [PSOE's] Cristina Narbona was Minister of the Environment [within the Zapatero government], an agreement was reached from the initiative of trade unions that institutionalized and articulated a specific social dialogue linked to the establishment of the European emission trading mechanism in Spain, with the aim of achieving the commitments set out [by the United Nations] in the Kyoto Protocol". Thus, the government created one general and several sectoral roundtables, comprising business confederations – CEOE and *Confederación Española de la Pequeña y Mediana Empresa* – and trade unions – CCOO and UGT – to jointly analyse and assess the employment consequences of climate mitigation in Spain, laying the foundation for the future participative mechanisms of just transition (Gómez and Nieto, 2022; Nieto et al., 2020).

While all these developments were ongoing, some ideational seeds were also planted in Spain for the penetration of "just transition" discourses in the political debate. This was made possible through the interlinked work of Spanish trade unions – and in particular CCOO – and international organizations. CCOO has long been regarded as a frontrunner among European trade union confederations, in that it has been promoting ecological demands since the 1990s (Räthzel, 2021). CCOO former Confederal Secretary for the Environment, Joaquín Nieto, played

a particularly active role in the United Nations' climate negotiations, steering the international and European labour movements in support of climate mitigation (Gómez and Nieto, 2022; Nieto et al., 2020). Nieto returned to Spain as the director of the national office of the International Labour Organization and actively put efforts to import the "just transition" concept into the domestic climate policy debate (Interview ES1; Interview ES9). Early signs of the successful penetration of such narrative could be found in Pedro Sánchez's (2017) PSOE primaries electoral platform, as well as in *Podemos* and *Izquierda Unida*'s programme (2016) for the 2016 general elections. It could clearly be seen from both documents that just transition was attached already early on to the challenge of the coal transition.

### *3.3. 2018-2019: The adoption of just transition policies*

The true turning point in the trajectory of just transition policies in Spain came with the fall of Prime Minister Rajoy through a vote of non-confidence and the consequent formation of the Sánchez I government on June 7th 2018. By that point, as stated above, PSOE's discursive support for just transition had been growing, so much so that in April 2018, the party presented a non-legislative proposal in the parliament, calling for the urgent approval of a programme of actions for a just energy transition in particularly-vulnerable territories, with specific reference to the coal and, to a less extent, nuclear sectors (PSOE, 2018). In contrast, before being voted out of office, the previous PP government actively tried to prevent the closure of the thermal plants, even against the will of the electricity companies running existing plants (Planelles, 2018).

However, both the previous government's position and the ambiguities that some members of PSOE manifested in the past were surpassed with Sánchez's appointment of Teresa Ribera as Spain's first-ever Minister for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge. Ribera, who was "an internationally recognized figure for her expertise on the climate agenda, and […] one of the architects of the Paris Agreement" (Gómez and Nieto, 2022), had a fundamental role in changing the approach of PSOE once and for all. As recognized by several interviewees (Interview ES4; Interview ES5; Interview ES6; Interview ES7; Interview ES13; Interview ES16), Ribera actively exercised her leadership to reach a consensus around just transition within her party, framing it as a whole-economy policy priority, rather than just a coal-related issue. Ribera and Sánchez were clear from the beginning on their intention to implement the European and international climate commitments – and consequently to phase out coal – and immediately sought to prevent possible conflicts.

In her first declarations as Minister in June and July 2018 (Planelles, 2018; Government of Spain, 2018a), Ribera stressed her commitment to upgrade the country's ambition in meeting the targets of the Paris Agreement and fighting climate change. In doing so, however, Ribera also highlighted that she was aware of the potentially detrimental socio-economic consequences of the transition and immediately committed to work with local administrations, trade unions and companies in vulnerable areas in order to put forward dedicated economic support. Ribera's expressed aim was to boost the opportunities of decarbonisation, while also placing citizens at the centre of the transition through participation (Government of Spain, 2018b). The appointment and subsequent declarations of the new minister, which were in line with Sánchez's 2017 electoral platform, yet less ambiguous with regards to coal phase-out, were immediately met with concern by the actors that formed the so-called "mining coalition" (Baquedano, 2018). First, PSOE was majoritarian in two of the most coal-dependent Autonomous Communities – Asturias and Aragón – which were actively pushing the national level to delay decarbonisation (Interview ES6; Interview ES15; Interview ES14). Within-PSOE negotiations led to an informal agreement between the national and regional representatives of the party, with regional actors refraining from vetoing the government's decarbonisation agenda in exchange for the promise of support measures (Interview ES16).

The new Minister's plan was initially also met with hesitation by the principal Spanish trade unions, worried about the employment downturns of closing coal mines and power plants (Interview ES14). Immediately taking action, the coal sector representatives of CCOO and UGT sent a letter to Minister Ribera, requesting a meeting to discuss their concerns for sectoral workers and coal regions (Rodríguez, 2018; Ileón, 2018). In such letter, unions, although recognizing the inevitability of a transition, reproached the newly-appointed Minister for the foreseen speed of her decarbonisation strategy and demanded the prevention of job losses in areas that were already characterized by high levels of unemployment (Rodríguez, 2018; Ileón, 2018). In response to such a letter, on the 10$^{th}$ of July 2018, Minister Ribera met CCOO at the conference *Transición Energética y Justa*, organized by the trade union confederation in Madrid (Government of Spain, 2018c). In that occasion, the Minister announced her intention to put forward what she called a "Just Transition Plan" (*Plan de Transición Justa*) to accompany the future Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition and she presented this as her main task in the coming months (MITECO, 2018). Subsequently, also in July 2018, after continuous communications between Minister Ribera and the Director-General of the International Labour

Organization Guy Ryder, the Government of Spain signed a strategic partnership with the ILO to implement their Guidelines for a Just Transition and use them as a baseline to build the Spanish plan (MITECO, 2020a; Gómez and Nieto, 2022).

Even after these developments at the national level, sectoral and territorial trade unions' preoccupations and discontent continued and resulted in a threat to organise new striks or mobilizations if the government was not to guarantee a just transition. Unions were leveraging on the claim that Sánchez's win in the previous-year primaries was made possible also through the political support of socialist constituencies in coal regions (Etxarri, 2018). Against this background, in the fall of 2018, the most representative unions in the coal sector – CCOO, UGT and USO – and Carbounion were called by MITECO to negotiate a new pact for coal. The crucial difference with similar previous pacts was that this was now meant to accompany the closure of coal mines, as opposed to sustaining coal. At that point, Carbunion was not strong enough to oppose the government's decarbonisation plan and unions were starting to see the phase-out as inevitable, while still being compact in asking for economic compensation (Interview ES15). Ultimately, on October 24th 2018, in a ceremony attended by the Minister for Ecological Transition, Teresa Ribera, and the Minister of Labour, Migration and Social Security, Magdalena Valerio, the Government and coal-sector social partners signed what would most likely be Spain's last-ever tripartite agreement for the mining sector (Government of Spain, 2018d).

The Framework Agreement for a Just Transition in Coal Mining and Sustainable Development of the Mining Communities for the Period 2019-2027 (*Acuerdo Marco para una Transición Justa de la Minería del Carbón y Desarrollo Sostenible de las Comarcas Mineras para el Periodo 2019-2027*), hereafter Coal Mining Agreement, was meant to respond to the socio-economic costs of coal mines closure, complying with the EU Council Decision 2010/787 (Government of Spain et al., 2018). As described more in detail below, the primary objective of this agreement was the economic reactivation and alternative development of mining areas. The Agreement importantly provided social support schemes for affected workers, as well a promised fund of 250 million euros to support the development of mining areas, to be delivered through a dedicated Urgent Action Plan and several territorial plans (Government of Spain et al., 2018), which would later become the core instrument and governance procedure of JTPs in Spain. The Coal Mining Agreement was presented as a success by both the government and the trade unions (Neslen, 2018) and it was also taken as a positive example internationally (European Trade Union Confederation, 2018). To further prove its commitment to a just transition, in

December 2018, the Sánchez government ratified the Silesia Declaration on Just Transition at the Katowice Climate Summit in Poland (Government of Spain, 2018e).

When the government converted the above-mentioned Coal Mining Agreement into a Decree-Law in December of 2018 (*Real Decreto-ley 25/2018, de 21 de diciembre, de medidas urgentes para una transición justa de la minería del carbón y el desarrollo sostenible de las comarcas mineras*) (Cortes Generales, 2018), the discussion on just transition measures for coal mines was then moved to the partisan arena. The Decree-Law was presented by Minister Ribera and then discussed in a Planary session of the *Congreso de los Diputados* on January 22nd, 2019. Ultimately, with 132 votes in favour and 212 abstentions, the Decree-Law was approved (Congreso de los Diputados, 2018b).

Once this Decree-Law on coal mining was finally approved in the Parliament and after the last coal mine finally ceased to operate at the end of 2018, the government moved on to design the rest of its just transition policy framework, for which the tripartite agreement represented the starting point (JTI, 2020a). In February 2019, it presented its Strategic Energy and Climate Framework, confirming Spain's intention to also close remaining coal-fired power plants by 2030(Government of Spain, 2019a; Planelles, 2019b). The new Strategic framework also comprised the proposal – presented as unique in the World – for a Just Transition Strategy (*Estrategia de Transición Justa*) (JTS), which follows the guidelines of the ILO and the Paris Agreement and seeks to maximise the employment opportunities of the transition to a low-carbon development model, while also supporting workers and territories affected by the closure of coal mines and the cessation of activity of coal-fired and nuclear power plants (Government of Spain, 2019c).

The announced JTS also included Spain's main just transition instrument – that is the Urgent Action Plan for Coal-mining Regions and Power Plant Closures (*Plan de Acción Urgente para comarcas de carbón y centrales en cierre*), hereafter the Urgent Action Plan,, which builds upon and expands the Coal Mining Agreement – and governance mechanism – including the possibility of putting forward Just Transition Agreements channelling a proposed 130 million euros to affected territories and a Just Transition Institute to oversee this process (Government of Spain, 2019c; Interview ES10). Commenting on these initiatives, which were among the last of its first mandate (and hence their implementation was left to the subsequent government), Prime Minister Sánchez assured that there was no trade-off between climate mitigation on the

one hand, and jobs and prosperity on the other hand, promising that the government's strategy would have allowed to create circa 300.000 new jobs in the following decade (Planelles, 2019a).

### *3.4. 2019-onwards: Subsequent developments in the Spanish just transition policy trajectory*

A few days after the government announced the Just Transition Strategy, the *Cortes Generales* were dissolved and Spaniards were called to the polls for a general election, which was held on April 28th 2019. In the April elections, PSOE got the relative majority of the votes and started the negotiations with other parties to form a government, with the initial view to replicate the formula of the Sánchez I minoritarian government, hence with *Unidas Podemos* and other left-wing regionalist parties providing external support. Nevertheless, these attempts to form a new government were not successful and, with Sánchez remaining in charge as caretaker in the meantime, a second election round was scheduled in November of the same year. This time, the elections resulted in the successful investiture vote for a new minority coalition government involving PSOE and UP. While the actual drafting and implementation of the JTS was substantially suspended until the new coalition government took office, just transition became a topic of discussion in the political campaign, as well as in the negotiation behind government formation. This is unsurprising, given that both PSOE (2019) and *Podemos*' (2019) electoral programmes featured a commitment to ensure a just transition

Interview data and journalistic sources claim that Sánchez was adamant about keeping Teresa Ribera as the head of MITECO during the negotiations with *Unidas Podemos* in the fall of 2019, despite the fact that this was one of UP's most coveted portfolios (Interview ES13; Vallín, 2019). Ultimately, an agreement was reached in November 2019, with the fight against climate change, decarbonisation and just transition being placed among the top priorities of the two parties seeking to form a joint government (Redacción EFEverde, 2019). These objectives were also reaffirmed in early January 2020 during Sánchez's investiture speech, when he notably asserted the two governmental parties' intention to approve the Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition and to transform the existing Institute for Restructuring Coal Mining and Alternative Development of Mining Regions (*Instituto para la Reestructuración de la Minería del Carbón y Desarrollo Alternativo de las Comarcas Mineras*) into a Just Transition Institute (*Instituto Para La Transición Justa*) (JTI) (Gálvez, 2020). Due also to the success of her just transition initiatives, Teresa Ribera was re-elected as head of the MITECO, gaining increasing influence within

Sánchez's cabinet (Interview ES15), and confirming her commitment to bringing forward just transition measures (El Mundo, 2020).

While this tumultuous year for Spanish politics was unfolding, a couple of other notable developments took place in 2019. First, in July, UP presented in the parliament a proposal for a Climate Change and Energy Transition Law (*Proposición de Ley sobre Cambio Climático y Transición Energética*), featuring several measures to deliver on a just transition, including funds for workers and communities impacted by the closure of coal-fired and nuclear plants (Congreso de los Diputados, 2019). Second, protests were mounting in several Autonomous Communities against the foreseen closure of coal-fired power plants, which was set forth by the government in November 2019 under Royal Decree-Law 17/2019 (Cortes Generales, 2019). For instance, the closure of Endesa's plant in As Pontes sparked citizens and workers' reactions, raising a demand for the reactivation of the plant (El País, 2019).

The newly-established Sánchez II government's activities to promote a just transition reprised in 2020. In April, the government signed a tripartite agreement "for a Just Transition for Coal Power Plants" with the energy companies owning thermal power plants Endesa, Iberdrola, Naturgy and the most representative trade unions in the sector, CCOO and UGT. The following year, in March 2021, the company EDP also joined the signatory parties, making sure that all the country's power plants were covered by the Agreement (Government of Spain et al., 2021). The Power Plant Agreement came from the impulse of energy companies (Interview ES3) to support training and job placement for affected workers and investments in affected territories. Another step forward was made in May 2019 when the government, after having declared a climate and environmental emergency (Government of Spain, 2020b), finally presented the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law (Congreso de los Diputados, 2020a). After 758 amendments were submitted by opposition parties and discussed (Congreso de los Diputados, 2020b), this Law was ultimately approved by the Parliament in May 2021 (Cortes Generales, 2021), featuring a whole section on just transition.

Finally, in April 2020, the government followed up on its decision to rename and provide new competencies to the Just Transition Institute through Royal Decree 500/2020 (Ministerio de Política Territorial y Función Pública, 2020). Laura Martín Murillo, who had a long-lasting renowned career in the International Labour Foundation for Sustainable Development and had been a prominent voice for just transition in the United Nations' climate policy debates, was

appointed as Director of this Institute (Gómez and Nieto, 2022). Under the new Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition, the Institute is made responsible for the governance of Spain's JTS and, in particular, for the negotiations behind the Just Transition Agreements (*Convenios de Transición Justa*) (JTAs) (Interview ES1; Interview ES3). By July 2022, 13 JTAs have been signed, linked to coal phase-out in six Spanish regions: Asturias (Suroccidente, Valle del Nalón, Valle del Caudal and Aboño); Andalusia (Valle del Guadiato, Los Barrios, Carboneras); Aragon (Aragon); Balearic Islands (Alcúdia); Castilla y León (El Bierzo-Laciana, Montaña central leonesa-La Robla, Guardo-Velilla); and Galicia (As Pontes, Meirama) (JTI, 2022a).

Parallel to national developments, in 2020, notable progress was made at the EU level, contributing to Spain's own just transition policies. In February, the European Commission selected eight Spanish provinces – A Coruña, Asturias, León, Palencia, Teruel, Almería, Córdoba and Cádiz – to be recipients of 307 million euros allocated to Spain from the EU Just Transition Fund for the socio-economic development of coal regions (Pellicer, 2020). The EU Commission's proposal came after the Spanish government contested the small number of financial resources initially allocated by the European Commission (Pellicer, 2020). The Spanish government also criticised the narrow just transition definition adopted at the EU level, which was presented as satisfactory from an environmental point of view, but lacklustre from a social perspective (Euractiv, 2020; Kyriazi and Miró, 2022). Ultimately, the EU Just Transition Fund was approved in June 2021 (El Mundo, 2021) and in December 2022, the European Commission approved Spain's Plan and Programme for the allocation of a foreseen total of 868 million euros mobilized through this European Fund, hence with a substantial increase with respect to the initial financial envelope (Government of Spain, 2022a; 2022b). Additional important resources for a just transition came to Spain through the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility, also approved in 2020. In its 2021 National Recovery and Resilience Plan, the government of Spain pledges to allocate 9.2% of this novel resource, corresponding to 300 million euros, to "a just and inclusive energy transition" (Government of Spain, 2021), of which 150 million should be directly allocated to the JTI (Salinas, 2021).

The novel financial resources coming from the European Union were immediately presented by the government as an opportunity to strengthen existing national just transition initiatives (Congreso de los Diputados, 2020c). On this basis, not only the JTI was able to propose novel initiatives, such as a training programme to foster green jobs (Murillo, 2022), but the government also managed to extend existing aid for coal mining workers and communities until

2025 (MITECO, 2021). When asked about the prospects for just transition policies to evolve further in the near future, many of the informants interviewed for this study agreed that just transition is now a prominent part of the political agenda of the Spanish government, destined to remain unaltered even after the next 2023 General Elections (Interview ES3; Interview ES4; Interview ES7; Interview ES9; Interview ES17). The scope of the Just Transition Strategy could potentially be expanded in the future so as to include nuclear phase-out, the transformations of the automotive and transport sectors and climate adaptation (Interview ES3; Interview ES9). However, several interviewees also highlight that the Spanish just transition agenda, despite being framed as cross-sectoral, is still largely limited to the fossil fuel sector and that there has been a lack of significant evolution since 2020 (Interview ES11; Interview ES13; Interview ES14). Finally, discontent is mounting in former coal-dependent territories, since many lament that the just transition resources, although well-received, are not enough to address the huge structural socio-economic and demographic challenges ahead (Interview ES18).

***4. Describing just transition policies in Spain***

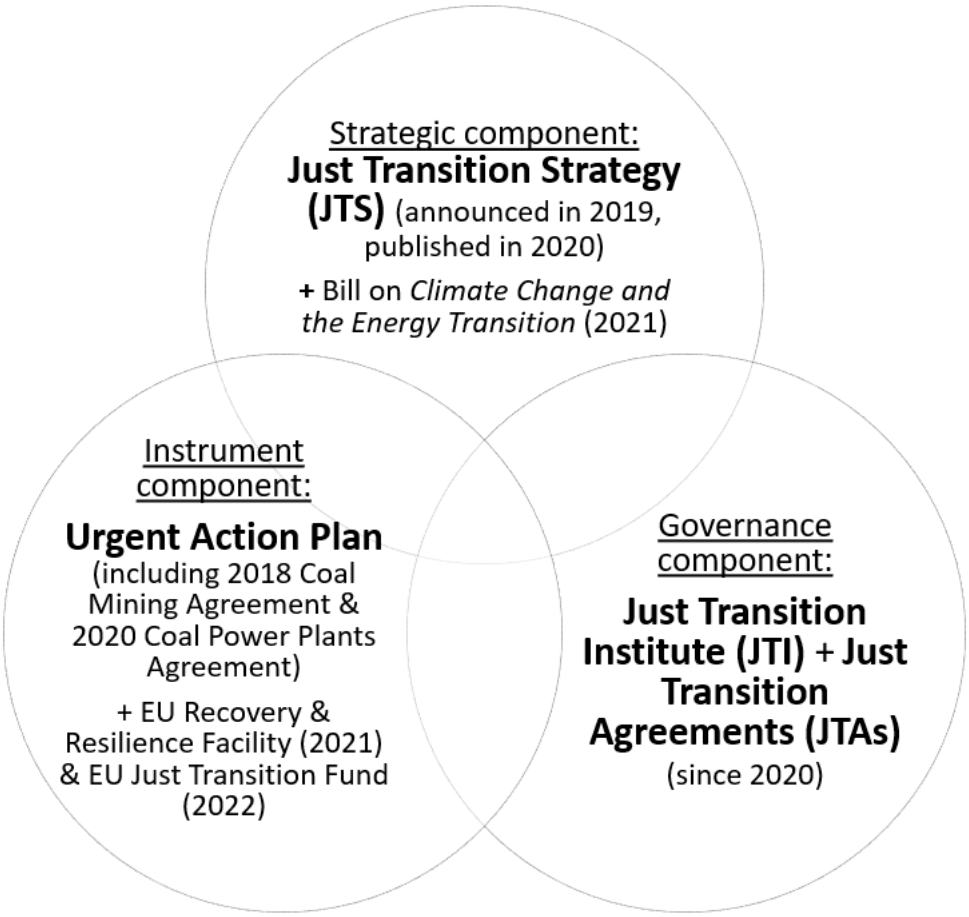


**Figure 4.1:** ***Just transition policies in Spain*** (source: author's own elaboration)

This Section presents, through an in-depth description, the just transition policies adopted by the Spanish government, disentangling the strategic, instrument and governance components. A summary of the various elements composing the Spanish JTPs is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

***4.1. the strategic component***

The Council of Ministers of Spain presented the Strategic Energy and Climate Framework in February 2019, containing a set of initiatives aiming to "facilitate economic development towards a sustainable and competitive model, which minimises the impact of the energy transition, fosters job creation and improves the quality of life of citizens, particularly the most vulnerable" (Government of Spain, 2019a). As already stated, the initiatives included in this Framework were the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan, the Draft Law on Climate

Change and Energy Transition, and a Just Transition Strategy (Government of Spain, 2019b; MITECO, 2019a). While in February 2019 the JTS came out as a draft (MITECO, 2019b), in April of the following year, the government put forward the final version of the JTS, which is available in English in both a short (MITECO, 2020a) and a longer version (JTI, 2020a) published by the JTI.

The JTS is based and builds upon the international debate around just transition created by the trade union movement (Nieto Sáinz et al., 2020). In particular, the JTS itself recalls that, in 2018, a "strategic partnership agreement" was signed between the Government and the International Labour Organization in order to implement the ILO's Guidelines on Just Transition in Spain (JTI, 2020a). The JTS was meant to accompany the increasing climate ambition of the Sánchez I Government and, in particular, to tackle the transformations that are expected to occur in the productive sectors of the economy and in the labour market. In the JTS, the green transition is presented primarily as a vehicle for new opportunities (mainly in terms of job creation), but also, crucially, a few negative impacts are acknowledged (JTI, 2020a). These are regarded to arise especially as a by-product of the phase-out of fossil fuel-based industries, which are associated to job losses and depopulation. In sum, the JTS asserts that "the design of policies and measures that set ecological objectives must achieve their socio-economic impacts, optimizing the beneficial effects and mitigating the negative ones" (JTI, 2020a: 9).

The core overarching objective of the JTS is "optimizing activity and employment opportunities in the ecological transition to a low greenhouse gas emission economy", identifying and adopting measures "to ensure equitable and supportive treatment of workers and territories in this transition" (JTI, 2020a: 30). This overarching goal is specified by a list of different sub-objectives all related to industrial decarbonisation. These include exploiting the opportunities for employment; guaranteeing equal opportunities; monitoring labour market trends; promoting participatory fora; producing sectoral plans; improving business support; putting forward coordinated and multilevel policies; and minimizing the negative impact on vulnerable areas (JTI, 2020a; MITECO, 2020a). The time frame of the JTS application is from 1 January 2020 until 31 December 2024.

Besides setting strategic objectives, the JTS can also be seen as a proper action plan, since it proposes a series of measures to implement its objective, organized around 8 different "Axes". These proposed measures are not attached to any proper policy instruments and they should hence be seen as guidelines of action that the Spanish Government *intends* to pursue in order

to deliver on a just transition. Axis A is meant to boost the job creation opportunities derived from the ecological transition in a whole-economy perspective, while Axis B concerns specific support for strategic industrial sectors, including the automotive, transport, and energy-intensive sectors (JTI, 2020a). Axis C deals with "consumers support and reduction of inequality", entailing a general commitment to assess the distributive impact of climate mitigation, as well as a reference to the National Strategy against Energy Poverty (*Estrategia nacional contra la Pobreza energética*) approved by the Government in April 2019. This latter strategy aims to improve the national understanding and response to the issue of rising energy poverty in Spain, which is another notable social implication of the green transition, yet, unlike just transition policies (as defined in this research), it pertains to the consumption side of the economy (MITECO, 2019c).

Axes D to F of the JTS deal specifically with the negative labour market consequences of the green transition. Axis D in particular is dedicated to reactivation, hence to the anticipation and facilitation of economic restructurings (JTI, 2020a). Proposed actions under Axis E have to do with "active green employment and social protection policies" targeted at vulnerable workers from sectors undergoing restructurings in specific territories, with a view to provide these workers with the skills and support needed to ensure their inter-sectoral mobility (JTI, 2020a). Among the various actions proposed to deliver on Axis E, the JTS mentions the government's intention "to incorporate the Ecological Transition into the Annual Employment Policy Plans, paying particular attention to equal opportunities and improving the performance of employment services in vulnerable areas through the Public State Employment Service, in partnership with the Autonomous Communities (regions) and social partners" (MITECO, 2020a: 8). Axis F is specifically dedicated to "Green vocational training", enlisting "measures to review curricula taught in compulsory secondary education, vocational training and higher education and add[ing] contents referring to the Ecological Transition, and others such as digitalization and the promotion of Dual Vocational Training between green sector businesses and young people undertaking training" (MITECO, 2020a: 8). The final set of actions proposed in the JTS concerns research and development (Axis G) and improving knowledge about the impact of the transition on employment (Axis H). To follow up on this latter objective, the JTS mandates the Public Employment Service's Occupations Observatory to conduct regular analyses, including "a full diagnostic report with the launch of each Just Transition Strategy every 5 years and a follow-up report at the mid-point of the development period" (JTI, 2020a: 40).

The JTS was enshrined into legislation with the Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition, which was first proposed in the form of a draft in February 2019 alongside the JTS (MITECO, 2019d) and finally approved by the Congress of Deputies in May 2021 (Cortes Generales, 2021). Title VI of this Law is specifically dedicated to just transition measures and Article 27 to the Just Transition Strategy. Importantly, in Article 27, the Law states that the Government shall approve a new Just Transition Strategy every five years, specifying also that this initiative should come as a proposal of the MITECO alongside the ministries for Employment and the Social Economy; for Industry, Trade and Tourism; for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; for Transport, Mobility and the Urban Agenda; and for Science and Innovation. Also, the participation of the Autonomous Communities and the social partners should be guaranteed (Cortes Generales, 2021). The law also specifies the principal instruments and governance mechanisms to deliver on the current and future Just Transition Strategies (see below for more details on the instrument and governance components) and it also presents the core elements that any re-edition of the JTS should contain. These include identifying vulnerable groups; assessing transition-derived opportunities; and outlining industrial-economic and labour market policies to address vulnerabilities and opportunities (Cortes Generales, 2021).

The Spanish JTS reveals that the government is endorsing a comprehensive understanding of just transition, which, relying on the ILO guidelines, pays attention to decarbonisation-related risks and opportunities in several sectors of the economy. This said, a greater emphasis in the JTS is put on the most urgent short-term social challenges that are expected to arise in one specific sector of the economy, that is coal. This said, the link to the Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition ensures that the priorities of the JTS are renewed every five years, which might result in a shift of focus to other sectors beyond coal in the future re-editions of the strategy.

### *4.2. the instrument component*

While the Just Transition Strategy, as stated above, identifies a wide range of measures to deliver on its strategic objectives, most of these measures remain, for now, a mere commitment on paper. The principal concrete instrument envisaged within the JTS is the Urgent Action Plan for Coal-mining Regions and Power Plant Closures, which is included in JTS (JTI, 2020a; MITECO, 2020a). The Urgent Action Plan concentrates on specific employment and social vulnerabilities (JTI, 2020a). In particular, it covers three sectors (JTI, 2020a) – coal mining, coal-fired power plants and nuclear power plants, all of which are undergoing (or are going to undergo) a closure

process in the following years – and it was approved for the period 2019-2021, although its execution was delayed as a consequence of the Covid-19 crisis (JTI, 2022a). The Urgent Action Plan covers three main objectives: i) "ensure that workers who lose their jobs in mining companies that close down are adequately compensated"; ii) "maintain employment for the mining areas through various schemes"; iii) "offer, during the Plan's timeframe, the possibility of establishing JTAs in areas subject to mine closures as of 31 December 2018, as well as shut-down coal or nuclear power plants, with the aim that the closures do not generate impacts on employment and population at the end of the process" (JTI, 2022a: 14). Unlike the JTS, the Urgent Action Plan contains a set of concrete policy instruments to deliver on its objectives.

In particular, the Urgent Action Plan is built upon 2 tripartite agreements signed by the Spanish Governments, sectoral companies and trade unions to accompany the closure of coal mines and thermal power plants and to address their negative employment implications. The first was the so-called Framework Agreement for a Just Transition in Coal Mining and Sustainable Development of the Mining Communities for the Period 2019-2027 which was signed in October 2018, with a view to accompany the closure of uncompetitive coal mines by the end of 2018 (Government of Spain et al., 2018). The Coal Mining Agreement was then translated into Royal Decree-Law 25/2018 in December 2018. It provides financial aid to both mining workers and communities for a planned annual total of 250 million euros derived from the general state budget and covering the period 2019-2023, yet with execution until 2027 (Government of Spain et al., 2018).

Following the provisions of this agreement, funds should be channelled to different purposes, including the development of new business facilities and the expansion of existing ones, as well as the development of alternative economic activities in mining communities. For sectoral workers, two principal lines of social assistance are granted by the Coal Mining Agreement (Government of Spain et al., 2018). First, voluntary severance payments – composed of a fixed amount of 10.000 euros and an individually-variable amount – are offered to workers made redundant as of the end of June 2018 and not reaching an advanced age to meet the requirements to access ordinary retirement schemes. Second, an early retirement scheme – providing seventy-two percent of the monthly average gross salary received prior to redundancy – is offered to elderly redundant workers – at least forty-eight years old – who had been contributing to the Special Regime for Coal Mining of the Social Security for at least eight years and who were senior employees in a mining company that ceased its activities. Besides these

two passive labour market schemes, other measures are offered in the Coal Mining Agreement to sectoral workers, especially those who cannot meet the eligibility criteria to access the two above-mentioned social aids. These include a priority participation in mining restoration activities and the opportunity to voluntarily access dedicated training and orientation courses for jobseekers (Government of Spain et al., 2018; Cortes Generales, 2018). To follow up on the latter proposal, a job bank (*Bolsa de Trabajo minería de carbón*) was created for redundant mining workers and managed by the Just Transition Institute (JTI, 2022b).

While the Coal Mining Agreement was signed before the JTS and then incorporated into it, a second tripartite agreement was instead reached later to accompany the closure of coal-fired power plants, which was set forth by the government in November 2019 under Royal Decree-Law 17/2019 (Cortes Generales, 2019). This Agreement for a Just Transition for Coal Power Plants: Jobs, Industry and Territories (*Acuerdo por una transición energética justa para centrales térmicas en cierre: el empleo, la industria y los territories*), hereafter Coal Power Plants Agreement, was "signed in April 2020 between the General State Government (Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge and Ministry of Labour), the companies with thermal power plants that are closing (Endesa, Iberdrola, Naturgy and EDP, the latter in March 2021) and the trade unions (CCOO Industry, UGT FICA)" (JTI, 2022a: 15). This new Coal Power Plants Agreement extends the scope of the Urgent Action Plan to include power plant closure and it specifically aims to provide social schemes for redundant workers of the companies covered by the Agreement, as well as to encourage the implementation of JTAs for the territories in which these plants are located (Government of Spain et al., 2021). To smooth the employment transition, the Coal Power Plants Agreement requires signatory companies to present ad-hoc plans to relocate or provide training to their own personnel and to ancillary companies. Moreover, another job bank (*Bolsa de Trabajo centrales térmicas de carbon*) was established within the JTI to provide vocational training and employability support for redundant workers in the power industry (JTI, 2022c). Finally, the Coal Power Plants Agreement also asserts that it envisages "specific measures to facilitate the employment of workers redundant owing to closures, paying special attention to those over 52 and for whom relocation is difficult and, for instance providing sign-on bonuses for these people" (Government of Spain et al., 2021: 9), but no more details are offered on this type of support.

Beyond tripartite agreements, in order to respond to the socio-economic impacts of decarbonisation, the Urgent Action Plan pledges to allocate 130 million Euros to the

implementation of Just Transition Agreements – which, as discussed below, are the outcomes of the principal governance tools of the JTS – designed for territories affected by the closure of coal mines and coal-fired power plants (JTI, 2020a). Specifically, the JTAs aim to assist identified territories in identifying and exploiting windows of financial opportunities from available national resources, in order to maintain and create economic activities and employment (JTI, 2020a; 2022a). This means that "there is no single financing mechanism, but rather actions will be supported through different aid mechanisms, seeking maximum flexibility and diversity of instruments to generate employment and economic activity in the areas affected by the closure" (JTI, 2021b: 4). As explained below, the activities to be financed are co-decided by the signatory parties of each of the JTAs, but, in general, they all should include investments in public infrastructures, industrial projects, territorial restoration, training of workers, development of small or medium-size enterprises and other types of support for at-risk sectors or groups (JTI, 2022a).

Besides benefitting from available funding opportunities at the national level, the JTAs should also be co-financed with EU funds (JTI, 2020a). While this provision was initially meant to mobilize EU cohesion funds, a fundamental financial boost to just transition instruments in Spain came with the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility. In 2021, the Government approved its National Recovery and Resilience Plan (*Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia*), identifying the spending priorities for a total of 69.528 million euros in grants and loans (Government of Spain, 2021). According to this Plan, 9.2% of the novel EU resources should be spent to deliver on "a just and inclusive energy transition". In this framework, component 10 – out of 30 – of the NRPP is dedicated to the Just Transition Strategy: an estimated total of 300 million euros are to be invested for the implementation of the JTAs and, more in general, to deliver on the objectives of the JTS, which addresses challenges that preceded, yet were worsened by, the Covid crisis (Government of Spain, 2021).

Finally, in December 2022, the European Commission approved Spain's Territorial Just Transition Plan (*Plan Territorial de Transición Justa*) (Government of Spain, 2022a) and Just Transition Programme (*Programa Transición Justa España*) (Government of Spain, 2022b). These two documents are designed to set the priorities for spending the 868 million euros that Spain will receive from the EU Just Transition Fund, whose resources are partially derived (although not exclusively) from the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The beneficiary territories are the following: the Principality of Asturias, the province of A Coruña, the Province of León, the

Province of Palencia, the Province of Teruel, the Province of Cádiz, the Province of Almería, the Province of Cordoba and a designated area in Alcudia. Therefore, although the European Just Transition Fund, unlike national JTPs, is strictly linked to specific territories, the European fund is meant to complement national just transition efforts, combining a focus on economic diversification and social cohesion, with one on active labour market policies (Government of Spain, 2022a; 2022b).

### *4.3. The governance component*

The governance of both the Just Transition Strategy and the Urgent Action Plan is constructed around two pillars. The first is given by the procedures behind the Just Transition Agreements, which constitute the principal "tool for co-governance aimed at guaranteeing the commitment and coordination of public administrations and proposing support instruments in the just transition process" (JTI, 2022a). The governance of the JTAs is explained both in the (draft and final) Just Transition Strategy (JTI, 2020a; MITECO, 2019b; 2020) and in the (draft and final) Bill on Climate Change and Energy Transition (MITECO, 2019d; Cortes Generales, 2021). As stated above, the JTAs are conceived as territorial action plans based on the JTS and aiming to convey financial and technical instruments for a maximum of seven years to the territories that are going to experience the harshest socio-economic difficulties as a consequence of the energy transition. The aim of the JTAs is to promote economic development and revitalisation, as well as the employability of vulnerable workers and groups at risk of social exclusion in the transition to a low-carbon economy. The JTAs should hence be seen as the final outcome of a governance process implementing Spain's just transition strategic objectives and instruments.

The governance procedure for the preparation of JTAs entails a multilevel and multi-stakeholder process. Indeed, as the JTS states, the JTAs are "signed by the Ministry for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (following a report from the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, and the Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Trade) and the other public administrations, including Local Entities in geographical areas vulnerable to the transition to a low carbon economy. Companies, organisations from the business sector, trade unions, universities, educational centres, environmental non-governmental associations and organisations and other interested or affected entities may also participate in these agreements" (JTI, 2020a: 42). Particular attention is given to the participation of women and young people. While the number and type of stakeholders engaged

should depend on the context to which each of the JTAs is applied, the elaboration and implementation of the JTAs should always, at least in principle, be participatory, with inputs from stakeholders gathered through both written contributions and participatory fora (JTI, 2020b; 2021a; 2021b).

The procedure for the elaboration of JTAs envisages five different phases (JTI, 2020b; 2021a; 2021b). First, the geographic scope of the agreement is delimited and "just transition zones" are identified through a list of the municipalities that are deemed as most impacted (JTI, 2020c). Second, for each zone, a "characterisation and diagnosis" document is drafted, identifying contextual challenges and opportunities. Third, the public participation process starts and designated stakeholders are asked to present their proposals for projects to be financed under the Just Transition Agreements, as well as their contribution to the characterisation and diagnosis document. Fourth, building on a report about the participatory process prepared by the JTI (JTI, 2023a), the characterisation and diagnosis document is finalized. Fifth, and finally, the project proposals received during the participation phase are assessed and evaluated, with a view to identifying the best available funding instruments – considering both national and European financial lines – through which proponents can implement their projects. Once these five phases are concluded, the Just Transition Agreement is signed. The final Agreement shall include an assessment of the state of vulnerability in the targeted areas, commitments by all signatory parties, a list of measures and a roadmap of actions, complemented by measurable targets and monitoring mechanisms (Cortes Generales, 2021; JTI, 2020a). According to the provision of the Law on Climate Change and the Energy Transition, the identification of territories eligible for JTAs should be adjusted every five years, along with the revision of the JTS (JTI, 2020a).

