

# Policy Position Paper

## For a stronger EU Just Transition Policy Framework

December 2025



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## Introduction

Tackling the ever-worsening climate crisis requires fundamental changes to how we live and work in Europe. However, for this green transition to be successful and meaningful it must be socially just and fair, ultimately leading to more inclusive and equitable societies.

Currently, the EU does not have adequate measures in place to achieve a truly just transition for all. None of the existing just transition instruments place legal obligations on Member States or businesses and the current just transition framework at EU level remains fragmented, reactive, and ultimately insufficient. Despite the appointment of Teresa Ribera as Executive Vice President for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition (as campaigned for by Social Platform), no new legislation for the just transition was announced in either the European Commission's 2025 or 2026 Work Programme. As far as Member States are concerned, most of them do not have robust just transition approaches either, as is clear from their *National Energy and Climate Plans*<sup>1</sup>.

To guarantee real progress, the EU needs a comprehensive Just Transition Policy Framework (JTPF). Such a framework should build on the 2022 Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality<sup>2</sup> (Fair Transition Recommendation) and encompass social protection, strong public services and support for not-for-profit social services, workers' rights, civil society participation, civil and social dialogue, adequate public financing with strong environmental and social conditionalities, support for the social economy, and inclusive policymaking.

The climate crisis is already here. 2024 was the hottest year on record, and every year before that over the last decade has broken temperature records and we experience more and more natural disasters. Europeans understand the urgency. The majority recognise that environmental issues directly affect their health and daily lives. Yet the European Commission's recent shift in priorities tells a different story; one where competitiveness with the US and China and productivity take centre stage, and social and environmental goals risk being sidelined.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://caneurope.org/just-transition-necps/>

<sup>2</sup> The Council of the European Union: [Recommendation on a fair transition towards climate neutrality \(Fair Transition Recommendation\)](#) (June 2022) from now referred to as the *Fair Transition Recommendation*



# Why a stronger Just Transition Policy Framework is urgently needed

To date, the focus of the just transition has largely been on industry, research, and skills. With roots in the trade union movement, the concept was originally centred on safeguarding workers in transitioning economies, particularly in coal-intense sectors, promoting greener industries, and generating green employment while ensuring job-to-job transitions.

Building on this foundation, Social Platform calls for a broader definition of a just transition that encompasses all groups vulnerable to social exclusion. A truly just transition must ensure that no one is left behind in the shift to a low-carbon society that fits within planetary boundaries, by upholding people's rights and addressing their needs. This requires distributive justice, a fair distribution of resources, and procedural justice, including transparency, fair participation in decision-making processes, and quality jobs.

The implementation of the Green Deal, while generating unprecedented opportunities for sustainable development, impacts different stakeholders to varying degrees. Social Platform has been calling for a Green and Social Deal to ensure the social dimension is a priority rather than an afterthought within climate and environmental policymaking, and a disproportionate burden is not placed on marginalised groups<sup>3</sup>.

Cost of living concerns are a major challenge to Europeans, evident in the latest Eurobarometer<sup>4</sup>. Rising inflation and economic precarity have fuelled widespread discontent and insecurity, contributing to the significant shift to the right in the 2024 EU elections<sup>5</sup>. As a result, the political focus of the new European Commission is shifting away from the European Green Deal with increased attempts to water down green policies<sup>6</sup>. The focus is now on competitiveness, growth, productivity and defence, as illustrated in the new Competitiveness Compass. Initiatives such as the Clean Industrial Deal and the Omnibus deregulation packages further exemplify this shift, prioritising the interests of big business over people. Civil society has been largely excluded from consultation processes, while industry representatives have been given centre stage.

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3 <https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2024/03/Position-just-transition-2024.pdf>

4 <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3492>

5 Hobolt, Sara B. (2025). European democracy in action? The 2024 European Parliament elections. *Journal of European Public Policy*.

6 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jun/26/eu-rollback-on-environmental-policy-deregulation-european-green-deal>



Rather than working to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of Europeans, this new competitiveness agenda neglects the social and environmental dimensions that are essential for a just transition. The Clean Industrial Deal's narrow focus on jobs and skills fails to address structural inequalities, and risks leaving behind low-income and marginalised communities, while impoverishing the middle-class. The first Omnibus package represents a further step backwards, prioritising deregulation at the expense of corporate accountability and sustainability. It weakens key safeguards designed to protect workers, human rights and the environment.

Meanwhile, climate disinformation is rising, especially during key moments like last year's EU elections<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, the EU's progress on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been slowing since 2020<sup>8</sup>. Progressive ideas aiming to create more equal, sustainable and resilient societies like the wellbeing economy and beyond GDP metrics, which were gaining traction, are losing momentum. Growing geopolitical pressure and economic uncertainty are prompting EU leaders to compromise on progress, by lifting social and environmental protections rather than reinforcing them.



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<sup>7</sup> *European Digital Media Observatory, 11 June 2024*

<sup>8</sup> *New SDSN Report Reveals the State of Sustainable Development in Europe and Priorities for the Newly Established EU Leadership, SDSN and SDG Transformation Center, 29 January 2025*



# Expanding the EU's Just Transition Policy Framework

Established within the Green Deal, the current pillars of the EU's Just Transition Policy Framework are the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM), the Social Climate Fund (SCF), the 2022 Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality (Fair Transition recommendation) and two European Commission Recommendations on energy poverty ([2020](#), [2023](#)) as well as the upcoming European Fair Transition Observatory announced in the Clean Industrial Deal to be established in 2026. These tools lack binding obligations and coherence, are too limited in scope, or are not reaching the people intended. The Fair Transition recommendation is a promising foundation, setting out a comprehensive set of measures to support people in the green transition. But it is not legally binding, and as a result, not being properly implemented by Member States.

