

Climate change: ETUC's position with a view to COP 22

Position adopted at the Executive Committee on the 26-27 October 2016

Introduction

Nearly a year after COP 21 and the adoption of the Paris Agreement, news concerning the climate is particularly alarming. Temperature readings are breaking record after record, confirming that the world is day by day drawing dangerously closer to the threshold beyond which climate disruptions will no longer be manageable. Extreme meteorological phenomena – fires, droughts, torrential rains, extended heat waves – are following each other at an alarming rate as well, exposing millions of men and women to material and psychological disarray. In the face of such a situation, a wait and see attitude simply will not do. It is now more urgent than ever to amplify and step up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also to generalise the implementation of policies commensurate with the transformations in progress and to come. Also, in the days before the COP 22 held in Marrakech, the ETUC has identified five priority demands, which largely mirror those of the international trade union movement as formulated by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

The Paris Agreement must be implemented now!

ETUC demands that no effort be spared to have the Paris Agreement implemented rapidly, as it lays the foundations for action against climate change that will be global for the first time. The ETUC welcomes the ratification of the agreement by the EU and call Member states to confirm their commitment through a rapid ratification of the text. The ETUC hopes that the early entry into force of the agreement will open the way to the application of its main provisions without delay. It is vital in fact to analyse national contributions and improve them where warranted as promptly as possible. Investment – mainly public investment, just transition and the creation of quality jobs should be at the heart of national contributions, which must be developed with the participation of social partners.

No devil in the details!

To accelerate the implementation of the agreement, ETUC also calls on the successful completion at the COP22 in Marrakech of negotiations on elements of the Agreement on which a decision is still pending, and the “Transparency Framework,” the “Global Stocktake,” “Guidelines for the elaboration of national contributions”, the differentiation procedures, and the “mechanism to facilitate implementation of and promote compliance with the provisions of the agreement.” The implementation procedures must guarantee the transparency and integrity of the system put in place. The decisions taken in Marrakech and subsequently must not weaken commitments or create loopholes. These decisions must also maintain the requirements of just transition and decent work at the heart of measures against climate change, through the guidelines for the development of national contributions. Finally, the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 as part of Agenda 2030 must ensure the coherence of international climate action with other policy areas.

Individual commitments in line with collective ambition for the planet and for jobs!

ETUC reiterates its deep concern about the gap between the collective ambition to limit warming beyond 2°C compared to pre-industrial values (and to continue the efforts to limit it to 1.5°C), and the modest national contributions which will not attain this objective as such. ETUC moreover calls on the European Commission and the Member States to review the EU objectives for 2030 upwards and to intensify their efforts, particularly in sectors where the environmental ambition is synonymous with investments and thus job creation, such as the renovation of buildings, public transport, circular economy or renewable energies.

In this regard, ETUC is urging the Commission to specify how it plans to implement the provision of the Paris Agreement aimed at making financial flows compatible with development with low greenhouse gas emissions and resilient to climate change. In ETUC's view, this commitment entails that resources allocated from the EU budget must support exclusively projects that are compatible with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

ETUC moreover underscores that the reform of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) currently under discussion must direct investments in the sectors concerned towards low carbon technologies, without however penalising European industries that are in active in highly competitive world markets and whose emissions correspond to the benchmark of the best performing installations. In the absence of an ambitious reform, the added value of the EU ETS will become highly uncertain and alternative policy instruments might have to be considered.

Just transition: Concrete action needed!

By integrating the imperatives of just transition and decent work in the preamble of the Paris Agreement, Parties endorsed a major political commitment. Politically, it obliges governments to implement a just transition for workers and to promote decent work in their policies to combat climate change.

The COP 22 must now urge Parties to integrate just transition elements into their national contributions, notably by mandating the Subsidiary Bodies Implementation (SBI) and for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), for they define the terms of this integration.

The adoption in 2015 of the "Principles for a just transition to environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all" by the International Labour Organization provides an internationally recognized reference for governments and social partners willing to make just transition a reality in their country. The ETUC urges the Commission and the EU Member States to learn from this document so that adequate social measures can accompany the policies against climate change. The ETUC demands that the ILO's future work further strengthens the commitment of governments and social partners to put into practice just transition.

ETUC points out that a just transition presupposes active support for workers in sectors that will suffer from the transition to a low carbon economy. ETUC reiterates its call to set up a fund for the just transition fed in the first place by revenues from auctioning a part of the EU ETS emission quotas. ETUC underscores that the participation of the social partners in developing and implementing low carbon strategies is a necessary precondition to their success. ETUC stresses the role of public services in the proper implementation of a just transition for workers. Finally, ETUC considers that the just transition requires another Europe, for the planet and for people, one that offers prosperity for all.

Financing and climate refugees

The ETUC calls on the EU to contribute to the mobilisation of at least 100 billion US dollars annually by 2020 to support the fight against climate change in developing countries pursuant to the commitments made by developed countries in 2010. The EU must also develop a plan to sustain and amplify its financial support to these countries beyond 2020 in accordance with Decision accompanying the Paris Agreement.

Climate change will increase migration during this century. The EU should contribute to building a comprehensive policy response to this question, including working with the recognition of the status of "climate refugees" by the United Nations.