The second pillar of the governance of just transition policies in Spain is institutional and it is entrusted to the Just Transition Institute. The latter was originally created by Law 66/1997 in December 1997 (Cortes Generales, 1997) under the name of Institute for Restructuring Coal Mining and Alternative Development of Mining Regions. The Institute has legal personality and autonomous capacity to act, with a mandate to promote the restructuring of the coal mining sector and to develop measures for the alternative economic development of mining municipalities (JTI, 2023b). The JTI is now attached to the Ministry for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, under the Secretary of State for Energy, as regulated by Royal Decree 864/2018, which established the structure of the new Ministry (Ministerio de Política

Territorial y Función Pública, 2018). With the publication of the JTS and the reorientation of the national coal strategy, the old Institute was reamed into Just Transition Institute and the underlying regulatory framework was amended through Royal Decree 500/2020, in order to adapt the mandate of this autonomous body to its new functions (Ministerio de Política Territorial y Función Pública, 2020).

The JTI is currently directed by Laura Martín Murillo and it is coordinated by a "governing board" (*Consejo Asesor*), formed by representatives of most Governmental Ministries, Autonomous Communities and other local entities, as well as representatives of trade unions and business organizations (JTI, 2022a). Additionally, the JTS provides for the eventual creation of working groups within the JTI, tasked to deliver on specific measures when needed (JTI, 2022a). With respect to the current functions attributed to the JTI, this Institute is meant to provide technical support in the drafting and implementation of the JTAs and it serves as the managing body of all the instruments connected to the JTS and the Urgent Action Plan, notably including the social aid schemes and job banks for redundant workers.

## 5. The politics of just transition in Spain

### *5.1. The supply side of policymaking: parties' preferences & strategic interactions*

The politics of just transition policies in Spain has been characterised by a moderate level of partisan conflict. The focal point of parties' disagreements has not been whether and how to manage the social consequences of decarbonisation, but parties rather conflicted over the desirability of decarbonisation (Interview ES10). The main protagonist in the Spanish politics of just transition has been PSOE. The socialist party's stances on both climate change and the coal transition have progressively changed over the years. Before climate change became a priority, the main concern of PSOE's industrial and energy policy used to be primarily the preservation of good-quality employment, in line with the demands of affiliate trade union UGT (Interview ES17). Crucially, PSOE has a fundamental source of electoral support in the constituencies where coal mines were located – especially Asturias and Aragón – which was the main reason why the socialist party had a vested interest in the maintenance of the coal industry for decades (Interview ES4; Interview ES6), with several socialist representatives of Spain's mining territories being particularly critical of decarbonisation (Interview ES10; Interview ES13). Nevertheless, over the years, an environmentalist faction within PSOE, which had its roots in the

environmental movements of the 1970s and 1980s, was able to gradually carve out more and more political space within the internal power structures of the party. The increasing penetration of environmental claims within PSOE manifested in the appointment of a prominent representative of this green-progressive group, Cristina Narbona – who later became President of the party – as Minister of the Environment for Zapatero (Interview ES4; Interview ES13).

Therefore, green-progressivist and more conservatist views co-existed for years within PSOE. The combination of these opposite views resulted in an ambiguity in the party's position with respect to coal policy, which was evident in PSOE's electoral programme for the 2015 (PSOE, 2015) and 2016 (PSOE, 2016) general elections. In these documents, the socialist party asserts its intention to find a *just* solution for the Spanish coal mines, striving both to cut emissions from the sector and to keep consuming national coal. In 2017, just one year before PSOE would eventually take governmental office, on the one hand, socialist Congress Members voted in favour of a UP legislative initiative to encourage the closure of coal-fired power plants by 2020 (Baquedano, 2017; Álvarez, 2017), and, on the other hand, other PSOE Members presented a legislative proposal to safeguard the reserves of national coal (PSOE, 2017a) with the support of several prominent personalities in the party, including former Prime Minister Zapatero (Leonoticias, 2017).

To solve this ambiguity, the party leadership spent considerable efforts, when it was still in the opposition, to find a balance between the green and the pro-coal political currents, with the former gaining increasing influence thanks to the increasing salience of climate change in the public debate (Interview ES13). This internal process of preference mediation culminated with the party's 2017 federal Congress, which resulted in Pedro Sánchez's victory as Secretary of PSOE. In his programmatic document for the primaries, Sánchez (2017) presented just transition as a compromise to guarantee job stability while also decarbonising the economy, a position that was later adopted by the whole party through a 2017 resolution on climate change (PSOE, 2017b) and a 2018 non-legislative proposal for a just energy transition in particularly-vulnerable territories, namely those depending on the coal and (to a less extent) nuclear sectors (PSOE, 2018).

Once Sánchez came to power in 2018, he confirmed the green turn of his party through the appointment of Teresa Ribera as Minister, who had a known position in favour of phasing out coal, making PSOE the most firmly anti-coal party in the whole Spanish partisan scene at the

time (Interview ES6; Interview ES17). Ribera's appointment dissolved the previous ambiguities, but it also immediately raised the preoccupation of the pro-coal current of the party, as well as the trade unions historically close to PSOE (Interview ES14). With the aim to prevent an internal conflict with socialists from coal-intensive territories, the newly-elected government actively reached out to regional and local members of the party, as well as administrators, reassuring them that, with just transition policies, workers and communities were not going to bear the costs of decarbonisation (Interview ES13; Interview ES14; Interview ES16; Interview ES17). This strategy paid off, as PSOE managed to keep its members compact, avoiding internal frictions, and presenting itself as the leading voice of just transition in Spain and even in the EU (Interview ES13). As a consequence, PSOE's programme for the 2019 general elections framed the initiatives taken by the Sánchez I government as a success and it featured a commitment to further promote active green employment and social protection policies in sectors undergoing decarbonisation, in the framework of the Just Transition Strategy (PSOE, 2019).

The penetration of green concerns in PSOE's political agenda relates to the broader process of transformation of the Spanish party system from a bi-partisan to a multi-party system. A strong electoral space for single-issue green parties has historically been missing in Spain (Interview ES13; Interview ES 10). Nonetheless, according to several interviewees, the entry of *Unidas Podemos* in the partisan scene, coupled with the growing salience of climate change nationally and internationally, triggered partisan competition on the left to capture the increasing green attitudes in the electorate (Interview ES13; Interview ES4). This was also evident in the latest 2019 general elections, when PSOE and UP both publicly appealed to the so-called "green vote", with reference especially to the emerging youth climate movement (Marcos and Marcos, 2019). This said, however, several interviewees highlight that, while UP is generally labelled as the most ecologist Spanish party, it still does not qualify as a purely green party. Actually, being a coalition of various parties, in the ranks of UP one could find both the green party *Verdes Equo* – which has since left UP to join *Más País* in 2019 – and parties that attach much less relevance to environmental issues (Interview ES6; InterviewES7; Interview ES10; Interview ES13).

Therefore, unsurprisingly, before joining PSOE in a government coalition, *Unidas Podemos* held a much more ideological, yet vague, position than PSOE on the just transition debate (Interview ES15). The end result was that UP played a supporting (and at times ambiguous) role in the politics of decarbonisation and just transition, with PSOE instead taking the lead (Interview ES13; Interview ES10). While *Podemos* and *Izquierda Unida*'s programme (2016) for the 2016 general

elections underlined that the party was committed to fight climate change and to do so by guaranteeing a just transition, UP's stances on coal phase-out were much more hesitant. In 2016, UP advocated for a *progressive* substitution of fossil fuels with renewable energies (Podemos and Izquierda Unida, 2016) and declared that it would not have allowed any mine closure without satisfactory alternatives for the affected workers and territories, ultimately defending the use of domestic coal, framing this as compatible with a gradual energy transition (Europa Press Asturias, 2016). UP's preoccupations that a quick decarbonisation would have given rise to social trade-offs came out also in the parliamentary discussion of Decree-Law 25/2018, when the party abstained fearing that the Coal Mining Agreement would have been too weak to properly cushion the social consequences of mines closure (Congreso de los Diputados, 2018a; Interview ES14).

Once coal phase-out became less politically salient and once it was evident that Ribera's just transition measures were positively received, UP embraced a much less ambiguous position on just transition (Interview ES15). In its electoral programme for the 2019 general elections, the radical left party asserts that "the energy transition we are proposing will be just or it will not be" (*La transición energética que planteamos será justa o no será*) (Podemos, 2019: 10). In July 2019, UP also presented its own legislative proposal for a Climate Change and Energy Transition Law, which included several just transition measures, with particular attention to workers and communities impacted by the closure of coal-fired and nuclear plants (Congreso de los Diputados, 2019). While this Law was never adopted, it constituted the basis for the following 2021 Law that UP proposed in coalition with PSOE (Cortes Generales, 2021). For the current government coalition decarbonisation and just transition are important priorities (Redacción EFEverde, 2019), so much so that, when forming the government, the two coalition partners conflicted over the attribution of the competent ministry portfolio (Interview ES13).

Turning to current opposition parties, no trace of the just transition concept can be found in the 2019 electoral programmes of major right-wing Spanish political parties PP (2019), *Ciudadanos* (2019) and *Vox* (2019). *Partido Popular* has consistently promoted a market-based and neoliberal understanding of climate policy (Hess and Renner, 2019). This approach also characterised the party's position on the coal transition, with the Rajoy's government strongly defending domestic coal when in office and hindering decarbonisation (Interview ES4; Interview ES11). While the core interest of PSOE in maintaining coal was related to its ties with mining constituencies, PP the has never been too invested in miners' interests, testified by the fact that

Rajoy faced a widespread unions' mobilization against his intention to cut subsidies to the sector (De Pablo, 2012). Conversely, for PP, the principal reason for opposing decarbonisation from coal was related to energy security and competitiveness (Interview ES6). When in office, PP actively tried to keep coal-fired power plants open, even against the interests of energy companies (Energìa Renovables 2017;2018; Arévalo, 2017; Proctor, 2018). For this reason, PP opposed the Coal Mining Agreement in the Parliament (interview ES14; Congreso de los Diputados, 2018b). Thus, while the party has long promoted green growth, coal phase-out and just transition have never been part of its policy agenda. Indeed, in PP's own proposal for a Law on Climate Change and the Energy Transition – announced by the Rajoy government in 2017, but presented in the Parliament only after this government's fall – just transition is not mentioned, unlike in the PSOE and UP's specular proposals (Congreso de los Diputados, 2018c). Despite PP did not explicitly support PSOE's just transition policies, it also did not fiercely oppose them (Interview ES13), given that these policies would not have implied big financial burdens for citizens and businesses (Interview ES10). After the adoption of the JTS and Urgent Action Plan, rather than criticizing their formulation, PP's opposition was limited to holding the government accountable for the supposed precarious implementation of these just transition policies (Partido Popular, 2022; Varela, 2020)

PP's climate preferences could be expected to potentially change in the following years, since *Vox* has gained electoral ground with the 2019 general election: some interviewees believe that this might force PP to radicalize its climate preferences in the following years (Interview ES7; Interview ES13). While not explicitly denying climate science (Hess and Renner, 2019), *Vox* proposes an optimistic take on climate mitigation advocating for a "no transition", which appeals especially to rural Spanish voters, fearing to pay the highest costs of decarbonisation (Mathiesen, 2022; Interview ES10). With regards to just transition policies, this translates into *Vox*'s opposition not to social aid for workers and communities, but rather to decarbonisation in itself, which *Vox* defines as ideological (Nortes, 2020). In this sense, more so and more consistently than PP, *Vox* has attempted to position itself as a representative of the interests of the rural communities most affected by decarbonisation, advocating that a just transition should actually consist in postponing or slowing down decarbonisation and, thus, criticizing the government for prioritizing the green transition over socio-economic wellbeing (Vox, 2021; Interview ES4; Interview ES7).

Considering the other parties that occupy seats in the *Congreso de los Diputados*, most of them did not have much electoral interest in just transition policies. However, the external support of *Ciudadanos* and of left-wing regionalist parties *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* and *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* were crucial for the approval Decree-Law 25/2018 and the related implementation of the Coal Mining Agreement (Interview ES6; Congreso de los Diputados, 2018b). Much less radical than the other two centre-right parties, *Ciudadanos* has been a promoter of ecological modernization (Ciudadanos, 2019), attempting to compete for "green votes" with the centre-left (García de Blas, 2019). Finally, although just transition policies touch upon the inter-regional distribution of resources – and hence upon a territorial cleavage (interview ES10) – Basque and Catalonian parties did not have a specific interest in coal, but rather respectively in oil and nuclear. Even though these energy sources were not the focal point of the JTS, future iterations of the Strategy might address them, which might explain why Basque and Catalonian parties have engaged positively with the just transition debate (Interview ES7; Interview ES14).

Finally, another relevant supply-side actor in the politics of just transition policies in Spain was represented by the regional authorities from coal-intensive Autonomous Communities. While some have strongly opposed the national government's just transition initiatives, others instead became fundamental allies from 2018 onwards (Interview ES10). In particular, a key role was played by Asturias. Under the current PSOE-led regional administration, Asturias has aligned with the government in the promotion of just transition, particularly demanding investment to prevent social costs and depopulation (Interview ES7; Interview ES8). Moreover, the regional government has complemented national measures with its own regional initiatives to tackle the social consequences of coal phase-out. Increasingly aware of the inevitability of decarbonisation and after 9 months of multistakeholder dialogue at the regional level (Interview ES6), in 2019, the Asturian government, in collaboration with the national government, developed its own regional Just Transition Strategy (Gobierno del Principado de Asturias and Fundación Asturiana de la Energía, 2021). Administered by the *Fundación Asturiana de la Energía*, this regional strategy aims to complement the namesake national JTS, by identifying measures to transition the Autonomous Community out of coal dependency, mainly through jobs creation and technological-industrial development (Interview ES8).

The Asturian regional strategy fosters the participation of citizens both with dedicated measures (e.g. the development of energy communities), as well as with multi-stakeholder roundtables

dedicated to the development and implementation of this strategy (interview ES8; Interview ES16). In this respect, interviewees involved with the Asturian government point out that most stakeholders in this Autonomous Community, despite differences in opinion, were favourable to decarbonisation, seeing this as inevitable (Interview ES8). Finally, Asturias has also been very active in the EU Coal Regions in Transition Initiative (Interview ES8), from which it has received technical support for years (European Commission Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, 2020). The same support that Asturias gave to the national government cannot be found in other Autonomous Communities affected by just transition, especially those governed by centre-right governments such as Galicia and Castilla y Leon, which are proponents of a much more productivist approach, striving to make use of the financial resources provided by the national JTS to support companies and job creation (Interview ES7).

### *5.2. The demand side of policymaking: stakeholders' preferences and strategic interactions*

The trajectory of the coal transition in Spain clearly shows that an influential "mining coalition" had been successful in hindering policy change in this sector for many years, lobbying the national government to prevent the shutting down of uncompetitive coal mines, and successfully managing to slow down or veto mine closures (Del Rio, 2017; Rentier et al., 2019). This informal group included trade unions representing coal miners – UGT, CCOO and the *Unión Sindical Obrera* (USO) – Carbunion, that is the federation of mining companies (*Federación Nacional de Empresarios de Minas de Carbón*) (Carbunion, 2023); the regional governments of Asturias, Casilla y León and Aragón where coal production used to be concentrated; and the mining municipalities, whose administrations came together in 1991 to form ACOM, the Spanish branch of a European initiative for municipal administrations affected by the crisis of the coal industry (Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias, 2023). As Del Rio (2017: 18) points out, the coal transition in Spain has long been "a typical case of political economy, whereby the noise made by the few beneficiaries with the continuation of support is louder than the silent complaints of millions of electricity consumers who are burdened with the costs of the policy". While the mining coalition was able to successfully block coal phase-out for decades, undermining the social and environmental ambition of tripartite agreements for coal (Interview ES6), the supranational pressure to restore the competitiveness of the Spanish energy market resulted in decreasing state aid, which, in turn, progressively weakened the political strength of the mining coalition, representing, over the years, fewer and fewer workers.

What changed with the Sánchez I government was the willingness to find consensus around decarbonisation, especially with social partners (Interview ES4). This was done by resorting to established neo-corporatist practices, which were typical not only of Spanish social-labour (Molina and Rhodes, 2007) and environmental policies (Gómez and Nieto, 2022), but also, of coal policies (Del Rio, 2017). Thus, when the government needed support to speed up its decarbonisation agenda, concertation became essential to preventively appease underlying conflicts and to create consensus around the just transition agenda (Interview ES17). Social partners, in this scenario, were made responsible for the management of the transition (Interview ES15). Nevertheless, several interviewees pointed out that social partners have played an arguably reactive role in the politics of just transition policies in Spain, refraining from exercising a veto and following the direction already set by the national government (Interview ES9; Interview ES14).

The shift of CCOO and UGT from leading components of the mining coalition to just transition champions was a result of both long-lasting developments and contextual conditions. With respect to the latter, Spanish trade unions have developed a relatively profound environmental consciousness over time if compared to other European trade unions, especially at the confederal level. Räthzel (2021) studied the case of labour environmentalism within CCOO, highlighting the entrepreneurial role of some union leaders in setting up a research institute for environment and occupational health (*Instituto Sindical de Trabajo, Ambiente y Salud*) (ISTAS) already in the mid1990s. More in general, environmental unionism in Spain should not be seen as surprising, given that trade unions have historically claimed to represent class interests, more so than sectoral ones (Interview ES11). In the case of just transition policies, driven on the one hand by their environmentalist attitudes and, on the other hand, accounting for the specific interest of their members who feared the social costs of industrial restructurings, Spanish trade unions were forced to adopt a dualist and at times controversial position (interview ES13). It should be pointed out that a key role for Spanish trade unions – and particularly CCOO – to embrace a just transition agenda was specifically played by a few prominent unionists who engaged in the international debate about just transition, mainly in the framework of the International Labour Organization (Interview ES2).

When Ribera was appointed Minister, the reaction of national trade unions was very negative (Interview ES14) – with some local members of UGT even calling for President Sánchez to "put her in her place" ("*ponga en su sitio"*) (Mirantes, 2018) – and it prompted UGT and CCOO to

jointly send a letter to the newly-appointed Minister asking for a meeting (Ileón, 2018). This could be seen as the starting point of the negotiations that eventually brought to the tripartite Coal Mining Agreement. Through the latter Agreement and the subsequent Coal Power Plants Agreement – hence when almost all the key demands of trade unions were already met (Industriall, 2020; Interview ES4) – the position of trade unions changed dramatically, going from dubious resistance to convinced support to the government's just transition policies (Interview ES5; Interview ES14) and CCOO even called Spain a "pioneer country" in just transition (ISTAS, 2022).

Turning to the policy preferences of the two principal Spanish unions, CCOO has been the most active proponent of a just transition narrative (Interview ES7). In June 2018, this trade union presented to newly-elected Minister Ribera a written document with its "proposals for a just energy transition" (*Propuestas de CCOO para la transición energética justa*) (CCOO, 2018), which were in large part similar to the just transition policies that the government ended up adopting. CCOO supports the ecological transition, as long as the latter is complemented by the creation of decent green jobs and by a smooth and well-managed job transition, seen as a key element to mobilize consensus around decarbonisation (Interviews ES5). Hence, according to CCOO, workers should not only be supported with passive monetary support, but also with appropriate investments (Interview ES5).

If compared to CCOO, UGT came relatively later in supporting the just transition narrative and it did so, unsurprisingly, by largely aligning with PSOE's positions (Interview ES7). However, being the most representative union in the mining sector, as well as the most politically attached to PSOE, UGT itself had a notable influence on the Sánchez government (Interview ES10; Interview ES15). In the negotiations around just transition policies, UGT had two principal objectives, which were to protect coal workers and to protect their communities (Interview ES15). Through more recent publications, UGT is pushing the government to broaden the scope of just transition policies beyond decarbonisation (for instance in areas like climate adaptation, biodiversity and digitalisation), as well as to increase the number of financial resources allocated to these policies (UGT 2020; 2021). Despite the few differences, CCOO and UGT's actions in this policy field – either mobilization, lobbying or social dialogue – have been largely coordinated through the years and so were they in 2018, when the two unions converged in demanding a just transition out of coal (Interview ES15). Finally, it should be stressed that, while confederal unions at the national level have been more supportive of a just transition, more resistance could be found

among sectoral and local branches of both unions, especially in carbon-intensive regions like Asturias (Interview ES6).

Although, before the mid-2010s, the largest energy companies in Spain heavily lobbied the national government to slow down the energy transition (Interview ES10), since then, many of such companies have changed their position, putting pressure to close thermal power plants (Interview ES16). This is because fossil fuels had become more and more uncompetitive (Interview ES6), while renewables grew in profitability, especially thanks to various government subsidies (Interview ES15). Therefore, large utility companies have been preparing for a coal phase-out for a while (Interview ES17), with both Endesa and Iberdrola expressing earlier than 2018 their interest in the closure of their last coal-fired plants by 2020 (Proctor, 2018; Barreira and Ruiz-Bautista, 2020; Interview ES 14). Thus, when the time came with the Sánchez I government in 2018, energy companies were interested in facilitating and supporting agreements to accompany plant closures (Interview ES3). Finally, both Endesa and Iberdrola also expressed themselves in favour of the just transition concept (Iberdrola, 2023; Martinez, 2020). Similarly, the largest and most influential employers' association in the country CEOE committed to promoting a just transition, even collaborating with MITECO on a joint initiative for the creation of green employment (CEOE, 2019).

The only notable outlier among companies and employers' associations has unsurprisingly been Carbunion, which has been conflicting with utility companies for years, given that the former expressed their preference for the use of imported coal (Interview ES14). Carbunion was against the closure of coal mines, but it lost considerable bargaining power over the years, due to both the scarce economic performance of mining companies and their dependence on state aid for survival (Interview ES14). As a result, in 2018 – although they participated in the Coal Mining Agreement negotiations and ultimately signed it – Carbunion was not in the position to exert too much influence on the just transition negotiations and, hence, it was forced to passively accept the outcome of the decision (interview ES15).

Part of the mining coalition were also the regional and municipal administrations where coal mines were located (Interview ES17). Since 1991, coal municipalities have organized around the so-called ACOM association (Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias, 2023), which has advocated for years for the delay of coal mine closure, as well as to demand resources to be invested in coal municipalities (Interview ES18). For this reason, in 2018, ACOM, chaired by

PSOE's Alider Presa (Iglesias, 2018), tried to fight the Sánchez government's decision to close coal mines, but it was given no option to negotiate the government's decision (Interview ES15; Interview ES18). Since 2018, with the closure of coal mines, ACOM has changed its name into Municipalities in a Just Transition (*Municipios en Transición Justa-Acom*) and it has also incorporated representatives from municipalities where nuclear and coal-fired power plants are located (Diario de León, 2021; Interview ES18), embracing a much more collaborative position.

Despite local communities welcomed the financial resources provided through national and EU just transition policies, the ACOM representative interviewed for this research pointed out that these resources are too little to effectively deliver a transformation of the local economies and cover the social costs of decarbonisation, stressing also that spending priorities are far from the actual needs of local communities (Interview ES18). Moreover, local contestation and tensions have arisen especially in response to the government's plan to install renewable energy parks in formerly coal-dependent territories (Interview ES17). In this respect, ISTAS (2022) notes that there is a "climate of scepticism' within affected communities", for which "the Just Transition Agreements are generally seen in their territorial contexts as late and insufficient".

Importantly, the same scepticism found in rural coal-dependent territories does not characterize the broader Spanish population. The boost in national climate ambition was indeed accompanied by a general increase in the salience of climate change among Spaniards. Spanish citizens have been found by representative surveys to express relatively ecologist views, they are aware of climate change, its anthropocentric causes and multifaceted consequences and only the 3% of the population denies climate science (Averchenkova and Lázaro Touza, 2020a; 2020b). Nevertheless, the environment and climate change still do not represent priority concerns for Spaniards, which is reflected in the historically limited weight of green parties in the parliament (Averchenkova and Lázaro Touza, 2020a; 2020b). The raising salience of climate change has also generated increasing bottom-up mobilization, manifesting massively with the 2019 climate march (Yanke et al., 2019). However, generally speaking, while mobilization occurs often and it has an impact on the political debate, civil society in Spain is not too well-organized to actually be able to influence policymaking (Interview ES10).

Much more organised actors representing environmental demands are green NGOs. The most active NGOs in Spain are five: Ecologistas en Acción, Greenpeace Spain, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), SEO Birdlife and Friends of the Earth (Márquez and Guerrero, 2022; Jiménez, 2007;

Interview ES10). Greenpeace was the main Spanish NGO working on the coal transition (Interview ES6; Interview ES12), as well as a proactive actor advocating for a just transition, pushing the government to support affected populations and workers and to ban all sources of energy that are not clean (Interview ES7; Interview ES12; Greenpeace España, 2021; Nuño, 2019). WWF has also been active in the just transition debate, by proposing its own policy recommendations (WWF España, 2020) as well as providing inputs to the government's JTS (WWF España, 2019). However, in line with Spain's neo-corporatist tradition, which has traditionally given voice exclusively to organized economic interests, environmental NGOs have never been given a seat at the decision-making table (Interview ES7; Interview ES14).

In order to feed the policy debate, the principal green NGOs in Spain have hence resorted to their long-lasting contacts with national trade union confederations, especially CCOO (Interview ES5; Interview ES7; Interview ES15). Unions-NGOs exchanges have occurred mostly informally or in the framework of the formalized Alliance for the Climate (*Alianza por el Clima*) (interview ES7; Interview ES12; Alianza por el Clima, 2021). This Alliance "was built in 2015 in preparation for the COP 21 in Paris. The membership of CCOO in the alliance shows that the union has overcome its "previous reservations against other social movements immersing itself into civil society" (Räthzel, 2021: 669). It was in the framework of these labour-environmental exchanges that the concept of "just transition" was first diffused in Spain (interview ES7). However, some tensions have emerged over the years between the environmental and labour Spanish movements, since green NGOs feel that their demands have been subsumed too much into those of trade unions, resulting in a diminished priority of green claims (Interview ES10; Interview ES14).

### *5.3. Partisan and societal conflicts on the formulation of just transition policies*

As underlined in the previous Sections, the main line of conflict in the politics of just transition policies in Spain was not really just transition in itself, but rather its prerequisite, decarbonisation, separating actors that supported it from those that instead wanted to hinder or delay it. For this reason, there have been no significant conflicts among socio-political actors about the formulation of JTPs. In the partisan arena, the content of JTPs was discussed in two occasions.

The first occasion was for the approval of Decree-Law 25/2018, transposing the Coal Mining Agreement into legislation. In that discussion, Deputy Rodríguez Hernández of *Ciudadanos* expressed her party's position, which was favourable to the Decree-Law, although lamenting the lack of sufficient coverage for non-unionised workers and asking the government, first, to improve the governance of the plan in order to prevent the ineffectiveness and lack of transparency of previous coal plans and, second, to refrain from using emergency legislative instruments such as a Decree-Law that do not allow the Parliamentary representatives to provide inputs (Congreso de los Diputados, 2018a). Also voting in favour of the government's initiative were the regionalist parties *Esquerra Republicana* and the *Grupo Parlamentario Vasco* (Congreso de los Diputados, 2018b).

More critical were instead the representatives of *Unidas Podemos* and PP. The former, which intervened in the discussion through Deputies Marcello Santos and González García, denounced that the Coal Mining Agreement was not ambitious enough environmentally – since imported coal had not been banned yet by that point – nor socially – since regions and subcontracted workers were largely excluded from the monetary benefits and they were only promised access to dedicated job banks. Thus, UP asked for increasing funds and it also expressed concerns similar to those raised by *Ciudadanos* regarding governance and decision-making aspects (Congreso de los Diputados, 2018a; Interview ES14). Abstaining from voting Decree-Law 25/2018, like UP, was also PP although for different reasons. While agreeing with the social support for affected workers, PP Deputy Herrero Bono voiced the party's concerns for the closure of thermal plants, presenting it as a negative consequence of the new government's coal policy. PP pointed to a demagogic war against coal, seemingly against the economic and competitive interests of energy companies, as well as the defence of national security of energy supply (Congreso de los Diputados, 2018a).

The second occasion for parties to discuss the content of JTPs came in 2020 with the presentation of amendments to the proposed Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition by the PSOE-UP governmental coalition. Among the various proposed amendments to the initial text, the most critical were those coming from *Vox* that criticized the whole project Law, arguing that it would have jeopardized Spain's economic activities. Nevertheless, *Vox* did not oppose the Articles of the proposed Law specifically dedicated to just transition and actually proposed an amendment to strengthen legal standards, social protection policies, social dialogue and skills development programmes to support people affected by decarbonisation (Congreso de los

Diputados, 2020b). PP also presented a few amendments to improve the participated procedures for the socio-economic impact assessment (i.e. the identifications of costs and opportunities) of the measures proposed by the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law (Congreso de los Diputados, 2020b).

Furthermore, PP, alongside *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* and some unspecified Members of the *Grupo Parlamentario Plural*[39] highlighted that future revisions of the Just Transition Strategy should broaden the scope of this strategy beyond decarbonisation, particularly to include the socio-economic impacts of climate adaptation policies (Congreso de los Diputados, 2020b). A final relevant amendment to the just transition measures in the proposed Law came from the Basque Nationalist Party and the *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, which pointed to the need of deferring greater competencies to the Autonomous Communities in the elaboration of the Just Transition Agreements, hence treating regional administrations as more than simple stakeholder (Congreso de los Diputados, 2020b). *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* also proposed an amendment to strengthen the power of workers' legal representatives within companies (Congresso de los Diputados, 2020b).

[39] *Grupo Parlamentario Plural* is a composite group in the *Congreso de los Diputados* comprising different regional parties: *Junts per Catalunya*; *Más País*; *Compromís*; *Partito Democratico Europeo Catalano*; *Bloque Nacionalista Galego*

# Chapter 5 – Just transition policies and politics in Ireland

**Introduction**

This Chapter presents the second case selected to study just transition policies and politics: Ireland. First, relying on a selective review of the secondary literature, the Irish overarching institutional-political architecture is presented. This implies, on the one hand, focusing on the country's main democratic and economic institutions, with a particular attention to the party system and the model of interest representation. On the other hand, the Chapter digs deeper into the two policy fields that just transition policies are most concerned with, that is the welfare and the environmental state. This politico-institutional overview should not only allow to contextually situate the case study, but it should also provide knowledge on the potential institutional-political drivers behind the politics of just transition policies in Ireland, which will be then reprised in the interpretation of the findings in Chapter 6.

Second, this Chapter aims to extensively present the main pieces of evidence collected through the empirical investigation, which was based on a qualitative analysis of policy document, selected press articles and secondary literature, as well as on a set of semi-structure interviews with key informants. While the interpretation of the findings is left to Chapter 6, this Chapter instead adopts a descriptive register. This entails i) chronologically tracing the trajectory that from 2010 to 2022 brough to the emergence of just transition policies in Ireland; ii) describing in depth these policies; and iii) thoroughly presenting the policy preferences of relevant supply-side actors – namely political parties holding a significant share of seats in the parliament, as well as their regional and local branches – and demand-side actors – namely trade unions, business organisations, but also green NGOs and movements.

With respect to the structure of the Chapter, Sections 1 and 2 are dedicated respectively to Ireland's overarching institutional-political characteristics and to the Irish welfare and eco state. Section 3 provides a historical reconstruction of the policy trajectory with which JTPs were

adopted and formulated, while Section 4 concentrates specifically on describing Irish JTPs and Section 5 addresses the politics behind such policies, mapping relevant socio-political actors and their preferences.

## 1. Irish institutions and politics: an overview

### *1.1. Irish political and economic institutions*

With circa 7 million inhabitants, Ireland is a small peripheral state member of the European Union and the Eurozone. Compared to other Western European countries, Ireland reached its independence relatively recently. At the moment of writing of the present chapter (2022), the Republic of Ireland is celebrating the centenary of its independence from the British monarchy, which came after centuries of subordination and five years of War of Independence (1916 – 1921), resulting in the partition of the island and subsequently giving rise to a civil war (1921 – 1923) (Mitchell, 2003; Kirby and Murphy, 2011).

The formation of the state, which took the shape of a parliamentary democracy, occurred through a recession from the United Kingdom, but a deep institutional emancipation from the long-lasting British heritage was never completely achieved. The Republic of Ireland indeed presents "many features such as the organization of Parliament, procedures for law-making, and the administrative structure clearly inherited from Westminster" (Mitchell, 2003: 418). Besides similarities, however, the Irish state diverges from the prototypical Westminster model for some major characteristics, including the presence of a written constitution (adopted in 1922 and then amended in 1937) protected by a supreme court; a proportional electoral system; and a directly-elected Head of the State (Mitchell, 2021). Making a direct reference to Lijphart's analytical categories, Kirby and Murphy (2011: 24) describe Ireland "as a unitary and centralised, two-and-a-half-party, semi-presidential system with a bicameral parliament, an elected president, a prime minister who has a medium level of influence, and as being 'weakish' in relation to judicial review and constitutional rigidity".

The key institutions of Ireland are referred to with both English and Irish Gaelic names (the latter are reported in brackets). The President of the Republic (*Uachtarán na hÉireann*) is elected every 7 years and tasked to monitor the constitutionality of legislative process. The executive branch of the Irish political system is constituted by a Prime minister (*Taoiseach*) who guides the government, by sharing responsibilities with cabinet members chosen among Parliament

representatives (Schulze and Moran, 2007). Government formation occurs through a so-called "freestyle bargaining" (Schulze and Moran, 2007: 760), hence one in which no party necessarily leads the negotiations. This culminates with the formation of a new government if the majority of the votes in the House of Representatives and a quorum of 20% of total votes are reached (Schulze and Moran, 2007).

The legislative power lies in the hands of the two-chambers Parliament (*Oireachtas*). On the one hand, the House of Representatives (*Dáil*) comprises 166 members (*Teachtaí Dála*) (TDs) holding a 5 years-term and elected by citizens in 41 multi-members districts; on the other hand, the Senate (*Seanad*) involves 60 members, of which 11 are nominated by the *Taoiseach* and the remaining 49 represent universities and corporations, chosen through panel elections by university graduates and local councillors (Schulze and Moran, 2007). As stated, the Government is responsible before the Lower House, whereas the Upper Chamber has powers limited just to commenting and delaying legislation and, over time, its original rationale as a vocational house has faded away: the Senate came to resemble the majorities in the *Dáil*, rather than effectively representing corporatist interests (Ibid.). The legislative process occurs in 5 steps (Ibid.): i) submission; ii) general discussion and vote on the core principles of the proposed bill; iii) committee stage, where deliberation concerns each paragraph of the proposed bill, excluding the core principles; iv) second reading; v) transmission to the other house. The right of initiation belongs to the Parliament. However, given that opposition's proposals are normally rejected, it is often the Members of the government that initiate bills, acting as representatives in the *Dáil*.

According to Kirby and Murphy (2011), two would be the key interconnected institutional features – or "problems", in the words of the authors – of the Republic of Ireland: a centralised State with a localized electoral system. Centralisation means that the allocation of power highly favours the executive power at the national level. Except for the House of Representatives in case a minority government is in power (which occurs often), no other institution has a true potential to exercise a veto power blocking legislation (Schulze and Moran, 2007). This concentration of power occurs at both the vertical and horizontal level. First, the weak separation of power between the executive and the legislative is a matter more of parliamentary practice and political culture than constitutional provision. These power-concentrating practices and cultural traits include a strong exercise of party whip, weak development of the committee system and patterns of policymaking that bypass parliamentary scrutiny, for instance when governments adopt legislation via negotiation with strong interest groups (Kirby and Murphy,

2011; Coakley, 2018). Second, the unitary nature of the state makes it so that its main territorial administrative units – 27 county boroughs and councils with their own parliaments – are financially dependent on the central state and enjoy little political power (Schulze and Moran, 2007).

The second peculiar characteristic of Irish politics is its candidate-centred and localized electoral system (Mitchell, 2021). By constitution, the elections of TDs in the *Dáil* are based on proportional representation in multi-seat constituencies following a single-transferable vote system, which is a relatively rare voting system (Kirby and Murphy, 2011; Mitchell, 2021; Farrell and Sinnott, 2018). Basically, instead of having to choose between rival party lists, the Irish electorate rather has one single vote and directly ranks individual candidates across party lines (Mitchell, 2021). This means that "it is possible to express preferences on the ballot sheet in ranking the candidates within or across parties. The candidate with first preference will receive the vote unless the candidate has no chance of winning a seat or he has already a secure seat. If either is the case, the candidate marked with second preference will receive the vote." (Schulze and Moran, 2007: 763).

This peculiar system has even more peculiar consequences for "the proportionality between votes and seats, the stability of the party system and of governments, and the role of the elected representative" (Farrell and Sinnott, 2018: 99). While one would expect proportionality to favour independents and small parties in gaining seats and, thus, to work against power concentration (Kirby and Murphy, 2011), the candidate-centred system and the transfer of votes instead favour few bigger parties to the expense of smaller ones (Farrell and Sinnott, 2018). This way, the Irish electoral system is designed to counterbalance the standard problem of proportional systems – i.e. government instability – while also making governments often dependent on unreliable (mostly independent) TDs. Finally, the most notable consequence of the single-transferable vote system pertains to the incentives of election seekers. While, on the positive side, individual candidates are more prone to be closer to their constituency than in other electoral systems, on the negative side, the highly-personalistic political competition leads to a perennial and strong inter- and even intra-party competition between candidates, leading these to be overloaded by constituency work at the expense of parliamentary work, and ultimately favouring clientelism (Mitchell, 2021; Kirby and Murphy, 2011). Table 5.1 enlists governments in Ireland in the last 20 years.