There is growing consensus on the need for stronger tools. Civil society, trade unions, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), and the European Parliament have all been calling for a binding EU Just Transition Policy Framework and Directive (see e.g. [ETUC](#), [EESC](#), [civil society](#), [EP](#)). The European Parliament's EMPL Committee is now working on a Legislative Own-Initiative (INL) report toward this goal. Social Platform supports the call for a Directive on a just transition in the world of work and believes it should be complemented by action addressing other social dimensions of the transition. In light of these demands, Social Platform is joining the call for an improved EU Just Transition Policy Framework.

As the EESC stated in its 2023 opinion, the mission of a true Just Transition Policy Framework should be to ensure well-being, a good quality of life, and a sustainable future for all people in the EU during overlapping crises. This must go hand in hand with climate action, environmental protection and restoration, social justice, human rights, and tackling poverty, inequality, discrimination, and their intersections<sup>9</sup>.

To achieve this aim, the EU must bring the just transition back to the centre of its political agenda. Sustainable competitiveness and security will only be possible if environmental and social goals are delivered. The impacts of climate change are disproportionately felt by those in vulnerable situations, and the very climate policies that are necessary can end up disproportionately burdening the same groups if they are

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2024/03/Position-just-transition-2024.pdf>



not well designed and if adequate support is not made available. In addition to the green transition, Europe is facing demographic change, industrial transformation and digitalisation. These multiple transitions will significantly affect people, with risks of exacerbating exclusion and inequality unless proper design and support measures are in place.

With an adequate framework in place, people can be supported throughout the various transitions and be actors of the transformation required. Getting the just transition right will not only ensure fairness but also help prevent public backlash to vital climate, environmental, industrial and digital policies. If we are serious about building a socially inclusive, climate-neutral Europe, then a legally binding, well-funded, and coherent EU Just Transition Policy Framework, based on the Fair Transition recommendation, is urgently needed.





# Main components of a socially inclusive Just Transition Policy Framework

A stronger EU Just Transition Policy Framework must include legally binding measures to ensure implementation. Social Platform believes these must:

## 1. Ensure Policy Coherence and Cross-Sectoral Governance

- Mainstream just transition principles across all EU policies to align social, environmental, climate, and economic objectives
- Establish whole-of-government coordination, involving all EU Commissioners and Directorates-General in delivering the Just Transition Policy Framework
- Create cross-sectoral mechanisms such as joint Council meetings, interinstitutional working groups, and a European Parliament intergroup on just transition
- Require Member States to set up dedicated bodies to coordinate just transition strategies and ensure no community or region is left behind

A big obstacle standing in the way of achieving a truly fair and just transition in the EU is siloed policymaking. Social, environmental, climate, and economic objectives are deeply interconnected, and policies that treat them in isolation risk undermining the very goals they intend to achieve. Just transition principles should be mainstreamed into all EU policies.

Contradictions arise when policy areas are disconnected. EU economic and social policies narrowly aiming to boost employment to drive competitiveness and growth without green conditionalities can undermine climate objectives by, for example, enabling fossil fuel subsidies or incentivising resource-intensive industries. Climate and environmental policies that overlook social impacts can lead to public backlash and inequity, for example when carbon pricing disproportionately burdens low-income households, or when green infrastructure projects displace communities without adequate safeguards in place.



The Council Recommendation on a fair transition towards climate neutrality (2022) offers a useful foundation, calling for integrated approaches that leave no one behind. But to operationalise this vision, the EU must go further, encouraging cooperation between departments, participatory policymaking, and comprehensive impact assessments that capture social and environmental dimensions together. The success of the transition hinges not just on individual policies, but on how they work together as a coherent whole.

At EU level, establishing the role of Executive Vice President for Clean, Just and Competitive Transition and a Commissioner for Sports, Culture, Youth and Intergenerational Fairness are good steps forward in the 2024-2029 European Commission. However, to truly deliver a just transition for future generations, it is essential to actively connect the climate, economic and social dimensions of policy. This requires the involvement of not just two, but all of the Commissioners, working collaboratively to mainstream the principles of a just transition across all areas of EU policymaking. A whole-of-government approach should be adopted, integrating the objectives and principles of the Just Transition Policy Framework into the agendas of all relevant Directorates-General and Council configurations.

Stronger coordination between departments and institutions is crucial. This includes practical mechanisms such as joint Council meetings, joint monitoring and evaluation of policies through interinstitutional working groups, and coordinated implementation efforts informed by data and analysis from the forthcoming Fair Transition Observatory.

Economy and finance, social and environmental ministers should meet in joint Council configurations. In the European Parliament, structures must be in place to ensure the work across different parliamentary committees is not siloed, as this is how just transition can get overlooked. Creating a European Parliament intergroup or working group on just transition would be a way to ensure policy coherence. At national level, Member States should establish dedicated bodies to coordinate cross-sectoral strategies and ensure that no community or region is left behind in the transition, following the lead of initiatives like Ireland's Just Transition Commission.





## 2. Employ Evidence-Based Monitoring and Research

- Mandate social, employment, and distributional impact assessments of all green legislation, focusing on marginalised groups
- Link green transition monitoring to the Social Scoreboard, strengthening indicators on job quality, social services, and environmental justice
- Integrate just transition objectives into the European Semester, with balanced social, environmental, and economic oversight
- Ensure the EU Fair Transition Observatory monitors joint climate and social goals and supports Member States in identifying people needing support
- Sustain and expand EU research funding on intersectional impacts of climate change, ensuring a successor to Horizon Europe

Establishing adequate monitoring systems will be important for coherence in policymaking. To ensure that nobody is left behind by the Green Deal policies and guarantee a just transition, there needs to be greater attention given to the impact green legislation will have on women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, people experiencing poverty, children, young and older people. The Fair Transition Recommendation calls for monitoring progress towards joint climate and social goals. In line with this, the European Commission should promote full social impact assessments of green legislation with a specific focus on marginalised groups, both to mitigate detrimental social impacts and to understand how these impacts connect to the measures to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights.

To make sure that the green transition and social progress go hand-in-hand and are mutually supportive, a tracking methodology linked up to the indicators of the Social Scoreboard should be put in place, ensuring that policies addressing the green transition contribute to the full implementation of social rights. It is also essential to ensure quality social, employment and distributional impact assessments of all initiatives linked to the green transition.

