

Executive Summary

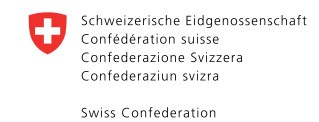
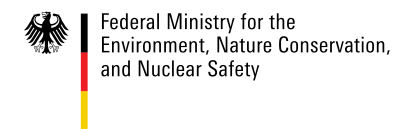
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1. Abstract

The concern about climate change and environmental degradation represents the need to initiate a just transition towards a model of sustainable growth, not only from the economic perspective but also from the environmental and social perspective. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 constitute a framework of reference for orienting the transition towards a greener economy.

From the labour perspective, taking on a just transition towards an environmentally sustainable economy means revitalizing the concept of “decent work”. The transition towards a greener economy could be considered a new type of production revolution due to the magnitude of the expected effects on forms of production and on labour markets. According to the definition given by the UNEP-ILO, a green economy “is one that improves human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities”.

In order for the transition to be just, the change towards a greener economy must create decent work for all, and in inclusive societies that eradicate poverty. This process should be managed through social dialogue to guarantee that the burden of transition is shared fairly and to ensure that nobody is excluded.

Within this context, the publication “Labour diagnostic of the just transition towards a green economy in Argentina” analyses these topics through five studies that develop the central theme of the research, from different yet complementary perspectives: the creation of green employment; the value chains of the circular economy and its effects on employment (including the possible scenarios); changes in vocational skills; and recommended policies for promoting a transition that, from the employment perspective, is just.

First of all, the study, “Green employment in Argentina. Advances, setbacks and future perspectives”, shows that green jobs¹ are created as a result of actions that are implemented from both the public and private spheres to promote more sustainable models of production and consumption. We could cite examples of these types of actions, such as those linked to the expansion of renewable energies in the energy mix and those related to the application of good production practices – environmental and social – in agriculture and tourism. Others include the progress on circular economy practices in the manufacturing sector, as well as in agriculture. Actions for mitigating and adapting to climate change must be designed as a part of long-term processes in which the stimulus for producing renewable energies and fuels must be accompanied by investment in infrastructure works to reduce the vulnerability to adverse weather events.

While major advances towards a greener economy have been made in Argentina, particularly regarding energy, there are still many difficulties to be overcome for dealing with the negative impacts of climate change. Added to these complex scenarios now are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which, in addition to creating an unprecedented health emergency, is considerably exacerbating the economic crisis and the destruction of employment, a situation that has been increasingly evident over the last decade and whose current scope is still unknown.

To conduct a more in-depth analysis of the opportunities and challenges presented by this transition, the study, “The value chains of the circular economy: towards a new model of inclusive development”, examined the main links that are shown, at least initially, by these circular models of production organization in some sectors. The most relevant chains of the circular economy include very important segments in which there is a predominance of informality, labour precariousness, low income, hazardous jobs and even child labour. These aspects are not only present in activities linked to the recycling of materials and waste management, but also in other stages of those value chains – both upstream and downstream. To achieve a just transition, improving the labour conditions in those segments is key.

The analysis of how those value chains are shaped, as well as the types of connections between the composite links, the degree of formality and the labour conditions of workers, has allowed some of the most important problems for reaching sustainable development to be identified. Those problems are generally linked to pending tasks related to achieving greater equality, achieving greater inclusion² and, above all, coming up with effective policy proposals that extend to all aspects.

¹ These jobs are created throughout the entire production structure, but they are concentrated in sectors that produce environmental goods and services – the circular economy, sanitation and waste management activities, renewable energy production – and in traditional sectors that develop more environmentally-friendly processes, such as transportation, sustainable agriculture and green tourism.

² A lack of productivity is one of the factors that leads to informality. FORLAC (ILO, 2014b).

The analysis presented in “Future scenarios of the direct and indirect impact of a transition towards a green economy: recycling activities” is focused on the value chains of the circular economy. The study shows that when the use of recycled materials replaces the use of virgin materials that are produced in the country, it can also replace jobs in traditional activities. The document presented the impacts that would be caused to employment as a result of expanding the circular economy (specifically due to materials recycling), under previously defined scenarios. In other words, the gross creation of direct and indirect jobs in sectors related to recycling and the gross destruction of jobs in sectors associated with the production of virgin raw materials and in energy production sectors based on fossil fuels. The net result, in the absence of policies, is a trend towards labour precariousness: more formal job positions would be destroyed than those that would be created. As a key issue in promoting just transition processes, the working conditions of the sectors that form a part of the value chains of the circular economy must be dealt with and improved.

The transition towards a greener economy is also conditioned by incorporating the technological changes of the global economy into the country’s production fabric. Among other consequences, technological transformations cause imbalances between the vocational skills of workers and the new demands of production and services. These gaps have costs, which for workers are represented by difficulties in gaining access to decent work. For enterprises, they are expressed by productivity losses; higher costs for recruiting, selecting and training personnel; and difficulty in the practical implementation of management solutions. Therefore, in order for the transition to be just, policy measures that tend to limit these gaps in qualifications must be designed and implemented.

The study, “Vocational skills required by green jobs. Case studies for Argentina”, analyses the changes to occupations as a result of expanding the green economy in Argentina, and it identifies the new vocational skills that are required for taking on those changes. The study shows that the professional training system must incorporate these new trends by developing information that allows learning about those trends, supported by social dialogue processes.

The aforementioned studies show that moving forward in the just transition towards a greener economy requires numerous changes that are basically linked to the design of regulatory frameworks and the implementation of public policies, which must take place through broad social dialogue.

As a general conclusion to the research and to facilitate the transition, the document, “Policy recommendations for a just transition towards a greener economy”, presents a menu of policy instruments (related to the environment, production and labour). Particularly, the research has shown that the transition towards a greener economy offers numerous opportunities for positive social and labour impacts. But these impacts are not automatic, given that there are numerous risks associated with the process.

The analysis has also highlighted specific aspects, such as the high degree of informality observed in the greenest sectors (especially in primary activities and recycling activities) and the need to adjust professional training systems to the vocational skill requirements demanded by the technological changes associated with the transition. As it was stated, the document offers a menu of policy tools for handling these situations, in which social dialogue and different instances for the coordination of public policy are central aspects.

For the transition to be just, its effects on employment must be evaluated and dealt with. Prioritizing environmental or production objectives over social and employment objectives is not an acceptable option.

