

A JUST TRANSITION

The core principle of Québec's fight against climate change

Government of Québec climate action fact sheet



The government adopted a framework policy on climate change to guide Québec's climate transition, which is titled the 2030 Plan for a Green Economy (2030 PGE). The plan sets out the ways forward to tackle our collective challenge, the climate emergency, and nine principles to guide Québec's actions. One of these principles is a just transition.

What is a just climate transition?

The **climate transition** involves transforming society and its economy so it stops contributing to climate change and becomes resilient.

Climate transition is a concept closely related to the fight against climate change. However, it emphasizes the need for Québec's foundational and rapid transformation to a low-carbon and resilient society. This process is needed given the magnitude of climate change, as some of its effects are unavoidable while others are avoidable. The climate transition implies changes like transforming production, consumption, land use and governance methods.

These changes are likely to have environmental and socioeconomic consequences for Québec. Several impacts of the climate transition can already be assessed as benefits and costs. The action potential, ability to act, resources and responsibility in the fight against climate change vary from one society stakeholder to the next; these impacts must therefore be spread justly.

For the Government of Québec, a just climate transition is one in which the social, economic and environmental benefits and costs are distributed equitably and fairly between the various societal stakeholders and our current and future generations.

"Electrification and the fight against climate change must ensure a just transition for society as a whole and factor in the specific realities of each of Québec's regions." (2030 PGE)

Examples of climate transition benefits

- Environmental benefits may include improved air quality due to lower fossil fuel use or reduced heat islands.
- Social benefits may include better community resilience to climate change impacts and less energy demand to fulfill mobility, housing and consumption needs.
- Economic benefits may include the development of new industries related to the climate economy and an improved trade balance.

Examples of climate transition costs

- Environmental costs may include building the infrastructure needed to produce clean energy, or broader exposure to environmental degradation for people living in vulnerable areas.
- Social costs may include further social inequality and constrained land use for citizens and municipalities.
- Economic costs may include infrastructure adaptation or energy and insurance costs.

The Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs (MELCCFP) wrote this fact sheet to introduce the concept of a just transition and foster consistent interpretation. It sets out the concept, explains its origins and shows how the government is taking action to ensure a just climate transition as part of the 2030 Plan for a Green Economy.

Origins and progress of the concept of just transition

The concept of just transition emerged in the United States in the 1990s. Various environmental groups and trade unions popularized this concept, which gradually gained steam—particularly for labour and green jobs.

In 2013, the International Labour Organization (ILO) began the work leading to the adoption of the Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all in 2016. These guidelines provide practical, non-binding guidance to governments and social partners.

In 2015, just transition imperatives were acknowledged internationally with the signing of the Paris Agreement, a treaty to limit global warming and frame climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts in signatory countries.

In 2018, the Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration was signed by many countries at the Conference of the Parties (COP24) on climate in Katowice to reaffirm the Parties' commitment to a just transition.

In 2021, during COP26 in Glasgow, the Just Transition Declaration was signed by over 30 countries. Signatories committed to implementing strategies ensuring workers, businesses and communities will be supported during the transition to greener economies. They also recognized the need to ensure no one is left behind as the transition to carbon-neutral economies unfolds.

The foundations of a just climate transition in Québec

Québec chose to define the concept of a just transition more broadly, linking the climate transition with social, equity and justice issues. This definition helps take into account many issues related to the climate transition, such as the impact of the transition on labour, current and future generations, Indigenous peoples, communities, and individuals particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 and becoming resilient to the impacts of climate change as a society requires every industry sector to decarbonize and adapt. All stakeholders, including government at every level, the business community, individuals, Indigenous communities and non-governmental organizations, etc., need to mobilize for action.

A just transition means recognizing that, on the one hand, everyone must contribute, and on the other, these efforts must be equitable. Equity fits into a climate justice perspective. It must be mirrored by societal stakeholders in Québec and internationally, based on countries' contribution to global warming and their ability to address it. The equitable nature of climate action fosters public support for the transition by empowering citizens and motivating them to get involved in the fight against climate change.

Climate justice

In its 2022 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) refers to the following definition: "Justice that links development and human rights to achieve a human-centred approach to addressing climate change, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts equitably and fairly." (IPCC, 2022)

Since measures to fight climate change can either

improve

or

worsen

inequalities, anticipating the disparate impact of transition measures may help to deploy optimal solutions which will benefit the most affected people and groups. These solutions may be targeted programs, regulatory and fiscal measures (redistribution, eco-taxation), financial support and more.

This includes creating co-benefits like cleaner air and improved housing standards (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022).

Such impacts may lead to increased risk of adverse climate-related outcomes, increased vulnerability to climate change, or diminished welfare, now or in the future. (IPCC, 2018)



Climate transition as part of sustainable development

Just transition and sustainable development

Climate transition actions must be implemented not only with a view to just transition but also in a sustainable development perspective, in the same way as all government actions are carried out.

The just transition concept draws heavily from several of Québec's sixteen sustainable development principles, including social equity and solidarity, the polluter pays principle, prevention and precaution, meaning sustainable development and the fight against climate change are inseparable.

Just transition and socioeconomic inequalities

Although Québec has many social programs in place, it's crucial to recognize that not all individuals and groups in society are equal in the face of climate transition and climate change. For example, higher energy costs do not randomly affect people in the population. Certain population groups will be more affected than others, particularly low-income households.

Social and economic inequalities must be considered when planning and implementing the climate transition, as they may amplify the impacts of both the transition and climate change itself, particularly when it comes to the health of individuals and the population as a whole.

The development of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures must take into account factors such as income, age, chronic illness, mobility level, social network and risk aversion. These factors, among others, affect individual and community' sensitivity to the impacts of climate hazards, their ability to adapt, and how they will be affected by transition measures.