The future EU Fair Transition Observatory (EFTO) should play a central role in this. It should monitor progress towards joint climate and social goals, collect quantitative and qualitative data about the social benefits and possible adverse social impacts of climate action and inaction, as well as provide technical support to allow Member States to better identify the people who need support.



The European Semester should serve as a key governance tool to deliver a socially fair green transition. Integrating just transition objectives into the European Semester would provide a structured and coordinated process for monitoring and aligning Member States' economic, social, and environmental policies. This requires rebalancing macroeconomic and fiscal oversight with strong social and environmental considerations. The Semester should support mutual learning, guide national reforms, and promote investments that support both climate neutrality and social cohesion. To ensure a fair transition, the European Semester must prioritise social investments, particularly those that target people most at risk of exclusion. Strengthening the Social Scoreboard is essential, especially by improving indicators on job quality, access to social and essential services, and environmental justice to better reflect the realities of the transition.

The Fair Transition Recommendation reinforces the importance of embedding just transition across EU social and economic governance. The EU must ensure that the resilience indicators developed under the European Semester are not sidelined, but rather used to monitor the impact of transition policies on social well-being and territorial cohesion. Civil society, social partners, and local authorities should be systematically involved in shaping national reform plans and Semester recommendations.

Furthermore, policymaking should be based on scientific evidence, including research on the intersectional implications of climate change and green policies. Horizon Europe projects are already advancing our understanding of how green policies affect societies, and how to transition towards models centred on well-being and sustainability<sup>10</sup>.

Funding for social research must continue, as it is vital to ensuring that climate action leads to fairer, more inclusive societies. The EU needs a successor to Horizon Europe that supports research in the areas of social inclusion, environmental sustainability and fundamental rights, with the aim of improving the wellbeing of its people.



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<sup>10</sup> Such as the Horizon projects [Sustainability Performances, Evidence and Scenarios \(SPES\)](#) and [MERGE](#).



### 3. Receive Adequate and Fair Funding

- Revamp the Just Transition Fund with a broader scope, increased budget, and stronger social criteria; increase and extend the Social Climate Fund beyond 2032 with 100% of ETS2 revenues
- Mainstream just transition objectives across all relevant EU funds and programmes, applying social and environmental conditionalities, the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle, earmarking, and an EU Social Taxonomy
- Reform EU fiscal rules to allow Member States the fiscal space to finance the transition and shift tax burdens from labour to environmental taxation while maintaining progressivity
- Phase out fossil fuel subsidies and introduce progressive taxes on wealth, financial transactions, and fossil fuel profits to fund social protection, green investment, and support for affected communities
- Maintain and strengthen Cohesion Policy with higher co-financing rates for socially innovative projects and those supporting groups in vulnerable situations

The current state of funding for the just transition centres around the Just Transition Fund (JTF) and the Social Climate Fund (SCF), which are both underfunded and limited in scope. The JTF is a part of the Just Transition Mechanism and aims to support carbon-intensive regions as they transition away from carbon-intensive industries. Although good for targeting the sectors and regions that will go through big changes, the just transition will affect everyone and the scope of the JTF is too limited to address these broader effects. The SCF is being established in the context of the expansion of the Emissions Trading System 2 (ETS2) to transport and buildings, with the aim of mitigating its social impacts while supporting low-income and energy- or transport-poor households to participate in and benefit from the transition.

However, both the JTF (€17.5 billion for 2021–2027) and the SCF (€86.7 billion for 2026–2032) are far too small to meet even their stated goals. The Fair Transition Recommendation calls for adequate resourcing to support the green and social transition. With this in mind, the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), set to begin in 2028, must prioritise just transition funding. It was announced that funding for



the just transition would be significantly increased in the Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029 published last year<sup>11</sup>. A broader, more comprehensive fund is needed to address the adverse impacts of the various transitions. The next MFF should include a revamped Just Transition Fund, with a broader scope, increased budget, and stronger social criteria to address transition impacts beyond coal regions and ensure support reaches all affected communities. The Social Climate Fund's budget should be increased with 100% of revenues from ETS2 allocated to the Fund and it should be extended beyond the year 2032 to effectively mitigate its social consequences. The proposed Competitiveness Fund should integrate just transition measures into its strategy for a decarbonised, clean, and competitive Europe, including a dedicated funding stream to achieve this goal.

In addition to increasing funding, there is a need to mainstream just transition objectives across all relevant EU funds and programmes, applying social and environmental conditionalities to spending. This includes setting clear earmarking requirements for eco-social goals and applying the “Do No Significant Harm” (DNSH) principle systematically across the budget. The European Commission should propose an EU Social Taxonomy, as recommended by the Platform on Sustainable Finance in 2022<sup>12</sup>, alongside the already existing EU Green Taxonomy<sup>13</sup>. It would define what constitutes a socially sustainable economic activity, providing clear guidance to both public authorities and investors. This should be complemented by EU-level social investment indicators to monitor progress and ensure accountability.

An estimated 520 billion euros a year are needed to finance the green transition in the EU<sup>14</sup>. Yet, currently only three Member States are able to achieve this under the new fiscal rules<sup>15</sup>. The EU's fiscal rules should be revised to allow Member States the fiscal space to finance and achieve a just transition. Currently, the strict rules greatly limit what Member States are able to do.

The Fair Transition recommendation encourages Member States to reform their tax systems to support climate goals while protecting social equity. It proposes shifting the tax burden away from labour, particularly for low- and middle-income groups, and

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11 [European Commission, Europe's Choice: Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024–2029 \(European Commission, 2024\).](#)

12 [https://finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-08/220228-sustainable-finance-platform-finance-report-social-taxonomy\\_en.pdf](https://finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-08/220228-sustainable-finance-platform-finance-report-social-taxonomy_en.pdf)

13 <https://eurochild.org/uploads/2023/07/Open-letter-for-a-Social-Taxonomy.pdf>

14 [Investments in the sustainability transition: leveraging green industrial policy against emerging constraints.](#) European Environment Agency, 2023

15 Mang S. & Caddick D. (2024) [Navigating Constraints for Progress: Examining the Impact of EU Fiscal Rules on Social and Green Investments](#), joint ETUC-NEF report.



towards environmental taxation, such as carbon and pollution-based levies. The Recommendation also emphasises the need to preserve the progressive nature of taxation and to reinvest revenues from green taxes into social protection and green investment, ensuring that no one is left behind in the transition.

