accting | AdvanCing behavioural Change Through an INclusive Green deal

For an inclusive and socially just European Green Deal: Integrating gendered and intersectional perspectives in Green Deal policies

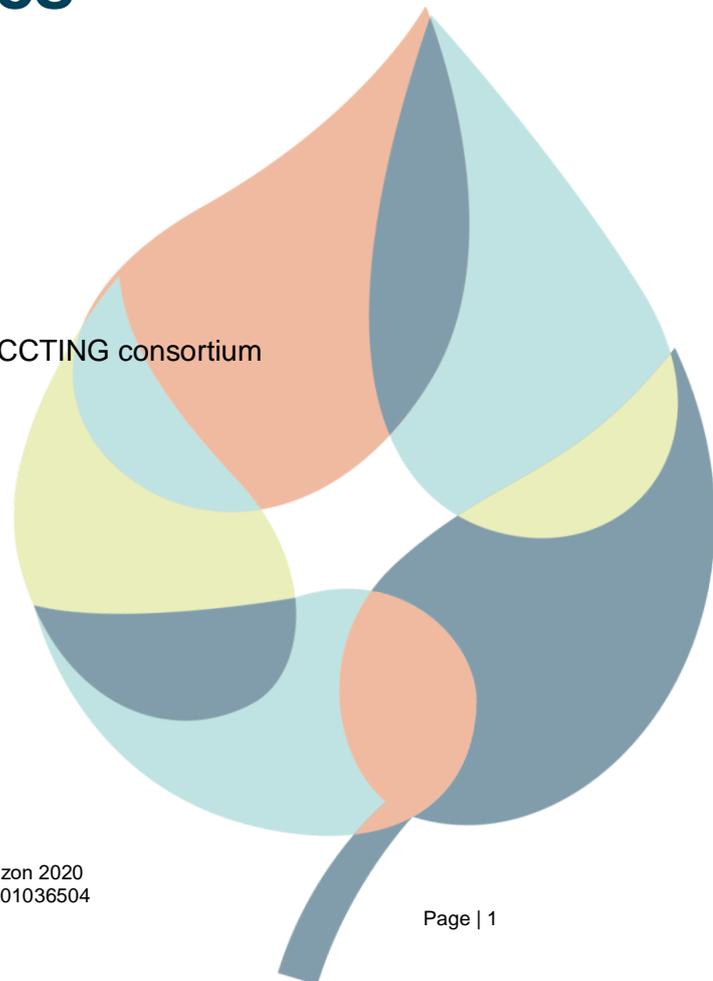## Policy Brief #1

University of Gothenburg

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Introduction

The European Green Deal aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, while ensuring a fair transition for all and to "leave no one behind" (von der Leyen 2020). However, policies designed to mitigate and adapt to climate change have largely failed to consider gendered and intersectional impacts (Alston 2014; Magnusdottir & Kronsell 2021; Lau et al. 2021). This has resulted in uneven and unequal consequences for different social groups, and the long-term impacts are uncertain.