**Table 5.1:** ***Governments in the Republic of Ireland in the last 20 years*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| ***Starting date*** | ***Head of Government*** | ***Governing parties (n. of TDs' votes)*** | ***Type of government (total n. of TDs' votes)*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 06.06.2002 | Bertie Ahern (FF) | FF (80), PD (8) + Independent (5) | Majority (93/166) |
| 14.07.2007 | Bertie Ahern (FF) | FF (77), GP (6), PD (2) + Independents (4) | Majority (89/166) |
| 07.05.2008 | Brian Cowen (FF) | FF (76), GP (6), PD (2) + Independents (4) | Majority (88/166) |
| 09.03.2011 | Enda Kenny (FG) | FG (76), LP (37) + Independent (5) | Majority (117/166) |
| 06.05.2016 | Enda Kenny (FG) | FG (50) + Independent (9) | Minority (59/158) |
| 17.06.2017 | Leo Varadkar (FG) | FG (50) + Independents (7) | Minority (57/158) |
| 27.06.2020 | Micheál Martin (FF) | FF (37), FG (35), GP (12) + Independents (9) | Majority (93/160) |

On the economic side, Ireland is a small neoliberal open economy, where foreign and multinational firms are very influential and where the fiscal system is highly deregulated and not particularly redistributive (Kirby and Murphy, 2011). The country has undergone significant changes since its establishment as an independent state. As a rural economy, Ireland was late to industrialization if compared to its European neighbours. In the early 1960s, however, the government begun a major modernization project, principally by relying on foreign direct investments (Powell, 2017). Economic development was temporarily interrupted in the 1980s, when, despite the country joining the European Community, stagnation and an overall decline heavily impacted the national economy. Once the crisis was over, economic modernization and growth started back again and stronger than ever, giving rise to a period of unprecedented economic expansion, known as the "Celtic Tiger" era (circa 1996-2008). Since then, "driven by the combined forces of economic development, economic growth, increased participation, lower emigration, and the arrival of migration, between 1990 and 2018, the labour force increased by just over 1 million people (+80 per cent) and employment by almost 1.1 million

people (+94 per cent)" (Collins and Murphy, 2021: 2). The Celtic Tiger was abruptly interrupted by the global Great Financial Crisis of 2008, due to which Ireland was at risk of defaulting on its national debt and was subjected to the austerity measures by the "troika"[40] (Powell, 2017). This had severe consequences on the main social indicators, so much so that "in 2012, the nadir of its labour market effects, employment had fallen by 342,000 individuals (–15 per cent), unemployment had increased by 208,000 (+144 per cent), and the labour force shrank by 134,000 (–6 per cent)" (Collins and Murphy, 2021: 2).

Alongside the United States and the UK, Ireland is often considered an example of the Anglo-Saxon Liberal Market Economy, with low taxation and low state intervention to accommodate market imperatives and free trade (Dukelow and Kennett, 2018). However, placing the Irish political economy within the literature on Varieties of Capitalism can prove to be a difficult task. For years, Ireland could have been seen as a hybrid model of capitalism, mixing elements typical of Liberal and Coordinated Market Economies (Teague and Donaghey, 2009). Indeed, "efforts to situate Ireland as an [Liberal] or a [Coordinated Market Economy] are difficult due to the very large role played by foreign firms in the Irish economy and due to the existence of the concertative mechanisms, known as social partnership in Ireland, that characterise the [Coordinated Market Economies]"' (Kirby and murphy, 2011: 9). However, with the fall of the social partnership (which is presented below), Ireland has moved back towards a Liberal Market Economy model in the past few years, although it still remains distinct due to its heavy dependency on foreign markets and companies as a fundamental source of economic growth (Andreosso-O'Callaghan et al., 2016).

### *1.2. Parties and cleavages in Ireland*

Traditionally, in the comparative literature on party systems, Ireland stands out as a puzzling case (Little and Farrell, 2021) for two main reasons: a low level of positional competition among the main political parties, which results in a perennial weakness of the left and in exceptionally strong centre-right parties, and a decades-long stability of the system in spite of major societal changes (Green-Pedersen and Little, 2022). These peculiarities are rooted in the political history of the Republic, as well as in its cleavage structure and political culture.

[40] The Troika indicates the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank.

The origins of the Irish party system are to be found in the years when Ireland reached its independence from the British Monarchy. *Sinn Féin* (SF), a pro-independence nationalist party, enjoyed the almost total support of Irish citizens. The foundations of the modern Irish party system were laid through the internal division within SF that occurred during the civil war, when a more moderate fraction of the party sided in favour of the enduring of British rule in Northern Ireland, as demanded by the UK, while other members of SF were not willing to see the island divided. In 1923, the former pro-treaty section of SF formed the *Cumann na nGaedheal* party, which governed the country for its first 10 years and was later renamed *Fine Gael* (FG), while the anti-treaty component of SF further split between those willing to accept the new Republican constitution, which took the name of *Fianna Fáil* (FF), and a more radical group retaining the original SF denomination, which instead opted out of the political scene, being for decades openly critic on the division of the island (Weeks, 2018; Kirby and Murphy, 2011). The most relevant consequence of this peculiar historical pathway was that, unlike what happened in most Western European modern democracies, the Irish party system was not founded around the cleavage between labour and capital, but rather around a historical divide (Little and Farrell, 2021).

The period between the 1930s to 1989 was described by Peter Mair as "Fianna Fáil versus the rest" (Mair, 1987). Right after independence, indeed, FF quickly rose to become a prototypical "catch-all" party, with an average vote share approaching 46.4% (1932-1987), boosted by the electoral system so as to reach an average of 49.6% of parliamentary seats (1987-1932) (Mitchell, 2021). Before 1989, only two government compositions were possible: FF single-party (sometimes minority) governments and coalition governments comprising nearly all other remaining parties, normally guided by FG as the second most-voted party (Mitchell, 2021; Little and Farrell, 2021; Kirby and Murphy, 2011; Schulze and Moran, 2007). Therefore, as already said, until recently, the Irish party system resembled a two-and-a-half-party, with FF and FG dominating. Historically, the other "half" of the system, i.e the third consistently-largest party (with only few exceptions), has been the Labour Party (LP), characterized, if compared to ideologically-close parties across Western Europe, by a chronically small electoral size (Kirby and Murphy, 2011; Mitchell, 2021).

The Irish political history took a first unprecedented turn with the 1989 general election, starting a change in a party system that before appeared to be one of the most stable in Europe (Green-Pedersen and Little, 2022). This occurred with FF breaking its long-lasting pledge not to coalesce

with any other party and aligning with the newly formed Progressive Democrats (PD), which, in turn, was formed by a right-separatist section of FF. This development came as the result of a declining consensus for FF, but it also paradoxically allowed the latter to increase its bargaining power, since any potential winning coalition had to necessarily involve the largest party (Mitchell, 2021; Schulze and Moran, 2007). In the 1980s and then during the Celtic Tiger period, the convergence of all the main parties, including LP, in support of essentially centre-right positions increased dramatically (Weeks, 2018). It took the 2008 global financial crisis for FF and for the overall stability of the Irish party system to crumble again (Mitchell, 2021; Weeks, 2018; Green-Pedersen and Little, 2022; Little and Farrell, 2021). For almost a decade now, the Irish party system has found itself in what Little and Farrell (2021) describe as a "critical juncture". The most notable trace of this critical juncture could be found in the unprecedented increase in electoral volatility, which initially favoured FG and Labour, but ultimately mostly benefitted independent TDs and, especially, SF (Little and Farrell, 2021; Weeks, 2018). After years of absence from the political scene, the latter party indeed managed to successfully capitalize on the electorate's view shifts of the 2010s, gaining a solid fourth place in the 2011 elections, a third place in the 2016 elections and the relative majority of votes in the latest 2020 elections (Siaroff, 2018; Little and Farrell, 2021).

As the single undisputed dominant party, winning the majority of both votes and seats from 1932 to 2011, *Fianna Fáil* has been influencing political competition and culture in Ireland for almost a century (Little and Farrell, 2021). For this reason, some simply argue that "to understand modern Ireland, one has to understand Fianna Fáil" (Kirby and Murphy, 2011: 31). Like other one-party dominant systems, FF evolved into a centrist and clientelist "catch-all" party (Kirby and Murphy, 2011). The peculiarity of the Irish case, however, is that even the second party, *Fine Gael*, can be classified as a catch-all and somehow centrist party. As Weeks (2018: 112) argues, both parties "have tended to converge on the centre of the ideological spectrum, sometimes switching sides between left and right. This has resulted in their promoting policies with flavours of conservatism, Christian democracy and social democracy, but not to the extent that either fits clearly into any of these categories". Comparatively, FF has been consistently more conservative than FG on civil rights issues, while also maintaining its original anti-partition republican ideology (Siaroff, 2018). Despite representing different class bases – with FG being more popular with the upper-middle class, while FF claiming to also present the working class – (Siaroff, 2018) on economic issues, the positions of the two parties tends to converge towards

the centre, with both parties adapting to the circumstances (Weeks, 2018). Despite their ideological proximity, a strong, almost ritual or symbolic animosity have endured for years between the two main Irish parties, so much so that the two have, until recently, consistently refrained to establish coalition governments together.

The other side of an exceptionally strong centre-right in Ireland has been the perennial weakness of centre-left parties. "The mean aggregate vote for such parties fluctuated between 10 and 20 per cent from the 1920s up to the 2000s, less than half that attracted by their counterparts in western Europe" (Weeks, 2018: 113). The Labour Party, historically representing the most voted force on the left of the political spectrum, emerged pre-independence as an affiliate to the Irish Trade Union Congress. The principal reason for the weakness of LP is related, as later discussed, to the cleavage structure in Ireland and, more specifically, to the absence, until a few decades ago, of an urban working-class comparable to other industrialized Western countries (Siaroff, 2018). This has led LP to assume, over the years, generally more moderate positions than its European counterparts. On the left, various other political parties have also emerged over the years, sometimes arising from internal splits within LP (Kirby and Murphy, 2011). In recent times, these include the Social Democrats (SD) and the coalition known as People Before Profit/Solidarity (PBF).

Besides small new parties on the left, during the current critical juncture of the Irish party system, two other parties have (re)emerged as relevant. First, the incremental electoral growth of SF after the 2008 financial crisis in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (Weeks, 2018) has brought this nationalist, republican and left-leaning party back in the political scene, advocating for a united and socialist Ireland (Siaroff, 2018). Second, the Green Party (GP), which has occupied only few seats in the *Dáil* almost consistently since 1989, has recently enjoyed a small growth in its electoral share, that ultimately brought it into government in 2007, 2008 and 2020. Finally, another peculiar characteristic of the Irish party system is "that postwar Ireland has elected more independents to parliament than the rest of Western Europe combined" (Siaroff, 2018: 305).

Against this backdrop, the political culture determining and determined by party competition in Ireland appears consensus-driven, conservatist and populist (Kirby and Murphy, 2011). The consensual and conservatist culture has prevented Ireland to evolve into a fully-fledged "multi-elite party system" (Bauluz et al., 2021), while populism has made political parties and their

electorate constantly vulnerable to each other's influences (Kirby and Murphy, 2011). This peculiar culture is the result of several structural factors, including, notably, the heavy legacies of a peasant rural heritage and of the Catholic Church. With respect to the former element, early studies (Garvin 1974: 307) concluded that "Ireland affords an example of a polity in which the political concerns and style of the rural periphery came to "invade" and dominate the urban centre for more than a generation". Furthermore, while religion was not the basis for party formation, the overwhelming support for the Catholic Church in Ireland has created a vocationalist and corporatist culture (Kirby and Murphy, 2011) weakening secular institutions and hindering the chances of a socialist perspective to gain ground (Bauluz et al., 2021).

Therefore, the classic Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) cleavages – workers-capital; church-state; urban-rural; Centre-periphery – cannot fully explain the Irish party system (Weeks, 2018). As Little and Farrell (2021) put it, parties in Ireland "are separated by an historical civil war divide representing a divide between degrees of 'peripheralism', in Lipset and Rokkan's terminology", i.e. a long-lost cleavage rooted into territorial divides that was frozen into the political competition for decades (Weeks, 2018). The absence of a strong capital-labour political cleavage has resulted in the ideological proximity between the main parties of the political spectrum. Nevertheless, this pattern started to change with the 2008 financial crisis, when an unprecedented increase in the salience of class-based voting occurred, culminating in the recent victory of SF at the 2020 elections (Bauluz et al., 2021). The (re)emergence of this pro-redistribution party, largely supported by the less-educated working class, can be explained as a response to the dramatic inequalities that Ireland's fast-growing economic model has produced since the 80s, which were further exacerbated in the years of austerity (Bauluz et al., 2021). Finally, Ireland differs from other Western European Countries also with respect to post-materialist political cleavages, like the ones described by the GAL (Green-Alternative-Libertarian) – TAN (Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist) framework. Irish major parties' attention to these new political issues has been limited, due to parties' lack of sufficient electoral incentives to care for them (Little, 2020). This has resulted notably in a constant lack of salience of environmental issues within the political agenda of most major parties (Little, 2020).

### *1.3. Interest representation in Ireland*

With a voluntarist industrial relations regime (Maccarrone and Erne, forth.) and multiple and decentralized interest groups representation (Taylor, 2003), Ireland might, at first sight, seem to

be a typical case of a pluralist model of interest representation, hence one where interest groups freely, yet in a disorganized way, compete to exert influence on policymaking (Murphy, 2018; Schmitter, 1974). This is reflected in the fact that social movements, expressing active citizenship, have a rich history in Ireland and that civil society – voluntaristic, service-oriented and connected in large part to the Catholic Church – is considerably developed (Kirby and Murphy, 2011).

The key characteristic of pluralist models is that interest groups' influence on policymaking is not institutionalised. This, on paper, offers more opportunities to exercise agency even to non-organized and less-powerful groups. However, in reality, unregulated interest competition ultimately ends up favouring the most powerful (hence economically resourceful) groups (Murphy, 2018). Throughout its history, however, Ireland has also moved towards the opposite type of interest representation: neo-corporatism. While the country does not show the core characteristics of the classic neo-corporatist state – with concentrated, centralized and hierarchical interest groups (Baccaro and Lim, 2007) – in certain time periods some organized interests – most notably the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC) and the Irish Farmers' Association – have been systematically involved in national-level decision-making regarding macro-economic and welfare issues through social pacts (Baccaro and Lim, 2007; Regan, 2012; Maccarrone et al., 2020; Geary, 2016). This hybrid model of interest representation was referred to as "social partnership". It resembled a competitive corporatism, where concertation was seen, by all parties involved, as a way to enhance national economic competitiveness (Murphy, 2018).

The origins of the social partnership can be traced back to governmental practices in the 1960s and 1970s, when prototypical tripartite consultations occurred often in the realm of economic and social policies, giving rise to a weak form of neo-corporatism (Murphy, 2018; Hogan and O'Rourke, 2015). However, these practices were dropped in the early 1980s, when the Irish system of industrial relations was dominated by firm-level bargaining, with decentralized trade unions pursuing disrupting strategies and with the government (FG-Labour from 1981 to 1986) actively excluding interest groups from decision-making (Culpepper and Regan, 2014; Hogan and O'Rourke, 2015). This governmental strategy led ICTU to organize massive and unprecedented strikes against the government's retrenchment tax regime, putting particular pressure on LP, that ultimately pulled out of government in 1986 (Culpepper and Regan, 2014).

Union mobilisation managed to strike its effects on the FF minority government in power in 1987, since the latter "needed the ICTU to get a fragmented union movement to accept wage restraint in order to generate the stability for an export-led economic recovery based on attracting foreign direct investment, particularly in the aftermath of the 1986 currency devaluation" (Culpepper and Regan, 2014: 734). In exchange for their support, then government provided ICTU with a solid political access to the decision-making table. This resulted in the conclusion of a succession of tripartite agreements, under the auspices of the multi-stakeholder advisory body known as the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) (Geary, 2016).

The important novelty introduced by the social partnership era was that tripartite negotiations did not concern only wages, like in the 1960s and 1970s, but they were meant to be part of a more strategic coordination on broader policy issues, link financial and welfare policies, with the Department of the *Taoiseach* directly responsible for the management and implementation of the agreements (Murphy, 2018). The social partnership model lasted roughly 20 years. It proved to be adaptable to several economic circumstances (Geary, 2016) and, through its consensual approach to policymaking, it was also widely recognized to be one of the major political factors sustaining economic growth during the Celtic Tiger period in the mid-1990s and early 2000s (Murphy, 2018).

Several studies have attempted to explain the emergence and relative stability of the social partnership in a traditionally pluralist system like Ireland. Some scholars pointed to the role of union mobilization – in times where the ICTU was considered a legitimate representative of the working class – as a destabilizing force for the government's support and the social partnership as an effective mechanism for the government to foster industrial and broader public consensus (Culpepper and Regan, 2014; Hogan and O'Rourke, 2015). As Baccaro and Lim (2007: 30) put it, "social compacting is a quintessentially political phenomenon: the government's decision to involve the social partners is shaped by the electoral and strategic configuration of the political system, while the actors' decision to commit themselves to a negotiated solution is the result of an internal political struggle". On the government side, some of the main factors explaining the emergence and development of the social partnership include the prime minister's office power (Regan, 2017) and the presence of a weak government facing substantial economic challenges (Culpepper and Regan, 2014). Trade unions also played an active role in this period, as they shifted from an adversarial to a collaborative strategy, in fear that they would have suffered long-term marginalization if they would not have collaborated with the government (Geary,

2016). Finally, a more structuralist explanation in the literature frames the emergence of the social partnership in Ireland as a functional necessity for a small open economy, more vulnerable to changes in the international markets and, hence, more in need to align national interests on a common policy objective (Regan, 2012).

When the 2008 global financial crisis hit Ireland, social partnership was one of the very first victims (Murphy, 2018). The collapse of the social partnership took place when another FF minority government decided to unilaterally pursue its post-crisis adjustment measures, despite the firm opposition of several key stakeholders, including ICTU (Murphy, 2018; Culpepper and Regan, 2014). In short, "the NESC was sidelined, social partnership committees shut down and parliamentary subcommittees re-emerged as the main arena of decision-making within government. Trade unions were now considered part of the problem, not the solution" (Culpepper and Regan, 2014).

More in general, while it ensured institutionalized stakeholders' engagement for over two decades, the social partnership has often been also criticized for it resulted in the taming of civil society in Ireland, hence creating an elitist system of interest representation, that allowed little space for less-resourceful and more critical groups (Kirby and Murphy, 2011). When the social partnership came to an end, even entrenched interest groups had by then lost their strength as public opinion mobilizers. This was the case notably of trade unions, that, over the years, suffered a gradual collapse in union density and collective bargaining coverage, which came as a result of broader socio-economic transformations, including the advent of non-unionized foreign multinationals in the domestic market (Culpepper and Regan, 2014; Regan, 2014; Maccarrone et al., 2020). The end of the social partnership also brought significant changes to the broader institutional system in Ireland, for instance weakening the Prime Minister's role within the government (Regan, 2016). Moreover, business organization have seemingly increased their influence on policymaking, since both IBEC and the American Chamber of Commerce now represent influential actors in the Irish lobbying arena (Maccarrone et al., 2020).

After having described the evolution of the model of interest representation in Ireland, it is worth briefly presenting who the main interest groups are. As Gary Murphy (2018: 241) outlines, "Considering sectional groups, in 2016 there were 17 agricultural organisations, 24 educational organisations, 22 professional health organisations, six civil service associations, two different Garda (police) representative bodies, three defence force representative bodies, seven local

government organisations, 45 trade unions affiliated to ICTU, four unions not affiliated to ICTU, and some 300 other trade and professional bodies that were organised to represent the interests of their members. Within these, there were a number of distinct business organisations, with IBEC, for instance, having over 21 separate sectoral associations affiliated to it".

As already stated, private-companies' lobbying has considerably increased since the collapse of the social partnership, at the expense of more traditional sectional associations, although IBEC still remains influential to this day, as the umbrella organization representing different sectors of the Irish economy, including small and big, domestic and multinational, companies (Murphy, 2018). In a country of rural roots like Ireland, the Irish Farmers' Association still represent around 75 thousand members, it is well-eradicated, with several branches around the country, and maintains links with the major political parties at different levels (Murphy, 2018). On the trade unions side, even though union density has severely declined over time and the financial crisis ended up damaging unions' power resources (Maccarrone and Erne, forth.), Irish unions still prefer to pursue a "logic of representation", as opposed to a "logic of mobilization" (Geary, 2016). To this day, ICTU represents the peak umbrella organization, coordinating several unions in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and representing their interests in governmental advisory bodies, as well as in European and international confederations (Murphy, 2018). Among its core member, on the public sector side, *Fórsa* represents circa 85 thousand members (Maccarrone and Erne, forth), while Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) is the largest union in the private sector with circa 200 thousand members (Schulze and Moran, 2007).

Beyond economic ones, other interest also find voice in what has been described as a "vibrant" civil society. Nevertheless, economic interests – despite arguably not being representative and inclusive when it comes to class, gender and ethnicity – still enjoy the greatest powers among demand-side actors (Murphy and Dukelow, 2016). This is perhaps a result of the corporatist tradition, which formed a civil society with a very dependent relationship with the state: FF, in particular, has actively tried to co-opt organizations in its sphere of influence and suppress dissensus, which comes mostly from grassroots activism (Kirby and Murphy, 2011: 35). Thus, the most active civil society groups have been community-based and voluntary social service providers. These organizations include both faith-based and secular groups, which were involved in state-sponsored community empowerment projects in the 1980s and 1990s. Finally,

epistemic communities are very scarce in Ireland: the Economic and Social Research Institute is the dominant private think tank in the country, while NESC provides government-mandated strategic advices on a different number of subjects (Murphy and Dukelow, 2016).

In very recent years, new opportunities have been created for civil society to engage with policymakers, for instance through parliamentary committees (Connaughton, 2021). In this framework, two developments seem particularly relevant for this research. First, in the past few years, there have been several experiments with different forms of direct – namely referenda – and deliberative democracy, such as Citizens' Assemblies. In a comparative perspective, Ireland stands out because it has held four consecutive randomly-selected Citizens' Assemblies, which managed to shape the public discourse and produce major changes both in terms of policy reforms and referendum initiatives (Walsh and Elkink, 2021). Particularly relevant is the latest deliberative experiment, i.e. the 2016-2018 Irish Citizens' Assembly, composed of a mini-group of 99 randomly-selected citizens originally meant to discuss the issue of abortion, but then tasked by the Parliament to also discuss ageing challenges, fixed-term parliaments, referenda procedure and climate change (Courant, 2021).

The second notable recent development pertains the Irish environmental movement. The latter has had a long history and was also part of the social partnership through the umbrella organization Environmental Pillar, which to this day represents 32 national environmental NGOs, including big ones like Stop Climate Chaos and Friends of the Earth Ireland (Murphy, 2023). More recently, following the increasing salience of environmental issues in the face of the current climate crisis, environmental mobilization has resurfaced strongly, with domestic branches of global movements, such as Extinction Rebellion or Fridays for Future, promoting strikes and bottom-up forms of mobilisation (O'Neill and Alblas, 2020; Murphy, 2023). These movements appear to adopt more critical strategies and positions with respect to Irish environmental policies if compared to more established "insider"' environmental NGOs (Gold, 2020).

## 2. The Irish eco-welfare state

### *2.1. The Irish welfare state*

Expenditure in social protection in Ireland ranks as one of the lowest in Europe. As Andreosso-O'Callaghan et al. (2016: 13) state, referring to a report by NESC, "if by the size of the 'welfare state', one means social expenditure related to GNP or/and GDP ratio, Ireland showed a wide

gap between its pre-crisis relative wealth and its relative social spending compared with the EU-15 countries". Analysing the Irish welfare system in a cross-country perspective has been a difficult task for comparative welfare state scholars, mainly due to the exceptionality of this system (Hübscher, 2018, Powell, 2017; Collins and Murphy, 2021). Applying Esping-Andersen's (1990) seminal typology, Ireland comes close to a Liberal regime where social provisions by the state are selective and residual – hence often means-tested an associated with stigma or coercive sanctions – in a way that is designed to sustain the primacy of the Market in determining individuals' risks and opportunity, and ultimately achieving minimal decommodification. The influence of pre-independence British rule has been deemed as crucial in shaping Ireland as an Anglo-Saxon welfare model (Hübscher, 2018).

However, the Irish welfare state does not entirely fit in Esping-Andersen's Liberal ideal-type, since it also contains elements of other welfare models. Notably, some authors identify elements of the continental model in Ireland, due to the diffusion of corporatist practices in the development of social and labour market policies and due to the Catholic roots of the welfare state (McLaughlin, 2001). Others instead highlight the unique factors leading to the emergence of the Irish welfare state, which "was not shaped by the interests of the urban working class but rural tenant farmers" (Powell, 2017: 24) giving rise to "a property-based" welfare state close to the Eastern-Asian model (Norris, 2016). Finally, familism and influence of Christian-democratic parties in the development of social policies, typical of the Mediterranean model, have also been detected in the Irish experience (Collins and Murphy, 2021). In short, the two main elements that characterize the Irish welfare state are residuality, which is related to punitive neoliberalism (Dukelow and Kennett, 2018), and conservativism, which translates into widespread earnings-related social insurance schemes and in the reliance on the Church and the family as voluntary welfare providers (Hübscher, 2018).

As already stated, unlike in most Western European Countries, the Irish welfare state developed from rural interests in what was then a largely non-industrialized country. The origins of the welfare state in Ireland can be traced back to the Poor Relief Ireland Act, a prototypical housing policy adopted by the UK government in 1838 (Hübscher, 2018). The first pension scheme came in 1908, while the first contribution-based unemployment scheme was introduced three years later. After independence, welfare institutions remained largely rudimental. First, the influence of the Catholic Church, on which the state heavily relied especially in the fields of education and health, blocked any possible reform (Collins and Murphy, 2021; Hübscher, 2018). Second, the

legacy of the British model of social policy constrained the emerging Irish welfare institutions. Nevertheless, between the 1960s and 1980s these institutions started to change, as the country embarked in an ambitious development project for the construction of a productivist labour market, coupled by the parallel processes of secularization and Europeanization (McCashin, 2019; Hübscher, 2018; Powell, 2017). The main policy paradigm pursued in these years was education for national development, while notable innovations included the expansion of social insurance and assistance for the unemployed and the introduction of free secondary education and technical training. (McCashin, 2019).

In the mid-1980s and early 1990s, the economic crisis forced the government, in collaboration with social partners, to reform the welfare system and upgrade it to European standards (McCashin, 2019; Hübscher, 2018). The new dominant paradigm became social inclusion, which, in the field of labour market policies, resulted in the introduction of positive financial incentives for low-paid workers and, most notably, of a passive scheme for long-term unemployed known as Community Employment (McCashin, 2019). During the Celtic Tiger years and, mostly from the from the 2000s onwards, the Irish welfare paradigm changed again, from a passive to a more active approach, which is still dominant to this day (McCashin, 2019; Collins and Murphy, 2016). "This entails a more restrictive and conditional benefit regime, combined with more concerted interventions with individual jobseekers in a reformed institutional setting" (McCashin, 2019: 240). The reforms undertaken during the Celtic Tiger years and then in the early 2000s relied on the idea of a welfare productivism, where social and labour market policies were meant to serve the needs of a growing economy (Powell, 2017).

Much like other areas of public life in Ireland, the welfare state was considerably shaken by the 2008 financial crisis. Like in all the most-impacted European countries, the immediate effects of the crisis on social security were a cost containment and a retrenchment of existing assistance and insurance schemes – justified by the austerity imperative of fiscal consolidation – alongside some recalibration to address new risks (Dukelow and Considine, 2014). Moreover, Ireland's activation-turn in the early 2000s was emphasised by the reshaping of social security towards employment (McCashin, 2019). In the words of Dukelow and Kennett (2018: 496), this resulted in coercive commodification, including "the institutionalisation of a stricter benefit regime, eroding the duration of insurance payments and tightening eligibility (which particularly impacted young people and lone parents); and the introduction of more coercive labour market

programmes coupled with the increasing use of disciplinary surveillance techniques and sanctions".

The peculiarity of the Irish welfare state is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the area of labour market policies. With Community Employment, the state has been promoting a distinctively passive approach to labour market policies. The latter is a voluntary scheme governed by an independent body, providing wages in exchange for community work organized by civil society groups. It proved to be an extremely popular scheme among participants, clientelist politicians and civil society representatives (McCashin, 2019; Boyle, 2005). This model lasted until the early 2000s, against the social investment recommendations of the European Employment Strategy (Collins and Murphy, 2021). Thus, Ireland came late to activation if compared to other European Countries (Collins and Murphy, 2016). However, since the financial crisis, the work-first character of the Irish activation model has been more and more emphasized and the use of penalties for non-compliance by beneficiaries and quasi-marketized employment services have increased (Dukelow and Considine, 2014; McGann, 2021). This was also accompanied by a reform in the governance of labour market schemes, with the establishment of a new government-controlled agency at the national level – the National Employment and Entitlements Service – and, at the local level, the integration of social protection and activation services into a single public service for the short-term unemployed (Intreo) and a private service for the long-term-unemployed (Job Path service) (McGann, 2021; Collins and Murphy, 2021).

Power in the Irish welfare state, like in other areas of public intervention, is highly centralised, with the government retaining high level of control over the state's bureaucratic assets, especially after the collapse of the social partnership (Murphy and Dukelow, 2016). This makes it so that political conflicts are often transposed into government departments, which align themselves with different contending interests (McCashin, 2019). Furthermore, the constituency-based electoral system favours a localisation of the politics of social policies (Murphy and Dukelow, 2016). Ideological differences between parties on distributive issues and social security spending have been historically low and so was the level of electoral conflict around these issues (Murphy and Dukelow, 2016; McCashin, 2019). Despite the lack of a strong left-wing party, the centrist and catch-all vocation of the dominant party, FF, has acted as a consensus-oriented counterbalance to neo-liberal market pressures (McCashin, 2019). The impact of the financial crisis slightly shifted this pattern by reawakening class conflict, as witness

with the emergence of new social movements and left-wing anti-austerity parties (Dukelow and Kennett, 2018).

Power concentration also displays in the demand-side of welfare politics in Ireland, with the dominance of non-inclusive ruling elites in terms of class, gender and ethnicity (Murphy and Dukelow, 2016). In the past, a portion of interest groups – especially social partners, but also civil society service-providers – used to be involved in the delivery of welfare benefits (such as through Community Employment). This contributed to the creation of a wide pro-welfare advocacy coalition (McCashin, 2019). However, with the activation turn of social security and the collapse of corporatist practices, civil society actors across the Irish political arena are now lacking the capacity to mobilize interests around alternative social policies and to effectively drive policy change (Murphy and Dukelow, 2016). This leaves a space for more powerful organized interests, namely businesses and industries, to enjoy a disproportional power in policy areas like pension, housing, health, corporate welfare and labour market policies (Ibid.). Finally, with respect to epistemic communities, influential in the development of social and labour market policies have been the Economic and Social Research Institute and NESC (Ibid.).

### *2.2. The Irish eco state*

The Irish record on the environment has traditionally been far from virtuous, which is evident especially when it comes to climate change performance. Citing the annual Climate Change Performance Index (Burck et al., 2017) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA 2019a), Torney (2020: 37) notes that Ireland "has been regarded for some time as a climate laggard, repeatedly ranked among the lowest performing European Union (EU) member states […] on track to miss EU climate targets by a considerable margin". The author also points out that, despite progress in the field of renewable electricity, Ireland is still lagging behind when it comes to reducing emissions in key sectors, such as transport and agriculture (Torney, 2020). In its 2018 assessment of EU countries' ambition and progress in fighting climate change, the renowned non-governmental organization Climate Action Network placed Ireland penultimate in its ranking of European member states' climate performances (CAN, 2018). The CAN report asserted that Ireland was set to miss its short- and long-term EU-wide climate targets. It also stated that "Ireland has failed to prepare effective policies to align near-term climate action with EU and Paris Agreement commitments" (CAN, 2018: 13). The picture does not look different if one considers other planetary boundaries beyond climate change and carbon emission, since

the country was found in 2018 to have surpassed five other boundaries, namely material and ecological footprints, phosphorus and nitrogen cycles and, to a less extent, land use change (Murphy, 2023).

When it comes to the eco state, there is no well-established typology to classify countries, like for the welfare state. Nevertheless, in the few studies that have attempted to identify different models of eco states, Ireland is clustered either among low- or mid-performing eco states. Duit (2016) concentrates on the governance resources allocated to environmental protection and places Ireland in a set containing small European countries that – in spite of low administrative capacity and despite not being environmental "leaders" – have been responsive to environmental problems, namely via R&D investments and taxes. Koch and Fritz (2014) check the evolution of countries' environmental performance over time and cluster Ireland among the so-called "deadlock ecostates", characterized by steady and average performances. Average is Ireland's ecological performance also according to Zimmermann and Graziano (2020). Finally, Jahn (2014) combines countries' environmental performances with their prevailing economic regimes and places Ireland among the less environmentally successful and more productivist countries alongside other Anglo-Saxon, as well as Southern-European, countries.

When presenting the history of Ireland's climate policy, Torney (2020: 37) distinguishes four phases. The first coincides with the Celtic Tiger era, where rapid economic growth was coupled with a rise in greenhouse gas emissions. Although limited, a first national policy response to climate change started in these years, with notable important measures including Ireland's first National Climate Change Strategy in 2000 and a second version of such strategy in 2007 (containing measures to comply with EU-wide emission reduction targets) (Torney, 2020). The global financial and economic crisis contributed to opening a second phase for Irish climate policy. Despite the unprecedented presence of the Green party in a government's coalition (with FF and the Progressive Democrats), the abrupt socio-economic crisis resulted in the disappearance of climate change from the national political agenda. On a positive note, driven by the fall in economic growth and by relevant governmental initiatives, including a carbon tax in 2010 and the domestic transposition of EU 2020 climate and energy targets, this period was also characterized by a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (Torney, 2020).

A third phase was inaugurated with the dawn of the economic recovery, which brought back growth both in the economy and in emissions (Torney, 2020). In this scenario, in 2015, the FG

and Labour government enacted the first national climate legislation, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (O'Gorman, 2020). The law was inspired – through policy diffusion – by the UK Climate Change Act, although it ultimately ended up being way less transformative (Torney, 2017). In such a law, the Irish government committed to pursue a transition towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050 (O'Gorman, 2020). However, no quantitative targets were agreed (Torney, 2020). The law also envisaged an obligation for the government to come up every five years with National Mitigation Plans (the first of which was published in 2017), setting objectives for cutting greenhouse gas emissions, and with National Adaptation Frameworks (the first of which was adopted in 2018). The 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act also provided for the creation of a Climate Change Advisory Council, an independent body tasked to give advices to the government through periodic reviews (O'Gorman, 2020). Also during this third phase, the government put forward an Energy White Paper in 2015, committing to deliver on a low-carbon energy system by 2050 through increasing renewable energy share (Torney, 2020). Despite all the progresses, Ireland continued to act like a climate laggard, which was exemplified notably by its braking role in the negotiations for EU climate and energy policies (CAN, 2018).

Some signs of a "new dawn" for Irish climate policy came more recently, form 2017 onwards, with a series of developments that, as later seen, also intersected the trajectory of just transition policies (Torney, 2020). First, as climate change gained unprecedented salience in the public debate due to increasing mediatic coverage in the wake of the Paris Agreement and of the 2018 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2018), civil society mobilization saw an unprecedented resurgence (O'Neill and Alblas, 2020). This occurred not only through the emergence of new movements, primarily school strikes inspired by Greta Thunberg's action, but also via novel strategies by more established environmental organisations. Notably, in 2017, Friends of the Irish Environment promoted an influential judicial review of the National Mitigation Plan in the High Court, arguing that the plan was failing to achieve its emission reduction objective (Ibid.). Although the court's final judgement was expressed in 2019 against Friends of the Irish Environment's claims, it importantly recognized the organization's entitlement to raise climate complaints (Ibid.). A second innovative landmark event was the Citizens' Assembly of 2016–2018, which was tasked by the parliament – over an impulse by the Green Party – to address the question of "How the state can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change" (Torney, 2020). "The recommendations they agreed on the climate change

topic were significantly more radical than many observers expected, with strong support (80 percent or higher in all cases) for all proposed actions, including paying higher taxes on carbon-intensive activities, taxing GHG emissions from agricultural produce, and phasing out support for peat extraction on a phased basis" (Torney, 2020: 45).