Financing could be increased by building own resources through progressive taxation proposals. If just transition is about fairness and justice, then those who have contributed most to the climate crisis should take the greatest responsibility in financing it. In line with the polluter pays principle, fossil fuel subsidies should be phased out and redirected towards social protection, green infrastructure, and support for communities most affected by the transition. Establishing EU tax legislation on extreme wealth and capital as well as fully implementing the polluter pays principle would help fund the transitions whilst simultaneously lowering emissions of wealthy individuals and polluting industries as well as reducing inequality<sup>16</sup>. Introducing a financial transaction tax at the EU level could generate significant revenues from speculative capital flows while promoting a more stable and equitable financial system<sup>17</sup>. A progressive wealth tax of up to 5% on Europe's multimillionaires and billionaires could generate around 286.5 billion euros per year<sup>18</sup>. An additional tax on the profits of 585 major oil, gas and coal companies could generate US \$400 billion<sup>19</sup>. According to [a recent survey](#), public support for this is strong: 81% of people surveyed support new taxes on the fossil fuel industry to pay for climate-related damages such as storms, floods and wildfires, and 86% support directing these revenues to communities most impacted by the climate crisis.

Finally, Cohesion Policy should remain a key pillar of the EU's funding architecture for the just transition, grounded in its long-standing commitment to economic, social, and territorial cohesion. Its place-based approach, combined with shared management and the partnership principle, makes it well-positioned to respond to local needs through inclusive governance. To effectively support communities most affected by the transition, EU co-financing rates for Structural Funds should be increased, with at least 90% co-financing for socially innovative projects or those supporting vulnerable groups, even in more developed regions.

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16 Finér, L. & Pankka, N. (2025). *'Tackling Tax Avoidance - Reforming Capital Income Taxation in the EU'*. FEPS policy study.

17 FEPS & SOLIDAR (2025), *Strengthening and Mainstreaming Just Transition Goals in the EU Budget*

18 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/wealth-eus-five-richest-men-soars-almost-6-million-euros-every-hour-2020>

19 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/blogs/rich-polluter-profits-tax-could-raise-400-billion-and-help-phase-out-fossil-fuels>



## 4. Align the European Pillar of Social Rights

- Make full implementation of the EPSR a core objective of the Just Transition Policy Framework, ensuring all climate and economic policies advance social rights
- Align national and EU transition policies with EPSR principles on equal opportunities, quality employment, social protection, and inclusion
- Revise the EPSR Action Plan to address climate-related social impacts, inequalities, and labour market changes through binding commitments and meaningful civil dialogue

Social rights must be at the centre of an EU Just Transition Policy Framework. The shift to a climate-neutral economy must be fair, inclusive, and leave no one behind. This is only possible through the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). Social rights are the foundation of a fair society, they ensure access to decent working conditions, quality education, adequate social protection, quality and accessible public and other social services, equal opportunities, and social inclusion. These are not optional add-ons, but essential safeguards for people and communities facing the profound changes brought by the various transitions.

The EPSR outlines 20 key principles that guide the EU towards stronger social cohesion and solidarity. These principles are concrete commitments that must shape every policy and investment decision made under the Just Transition Policy Framework. From guaranteeing secure employment and skills development, to providing income support and access to social and essential services, the EPSR provides the blueprint for building resilient and equitable societies. A Just Transition Policy Framework that does not explicitly deliver on the EPSR risks reinforcing inequalities and undermining public trust in the green transition.

As the EU prepares to revise the EPSR Action Plan, this moment presents a critical opportunity. The updated Action Plan must address the social consequences of climate change, the cost-of-living crisis, rising inequalities and discrimination, and evolving labour market dynamics. It must reflect the reality that climate and economic policies cannot succeed in isolation from social policies. The 2022 Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality calls on Member States to align their climate transition policies with the principles of the EPSR. It urges them to ensure that



the green transition is fair and inclusive by designing and implementing policies that promote equal opportunities, quality employment, social protection, and inclusion, in line with the EPSR, so that no one is left behind.

Anchoring the Just Transition in social rights means putting people first. It requires strong coordination between EU and national policies, meaningful civil dialogue with those most affected, and binding commitments to uphold social justice across all transitions. Only by aligning Just Transition measures with the EPSR can the EU deliver on its promise of fairness, inclusion, and dignity for all.





## 5. Strengthen Social Protection and Welfare Systems

- Adopt an EU Directive on adequate minimum income with EU-wide standards, ensuring non-discriminatory access and decent living conditions
- Develop a framework for Universal Basic Services, including affordable, accessible, and green housing, transport, and care services
- Propose an EU Action Plan for Social Services with common quality standards, improved funding, and better working conditions in the sector
- Place poverty and inequality reduction at the centre of the just transition, including through an ambitious EU Anti-Poverty Strategy<sup>20</sup>

The Fair Transition Recommendation calls for adequate social protection as a core mechanism for a fair and just transition. Strengthening the European social model is crucial to ensuring that no one is left behind. As the shift to a green economy transforms industries, labour markets, and communities, many people, especially marginalised communities, groups in vulnerable situations, workers in carbon-intensive sectors, and people in precarious work, are at risk. Without strong social protection systems and a strong welfare state, the transition could deepen inequality and social unrest, undermining public support for climate action. Social protection is one of the pillars of the International Labour Organization's 2015 Guidelines for a just transition<sup>21</sup>. An EU directive on adequate minimum income is urgently needed to make the right to a decent standard of living legally binding across Member States. Such a directive should set EU-wide standards for calculating income support schemes and ensure their non-discriminatory access, thereby raising living and working conditions for millions of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

The EU should ensure access to well-funded public services that can protect people during times of structural change. The European Commission should develop a framework for Universal Basic Services as a key tool in the just transition. Rather than relying solely on individual compensation for the impacts of climate policies, there needs to be a rethinking of how public services are delivered. They must be affordable, accessible, available, and green. This includes investing in energy-efficient social housing, low-carbon public transport, and sustainable social and care services that help reduce everyday living costs for all.

