



Toward Just, Ethical and Sustainable Arctic Economies, Environments and Societies

Key Challenge 2: EU Climate Change Mitigation Policies



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 869327



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KEY CHALLENGES SERIES AUTHORS

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The general trend towards less carbon-dependent societies is especially affecting Arctic populations due to their dependence on fossil fuels (e.g. car-dependent transportation, greater heating needs, etc.). Such a trend is underpinned by ambitious international policies towards emissions reductions. EU policies are part of this global pressure to foster green transition. Yet, there is a paradoxical increase in the demand for fossil fuel across Europe (especially since the start of the Ukraine conflict). A balance should be found between Arctic and non-Arctic energy needs on one hand, and a commitment to climate change action on the other. Unfortunately, in some cases, global and national sustainability goals inadvertently compromise Arctic local social and environmental sustainability. In several countries of the European Arctic, climate mitigation and adaptation actions follow EU policies and directives on sustainable development.

However, findings from JUSTNORTH case studies show that these pressures can at times result in negative impacts on local communities' environment and on the sustainability of other economic and cultural practices (e.g. disruption of traditional livelihoods by wind farms; opening of new mines to extract materials required for electrical batteries, etc.). Additionally, the European Climate Law Regulation and its climate neutrality 2050 target, as well as the Renewable Energy Directive, are directly or indirectly contributing to put increased pressure on the Arctic to develop renewable energy parks or to fully develop its potential as a European raw materials reservoir. These pressures are

partially based on the perception of the Arctic as being a vast and uninhabited place while the existing land uses are often overlooked. This mismatch between ambitions and reality has been translated into Arctic local instances of resistance to large-scale projects of low-carbon transition. Achieving a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of climate change mitigation action is thus the main challenge ahead. A just transition should “recognis[e] and accommodate[e] the needs of local stakeholders (in the Arctic, importantly the local inhabitants) and ecosystems” .

The design and implementation of successful climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies thus need to take into account social sustainability and the values of stakeholders in order to ensure just outcomes. In this sense, the EU should ensure a strong engagement with Arctic stakeholders and rightsholders ensuring participation and involvement in both decision-making and planning processes. Their particular values and experiences should be considered and understood. An engagement with traditional knowledge remains a significant task. Arctic stakeholders and rightsholders' concerns should be addressed and included in EU climate strategies and policies as much as possible. Additionally, dialogues and partnerships between different Arctic stakeholders and rightsholders could be promoted to facilitate implementation and potentially resolve conflicts surrounding it. It would also be beneficial for the development of a common regional climate mitigation and adaptation strategy. This shared framework has often been pointed out by JUSTNORTH stakeholders as a high priority.

Finally, support should be given to workers and communities that are or were dependent on extractive activities as the transition to low-carbon economy advances. For instance, the “keep it in the ground” proposal to ban the import of newly extracted Arctic fossil fuels in the EU 2021 Arctic policy statement was criticised due to the severe negative effects anticipated on national economies and on some local communities and particular economic sectors depending on extractive activities. The EU Just Transition Mechanism

and Just Transition Fund were created to address transition challenges and are responsible for, respectively, phasing out peat energy and decarbonizing heavy industry. However, these tools have been criticised as well for being almost solely focused on skills and jobs replacements and not applicable in the Arctic beyond Finland and Sweden. A broader lens is required to address climate mitigation issues and just transition in the Arctic region.



Photo: Corine Wood-Donnelly

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 Address the unequal distribution of burdens in climate mitigation strategies

R2 Ensure that social sustainability is considered as a central aspect in EU regulations and mechanisms (e.g. Taxonomy Regulation)

R3 Contribute to the development of a comprehensive transnational, multilevel and cross-sectoral Arctic climate mitigation and adaptation strategy

R4 Establish a EU common target for black carbon reductions, similar to the one promoted by the Arctic Council

R5 Integrate distributional and recognitional justice considerations into the work of the Just Transition Mechanism

Risks, Challenges and Barriers to Implementation and Effectiveness

The EU may encounter limitations regarding its legal jurisdiction to enforce regulations or social sustainability standards in regions where it lacks direct competence (non-member states) (R2; R3; R4).

The coordination process with Member states may be intricate, given disparities in policies and approaches among these countries (R2; R3; R4).

The idea that the EU could follow the Arctic Council's voluntary commitment on the reduction of black carbon emissions when the EU is not even a regular observer may lead to some political resistance (R4).

Opportunities and Facilitators for Implementation and Effectiveness

By ensuring participation in decision-making on strategic priorities and local ownership and control of development processes, the EU can facilitate a more sustainable approach to development in the Arctic region (R1).

By taking an active role in the development of an Arctic climate strategy, the EU can foster greater cooperation with Arctic states and other stakeholders in the region. Such strategic alignment could reinforce the EU's position as a strong and reliable partner in Arctic governance (R3).

The EU has already established national targets for emissions that partially cover black carbon, thus showing political will to address the issue (R4).

If the EU were to commit to emissions reduction, this could influence other Arctic Council observers and non-observers to do the same (R4).

Black carbon emissions reduction is also a part of the clean air measures, which are beneficial for European citizens directly, while also benefiting the Arctic and global climate change mitigation (R4).

These policy orientations and recommendations would lead to improvement in regard to the following justice considerations:

- Distributive justice lies at the core of these recommendations as they seek a better balance in the distribution of climate mitigation policies' negative impacts and benefits on local communities.
- In terms of restorative justice, prioritising the social sustainability of Arctic communities would lead to a substantial reduction in social inequalities resulting from common extractive practices and ecosystem damage to the local population. Additionally, it would also reinforce recognition justice as it would require the consideration of different needs, experiences and value systems, especially those of vulnerable and marginalised groups.





Integrated Arctic Policy Analysis Report and Recommendations - Key Challenges



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