All these events triggered political action. The Parliament set up a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (JOCCA), comprising nearly all relevant political parties and tasked to consider the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly. The final report by the JOCCA came out in March 2019, with 40 policy recommendations. These recommendations were supported by a cross-party consensus and they were meant to suggest measures of different kind to curb emissions in key sectors of the economy (Torney, 2020). Among the important proposals of the JOCCA, we find a support for just transition and a recommendation to phase-out both peat and coal as soon as possible (Little, 2020). The work of the JOCCA was fundamental in shaping the 2019 Climate Action Plan (CAP), promoted by the minority FG Government and by then Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Richard Bruton (Torney, 2020). This Plan represented a notable step forward in Irish climate policy, in line with both the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and with European standards (Ibid.). It contains 183 detailed and ambitious recommendations for concrete actions meant "to significantly alter the governance structure around climate action in Ireland, but also [to] set out some of the most detailed plans for many sectors of the economy, including agriculture, waste, the build environment, transport and electricity" (O'Gorman, 2020: 85). It also envisaged a commitment to launch a Climate Action (Amendment) Bill (DCCAE 2020), which was initially proposed in January 2020, but ultimately adopted by the following government (FF-FG-GP) in 2021 (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021a). This Bill "would make provision for the adoption of carbon budgets a legal requirement, establish the Climate Action Council as a successor organisation to the Climate Change Advisory Council, and create a Long-Term Climate Strategy to match the period covered by the three five-year carbon budgets, which would replace the existing requirement for National Mitigation Plans" (Ibid.). The new legislation also sets the 2050 decarbonisation target in the law.

In Ireland, three are the main characteristics of climate party politics: "the low salience of climate policy among the parties, a tendency towards party political consensus, and a willingness on the part of politicians to respond—at least symbolically—to voters' concerns" (Little, 2020: 92). First, climate change has traditionally found little salience among the principal political

parties, with the exceptions of the 2006-2007 and the recent post-2019 periods, driven by international events and party competition triggered by the growing popularity of the Greens (Little, 2020). As a result, while climate change denial or scepticism has never been detected in Irish parties' positions (Ibid.), only the GP has played a consistent entrepreneurial role in pushing for more ambitious climate policies (Bolleyer, 2010). Second, a "passive consensus" (Little, 2017) characterized both the 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act and the 2019 JOCCA Report (Little, 2020). More in general, this tendency mirrors the low ideological differences between Irish parties (Ibid.), which finds only few exceptions in the climate policy field, including polarization over carbon taxes (Torney, 2020). Third, while traditionally the public's attention to climate change has been low, this pattern seems now to be shifting (Little, 2020). Increasing public attention, coupled with intra-party policy entrepreneurship, allowed for a novel alignment between office-seeking and policy-seeking incentives of parties on climate issues (Little, 2017).

While Torney (2020) notes that Irish politics has witness a progressive "agencification" over the past few years, he also asserts that this mainly manifests in the empowerment of governmental bodies, while societal engagement remains sporadic. Nevertheless, on the demand side of climate policy, few groups have managed to successfully exercise their influence, including businesses and farming organizations (Wagner and Ylä-Anttila, 2018); the Citizens assembly; and local authorities that, although legally and financially restricted, have been identified as crucial facilitators and supporters of national climate initiatives (Dekker, 2020). Finally, as already mentioned, since 2018 the Irish environmental movement has witnessed a resurgence and a radical change. Stop Climate Chaos was the first civil society coalition focussed solely on climate action. It was founded in 2006 by Friends of the Earth Ireland and *Trócaire*, promoting climate policy demands with an "insider-outsider" approach, hence pursuing both public campaigns and institutional lobbying (Gold, 2020). With the emergence of new movements – like Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future and Schools Climate Action Network – and with established organised NGOs shifting towards the use of "outsider" tactics, a "new politics" of climate change is emerging, increasing the demand for climate action (Ibid.).

**3. The Irish policy trajectory: the emergence of just transition policies**

The present Section summarises the trajectory leading to the emergence of just transition policies in Ireland. Table 5.2 contains a list of the main events that make up this trajectory, presented in chronological order.

**Table 5.2:** ***The policy trajectory of Ireland's Just Transition Policies*** **(source: author's own elaboration)**

| **Month/year** | **Short description of major developments** |
|---|---|
| October 2015 | The monopolistic peat-harvesting company BNM signals its intention to phase out peat production by 2030 by publishing the "Sustainability 2030" Plan |
| 2016 | A bipartite agreement is reached between BNM and peat workers' unions for the management of the phase-out, including a mechanism to regulate eventual disputes with redundant workers |
| May 2017 | SIPTU publishes "There are no jobs on a dead planet: what just transition means for workers" and ICTU organises the Energy & Natural Resources Conference, importing the just transition debate in Ireland and initiating an informal collaboration between unions, green NGOs and the Green Party |
| July 2017 | The FG government publishes the National Mitigation Plan, mentioning just transition for the first time and acknowledging trade unions' demands |
| April 2018 | The Third Report of the Citizens' Assembly about climate action is published, alluding to the principles of just transition |
| July 2018 | The JOCCA, comprising 16 TDs and 6 Senators, is established within the Irish Parliament to respond to the Citizens Assembly's Report and to provide recommendations on climate actions |
| October 2018 | - BNM announces its "Brown to Green Strategy", anticipating the deadline for ceasing peat harvesting to 2027. The strategy includes a voluntary schemes and skills support for the "just transition" of peat workers. This Strategy is met with criticism from trade unions<br>- After the resignation of his predecessor, Richard Bruton is appointed Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment within Varadkar' *Fine Gael* minority government<br>- In response to the "Brown to Green Strategy", BNM, ESB, trade unions, TDs from the Midlands and local authorities constitute the MRTT during a meeting of the Offaly County Council. The MRTT starts its advocacy activities |
| November 2018 | The Green Party proposes a "Just Transition (Worker and Community Environmental Rights) Bill 2018" for the establishment of a National Just Transition Commission |
| March 2019 | The final report of the JOCCA is published, featuring recommendations specifically on just transition |
| June 2019 | Building on the JOCCA report, the government publishes the **Climate Action Plan**, containing Ireland's just transition strategy |
| July 2019 | An Bord Pleanála withdraws ESB-owned West Offaly power plant planning permission to co-fire peat with biomass , de facto accelerating peat phase-out |

| | |
|---|---|
| September 2019 | The Just Transition Alliance, comprising national trade unions and green NGOs, issues its first statement calling for just transition measures in the Midlands |
| October 2019 | The government announces the new Budget Law for 2020 containing measures to address the social crisis in the Midlands, including a €6 million **Just Transition Fund** and the appointment of Kieran Mulvey as a **Just Transition Commissioner**. Mulvey starts its work leading to the publication of four separate reports based on stakeholders' consultation between 2019 and 2021 |
| November 2019 | ESB complements the Government's Just Transition Fund with €5 million and announces that its two remaining peat-fired power plants would have ceased generation of electricity by the end of December 2020 |
| March/April 2020 | - NESC publishes a series of reports, based on inputs from multiple stakeholders, recommending actions for a just transition in Ireland<br>- BNM announces the end of peat harvesting in all its lands |
| June 2020 | A new government – based on a coalition between FF, FG and GP – enters into office. Eamon Ryan from GP substitutes Bruton as Minister and pledges to publish a Just Transition Plan and to establish a Commission for Just Transition (which, so far, has not been done) |
| August 2020 | The government submits to the European Commission Ireland's final National Energy and Climate Plan |
| July 2021 | The **Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill** is adopted, setting into legislation the goals of the Climate Action Plan, including those on just transition |
| September 2021 | A new Just Transition (Worker and Community Environmental Rights) Bill is proposed in the parliament by the Social Democrats, attempting again to establish a Just Transition Commission |
| November 2021 | The Climate Action Plan is renewed and a new version is published, with two chapters specifically dedicated to just transition |
| January 2022 | The mandate of the Just Transition Commissioner is prolonged after its expiry |
| December 2022 | - The European Commission approves Ireland's Territorial Just Transition Plan providing financial resources through the EU Just Transition Fund to accompany peat phase-out in the Midlands<br>- The government publishes the third edition of the Climate Action Plan |

### *3.1. The socio-economic premises: the Irish energy sector and the peat industry in transition*

Ireland is responsible for 1.7 % of the total EU's greenhouse gas emissions (Jensen, 2021). A key peculiarity of Ireland's emission profile is that, unlike other EU Countries, agriculture weights comparatively more (around 35% of the total) (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020b). Despite the relatively small size of the heavy industry sector, fuel combustion across economic sectors is the primary source of national emissions: "this highlights Ireland's particular energy

balance structure, which relies on peat and coal for less than 8% of primary energy supply [...] despite these fuels contributing 29% of the sectoral emissions" (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020: 5). Electricity generation is hence a key sector in Ireland's path towards decarbonisation, whereas "energy industries account for only 15 % of emissions, against 24 % on average in the EU" (Jensen, 2021, 3). While aggregate emission reduction in Ireland has been lower than EU average, Irish energy industries have achieved better results than any other sector (Jensen, 2021). This can be explained by the fact that the energy mix in electricity generation has considerably changed over time, with natural gas usage growing in share at the expense of other fossil fuels, like oil, coal and peat (Dekker and Torney, 2017). Moreover, "Ireland has seen a strong increase in renewable electricity and is one of the leading countries in integration of variable renewable energy" (International Energy Agency, 2019: 114).

With respect to the policy framework for the decarbonisation of the electricity sector, fossil fuel for electricity generation is part of the EU Emission Trading System (ETS) and a number of targets and support schemes for the development of renewables have been put forward over the years (Dekker and Torney, 2017). In the 2020 National Energy and Climate Plan, Ireland committed to achieving a 34% share of renewable energy in energy consumption by 2030, as well as to increase electricity generated from renewables by 70%. (Government of Ireland, 2020a). We find various measures in the Irish NECP to achieve these objectives. On top of these, the NECP also provides for the delivery of "an early and complete phase-out of coal- and peat-fired electricity generation" by 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2020a: 70). With respect to coal, so-called Moneypoint power plant – which is owned and operated by the semi-state company Electricity Supply Board (ESB) – is the largest power station in the country, accounting for almost 12% of the total electricity generated in 2017 (International Energy Agency, 2019). With the NECP, Moneypoint is set to cease coal burning by 2025, with a view to substituting it with a clean energy hub (Jensen, 2021). Significant job losses are expected from this transition, with a high territorial impact in County Clare. As a consequence, since 2019, ESB has been offering voluntary severance, retirement schemes or relocation plans for its redundant workers (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020b).

Peat, a material derived from partially-decayed organic matter, has historically represented an important component of the energy mix in Ireland, since the country "has the highest share of peat use among [the International Energy Agency] member countries" and "peat accounted for 7.7% of Ireland's electricity generation in 2016 and was responsible for 19.3% of CO2 emissions

from the electricity sector" (International Energy Agency, 2019, 114). Nevertheless, peat usage in electricity generation has been declining considerably since the 1990s, as an effect of the EU ETS and other policies encouraging to co-fire it with solid biomass (Bord na Móna Living History, 2017). The majority of the bogs where peat is extracted are concentrated in the Midlands, a region in the centre of the island, comprising four counties, Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath (European Commission Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, 2020).

Industrial use of peat for electricity generation and domestic heating in the Midlands has been managed by semi-publicly-owned company Bord na Móna (BNM), whereas the last three peat power stations remaining in Ireland prior to 2020 were operated by BNM and ESB (European Commission Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, 2020). While peat has been harvested and used as a fuel for cooking and heating in Ireland for centuries, BNM was founded in 1946 to secure public ownership of the impressive number of bogs across the country (Bord na Móna Living History, 2017). In the Midlands, peat not only holds a historical and cultural relevance to the community, but also a socio-economic one (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020b). For circa 70 years, in fact, BNM and ESB have been stable sources of long-term and well-paid employment in a region with the second highest unemployment rate in Ireland (4.5% in 2019), hence preventing migration and enabling local development (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020b; European Commission Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, 2020). In 2019, three were the remaining power plants - Edenderry Power, owned by BNM, and West Offaly Power and Lough Ree, owned by ESB - and 21 were the peat bogs across the country at risk of closing down (European Commission Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, 2020).

Prior to the Government's decision to phase peat out with the NECP, "in 2020, approximately 1,664 people were directly employed across the Bord na Móna sites, excluding seasonal workers" (European Commission Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, 2020: 8). This figure included workers employed in peat supply, power plants and other related activities. If we also add indirect and induced workers, the number increases to 2.951 (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020a). The share of regional employment in peat extraction and peat power plants in 2019 amounted respectively to 0.08% and 0.09%, while other peat-related activities represented 0.5% of the share of total regional employment (European Commission Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, 2020). Moreover "contraction of the workforce over recent years has contributed to an aging of Bord na Móna's workforce, with an age profile of workers that is

largely over 50 (48%)" (European Commission Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, 2020: 8), many of which do not have educational levels beyond secondary school (Ibid.).

In such a context, the crisis of the peat sector, which is presented in detail in the following Section, has had considerable impacts on the local economy: "by December 31st, 2019, 370 employees had been made redundant" (European Commission Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, 2020: 8) and "in the period January 2019 to May 2021, a total of 560 employees have left BNM, many of which would have been directly lost as a result of the closure of the two ESB power plants" (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020a: 14). Furthermore, "in addition to the direct, indirect and induced employment, the plant closures will also further impact on [regional] revenues via lost rates. The annual rates contributions of the Midlands peat stations were in the region of €4 million per annum" (Ibid.).

### *3.2. 2010-2018: Key events preceding the adoption of just transition policies*

Before just transition policies were adopted in 2019, two notable parallel processes unfolded over time. The first had to do with the crisis of the peat sector in the Midlands, while the second pertained the construction of a consensus over the concept of just transition among Irish elites.

As already stated, the crisis of the peat sector and the first seeds for a transition out of peat, started long before demands for just transition appeared in the political arena, as the Irish Government had begun to consider substituting peat with renewables in the Midlands since the early 2000s (Interview IE7). This process culminated in 2015, with BNM signalling its intention to phase out peat production by 2030 and to transform itself into a renewable energy company (Murtagh, 2015) through a plan called "Sustainability 2030" (BNM, 2015). This decision was initially taken by the company with a "serious lack of discussion and complete breakdown in communication between the board of directors of Bord na Móna and the company's staff and union representatives" (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2015).

In response to the backlash coming from trade unions, as recalled by SIPTU's Willie Noon "in 2016, the group of unions in Bord na Móna agreed a plan [with the management of the company], which accepted that peat production would be ceased as part of a phased process. It was agreed that processes and practices would be put in place during the transition to take account of each person's age and location and the alternative jobs that might be available" (JOCCA, 2019b: p. 19). Furthermore, in the words of BNM Chief Executive Tom Donnellan

(JOCCA, 2019b), an "industrial relations mechanism" was also set up in 2016 to deal with the workers' disputes that cannot find a resolution through ad-hoc agreements. Disputes, in these cases, were deferred to an ad-hoc Joint Industrial Relations Commission for adjudication and, if no agreement was reached, to the national Workplace Relations Commission. Although it was not framed under an explicit just transition objective, the 2016 bipartite agreement is presented as a positive example of a firm-level just transition agreement by Irish unionists, although the latter later contested the poor delivery of this agreement (Interview IE11).

A further acceleration of the transition out of peat occurred in October 2018, with BNM announcing the "Brown to Green Strategy" (BNM, 2019) complemented by an anticipation of the deadline for ceasing peat harvesting to 2027 and a commitment to cut peat supply by a third already by 2020 (Toner, 2018). While just transition was not mentioned in the previous-year BNM strategy (BNM, 2017), the "Brown to Green Strategy" instead asserts that "achieving a just transition was extremely important to Bord na Móna" and that "this was reflected in the terms of the voluntary redundancy scheme and the provision of an extensive range of skills supports to employees leaving the company" (BNM 2018: 20).

Bord na Móna's choice to gradually cease peat harvesting was described as an obvious and almost-obligatory decision for the company (Interview IE7). First, the "Public Service Obligation", with which the state had been subsidizing peat for electricity generation, was bound to expire in 2019 for the two ESB plants (International Energy Agency, 2019). Second, Ireland became more and more committed to divest from fossil fuels, which was made evident by the passing of a dedicated Act in December 2018, as well as by the strong increase in EU and national climate ambition, for which Ireland, already in 2007, committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 (Fox, 2019). As a result of the "Brown to Green Strategy", the foreseen risk of job losses triggered the immediate political responses of opposition parties, who were critical with the FG-led Government and with the new Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Richard Bruton (Dáil Éireann, 2018a). It also sparked criticism from trade unions SIPTU and ICTU, which started to talk about a failure in the delivery of a just transition for peat workers, criticizing the inadequacy of the measures put forward by BNM (O'Sullivan, 2018).

Indeed, the job crisis was met with coordinated responses at the company level, with the external support from the Government – through the Department of Employment Affairs and

Social Protection and the Department for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) – and from local education and training boards (Dáil Éireann, 2018a; Interview IE12). Company-level measures included voluntary redundancy schemes (severance and/or early retirement) and redeployment schemes (including the Peatlands Climate Action Scheme) or job transfers, but also retraining and career advice services (Lee 2019; Dáil Éireann, 2018a; Interview IE12). However, at this point, no public policy was yet supplied to accompany the crisis in the peat sector and supplement BNM's controversial private policies (JOCCA, 2019c).

Besides employment-related concerns, the acceleration of the peat phase-out also started to raise concerns regarding the broader socio-economic impacts of the transition at the regional level. For this reason, in October 2018, a number of different local stakeholders, including BNM, ESB, trade unions, TDs from the Midlands and local authorities were brought together by the local City Council of Offaly (Offaly County Council, 2018), constituting what was later named the Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) under the auspices of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 (Government of Ireland, 2019d) and, hence, in strict collaboration with the central DCCAE (JOCCA, 2019c; interview IE12). The MRTT, jointly with the EU Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition, played a pivotal role in channelling and representing the bottom-up demands of a wide array of stakeholders from the Midlands to the central level (Interview IE4). This was done by continuously engaging with representatives from the DCCAE (via the Midland Regional Enterprise Plan) and from NESC (JOCCA, 2019c), as well as with National TDs, for instance by inviting them over for the MRTT meetings (Interview IE4).

The second parallel process that affected the emergence of just transition policies in Ireland took place in national climate policy fora, where, gradually, a coalition of actors promoting the just transition narrative emerged and consolidated. The earliest trace of a prominent socio-political actor advocating for a just transition in Ireland could be found in the work of national trade unions, which imported the concept from their international confederations (Interview IE15). In particular in SIPTU's publication "There are no jobs on a dead planet: what just transition means for workers" (SIPTU, 2017) and ICTU's Energy & Natural Resources Conference in May 2017 (Interview IE3; Interview IE2), produced and organized in the wake of the Paris Agreement, could be seen as the first penetration of the just transition concept in the Irish political arena. These initiatives were not only important for Irish trade unions to start engaging with climate policies (Interview IE15; Interview IE2) and formulating proposal to tackle the foreseen social consequences of climate change (SIPTU, 2017), but they also planted the first

seeds for their political coalition with the green movement. Indeed, SIPTU's document was drafted with the aid of Sinéad Mercier, who was then also a researcher for the Green Party and who would later advise TDs from the GP specifically on just transition (Interview IE5). Soon after, the GP and trade unions – in parallel and then in coalition (ICTU, 2019a) – started to influence the development of Irish climate policies in the direction of a just transition.

Another remarkable step came with the work of the Citizens' Assembly from 2016 to 2018, which, as previously recalled, was tasked by the Parliament to formulate address the question of "how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change" and it resulted in the publication of a Report in April 2018, containing series of recommendations encouraging the State to put climate change at the centre of policymaking (Citizens' Assembly, 2018). With respect to the social implications of climate action, "while the Citizens' Assembly recommendations do not explicitly mention climate justice or a Just Transition, the aims of such are alluded to in Recommendations 3 and 7 and in Ancillary Recommendation 3" (JOCCA, 2019a: 16). Through Recommendation 3, the Members of the Assembly expressed their willingness to pay higher taxes for carbon intensive activities. Recommendation n. 7 is particularly relevant, as "97% of the Members recommended that the State should end all subsidies for peat extraction and instead spend that money on peat bog restoration and making proper provision for the protection of the rights of the workers impacted with the majority 61% recommending that the State should end all subsidies on a phased basis over 5 years" (Citizens' Assembly, 2018: 5). The work of the Citizens' Assembly hence not only generally served to push Ireland further in its climate ambition, but it was also a key platform to bring forward a debate on the justice dimension of climate policies, connecting it also to the needs of peat farmers (Interview IE14; Citizens' Assembly, 2018). Fundamental, in that respect, were the inputs that SIPTU, ICTU and the GP (acting through Mercier) provided to the Assembly, with a view to mainstream the language of just transition (Ibid.).

Since then, the just transition debate also slowly started to filter into the Government's and the Parliament's activities. At the Government level, a first initiative came in July 2017, with the publication of the National Mitigation Plan, with which then Minister Denis Naughten (Independent) committed to "prepare a report on the economic and employment implications of the transition", as well as to "address the just transition as part of the National Dialogue on Climate Action" (Government of Ireland, 2017: 27). Again, the advocacy activity of trade unions was fundamental to mainstream the just transition language into public policies, since both ICTU

and SIPTU engaged in the preparation process of the Mitigation Plan via written submissions (JOCCA, 2018).

At the *Dáil* level, another relevant development came in November 2018, when Deputy Eamon Ryan – former (2007-2011) and future (2020-present) Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications and Leader of the Green Party (since 2011) – initiated a "Just Transition (Worker and Community Environmental Rights) Bill 2018" (Dáil Éireann, 2018b). The proposed bill provided "for the establishment of a body to be known as An Coimisiún Náisiúnta um Thrasdul Cóir or, in the English language, the National Just Transition Commission to oversee the bringing together of workers, communities, employers and government in social dialogue to drive the plans, policies and investments needed for a fair transformation to a low-carbon economy; to require the preparation, by certain prescribed bodies, of just transition plans; to provide for the conferral of other functions on the said body; to amend the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015; and to provide for related matters" (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2018: 5). While the proposal gathered the support of several parties (LP, FF, SF, PBF) and trade unions (Dáil Éireann, 2019a), it ultimately lapsed with the dissolution of the two Chambers in 2020.

Also in the *Dáil*, a special Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action was established in July 2018 to "respond to the recommendations set out in the Third Report of the Citizens' Assembly" (JOCCA 2019a: 98). The JOCCA comprised 16 TDs and 6 Senators form different parties, as well as independents, and it was tasked to put forward recommendations for concrete public actions to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 (JOCCA 2019a). A notable feature of the JOCCA policymaking process was that it gave the opportunity to various stakeholders to provide inputs on how to design Recommendations (Interview IE14). With respect to the social dimension of climate action, a key role was played not only by trade union organizations, lobbying for the inclusion of just transition in the final JOCCA report (JOCCA, 2018; interview IE15), but also by several policy advisers working for various political parties, or for "Independents for Change" TDs – including the already-mentioned Mercier for the GP, Jerry Mac Evilly for FF, Sadhbh O'Neill for an Independent TD and Anja Murray for the LP – who were sensitive to the themes of climate justice and just transition and together actively sought to reach a cross-partisan consensus on just transition in the JOCCA (Interview IE14, Interview IE5, Interview IE13; Interview IE12).

### *3.3. 2019: The adoption of just transition policies*

In late 2018, when the Government submitted a draft National Energy and Climate Plan (Government of Ireland, 2018) to the European Commission, just transition policies were yet to be put forward. 2019 was a crucial year for the adoption of such policies in Ireland, as the need for Government's intervention to cope with the crisis in the Midlands came to coincide with the consolidation of a consensual cross-party coalition in favour of a just transition in the Parliament.

The Final Report of the JOCCA came out in March 2019. Chapter 2 of this Report is dedicated to make sure "that climate action is fair and vulnerable citizens, workers and communities are protected" (JOCCA, 2019a: 3). On this matter, two main recommendations were put forward with this Report: i) to establish a Just Transition Task Force, involving workers and employers' representatives, communities, farmers, civil society organizations and government bodies, gathered to assess and address the social protection, skills and economic development needs related to the climate-neutral transition; ii) to address the impacts of the ongoing transition in the Midlands through a Midlands Just Transition Strategy, including by providing funding for the redeployment of BNM workers into peatlands restoration projects and for a house retrofitting programme (JOCCA, 2019a). Around the just transition notion, the Members of the JOCCA reached an outstanding cross-partisan consensus. No major opposition to the principles of just transition was detected. If anything, left-wing parties were pushing for a more ambitious approach. This was the case, notably, of SF, which produced a "minority report", outlining the limits of the JOCCA Report and advocating "to anchor the Just Transition in demands for a deep, transformative change that will lead to dramatically different forms of production and consumption" (Sinn Féin, 2019a: 19).

Building on the JOCCA Report and, indirectly, on the work of the Citizens' Assembly (Interview IE8; Interview IE12), on 17th June 2019, the Government of Ireland published a Climate Action Plan (Government of Ireland, 2019a) to tackle the climate breakdown. As already discussed, the 2019 CAP sets up initiatives in different fields to fight climate change in Ireland and, as will be discussed more in detail below, this Plan also contains the country's strategic provisions to achieve a just transition. Although it was inspired by the work of the JOCCA, the just transition provisions in the CAP are much less ambitious: first, instead of a Just Transition Task Force, the CAP provides for the establishment of a Transition Review Group within NESC, second, no measure to tackle the crisis in the Midlands was provided.

The CAP was a flagship measure by then Minister Richard Bruton of FG, acting as head of the DCCAE. The CAP was drafted by the DCCAE, but it was first and foremost a political initiative, reflecting the preferences of Minister Bruton and his party FG, who wanted to make just transition an integral component of their climate agenda (Interview IE8; Interview IE12). Beyond talking explicitly about just transition, the CAP also provides for what would turn out to be a major driver to address the crisis in the Midlands: it introduced a plan to increase the carbon tax progressively over a decade, combined with an obligation to spend the revenues raised through this tax for climate objectives (Interview IE1; Interview IE6). As recognized by Bruton himself, there was wide partisan support for the inclusion of a just transition objective in the 2019 CAP (Ibid.), although most opposition parties were calling for a different interpretation of the concept, closer to the one featured in the JOCCA Report (Interview IE9; Dáil Éireann, 2019b).

Soon after the publication of the CAP, in July 2019 came another turning point. An Bord Pleanála, the national planning authority, refused an application submitted by ESB in 2018 to seek "planning permission to transition West Offaly Power from peat to biomass over a number of years starting in 2020" (ESB, 2019a). The withdrawal of planning permission came indirectly as a consequence of increased climate ambition and, more directly, of climate litigation activities by environmental movements (Interview IE11). ESB immediately accepted An Bord Pleanála's decision and, on November 8th 2019, the company announced that its two remaining peat-fired power plants (West Offaly Power and Lough Ree Power) would have ceased generation of electricity by the end of December 2020 (ESB, 2019a). This event generated a dramatic acceleration in the ongoing peat phase-out process, anticipating "what was expected to be a 10-year transition process into a 12-month period" (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020b: 13). The significance of this event in leading to the adoption of just transition policies is recognized by Government officials (Interview IE8; Interview IE12), trade unions (Interview IE11) and local stakeholders (JTC, 2020a), all of whom received this decision back then as an unexpected event.

The developments in the Midlands forced the pace of the Government's intervention. On October 8th 2019, the Government announced the new Budget 2020 containing measures to address the social crisis in the Midlands, including a €6 million Just Transition Fund and two additional ad-hoc funds, all financed through the revenues of the increased carbon tax, as well as the appointment of Kieran Mulvey as a Just Transition Commissioner (JTC) (Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 2019). Soon after, ESB announced that they

were going to contribute to the Government's Just Transition Fund with extra €5 million (ESB, 2019b). The day when ESB officially announced the closure of its power plants, Minister Burton went to the Midlands to meet with ESB workers affected by the closure and he issued a press release, saying that "the government has been working for months to ensure that we fulfil the promise in the Climate Action Plan to deliver a just transition for workers and for regions. I am acutely aware of the impact that an accelerated exit out of peat will have on workers and the Midlands region more broadly. We are bringing forward a number of initiatives as part of our Just Transition Plan. The government prioritised just transition in the recent Budget, including a number of measures which will help ensure the transition which Kieran Mulvey, in his role as JTC will now co-ordinate to ensure we secure long-term, sustainable employment for the Midlands" (Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 2019).

### *3.4. 2020-onwards: Subsequent developments in the Irish just transition policy trajectory*

Since 2019, as the political discussion around just transition continued, several developments occurred both under Varadkar's Government and under the following (and current) Martin's Government, which entered in office in June 2020. As reported above, while the first was a minority FG government, with Richard Bruton from FG as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the latter instead is a coalition government between FF, FG and GP, with Eamon Ryan from GP substituting Bruton.

Building on the 2019 CAP, various just transition strategic initiatives have been taken by the new Government. First, in the "Programme for Government" published right after the elections in June 2020 by the Department of the Taoiseach (Government of Ireland, 2020b) there is a pledge to "publish a Just Transition Plan, to frame the work of a permanent Commission for Just Transition" (Government of Ireland, 2020b: 38) and to grow the size of the national Just Transition Fund. Second, in the Final National Energy and Climate Plan (Government of Ireland, 2020a) submitted to the European Commission in August 2020, the new Government affirms again its commitment to achieve a just transition, including by supporting workers in vulnerable sectors, as well as the communities of the Midlands. Third, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021a) was adopted in July 2021, sponsored by Minister Eamon Ryan, requiring to have regard for "a just transition to a climate neutral economy which endeavours, in so far as is practicable, to (i) maximise employment opportunities, and (ii) support persons and communities that may be negatively affected by the

transition". Fourth, and finally, The Climate Action Plan was renewed in November 2021 (Government of Ireland, 2021a), increasing the number of proposed actions for just transition, with two dedicated chapters, one on "Ensuring a Just Transition to a Climate Neutral Ireland" and the other specific on "A Just Transition Implementation Plan for the Midlands Region".

Regarding just transition instruments, the most notable development since 2019 came as a consequence of a supranational initiative. In January 2020, the European Commission proposed a Just Transition Mechanism and a related Fund (Government of Ireland, 2021c) to assist carbon-intensive regions all over the EU with their efforts to achieve a socially just transition. In the 2020 Irish Country Report, the European Commission identified the Midlands as the region most in need to be assisted through the EU JTF (European Commission, 2020) with up to € 84.5 million to be co-financed through national schemes (Government of Ireland, 2021d). After a process of consultation (M-CO, 2022) and technical assistance (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support 2020a, 2020b), in 2021 the Government published the Draft Territorial Just Transition Plan prepared by DCCAE (Government of Ireland, 2021c), which was ultimately approved in its final version in late 2022 (Government of Ireland, 2022a). Funds from other EU cohesion policies are also expected to be rolled out to contribute to just transition in Ireland (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020a). The EU Just Transition Fund thus has substantially substituted (with increased resources) the national JTF as the main instrument to address the socio-economic crisis in the Midlands, which was recently further aggravated with BNM confirming more than 200 job losses in April 2020 (Mc Cormack, 2020) and announcing the end of peat harvesting in its lands (BNM, 2022).

Finally, few developments also occurred at the governance level after 2019. The JTC continued its work also under new Minister Ryan. After four Progress Reports, Mulvey initially announced that he was going to step down from the role at the end of 2021 (Fanning, 2021), but then he was reconfirmed in January 2022 (Mahon, 2022). While the GP-proposed Just Transition (Worker and Community Environmental Rights) Bill was not brought forward due to the dissolution of the Parliament in 2020, a new Bill under the same name was initiated in the Parliament in September 2021 and sponsored by Jennifer Whitmore of the Social Democrats (Dáil Éireann, 2021a), mirroring almost-entirely the 2018 GP proposal (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021b). This new Bill proposal has not (yet) been approved, but the renewed 2021 CAP mentions the Government's intention to establish a Just Transition Commission, which should gather various stakeholders to recommend actions in this field (Government of Ireland, 2021c).

### *4. Describing just transition policies in Ireland*

This Section presents, through a thick description, the just transition policies adopted by the Irish government, disentangling the strategic, instrument and governance components. A summary of the various elements composing the Irish JTPs is illustrated in Figure 5.1.

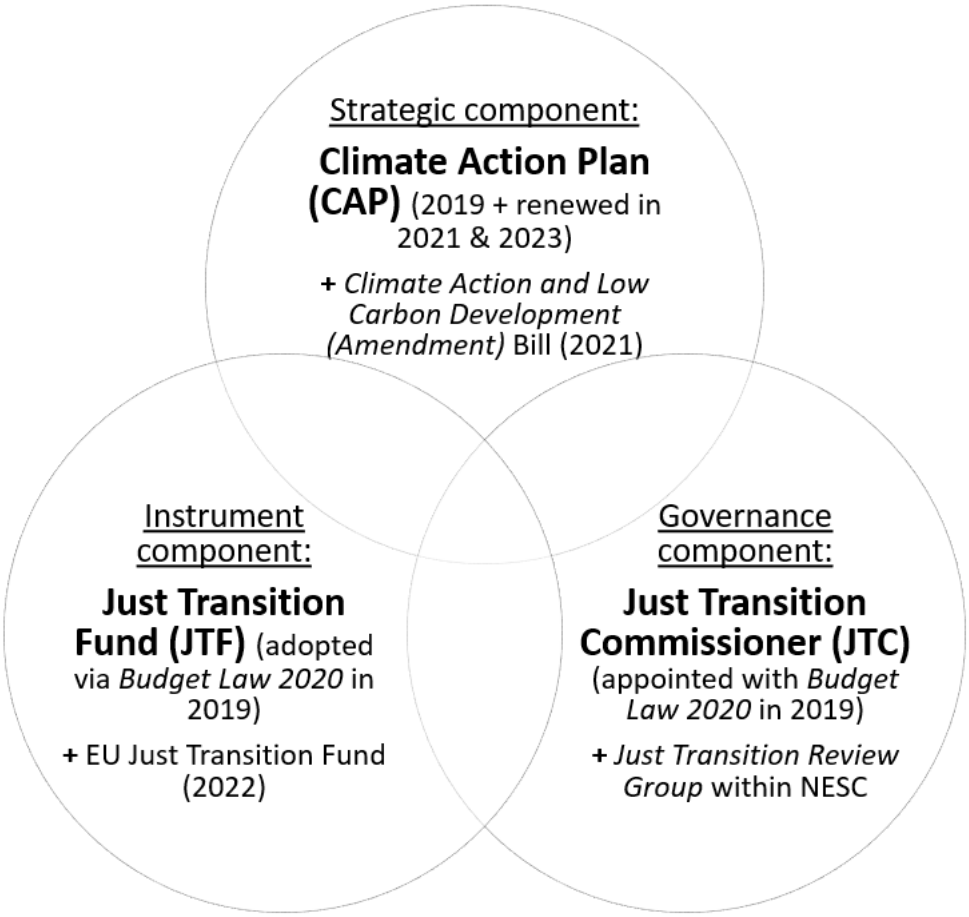


**Figure 5.1:** ***Just transition policies in Ireland*** (source: author's own elaboration)

### *4.1. the strategic component*

The 2019 Climate Action Plan entails a focus on "citizens' engagement" to make sure that people support and accept the changes envisaged. Among the specific objectives under the "citizens' engagement" headline, the government commits to a "just Transition for those facing particular challenges in adjusting through reskilling, energy poverty schemes and community participation" (Government of Ireland, 2019a: 13). A textual analysis of the 2019 CAP reveals

that the expression “just transition” is mentioned 26 times in the text. Nevertheless, the bulk of just transition initiatives in the 2019 CAP is concentrated in chapter 15.4. There, the Government affirms its commitment to a “global just transition”, by recognizing that “it is essential that the burdens borne are seen to be fair and that every group is seen to be making an appropriate and fair level of effort. This will be essential to maintaining the high level of political and civic consensus which has been built” (Government of Ireland, 2019a: 139). No further detail is given on the definition of just transition. A series of initiatives to deliver on the Government’s just transition commitment are enlisted in chapters 15.4 and 15.5. Actions 159 to 180 of the Annex of Actions (Government of Ireland, 2019b) are expected to deliver on Citizen Engagement, Community Leadership and Just Transition.

The Actions listed in the 2019 CAP are arguably vague, entailing either a general commitment to introduce policy changes in the future, or non-binding requirements for government agencies and/or stakeholders to carry out impact assessments and monitoring exercises. Among the promised initiatives, we find: assessing the socio-economic implications of the transition; identifying funding facilities; enhancing the career advice service provided through the Public Employment Service; improving training and support initiatives for community and voluntary stakeholders; mainstreaming just transition objectives in the education system; using Regional Skills Fora to allow enterprises to identify their skill gaps and need; and factoring in the needs of low-income groups in the Carbon pricing proposal. Also among its non-binding proposals, the 2019 CAP commits to “support the work of the Regional Transition Team established in the Midlands Region to address the specific challenges posed by the transition to a low-carbon economy, and to propose the additional measures that need to be taken” (Government of Ireland, 2019a: 140).

The Climate Action Plan was renewed in November 2021, incrementing the references to the “just transition’” expression up to 140 and giving it relatively more priority, with two dedicated chapters. As a premise “the plan acknowledges that some sectors will be more impacted than others, and we will need to help people with the costs of the transition to ensure that it happens” (Government of Ireland 2021a: 8). The 2021 CAP makes reference to the definition of just transition proposed by NESC, that seeks to achieve “fair, equitable, and inclusive” transition with respect to both processes and outcomes (NESC, 2020a: 57; Government of Ireland, 2021a: 37). This means that just transition in Ireland is understood as a “process, within the wider statutory framework of climate action, which endeavours, in so far as is practicable, to maximise

employment opportunities, and support persons and communities that may be negatively affected by the transition" (Government of Ireland, 2019a: 37).

