

# Labour market changes for a green and caring economy

Feminist Green New Deal Policy Paper



POWERED BY

wbg WOMEN'S  
BUDGET  
GROUP

Wen.

#GreenCaringEconomy

# **Labour market changes for a green and caring economy**

## **UK Feminist Green New Deal Policy Paper**

by Anna Johnston and Sara Reis

May 2022

## Executive summary

Our vision for a green and caring economy calls for an economy and society based around principles of wellbeing<sup>1</sup> and care. This will be crucial for addressing two of the biggest challenges facing us today, the climate and care crises. The end goal is a society in which environmental justice is realised alongside social justice, ensuring the transition to and the maintenance of a sustainable economy is just, fair and equal, with no one left behind.

One central aspect of transitioning to a green and caring economy will be greening the labour market. Beyond greening high-polluting sectors, this will require a full transformation of all jobs to become green. This will be achieved through the following changes:

- **Processes** within a sector would be greened (for example reducing material throughput and improving efficiency)
- **Activities** oriented towards green ends (for example green financial investing)
- **Sectors expand** where there is a case for the sector as a low-carbon one that supports the wellbeing of people and planet (for example the care sector).
- **Sectors contract** where greening processes and reorienting activities still cannot justify the overall size of the sector (for example retail and fossil fuel energy).

Changes to the labour market are likely to have gendered impacts because women and men are concentrated in different sectors in the economy and have different patterns of employment. Solutions must therefore take these differences into account so that a green economy is also a more gender-equal one. Alongside sectoral changes, employment changes to promote equality, fairness, diversity and wellbeing should be introduced:

- **Working conditions and employment culture** - For a green economy to be sustained, green job creation must exist within a set of wider policies and practices that protect the wellbeing of the worker and the environment, and work towards a gender-equal economy. This includes protections such as improved parental leave, flexible working hours, a robust and reformed social security system, a shorter working week, cooperative models which enable collective worker ownership, improved work/life balance. These would be supported through strong pro-labour institutions (for example, trade unions).
- **Reskilling and diversity** - A green caring labour market in which sectors are de-segregated will require improved and inclusive education and training throughout the life course, particularly to encourage women and minority groups into STEM sectors. Bringing more people into the care sector will be achieved by greater public investment to revalue care workers, enabling better pay, working conditions and career development. The pace of change required will also necessitate creative and community-led approaches to recruiting, reskilling and innovating. This should be underpinned by a transformative 'just transition', one that not only supports workers in specific transitioning industries, but also undoes existing inequalities in the labour market.

---

1 We define wellbeing as good quality of life and flourishing for all people: <https://bit.ly/3DwUIUX>

- **Changing behaviour** - Behaviour change will be required at the individual and community level towards significantly less and better consumption, particularly by more affluent individuals and households, who are more likely to overconsume, with an emphasis on redistribution to support low-income households.

## Introduction

The climate emergency is the most pressing crisis facing us today. The UK government has released a series of climate initiatives including its Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution<sup>2</sup>, its Green Jobs Taskforce<sup>3</sup> and Net Zero Strategy<sup>4</sup>. Key to the government strategy is a pledge to create two million 'green jobs' by 2030.<sup>5</sup> These jobs are principally committed to greening physical infrastructure, largely in energy, construction, and transport.

Yet there are many shortcomings in the way both the crisis and its solutions have been framed which strongly influence where public (and private) investment will go and ultimately the way our green economy and labour market will be structured.

Investing in physical infrastructure jobs such as those in renewable energy, retrofitting buildings and public transport is hugely important. Yet, current plans for a 'green industrial revolution' are not ambitious enough to create the level of transformational change required to create a genuinely green economy. Certain sectors will need to shrink, some will expand, and all will need to green their processes and outputs. Including sectors beyond those traditionally associated with green technology, such as in social infrastructure would help solve problems relating to reskilling and redistribution of jobs, but also social problems far beyond the labour market itself.

The Covid-19 pandemic shone a bright light on the UK's ongoing care crisis. As a relatively low-carbon sector, care should be a key site for green employment, both to welcome those retraining from high-polluting and contracting sectors (e.g. fossil energy and retail), as well as to create a valued, high-quality care system to maintain and support the current and future labour force and society more broadly.