To address the climate crisis effectively and legitimately, the transition to low-carbon production, consumption, and distribution systems requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach. Technological solutions alone are insufficient to tackle the enormity of the challenges posed by the climate crisis. Policies must consider circular economies, reduced consumption (Akenji et al. 2021), sufficiency (see Jungell-Michelsson & Heikkurinen 2022 for a review), and degrowth/post-growth (Jackson 2017; Hickel 2020) at multiple levels, including individual, organisational, and policy levels. Moreover, the policy solutions need to consider gendered impacts and intersectional perspectives in order to not leave some groups benefiting, and others falling further behind.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues, further highlighting the need for a fair and just transition towards a low-carbon society that leaves no one behind. However, there remains a significant research gap on how different policy and societal responses to climate change have unequal and unequalising effects (Chancel & Piketty 2015; Jorgenson et al. 2019; Kartha et al. 2020; Lokot & Avakyan 2020; Pellegrini-Masini et al. 2020; Walter & McGregor 2020; Wilkinson & Pickett 2011). The EU-funded ACCTING research project contributes to filling this gap by exploring the impact of Green Deal policies on the individual and collective behaviour of vulnerable groups, and how policies can effectively integrate gendered and intersectional perspectives to address the climate crises to promote an inclusive and socially just European Green Deal.
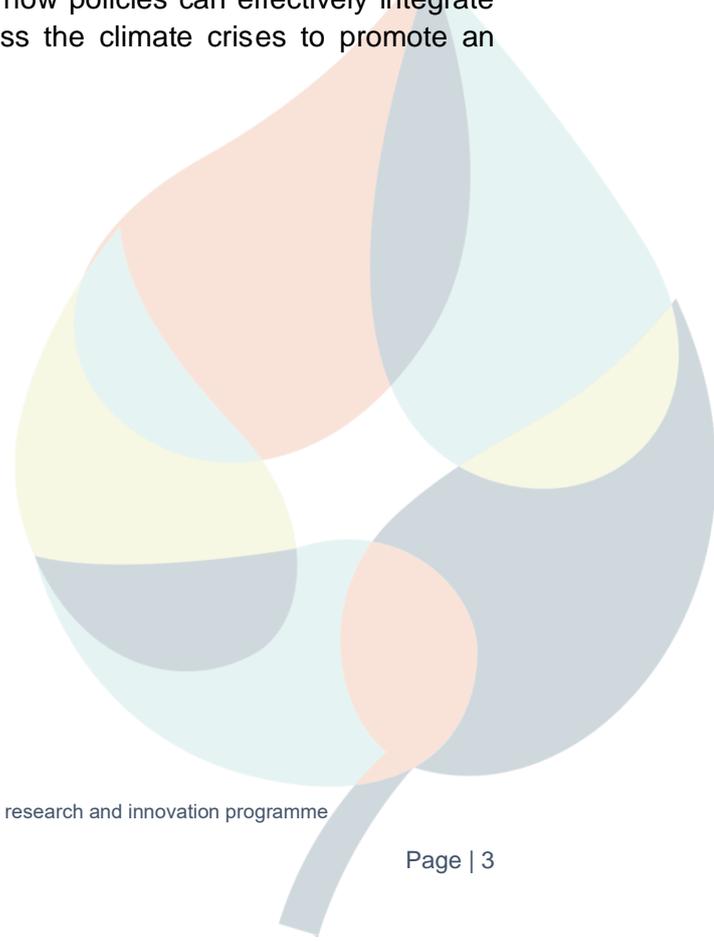
Evidence and analysis

The following policy recommendations are based on the **unique evidence-base** compiled by the ACCTING research team. It builds on desk research and fieldwork in **13 European countries** (2022), co-creation in Open Studios as well as workshops in which insights were operationalised into recommendations (2023).

The research output includes **400 interviews** of individuals with intersectional profiles representing a wide variety of **vulnerable groups**. Especially women with low income were interviewed, often of young or old age and with various kinds of racial, ethnic, and cultural marginalisation backgrounds. Furthermore, various people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ background, single parents, and persons living in socially and/or structurally deprived urban and rural areas are included.

The interviews were conducted across eight thematic research lines. Each related to and aligned with the Green Deal policy areas, including climate change, resource use and biodiversity, energy, food, and mobility.

The general findings are similar across all eight research lines:

1. The interviews confirm that possibilities to change behaviour in line with what is envisioned by the Green Deal are not equally distributed. **Change is especially difficult and complex to achieve for the socially vulnerable and marginalised:**

   a. Traditional gender roles persist and entail gendered values, stereotypes and roles that impair change. Especially being responsible for care work paired with poor socio-economic conditions makes change a burden for many women.

   b. Those with intersectional disadvantages 'pay' behavioural changes with their time, already scarce resources, and further reduced convenience. As a result, people are experiencing strong feelings of frustration.

   c. Vulnerable groups and inclusiveness are often marginal in the attention of businesses and authorities. But those who are sensitive to it are also the ones most successfully working on change towards social and environmental sustainability.

2. For the socially vulnerable and marginalised, there is a strong tension between ecological sustainability and socio-economic disadvantage:

   a. Individual values and beliefs can be major catalysts for change, yet long-lasting behaviour change is all too often hindered by lack of money, time, knowledge, social support, and the general structural conditions.

   b. Those living in disadvantaged conditions also find themselves most often in contexts where infrastructures (shopping, public transport, etc.), geography, (dis)trust in authorities, and lack of social cohesion are persistently preventing change.

3. Social dynamics are crucial enabler of change:

    a.   Person-to-person interaction and being part of communities and social networks are the most highlighted aspects that trigger behaviour change and help at consolidating it. They do so by providing 'moral support' (like inspiration, appreciation, and a feeling that 'one is not alone') and various kinds of resources (e.g., knowledge, shared goods).

    b.   Traditional, long-established customs and behaviours that remain deeply ingrained in a community, local and indigenous knowledge, role models, and family members are crucial sources for learning what to change, and how to do so.

