



# **CLEAN INDUSTRY, CLEAN ENERGY AND SAVING ENERGY**

**GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYEES**

## Introduction

These Guidelines were developed as part of the European Union co-funded project “GREENET Fast forwarding the green transition in a just and socially responsible way – cases of industry, energy, and transport sectors” to facilitate the green transition to zero-carbon economy. They are meant to help employees in planning and implementing action to reduce the impact of their companies on the climate and environment and contribute to the goals and targets set under the European Green Deal.

The Guidelines show a range of activities that workers and their organisations can take to reduce the carbon and environmental footprints of their workplaces. They also explain what steps worker representatives can take as an illustration of a proactive approach to greening the operation of the companies they work for and disseminating sustainable practices.

## Why to take action

The **climate change** has an aggravating effect on economies and societies. It **poses a risk for companies and workers**, as extreme weather phenomena affect business operation (and may increase business costs) as well as working conditions (physical risks). At the same time **climate change mitigation and adaptation measures**, applied to address the risks posed by the climate change, **have an impact on jobs and skill demand**, as they involve technology and business reorientation, incentivised by relevant policies and regulations, such as those of the European Green Deal. For that reason the climate change inevitably needs to become a concern of trade unions. And workers through their organisations should have a strong meaningful voice regarding the efforts needed to mitigate the climate change and increase resilience towards it.

It is of key importance that, in this respect, workers take a **proactive approach**, which involves an anticipatory action, because it allows sufficient time for developing, testing and adjusting solutions, and for workers to adapt to them and therefore can yield much better results for workers than just responding to employer's actions or to problems when they occur. Proactive measures empower workers to be active agents in the green transition and foster a collaborative approach to sustainability.

By taking actions which reduce the carbon and environmental footprints of their workplace, workers make it more sustainable and resilient, which can translate to **enhanced job security**. In short-term such actions can help the company improve its **economic performance** (thanks to more efficient energy and material use and the resulting cost reduction, reduced dependence on non-renewable materials and supply volatility; reduced financial burden thanks to reduced emissions, reduced risk of lawsuits or liabilities connected with environmental damage; better position to obtain investment financing and win orders under green procurement). Focus on sustainable practices also encourages innovation, which helps building a **competitive advantage** of the company.

By active involvement in training and development initiatives workers build **longer career prospects**. Last, but not least, by acting at national (sectoral) and regional level, trade unions have an important role to play in soliciting **policies and legislation supporting fair transition**.

## What actions workers can take

Workers and worker organizations can significantly contribute to reducing their companies' carbon and environmental footprints. They can do so by advocating for, participating in, and leading sustainability/green initiatives (as exemplified below).

### 1. Promote Awareness and Advocate for Sustainable Practices

- Educate colleagues about the importance of sustainability and how their roles impact the company's environmental footprint;

- Encourage management to prioritize sustainability initiatives and adopt green policies (such as waste reduction programs, energy efficiency targets, or renewable energy investments) and environmentally friendly practices.

## 2. Participate in Sustainable Practices

- Use resources efficiently (e.g., reduce energy consumption, limit waste) in daily operations.
- Practice sustainable driving habits, such as eco-driving techniques to minimize fuel consumption (e.g. in the transport sector)
- Participate in recycling programs and advocate for reduction in single-use materials, especially in warehousing and packaging.
- Actively participate in workplace recycling initiatives for materials like metal, plastic, and paper.
- Adopt practices that minimize scrap and promote efficient use of raw materials in production processes.
- Encourage energy-saving behaviours, such as turning off equipment when not in use and optimizing machine settings to reduce power consumption.

## 3. Support Training and Development

- Advocate for and participate in training programs focused on sustainability (e.g. operating electric vehicles or using new digital tools for logistics optimization in the transport sector)
- Take part in training programs on energy-efficient machinery, renewable energy systems, or sustainable production methods (e.g. in the manufacturing sector).
- Share knowledge and best practices with colleagues, including less experienced workers, to build collective competence in green technologies and processes.

## 4. Collaborate with Management on Green Transition Plans

- Actively participate in discussions with management to co-develop green transition strategies.
- Suggest ideas for reducing the company's carbon footprint, such as adopting cleaner technologies or optimizing logistics.
- Contribute practical insights: offer input on operational changes, such as route optimizations or technology upgrades, based on frontline experiences.
- Participate in planning: join committees or task forces focused on environmental sustainability to provide worker perspectives

## 5. Implement Workplace Sustainability Projects/Foster a Culture of Sustainability

- Organize campaigns to reduce energy usage, such as promoting the use of natural light or optimizing production schedules.
- Motivate peers to adopt eco-friendly practices and take pride in contributing to sustainability efforts.