Investment in care is also crucial to achieve a gender-equal economy. Care sectors have a predominantly female workforce that is low paid, often in insecure contracts and with low chances of career progression. Beyond important economic sectors in their own right, care sectors provide essential scaffolding to the rest of the market economy, allowing parents and other unpaid carers – mostly mothers and women – to participate in the labour market, increase their earnings, and build careers. The care sectors should therefore be key sites of investment for job expansion and better working conditions and pay in a green caring and gender-equal economy.

Beyond investment in the sectors themselves, a green economy must also reimagine employment practice and culture. All sectors of the economy must be re-valued to ensure green jobs are well paid and stable, with good working conditions, including access to a shorter working week, flexible working and acknowledgement of the importance of work-life balance. Key to this will be a recognition of the contributions and work that is not part of the market economy but still sustains and maintains it, such as unpaid care work. This will make an important contribution to gender equality as women are the majority of those in low-paid and insecure jobs.<sup>6</sup>

---

2 BEIS et al (2020) [The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution](#)

3 Green Jobs Taskforce (2021) [Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector](#)

4 HM Government (2021) [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#)

5 Green Jobs Taskforce (2021) [Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector](#)

6 Women's Budget Group (2022) [Spring Budget 2022: Women and employment](#)

Attention will need to be directed to diversifying and de-segregating the workforce, to ensure that opportunities in expanding sectors are extended to all. There are likely to be significant contractions and job losses in both female- and male-dominated sectors of the economy such as retail and manufacturing as part of a transition to a green economy. It will be crucial to increase the number of women and marginalised groups in STEM and greening physical infrastructure, as well as encouraging men into currently undervalued and feminised roles in care.

Private investment will likely play a role in shaping the labour force of tomorrow. Yet with private investment geared towards shareholder profit rather than positive social or environmental outcomes, it is crucial that this is not a market-led approach. Government will need to take the lead in investment and regulation to prevent greenwashing and lead on labour market standards by example.

Rather than see the transition towards green jobs as part of a 'green growth paradigm'<sup>7</sup>, this paper provides a vision of a green economy that reorganises the labour force and corresponding investment to put care for people and planet at the centre. It outlines the sectoral shifts required, and where government investment will be needed to facilitate this huge reorganisation of the economy and the labour market.

## Our vision of a green and caring economy

Our vision for a green and caring economy calls for an economy and society based around principles of wellbeing<sup>8</sup> and care. Prioritising the wellbeing of people and planet is crucial if we want to address two of the biggest challenges facing us today, the climate and care crises. The end goal is a society that recognises that environmental justice cannot be realised without social justice, which ensures the transition to, and maintenance of a sustainable economy that is fair and equal, with no one left behind.

Reorienting towards wellbeing and care will require a complete transformation and reorganisation of society, the economy and the labour market that go far beyond plans proposed in the government's current Net Zero Strategy. Every sector within the economy will need to reorient its activities away from socially and environmentally damaging activities, (for example, financial services divesting from polluting sectors) and green its processes and outputs.

Our Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy<sup>9</sup> made clear that the economy is not an abstract system operating separately from us. We are the economy, and therefore it should work for us. Polling undertaken as part of our Commission found that 68% of people in the UK say that wellbeing should be used to measure the success of economic policy.<sup>10</sup> Shifting towards a green economy should therefore prioritise wellbeing in all areas, including in how we reconceptualise our labour market and the sectors we prioritise for creating new, good quality, (green) jobs.

---

7 Sofroniou and Anderson (2021) [The green factor: Unpacking green job growth](#), International Labour Review, Vol 160, No. 1

8 We define wellbeing as good quality of life and flourishing for all people: <https://bit.ly/3DwUIUX>

9 WBG (2020) [Creating a Caring Economy: a call to action](#)

10 Ibid.

Investment in a quality childcare and social care system will be central to ensuring the wellbeing and autonomy of all within society. It would meet the needs of all, enabling people to be supported to have a good quality of life, and for children to have better life chances. It would also expand and diversify<sup>11</sup> the labour force by freeing those currently unable to work due to caring responsibilities, who are more likely to be women. Investment in the care sectors contributes thus to a gender-equal economy. This will require a larger proportion of total employment to be in the care sector.

In a green and caring economy, individual behaviour and time use as well as consumption within communities, on high streets and in city centres will shift towards significantly less and greener consumption. Less consumption will mean less overall economic activity, which could mean fewer jobs in many sectors, meaning employment protections and policies to protect workers will be even more vital (see 'working conditions and employment culture' section below). New care jobs, related to people's wellbeing as well as nature conservation, will be created and a process of reskilling, combined with strong social security system to protect people's incomes, will be necessary.