4. Successfully changing behaviour comes with very positive emotions, which is crucial for effectively sustaining, strengthening, and promoting further behavioural change.

Policy implications and recommendations

1. *Many people want to change, but they cannot, due to lack of money paired with structural and political conditions that do not favour environmentally friendly (e.g., mobility, energy, and shopping infrastructures). Change thus seems to be less about choice, but about conditions. Therefore, policies are needed that:*

    a.   **Provide targeted financial support and incentives for socially vulnerable and marginalised individuals** to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours. For example, offer subsidies for energy-efficient home upgrades or public transit passes, and provide tax credits for low-income families that grow their own food.

    b.   **Address the lack of access to basic infrastructures** (e.g., public transportation, healthy food options) by investing in and expanding public infrastructure in marginalised and low-income areas. For instance, prioritise the implementation of bike lanes and public transportation in areas that are currently underserved, make it mandatory for (or incentivise) supermarkets to prioritise local and seasonal produces, and facilitate the installation of regenerative energy sources at home.

    c.   **Shift the burden of responsibility from individuals to manufacturers and sellers** by incentivising businesses to adopt circular business models, such as product-as-a-service or sharing platforms; and make it mandatory to reduce/do without packaging and transition towards environmentally friendly production practices. This can include the introduction of a mandatory

circular economy law, offering tax breaks for 'green' businesses, and investing in infrastructure like repair and reuse centres.

2. *Possessing certain knowledge and education (e.g., how to grow vegetables or to bike), self-efficacy (e.g., feeling capable to garden or to bike long distances), and access to equipment and tools are key for enabling the vulnerable to change. Policies can fill in here which:*

a. **Develop, implement, and support education programs that focus on the applied locally specific skills and knowledge** needed to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours, and adapt to climate change. These programs can be tailored to specific groups, such as single parents or seniors, and can be delivered in community centres, schools, and online.

b. **Support the creation and maintenance of community tool libraries and sharing programs**, to give access to equipment and tools (e.g., bikes, gardening equipment, energy-efficient appliances) that are needed to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours and/or to adapt to climate change but are currently inaccessible for those living in marginalised or low-income communities.

3. *Communities and relationships can inspire awareness and knowledge. In reverse, lacking ties to other people, lack of social appreciation, facing social resistance, and norms that continue encouraging non-environmental behaviours, make change a lonely process and deprive motivation. Policymakers can leverage the power of social dynamics and create motivating contexts, with policy actions that:*

a. **Foster social connections and support networks through community-building initiatives that prioritise environmentally friendly practices**. For instance, support or establish community gardens and farmers markets where individuals can share knowledge and resources and connect with others who are interested in sustainable and more resilient living.

b. **Promote and normalise environmentally friendly behaviours and climate change adaptation through positive messaging and role models**, including politicians themselves acting in line with the Green Deal ambitions.

c. **Activate local knowledge holders and build capacity and resilience by drawing on place-based expertise.** Authorities can do much more to utilise and support existing knowledge by inviting diverse local representatives to meaningfully participate in planning and policy decisions (e.g., in biodiversity management and disaster preparation).

4. *Many micro- and small enterprises are not yet taking measures to adopt environmental measures, often due to a lack of awareness, knowledge, and financial constraints. Yet, it is of utmost importance that they do, which can be helped by:*

a. **Programs offering favourable loan terms, grant funding, or other forms of financial assistance to businesses** that commit to transitioning to more sustainable practices. To ensure that these programs are accessible to those who need them most, they should be made available to businesses in economically disadvantaged areas or those owned by individuals from marginalised communities.

b. **Incentives for joint investments in green and circular economy infrastructures** by SMEs and micro enterprises.

c. **Providing training, networking opportunities, and mentorship programs to support businesses and entrepreneurs to change**. These initiatives can also create a supportive social ecosystem for entrepreneurs to access information and resources, share experiences, and learn from others who have changed.

The research also highlights the remaining knowledge gaps:

1. **Intersectional data and analysis**. The intersection of multiple inequalities positions people differently in terms of behaviour change. But there is a need for data and methods that fully capture how multiple inequalities intersect and affect people's ability to make behavioural changes to achieve the EU Green Deal goals.