To operationalize such definition, the 2021 version of the CAP features "four principles" for a just transition framework: i) "an integrated, structured, and evidence-based approach to identify and plan our response to just transition requirements"; ii) "people are equipped with the right skills to be able to participate in and benefit from the future net zero economy"; iii) "the costs are shared so that the impact is equitable and existing inequalities are not exacerbated"; and iv) "social dialogue to ensure impacted citizens and communities are empowered and are core to the transition process" (Government of Ireland, 2019a: 38). The renewed Climate Action Plan also states how "the instruments, policies and regulations deployed in the delivery of [Irish] climate policy will need to align with these four principles, and ensure they are taken into account in their design and implementation" (Ibid.).

A list of 8 Actions is provided in the 2021 CAP – and further explained in a related Annex (Government of Ireland, 2021b) – to deliver on these four principles. These Actions include establishing a Just Transition Commission; developing a "Green Further Education and Skills Development Plan"; "promot[ing] timely and tailored activation and training responses for workers whose jobs are at risk by the decarbonisation process"; "creat[ing] additional community workplaces and supported workplaces in green sectors for people who are economically inactive, long-term unemployed, and/or with severe needs"; "ensur[ing] that targeted social welfare measures are put in place to prevent fuel poverty and support a just transition" (Government of Ireland, 2019a: 46). While just transition Actions in the renewed CAP are much more complex and articulated than in the 2019 version, the plan still contains mostly non-binding initiatives and pledges for future actions, that are yet to be transformed into concrete policies.

The only area where the CAP 2021 enlists actual measures, rather than just general commitments, is "A Just Transition Implementation Plan for the Midlands Region", to which chapter 7 is dedicated. Here the Government recognizes that "the Midlands region is the first in Ireland to directly experience the negative impacts of the transition away from fossil fuels with the ending of peat extraction for power generation" (Government of Ireland, 2019a: 48). The 2021 CAP then enlists a series of measures to address such impact, ranging from peatlands restoration, to research and development activities; from retrofitting housing programmes, to

supporting local enterprises and, finally, they comprise also the tailored just transition instruments that will be described later in the next Section. On the social side, the plan states that "there has been significant investment in the region to ensure that affected workers and those living in the region can access training courses which open up future employment opportunities, particularly in green sectors" (Government of Ireland, 2019a: 53).

Although the CAP, in both its 2019 and 2021 versions, does not constitute a legal document, the just transition strategic objective was also enshrined into legislation through the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill, adopted in July 2021 by the current government coalition and sponsored by the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications Eamon Ryan (GP). The above-mentioned Bill requires the Government to have regard for "a just transition to a climate neutral economy which endeavours, in so far as is practicable, to (i) maximise employment opportunities, and (ii) support persons and communities that may be negatively affected by the transition" (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021a: 11). Importantly, the Bill mandates the government to prepare an annual update of the Climate Action Plan 2019. Consequently, a third reiteration of the CAP called Climate Action Plan 2023 was published in December 2022 (Government of Ireland, 2022b), introducing no substantial innovation with respect to just transition if compared to the precedent CAP 2021.

Besides the CAP, yet in direct connection to it, just transition is mentioned in several other policy initiatives, including the National Energy and Climate Plan and the 2020 "Programme for Government". Furthermore, although not explicitly targeting just transition, other strategies are also regarded by the Irish Government as indirectly contributing to this strategic objective. These include the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, identifying policy priorities to implement Next Generation EU; Future Jobs Ireland 2019, promoting an integrated approach to economic and labour market policies; the Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024 and the National Skills Strategy 2025, promoting training and lifelong learning (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020a).

### *4.2. the instrument component*

The main national instruments to deliver on the just transition objective were adopted in late 2019 and sponsored by then Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Richard Bruton (FG). These instruments are meant to address the social consequences of peat

phase-out in the Midlands and they were put forward as part of the 2020 Budget law (Government of Ireland, 2019c). In such a law, a few measures are enlisted among the initiatives to be financed by the revenues of the increased Carbon Tax. Specifically, €31 million out of a total of €90 million should be allocated to ameliorate the disproportional effects of decarbonisation in the Midlands, including "a new aggregated housing upgrade scheme specifically for the midlands; a tripling of funding for peatland rehabilitation, supporting 70-120 new jobs; a just transition fund for training, enterprise supports and new job opportunities" (Government of Ireland, 2019c: 44).

The principal instrument tackling the social consequences of the phase-out from peat is the national Just Transition Fund (JTF). The initial budget foreseen in Budget 2020 for the JTF was €6 million, deriving from the increase in the carbon tax (Government of Ireland, 2019c). The total financial envelope was then increased to €11 million. The additional €5 million were provided by ESB, as a way to contribute to cushioning the consequences of its decision to close two peat-fired power plants (Government of Ireland, 2020c; ESB, 2019a). The JTF is administered by the DCCAE and grants funding in line with the Government's just transition priorities set out by the 2019 CAP, as well as with other sectoral national and regional strategies. The aim of the JTF "is to fund innovative projects that contribute to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of regions which are most affected by the transition away from fossil fuels or greenhouse-gas-intensive industrial processes" (Government of Ireland, 2020c: 4). Its first call for proposals is targeted specifically to the Wider Midlands region – comprising counties East Galway, Kildare, Laois, Longford, North Tipperary, Offaly, Roscommon and Westmeath – which is deemed to be the "first region in Ireland experiencing a concentrated transition away from carbon intensive activities" (Ibid.).

In its first edition, the JTF was given three priorities: i) "Employment and Enterprise Supports: to support innovation and investment proposals to generate sustainable employment in green enterprise"; ii) "Training Supports: to retrain and reskill workers to assist local communities and businesses in the Wider Midlands to adjust to the low carbon transition"; and iii) "Community Transitioning Supports: to support proactive communications with affected communities and other stakeholders in the region, establish best practice sharing networks, and assist in developing local transition plans" (Government of Ireland, 2020c). Among the projects eventually financed under priority two, we find for instance "a training and up-skilling project to ensure [Bord na Móna] workers can begin to immediately retrain and up-skill to take up training

opportunities […] and prepare for other career paths and opportunities" granted to BNM for € 590.000 (Government of Ireland, 2020d) and an "expansion of the local centre to offer training courses in the areas of horticulture, automation, robotics, home improvements and repairs, solar energy for beginners etc" granted to Ballycommon Telework and Training Centre CLG for € 59.853 (Government of Ireland, 2020d).

For projects to be financed, these had to go through a four-stages application procedure. First, they had to be registered with the "MRTT–START" process. This way, the Government made a direct link between the national Fund and the regional-supranational process of project inventory in the Midlands region, coordinated by the MRTT with the assistance of the EU Secretariat Technical Assistance to Regions in Transition (START). Registered organizations were then invited to apply for funding and such applications were evaluated by an ad-hoc Evaluation Team, composed by the DCCAE and "representatives from relevant Government Departments, the MRTT, regional representatives, and […] State Agency expertise" (Government of Ireland, 2020c: 10). In the finale stage of this process, a notification of acceptance and a provisional offer was issued.

The Just Transition Fund is meant to support projects across the three above-mentioned priorities. With respect to eligibility, the Government's specifies that "applications can be made by private, public, and community and voluntary organisations", excluding central Government Departments (Government of Ireland, 2020c: 14), and that "approved projects can provide funding towards capital and current costs" (Ibid.). Among the costs that are deemed as ineligible for funding, we find large infrastructural projects and, importantly, "income supports for targeted groups and grant payments" (Government of Ireland, 2020c: 16). Funding allocation with the JTF was only guaranteed for the year 2020, with possible outstanding instalments in the following three years. Between € 50.000 and € 1.000.000 could have been allocated to individual projects from the total JTF resources, for a maximum of 85% of the total project costs (Ibid.). Projects financed through this scheme are expected to be completed within three years' time, after going through a process of monitoring, reporting and verification conducted by DCCAE.

With respect to the implementation of the Just Transition Fund, the Government's website asserts that currently "the Department is supporting 56 projects, which includes 16 projects which started project delivery in September 2020 and 40 larger value projects which started

project delivery from June 2021.The Fund is providing €22.1 million in grant funding to the projects. These projects will bring €15 million in additional funding to the region and support an estimated 178 direct and 999 indirect jobs, as reported by the grantees" (Government of Ireland, 2020d). While new applications to the national JTF are not possible anymore, the EU Just Transition Mechanism and the related EU Just Transition Fund are going to assist the Midlands with up to € 84.5 million to be co-financed through national schemes. Mirroring the priorities of the national namesake fund, four are the core areas of recommended intervention for the EU Just Transition Fund in the Midlands: i) "Modernise the Business Environment and Create Employment Opportunities"; ii) "Enhance the Skills Profile"; iii) "Promoting Environmental Sustainability and Industrial Heritage"; iv) "Enhancing potential of region as a place to live and work" (Government of Ireland, 2021c).

Besides the national Just Transition Fund, the 2020 Budget law set up two additional Programmes targeted at the Midlands under the headline "Programmes Funded by Carbon Tax Revenue" (Government of Ireland, 2019c; Government of Ireland, 2020a). Although these are not directly tackling the social implications of industrial decarbonisation, they still represent relevant resources to address the wider socio-economic crisis in the Midlands. The first is a €20 million "Midlands Retrofitting Scheme" administered by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government for the energy efficiency of approximately 750 local authority homes, while private homes are also expected to "avail of the economies of scale benefits associated with the aggregation scheme" (Government of Ireland, 2020e: 3). The second is a €5 million scheme for bog restoration and rehabilitation in the peatlands previously harvested by BNM for electricity generation. This latter scheme is administered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Ibid.).

Finally, the government mentions that other parallel initiatives should also contribute to strengthen the delivery of the JTF. Notably, among these initiatives, the government committed to provide "income and return to work services/supports" to peat workers through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, in conjunction with Laois-Offaly Education and Training Board. This mainly means that such authorities have "provided numerous information sessions for affected employees on available income supports and all other supports available to assist with return to work, upskilling and retraining. Further to this, the [Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection] has also conducted 1 to 1 sessions with affected employees to discuss their individual needs and assist them in accessing the broad

range of [the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection services] & supports available" (Government of Ireland, 2020e: 3).

### *4.3. The governance component*

As part of the announcements made in Budget 2020, then Minister Bruton manifested the government's intention to appoint a Just Transition Commissioner. Hence, in November 2019, the Minister appointed Kieran Mulvey to the role, giving him mandate to engage with relevant stakeholders in the Midlands and to provide recommendations to the government on the essential elements of a just transition for local workers and communities (JTC, 2020a). Four points in particular are highlighted for the JTC to consider when formulating recommendations: i) "Delivery of the just transition measures provided for in Budget 2020, in particular an operating model for the new Just Transition Fund"; ii) "implementation of other actions underway, or planned, by Government Departments, agencies, and companies, including the four competitive funds under Project Ireland 2040"; "any additional actions/measures deemed appropriate"; and "optimal structures or processes to support co-ordinated and effective delivery of a Just Transition in the Midlands, including developing liaison channels between institutions in the region and central government" (JTC, 2020a: 67).

The list of stakeholders for the Commissioner to consider ranged from already-established local structures – the MRTT and the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee – to central and local Departments and Agencies. Other stakeholders to be consulted included the companies BNM and ESB, trade unions, local community organizations and the EU Platform for Coal Regions in Transition (JTC, 2020a). The Terms of Reference of the JTC however specifies that he should not intervene in the industrial relations of Bord na Móna. This Terms of Reference instead tasked him to report quarterly to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action, and the Environment, using secretariat support from the Department itself (Interview IE8). Mulvey's mandate lasted two years, i.e. until December 2021, but it was later renewed in 2022. During this period, Mulvey produced four Just Transition Progress Reports, published in April 2020 (JTC, 2020a), September 2020 (JTC, 2020b), December 2020 (JTC, 2020c) and December 2021 (JTC, 2021). Adopting a personal register, these Reports contain the Commissioner's own evaluation on the evolving status of implementation of just transition measures in Ireland, while also reporting the points of view of key stakeholders and putting forward suggestions for the government to revisit or strengthen existing initiatives.

Besides the appointment of Mulvey as JTC, another governance-level soft-law just transition initiative is present in the 2019 CAP: "under the Climate Action Plan, NESC has been requested to continue to provide strategic advice, research and analytical support for a just transition" (Garvey and Moore, 2022: 1). This occurred through the establishment of an ad-hoc Transition Review Group, responsible to identify and assess "transition needs" among different social groups and to issue periodic reviews and strategic advices. NESC has promoted several activities to encourage social dialogue around just transition, including the publication of a series of three publications (NESC, 2020a; NESC, 2020b; NESC, 2020c) and a conference (NESC, 2020d) on this topic in 2020. Through NESC, a wide array of stakeholders, from trade unions, to private companies, farmers' associations and environmental and community NGOs were able to agree on a single definition of just transition and on several related proposals, attempting to shift the national debate beyond the Midlands and to cover unexplored aspects, like the social impact of climate change in the agriculture sector (Interview IE3; Interview IE17). According to the National Energy and Climate Plan, the inputs from NESC's Transition Review Group were then supposed to constitute the base for the Government's formulation of a five year Just Transition Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2020a), which, to this day, has not been followed up on.

On top of existing mechanisms, new governance structures for a just transition in Ireland might soon be adopted. Both the proposed Just Transition (Worker and Community Environmental Rights) Bill and the 2021 CAP commit to establish a National Just Transition Commission, i.e. a formalized tripartite social dialogue body "to drive the plans, policies and investments needed for a fair transformation to a low-carbon economy" (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021b: 5). However, at the moment of writing, this Commission has not been established yet.

## 5. The politics of just transition in Ireland

### *5.1. The supply side of policymaking: parties' preferences & strategic interactions*

Party politics in Ireland, as explained above, is characterized by a consensus-seeking tendency, driven by parties' nearness in positional preferences, which is especially found in both the climate and welfare fields. This consensual attitude emerged strikingly in the case of the JOCCA, set up in 2018 with the specific intent for parties to agree on common recommendations on climate action. The discussions in the JOCCA and its final Report channelled in the parliamentary

arena the demands for increasing climate ambition coming from the Citizens' Assembly. The JOCCA's work ultimately proved to be instrumental in forging the content of the 2019 CAP.

With respect to just transition, agreement in the JOCCA was reached primarily through the active role of TDs from opposition parties. A particularly proactive role was played by policy advisors, nudging their TD employers to take a just transition direction (interview IE14; Interview IE5; Interview IE13; Interview IE20). The result of these efforts was that just transition went from being a largely unknown concept, with most parties not paying any attention to the social justice implications of climate policies (Interview IE5), to being endorsed across the political spectrum. The consensus around just transition in the JOCCA gave Minister Bruton, who was seeking to demonstrate the Government's commitment to fighting climate change, an input for action. In this sense Bruton acted with a passive, rather than proactive, yet pragmatic-technocratic and conflict-avoiding spirit (Interview IE14), making use of technical experts in the DCCAE and other Departments (Interview IE12; Interview IE19). In order to understand how was it possible for a cross-partisan consensus to emerge, we need to study the various positions of Irish political parties on the social implications of decarbonisation, as well the degree to which they have engaged with this specific debate.

Although historically minoritarian within the Irish party system, one of the main actors in the politics of just transition in Ireland – first as an opposition party and then in the Government – has been the Green Party, and, more specifically, a left-wing current of the GP. Before the establishment of the JOCCA, the Irish trade unions' work on just transition intersected the activities of the GP through Sinéad Mercier, policy adviser for the party and, prior to that, for ICTU. Mercier was also involved in the preparation of SIPTU's 2017 publication "There are no jobs on a dead planet: what just transition means for workers" (Interview IE5). After 2017, contacts between the GP and Irish labour unions became more frequent than ever before, overturning unions' previous opposition to the GP's neoliberal austerity positions promoted during its first term in the Government (Ibid.). These exchanges between the GP and trade unions fed the position of TD – and future Minister – Eamon Ryan, who represented the GP within the JOCCA, with Mercier as an advisor. Through Ryan, not only the GP was active in promoting the ILO's just transition ideas within the JOCCA (Interview IE5; Interview IE14; Interview IE13), but, in November 2018, Ryan also initiated and sponsored the Just Transition (Worker and Community Environmental Rights) Bill, proposing to institute a Just Transition

Commission for an effective governance of "social justice and ecological justice" (Dáil Éireann, 2018b).

Just transition allowed the GP to connect, for the first time, their traditional environmental stances – which have been mostly characterized by an urban, technocratic and neoliberal approach – to principles of social justice (Interview IE13). While this new, integrated, approach was strongly promoted by the GP in opposition, when the prospect of joining the new FF-FG Government came in 2020, the GP's attention to the social dimension of climate policies was side-lined and so were the progressive Members of the party that had been promoting this approach (Interview IE5; Interview IE13). Eamon Ryan went from being the face of Irish just transition policies when in opposition, to receiving harsh criticism when in Government for rejecting over 30 opposition amendments to his own 2021 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill. Through these amendments, opposition parties were aiming to extend the scope of just transition and to set up legal compliance mechanisms, but Minister Ryan rejected such proposals, showing the shift of the GP's position, which currently aligns with the centre-right stances of FF and FG (O'Sullivan, 2021). As a result of this change in preferences, a group of progressive Members of the party created the so-called Just Transition Greens, which define themselves as "a green-left action tank with a particular focus on the social justice, peace and democracy pillars of green politics" (Just Transition Greens, 2022). This is an affiliate, but independent, organization to the GP, active both in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland and gathering elected officials – mainly from the GP but also from other progressive parties – that are openly critical with the lack of attention to social justice by the heads of the party since joining the government (interview IE13).

Another key player in the politics of just transition policies in Ireland was *Fine Gael*. Not only the party was leading the Government and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications in 2019, but it also had Chairing duties, 5 out of 16 TDs' seats and 2 out of 6 Senators' seats in the JOCCA (JOCCA, 2019a). According to the FG representative interviewed for this thesis, "*Fine Gael* was the first to give tangible expression to Just Transition, and our members ensure that it is enshrined into every report from the [JOCCA]. [FG] strongly support[s] the concept" (interview IE6). The willingness to act of Minister Bruton, as well as his managerial approach to policymaking (Interview IE14), were arguably crucial to lead to the adoption of just transition policies in 2019. Bruton was able to match the financial opportunity coming from the revenues of the increased Carbon Tax with the pressing need to tackle the socio-economic

consequences of the accelerated phase-out in the Midlands (Interview IE1; Interview IE6; Interview IE20). However, evidence shows that Minister Bruton acted more passively than actively, since his actions did not reflect a mandate from his party, but rather the multi-party consensus on just transition reached in the JOCCA, which was driven by opposition parties. A key element pushing FG and Minister Bruton to adopt a just transition perspective was the presence of TDs from the Midlands within the party (Interview IE20), like Marcella Corcoran Kennedy from Offaly, who was a member of JOCCA and who directly reported to Minister Bruton the views of the MRTT (Kennedy, 2019a; Kenney, 2019b). Mirroring the overarching neoliberal ideology of the party, FG promoted a strikingly narrow view of just transition, concentrated only on the urgent crisis in Midlands, given that, in their view, "the idea of compensating everyone for the cost of adapting to the imperative of the climate crisis is beyond the capacity of any government" (Interview IE6). This also translates into a preference for economic development, over social compensation measures (JOCCA, 2019b). Finally, according to opposition parties and trade unions, FG would also be against the establishment of governance structures promoting social dialogue for a just transition, including the Just Transition Task Force proposed by the JOCCA Report and the Just Transition Commission proposed by the GP and the by the SD. For FG, these initiatives would concede too much power to trade unions, shifting collective bargaining power from the realm industrial relations to the state level (Interview IE14; Interview IE11).

Despite not being at the forefront of the just transition debate and not holding any Government positions in 2019, the other historically major party in Irish politics besides FG, *Fianna Fáil*, also played an important part in determining the just transition policy trajectory, for at least two reasons. First, within the JOCCA, FF was the second most represented group, with 4 out of 16 TDs and 1 Senator, and hence it necessarily had a considerable influence on the formulation of the Committee's Recommendations (JOCCA, 2019a). The FF delegation in the JOCCA, guided by TD Timmy Dooley, with the help of policy adviser Jerry Mac Evilly (who later became Head of Policy for Friends of the Earth Ireland) backed the GP's just transition proposals (Interview IE14; Interview IE5; Interview IE20). On this matter, FF TDs in the JOCCA, much like their FG counterparts, promoted a passive, but constructive approach, but, unlike then-rival FG, they were interested in a progressive just transition approach, mirroring the demands of trade unions (Interview IE14; Dáil Éireann, 2019c). Second, being historically the most represented party across the Republic and given the strong attachment of its elected officials with their

constituencies (which is a reflection of Ireland's peculiar electoral system), there have been several FF TDs from the Midlands, who had been trying for years to bring the Government's attention to the crisis of the peat sector (Interview IE20). One example is Barry Cowen, TD for the Laois–Offaly constituency and previous Member of the Offaly County Council, who addressed the crisis in a *Dáil* debate already in 2016 (Dáil Éireann, 2016) and again, more recently, criticizing its own Government for a lack of proper delivery on just transition (Seanad Éireann, 2021). Other local Members of the party have been crucial in the territorial politics of just transition. For instance, FF Offaly County Councillor Eamon Dooley was the first to launch the idea of establishing the MRTT (Offaly County Council, 2018).

Since joining a coalition Government with FG, the GP and FF have both aligned with the just transition conception proposed by FG, renouncing to their more progressive views. On the contrary, Irish left-wing parties have been more consistent over the years in promoting, from the opposition, an alternative vision of just transition in Ireland. The position of the Labour party was forged mirroring trade unions' demands, as exemplified by the declarations of the only representative of the party in the JOCCA, TD Seán Sherlock (Dáil Éireann, 2019d). LP considers the Government's just transition approach as "not sufficient", arguing in favour of a stronger language, more generous and rapid financial resources and social dialogue (Interview IE9). In its counter-proposal for a Climate Action Plan, LP states that they "will support the trade union Just Transition to a low carbon economy and [they] will provide a Job Guarantee to any worker who loses their job due to climate action" (Labour Party, 2021). LP is also in favour of "creat[ing] a Just Transition Fund to invest in state enterprises that are helping workers and communities to make the transition to a low carbon economy" and of "transfer[ing] workers to new roles in other state enterprises, with retraining and upskilling provided" (Labour Party, 2021). These statements show how the Labour Party has been supporting an investment-oriented approach to just transition, which is also testified by Sherlock's contrary vote to the amendment proposed by PBF in the JOCCA to avoid punitive conditionalities typical of active labour market policies (JOCCA, 2019a).

The currently-majoritarian party on the left, Sinn Féin did not engage with the just transition debate prior to the JOCCA, given that, at that time, this debate was confined in trade unions' discourses and SF does not have the same historical ties with unions as LP does (Interview IE14). In spite of this, within the JOCCA, the 2 SF TDs and 1 Senator were quick to join other just transition advocates, actively helping the GP in drafting the Committee's Recommendations on

this matter (Interview IE5). SF has since become a fervent advocate for just transition, criticizing first the JOCCA Report through an alternative Minority Report (Sinn Féin, 2019a), and then the current FF-FG-GP Government (Sinn Féin, 2019b) for their market-oriented understanding of just transition. SF endorses a "transformative justice" (Sinn Féin, 2019a) approach to the low-carbon transition which entails, inter alia, setting up "mechanisms for meaningful dialogue and enforceable agreements"; "social protection, along with active labour market policies"; and "compelled Transitional Justice Impact Assessments of both public climate policies and private industry initiatives" (Sinn Féin, 2019a: 19). With respect to the Midlands, SF – mainly through TD Brian Stanley, the only elected representative from the Laois–Offaly constituency that does not belong to FG and FF – has also been criticizing the current and former Governments for lack of effective delivery on their just transition policies (Stanley, 2020).

Finally, small left-wing parties People Before Profit/Solidarity and the Social Democrats have also engaged with the just transition debate in the Parliament. PBF is a self-proclaimed "eco-socialist" party that has sponsored several initiatives to give centrality to the issue of climate change in Ireland, endorsing a climate justice and degrowth approach (Interview IE10). PBF was also present in the JOCCA with TD Bríd Smith, who proposed an amendment to eliminate strict conditionalities from just transition policies (JOCCA, 2019a). Elected in 2020, TD Jennifer Whitmore from the SD, led her party to join the just transition discussion, by sponsoring a revisited version of the Just Transition (Worker and Community Environmental Rights) Bill, which was first proposed by the GP in 2018. This proposal aims to adopt an official definition of just transition, as well as to establish a Just Transition Commission and, thus ultimately, to push the GP to deliver on its previous promises, made while in opposition (Dáil Éireann, 2021a; Crosson, 2021).

### *5.2. The demand side of policymaking: stakeholders' preferences and strategic interactions*

Irish trade unions have started to engage with climate change only relatively recently. In the past, they used to be more hesitant, given that decarbonisation was seen as a threat for jobs and workers (Interview IE15). While labour environmentalism does not have a long history in Ireland (interview IE13), trade unions were the first to promote a just transition narrative in the country. In this respect, the year 2017 represented a crucial turning point. Under the impulse coming from international unions' activities in the framework of the Paris Agreement and from the European Trade Union Confederation, a number of climate-conscious personalities within

Irish unions started to import this debate in the domestic context. These include Macdara Doyle and David Joyce from ICTU, Willie Noone, Adrian Kane and Yvonne O' Callaghan from SIPTU and Seán McCabe from *Fórsa* (Mercier et al., 2020; Interview IE15; Interview IE11; Interview IE3). In May 2017, SIPTU published the booklet "There are no jobs in a dead planet: What a Just Transition Means for Worker" (SIPTU, 2017), which was meant to raise awareness among its members on the role of trade unions in securing workers' rights and interests in the transition towards a climate-friendly economy. As already stated, this document has relevance not only for SIPTU, but also because it facilitated a first contact between Irish trade unions and the Green Party. Also in May 2017, ICTU held an Energy & Natural Resources Conference (Mercier et al., 2020), where just transition was discussed, and then it founded a namesake sub-committee to deal with this topic. Finally, also in 2017, the Irish Municipal, Public and Civil Trade Union – which later converged into *Fórsa* – was commissioned by the Institute for International and European Affairs to produce a report about the implications of climate change for the workforce (Mercier et al., 2020; Mercier and Barry, 2018).

Trade unions' just transition demands were transmitted into the partisan debate by making use of various institutional opportunities (Interview IE15). First, both ICTU and SIPTU made submissions to the Citizens' Assembly pleading a case for just transition policies (Citizens' Assembly, 2018). Then, crucially, representatives from the two workers' organizations were given the opportunity to address the JOCCA in December 2018 (JOCCA, 2018), when unions presented the concept of just transition and the need to translate it into public policies, making a direct link with the risks arising from the accelerated phase-out of peat in the Midlands. Even after the publication of the 2019 CAP, unions kept engaging with the parliamentary just transition debate, welcoming the introduction of new measures, yet criticizing their formulation (JOCCA, 2019b; Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 2019). Unions have also been involved in key national consultation fora on climate change and just transition, first through the appointment of an ICTU officer in the Climate Change Advisory Council (Interview IE2) and, second, through the involvement of union representatives in NESC's work on just transition (Interview IE3).

All in all, especially in 2019, several opportunities were provided to and effectively exploited by Irish trade unions to lobby for a just transition (Interview IE12). In these instances, unions have promoted their own understanding of just transition. First, while calling for a whole-economy approach, most of the Irish trade unions' efforts aimed to bring attention to the crisis in the

Midlands, framed as the most heavily impacted community (Sargent, 2019; ICTU, 2019b). This is not particularly surprising, if one considers that the peat sector is highly-unionized and that trade unions, especially SIPTU, have been negotiating schemes for redundant workers with Bord na Móna, under the assistance of the Workplace Relations Commission, since 2015 (SIPTU, 2016). While highlighting that the statutory voluntary redundancies offered by BNM were inadequate especially for older workers (O'Sullivan, 2018), both ICTU and SIPTU have also advocated for an activation approach, hence insisting on the need to allocate public funds to reskill and redeploy redundant peat workers and to create new jobs and criticizing the Government for failing to deliver on these objectives (Interview IE2; interview IE15). Finally, and going beyond the Midlands, another important demand for trade unions is the establishment of a National Just Transition Commission, providing multi-stakeholder social dialogue for the low-carbon transition (Interview IE11; JTA, 2022b).

Over time, the strategic actions and positions of Irish trade unions have come to coincide with those of environmental NGOs. As recognized by Friends of the Earth on their website: "we have campaigned against the peat stations since they were opened in 2005. For years we did so without any reference to what the process should look like for the workers who would lose their jobs. That was a mistake on our part. Over the last few years we have begun calling for the Government to set up a Just Transition Taskforce and sit down with the trade unions to negotiate an orderly exit from peat" (Friends of the Earth Ireland, 2019). According to some interviewees, the approximation of Irish green NGOs and trade unions occurred because the former realised that the phase-out of peat would have triggered strong political resistance and, hence, they started to see just transition as a feasible solution to overcome a possible political block to a climate policy progress (Interview IE14; Interview IE20). Thus, these two worlds started to collide when decarbonisation became a salient political issue, overcoming the "animosity" which historically characterised the relationship between Irish trade unions and environmental NGOS.

This process of joint mobilization culminated in the establishment of a Just Transition Alliance (JTA). Initially, such Alliance was not formalized and it brought together ICTU, Friends of the Earth, SIPTU, *Fórsa* and Stop Climate Chaos. These organizations, in September 2019, issued a joint call for the Government to implement the recommendation of the JOCCA and to create a National Just Transition Taskforce with a focus on the Midlands (Fórsa et al., 2019; ICTU, 2019a). After a few years of activity, the Alliance has recently been revived and formalized through a launch event (Friends of the Earth Ireland, 2022), a joint declaration (JTA, 2019a) and an open

letter to Minister Ryan (JTA, 2019b) in spring 2022. Through this JTA, green NGOs and trade unions have been able to join their forces by agreeing on a set of essential demands for a just transition in Ireland (Interview IE11; Interview IE20). The JTA's central demand is the establishment of a National Just Transition Commission, meant to develop a new policy framework comprising "job retention, protection of living standards, skills development, the creation of Decent Work in respect of new employment opportunities arising from the transition - particularly in the renewable energy sector" and underpinned "by a commitment to genuine community and regional development" (JTA, 2019b: 2).

Besides unions and green NGOs, regional stakeholders in the Midlands have also crucially contributed to the emergence of just transition policies in Ireland. Decentralisation in the Irish institutional system is historically weak, which is why a regional-level influence on national policies is not to be taken for granted (Interview IE18). However, in the case studied here, local communities' demands were definitely heard in Dublin. As a recent study by Banerjee and Schuitema (2022) reveals, the suspension of operation of the peat industry in the Irish Midlands was met with strong criticism and frustration by both peat workers and local communities. In an initial stage, local politicians were vocally opposing a transition out of peat, trying to prevent the immediate negative downturns of job losses (Interview IE8).

Nevertheless, following years of declining returns (Interview IE7), in 2015, Bord na Móna, the monopolistic peat harvesting company in the Midlands, communicated its intention to cease peat production by 2030, which was further accelerated to 2027 in 2018 (JOCCA, 2019c). The latter announcement came through BNM's "Brown to Green Strategy" (BNM, 2018), which, for the first time, mentions that "achieving a just transition was extremely important to Bord na Móna" (BNM, 2018: 20). Contextually, since October 2018, the company also started providing a voluntary redundancy programme (JOCCA, 2019c), as well as retraining or redeployment facilities for its redundant workers (Lee, 2019). According to local observers, in this initial phase, BNM played a constructive role, engaging positively with unions and local authorities. However, this attitude was soon left behind and substituted with disinterest (Interview IE18; McMahon, 2019).

As a response to BNM's "Brown to Green Strategy", in October 2018, during a Monthly Meeting of the Offaly County Council in the Midlands, FF Councillor Eamon Dooley proposed to put together a "working group consisting of all stakeholders […] to provide clarification on the

timescale of the ceasing of production and to investigate what funding is available" (Offaly County Council, 2018: 1). As a consequence, the Midlands Regional Transition Team was established. Since then, the MRTT has represented a collective voice for a wide array of local and regional stakeholders advocating for a just transition in the wider Midlands region (Interview IE16). Among the group of stakeholders initially conveyed in the MRTT, there were local authorities (from Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon & Kildare); the central Department of Social Protection; Education and Training Boards; and representatives from BNM, ESB and ICTU (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020a; MRTT, 2020a). Crucially, the MRTT has also involved local *Dáil* Deputies, who have often participated to the activities of this group, with a view to bring the local-regional demands to the *Dáil*, pushing for the adoption of just transition measures for the Midlands (Interview IE16). Moreover, the MRTT has constantly liaised with the Government's DCCAE, first through the latter's Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan (Government of Ireland, 2019d; Interview IE16) and, later on, through the JTC.

Even though the MRTT has quickly become an advocacy platform, the two actual objectives of the MRTT formally are to "pursue funding opportunities to mitigate BNM job losses – impact on individuals and region" and to "position region to attract investment and secure alternative employment opportunities" (MRTT, 2020a: 1). Over the years, the MRTT has been active by producing a series of reports (MRTT, 2020b; Broughton and Dowling, 2020), as well as by organizing just transition-related community initiatives, for instance training events for affected workers (MRTT, 2020a). Furthermore, the MRTT has also carried out activities to facilitate the governance of EU and national initiative. In particular, it was the MRTT that decided to apply to the EU Secretariat for Technical Assistance for Coal Regions in Transition Programme in October 2019, requesting technical assistance for the production of a regional action plan for a just transition in the Midlands (AARC and EnvEcon Decision Support, 2020a; Interview IE16), which ultimately came out in October 2020 (MRTT, 2020c). Through the MRTT, hence, a link was created with EU-level just transition actions. Moreover, when the national Just Transition Fund was established, the MRTT-START process was made to be an integral part of the governance of the JTF, since it was used to create an inventory of projects to be funded (Government of Ireland, 2020c). Finally, the MRTT has repeatedly engaged with the JTC, who became part of the MRTT Steering Committee and then included the MRTT's views and activities in his Reports (Offaly County Council, 2020).

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the MRTT, a strong scepticism among Midlanders remains with respect to just transition, which is largely seen there as a "soundbite" (interview IE7). Quoting Banerjee and Schuitema (2022: 7): "the use of the term "just transition" implied a promise made by the BNM and the Irish government that had created hope among peat workers. The practical reality was, however, that the transition was not seen as just, which heightened negative emotions against a government that had promised justice". The authors explain the perdurance of such negative attitude even after the introduction of just transition policies, as a reflection of a failure to construct a truly participative process. This lack of decentralised democratic structures was also evident when the MRTT was not consulted by the DCCAE for the formulation of just transition policies in 2019 (Interview IE11).

### *5.3. Partisan and societal conflicts on the formulation of just transition policies*

While a cross-partisan and societal consensus was fundamental to steer the adoption of just transition policies, when it came to formulating these policies, it is evident that the Government's views prevail over those of any other actors. Not all parties and social actors indeed agreed with the Government's preferences and, as a consequence, a few lines of political conflicts emerged, which would be worth investigating.

Right from the start, the introduction of just transition policies at the national level was welcomed with mixed reactions across the Irish political landscape. In the *Dáil*, the JOCCA report was discussed on 9th May 2019 in front of then Minister Bruton, who acknowledged the importance of the Committee's work in giving centrality to this area of action (Dáil Éireann, 2019b). During this debate, the adoption of a just transition approach through the 2019 CAP was generally welcomed. However, several voices were raised to push for the adoption of a broader strategic framework. Minority TDs from FF (Timmy Dooley and Jack Chalmers), the LP (Brendan Ryan) and the GP (Eamon Ryan) asked Minister Bruton to give greater priority to the social component of climate action, by complying more strictly with the provisions of the JOCCA Report (Dáil Éireann, 2019b; Dáil Éireann, 2019c). SF and PBF went even beyond this Report, advocating for a more transformative conception of just transition, broader in scale and scope (Interview IE10; Sinn Féin, 2019a).

A couple of years later, both the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill and the 2021 CAP were discussed in the *Dáil*, where TDs from opposition parties SF, the LP, the

SD and PBF criticized new Minster Ryan for refusing to acknowledge their proposed amendments, which attempted to provide a legally binding definition and principles for just transition, with a view to ensure that the most vulnerable would not pay the highest costs of the climate-neutral transition (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021c; Dáil Éireann, 2021b; Dáil Éireann, 2022). SF, the LP and trade unions also contested the scarce amount of financial resources provided for just transition (making a direct comparison with the generosity of the Spanish JTPs), as well as the late timing of Government's intervention, which came only when the most severe consequences of the climate crisis were already strongly felt (Interview IE9, JOCCA, 2019b; Select Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 2019). The JTA also gave its own input to the 2021 CAP, striving to "developing the national framework and blueprint for Just Transition covering the entire economy" (JTA, 2022: 4).