There is also huge public support for a green and caring economy. Polling by IPPR and Policy Exchange in 2020 found that 61% of the public think social care spending has been below what is needed, 53% wanted to see spending increase following the Covid-19 pandemic and 80% agree that care workers should be paid more than the minimum wage.<sup>12</sup> Polling from WBG and NEON ahead of COP26 found that 65% of the public support investment in social infrastructure to increase green care jobs as part of decarbonisation plans.<sup>13</sup>

## What is a green job?

There has been much public and policy debate around what constitutes a green job, what the future of work will look like in a green economy, and what it takes to get there.

Currently there is no unified definition of a green job.<sup>14</sup> Most existing classifications focus heavily on sectors related to greening goods and services in currently high-polluting industries, as well as ecological conservation. The UK government's Green Jobs Taskforce report takes an amalgam of current definitions to produce its own, defining a green job as:

***employment in an activity that directly contributes – or indirectly supports – the achievement of the UK's net zero emissions target and other environmental goals, such as nature restoration and mitigation against climate risks.***<sup>15</sup>

This is important because the way we interpret and understand what a green job is will influence public and policy focus as well as both public and private investment. The lack of a unified definition provides an opportunity to examine and make a case for the expansion of the notion of a 'green job' beyond the typical sectors.

11 The government Green Jobs Taskforce acknowledges that a more diverse workforce 'brings many advantages to an organisation, from increased profitability, creativity, stronger governance, and better problem-solving abilities'

12 IPPR (22 May 20) [Care after Coronavirus: An emerging consensus](#)

13 Women's Budget Group (9 Nov 2021) [Twitter thread](#)

14 ONS (2021) [The Challenges of Defining a Green Job](#)

15 Green Jobs Taskforce (2021) [Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector](#)

The previous section has highlighted that in a green and caring economy, all sectors and therefore all jobs will need to become green. A new framework for defining a green job is therefore a component part within a completely greened labour market. Within this green and caring labour market, the processes within a sector would be greened (e.g. reducing material throughput and increasing efficiency) and its activities oriented towards green ends (e.g. green financial investing). In addition, sectors would become smaller where greening processes and reorienting activities still cannot justify the overall size of the sector (e.g. retail and manufacturing) and would expand where there is a case for the sector as a low-carbon one that supports the wellbeing of people and planet (e.g. care sector).

## A green and caring labour market

This new framework for defining green jobs will apply to the whole labour market. Whilst all occupations within each sector would be affected, outlined below are a few indicative case studies from different areas of the economy.

### Case study on physical infrastructure: public transport

In the UK, women in the labour market represent just 14% of the built environment sector and 21% of the transport sector.<sup>16</sup> BAME people represent just 4% of the transport planning workforce.<sup>17</sup> The Governments Green Jobs Taskforce has committed to increasing diversity in greening physical infrastructure (see Retraining, skills and diversity section).

Greening the public transport sector in a way which enables equal access to safe, affordable and accessible travel will require greater awareness of gendered differences in transport use and needs.

Transport infrastructure and investment are heavily skewed towards prioritising journeys into and out of a city centre (such as long commutes) at specific periods of the day and which are more likely to involve road and rail-based travel. Yet, the Department for Transport records that the three most common reasons to use public transport are leisure (26%) and shopping (19%) with commuting the third most common at 15%.<sup>18</sup>

Local and 'orbital' journeys for purposes other than commuting, often made on buses, are not prioritised in transport planning. Between 2008 and 2018, 134 million miles of bus coverage were cut across the UK.<sup>19</sup> Women make a third more bus journeys than men, are the majority of passengers making short journeys and are more likely to 'trip-chain' (a series of short trips linked together). This is partly due to greater caring responsibilities (for example, taking children to school) and domestic work (picking up the groceries, running errands).

Bus networks could be strengthened through public ownership, enabling local authorities to improve service coverage and integration, availability, affordability and accessibility. One example of this is Nottingham City Transport, which is the largest local authority-owned operator in England. It also has one of the highest passenger satisfaction rates for punctuality

16 WBG (2021) [Towards Gender-Inclusive and Sustainable Transport Systems](#)

17 Ibid.

18 Department for Transport (2020) [National Travel Survey 2019](#)

19 WBG (2021) [Towards Gender-Inclusive and Sustainable Transport Systems](#)

and affordability.<sup>20</sup> Local authority ownership could also enable a more connected approach to incentivising lower car usage and promoting active travel through education, outreach and peer support.

