

## **Ecological transition and the labour market.**

*Luca Novelli (Università degli studi di Milano); Renata Semenza (Università degli studi di Milano)*

The ecological transition is a process that will shape the future of European and possibly global societies. Even though a general consensus seemed to have been reached about its desirability – and in particular for those who advocate for a rebalancing of the relationship between human and non-human entities – and the path toward more sustainable societies and economies has been paved, considering the commitment to the achievement of the carbon neutrality for the 2050. Since now, however, few have been written on the impacts of employment and the broader consequences that the ecological transition is expected to have on European labour markets.

That is somehow surprising, considering how the unemployment risk has been used as an argument to oppose or hedge this transition (Thomas and Doerflinger 2020). If we consider the ecological transition as a comprehensive societal phenomenon, then we could also argue that virtually every job in the European societies will have to deal with that, producing, in some cases physiological resistance (Galgoczi 2023) – the images of the tractors in front of the European Commission resume plastically this concept.

Although, the economic and sociological literatures have started to increase their attention to this topic, the studies that relate directly labour market and ecological transition are underdeveloped (Ding and Hirvilammi 2024).

Accordingly, the first research question is how will the ecological transition impact on employment structure and labour market inequalities. From this very general research question, others arise which concern primarily analytical and methodological questions, on how to measure the impact, considering not only the jobs that will be lost, but also the quality of the green jobs that will be created. How is this relevant for labour market further liberalization? Thirdly, how to adapt skills, always indicated as central pillars on which the transition must take place, and how employment and training policies must intervene.

These research questions do not constitute an unexplored interrogative for the literature: we seek to innovate by advancing a reflection that proposes a link to the most relevant debate that interested the political economy studies in recent years. The objective of this article is in fact to discuss the relationship between the ecological transition and employment structure impacts, through the theoretical lenses of the labour market dualization theories, and the paradigm of liberalization theory.

There is in fact a twofold research hypothesis. On the one hand, it is expected that the green transition

will lead to more accentuated socio-economic inequalities between highly-qualified and low-skilled workers, as well as greater territorial divergences. On the other hand, that this transition will further push the process of liberalization of the labor market forward. We argue that the ecological transition will play a further step in the already in fieri process of liberalization of advanced economy labour markets, through the erosion of the work in heavy industries – or hard-to-abate industries, or energy intensive industries (EIIs).

From this point of view, the political direction of the transition process takes on great importance, which for now appears to be weak, despite being framed by advanced objectives dictated by the European Union.

Our objective is to set a reflection that embrace the potential of the ecological transition, and in particular in those sectors that are expected to benefit from this, and in particular renewables and circular economy. Accordingly, we will discuss the emerging inequalities profile of such a post-carbon society, focusing on the geographical inequality, the class inequality and the gender inequality.