The accelerated crisis in the Midlands and the measures introduced with Budget 2020 to cope with it were discussed in the Parliament on several occasions in November and December 2019. Although these initiatives were largely welcomed, criticism was raised regarding the national JTF, with particular attention to the investment-protection character of this instrument: "areas of difference probably related to whether the aim was to assist in the transition to new opportunity, or was to compensate those forced to make changes" (Interview IE6). On the one hand, FG – with the support of ESB, BNM and local authorities in the MRTT – highlighted that the JTF was directed to the Midlands communities, rather than to individual peat-sector workers. Thus, for FG, the focus of the JTF was primarily economic development and job creation, with a more marginal social component, relegated to training and skills development. On the other hand, trade unions backed by left-wing parties – and especially by SF – underlined how social protection measures for peat workers, namely non-voluntary redundancies, were absent from the Government's instruments (JOCCA, 2019b). Also worth considering, with respect to parties' preferences towards active or passive just transition instruments, are their voting behaviours on Amendment 3 to Chapter 2 of the JOCCA, which was proposed by PBF TD Bríd Smith to prevent stringent conditionalities in active labour market policies for redundant workers involved in low-carbon industrial restructurings (JOCCA, 2019a). This Amendment was supported by SF, the GP and, of course PBF, but did not pass due to opposition by FG and the LP and the abstention of FF. FG has been arguably the most convinced party consistently promoting an investment-oriented preference, whereas the GP has also started supporting this same view only since it formed a governmental coalition with FG. On this matter, FF instead holds more

ambiguous views, avoiding to express its preference for an investment or a protection model of JTPs.

At the governance level, various representatives from SF, FF, the LP and the GP contested the absence of appropriate governance structures for social dialogue. SF even advocated for the addition of a legal enforcement mechanisms to be attached to the just transition objectives (Sinn Féin, 2019a). The approach of the FG government and Minister Bruton was to say that the JTC and NESC's task groups were enough to allow for the engagement of different stakeholders. Furthermore, the FG government has also expressed itself against a formal attribution of powers to social partners in the implementation of the JTF, stating that these powers should be exclusively relegated to BNM and its Joint Industrial Relations Council, established under the national Workplace Relations Commission, which is responsible for unsolved collective bargaining disputes in Ireland (Dáil Éireann, 2019c; Select Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 2019). Moreover, Minister Bruton defended the choice of assigning to NESC the responsibilities of reviewing and recommending actions to the Irish government in the area of just transition (Ibid.). SF instead contested that the BNM's Joint Industrial Relations Council was not appropriate to govern the detrimental consequences of peat phase-out, while the GP, FF and the LP encouraged the government to comply with the recommendations of the JOCCA and hence to establish a Just Transition Task Force independent from NESC (Ibid.). The governance of just transition policies was also a crucial point for trade unions and for the JTA, which have been consistently advocating for the establishment of a Just Transition Commission since the GP first proposed it in 2018 (Interview IE15, Interview IE11). The GP-sponsored Act was discussed in the Parliament in September and November 2019 (Dáil Éireann, 2019a; Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 2019), with most parties (LP, FF, SF, PBF) and trade unions supporting the initiative, while the Members of the new government have retained more reluctant positions. As already stated, this act ultimately lapsed with the dissolution of the two Chambers in 2020 and was revived, so far unsuccessfully, by the SD in 2021.

# Chapter 6 – Comparing Spain and Ireland: empirical findings & theoretical implications

**Introduction**

The main empirical aims of this research are to *analyse* just transition policies and to *explain* their emergence, hence unveiling the driving factors that lead to the adoption and formulation of such policies. To investigate these questions, building on the mapping exercise presented in Chapter 2, Spain and Ireland have been selected as case studies. While the previous two Chapters have presented the two cases separately with an in-depth descriptive approach, this Chapter is instead meant to compare the Spanish and Irish cases in order to respond to the main research questions, as well as to derive theoretical implications for the sustainable welfare literature.

Following a Most Different Systems Design, selected cases should be the closest – among all other alternatives– in terms of the characteristics of the outcome under investigation. In this case Ireland and Spain appeared to be largely converging in the adoption of just transition policies, in spite of some notable differences in their content formulation. Furthermore, as envisaged by MDSD, Spain and Ireland are typically regarded as vastly different institutional systems. Spain is traditionally classified as a two-and-a-half party system, with partisan competition centred around class and regional cleavages. This peculiar institutional asset is complemented by a neo-corporatist model of interest representation, with weak social partners and a strong dominance of the State in steering social concertation. The Irish party system instead had traditionally been dominated by two centre-right parties competing in absence of any polarizing political cleavage, whereas a pluralist model is often used to describe interest representation in Ireland, although with some neo-corporatist heritage from the era of the so-called "'social partnership". Moreover, Ireland and Spain also differ considerably with respect to their welfare and environmental state models, with the latter often classified as a Southern-European welfare regime and a mid-fielder in environmental policy, whereas the former is a Liberal, hence residual, welfare state and an environmental laggard. Table 6.1 summarises the

key differences and similarities between Spanish and Irish institutions, which are explained more in detail in Sections 1 and 2 of Chapters 4 and 5.

**Table 6.1:** ***Comparing the Irish and Spanish systems*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| Institutional model | Ireland | Spain |
|---|---|---|
| **Party system** | Moderately multiparty system with 2 dominant parties & absence of strong political cleavages (but increasing polarization/fragmentation) | Two-and-a-half party system dominated by class and regional cleavages (but increasing polarization/fragmentation) |
| **Interest representation** | Pluralist system with some heritage from the "social partnership" era | Neo-corporatist system with weak social partners and a strong state |
| **Welfare state** | Liberal welfare regime | Southern-European welfare regime |
| **Eco state** | Environmental laggard | Mid-fielder |

Against such a backdrop, this research has aimed to trace the process leading to the adoption of JTPs in these two largely different countries, hence attempting to respond inductively and through outcome-explaining process tracing to the following research questions: what are the core characteristics of JTPs in Spain and Ireland? why have Spain and Ireland both adopted just transition policies? what factors determine the formulation of the content of JTPs in Spain and Ireland? This Chapter is meant to respond to these research questions, discussing comparatively the results of the empirical research conducted in the two countries, which is presented in details in the two previous Chapters. It does so by first by concentrating on *policy* aspects (Section 1), hence summarizing the two countries' trajectories and analysing their JTPs and, second on *politics* aspects (Section 2), presenting relevant socio-political actors' positions and actions in the policy process in the two cases. Section 3 schematically illustrates the main causal argument and, finally, in Section 4, the Chapter attempts to derive some theoretical conclusions from the comparison between the two countries, with a theory-generating rationale. The study concludes by proposing a revisited political exchange theory to explain the phenomenon under investigation, but it also provides reflections about the importance of other factors, such as functional pressures, institutional opportunities and the diffusion of the just transition idea.

**1. The Spanish-Irish comparison: the policy dimension**

This section focuses on the policy dimension of our empirical analysis. It is dedicated, first, to briefly reconstructing the main steps of the policy *trajectory* that brought to the emergence of just transition policies in Spain and Ireland. A more detailed reconstruction of these trajectories is reported in Sections 3 of Chapters 4 and 5, and summarised by Tables 4.2 and 5.2. Second, building on Sections 4 of Chapters 4 and 5, the aim is also *analysing* Spanish and Irish JTPs, following the analytical framework proposed in Chapter 1. Table 6.2 applies this framework to the two cases, while Sections 1.1. and 1.2. present the table more in depth. Comparing the content of JTPs in the two countries along their three constitutive components, it turns out that, despite the similarities found in the NECPs mapping exercise, considerable differences exist in the formulation of JTPS in the three countries: first, Spain has put forward a strategy that is broader in scope and scale if compared to Ireland; second, Ireland has relied on purely investment-oriented instruments, while Spain has adopted a mix of investment and protective measures; and, third, while Spanish JTPs are an example of a purely participated model of governance, the Irish model is more hybrid since governmentalism is mixed with an inclusive consultation of stakeholders.

**Table 6.2:** ***Comparing Just Transition Policies in Spain (ES) and Ireland (IE)*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| **COMPONENTS** | | **DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | ***Broad*** | ***Narrow*** |
| **Strategy** | *Scope: whole-economy vs sectoral* | **ES** | **ES / IE** |
| | *Scale: extended vs limited timeframe* | **ES** | **IE** |
| | | ***Protection*** | ***Investment*** |
| **Instrument** | *Tools: passive vs active* | **ES** | **ES / IE** |
| | *Targets: direct vs indirect* | **ES** | **ES /IE** |
| | | ***Participated*** | ***Concentrated*** |
| **Governance** | *Rules: coordination vs governmentalism* | **ES** | **IE** |
| | *Implementation structures: Inclusive vs exclusive* | **ES / IE** | |

### *1.1. Spain: policy trajectory & analysis*

Domestic coal in Spain has been uncompetitive since the 1990s, which has resulted in a gradual and continuous decrease in both the aggregate level of production and the number of employees in the mining sector. Between the 1990s and 2018, the various PP and PSOE governments in power provided continuous state aid for the coal sector by means of periodic tripartite agreements with affected social partners. These agreements were aimed both to encourage the reprise of the sector and to compensate coal mines' employees for the costs of redundancies. However, since the early 2000s, the European Union, gradually increasing its competencies in the energy field, started to push for Spain to stop distorting the market through coal state aid. Ultimately, in 2010, the EU decided for the closure of all uncompetitive coal mines by the end of 2018. As a result, existing policies to support coal mines and their employees were about to become redundant, unless the government would have chosen to oppose decarbonisation.

Just transition policies in Spain emerged during the short-lived first government of Pedro Sánchez, a minority PSOE executive that came to power in June 2018 after a vote of no confidence ousted PP predecessor Mariano Rajoy. Once in office, Sánchez appointed Teresa Ribera, representing an environmentalist fringe of the socialist party, as Spain's first-ever Minister for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge. Ribera immediately announced an ambitious plan for decarbonisation, comprising the closure not only of coal mines, in line with the 2010 EU Decision, but also of coal-fired power plants. Against increasing criticism targeting the government's shift in its historic defence of national coal, the government reached out to social partners and engaged with them in negotiations, making it clear that mines closure would have been inevitable, but also that the government was willing to concede economic compensation in whatever size and form the social partners would have requested. This led Ribera to announce her intention to put forward a Just Transition Strategy during a CCOO conference in July 2018. The outcome of the tripartite negotiations was the Coal Mining Agreement, signed by the Government of Spain, CCOO, UGT, USO, and *Carbunion* in October 2018. In January 2019, hence right after the last coal mine in Spain ceased to operate, this Agreement was transformed into Decree Law 25/2018, approved with the favourable vote of PSOE, *Ciudadanos* and Basque and Catalan left-wing parties, as well as the abstention of PP and *Unidas Podemos*. The Coal Mining Agreement was the starting point for the development of just transition policies in Spain, since in February 2019 Ribera finally presented the Just Transition

Strategy coupled with the Urgent Action Plan for Coal, as well as a draft Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition.

While the direction was set forth by the Sánchez I government, Spanish JTPs were substantially developed by Ribera during her second mandate within the Sánchez II government, which was composed of a coalition between PSOE and UP appointed by the Parliament in January 2020 after two rounds of general elections. Several notable advancements were brought forward by the new government. In April 2020, it signed a tripartite Agreement to accompany the closure of coal-fired power plants, which was decided through Royal Decree-Law 17/2019 in November 2019; it published the final version of the JTS and Urgent Action Plan; and it converted the old Institute for Restructuring Coal Mining and Alternative Development of Mining Regions into the Just Transition Institute, in charge of the governance of the Just Transition Agreements. The Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition was approved in May 2021, including an obligation for the government to renew the JTS every five years. Finally, in June 2021 and December 2022 respectively the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and the Territorial Just Transition Plan were approved by the Spanish government, aiming to make use of EU funds – respectively, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the EU Just Transition Fund – in order to provide new financial resources to deliver on a just transition.

Just transition policies in Spain come as a mix of three interconnected components. The main pillar of the *strategic* component is the Just Transition Strategy. This JTS is part of the broader Strategic Energy and Climate Framework and it has also been inserted in legislation with the 2021 Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition. The main just transition policy *instrument* attached to the JTS is the Urgent Action Plan for Coal-mining Regions and Power Plant Closures, which, in turn, incorporates the two tripartite agreements for the coal mining sector and for the closure of coal-fired power plants, while also setting the spending priorities for the Just Transition Agreements. The latter – which are territorial plans aiming to channel national and European funds and technical assistance to the territories identified as the most affected by decarbonisation – are fundamental pillars of the *governance* component of Spanish JTS. Also part of the governance component is the Just Transition Institute, an autonomous body within the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge in charge of the implementation of the JTS and the Urgent Action Plan, as well as the participative formulation of the above-mentioned Agreements.

Following the dimensions of the analytical framework, in order to assess the *strategic* component of JTPs, one should look at their (sectoral) scope and (time) scale. With respect to the former, the Spanish Just Transition Strategy aims to monitor and address the socio-economic impacts of decarbonisation in *all* the sectors of the economy, with the view to boost the employment opportunities of the low-carbon transition, especially in terms of green job creation. Beyond these broad objectives and a few actions outlined in the JTS, it is clear that the largest emphasis – substantiated by more detailed proposals – is put on the energy sector and first and foremost, on the negative social impacts of the already-occurred closure of coal mines and foreseen closure of coal-fired power plants. Therefore, the JTS has an ambivalent *scope*, mixing a broad overarching ambition to a prevalently-narrow emphasis. However, the Spanish JTS could still be considered an example of a broad just transition strategy, especially in light of its temporal reach or *scale*. Indeed, while the current strategy covers the relatively short period that goes from 2020 to 2024, the Bill on Climate Change and Energy Transition, which provides the legal framework behind the JTS, requires the government to renew the JTS every 5 years, hence broadening by law the temporal reach of this strategy. Given that the phase-out of coal in Spain is now already on its way and almost completed, one could expect that the future iterations of the JTS will cover other sectors undergoing a transition, including nuclear, transport and automotive.

With respect to the *instrument* component, our analytical framework distinguishes between protection- and investment-oriented JTPs. The Urgent Action Plan comprises a mix of both types of elements. On the one hand, coal mining workers are provided with direct and passive monetary support in the form of early retirement schemes and voluntary severance payments. These provisions resemble previous social support for coal workers that the government used to provide before pursuing decarbonisation in the framework of its state aid to the mining sector. However, both the Coal Mining and the Coal Power Plants Agreements also provide active labour market *tools* that both directly and indirectly benefit affected *targets*. In particular, first, two job banks – one for coal mines and the other for thermal power plants – have been set up in the framework of the two tripartite agreements constituting the Urgent Action Plan, with a view to provide vocational training and job-search assistance directly to redundant workers. Second, the Urgent Action Plan is also meant to mobilize – through territorial-specific JTAs – an unspecified amount of financial resources from the state budget and from available EU funds to promote (green) job creation, hence indirectly enabling affected agents to participate to a

decarbonised economy in already-precarious labour markets. Funds allocated to the JTAs should be invested in the development of public infrastructures, industrial projects, territorial restoration projects, as well as in offsetting up small or medium-size enterprises with low climate impact.

Finally, the *governance* component of the Spanish JTPs includes two elements that are meant to deliver on the implementation of the Just Transition Strategy and related instruments: first, the procedures behind the Just Transition Agreements and, second, the Just Transition Institute, which is the core institutional structure responsible for these Agreements. While territorial authorities are left free to negotiate the specific content of JTAs (as long as this is in line with the national JTS), importantly, the Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition asserts that the JTAs should be formulated, adopted and implemented through an *inclusive* and *coordinated* process that engages both the government and non-governmental actors, providing shared decision-making power to both actors. Participated were also the procedures behind the Coal Mining and Coal Power Plants Agreements, since these were based on tripartite negotiations between the government and social partners. Finally, social partners, local and regional authorities are also involved in the Advisory Board of the Just Transition Institute, even though the latter is formally part of a governmental ministry.

### *1.2. Ireland: policy trajectory & analysis*

Much like coal in Spain, the trajectory of JTPs in Ireland intersected the crisis and accelerated phase-out of another fossil fuel: peat. The crisis in the sector of peat harvesting for electricity generation had been going on for a few years. In October 2015, the quasi-monopolistic local peat company Bord na Móna announced its decision to phase out peat production as a consequence of increasing pressure to comply with climate policy targets. Accelerations in the initially-planned transition timeline came first in October 2018 – when BNM published the "Brown to Green Strategy" anticipating phase-out to 2027 and providing private voluntary schemes and skills support to peat workers – and, even more severely, in July 2019, when the national planning authority denied permission to continue burning peat in the West Offaly power plant to ESB, the company to which BNM used to sell peat for electricity production. Although a bipartite agreement was signed in 2016 between BNM and trade unions, up to that point, no dedicated public policy was ever put forward to address the peat crisis. In parallel to the events unfolding in the Midlands, important developments in the Irish just transition policy

trajectory came through progresses in climate policies. In this respect, the first impulse was given by the work of the Citizens' Assembly on climate action, which culminated with the publication of a dedicated report alluding to the principles of just transition in April 2018. In response to such report, in July 2018, a cross-partisan Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, or JOCCA, was established in the Irish Parliament and, in March 2019, it agreed on a set of recommendations for the government to address climate change, including through just transition policies.

Building on these preliminary events, Irish just transition policies emerged in 2019, under Leo Varadkar's *Fine Gael* minority government, with Richard Bruton as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. In June, the government published the Climate Action Plan, building on the JOCCA report and, hence, containing Ireland's just transition strategy. In October of the same year, the government announced Budget 2020, containing the main instrument and governance elements of Irish JTPs, that is a €6 million (later increased by an extra €5million provided by ESB) Just Transition Fund financed through the revenues of the increased carbon tax and the appointment of Kieran Mulvey as Just Transition Commissioner. Between 2019 and 2021, the Commissioner published a set of four reports about his engagement with stakeholders in the Midlands. Moreover, between March and April 2020, NESC also published a series of reports, based on inputs from multiple stakeholders, recommending actions for a just transition in Ireland.

After the adoption of JTPs, notable developments came under the new government formed in June 2020 –a coalition between FF, FG and GP – and under the responsibility of Eamon Ryan, new Minister from the Green Party succeeding Bruton. Among the just-transition-relevant actions taken by the new government, we find the publication of two renewed versions of the Climate Action Plan in November 2021 and December 2022, the prolongation of the mandate of the Commissioner in January 2022 and the adoption of a Territorial Just Transition Plan in December 2022, channelling resources from the EU Just Transition Fund to the Midlands. Finally, the new government also proposed to set up a multistakeholder Just transition Commission, but, despite two legislative proposals on this matter, this Commission has not been established yet at the moment of writing.

Like in Spain, just transition policies in Ireland come as a mix of three separate, yet interconnected, components. The Climate Action Plan, adopted in 2019 – and later renewed in

2021 and 2023 – provides the main strategic framework for a just transition in Ireland, alongside the 2021 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill, that, building on the CAP, enshrines a just transition objective into Irish legislation. The National Just Transition Fund, proposed in 2019 through the Budget Law of 2020, is Ireland's main just transition instrument, although it has since been substantially substituted by the EU Just Transition Fund. Finally, at the governance level, we find a Just Transition Commissioner, appointed with the specific mandate to engage with stakeholders in the Midlands and provide recommendations to the Government, and a Just Transition Review Group within NESC producing multi-stakeholder reports for the Government on this topic. We can analyse each of these three components by following the dimensions of the analytical framework.

Concerning the *strategy* component, while the CAP clearly gives relevance to just transition as a policy objective, this objective remains largely vague and narrow in *scope*. Despite, on paper, the CAP should support all persons and communities that may be negatively affected by climate action, there is no actual mentioning of any specific economic sectors. The only exception is peat harvesting, to which several passages are dedicated in the 2019 CAP, and even more so in its 2021 and 2023 reiterations. This relates to the second strategic-level characteristic of the CAP, which is the limited time *scale* of the CAP that has a short-term reach of only 1 or 2 years. Consequently, we can argue that Irish just transition measures can only respond to urgent, short-term challenges, which are framed as delimited, rather than systemic, and they hence supposedly require tailored interventions circumscribed in time and in resources. The Climate Bill approved in 2021 forces the government to update the 2019 Climate Action Plan yearly, which so far has been done in 2021 and 2023. However, unlike in Spain, this legal obligation does not refer specifically to just transition policies, which are only one part of the CAP, so, the 2021 Bill has not extended the timeframe of just transition policies. Therefore, looking at both the temporal scale and sectoral scope of the Irish strategy for a just transition we can conclude that this is narrow.

Turning to the *instrument* component, the Irish JTF – which was proposed in Budget 2020 alongside two other funds also tackling the accelerated crisis of the peat sector in the Midlands – clearly represents a purely investment-oriented, rather than protective, measure. First, while this Fund should ultimately benefit the workers and communities affected by decarbonisation in the Midlands, these agents cannot directly access the resources of the JTF, but only *indirectly* through the (supposed) trickle-down co-benefits of capital investments in job creation and

economic development. Indeed, only private, public and community/voluntary organizations were given the faculty to submit projects to be financed through the national JTF. Moreover, the Irish JTF provides enabling-active *tools*. This Fund indeed has three funding priorities: "employment & enterprise", "training" and "community transition": as evident, the social impacts of decarbonisation are addressed by means of job creation, economic development and active labour market policies, rather than compensation and buffers. Despite the resources of the National JTF were limited in both amount – a total of 11 million euros – and duration – with the first and only call for application in 2020 – the government has substantially substituted this national fund with the namesake EU Just Transition Fund, which is supposed to address very similar priorities as those of the national JTF, thus mirroring its purely investment-oriented nature.

Finally, JTPs in Ireland could be considered an example of a mixed *governance* model, where governmentalism is accompanied by the consultation of relevant stakeholders. All in all, implementation relies on a concentrated governance model, which leaves decision-making power in the hands of the Department of the Environment. This said, however, the governance of JTPs in Ireland has also been *inclusive*, hence engaging several non-governmental actors. Indeed, the Just Transition Commissioner has profusely carried out stakeholders' consultations under the Government's mandate since 2019 and the Just Transition Review Group within NESC has engaged a large number of societal stakeholders to discuss just transition issues in Ireland. However, governance rules provide stakeholders with merely consultative powers and with no guarantee for their opinions to effectively feed policy implementation, as it would have instead happened through the establishment of a formalized multi-stakeholder implementation structure, such as the Just Transition Commission that first the Green Party and then the SD have proposed to set up.

**2. The Spanish-Irish comparison: the politics dimension**

Beyond just transition policies in themselves, the empirical investigation of the Spanish and Irish cases has focused on the *politics* that brought to their adoption and formulation. This study adopts an actor-centred perspective, hence concentrating on the socio-political actors that are directly involved or exert a proven influence on the policymaking process. In this view, as stated in Chapter 3, the interaction between the policy preferences of different actors is expected to be the key driver behind the emergence of JTPs. Actors under investigation here are both supply-

side – namely the political parties that form a government, or the parliamentary opposition, as well as their local-regional branches – and demand-side ones – hence the organized interest groups that represent certain societal groups. The policy preferences of these actors are not assumed theoretically, but rather inductively derived from the empirical investigation.

We can assume that what matters for the adoption of JTPs is actors' preferences about the so-called socio-ecological nexus, that is the connection between social and environmental goals. In particular, the focus are actors' preferences about the social consequences of decarbonisation. Following the framework presented in Chapter 3, we can thus distinguish socio-political actors into three categories: i) "Green Progressivists" are the actors who are in favour of decarbonisation, yet ignoring its social implications; ii) "Socio-economic Conservatists" are the actors that oppose or aim to hinder decarbonisation in light of its negative socio-economic consequences; and, finally, iii) "Just Transitioners" promote a *convergent* policy preference, that, despite acknowledging trade-offs between social and environmental goals, strives to reconcile these goals by advocating for the adoption of JTPs. Table 6.3 summarizes the policy preferences of relevant Spanish and Irish actors, which will be discussed more in detail in the following subsections. Furthermore, beyond the adoption of JTPs, to account for the formulation of such policies, it would also be important to investigate actors' preferences with respect to the specific content that JTPs should take: a broad or a narrow strategy; investment- or protection-oriented instruments; and a participated or coordinated governance. Actors' preferences in the two cases will be summarized by Tables 6.4 and 6.5.

**Table 6.3:** ***Comparing actors' preferences on the adoption of Just Transition Policies in Spain and Ireland*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| ***Case*** | ***Actors' preferences on the socio-ecological nexus*** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Green Progressivists* | *Socio-economic Conservatists* | *Just Transitioners* |
| **SPAIN** | Supply-side: PP (post-2019)<br><br>Demand-side: utility companies | Supply-side: PP (pre-2019); *Vox*; coal regions (except Asturias)<br><br>Demand-side: coal municipalities (ACOM) (pre-2019); local-sectoral trade unions (pre-2018); *Carbunion* | Supply-side: PSOE; UP (but ambiguous until 2018); *Ciudadanos*; Basque, Catalan and other left-wing parties; Asturian government<br><br>Demand-side: ACOM (post-2019); green NGOs; national and |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | local-sectoral (post-2018) trade unions |
| **IRELAND** | Supply-side: FG (pre-2019); FF (pre-2019)<br><br>Demand-side: utility (ESB) and harvesting (BNM) peat companies | - | Supply-side: GP; left-wing parties; FG and FF (post-2019) and their elected officials from the Midlands<br><br>Demand-side: Just Transition Alliance (green NGOs, trade unions & others); MRTT |

### *2.1. Spain: Socio-political actors' preferences and interactions*

The politics of just transition policies in Spain has been characterized by a moderately high level of conflict. On the supply side, PSOE played a leading role since taking office in 2018. Fundamental to the adoption of JTPs in Spain was the socialist party acting as a *Just Transitioner*, hence striving both to advance with decarbonisation, while also making sure that social impacts were addressed. PSOE's adoption of a proactive convergent preference on the socio-ecological nexus was the result of a twofold process. On the one hand, since the mid-2000s, an environmentalist faction of the socialist party, which had its roots in the Spanish environmental movements of the 1980s, has gained increasing power within PSOE, so much so that these environmentalists became fundamental supporters of Sánchez's run first as leader of the party in 2017 and then as President. Additionally, the entry into the Spanish party system of *Unidas Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* resulted in an increase in the electoral competition to appeal to the so-called "green vote". These developments ultimately induced PSOE to upgrade its climate agenda, culminating in the appointment of Teresa Ribera as Minister. On the other hand, PSOE had a historical attachment to coal, due to its territorial and class roots. Indeed, several coal regions – Castilla Y León, Aragón and, especially Asturias – have been important socialist constituencies and also key supporters of Sánchez's candidacy as secretary of the party in 2017, as well as of his run in the 2019 general elections. Additionally, PSOE also has strong ties with trade union UGT, whose members would not have accepted decarbonisation without some form of compensation.

The initial result of this dual internal pressure was that, when it was in the opposition, PSOE was promoting an ambiguous policy preference, embracing decarbonisation and even the "just transition" narrative on the one hand, but being explicitly hesitant about coal phase-out on the other hand. Once the party was unexpectedly called to form a new government in June 2018, Sánchez's appointment of Teresa Ribera dispelled any previous doubts on the party's preference about decarbonisation. However, in order to realise her ambitious plan for a green transition and coal phase-out, Ribera needed the support of both the members of PSOE representing mining communities and regions, as well the social partners that were going to be most affected by mine closures. For this reason, soon after its investiture, the PSOE government had to carry out informal negotiations with its own members, which ultimately led regional-local representatives of the party – especially in Asturias – to refrain from vetoing the government's decarbonisation agenda in exchange for a promise of economic support.

Coal regions were one part of a broader "mining coalition", which, in spite of decaying economic power, had managed to effectively lobby the national government for decades – through both mobilizations and social dialogue – in order to prevent or delay the shutting down of coal mines, as well as to demand state aid for coal workers and companies. Besides PSOE-led regional governments, this informal group comprised the following demand-side actors: miners' unions UGT, CCOO and USO; the federation of mining companies *Carbunion*; and mining municipalities, organized around the so-called ACOM association. In 2018, this mining coalition immediately expressed its concerns when Sánchez and Ribera came to power and when they decided to explicitly adopt a pro-decarbonisation and anti-coal political agenda. For this reason, the government was forced to engage in tripartite social dialogue with these actors, attempting to convince them to shift their preference towards just transition.

Before 2108, the socio-economic conservative position of their local and sectoral affiliates, forced the largest Spanish confederal unions, CCOO and UGT, to carry out a dual and partially contradictory position. CCOO and UGT were in part aligned with the interests of their coal-sector members, and, in other parts, in favour of a green and just transition. Indeed, Spanish unions – and CCOO in particular – have long been promoting ecological claims and they have also been collaborating for a long time with green NGOs, promoting common demands. Thus, national and confederal-level unions were timidly and partially moving towards pro-decarbonisation stances. In sum, on the demand-side, in parallel to the conservatist mining coalition, an anti-coal coalition started to form, comprising unsurprisingly environmental NGOs, but also the utility companies

owning power plants, which started to see the transition towards renewable as more profitable than keeping firing coal, and some Green Progressivist branches of UGT and CCOO.

With respect to supply-side actors, supporting PSOE's position in the parliament since 2018 – when the government was aiming to transform the Coal Mining Agreement into Decree Law 25/2018 – were the centre-right party *Ciudadanos* and the regionalist parties *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* and the Basque Nationalist Party, all of which did not have a nested interest in the coal transition, but were still supportive of JTPs. More ambiguous has instead been the position of *Unidas Podemos* before joining POSE in the current governmental coalition. In 2018, while promoting a just transition narrative on paper, UP abstained when the Parliament was tasked to approve Decree Law 25/2018, asserting that they would have rather kept extracting national coal as long as the power plants were still operating. Since then, however, the party has now become a much more convinced Just Transitioner.

A Socio-economic Conservatist preference has been promoted by the principal opposition party to the PSOE government: *Partido Popular*. Although PP is generally in favour of climate mitigation and the green transition, it has criticized the Sánchez I government's decision to phase out coal, presenting it as detrimental not only to social objectives, but also, and most importantly, to Spain's energy security. Like UP, PP abstained in the parliamentary vote on Decree Law 25/2018. However, the centre-right party also crucially did not vote against it, since the government was supported by relevant economic interests. Once coal was out of the picture, PP moderated its initial stances and it now adopts a much more cautious position about the social consequences of decarbonisation, not fiercely opposing anymore, but also not really supporting the government's JTPs. When JTPs were first adopted, the far-right party *Vox* was not yet occupying such an influential place in Spanish politics as it is today. However, unlike PP, *Vox* has consistently adopted a convinced Conservatist preference, advocating to slow down the green transition with a view to preserving the socio-economic status quo.

The content of Spanish JTPs reflects the preferences of the socio-political actors that were involved in their formulation. In this case, such formulation occurred through neo-corporatist coordination, hence policymaking was co-determined by the socialist government's preferences and by those of the social partners, as well as of the regional and local authorities involved. Although political discussions on the specific formulation of these policies have been quite scarce, the empirical evidence suggests that all the key stakeholders shared PSOE's preferences,

which entailed coordinated governance, a mix of protective and investment-oriented instruments, and a broad strategy (although with a high emphasis to the coal sector). We can also assume that the parties that voted in favour of PSOE's just transition initiatives in the Parliament (namely Decree-Law 25/2018 and the 2021 Bill on Climate Change and the Energy Transition) share its same views. Conversely, obviously, the content-specific preferences of Socio-economic Conservatist actors, who opposed the adoption of JTPs in the first place, did not emerge from the empirical analysis. Table 6.4 summarizes socio-political actors' positions on the formulation of JTPs in Spain.

**Table 6.4*: The preferences of Spanish socio-political actors on the formulation of just transition policies*** (source: author's own elaboration)

| COMPONENT | DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strategic component** | **BROAD**<br><br>PSOE; UP; *Ciudadanos*; Basque, Catalan and other left-wing parties; the "mining coalition" | **NARROW** |
| **Instrument component** | **INVESTMENT**<br><br>PSOE; UP; Ciudadanos; Basque, Catalan and other left-wing parties; the "mining coalition" | **PROTECTION**<br><br>PSOE; UP; Ciudadanos; Basque, Catalan and other left-wing parties; the "mining coalition" |
| **Governance component** | **PARTICIPATED**<br><br>PSOE; UP; *Ciudadanos*; Basque, Catalan and other left-wing parties; the "mining coalition" | **CONCENTRATED** |

### *2.2. Ireland: Socio-political actors' preferences and interactions*

Just Transition Policies in Ireland have been characterized by a low level of political conflict and by a consensus-seeking attitude from most relevant socio-political actors. Fundamental in the politics of JTPs in Ireland was the role of demand-side groups, who were active in promoting convergent preferences and in advocating for a just transition. In particular, two groups of stakeholders moved in parallel. On the one hand, in Dublin, a few climate-conscious trade unionists, mainly from ICTU and SIPTU, gradually, yet proactively, imported from their international and European confederations the previously-unexplored just transition narrative in their policy agendas. Since 2017, Irish unions have actively lobbied the national government to promote a just transition and they had been central in constructing coalitions with actors

representing environmental interests, namely the Green Party and major environmental NGOs. The collaboration between the latter and trade unions, which initially started informally, eventually brought to the construction of a Just Transition Alliance, demanding social solutions to accompany Ireland's decarbonization efforts, especially with reference to the peat sector. The advocacy activities of this Alliance were directed first to influence the Citizens' Assembly and, later, the JOCCA committee in the Irish Parliament.

On the other hand, when BNM announced its intention to cease activities in the long run, local and regional stakeholders in the Midlands were forced to accept the end of peat as inevitable. Thus, after an acceleration of BNM's transition plan in October 2018, several local authorities, Members of the national Parliament, but also demand-side trade unions and BNM itself, voluntarily came together to form the Midlands Regional Transition Team. This MRTT has aimed to pursue funding to mitigate the job crisis and to create new business and employment opportunities in the Midlands. The MRTT made its participants aware of the need for the state's intervention to face the ongoing social crisis and it actively looked for policy aid at the national and supranational level, even requesting technical assistance from the EU Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition. Therefore, while not professedly relying on a "just transition" narrative, the MRTT can be categorised as a Just Transitioner, promoting solutions that could conjugate decarbonisation with social wellbeing. This composite group acted as a compact coalition exerting a regional-local pressure on national decision-makers, especially by making use of its links with elected politicians from the Midlands that were actively bringing the voice of the MRTT to the discussion within the JOCCA.

On the supply side, unlike in Spain, the first-movers and more proactive Just Transitioners in Ireland were not to be found in the government, but rather among opposition parties at the Parliament level. The Green Party and, more specifically, members of this party who had previously worked with Irish trade unions and who later would form the so-called Just Transition Greens, played a pivotal role in importing the just transition debate within the parliamentary discussion in the JOCCA. Just transition was presented by the GP as an appropriate policy objective to address the foreseen social implications of climate policies and peat phase-out, and, hence, to prevent eventual societal conflicts. Within the JOCCA, the GP managed to gather immediately the support of left-wing Parliamentarians (representing Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, the Social Democrats and People Before Profits), which quickly endorsed the just transition approach.

If the GP's success in convincing left-wing parties might appear expected, much more puzzling is the fact that, within the JOCCA negotiations, the two largest centre-right parties in Ireland, shifted their preference from mere Green Progressivists to expressing themselves in favour of the just transition agenda. Before 2019, both FF and FG largely ignored for years the social crisis connected to the decay of the peat sector in the Midlands, leaving it to industrial relations. Even the FG-led minority government that was in power in 2019, with the external support of FF, initially held a similar position. The shift in FF and FG's position could be explained by two factors. First, both parties, following their usual attitude in climate policymaking, were interested in reaching a cross-party consensus on climate policies and in claiming credit for a progressive climate reform. Moreover, with the crisis of the peat sector becoming more and more serious, several TDs representing the Midlands constituencies within FF and FG (which are the most representative parties in the region), were acutely aware of this crisis – and some of them were even directly involved in the MRTT – and they hence started to demand their party colleagues appropriate just transition solutions for peat workers and their communities. As a consequence, in 2019, JTPs gained a wide cross-party support in the JOCCA, making it somehow easy then for Minister Bruton to translate the Parliament's inputs into policies.

While a consensus was found in Ireland on the adoption of just transition policies, the same cannot be said about the formulation of such policies, for which Irish socio-political actors have expressed divergent preferences. Table 6.5 summarizes the preferences of main Irish parties, as well as of the Just Transition Alliance and the MRTT (taken as the two most influential coalitions of demand-side actors), on the three components of just transition policies. As evident, FG, the main governmental party responsible for the formulation of JTPS, was promoting a narrow, investment-oriented and concentrated understanding of JTPS, hence focusing on mobilizing investments to address the short-term challenges of the peat phase-out without giving decision-making powers to stakeholders. This position was not shared by any other opposition parties, nor by the members of the Just Transition Alliance. Only the actors forming the MRRT shared the government's narrow and investment-oriented preferences, but disagreed with a non-inclusive governance model. For this reason, most of the socio-political actors that were first in line to push for a just transition in Ireland did not welcome the final government's recipe for JTPs. This scenario slightly changed in 2020, when FG formed a new coalition government with FF and GP, resulting in a shift in the latter two parties' preferences on the content of JTPs, aligning with FG's original position.

| **Table 6.5*: The preferences of Irish socio-political actors on the formulation of just transition policies*** (source: author's own elaboration) | | |
|---|---|---|
| **COMPONENT** | **DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION** | |
| **Strategic component** | **BROAD**<br><br>FF (pre-2020); GP (pre-2020); left-wing parties; Just Transition Alliance | **NARROW**<br><br>FF (post-2020); GP (post-2020); FG; MRTT |
| **Instrument component** | **INVESTMENT**<br><br>FG; FF; GP; MRTT; left-wing parties; Just Transition Alliance | **PROTECTION**<br><br>GP (pre-2020); left-wing parties; Just Transition Alliance |
| **Governance component** | **PARTICIPATED**<br><br>FF (pre-2020); GP (pre-2020); left-wing parties; Just Transition Alliance; MRTT | **CONCENTRATED**<br><br>FF (post-2020); GP (post-2020); FG |

**3. Discussing the comparative findings**

The comparative analysis of the two selected cases brings to light some notable theoretical insights on the politics of just transition policies. The findings of both case studies seem to confirm interest-based *Expectation#3* presented in Chapter 3. Accordingly, the adoption of just transition policies should be driven by a convergence between green and labour interests. More specifically, a green-labour converge can be expected to occur a) within the supply side, through an eco-socialist government; or b) within the demand side, through alliances between green and labour interest groups.