### Case study on social infrastructure: care

The Green Jobs Taskforce acknowledges that nature-based sectors could become key job creators across the UK, with particular emphasis on regions experiencing high unemployment. This is particularly pertinent for women, as it is the only sector recognised in most interpretations of a green job in which women are well represented, making up almost half of the workforce at 46%.<sup>21</sup>

Green Alliance predict 16,000 jobs could be created across 20% of British constituencies with the most severe employment challenges through job creation in woodland, peatlands and urban parks improvement and maintenance.<sup>22</sup> Such jobs are available at entry and graduate level, expanding the employment landscape in regions struggling to keep younger populations.

This could be particularly beneficial for young women who tend to predominate in already contracting sectors such as retail. They were also a hard-hit group during the Covid-19 pandemic with an estimated 1.5 million young women having lost income since it began.<sup>23</sup>

Increasing employment in protecting UK's natural spaces, biodiversity and ecology has multiple benefits beyond job creation, including improving physical and mental health, mitigating against impacts of climate change, and increasing tourism.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, the role of social infrastructure, and care jobs in particular, have been neglected as a site for investment to create green jobs. Wellbeing and good quality of life should be recognised as ends in themselves, at the centre of any green economy and invested in by central government accordingly. There are two main incentives for care to be one of the key sites for green jobs within a new green economy: an urgency to address the care crisis and the fact that care jobs are low carbon.

Everyone requires care at some stage in their lives, which will often be provided by a combination of unpaid carers (usually family members or friends), and paid public/private care professionals. Yet access to professional care services is hugely limited. In childcare, only just over half of local authorities in England (59%) have sufficient childcare facilities for full-time working parents, with less than a fifth for parents who work atypical hours.<sup>25</sup> For adult social care, 18% of people aged 18-64 report a disability, yet only 3% receive care (either paid or unpaid).<sup>26</sup> For those aged 65 and over, 2.1 million people in England require support with at least one activity of daily living (ADL), 84% of which have unmet care needs.<sup>27</sup> Poor access to professional adult social care is caused by underfunding, the fact that it is means-tested rather than universal, and failing markets.<sup>28</sup>

20 Ibid.

21 Green Jobs Taskforce (2021) [Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector](#)

22 Green Alliance (2021) [Jobs for a green recovery Levelling up through nature](#)

23 WBG and Young Women's Trust (2021) [Covid-19 and economic challenges for young women](#)

24 Green Alliance (2021) [Jobs for a green recovery Levelling up through nature](#)

25 Coram Family and Childcare (2022) [Childcare Survey 2022](#)

26 The Health Foundation (2020) [Social care for adults aged 18-64](#)

27 WBG and NEF (2022) [Universal quality social care: transforming adult social care in England](#)

28 Ibid.

A combination of poor access to child and adult care mean that unpaid carers are heavily relied upon to fill the gaps, and this disproportionately falls to women. For childcare, 1.7 million women are prevented from taking on more hours of paid work due to childcare issues, resulting in up to £28.2bn economic output lost each year.<sup>29</sup> In adult social care, up to 8.8 million people are estimated to be carers,<sup>30</sup> 3 million of which are also in paid work<sup>31</sup> and 58% of which are women, who are more likely to give up paid employment to undertake caring responsibilities.<sup>32</sup>

It is evident that the creation of a high-quality care sector necessitates a larger number of people working in care, who are also better paid, valued and trained. Currently, care workers face poor pay and precarious working conditions, which means it is particularly challenging to recruit people into the sector. Across the care sectors an investment of 2.7% of GDP would generate 2.2 million new care jobs,<sup>33</sup> with decent pay (raised by 45% - in line with pay in Scandinavian countries). This would create 2.7 times as many jobs as equivalent investment in construction - 69% of which would go to women.<sup>34</sup>

### Case study on sectoral constriction: Retail

In the UK, retail accounts for 5% of our economy, contributing £17bn in business rates, and employing over 3 million people, equivalent to 8% of all jobs in the UK.<sup>35</sup> Yet, retail jobs are also poorly paid; median hourly pay in retail is £8.75, which is £3.41 lower than the UK average.<sup>36</sup>