- Encourage carpooling, biking to work, or using public transportation to reduce the carbon footprint of commuting.
- Lead initiatives to reuse or repurpose manufacturing byproducts.
- Recognize and celebrate individual or team contributions to reducing the company's environmental footprint.

## 6. Engage in Collective Bargaining for Sustainability

- Work with employers to include environmental goals and practices in collective bargaining agreements.
- Include environmental commitments in collective bargaining agreements, such as investment in sustainable technology or training programs.
- Negotiate green investments: advocate for employer commitments to invest in green technologies, worker training, and resource efficiency.
- Advocate for measures that ensure job security during transitions to green technologies, like reskilling programs.

Trade unions, may bargain for<sup>1</sup>:

- Employer recognising the need of action addressing the challenges posed by the climate change
- Employer recognising environmental issues as part of the bargaining agenda with unions
- An agreed joint approach to just transition planning (agreed just transition principles and measures, such as job and pay guarantees, upskilling and reskilling provision etc.)
- Managing carbon and environmental footprints in consultation with unions.
- Provisions related to: sustainable travel, resource management, ethical procurement, investment and banking, food and land use, water conservation, air pollution, community engagement.

## 7. Monitor and Report Sustainability Gaps/Environmental Issues

- Highlight areas of inefficiency, such as outdated equipment or energy-intensive practices, and propose alternatives
- Observe and report wasteful or environmentally harmful practices to management for improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Wales TUC (2024) Greener workplace for a just transition. A Wales TUC toolkit for trade unionists [https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/Greener%20Workplaces%20-%20English%20Version\\_0.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/Greener%20Workplaces%20-%20English%20Version_0.pdf)

- Monitor and report activities that negatively impact the environment, such as improper waste disposal or excessive energy use.
- Help ensure adherence to environmental regulations and internal sustainability policies.

## 8. Collaborate with External Partners

- Work with community groups: Partner with local environmental organizations to support broader sustainability initiatives.
- Engage with academic institutions or NGOs to access training resources and sustainability toolkits, to bring in expertise and resources for sustainability projects.
- Collaborate with other companies or unions to exchange ideas and replicate successful green initiatives

## 9. Advocate for Public Policies /Policy Alignment

- Lobby for supportive policies and legislation. Work with unions and industry groups to push for policies that provide incentives for green manufacturing and worker protections.
- Advocate for public funding to support green technologies and worker training programs.
- Advocate for policies that protect workers during the transition to greener practices, such as reskilling programs or job security measures.

## Planning and implementing action at company level

Whereas actions initiated by trade unions to reduce climate and environmental impacts of their workplaces can focus on different issues: energy sources, energy efficiency, resource management, work-related travel, they all would typically require taking similar steps, as described below.<sup>2</sup>

### Step 1: Research

- Identify **who in the company is responsible** for an area you want to target, e.g. for environmental issues, resource and waste management, procurement etc.
- Gather information on **company policies and procedures**, as well as on **actual practices** and their **effects and impacts** (such as energy and resources used, emissions generated, energy recovered, materials reused, waste recycled, etc.).

To collect the data on the current practices carry out **a survey or an audit**. For instance:

- if your focus is sustainable travel, conduct a survey among members of your trade union organisation to find out how they commute, what would make them use alternative travel modes)
- if your focus is waste reduction, carry out an audit of the amounts and different types of waste recycling, taking into account the waste hierarchy:
  - review procurement and purchasing
  - review company's own products and processes.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on Wales TUC (2024)

**Corporate sustainability reporting.** All EU large companies and listed SMEs are obliged to disclose information on what they see as the risks and opportunities arising from social and environmental issues, and on the impact of their activities on people and the environment under the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive which entered into force on 5 January 2023. Thanks to this investors and other stakeholders have access to the information needed to assess financial risks and opportunities arising from climate change and other sustainability issues.

- Identify any cost savings (this will be important at the negotiation stage).
- If applicable, collect relevant **contextual information**. For instance, if your focus is sustainable travel, then you would need to know what public transport connections are available as alternatives to commuting by car.