This green-labour converge was achieved through different mechanisms in Spain and in Ireland. In the former country, the process was steered by the PSOE minority government, which was promoting a just transition agenda, aiming to simultaneously boost climate action while also paying attention to it social implications, especially for the coal sector. PSOE's position was met with opposition from Socio-economic Conservatists representing the societal groups most affected by an eventual coal phase-out, namely the components of the so-called "mining coalition". PSOE acted like an eco-socialist government, claiming to represent green and labour interests and taking action to reconcile these interests. The government's just transition initiatives – supported by left-wing regionalist parties and *Ciudadanos* – were met with resistance by Socio-economic Conservatists right-wing parties PP and *Vox*, while *Unidas Podemos* initially retained an ambiguous view on coal phase-out. Against this conflictual

backdrop, in order to gain the necessary political support for its initiative, the government resorted to neo-corporatist concertation, engaging in negotiations and signing tripartite pacts with demand-side social partners. Concertation allowed demand-side actors, and especially trade unions, to mitigate their initial conflictual position, ultimately converging with PSOE in the adoption and formulation of JTPs.

In Ireland, empirical evidence indicates that the trajectory was much less conflictual and more consensual at the start. Differently than in Spain, the first movers advocating for a just transition in Ireland were demand-side actors. In particular, Irish trade unions started to collaborate with environmental NGOs, forming, first informally and then formally, a Just Transition Alliance. The just transition demands of this advocacy coalition were channelled in the partisan arena by opposition parties, primarily the Green Party and then also other left-wing parties, in the context of the JOCCA committee. In parallel, local authorities and social partners in the Midlands, preoccupied with the rising socio-economic risks of decarbonisation in the peat sector, also started to take action through the MRTT, demanding support to cope with peat phase-out. This double pressure coming from the MRTT and the JOCCA ultimately brought the right-wing Fine Gael government to adopt just transition policies.

Therefore, while a green-labour interest convergence was achieved in both cases, the mechanisms differ. In Spain, within a conflictual context – with the main opposition parties and several influential demand-side actors promoting a Socio-economic Conservative position – a convergence between green and social claims was first and foremost achieved *within* the governmental party PSOE. Therefore, even though PSOE might not appear at first sight as an "eco-socialist" party, the policies that it has promoted in recent years has rendered it close to a left-libertarian, or at least green-conscious, party, while also still representing interests typical of the "old-left". In Ireland instead, the process that led to the adoption of just transition policies has been much more bottom-up and demand-driven. The first impulse in this process actually came from the demand side, with trade unions forming alliances with green NGOs nationally and with local stakeholders coming together in the MRTT, joining forces to advocate for a just transition.

At first glance, the two cases seem to confirm interest-based Expectation#3 and the related two possible mechanisms: while in Spain JTPs were adopted through a green-labour convergence within the supply side, hence through a (quasi) eco-socialist government, in Ireland instead this

convergence was first achieved within the demand side, that is through the formation of an alliance between green and labour interest groups. However, a closer look into the findings induces us to refine this interest-based argument: neither in Spain nor in Ireland a green-labour convergence within one of the two sides of the political arena was sufficient in itself to drive the emergence of JTPs. To fully account for what happened in the two cases, we need to (re)introduce the concept of *political exchange*, bringing the attention to the strategic interactions within and between the supply and demand sides of the political arena.

A mechanism of strategic interaction between demand- and supply-side actors can be detected in both case studies. In Spain, political exchange was top-down, hence driven by the supply-side, and facilitated by neo-corporatist institutions. With the intent to gain political support (or at least to prevent societal conflicts) for its novel decarbonisation agenda, the PSOE government resorted to concertation, in order to convince demand-side actors – especially local and sectoral trade unions – to shift their position from Socio-economic Conservatists to Just Transitioners in exchange for economic support. In this sense, we can describe the Spanish case as an example of a *supply-driven political exchange*, hence a process steered by the PSOE government, exchanging with demand-side actors interested in not paying the social costs of decarbonisation. Analysing the process that led to the adoption of just transition policies in Ireland, it turns out that political exchange there was instead much more demand-driven and mirroring a pluralist model of interest representation. Through their lobbying activities, the preferences of the Just Transition Alliance and the MRTT penetrated the Parliamentary discussion within the JOCCA, making it clear to policymakers that the climate policy reform, which most parties were already interested in implementing, would have been resisted if its social consequences were not properly addressed. The interactions between demand-side Just Transitioners and opposition parties – primarily the Green Party and then other left-wing parties – brought the demand of just transition policies centre stage in the parliamentary discussion. Compared to Spain, the Irish case points to a *demand-driven political exchange*, with influential organised societal groups successfully pressuring a consensus-seeking government to pay attention to the social dimension of climate policy reforms. However, the Irish case reveals a much more puzzling result if compared to the Spanish case. Irish JTPs were adopted by a single-party minority government led by centre-right *Fine Gael*, which is far from an eco-socialist party, and without making use of policy concertation. An important element to consider is that opposition parties and local TDs were essential for the Irish government to become receptive of demand-side pressures. More

in general, to fully explain the adoption of JTPs, one also has to consider other forms of political exchange, besides demand-supply interactive dynamics.

In Ireland, but also in Spain, instrumental for governments to adopt JTPs were also the strategic exchanges occurring *within* the supply side, generated through both competitive and multilevel partisan dynamics. On the one hand, in both countries, several parties across the political spectrum were competing to claim credit for climate policy reforms, in a context where climate change was gaining increasing electoral salience. On the other hand, local-regional representatives from coal-intensive territories played a key role in leading their national party colleagues to pay attention to the social consequences of decarbonisation. In Spain, partisan dynamics were a fundamental precondition for PSOE to endorse a just transition preference. This was the result of an internal informal and multilevel mediation between Green Progressivist members of the party, who gained increasing power over the years due to increasing partisan competition on environmental policies, and Social Conservatists members, traditionally representing working-class interests and coal-dependent constituencies. In Ireland, a twofold partisan pressure on the FG government to become a Just Transitioner was observed. On the one hand, once it was clear that a just transition consensus among all other opposition parties was found in the JOCCA, the government had an incentive to claim credit for such consensus through the Climate Action Plan. This incentive was strong especially because, at the time, the government relied on the external support of FF and GP, with later joined FG in a coalition government. A second important mechanism that led not only FG, but also the principal opposition party FF, to become Just Transitioners was a territorial pressure from the MRTT in the Midlands. Local members of both parties were heavily involved in the MRTT and they were instrumental in making their colleagues aware of the demands coming from this electorally-relevant region, ultimately creating a competitive incentive for both parties to meet this demand.

Summing up, despite the differences between the two countries under scrutiny, process tracing in both the Spanish and Irish cases revealed that what was minimally sufficient for the adoption of just transition policies (the main *explanandum*) was the emergence of a convergence between green interests (promoting decarbonisation) and labour interests (seeking to tackle its social costs) (*explanans*) either in the supply-side (the PSOE government in Spain) or in the demand-side (the Just Transition Alliance and MRTT in Ireland). In both cases, *political exchange* was the main mechanism that connected the formation of just transition preferences to the adoption of

JTPs. This exchange was supply-driven in Spain and demand-driven in Ireland, but, in both cases, it consisted in an interaction between supply- and demand-side actors, coupled with competitive and territorial partisan pressures. As predicted by a Most Different Systems Design, such explanatory factor and mechanism(s) were common in both countries, despite the considerable differences.

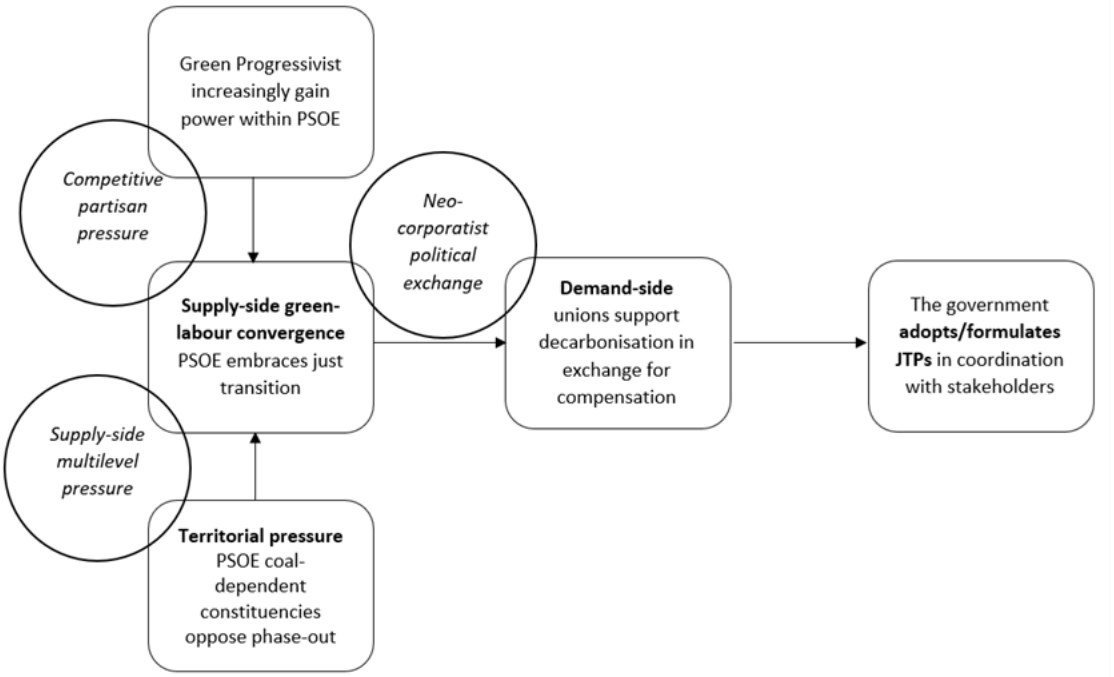


**Figure 6.1:** ***The emergence of just transition policies in Spain: supply-driven political exchange*** (source: author's own elaboration)

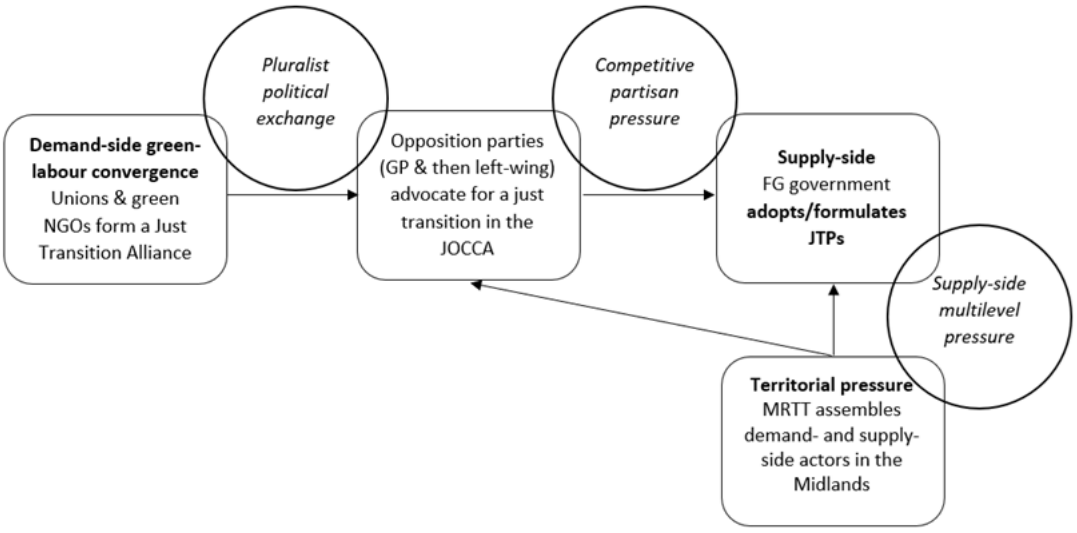


**Figure 6.2:** ***The emergence of just transition policies in Ireland: demand-driven political exchange*** (source: author's own elaboration)

Figures 6.1 and 6.2 briefly illustrate the process leading to the emergence of JTPs in Spain and Ireland respectively. Even though Spain and Ireland converged in the adoption of JTPs, a different story instead is the one that concerns the *formulation* of these policies, for which we can witness a divergence between the two cases. Investigating actors' preferences on the content that JTPs should have taken, it turns out that in Spain all relevant actors – with the obvious exception of those who were against JTPs in the first place – agreed on putting forward a just transition strategy with broad scope and scale; on mixing investment and protection instruments; and on having coordinated governance structures and procedures. Conversely, differences of opinion were detected among socio-political actors in Ireland, where the government's prevailing preference was not shared by other relevant actors, including notably the Just Transition Alliance, left-wing parties and, initially, also GP and FF (although the latter two parties have aligned with FG's preference since they joined the latter in a coalition government) – raising criticism on the government's formulation of JTPs.

All in all, one can explain the two countries' divergence in the content of JTPs by looking at which actors were attributed decision-making powers in the formulation of these policies. Simply put, in Ireland, while social groups and other opposition parties were influential in convincing the government to adopt JTPs, policy formulation depended exclusively on the executive alone,

which explains why Irish JTPs ultimately reflected *Fine Gael*'s understanding of just transition (and of social policies more in general): a narrow intervention by the state, where investment-oriented measures are strongly preferred and where governance structures do not attribute decision-making powers to stakeholders. Conversely, in Spain, JTPs were the result of a co-creation process, hence they were formulated *jointly* by the PSOE government and societal actors. For this reason, while several socio-political actors in Ireland have criticised the way in which JTPs were formulated, Spanish JTPs were met with a widespread societal and political praise. These patterns of policymaking reflect broader institutional differences that separate the two cases, particularly regarding their model of interest representation: Spain has a long history of tripartite concertation and neo-corporatist practices, while in Ireland the "social partnership" era has not survived the 2008 financial crisis and, hence, social dialogue is at best limited to pluralist consultation, with decisions taken in a top-down and often technocratic manner.

## 4. Theoretical implications for an underdeveloped field

Having discussed what specifically explains the two cases under investigation, we can now attempt to derive some theoretical reflections, linking the findings of the study to broader theoretical arguments in the welfare state literature. Indeed, the overarching goal of this empirical research was to generate an empirical theory of just transition policies: although, like for any small-N comparisons, the possibility of generalization remains limited, some factors might be expected to have causal power also in other contexts and, hence, their external validity might be tested through future research.

### *4.1. A Contribution to the theory of political exchange*

The evidence gathered from the two cases confirms that actors' *interests* were crucial to drive the emergence of just transition policies. Interest-based approaches in welfare studies put focus on elite actors that, through their power resources, supply or demand public policies, which benefit the interests of the societal groups that these elites claim to represent. An interest-based argument for the emergence of JTPs should go as follows: it is through the strategic pursuit of their own interests that socio-political actors are able to achieve a green-labour convergence. This convergence leads actors to promote just transition policy preferences. According to the interest-based expectation proposed in Chapter 3, if Just Transitioners acquire sufficient power resources – either because they are in government or because they are strong enough to

effectively put pressure on a government – then JTPs should be automatically adopted. However, in both the cases under investigation, the mechanism underlying green-labour convergences and the adoption of JTPs was slightly different. It consisted in a political exchange, supply-driven in Spain and demand-driven in Ireland.

In the original definition by Pizzorno (1977), political exchange occurs whenever governmental parties need consensus and organized interests (primarily trade unions, in Pizzorno's framework) seek to influence a governmental decision. The concept has since been widened to indicate forms of inter-organisational policymaking that permit conflicting interests to agree on a consensual policy output even when strong institutions enabling concertation are lacking (Molina, 2006). According to Stoppino (2001), political exchange describes a situation in which supply-side parties compete to acquire or maintain the political support of demand-side societal groups, which, in turn, provide such support in exchange for some policy outputs that meet their interest. In this sense, rather than being constrained by the fixed interests of their social base, both demand- and supply-side actors act by following a *strategic* logic, trading their power resources to achieve their goals (Molina, 2006). This argument has been used by Natili (2019) to show that political exchanges between supply and demand-side actors are crucial for the introduction and institutionalization of social policies, such as minimum income schemes.

This argument can be extended also to account for the strategic exchanges occurring within the supply side of the political sphere. The partisanship literature does not commonly refer to the concept of political exchange, but it similarly highlights that parties' behaviours might be driven by their strategic incentives, which can slightly modify their initial interests and make elites partially autonomous from their societal bases (Häusermann et al., 2013). In particular, theories on partisan competition argue that actors' interests evolve within the context in which they are expressed. This entails taking into account a party's position and their relative strength within the overall party system (Häusermann et al., 2013). In certain contexts, competition can even lead parties to support policies that they would have normally not been expected to support, for instance if they follow a credit-claiming or blame-avoidance logic (Bonoli, 2012; Natili, 2019).

Therefore, political exchange builds on and modifies the assumptions of interest-based actor-centred theories. In the classical power resource theory, when a societal group promoting a certain interest gains power – either through a political party or an organized interest group – then it should automatically be able to transform its preferences into public policies. Political

exchange instead allows us to account for the dynamic evolution of socio-political actors' preferences, which can ultimately transform in a way that is still coherent with their initial baseline interests. Differently than what is predicted by Korpi's theory, preferences evolution may occur at the "elite" level, as a result of strategic interactions within and between the demand and supply sides of the political sphere. In this sense, actors' preferences are not necessarily fixed, but they can rather develop whenever political parties and/or interest groups have overlapping strategic incentives to engage in political exchanges, hence whenever actors' power resources are not sufficient by themselves to realise their political aims.

In our cases, a green-labour convergence was achieved through political exchanges between some Green Progressivists looking for political support to get an environmental reform approved and some Socio-economic Conservatists threatened by the possible social risks deriving from this reform. The mechanisms of exchange allowing the two interests to converge into a shared just transition preference were twofold. First, between the supply and demand sides, trade unions with green organizations and other local stakeholders, traded their support to climate policies in exchange for economic compensation. This occurred through concertation in Spain and lobbying in Ireland. Second, within the supply-side, political exchange took the form of both issue competition between different parties, aiming to claim credit for a climate policy reform, and of intra-party territorial pressures from local members of governmental parties making their political support conditional on economic compensation.

Although, as predicted, interests are the basis behind the formation of socio-political actors' preferences, our findings overcome the principal limit of interest-based approaches, which is the assumption that actors' preferences are always a linear function of the societal/electoral interests that they represent. The political exchange argument sheds light on a more complex process of preference formation than the one envisaged by the power resources theory. On the supply-side, different interests can co-exist within the same party, especially at different levels (national or local). Moreover, party competition especially on relatively-new issues, like climate change, makes it so that different parties - from the left to the right side of the political spectrum – may compete to represent the same interest. The end result is a hybridization of political parties, which makes it difficult to assume parties' preferences a priori. PSOE is a clear example of a party that should be normally regarded as "old left", but, on climate policy, has rather acted like a "new left" party, primarily due to competitive pressures to capture the "green vote". Also non-linear are the preferences of demand-side actors. Labour environmentalism shows that,

even when they expect to face high social risks, trade unions often refrain from opposing the fight against climate change. The Spanish and Irish cases demonstrate that for trade unions to abandon social conservatist preferences, political exchange was crucial. However, as discussed below, the discursive diffusion of the just transition idea was also equally important in contributing to shift actors' preferences.

In an interest-based perspective, a crucial importance is given to actors' power resources. Adopting a political exchange approach means taking into account the context in which power resources are distributed, which is often understated in interest-based theories. Both in Spain and in Ireland, existing institutional characteristics provided similar power resources to actors representing green and labour interests in the partisan arena. While the two countries were traditionally regarded as having vastly different party systems, recently, they came closer to one another, through the entry of new parties (fragmentation) and the increase in partisan issue competition (polarization). This has resulted, first, in single-issue green parties or new left parties gaining more electoral ground; and, second, in an increasing partisan competition to appeal to green voters. As a result, both green parties and environmentalists within left-wing parties have gained more power resources in the two countries. It should be noted, while talking about the transformation of the party systems, that in Ireland far-right parties have never managed to gain significant electoral representation, whereas in Spain the advent of anti-green *Vox* might soon induce centre-right PP to take on more conservative stances on climate policies.

While recent trends in party systems changes have similarly impacted the distribution of actors' power resources in Ireland and Spain, differences in the institutional settings for interest representation had an impact on the different formulation of JTPs in the two countries. The preferences that counted the most to determine the content of JTPs in the two cases were those of governmental actors, unless some institutional structures gave power to other non-governmental actors in the formulation phase of policymaking. In particular, the heritage of neo-corporatism in Spain – present in both social and environmental policymaking – has given trade unions relatively high political power if compared to their organizational power, weakened over the years due to decreasing unionisation. Conversely, in Ireland, neo-corporatist structures are not alive anymore and the government does not even sporadically resort to concertation, which explains why social partners were not able to have a say in the formulation of the content of JTPs. The remnants of the "social partnership"– notably including the National Economic and Social Council – merely allowed social partners to provide recommendations to the government.

### *4.2. Other relevant factors: functional pressures, institutional opportunities and ideas*

Although interests are found to be the main determinants of JTPs emergence – through their influence on the formation of actors' policy preferences – a question should be raised about the potential explanatory power of other explanatory factors. Building on the discussion presented in Chapter 3, the mainstream theories of the welfare state point to both structural and agency-level explanations. Starting from the structural level, functionalist theories predict that exogenous changes in socio-economic factors might create social risks exerting a problem pressure that provokes a policy reaction. Historical institutionalism instead concentrates on endogenous structures and, in particular, on the role of institutions in setting in stone a certain policy paradigm and in blocking attempts to divert from such a paradigm. Following both a functionalist and a historical institutionalist argument, we could expect that eco-social policies and, even more so, just transition policies, would be affected by the strength of both the environmental and the welfare state. On the one hand, an increase in the strength of the environmental state – for instance through a reform that promotes decarbonisation – generates new social risks and problem pressure, on the other hand, if the welfare state cannot effectively respond to such risk, a policy gap or gate will open, creating an opportunity for the emergence of new policies.

As argued theoretically in Chapter 3, while functional pressures and institutional opportunities can be seen as *necessary* drivers for just transition policies to emerge, if these structural conditions are not politicized through the actions of relevant interest groups and political parties, then we cannot reasonably expect public policies to automatically emerge from structural inputs. Thus, structural theories cannot provide sufficient arguments to explain the emergence of JTPs. Indeed, as shown in Chapter 2, the analysis of NECPs across Europe reveals that 20 out of 27 EU Member States at least partially expect decarbonisation to bring about some kind of negative consequences, but only half of them have put forward some (often partial) JTPs to respond to such consequences. Moreover, the countries that have adopted JTPs, including Ireland and Spain, have vastly different welfare models, making it difficult to establish a clear connection between welfare regimes and the formation of institutional gaps and gates leading to the emergence of JTPs. Finally, structural arguments only partially help us interpret differences in the formulation of JTPs. For instance, looking merely at socio-economic conditions does not permit us to explain why JTPs in Spain have gone beyond the most urgent functional pressures of the coal mining sector, so as to address also the power sector and possibly other

sectors in the following years, while in Ireland these policies have remained focused on peat-harvesting alone. This said, however, structural and contextual variables have an important place in both the Spanish and the Irish just transition policy trajectories.

Functionalism could give us some hints on why Spain and Ireland were among the very few frontrunners in just transition policies in Europe. In both countries, since the 2016 Paris Agreement and the consequent growth in EU's climate policy efforts, the political salience of global warming and decarbonisation has grown considerably, putting particular pressure on carbon-intensive economic sectors. In the late 2010s, when JTPs were put forward, both peat in Ireland and coal in Spain had been declining sectors employing increasingly fewer workers for decades, with Spanish coal arguably being able to survive in the market only through continuous state aids. Thus, the mere perspective of decarbonisation represented an immediate threat for both sectors, generating social risks for redundant workers and their communities, which were heavily economically (but also culturally) dependent on the extractive sector. Even though problem pressure from the social risks of decarbonisation can be found in nearly all EU countries, in Ireland and Spain it had peculiar characteristics, which perhaps made it politically feasible to address it. First, the peat and coal sectors in these two countries were arguably not strong enough to credibly resist a phase-out, which is why Spanish and Irish energy companies supported decarbonisation. Second, while the acceleration of phase-out created urgent risks for some social groups, these were concentrated enough for the state to be able to respond to them without incurring in substantially high economic costs. We may instead hypothesize that it would be more unlikely to find JTPs in countries like Poland, where finding an alternative to fossil fuels and compensating for an eventual phase-out would represent a much heavier public effort. However, more research would be needed to understand why countries do *not* adopt JTPs, as well as to observe the (eventual) causal role of problem pressure.

Turning to an historical institutionalist perspective, while social policies to address novel eco-social risks were missing in Ireland, in Spain the state had actually been giving social aid to coal miners for decades. Nevertheless, these aids were insufficient to respond to new challenges and, more importantly, unfit for decarbonisation, given that they were designed to the opposite end, i.e. sustaining the coal sector. Therefore, industrial decarbonisation gave rise to an institutional *gap* in Ireland and an institutional *gate* in Spain, arguably creating in both countries novel opportunities for policymakers to exploit in order to respond to new eco-risks. Moreover, path dependence might partially contribute to explain the formulation of the governance and

instrument components of JTPs: Ireland, mirroring the residual rationale of its Liberal welfare model and its pluralist tradition of interest representation, adopted investment-oriented and concentrated JTPs, whereas Spain, whose welfare state is fragmented and attached to a neo-corporatist tradition, has opted for a mix of active and passive instruments and for a participated governance.

Besides interest-based arguments, another possible actor-centred explanation of the emergence of JTPs might focus on ideas. Ideas-based approaches in the welfare state literature typically highlight the power of ideas, diffused through the discourses of domestic and/or international entrepreneurs, in forming advocacy coalitions that ultimately drive policy change. In the context of this study, the just transition narrative can be expected to provide a polysemic concept that permits a wide set of actors to coalesce around it. Undoubtedly, ideas had an important role in both cases under scrutiny. At the time when JTPs were adopted in Ireland and Spain, a just transition discourse had been already circulating among key domestic socio-political actors of both countries for a few years. In both countries, the discursive diffusion of this idea was promoted initially by national trade unionists, which imported this narrative at the domestic level from the work of international and European trade union confederations. Trade unions were prominent actors in the framing of just transition policies in both countries: not only the "just transition" label comes from the labour movement, as reported in Chapter 1, but the importance given to employment and social dialogue are clear signs of how unions were able to shape this narrative. The just transition idea was a fundamental glue for the constitution of the Just Transition Alliance in Ireland, as well as the baseline of unions and green NGOs' joint demands in Spain. This narrative was also diffused in the fossil-fuel-intensive regions Asturias and the Midlands, which were both part of the EU's Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition, advocating for a just transition from the supranational level. A just transition discourse was also embraced by left-wing and green parties in the two countries. Ultimately, as expected in Chapter 3, this narrative was indeed framed in a way that was vague enough for a wide set of actors to endorse it, creating a broad advocacy coalition, going from far-left political parties, like *Unidas Podemos* and People Before Profits, to large energy companies, like Endesa and ESB.

Despite the importance of just transition discourses in the two cases, ideas-based approaches present some notable limitations. The diffusion of a just transition narrative from European-international to domestic political circuits might indeed have induced different actors to adopt a convergent policy preference, but this is not necessarily the case. As shown in Chapter 2, some

countries have adopted JTPs that do not mention the just transition concept, while others profess themselves as committed to a just transition, but have not put forward any JTPs. Turning to the two cases analysed here, empirical evidence demonstrates that the diffusion of a just transition discourse, although important, was not *sufficient* in itself for the adoption, nor formulation of JTPs. In Spain, trade unions at the national level, and especially CCOO, had embraced surprisingly-advanced ecological views for a long time, if compared to workers' confederations in other EU countries. While Spanish unions were strong promoters of a just transition narrative – arguably also influencing PSOE to adopt it – before 2018 they still retained a Socio-economic Conservatist position on coal phase-out until the government engaged with them in a political exchange, promising targeted economic compensation. Moreover, also within PSOE, the just transition idea was far from a coalition magnet and it was rather initially met with hesitance by Socialists from the coal regions, which were convinced to discursively become Just Transitioners only insofar as their material interests were first secured.

As recognised by several interviewees, in the Irish case, the diffusion of the just transition narrative appears to have played a more crucial role. In particular, this narrative was fundamental in the formation of the green-labour alliance on the demand side of the political arena, which was the first mover in the policymaking process behind JTPs. Without Irish unionists and NGOs representatives importing the just transition idea from the international-European debate, there would likely have been no incentive for the formation of the Just Transition Alliance. Nevertheless, by inducing demand-side actors to form a green-labour alliance, the diffusion of the just transition narrative in Ireland was only sufficient to influence the agenda-setting phase of policymaking, hence to give salience to the social implications of decarbonisation. Instead, when it came to policy adoption and formulation, what ultimately led the Irish government to adopt JTPs was *Fine Gael*'s interest-based calculus, entailing, first, a competitive race with other political parties to claim credit for a climate policy reform and, second, a political pressure from FG and FF (externally supporting the government) affiliates from the Midlands. In absence of this twofold pressure on the government, we could hypothesise that *Fine Gael* would have likely had no incentive to endorse the just transition narrative promoted by demand-side groups. This said, however, the fact that the just transition concept is vague enough not to jeopardize FG's core demands, surely also facilitated the party in standing behind it. More in general, while not minimally sufficient, ideas might have instead been necessary drivers in shaping the preferences of relevant socio-political actors in Spain and

Ireland. Finally, as exemplified by Irish socio-political actors' strong disagreements about JTPs formulation, precisely in light of its vagueness, the same just transition idea can correspond to different preferences about the specific content of JTPs, making it difficult to establish a link between the diffusion of this narrative and the formulation of JTPs.

Figure 6.3 illustrates the inductively-derived argument to explain the emergence of just transition policies from an actor-centred and interest-based perspective. The Figure also points out the links with other possible important causal drivers derived deductively from welfare state theories.

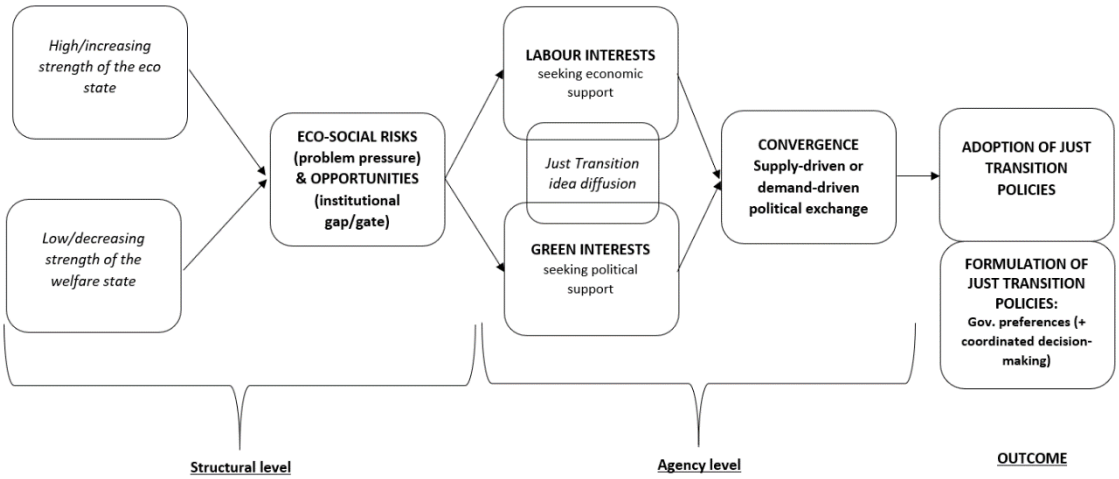


**Figure 6.3:** ***An empirical political theory of just transition*** (source: author's own elaboration)

# Conclusions

The long journey that brought this dissertation to life started over three years ago, when climate change arguably still seemed to be a distant problem, which was just starting to attract significant political attention. A few pioneer studies back then were beginning to advocate for the redesign of Western welfare systems towards a "sustainable welfare", guaranteeing well-being within planetary boundaries through a new type of integrated public policies, labelled eco-social policies. At the same time, the advent of the European Green Deal in 2019 signified not only an acceleration in the EU's fight against climate change towards decarbonisation, but also an unprecedented attention to the new wave of social risks connected to decarbonisation, which, in turn, was connected to the quick and wide diffusion of the just transition approach in Europe. Nearly four years have now passed and the number of studies and policy initiatives in this new field have multiplied at an impressive speed, whereas the disruptive effects of global warming are more and more strikingly showing that we are not doing nearly enough. In spite of the growing urgency and salience of the problem, welfare state and climate sciences still seem to be two worlds apart, as we arguably know very little about how European welfare states are adapting to this epochal challenge. Navigating a largely-unexplored field, the present study contributes to the emerging sustainable welfare and just transition literatures, attempting to systematically bring focus on the so-far largely underdeveloped empirical-political perspective. In a nutshell, this thesis is about policy changes and political agency during the climate crisis era and it should provide some hints on what is politically at stake for the European welfare model.

Sustainable welfare presents eco-social policies as suitable tools to address the intricate intertwinement between environmental and welfare challenges and policies. A particular type of eco-social policies is recently emerging in the face of the growing social risks of decarbonisation: just transition policies. The emergence of these just transition policies is the object of this research and it comprises both a focus on the *adoption* of such policies, hence on the process that leads to their introduction, and on their *formulation*, hence on the specific content that they take. Against the existing knowledge gaps, the study has aimed to i) define and classify eco-social and just transition policies; ii) empirically map and describe just transition policies in EU countries; iii) reconstruct the political process that led to the emergence of these policies in Spain and Ireland, selected as case studies; iv) generate tentative theoretical

suggestions on the politics of just transition policies, building inductively from the comparison between the two cases and deductively from established welfare theories. Two were the overarching research questions that this thesis has attempted to respond to:

- RQ1: which EU countries have adopted just transition policies? what is the content of existing just transition policies?
- RQ2: what explains the adoption of just transition policies? what explains their content formulation?

The study has led to various notable findings, first, for policy analysis, on the diffusion and content of just transition policies (RQ1); and second, on the politics behind their emergence and on theoretical implications (RQ2).

With respect to *policy*-relevant contributions (RQ1), in order to avoid the normativity of existing studies, this thesis has argued that an output-based definition of eco-social policies and of just transition policies, with policy integration as the core defining element, should be preferred. It has also proposed a new analytical framework to classify just transition policies, distinguishing broad from narrow strategies, protection- from investment-oriented instruments and participated from concentrated governance. Mapping just transition policies across the European Union, it turns out that these are still relatively scarce, since seventeen out of twenty-seven member states still have proposed no measures to address the social implications of decarbonisation. Moreover, looking at the Spanish-Irish comparison, it is clear that policy formulation can result in different policy contents: Ireland adopted a narrow, strictly investment-oriented and concentrated (although with inclusive consultation) model of just transition policies, while Spain has relied on a broader approach, with participated governance and a mix of investment and protection elements. If Ireland's formulation of just transition policies resembles the prevalent view promoted by the European Union and by few other Member States, Spain was instead able to promote an arguably more unique and slightly transformative approach.

With respect to the *political-theoretical* dimension of just transition policies (RQ2), the comparison between Spain and Ireland shows that the adoption of these policies resulted from convergence between actors representing green and labour interests. This convergence was supply-driven in Spain, with a government embracing a just transition preference, and demand-

driven in Ireland, where a green-labour advocacy coalition formed within the constellation of relevant interest groups. In both cases, this convergence was accompanied by processes of political exchange. This entailed, first, an interaction between supply-side parties in search for political support and demand-side actors representing societal groups at-risk from decarbonisation; and, second, a twofold competitive and multilevel pressure on governmental parties to embrace just transition. The content formulation of just transition policies instead depended primarily on the preferences of the ruling government, unless neo-corporatist institutions attributed decision-making powers to other actors – typically social partners – which is what happened in the Spanish case. The main theoretical takeaway from this empirical study is that actors' interest-based strategic interactions can provide a minimally-sufficient explanation of the emergence of just transition policies, since they are found to influence the evolution of actors' preferences. However, other factors should also be taken into account in the construction of a comprehensive political theory of just transition policies, including the strengths of the environmental and welfare states in respectively generating and adequately responding to new eco-social risks, as well as the discursive diffusion of the just transition idea as a key source of coalition-building.

More research would be needed to reinforce the theoretical claims of this explorative study. Studying other cases could help us testing whether a green-labour convergence has been a sufficient condition for the adoption of JTPs also in other countries or contexts. Moreover, comparing Spain and/or Ireland to some negative cases – for instance by adopting a Most Similar Systems Design and selecting cases where JTPs were *not* adopted – could allow us to generalize the arguments, identifying both sufficient and necessary conditions. Furthermore, while the mapping exercise conducted in Chapter 2 revealed that just transition policies were rarely diffused at the time when the NECPs came out, one could expect that more countries have put forward JTPs since the publication of the NECPs, especially considering the increasing pressure from the EU to pay attention to this policy area. Thus, new cases worth investigating might have emerged in Europe, while it would also be important to study JTPs in non-European countries. Moreover, a greater focus could also be placed on supranational and subnational policies and political dynamics. Finally, it would be crucial to check whether the theoretical argument proposed here can apply also to other types of eco-social policies, or whether instead different political dynamics would emerge. For instance, we could expect a completely different politics when eco-social policies are designed to "greening" the welfare state – differently than JTPs,

which integrate a social dimension into climate policies – like in the cases of green social housing or green pension funds. Thus, much more research needs to be conducted to generalize and understand the nuances of the argument hereby proposed.