2. **Consumption**. The interviews show a near total lack of possibilities and drivers to reduce consumption, although this is essential to achieve sustainability and climate goals. Rather, there are huge infrastructural as well as socio-cultural obstacles to reduce consumption. A crucial gap for future research is thus to investigate how policy, communities, civil society, and other actors can challenge structures of overconsumption and facilitate reduced consumption.

3. **Norm change and masculinities**. The results suggest that men tend to make different choices than women. However, we need to address this role of men and masculinities, as there is a lack of knowledge about how masculinities work as enablers or hinders of sustainability, and how they are/can be transformed.

4. **The role of authorities and legislation**. Lack of trust in authorities and streamlined policymaking are preventing entrepreneurs and individuals to make decisions with a long-term sustainability view. Accordingly, research is needed on trust and the role of streamlined legislation among the marginalised and vulnerable.

5. **Intergenerational and cross-cultural dialogue**. There seems to be great potential of exchange across cultural backgrounds and generations to contribute to the advance of sustainable values and practices, yet it continues to be an underexplored area.

Further reading

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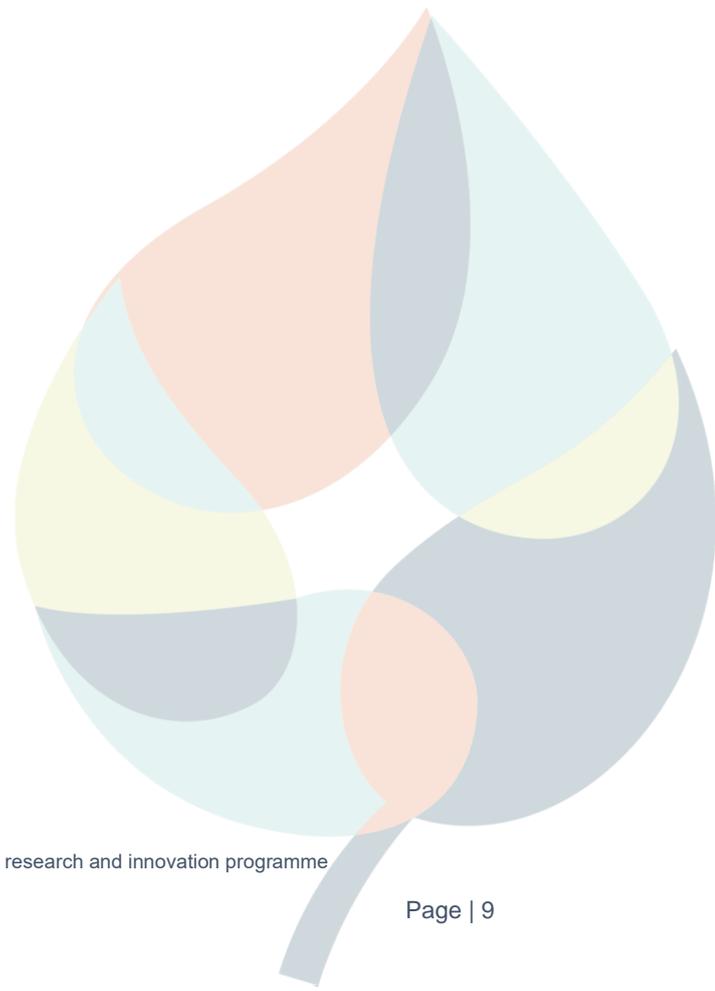
The ACCTING project

The European Green Deal aims to improve the well-being and health of citizens and future generations by providing fresh air, clean water, healthy soil and biodiversity; renovated, energy efficient buildings; healthy and affordable food; more public transport; cleaner energy and cutting-edge clean technological innovation; longer lasting products that can be repaired, recycled and re-used; future-proof jobs and skills training for the transition; globally competitive and resilient industry. However, inequalities emerge in the context of its policy and interventions.

> *The EU-funded ACCTING project is mobilising research experimentation and innovation to promote an inclusive and socially just European Green Deal focusing on the inequalities produced by its policies.*

The project is exploring the impact of Green Deal policy initiatives on individual and collective behaviours, providing evidence, and empowering policymakers and stakeholders to anticipate policy responses and potential negative influences, and mitigate such impacts in decision-making. ACCTING is collecting new data on Green Deal policy interventions and co-designing and implementing pilot actions to reduce or prevent policy-related inequalities.

More information: https://accting.eu/project

- Coordinator: European Science Foundation, Strasbourg, France: accting-eu@esf.org.
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Disclaimer

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