### Step 2: Engage

- Discuss your research findings with members of your trade union organisation.
  - Discuss the possible measures that can be applied (e.g. to reduce waste)
  - Find out the type of changes they will support.
- Talk to other unions and other members

Make sure that you take you apply the respective sustainability hierarchies when planning and discussing measures to address the identified challenges and opportunities.

### Step 3: Plan

- Prepare a plan of action based on the results of the research and consultation phases.
- Focus on the highest impact actions
- Plan a campaign to build support for change

### Step 4: Negotiate

The negotiations should result in agreeing on a plan with benefits to workers as well as to the employer and the environment.

- Make sure you have clear basis for negotiation with management regarding:
  - environmental targets (e.g. for waste reduction)
  - benefits for the employer such as cost savings, enhanced reputation
  - benefits for workers
- Ensure that workers have a share in the benefits resulting from the proposed actions. The savings (obtained from reduced emissions, reduced waste, more effective energy and resource management, etc.) should be reinvested into people, their skills, retaining jobs and further improvements in company sustainability (e.g. continued efficiency) .

## Step 5: Consolidate

- Communicate the success. Make sure that members of your trade union organisation are informed about the negotiated improvements and about the role of your trade union.
- Ensure that the employer provides appropriate training and awareness raising (e.g. on waste management, procurement policies etc.)
- Monitor the implementation and review the progress of the agreed action

## A new role: worker representative for environmental issues

As a rule, in companies there are worker representatives for occupational safety and health, and a joint committee which deals with occupational safety and health in the workplace. The same model can be used to ensure worker representation on environmental issues: worker environmental representatives and a joint committee serving as a forum to agree with the management a joint approach to decarbonisation and sustainability in a workplace. The two worker representative roles: on occupational safety and health and on environmental issues can be held by the same person or be separated.

In the UK trade unions have called for the statutory recognition of green representatives, but even without it, in some workplaces trade unions succeeded in getting employers' recognition of such a role, and in including environmental issues into a consultation agenda.

The role of a green representative may include<sup>3</sup>:

- Raising awareness and promoting environmentally friendly practices among members
- Co-operating with the TU branch on green and sustainability issues that need to be raised with management
- Carrying out workplace environmental audits
- Monitoring employers' activity and progress regarding green policies and targets
- Involvement in developing best workplace practices in reducing climate and environmental impacts (policies and management systems, drawing workplace agreements)
- Networking with other worker representatives on environmental issues

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<sup>3</sup> Based on Wales TUC (2024).



## Annex. Sustainability hierarchies and a product life-cycle assessment

By prioritizing actions according to hierarchies defined below you can maximize the effects of your efforts.

### Energy hierarchy

1. **Energy saving.** Eliminate unnecessary energy waste: change wasteful behaviour, turn off devices not used, adjust heating for lower temperatures, eliminate inefficient space use.
2. **Energy efficiency.** Consume more efficiently: use technology to reduce demand and eliminate energy losses: use more energy-efficient devices, programmable thermostats, intelligent controls; better insulation of buildings and pipes. Design products which are energy-efficient.
3. Using **renewable energy.**
4. Using low emission energy: non-sustainable sources using low carbon technologies (low carbon generation, carbon capture).
5. Least sustainable: Using conventional sources

### Waste management hierarchy

1. **Preventing** (minimizing). Reduce packaging used, eliminate single-use products, design products for durability, reuse, repair and recycling
2. **Reusing/Repair/Refurbishing/Remanufacturing**
3. **Recycling /Composting**
4. **Other recovery** (including energy recovery)
5. Least sustainable: Disposal

### Travel to work hierarchy

1. **Reducing needs** (e.g. meeting on-line, telework)
2. **Walking**
3. **Cycling**
4. **Public Transport**
5. **Carsharing, carpooling, electric cars<sup>4</sup>**
6. Least sustainable: Internal combustion engine cars

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<sup>4</sup> The actual sustainability of electric vehicles depend on the share of fossil fuels in the electricity mix. There are also concerns related to electric battery disposal. To address this issue in 2023 New Batteries Regulation was adopted with targets for recycling efficiency, material recovery and recycled content to be introduced gradually from 2025 onwards.

## Life-cycle based product analysis

It takes into account all stages of a product life to assess generated emissions, waste, and other environmental impacts, as well as the use of energy, materials and other resources.

1. Resource extraction and transport
2. Manufacturing process
3. Packaging and transport
4. Usage
5. End of life





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