Changes already evident in the sector due to shifting consumption behaviours mean that traditional high street retail spaces and jobs are already in decline. Yet this does not mean the sector is shrinking; increasing automation and online shopping has led to a greater reliance on warehouse and logistics roles, in which men predominate.<sup>37</sup> Online shopping has also increased the prevalence of 'fast fashion'. Whether in a virtual or physical retail environment, contraction of the sector is essential to green the economy but will have a disproportionate impact on women as currently the sector employs 58% women compared with 42% men.<sup>38</sup>

This presents an opportunity for retail workers to move into roles with better pay and conditions as part of a just transition. One possibility could be to retrain workers for roles in local circular economies, funded through local government schemes and initiatives or local CICs which facilitate the continued use of products through reusing, repairing, re-manufacturing, and recycling. Many such projects are already thriving across the UK such as Zero Waste Leeds.<sup>39</sup> The Green Jobs Taskforce suggests that the growth of circular economy sectors such as repair, re-manufacture, refill and servicing could create between 54,000 to 102,000 net jobs across all regions in the UK by 2030.<sup>40</sup> Green Alliance go further, estimating that the government could help create over 450,000 jobs in the circular economy by 2035.<sup>41</sup> These new jobs must be

29 WBG (2022) [Spring Budget 2022: Childcare and gender](#)

30 Carers UK (2019) [Facts about carers](#)

31 Carers UK (2019) [Juggling work and unpaid care](#)

32 Carers UK (2019) [Facts about carers](#)

33 WBG (2020) [A Care-Led Recovery from Coronavirus](#)

34 Ibid.

35 British Retail Consortium (2020) [Climate Action Roadmap: Executive Summary](#)

36 Work Foundation (2020) [No Returns: a new direction to tackle insecurity in retail following COVID19](#)

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 [Zero Waste Leeds campaign](#)

40 Green Jobs Taskforce (2021) [Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector](#)

41 Green Alliance (2021) [Levelling up through circular economy jobs](#)

accessible to workers transitioning from retail and other sectors (particularly those with caring responsibilities).

## Case study on sectoral change: food

The current global food system (including production, transport, processing, packaging, storage, retail, consumption, loss and waste) is responsible for 21-37% of total GHG emissions.<sup>42</sup> In the UK, domestic agriculture, forestry and fishing make up 9.3% of domestic GHG emissions,<sup>43</sup> yet 48% of all food is imported, highlighting that the actual environmental impact of the UK food system is far higher than domestic emissions alone.<sup>44</sup> It is also a major UK employment sector, providing 3.9 million jobs.<sup>45</sup> However, jobs are often precarious, seasonal and temporary with low wages and poor working conditions. Women and migrant workers are disproportionately represented within these jobs.<sup>46</sup> Women also predominate in food retail which employs 1.2 million workers, many of whom receive social security benefits to top up their low wages.<sup>47</sup>

The unsustainable nature of the global food system is impacting the climate, biodiversity and our ability to feed a growing population. Globally, fertile soil is being lost up to 100 times faster than it is forming<sup>48</sup> and total soil erosion in England and Wales has been estimated at 2.9 million tonnes per year.<sup>49</sup> Industrial agriculture is responsible for clearing 5 million hectares of forest per year globally.<sup>50</sup> Shortages in food during the Covid-19 pandemic and implementation of Brexit have exposed deep and longstanding issues within the UK's food supply chains. They have prompted recognition of the level of food insecurity which affects 8-10% of households, disproportionately those on lower incomes, the unemployed, lone-parent households, and Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.<sup>51</sup>

Addressing food security and creating a just food system must happen at a national and international level. Yet there is much that can be done within local authorities and communities to create shorter supply chains, better and more transparent processes and working conditions. Local revitalisation of food provisioning could be facilitated through community wealth building (CWB).<sup>52</sup> Investing in CWB would enable job creation through anchor institutions (large asset owning businesses or institutions, for example, NHS Trusts or local universities) supporting local procurement practices that would award contracts to local sustainable businesses. This would encourage the flourishing of local green and inclusive businesses.<sup>53</sup>

There is also an opportunity for greater local investment and community participation in urban growing. Just as food systems will have to become greener, so too will eating habits, with policy in place to reduce demand and consumption of high-impact products and food waste.<sup>54</sup>