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20 <https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2025/05/anti-poverty-strategy-paper.pdf>

21 [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed\\_norm/%40relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_886647.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_norm/%40relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_886647.pdf)



To ensure access to high-quality social services to support people during the multiple transitions, the European Commission should propose an Action Plan for Social Services. This plan should create an enabling regulatory and financial framework for not-for-profit social service providers, supporting the development of a resilient ecosystem for social services. It must also establish ambitious common quality standards embedded in human rights, and ensure that services are available, accessible, affordable and adequate across the EU. Public funding and investment conditions should be improved through better use of EU instruments, especially within the next Multiannual Financial Framework, to ensure social services are adequately financed.

Moreover, the Action Plan should help improve working conditions in the social services sector by encouraging fair wages, better working conditions and career paths, collective bargaining, upskilling and reskilling, and improved health and safety standards. It must also strengthen the recognition of both formal and informal care work. Importantly, social services themselves must be green and sustainable, ensuring they do not negatively impact the climate or environment. It should also support the digitalisation of social services, while making sure that negative side effects, including the digital divide, digital poverty and accessibility concerns are tackled.

Poverty and inequality reduction must be at the centre of the just transition. Without addressing poverty and social exclusion, the benefits of the green industrial and digital transitions will not be distributed fairly. The upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy is therefore essential to ensure that no one is left behind and must focus on addressing the structural root causes of poverty and acknowledge that the prevalence of poverty is the result of political choices and is a systemic, rather than individual failure<sup>22</sup>. Social protection is not just a safety net but an essential enabler for economic and social resilience, and should be treated as a cornerstone of the EU's Just Transition Policy Framework.



<sup>22</sup> <https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2025/05/anti-poverty-strategy-paper.pdf>



## 6. Protect and Empower all Workers

- Adopt an EU Just Transition Directive to safeguard workers' rights, strengthen collective bargaining, and ensure social dialogue in the green and digital transitions
- Make the SURE instrument permanent to support workers and the self-employed during job transitions, and integrate just transition considerations into the EU Quality Jobs Roadmap, Union of Skills and industrial strategies
- Establish a European Job Guarantee providing secure, quality, sustainable employment with strong rights, decent wages, and upskilling opportunities, funded through EU, national, and local resources
- Introduce a European Unemployment Benefit Reinsurance Scheme to support Member States during economic shocks linked to the various transitions
- Protect and fully implement corporate accountability legislation (e.g. CSDDD, CSRD) to uphold social and environmental standards and prevent a race to the bottom in labour rights

The Fair Transition Recommendation calls for placing workers at the heart of the EU's green and digital transitions. Strong protections are needed to ensure that the shift to a sustainable economy does not come at the expense of workers' rights, job security, or livelihoods. A Just Transition Directive (JTD) is urgently needed to proactively anticipate and manage changes in the world of work<sup>23</sup>. The JTD should serve as a legal tool to support workers through the transitions and to reinforce collective bargaining and social dialogue as central pillars of a fair process. It would strengthen the rights of workers and ensure that they have a meaningful say in decisions that affect their jobs and futures. Specifically, the JTD should guarantee early information, consultation and participation rights for workers; create a legal entitlement to paid training and reskilling during working hours; and require companies to prepare transition plans that map out the employment and skills impacts of climate, digital and industrial changes. Member States should be obliged to adopt national just transition strategies in consultation with social partners and civil society, while compliance with the Directive must be linked to access to EU funds and public procurement. The EU Fair Transition Observatory should monitor progress, ensure enforcement and provide foresight for workers and companies.

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<sup>23</sup> *Séverine Picard, Proposal for a European Just Transitions Directive: Improving working conditions for just transitions through the anticipation and management of change* (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, June 2025)



The Support instrument to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) was a positive temporary tool that helped protect employment and reduce the loss of income in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We call to expand SURE to make it a permanent financial instrument, which would help support Member States in protecting and supporting employees and self-employed persons in job transitions that will increase in the context of the just transition. It could be a key financial instrument to finance the implementation of a Just Transition Directive.

The Fair Transition Recommendation calls for support for lifelong learning and reskilling. Upskilling, reskilling, and lifelong learning must be prioritised to ensure workers can transition into new, sustainable sectors. The EU Union of Skills must integrate just transition principles throughout its programming. Similarly, the upcoming EU Quality Jobs Roadmap must place a just transition at its core, ensuring the green transition results in good-quality jobs with decent wages, whilst preventing job losses, precarity or weakened labour rights. The transition must not only be environmentally and economically sustainable, but also socially just, ensuring that workers are protected and empowered throughout the transition process.

When it comes to industrial policy, the EU must apply lessons learned from the initial phase of the European Green Deal, where social considerations were often treated as an afterthought. Social dimensions must be integrated into the Clean Industrial Deal from the outset. Within the Just Transition Policy Framework, the EU should ensure that industrial strategies prioritise both workers and the environment to secure a socially equitable and economically sustainable path to competitiveness.

The Fair Transition Recommendation calls for inclusive labour market policies. One such policy would be a European Job Guarantee. Establishing a European Job Guarantee would ensure that no one is left behind in the shift to a green and digital economy by providing secure, quality employment, reducing long-term unemployment, and promoting social cohesion across all regions. Building on the existing pilot project, the European Commission should scale up existing Job Guarantee schemes and propose a European Job Guarantee to improve the availability of decent work. A European Job Guarantee should be funded by the EU, national governments and local authorities, supported by European Social Fund+ and other cohesion policy funds. It should be implemented at national, regional and local level to reduce involuntary, long-term unemployment by creating a safety net of publicly funded employment. Doing so, it should promote quality sustainable jobs and prevent in-work poverty by ensuring sustainable contracts, strong employment rights, including adequate wages above minimum wage level, and social security provisions, protection from discrimination, as well as workplace learning, upskilling and reskilling.