In conclusion, a question still remains about what lessons can be learnt from existing just transition experiences to speculate about the possible pathways of evolution for sustainable welfare in Europe. Arguably, a green-labour convergence can be predicted to be a sufficient condition for *any* type of eco-social policy to emerge. However, the evidence collected by this research leads us to argue that, at least for the two cases under investigation, the politics of just transition policies is consensual in nature. Either consensus is already present since the start, like in Ireland, where no major socio-political actor ever really opposed the adoption of just transition policies, or actors pursue a consensus-seeking and conflict-avoiding political strategy, striving to convince key adversarial actors to join their just transition agenda. Indeed, a very indicative piece of evidence from the two cases was that large energy companies did not oppose, but were actually indifferent or even in favour of JTPs, since they saw these as solutions that would not have jeopardized their core interests. This peculiar kind of policymaking has major normative implications for researchers to consider when studying the politics of eco-social policies. Indeed, one could argue that consensual policymaking, although potentially effective to avoid the possible distributional conflicts that could arise from climate change and the green transition, could also lead us to watered-down policy solutions, that might ultimately result in delayed decarbonisation and/or in significant social costs. Indeed, just transition is starting to raise some eyebrows, since it is often criticised as insufficient from a social perspective or even dangerous from an ecological perspective, given that this approach is increasingly evoked to slow down climate mitigation, in the name (supposedly) of social justice.

The consensual pattern of decision-making that was instrumental for the adoption of just transition policies in Spain and Ireland might hinder the possibility to propose more radical solutions to respond to eco-social risks, for instance through post-growth policies. Increasing scientific evidence about the climate crisis indicates that, in order to effectively respond to this crisis in an equitable manner, much more transformative solutions would be needed, which would inevitably lead us to question the foundations of the current economic model based on infinite production (and consumption) growth. More radical eco-social policies, if compared to the ones put forward in Spain and Ireland, would likely represent a substantial threat to entrenched economic interests and, hence, they would probably awaken much more conflictual

political dynamics. Therefore, for more transformative eco-social policies to emerge, green and labour interests should probably converge towards more conflictual preferences, going against powerful economic interests in order to break the growth-dependence of modern European democracies and to safeguard the original transformative nature of the just transition approach. The political prospects for such post-growth eco-social policies to emerge are all left to be investigated. The hope is that, a deeper understanding of existing policies and practices, which this research aspires to advance, could inspire a broadening of our collective imagination to politically shape a just and sustainable future.

# LIST OF REFERENCES[41]

**I. LIST OF INTERVIEWS & OTHER SOURCES FROM THE FIELDWORK**

**Semi-structured interviews - Ireland**

IE1 – Former Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment – Fine Gael (FG) – March 31 2021 – Written answers by email.

IE2 – Campaigner – Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) – April 15 2021 – Teams online interview

IE3 – Policy Analyst – National Economic and Social Council (NESC) – April 19 2021 – Zoom online interview.

IE4 – Advisor – Secretariat of the EU Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition – April 21 2021 – Skype online Interview.

IE5 – Former Advisor – Green Party (GP) – May 10 2021 – Skype online interview.

IE6 – Former Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment – Fine Gael (FG) – May 6 2022 – Written answers by email.

IE7 – Local activist from the Midlands (Rathanag) – May 10 2022 – Skype Online Interview.

IE8 – Former Officer – Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment (DCCAE) – May 11 2022 – Zoom online interview.

IE9 – Teachtaí Dála (TD) – Labour Party (LP) – May 11 2022 – Written answers by email.

IE10 – Teachtaí Dála (TD) – People Before Profit (PBF) – May 12 2022 – Teams online Interview

[41] All the links reported in the List of References have been last accessed in March 2023.

IE11 – Campaigner – Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) – May 16 2022 – Teams online interview

IE12 – Officer – Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DCCAE) – May 19 2022 – Teams online interview.

IE13 – Two Members of the Just Transition Greens from the Green party (GP) – May 25 2022 – Belfast, United Kingdom.

IE14 – Climate Activist and Former Advisor – Independents for Change – May 26 2022 – Teams online interview.

IE15 – Head of Policy – Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) – May 30 2022 – Teams online interview.

IE16 – Programme Manager – Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan – May 31 2022 – Teams online interview.

IE17 – Policy Analyst – National Economic and Social Council (NESC) – June 2 2022 – Teams online interview.

IE18 – Researcher – Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) – June 8 2022 – Teams online interview.

IE19 – Officer – Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage – June 20 2022 – Teams online interview.

IE20 – Head of Policy and Former Advisor – Friends of the Earth Ireland and Fianna Fáil – December 14 2022 – Teams online interview.

**Semi-structured interviews - Spain**

ES1 – Collaborator – Just Transition Institute (JTI) – April 6 2021 – Skype online interview.

ES2 – Former Director – International Labour Organization (ILO) office for Spain – April 9 2021 – Zoom online interview.

ES3 – Just Transition Advisor – Just Transition Institute (JTI) – July 18 2022 – Teams online interview.

ES4 – Former Senior Advisor – State Secretary for Energy in the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO) – July 19 2022 – Teams online interview

ES5 – Confederal Secretary in the area of the ecological transition – *Comisiones Obreras* (CCOO) – July 29 2022 – Teams online interview.

ES6 – Former Member of the Congress and spokesperson in the Energy Committee – *Unidas Podemos* (UP) – August 17 2022 – Teams online interview.

ES7 – Associate Director for Just Transition and Global Alliances – ECODES – September 2 2022 – Teams online interview.

ES8 – Technical and Project Coordinator – Fundación Asturiana de la Energía (FAEN) – September 6 2022 – Teams online interview.

ES9 – Former Director – International Labour Organization (ILO) office for Spain – September 7 2022 – Teams online interview.

ES10 – Member of the Madrid City Assembly – Más Madrid – September 9 2022 – Teams online interview.

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ES12 – Campaign Coordinator on Climate Change and Fossil Fuels – Greenpeace Spain – October 10 2022 – Teams online interview.

ES13 – Climate activist and researcher of socio-ecological transitions – October 17 2022 – Teams online interview.

ES14 – Senior researcher – Basque Centre for Climate Change – October 18 2022 – Teams online interview.

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ES18 – Technical Secretary General – Municipios en Transición Justa (ACOM) – December 20 2022.

**Other relevant sources from the fieldwork**

- Experts interviewed informally on the Irish case**:** Patrick Bresnihan; Fiona Dukelow; Peadar Kirby; Conor Little; Vincenzo Maccarrone; Mary P. Murphy; Aidan Regan; Diarmuid Torney.
- Experts interviewed informally on the Spanish case: Ángel Alonso-Domínguez; Roberto Barrella; Pablo Bustinduy; Ana Marta Guillén; Margarita León; Oscar Molina Romo; Alexia Sanz-Hernández.
- List of participated experiences:
    - "Just a Just Transition", April 22 2022, hybrid event organised by the Cloughjordan Ecovillage (Ireland);
    - "The Case for Eco-socialist Degrowth", May 5 2022, public event organised by Rise, Dublin (Ireland);
    - "Just Transition", June 6 2022, (hybrid) Extraordinary meeting of the Bureau of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, organised by the European Economic and Social Committee, Tullamore (Ireland);

- “Third Annual Political Dialogue of the EU initiative for coal regions in transition”, July 7 2022, hybrid event organised by the EU Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition, Oviedo (Spain);
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# Annex A – Just transition policies in the NECPs[42]

**AUSTRIA (AT)[43]**

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Trade-offs recognized*** | Employment impacts are recognised but not assessed. Impacts in construction, transport and power generation and supply are expected to be positive; the effect in manufacturing is more ambiguous. |
| ***Strategy component*** | – |
| ***Instrument component*** | There is a very generalised commitment to improve training for professionals and to include climate protection in learning curricula and technical training programmes. |
| ***Governance component*** | – |

[42] Parts of this Annex have been published by the author and, hence, the Annex heavily draws on the following source: Mandelli, 2022b.

[43] Sources: Government of Austria (2019) and European Commission (2020-AT).

**BELGIUM (BE)[44]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | Employment impacts are recognised, but not assessed.<br><br>The overall employment impact is said to be positive (in Wallonia and Flanders), with some possible negative downturns for specific territories, sectors and social categories (in Wallonia). A positive impact on employment is expected in the building sector (in Flanders), but a negative impact in the energy and transport sectors (in Wallonia). |
| **Strategy component** | – |
| **Instrument component** | There is a commitment to address skills-related aspects of several policies (through vocational training, support to jobseekers and climate-related education, especially for new sectors) through an 'Employment-Environment-Finance' Alliance.<br><br>Moreover, the NECP states that a register of 'at-risk jobs' in all sectors will be created as part of the transition to a low-carbon economy and this will be analysed in the context of training and retraining needs. |
| **Governance component** | – |

[44] Sources: Government of Belgium (2019a; 2019b) and European Commission (2020-BE).

**BULGARIA (BG)**[45]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | Both positive and negative employment and skills impacts are recognised but not assessed. Negative employment impacts are expected in coal mining and energy-intensive industries. |
| **Strategy component** | – |
| **Instrument component** | There is a commitment to use EU instruments for carbon-intensive regions, both financial (EU funds) and non-financial (opportunity to join Coal Regions in Transition).<br><br>There is a generalised commitment to improve digital skills for a socially-oriented transition. |
| **Governance component** | – |

[45] Sources: Government of Bulgaria (2019) and European Commission (2020-BG).

**CYPRUS (CY)[46]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment effects of decarbonisation are recognised and assessed. There is no consideration for skills. Positive employment impacts are expected mainly in the energy and regeneration sectors, but negative (albeit marginal) ones in the fossil fuel sector. |
| **Strategy component** | – |
| **Instrument component** | The opportunity to use the EU Just Transition Mechanism to support the most severely impacted territories and sectors is mentioned.<br><br>There is a commitment to 'Developing New Skills and Enhancing/Upgrading Existing Skills' as one of the pillars of the New Industrial Policy for 2019-2030. This is, however, not explicitly related to green jobs. |
| **Governance component** | – |

[46] Sources: Government of Cyprus (2020) and European Commission (2020-CY).

**CZECHIA (CZ)[47]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The negative employment impacts of decarbonisation are partially recognised, mostly in the lignite mining sector. |
| **Strategy component** | The RESTART Programme (2015) is described in the NECP as a 'comprehensive framework for the restructuring of the Ústí, Moravian-Silesian and Karlovy Vary regions, which should contribute to the fair transformation of coal regions'. There are no specific instruments related to the Programme, which is a strategic framework, setting the government's long-term objectives, and providing for region-specific and periodic Action Plans. The Programme sets goals for the restructuring of the lignite sector, including 'Social Stabilisation'. |
| **Instrument component** | A 1992 plan to end coal mining in uneconomic underground mines and quarries is mentioned. This is meant to cover the social costs of phasing out mining activities (e.g. health benefits for miners) for workers and communities in lignite regions.<br><br>There are government-approved periodic territorial development action plans to implement the RESTART Programme in the Ústí, Moravian-Silesian and Karlovy Vary regions, as well as financial envelopes attached to them.<br><br>Three regions are involved in the EU Platform for Coal Regions in Transition.<br><br>There is a cross-cutting target on education, training and awareness-raising in the National Action Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change. |
| **Governance component** | A Coal Commission was established in 2019, chaired by the Minister of Industry and Trade together with the Minister of the Environment with the aim of (i) 'assessing the future needs of lignite' and (ii) analysing 'the possibilities of future diversion from coal'. The Coal Commission and its three working groups are composed of 19 members, including ministries and offices, trade unions, industrial associations, non-profit organisations, regions, the Chamber of Deputies and academics. |

[47] Sources: Government of Czechia (2019) and European Commission (2020-CZ).

**GERMANY (DE)[48]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment and skills impacts of decarbonisation are recognised and partially assessed. The net employment impact is expected to be positive (with 185 000 more jobs in 2030), with skills impacts being negative, as there will be a shortage of skills in sectors undergoing the transition, especially the technical and construction sectors. The employment impacts are said to be negative in the energy, automotive and transport sectors. |
| **Strategy component** | The Final Report of the Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment encompass recommendations on how to phase out coal-fired power generation by 2038 in a socially responsible manner. When the final NECP came out, the German Federal Cabinet was in the process of converting the recommendations into a bill. A just transition is not explicitly mentioned in the NECP. |
| **Instrument component** | There are financial policy instruments for workers of hard-coal mining sectors and coal region communities:<br>– 'Granting of transition monies to workers employed in the hard-coal mining sector' until 2027, i.e. 'subsidies for the early retirement of employees leaving the hard-coal mining industry', provided in the context of the arrangements for ending hard-coal mining;<br>– Structural Development Act for the Coal Regions (2019) to channel funds to regions affected by the phasing-out of coal-fired power generation;<br>– Attention to training and consumer awareness, but no specific measure;<br>– Acknowledged opportunity to use the resources of the EU Just Transition Fund. |
| **Governance component** | The Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment was established in 2018 by the government. It comprised several stakeholders and it was tasked with formulating recommendations on German energy policies, mainly on the coal phase-out. |

[48] Sources: Government of Germany (2020) and European Commission (2020-DE).

**DENMARK (DK)[49]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment and skills impacts of decarbonisation are recognised but not assessed, beyond the energy sector. They are seen as positive, provided that the government duly intervenes. |
| **Strategy component** | Fairness, justice and equality are mentioned in general terms in the NECP as objectives of the government in the energy transition, but there is no indication as to whether or how the government has translated these objectives into actual policies. |
| **Instrument component** | Existing policies address the educational and skills impacts of the transition through changes in study programmes in education and an initiative to improve skills in the building sector. |
| **Governance component** | – |

[49] Sources: Government of Denmark (2019) and European Commission (2020-DK).

**ESTONIA (EE)[50]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impacts of decarbonisation are recognised but not assessed. Different sectors are said to be experiencing different impacts: agriculture, transport, heating and building, and energy (oil shale mining) sectors. |
| **Strategy component** | The government states in the NECP that the country has signed the 2018 Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration and the NECP contains a commitment to supplement existing plans for the Ida-Virumaa County (where oil shale mining is concentrated) with just transition measures, for instance to re-employ redundant workers in green jobs. |
| **Instrument component** | There is a generic commitment to provide in-service training to employees.<br><br>The EU Just Transition Fund is mentioned as a possible tool to assist impacted regions. |
| **Governance component** | There were NECP-related discussions on the topic of a just transition and low-carbon technologies with 60 participants at the Ministry of the Environment on 18 October 2019. No permanent governance structure followed, nor does the NECP specifies which actors have been consulted. |

[50] Sources: Government of Estonia (2019) and European Commission (2020-EE).

**GREECE (EL)**[51]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impacts of decarbonisation are partially recognised and assessed as generally positive, especially in the renewables and energy efficiency sectors, but with some negative downturns for other sectors (mainly lignite). The skills impacts are recognised but not assessed. |
| **Strategy component** | The 'Just Development Transition Master Plan' (2020) is described as an 'integrated, multi-faceted and front-loaded' plan with financial and non-financial initiatives for workers and communities of lignite-dependent territories experiencing phase-out (Western Macedonia and Megalopolis), including: 'investment and tax incentives, new infrastructures, new technologies, utilising local natural resources, supporting agricultural production and tourism, retraining workers, securing existing jobs and creating new ones through flexible developmental transformation and through growth in all production sectors'. |
| **Instrument component** | To implement the above-mentioned strategy, the NECP cites the following initiatives: EU Just Transition Fund and other European funds; a National Fund channelling funds to lignite regions from the revenue from the auctioning of Emissions Trading Scheme allowances (albeit reduced); and several training initiatives (e.g. incentives for businesses to retrain their employees in the single-use plastic sector).<br><br>The 'LIFE-IP AdaptInGR – Boosting the implementation of adaptation policy across Greece' project is expected to provide education and training for the human resources of the bodies responsible for implementing climate change adaptation actions and policies. |
| **Governance component** | There is an Interministerial Committee (December 2019) coordinating and laying down the priorities for the Master Plan and there were coordinated procedures for drafting the Master Plan, open to local communities (regions, municipalities, chambers) and other stakeholders. |

[51] Sources: Government of Greece (2019) and European Commission (2020-EL).

**SPAIN (ES)[52]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment and distributional impacts are recognised and assessed: a net increase in employment (+1.7% in 2030) is expected through investments in renewables, efficiency and networks. This positive employment impact will affect especially industries like trade and repair, manufacturing and construction, but also the service sector and electricity.<br><br>The only negative employment impact foreseen is related to disinvestment in coal mining and quarrying. |
| **Strategy component** | There is a national Just Transition Strategy (2019) attached to the NECP, proposing, among other things, 'green employment policies, vocational training policies, better guidance for companies and the promotion of transition guidance plans for industry and other sectors'. |
| **Instrument component** | The measures contained in the Just Transition Strategy mainly target, for now, the coal mining and coal production sectors; these measures are:<br><br>– a Framework Agreement for the coal sector (2018) and the subsequent 2019-2021 Urgent Action Plan providing technical and financial assistance to coal workers and regions;<br><br>– Just Transition Agreements providing ad hoc guidance (with respect to available policy, projects and funding opportunities) for sectors and groups at risk.<br><br>Finally, measures for training professionals in renewable energy and energy efficiency are proposed (under the responsibility of the Autonomous Communities). |
| **Governance component** | A Just Transition Institute has been created within the Ministry for Ecological Transition. The administrative bodies responsible for the Just Transition Strategy are cooperating. These include the Ministry for Ecological Transition, the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy; the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and regional and local governments. Business organisations, trade unions and other social organisations were also involved in the design and implementation of the Just |

[52] Sources: Government of Spain (2020a) and European Commission (2020-ES).

| | |
|---|---|
| | Transition Strategy. They are also actively involved in the Just Transition Agreements. |

**FINLAND (FI)[53]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impact of decarbonisation is only marginally assessed as positive (growth of 3% by 2030 compared to 2015). |
| **Strategy component** | There is only a generalised commitment by the government in the NECP, but no evidence of any national initiative explicitly encompassing this commitment: 'a fair transition is a guiding theme in the government's climate policy. Emissions reduction measures will be carried out in a way that is fair from a social and regional perspective, and that involves all sectors of society'. |
| **Instrument component** | – |
| **Governance component** | A ministerial working group on climate and energy issues will be established to assess the climate impacts of legislation.<br><br>A Round Table on Climate Policy in connection with the Sustainable Development Committee will bring together a variety of social stakeholders, making sure that climate measures are supported by the public.<br><br>A broad-based Peat Industry Working Group will be established to ensure geographic and social fairness in the government's upcoming effort to halve the use of peat by 2030. |

[53] Sources: Government of Finland (2019) and European Commission (2020-FI).

**FRANCE (FR)**[54]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impacts of decarbonisation are recognised and partially assessed. A positive employment impact (300 000-500 000 extra jobs by 2030) is expected in all sectors, especially the tertiary sector.<br><br>A negative employment impact is expected in fossil fuel extraction, fossil-fired and nuclear power plants and road goods haulage.<br><br>Skills needs are acknowledged but not assessed. |
| **Strategy component** | The NECP mentions 'a fair transition for everyone' among the cross-sectoral guidelines of the National Low-Carbon Strategy (SNBC). However, no detail is provided with respect to how this objective is or will be implemented. |
| **Instrument component** | The Skills Investment Plan includes a commitment to improve curricula, develop skills and provide targeted training to students, in-service workers (by professional discipline) and jobseekers in professions impacted by the energy transition. |
| **Governance component** | The National Council for Ecological Transition ('including representatives of each group within civil society, e.g. representatives of workers and employers, consumer rights activists, environmental NGOs, local authorities and members of parliament') has highlighted through its 2019 Opinion 'the importance of the economic and social impacts of the guidelines outlined in the SNBC and the need for supporting measures'. |

[54] Sources: Government of France (2020) and European Commission (2020-FR).

**CROATIA (HR)[55]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impact is recognised as positive but not assessed in detail. Employment increases are expected in construction, industries and the tertiary sector. |
| **Strategy component** | – |
| **Instrument component** | Training measures are mentioned, but not enough detail is provided on how these measures relate to the green transition. |
| **Governance component** | – |

[55] Sources: Government of Croatia (2019) and European Commission (2020-HR).

**HUNGARY (HU)[56]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impacts are partially recognised as negative but not assessed. Negative impacts ('the creation and retention of jobs, the indirect creation of jobs by related undertakings, and local tax revenues') are expected in relation to the decarbonisation of the lignite-fired Mátra Power Plant by 2030. |
| **Strategy component** | There is a commitment to pay attention to economic diversification and just transition aspects in the revitalisation of the lignite-powered Mátra Power Plant, including through dedicated just transition 'strategies' or 'agreements' for women and vulnerable social groups. |
| **Instrument component** | There are proposals for the just transition of the lignite-powered Mátra Power Plant: monitoring labour market impacts of the transition, improving employment prospects in the green economy, supporting opportunities for training and retraining, enforcing of equal opportunities for women and vulnerable social groups.<br><br>A just transition is mentioned among the priorities of the Modernisation Fund. |
| **Governance component** | – |

[56] Sources: Government of Hungary (2019) and European Commission (2020-HU).

**IRELAND (IE)[57]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment, skills and distributional impacts of decarbonisation are recognised but not fully assessed. The macroeconomic impact in general is said to be positive. Negative employment impacts are expected, especially in the peat extraction sector. Skills needs are identified for sectors like retrofitting, new farming methods, soil remediation and the bioeconomy. |
| **Strategy component** | A just transition is an explicit objective of the national Climate Action Plan and Future Jobs Ireland, both adopted in 2019. Furthermore, the NECP contains a proposal for a five-year Just Transition Strategy for people affected by the transition. |
| **Instrument component** | There are specific measures to respond to the fallout from the cessation of peat harvesting by Bord na Móna in Budget 2020: the appointment of a Just Transition Commissioner; the establishment of a €6 million Just Transition Fund to support the retraining and reskilling of workers and assist local communities and businesses in the Midlands to adjust to the low-carbon transition; the allocation of €5 million for bog restoration and rehabilitation; and the provision of €20 million to deliver a new model for housing upgrades.<br><br>Other instruments that will be proposed as part of the national Just Transition Strategy include: promoting information and capacity building, introducing training and support initiatives for communities, improving targeting of energy schemes, addressing the impact of carbon pricing on vulnerable people, and enhancing the capacity of the education and training system to support a just transition.<br><br>Finally, Ireland is part of the EU Platform for Coal Regions in Transition. |
| **Governance component** | A Just Transition Review Group (involving several stakeholders) has been established within the National Economic and Social Council, in charge of providing capacity building, periodic reviews and advice on a just transition. Moreover, a Just Transition Commissioner has been appointed to engage with all relevant stakeholders in the Midlands. At the local level, there is also a Midland Regional Transition Team. Finally, there are initiatives to improve citizens' involvement in the Climate |

[57] Sources: Government of Ireland (2020a) and European Commission (2020-IE).

| | |
|---|---|
| | Action Plan, including engagement capacity building and local community action. |

**ITALY (IT)[58]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment and skill impacts of decarbonisation are recognised and assessed. In particular, the NECP identifies the most severely affected occupations and the skills associated with them, while evaluating the importance of different skills.<br><br>Different sectors are shown to be impacted either negatively or positively. Employment impacts in the coal sector phase-out are expected to be negative. |
| **Strategy component** | – |
| **Instrument component** | There are measures to counteract the impact on 3 800-plus direct and indirect full-time equivalent workers employed in electricity generation from eight coal-fired power plants:<br>(i) Decree-Law 101/2019, establishing that, from 2020 to 2024, the amount exceeding €1 000 million of the proceeds from the auctions for the allocation of EU ETS quotas, up to a maximum of €20 million per year, will be channelled to a fund for vocational retraining in areas in which coal-fired power plants are located; and (ii) the public-private 'Futur-e' project for the decommissioning of old thermoelectric power plants (including coal-fired ones) and for the retraining and redeployment of workers, industrial negotiations and conversion of sites. |
| **Governance component** | Sectoral working groups will be organised by the Ministry of Economic Development to assess the technical and regulatory conditions, the necessary infrastructure and the best means of safeguarding jobs in industrial and carbon-intensive regions particularly affected by decarbonisation policies. These working groups will include several stakeholders, including operators, local authorities, Terna and the social partners. |

[58] Sources: Government of Italy (2019) and European Commission (2020-IT).

**LITHUANIA (LT)[59]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impacts of decarbonisation are recognised and assessed as positive (between 2020 and 2030, the employment rate is expected to increase by 1.56%). No consideration is given to employment impacts in specific sectors (especially carbon-intensive industries expected to reduce their emissions). |
| **Strategy component** | – |
| **Instrument component** | There are various commitments to provide training for environmental professionals. |
| **Governance component** | – |

[59] Sources: Government of Lithuania (2019) and European Commission (2020-LT).

**LUXEMBOURG (LU)[60]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | Employment impact is recognised (as positive) but not assessed. |
| **Strategy component** | – |
| **Instrument component** | – |
| **Governance component** | – |

[60] Sources: Government of Luxembourg (2020) and European Commission (2020-LU).

**LATVIA (LV)**[61]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impact of the transition is generally recognised as positive and assessed (with up to 4 600 new jobs and around 6 100 indirect jobs). Possible negative social impacts are recognised but not assessed. The positive employment impact will especially derive from energy efficiency and renewable energy development: building, industry and service sector. Conversely, possible negative impacts are expected in the agriculture, land-use and forestry sector, in the energy sector and in emission-intensive industries. |
| **Strategy component** | A 'fair transition' is mentioned in the NECP, but not translated into any national policy. The government's commitment to a just transition is hence too vague. |
| **Instrument component** | There is a commitment to put forward possible just transition policies for sectors in transition. This entails ensuring that employees' social situation should not be adversely affected by the transition, through training and reorientation of individuals' careers, and help with finding a job in another sector, including help with changing residence.<br><br>There is also an invitation to use EU structural funds to support reskilling, the development of employees' skills or the mitigation of the impact of higher energy prices on the financial capacity of households. |
| **Governance component** | – |

[61] Sources: Government of Latvia (2020) and European Commission (2020-LV).

**MALTA (MT)[62]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment (job-creation) impact of the transition is recognised as positive and assessed, but there is a lack of recognition of possible trade-offs. |
| **Strategy component** | – |
| **Instrument component** | – |
| **Governance component** | – |

[62] Sources: Government of Malta (2019) and European Commission (2020-MT).

**NETHERLANDS (NL)[63]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impact of the transition is recognised and assessed as limited. However, some short-term negative impacts are recognised (like decreasing labour demand in fossil-intensive sectors). Skills needs are acknowledged but not assessed. |
| **Strategy component** | The government is committed to adopting an integrated approach towards the labour market and training issues related to the transition. In 2018, the Social and Economic Council put forward recommendations to boost the opportunities and absorb the social risks of the transition, which were then transposed into the national Climate Agreement. Also in the context of the national Climate Agreement, the government committed to establish sectoral (including in the electricity and industry sectors) educational and labour market agendas to be updated regularly. The concept of a just or fair transition, however, is not mentioned in the NECP. |
| **Instrument component** | The NECP states that the government will create a facility to address the employment effects of the energy transition by providing 'from-work-to-work' guidance and upskilling and reskilling (€22 million). This is not limited to workers in the coal sector, but also applies to those employed in electricity, industry, agriculture and land use, built environment and mobility. Furthermore, training and educational policy commitments are also mentioned. |
| **Governance component** | A cross-sector Task Force within the Social and Economic Council was tasked with formulating recommendations for the Climate Agreement, representing a broad swathe of employers, employees, educational bodies and ministries. All in all, in the Netherlands, there was broad engagement of stakeholders and social partners in the development of above-mentioned policy measures. |

[63] Sources: Government of the Netherlands (2019) and European Commission (2020-NL).

**POLAND (PL)[64]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The negative employment and skills impacts of decarbonisation are recognised, but not assessed. Negative employment and skills impacts are mainly highlighted for coal regions. |
| **Strategy component** | The NECP makes many references to the concept of a just transition, which the government declares that it supports. There is a commitment to develop a 'restructuring plan for hard coal and lignite mining areas' in 2020 to be cofinanced by EU funds, entailing an in-depth social, employment and skills impact assessment of the transition in mining regions. |
| **Instrument component** | There is also a commitment to promote regional development programmes, social and stakeholder dialogue and job-creation and requalification policies for coal regions, while also updating workers' skill profiles.<br><br>The country is part of the EU Coal Regions in Transition Initiative with the Silesia, Lower Silesia, Wielkopolska and soon Małopolska regions. The government will also explore the opportunity to use the EU Just Transition Fund and other financial opportunities for coal regions.<br><br>There is a 2017 national development Programme for Silesia and regional strategies for the transformation of coal regions: the Sudety Strategy 2030 in Lower Silesia; the Clean Air Programme in Małopolska; and ongoing work to prepare a document setting out the transition strategy for the Wielkopolska region.<br><br>There is a commitment to develop 'comprehensive solutions concerning State Aid granted to cover losses in case of natural disasters and insurance systems covering risks caused by climate change'. |
| **Governance component** | Generically, social dialogue is encouraged. |

[64] Sources: Government of Poland (2019a; 2019b; 2019c) and European Commission (2020-PL).

**PORTUGAL (PT)**[65]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | Decarbonisation is deemed to have a positive employment impact, but this is not assessed. Positive spillovers concern new sectors, such as renewables, electric vehicles, hydrogen, urban rehabilitation, agricultural production and R&I.<br><br>Employment and skills challenges are recognised but not assessed, mainly in the fossil fuel sector. |
| **Strategy component** | The NECP contains 'Action Strategy No. 8.1.' which is intended to 'ensure fair transition'. There is a commitment by the government to develop a 'Fair Transition Strategy' to highlight opportunities and risks associated with decarbonisation and identify possible sources of funding. There is also a commitment to developing specific Action Plans from the Strategy, such as the Action Plan to end the generation of electricity from coal. |
| **Instrument component** | There is a commitment to use EU Funds, including the Just Transition Fund.<br><br>There is a commitment to 'promote capacity-building (education and training) to mitigate climate change, develop a low-carbon economy and improve air quality'. |
| **Governance component** | There is a commitment to ensure that the Fair Transition Strategy envisaged is designed through a multi-stakeholder process, hence involving representatives of central and local governments, representatives from the energy and environment industries and academics. |

[65] Sources: Government of Portugal (2019) and European Commission (2020-PT).

**ROMANIA (RO)[66]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The negative social effects of decarbonisation are identified (and regions affected mapped) but not assessed. They concern mining, coal-fired plants, heavy industries and related activities. |
| **Strategy component** | A just transition is cited in the NECP as a policy objective in the transition for carbon-intensive sectors; however, this remains too vague. |
| **Instrument component** | There are several measures for the mono-industrial region of Valea Jiului:<br><br>– Government Emergency Order (2019) with 'monthly supplementary income to be granted as a social protection measure, which is received by the persons made redundant from the companies for which the granting of State aid was approved in order to facilitate the closure of uncompetitive coal mines';<br><br>– EU Platform for Coal Regions in Transition;<br><br>– For the financial year 2021-2027, commitment to 'consider this region for Integrated Territorial Investment allocations';<br><br>– Private project for a retraining/training centre in Valea Jiului that is to be supported by EU funds;<br><br>– Human Capital Operational Programme using EU Funds to improve professional competencies and increase the employment rate in the region.<br><br>The EU Just Transition Mechanism (complemented by the Modernisation Fund and InvestEU) is seen as an important tool for coal-mining and highly-emitting (heavy) industries, as well as for areas where coal-fired plants are located. The investment priorities identified for the Mechanism are: regeneration and decontamination; technologies and infrastructure; SMEs; new enterprises; R&I; development of workers' skills and competencies; assistance to jobseekers; and technical assistance. |

[66] Sources: Government of Romania (2020) and European Commission (2020-RO).

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|---|---|
| | The development of specific educational packages at all levels is mentioned among the objectives of the Energy Strategy. |
| **Governance component** | – |

**SWEDEN (SE)[67]**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | Employment impacts are generically acknowledged but not assessed. |
| **Strategy component** | – |
| **Instrument component** | – |
| **Governance component** | – |

[67] Sources: Government of Sweden (2020) and European Commission (2020-SE).

**SLOVENIA (SI)**[68]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impact of decarbonisation is recognised and assessed as positive, with a 1.4% increase expected by 2030. There is a lack of assessment of negative employment implications, which are likely to affect coal and coke production, refined petroleum, transport and the metal and paper industries. |
| **Strategy component** | There is a commitment to draft a strategy for abandoning coal use and restructuring coal regions in accordance with the just transition principle by 2021 at the latest. |
| **Instrument component** | There is a commitment to promote and monitor training especially for the transition to a climate-neutral society and to integrate climate content into education programmes. |
| **Governance component** | – |

[68] Sources: Government of Slovenia (2020) and European Commission (2020-SI).

**SLOVAKIA (SK)**[69]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade-offs recognized** | The employment impact of decarbonisation is recognised and partially assessed. There is going to be a positive employment impact, mainly in export-oriented and capital goods industries, and a negative one, mainly in consumer goods production industries. |
| **Strategy component** | The Upper Nitra Development Action Plan was approved by the Slovak Government in July 2019 to address, among other issues, the employment impacts of coal mining reduction and local development issues. The plan, however, does not mention a just transition, and there is a general lack of detail on its social dimension in the NECP. |
| **Instrument component** | There is state aid 'to cover extraordinary costs associated with the Hornonitrianske bane Prievidza a.s. Cigel' mine', covering, among other things, extraordinary costs for workers who have lost or will lose their jobs. |
| **Governance component** | The Upper Nitra Development Action Plan 'was prepared by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic for Investment and Informatisation in cooperation with the Trenčín self-governing region, the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Upper Nitra and interested parties from the region concerned'. No governance structure has followed. |

[69] Sources: Government of Slovakia (2019) and European Commission (2020-SK).

# Annex B – Interview schedules

**Spain**

Las preguntas se refieren al siguiente conjunto de políticas adoptadas por el Gobierno español en 2019: i) la *Estrategia Nacional de Transición Justa* y el objetivo de transición justa en el Anteproyecto de *Ley de Cambio Climático y Transición Energética* ii) el *Plan de Acción Urgente para comarcas de carbón y centrales en cierre* y iii) los *Acuerdos de Transición Justa* gestionados por el Instituto para la Transición Justa.

a. ¿Cuáles son las principales características de la Estrategia de Transición Justa y de las iniciativas conexas? ¿En qué medida diría que estas iniciativas representan una novedad si se comparan con las tendencias políticas anteriores en España (en términos de objetivos estratégicos, tipo de política y gobernanza)?

b. ¿Podría describir la dinámica gubernamental que llevó a la adopción de las políticas de transición justa en 2019? ¿Quién es el responsable de estas propuestas y cómo se aprobaron? ¿Qué papel desempeñó el Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico y otros departamentos o estructuras gubernamentales (especialmente el Instituto para la Transición Justa)?

c. En su opinión, ¿el cierre de las minas de carbón - y la consiguiente pérdida de puestos de trabajo y la exclusión social - desempeñó un papel importante en la adopción de esta nueva política?

d. ¿Qué partidos apoyaron las iniciativas del Gobierno en 2019? Hubo algún tipo de conflicto partidista/parlamentario en torno a la transición justa y, de ser así, sobre qué cuestiones concretas?

e. Según su conocimiento, ¿qué papel (si es que hay alguno) han desempeñado los siguientes actores en la oposición o la defensa de una transición justa en España: i) las empresas energéticas y del carbón; ii) los sindicatos; iii) las autoridades regionales y locales; vi) las ONG medioambientales; vi) UE?

f. En su opinión, ¿la transición justa sigue formando parte de la agenda política española en la actualidad, o más bien ya ha perdido impulso? ¿Ha habido avances notables desde 2019?

**Ireland**

The questions refer to the following set of measures adopted by the Irish Government in 2019: i) the just transition objective in the *Climate Action Plan* and ii) the *National Just Transition Fund* and the *Just Transition Commissioner* for the Midlands.

a. To what extent would you say that these initiatives represented a novelty if compared to previous policy trends, specifically in terms of their i) strategic objectives; ii) instruments; iii) governance?

b. Could you please describe the inner governmental dynamics that led to the adoption of the two above-mentioned measures in 2019? What role did the *Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications* and other governmental departments or structures (notably *NESC*) play in this framework?

c. Did the accelerated phase-out of peat in the Midlands - and the consequent job losses and social distress - play an important role in driving this policy change?

b. Which parties supported the Government's initiatives in 2019? Was there partisan conflict of any kind on just transition and, if so, on which specific issues? To what extent did the work of the *Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action* on just transition inform the government's decisions?

c. To your knowledge, what role (if any) have the following actors played in actively advocating for a just transition in Ireland: i) *Bord na Mòna*; ii) trade unions; iii) the *Citizens' assembly*; iv) regional and local authorities (specifically, the *Midlands Regional Transition Team*); v) environmental NGOs?

d. In your opinion, is just transition still part of the Irish political agenda nowadays, or has it rather already run aground? Were there notable developments since 2019?