42 The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2021) [Special Report on Climate Change and Land: Chapter 05. Food Security](#)

43 Calculations by Jerome De Henau for WBG using Eurostat data for all NACE activities plus households from: [Air emissions accounts by NACE Rev. 2 activity \[env\\_ac\\_ainah\\_r2\]](#)

44 Power et al (2020) [How COVID-19 has exposed inequalities in the UK food system: The case of UK food and poverty](#) [version 2; peer review: 5 approved]. Emerald Open Research, 2020, 2:11

45 IPPR (2021) [Building a Food System that Works for Everyone](#)

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Feedback (2019) [Too Much of a Bad Thing: The use and misuse of UK soil and land to grow sugar](#)

49 Ibid.

50 Feedback (accessed 2022) [Food System Facts](#)

51 IPPR (2021) [Building a Food System that Works for Everyone](#)

52 WBG (2021) [Revitalising Local Communities](#)

53 Ibid.

54 IPPR (2021) [Building a Food System that Works for Everyone](#)

However, a necessary increase in consumption of whole foods would mean increased food preparation time at home, which most often falls to women. Funded by local community schemes, employment opportunities could develop here to remove dependence on home preparation, creating healthy and locally sourced and prepared meals, as well as digital cooperatives such as CoopCycle which provide Living Wage jobs.<sup>55</sup>

## Working conditions and employment culture

For a green economy to be sustained, green job creation and maintenance must exist within a set of wider policies and practices to protect the wellbeing of the worker and the environment.

### Childcare, parental leave and recognising caring responsibilities in the workplace

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the crisis of care in the UK, from adult social care and childcare to unpaid care. It has also exposed how this crisis is gendered: during the pandemic 35% of working mothers lost work or hours due to a lack of childcare support.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, one of the biggest barriers to women's participation in the labour market is the unaffordability of childcare. Public investment in a free, universal childcare sector would enable women to participate with fewer constraints.<sup>57</sup> More flexible and equally shared parental leave is also important for a more equal distribution of care work between women and men and therefore women's freer access to the labour market.<sup>58</sup>

Overall, a greater recognition of the unpaid caring responsibilities of workers, and the flexibility to accommodate this will be key to making the employment landscape fairer and more accessible. You can read further policy recommendations on this issue in a separate publication.<sup>59</sup>

### Shorter working week

A shorter working week flexibly implemented would mean more people are able to participate in the labour market.<sup>60</sup> This will be crucial as less consumption and therefore less economic activity could mean fewer full-time jobs within the economy. You can find more on this in our dedicated shorter working week for a green caring economy publication.<sup>61</sup>

Due to the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, women are the majority of part-time workers in the market economy. A shorter working week for both men and women could result in unpaid care being more evenly distributed between women and men. This is more likely to be the case if it is implemented flexibly, enabling individuals to choose their working hours.

---

55 WBG (2021) [Revitalising Local Communities](#)

56 House of Commons Library (2021) [How has the coronavirus pandemic affected women in work?](#)

57 WBG (2022) [Spring Budget 2022: Childcare and gender](#)

58 WBG (2021) [Maternity, paternity and parental leave](#)

59 Ibid.

60 WBG (2022) [A shorter working week as part of a green caring economy](#)

61 Ibid.

## Decent pay and working conditions

It will also be crucial to ensure that the jobs and working conditions in a green economy are decent. Currently, many of the sectors that are key to a green economy, such as agriculture, forestry, construction, trade<sup>62</sup> and care<sup>63</sup> are vulnerable to poor working conditions.

Employers and policymakers must work with regional and national unions to ensure that greening sectors as well as retraining the workforce protect workers' rights and lead to better working conditions and decent pay.

## Flexible work and work-life balance

Flexible working practices should also be implemented in acknowledgement that women are more likely to leave paid employment where this is not available. More than 75% of women who leave engineering after maternity leave or career breaks want to return to work yet are put off by inflexible working patterns.<sup>64</sup>

Polling undertaken for our Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy found that 79% of the public agree that a better balance is needed between paid work, caring responsibilities, and free time.<sup>65</sup>

## Protecting people

There also needs to be greater financial protections for workers through a reformed and robust social security system.<sup>66</sup> The social security system must play an important role in protecting incomes and protecting people as workers transition from one sector to another.