In addition to a Job Guarantee, a European Unemployment Benefit Reinsurance Scheme should be considered to enhance automatic stabilisation across the EU and better support Member States in times of economic downturn or sectoral disruption related to the various transitions.

As already mentioned, the Fair Transition Recommendation calls for policy coherence and the safeguarding of rights. In this context, it is critical to protect the regulations such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), which are under threat of being weakened by the Omnibus proposal. These legislative tools play a vital role in upholding social and environmental standards, ensuring corporate accountability, and preventing a race to the bottom in labour rights. Dismantling corporate social and sustainability regulations would undermine the very foundation of a just transition.





## 7. Strengthen the Social Economy as a Core Driver

- Integrate social economy actors into EU just transition policies and funding to deliver locally rooted, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable solutions
- Develop an EU legal framework and long-term strategy for the social economy, supporting quality jobs, skills, and employment pathways for disadvantaged workers
- Revise the EU Public Procurement Directive to prioritise social and environmental criteria over lowest price, with mandatory social clauses and market reservations for underrepresented groups
- Align the EU State Aid framework with just transition goals, expanding exceptions for social economy enterprises providing essential services

The Fair Transition Recommendation highlights the need for inclusive and participatory approaches to climate action, and the social economy offers a concrete model for implementing this by empowering communities, creating quality jobs, and ensuring that no one is left behind during the transition. The social economy is not just compatible with a just transition, it is the economic model best suited to it. By placing the well-being of people and the planet above profit, the social economy demonstrates how economic transformation can be both socially fair and environmentally sustainable.

The social economy is key to achieving a just transition in the EU. By prioritising people and the planet over profit, many of its actors (social enterprises, cooperatives, and not-for-profit social service providers) ensure that economic transformation is not only socially inclusive but environmentally effective. In so doing, they play a critical role in creating and sustaining decent jobs in key transition sectors such as renewable energy communities, sustainable agriculture, the circular economy, and social care. These organisations reinvest profits into community missions, fostering local resilience and reducing regional inequalities, which is critical as industries and labour markets go through structural changes. By emphasising democratic governance, solidarity, and long-term social value, the social economy demonstrates that the benefits of the transition can be shared fairly.

The social economy sector's capacity for innovation and collective action makes it a vital partner in delivering locally rooted social and ecological solutions that public and private actors alone may struggle to provide. Integrating the social economy into EU policies and funding mechanisms can help ensure that the just transition is not only environmentally



effective but also socially just, empowering communities to actively shape their future. Social economy actors can offer training and employment to marginalised groups and support workers in industries most affected by the transition and with the highest potential for local transformation.

To support this, further social economy measures should be put forward to provide a long-term vision with clearly established targets and initiatives that link the EU social and green agendas. These measures should contribute to building an EU legal framework adapted to the specificities of the social economy sector and allowing them to operate properly across Europe.

As part of this, the Quality Jobs Roadmap should support investment in employment pathways and active labour market measures and scale up the role of Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) in fostering access to decent work and skills for disadvantaged workers. It should also promote worker-owned cooperatives, including cooperatives of nonstandard workers, as a tried-and-tested model consistently providing better working conditions, more equal pay, and higher worker satisfaction resulting from worker participation, solidarity and mutualisation.

In addition, the upcoming revision of the EU Public Procurement Directive must integrate just transition principles by prioritising social and environmental considerations over the current lowest price criteria, ensuring that public contracts support fair wages, sustainable practices, and the creation of quality green jobs. The revision should strengthen the provision of socially responsible and green public procurement, including through market reservations to support the employment of labour market underrepresented groups. Social clauses should be inserted in all public procurement procedures, ensuring the use of social and sustainability criteria where applicable to support social and circularity business models, rather than the continued emphasis on lowest price in public tenders. Indeed, the revision should improve selection criteria to ensure that price is not the deciding factor when awarding contracts. Public purchases should endorse labour standards, employ disadvantaged workers, and create quality local jobs, including in social, green and circular sectors. Furthermore, such social and green criteria as well as reskilling and upskilling requirements should be increasingly made mandatory. The option to reserve contracts and thus facilitate the work integration of disadvantaged persons should be maintained and terms of such contracts should be improved. The rules should also lower administrative burden to create a level playing field for SMEs, including social economy enterprises, and facilitate their access to public procurement.



Finally, the upcoming revision of the EU State Aid framework should create better convergence between green and social criteria. Current exceptions concerning state aid should also be increased and new exceptions created regarding social economy enterprises (including those providing health, care, social, and other essential services).





## 8. Mandate Intersectionality and Targeted Inclusion Policies

- The Union of Equality and its strategies (including Gender, LGBTIQ, Anti-Racism, Roma) must be mutually reinforcing with a just transition
- Member States should develop intersectional inclusion strategies coordinated across governance levels, providing targeted support to those hit hardest by transitions
- The Social Climate Plans must prioritise support for the most disadvantaged groups facing rising prices caused by ETS2, and they need to be finalised and implemented swiftly by Member States
- All climate initiatives must integrate a strong anti-discrimination dimension, supported by reporting and assessment mechanisms, disaggregated data collection, and targeted social impact assessments
- The EU must address global justice in supply chains and international climate finance, support sustainable transitions in the Global South, and embed intergenerational fairness in long-term planning

A just transition in the EU must be grounded in intersectionality, inclusion, and equity, recognising that the impacts of climate and economic transformation are not experienced equally across society. Structural inequalities based on gender, racial or ethnic background, socioeconomic or migration status, age, and disability significantly influence how different groups are affected by job losses, rising living costs, environmental degradation, and climate-related events. For example, women, racialised communities, low-income households, and people with disabilities are more likely to work in precarious or undervalued sectors, face higher energy poverty, and have less access to reskilling opportunities, while facing daily discrimination in all areas of public life. Without targeted policy responses that address these disparities, the transition risks deepening social and economic exclusion rather than reducing it. These principles of inclusion and equality are also echoed in the Fair Transition Recommendation, which highlights the need for targeted support for the most affected and marginalised groups, and urges Member States to adopt intersectional approaches to ensure that no one is left behind in the green and digital transitions.