A more robust social security system, designed with gender equality and climate change challenges in mind, would work as safety net for those that are unable to participate in the workforce, but also as a shock absorber to climate-related impacts on the workforce, both during the transition and beyond (for example if flooding or other natural disasters led to loss of work/shut down of place of employment), and therefore as an economic and social stabiliser.

## Greater employee and community participation in decision-making

A vital part of ensuring the greening of employment sectors is fair for workers and communities is to ensure everyone can play a role in decision-making, particularly at the local level. Incentivising the creation of more worker-led workplaces such as cooperatives would enable greater participation, whilst also bringing in more inclusive and horizontal business models.

---

62 B. Littig (2018) [Good work? Sustainable work and sustainable development: a critical gender perspective from the Global North](#). Globalizations. Vol. 15

63 WBG and NEF (2022) [Universal quality social care: transforming adult social care in England](#)

64 National Grid (2020) [Building the Net Zero Energy Workforce](#)

65 WBG (2020) [Creating a Caring Economy: a call to action](#)

66 WBG (forthcoming) [Managing risk through security: Social security's contribution to tackling climate change and gender inequality](#)

## Retraining, skills and diversity

The transition to a sustainable economy as outlined above will require significant re-skilling in many sectors of the economy. The government's Green Jobs Taskforce has pledged a 'Lifetime Skills Guarantee' as well as increasing diversity through retraining in the sectors it defines as containing green jobs (power, business and industry, homes and buildings, transport, natural resources, enabling decarbonisation and climate adaptation). However, there is also a point of tension between reskilling those in high-polluting sectors into new 'green jobs' and ensuring that these sectors are diversified.

Lack of diversity is a big issue in these sectors. They are heavily male-dominated; for example, women make up just 2% of employees in construction, building and vehicle trades, 18% in offshore wind<sup>67</sup> and 21% in transport.<sup>68</sup> Jobs in these sectors are also disproportionately held by white workers who make up 94.6% in construction, 92.6% in electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply and 91.8% in manufacturing.<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, jobs currently defined as 'green' tend to be held by white male workers. They also tend to be older, educated to a higher level, and on permanent contracts.<sup>70</sup> By the Green Jobs Taskforce definition of green jobs, these workers benefit from higher wages at a lower skill level than non-green jobs and to be at lower risk of automation.<sup>71</sup>

In the transition to a green economy, analysis by IPPR finds that 1.68 million jobs (780,000 direct and 905,000 indirect) could be created by 2035 in clean industries, some of the largest of which include energy efficiency retrofitting, low-carbon electricity, electric vehicle supply and infrastructure and expanding and improving rail networks.<sup>72</sup>

To ensure that a green economy is a just one, with equal access to green jobs, a serious and consistent effort needs to be made to attract and retain more women and underrepresented groups into these sectors. This points to the need for a just transition that not only supports one group of workers into new jobs, but that actually transforms existing inequalities in the labour market, ensuring that everyone has access to good quality, well-paid, secure, green jobs.

There is also a strong business case for prioritising increased diversity in workforces, with access to a wider pool of employees bringing greater creativity, stronger governance, and better problem-solving abilities.<sup>73</sup> Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams are 25% more likely to have higher profitability than companies in the lowest quartile.<sup>74</sup> Relating to ethnic and cultural diversity, top-quartile diverse companies outperformed those in the lowest quartile by 36% in profitability.<sup>75</sup>

Increasing the number of women and minority groups in physical infrastructure and STEM jobs requires change throughout the life course. Girls and BAME students should be actively

67 Green Jobs Taskforce (2021) [Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector](#)

68 WBG (2021) [Towards Gender-Inclusive and Sustainable Transport Systems](#)

69 Green Jobs Taskforce (2021) [Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector](#)

70 Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy et al (2021) [Are 'green' jobs good jobs?](#)

71 Ibid.

72 IPPR (2021) [Final report of the IPPR Environmental Justice Commission: Chapter 4. Transforming our economy](#)

73 Green Jobs Taskforce (2021) [Report to Government, Industry and the Skills Sector](#)

74 McKinsey & Company (2020) [Diversity wins: How inclusion matters](#)

75 Ibid.

encouraged to consider STEM subjects and apprenticeships. Companies should ensure diversity quotas are built into recruitment and promotion processes. Maintaining a diverse workforce will also necessitate a shift away from a male-dominated work culture, towards flexible working, promotion of work-life balance and gender equality in decision-making.<sup>76</sup> As well as removing the barriers for women to train or retrain, it will be crucial for the government to address discrimination and gendered inequalities in employment opportunities, pay and career progression following training and apprenticeships. Currently, young women can expect to earn on average £8,000 less than a young man five years after completion of an apprenticeship.<sup>77</sup>