The Social Climate Plans (SCPs) will be key instruments to ensure that green policies do not disproportionately harm certain groups. These plans must provide targeted support to the most disadvantaged groups who are disproportionately affected by rising energy and transport prices resulting from the expansion of the Emissions Trading System (ETS2). To achieve this, Member States must swiftly finalise and implement their SCPs



with meaningful participation of civil society, social partners, and organisations representing disadvantaged groups. Ensuring that these plans are comprehensive, inclusive, and adequately funded is essential to prevent widening inequality and to guarantee that the Social Climate Fund fulfils its purpose of cushioning those most at risk from the social impacts of climate policies.

Despite their importance, current EU actions for a just transition largely fail to address identity-based inequalities with concrete, measurable policies. To correct this, there must be strong links and fruitful synergies between the design and delivery of just transition initiatives and the Union of Equality and its targeted strategies. This includes reviewing and reinforcing existing strategies, such as the Gender Equality Strategy, LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, the EU Roma Strategic Framework and the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan (soon to be replaced by a new Anti-Racist Strategy), as many are set to end in 2025. These frameworks should be renewed with concrete targets, robust indicators to measure progress, and clear national and subnational implementation mechanisms. Member States must be required to adopt their own tailored strategies and ensure institutional coordination at all governance levels to deliver on inclusion. The implementation of ongoing equality strategies must be reinforced to include environmental justice as a key component.

Embedding an intersectional lens into EU policymaking also requires the systematic collection of disaggregated data on a variety of grounds, as well as comprehensive and targeted social impact assessments. These tools are essential to identify which groups are at risk of being left behind and to design appropriate, evidence-based policy responses. A just transition must centre the voices and needs of marginalised communities through inclusive policymaking, ensuring equitable access to decent work, quality public services, and robust social protection.

In addition to equity within the EU, a truly just transition must reflect global justice. The EU must take into account its historical responsibility for emissions and ensure that its transition does not come at the expense of workers, communities, and ecosystems in the Global South. This includes addressing the extractivist model underlying the EU's demand for critical raw materials, which often leads to social and environmental harm in third countries and on Indigenous lands, such as Sámi territory in Northern Europe. The exploitation of these areas for so-called green technologies risks reproducing colonial dynamics under the guise of sustainability. Upholding global equity must therefore be a central pillar of the Just Transition Policy Framework. The EU has a responsibility to support Global South countries in the transition in ways that do not reproduce imperialist dynamics. This requires providing climate finance as grants rather than loans, advancing debt cancellation, and avoiding the outsourcing of emissions to third countries through loopholes in the EU 2040 climate target.



Finally, just transition policymaking must be intergenerational. This means taking a long-term perspective that considers the wellbeing of children, young people, and future generations. A just transition must address the growing care needs of Europe's ageing population and ensure that care systems are inclusive, sustainable, and resilient. The European Care Strategy marked progress for carers and care recipients, but gaps remain both in terms of childcare and long-term care. To future-proof the care sector, socially and environmentally, the EU should set ambitious targets and indicators for long-term care. The EU should invest in developing forward-looking models and tools that better forecast social and environmental developments, enabling evidence-based and future-proof decision-making.





## 9. Strengthen Civil and Social Dialogue

- Guarantee structured, inclusive involvement of civil society, trade unions, and local authorities in all just transition planning and implementation, with mechanisms for continuous monitoring and adjustment
- Adopt an EU Civil Society Strategy as an interinstitutional agreement to formalise civil dialogue, safeguard civic space, remove participation barriers, and ensure long-term, flexible, and sustainable funding for civil society
- Institutionalise participatory processes at national, regional, and local levels, engaging community-led initiatives, youth councils, energy cooperatives, and other grassroots actors
- Empower regional and local authorities with adequate resources and decision-making power to deliver tailored, place-based just transition solutions

Civil and social dialogue are essential pillars of an effective EU Just Transition Policy Framework. They help ensure that the shift to a green and digital economy is inclusive, democratic, and socially just. Engaging regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, trade unions, and other key stakeholders is vital to designing and implementing just transition measures that reflect the needs and priorities of all communities. Without meaningful stakeholder involvement, the transition risks fuelling public resistance and undermining both climate and social goals.

Civil society organisations play a critical role by representing marginalised groups, monitoring policy outcomes, and holding governments accountable. Trade unions, meanwhile, ensure workers' voices are heard and labour rights are protected in the face of economic restructuring. Together, these actors make up the social fabric that can carry the transition forward in a fair and inclusive way. But shrinking civic space, legal barriers, and harassment threaten their ability to act. The upcoming EU Civil Society Strategy to support, protect and empower civil society must guarantee a safe and enabling environment, remove restrictions to civic space, and ensure access to long-term, flexible funding. Structured civil dialogue must be reinforced through an interinstitutional agreement that ensures quality engagement across all EU institutions and Member States.

The EU must place people and stakeholders at the heart of its just transition policies. This means embedding participatory mechanisms into both the design and implementation phases, enabling continuous monitoring and adjustment at the national and regional levels. Civic participation should include engagement with community-led



initiatives, cities in transition, popular assemblies, youth councils, energy communities and cooperatives, and inclusive local planning processes. These structures can help ensure that policies are grounded in lived experience, supported by locals, and responsive to emerging challenges.

Regional and local authorities are on the frontlines of the green transition and must be empowered to lead it. Their involvement is crucial for implementing tailored, place-based solutions that address specific territorial challenges. The Territorial Just Transition Plans, the Just Transition Mechanism, and the Social Climate Plans currently being developed, must go beyond box-ticking exercises and become tools for real engagement and collaboration.