Equally important will be ensuring inclusive access to funding for innovation projects. Currently, opportunities to innovate in technology sectors are limited to those with market insight and experience, who are predominantly white and male.<sup>78</sup>

As care and social infrastructure form a crucial part of the puzzle, both from the perspective of chronic staff shortages and care as a low-carbon sector, retraining in these areas will also need to be prioritised. As has been explored in a recent joint WBG and New Economics Foundation paper, careers in care will be more attractive for retraining if working conditions and pay are significantly improved.<sup>79</sup> Sectoral size will also change in line with an incentivised change in consumption patterns, meaning those in sectors such as retail and manufacturing will also need reskilling.

Further, we are currently heading in the direction of a shift towards automation which presents a problem for maintaining jobs in certain sectors. This change should not be an inevitable development in a caring green economy that puts people and planet first, ending the emphasis on profit-seeking through efficiency gains. Yet acknowledging the possible implications of increase in automation is important as it would have particularly gendered impacts. In 2019 the ONS found that an estimated 70% of roles at high risk of automation are held by women.<sup>80</sup> McKinsey forecasts that 22% of women employed in the UK could find their jobs displaced by automation by 2030. This is because women predominate in sectors such as retail and wholesale trade, healthcare, administration and government.<sup>81</sup> Young people, those without university-level qualifications, and those in part-time work were also disproportionately likely to be at high risk of automation.<sup>82</sup>

Low-carbon physical infrastructure jobs must also be distributed across the UK. IPPR advocates for utilising local and regional assets (for example, salt caverns in Tees Valley that could be used for hydrogen storage).<sup>83</sup>

However, there is a pace of change issue, as building skills development to bring about a de-segregated work force will likely take longer than we currently have to address the current climate crisis. Another mechanism to bring new entry level workers into certain sectors is to

76 Littig (2018) [Good work? Sustainable work and sustainable development: a critical gender perspective from the Global North](#). Globalizations. Vol. 15

77 WBG and Young Women's Trust (2021) [Covid-19 and economic challenges for young women](#)

78 Statement by researcher at the Black South West Network at Green Jobs roundtable, held 27th January 2022. More information can be found here: <https://www.blacksouthwestnetwork.org/>

79 WBG and NEF (2022) [Universal quality social care: transforming adult social care in England](#)

80 ONS (2019) [The probability of automation in England: 2011 and 2017](#)

81 McKinsey & Company (2019) [The future of women at work in the United Kingdom](#)

82 Ibid.

83 IPPR (2021) [Final report of the IPPR Environmental Justice Commission: Chapter 4. Transforming our economy](#)

recruit based on values rather than skills and train up employees once they have been recruited. One example of this is Birmingham, where CLES worked with local anchor institutions, including NHS Trusts and local housing associations to understand and change the recruitment pipeline (particularly regarding barriers to applying for positions).<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

Wellbeing and care for people and planet should be recognised as ends in themselves, and put at the centre of a new, green caring economy. Reorienting towards wellbeing and care requires complete transformation and reorganisation of society, the economy and the labour market. This highlights that the government's current Net Zero Strategy does not go nearly far enough to address the scale of the challenges we face. Every sector within the economy will need to reorient away from socially and environmentally damaging activities, whilst also enabling a diverse, well-supported and valued workforce.

---

84 See for example NHS's campaign: Discover how to get into jobs in Health and Social Care in Birmingham and Solihull – at <https://bit.ly/3xeFtPF>

The Feminist Green New Deal is bringing a gendered and intersectional approach/ perspective to the Green economy/Green Recovery - ensuring that the voices of women, people of colour and other marginalised groups are heard during environmental and political debates.

Through a programme of nationwide grassroots workshops and policy roundtables a Feminist Green New Deal Manifesto will be created and launched in 2022.

This Project is a collaboration between Wen (Women's Environmental Network) and the Women's Budget Group (WBG).

May 2022



POWERED BY

wbg WOMEN'S  
BUDGET  
GROUP

Wen.