The Fair Transition Recommendation explicitly recognises the importance of inclusive governance and urges Member States to ensure structured involvement of civil society, social partners, and local authorities. Embedding civil and social dialogue into the EU JTPF is not optional, it is the foundation for public trust, democratic legitimacy, and equitable outcomes.





## 10. Promote Affordable and Sustainable Housing and Energy

- Align the EU Affordable Housing Plan with just transition goals, prioritising renovation of worst-performing buildings, supporting public, social, affordable, community-led and cooperative housing models, and ensuring legal social safeguards to protect tenants from disproportionate rent increases, gentrification, renoventions and displacement, while maintaining housing cost neutrality after renovation
- Require Member States to adopt and fund national strategies for affordable, climate-resilient housing, linked to the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness
- Attach strong social conditionalities to EU and EIB housing investments, and revise state aid rules to support public, social, and cooperative housing providers
- Ensure the Citizens' Energy Package and Social Climate Fund tackle structural drivers of energy poverty, safeguard vulnerable households during renovations, and expand community energy initiatives

Tackling housing insecurity and energy poverty must be central to the EU Just Transition Policy Framework. These are not just side issues, but fundamental pillars of a fair transition, critical to reducing inequality, ensuring resilience, and building public support for climate action. As the 2022 Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality recognises, access to essential services, including social services and social protection are key to social fairness. However, to fully realise that vision, the EU must address the material conditions shaping the lives of people, particularly access to secure housing and clean, affordable energy.

Housing insecurity undermines social inclusion and slows down progress on climate goals. The upcoming EU Affordable Housing Plan must be fully aligned with just transition goals. This means, it should ensure that climate-resilient, energy-efficient housing is accessible to people experiencing poverty, racialised and other marginalised communities, and low- and middle-income households, not a green luxury reserved for the few. It should prioritise renovation of the worst-performing buildings, which often include social housing, while supporting public, social, affordable, community-led and cooperative housing models. Strong legal social safeguards must protect tenants from disproportionate rent increases, renoventions, gentrification, and displacement, and ensure housing cost neutrality after renovation. Housing affordability must also be operationalised, ensuring that people's remaining income after housing costs is enough to cover basic needs.



The EU Affordable Housing Plan must require Member States to adopt or reinforce national strategies for affordable and sustainable housing, backed by sustainable funding streams. It should be closely linked to the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, and integrated with existing services in health, social care, and employment. The new European Commission Housing Taskforce must also play a key role in ensuring coordination and implementation across the European Commission's relevant departments.

It is positive that the plan will “address structural drivers, develop a strategy for housing construction, offer technical assistance to cities and Member States and focus on investment” and that the European Commission is already working with the European Investment Bank (EIB) on a pan-European investment platform for affordable and sustainable housing<sup>24</sup>. Strong social conditionalities must be attached to EU investments, to ensure a real and measurable increase in the stock of social and affordable housing, alongside long-term sustainability. The upcoming revision of EU state aid rules must also support social, public, cooperative, and community-led housing providers in meeting the growing needs of low- and middle-income groups.

On energy, the Affordable Energy Action Plan, published as part of the Clean Industrial Deal, takes some welcome steps by lowering taxes and expanding access to renewables. Yet more must be done to tackle the structural drivers of energy poverty, particularly in the Citizen's Energy Package expected in Q3 of 2025. This package must go beyond technical fixes and market incentives to directly support those most affected, through fair tariff structures, energy justice measures, and targeted income support. Community energy projects, energy citizenship, and public participation in the energy transition should be strengthened to ensure that citizens are not just consumers, but co-creators of a clean energy future.

The Social Climate Fund and Social Climate Plans must play a key role in protecting low-income households and tenants. Support for building renovation must include safeguards to prevent renovictions, avoid gentrification, and protect households from rising climate-related housing risks. In this context, funding should be made available for both public authorities and non-profit actors delivering affordable, quality, and energy-efficient housing.

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<sup>24</sup> [European Commission Political Guidelines, 2024](#)



A just and fair transition is not only about decarbonisation, it is about redistribution, rights, and resilience. Everyone must have access to affordable, safe, and climate-resilient housing and energy if the green transition is to succeed. The Fair Transition Recommendation reinforces these principles by urging Member States to guarantee access to affordable housing, energy, and other essential services as core elements of a socially just transition. An EU Just Transition Policy Framework must guide EU and national efforts to ensure that climate neutrality does not come at the cost of social equity, but rather advances it.





## Conclusion

The European Union's goal to become climate-neutral by 2050 cannot be achieved through environmental policy alone. A fair and just transition is essential to ensure that the profound changes required for the green transition do not deepen inequalities or leave communities behind. Climate, social and economic goals must be pursued together, not as competing objectives, but as mutually reinforcing pillars of a fair and resilient Europe. Yet current EU measures remain fragmented, underfunded, and largely non-binding, with social concerns too often treated as an afterthought.

To meet the scale of the challenge, the EU must establish a strong, coherent Just Transition Policy Framework which includes legally binding measures. This framework must embed social rights at its core, support workers and groups in vulnerable situations, strengthen public services, and promote a fairer economy through the social economy and inclusive governance. It must also uphold intersectional equality, non-discrimination, global justice, and intergenerational responsibility, ensuring that the transition benefits all people in the EU and beyond.

The appointment of a Commissioner for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition is a welcome step, but must be matched with concrete legislative action and meaningful engagement with civil society and social partners. The EU has the knowledge and the capability, what is needed now is political will. By putting fairness, dignity, and solidarity at the heart of the green industrial and digital transitions, the EU can lead not only in climate ambition, but in building a future where both people and planet thrive.





Social Platform is the largest, leading organisation working on social issues. We have strength in numbers and put power back into people's hands who want a more Social Europe. Collectively we unite and give a voice to tens of thousands of organisations and hundreds of millions of people in Europe in all their diversity.



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