From a sustainable development standpoint, the climate transition must not widen socioeconomic gaps. Better yet, it should help close these gaps and enhance the well-being and resilience of the affected populations.

Québec's commitment to a just transition

Internationally

- In 2015, Québec declared itself bound by the **Paris Agreement** and committed to implementing the agreement in its jurisdictions.
- In 2021, a motion was passed unanimously in the National Assembly to support the **Just Transition Declaration** presented at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow in November 2021, emphasizing Québec's commitment in that regard.
- Since 2022, Québec has been involved in the **Just Transition Taskforce** with the Under2 Coalition. The initiative aims to accelerate progress towards a low-carbon, equitable economy by framing government actions on just transition through a working group of subnational governments dedicated to strengthening just transition efforts.

Under2 Coalition

This international network includes over 270 subnational governments representing 1.75 billion people and 50% of the world economy. The coalition members who signed the Under2 Memorandum of Understanding in 2021, including Québec, commit to collectively achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

In Québec

- In 2020, the Québec government **introduced the concept of just transition into one of its policies for the first time**, listing it as one of the nine principles guiding its actions in the fight against climate change.
- The government also **brought the just transition concept into the legislation** by including it in the preliminary provision of the Environment Quality Act (chapter Q-2).
- **On an operational level**, the just transition principle is embedded in many aspects of Québec's climate action, from determining orientations and objectives to designing, deploying and evaluating measures, and drafting specific measures.



Just Transition Issues in the 2030 Plan for a Green Economy

Compounded by the disruptions caused by climate change impacts, mitigation and adaptation measures will transform Québec's economy, personal and collective behaviours, and relationship with the environment. These transformations affect, and will continue to affect, society's stakeholders unequally, either because some are overexposed to climate transition fallout or do not all have the same capacity to cope.

Interventions must be made with a just transition focus, meaning the goal is to ensure the benefits and costs of this transition are fairly distributed. Here are six examples of just transition issues that are receiving particular attention under the 2030 PGE.

Prioritizing adaptation measures based on risk level

Climate change will have a widespread impact on Québec's development, the growth of its communities and its citizens. As temperatures rise and precipitation patterns shift in Québec, many risks will intensify, including flooding, heat waves, erosion, coastal submersion and permafrost thaw.

However, people, communities and regions will face varying degrees of climate risks. Achieving a just transition in this area especially means prioritizing support for those who have to cope with a higher degree of risk.

In this context, risk exposure and the vulnerability of communities and the population must be considered when prioritizing measures. Doing so will help focus on actions that will have the greatest effect on protecting individuals' physical, mental and financial health, as well as the safety and resilience of essential and priority infrastructures and services in Québec.

Vulnerability factors

Age, chronic illness, income, mobility level, social network and risk perception are all factors affecting sensitivity to climate hazards and people's ability to adapt to them. Indigenous and rural populations often struggle with limited access to financial, social, health and human resources to cope with climate hazards and are more exposed to environmental disruptions (INSPQ, 2021).

Preserving the culture and traditions of First Nations and Inuit peoples and maintaining safe access to territories must also be considered, given the impacts of climate change compromise their lifestyles.

As part of the 2030 PGE, the government has planned a comprehensive risk study for Québec to systematically assess the relative magnitude of the various climate risks in the short-, medium- and long-term and guide interventions. Similarly, as part of the OASIS program, aiming to protect population health during heat waves and intense precipitation exacerbated by climate change, targeted interventions will be deployed across Québec with a priority on the most vulnerable populations.

Partnership with First Nations and Inuit peoples

It is essential to maintain a dialogue between First Nations and Inuit peoples and the government to ensure a just transition and take concerted action tailored to Indigenous realities.

Partnerships between First Nations and Inuit peoples and the Government of Québec ensure these people's realities and specific needs are considered, while making sure they can benefit from the climate transition.

First Nations and Inuit peoples play a vital role in the climate transition. For this reason, the government has included a measure in the 2030 PGE specifically intended to strengthen First Nations and Inuit leadership in the fight against climate change. This measure is being co-developed by Indigenous partners and the Government of Québec. The government is also supporting an energy transition in Nunavik in tune with the needs and interests of communities while stimulating local job creation.

A just energy transition

From an energy standpoint, the climate transition involves a considerable reduction of fossil fuel usage, replacing it with renewable and low-carbon energies.

With a primary focus on energy conservation and efficiency, the transition will require increased renewable energy production in Québec, generating significant economic and employment benefits across several regions. This will also help citizens and businesses rely less on high-carbon energies, whose prices are set to rise as the world transitions to carbon neutrality. Any large-scale energy development can impact the environment, land and communities. Hence, the associated costs and benefits must be distributed fairly.

Similarly, while implementing energy efficiency and conservation measures will support a successful transition to carbon neutrality, it must also be done with equity in mind, especially when sharing benefits and costs.

Lastly, decarbonizing Québec will mean greater reliance on electricity to meet some of its citizens' essential needs, like heating homes in winter. Resilient generation, transmission and distribution networks, primarily located in northern regions or far from major city centres, is vital for energy security, not least in the event of prolonged power failures. The government and Hydro-Québec are taking this issue into consideration, notably in Hydro-Québec's Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

Off-grid communities

Some communities, including Inuit communities, are not connected to Hydro-Québec's main grid. These off-grid communities heavily depend on fossil fuels for electricity, heating and transportation due to limited access to renewable energies and community safety concerns specific to Nunavik's cold climate. Therefore, they face particular decarbonization challenges.

The framework of the 2030 PGE will support these communities in their transition so they can be less dependent on energy sources likely to be subject to restrictions and rising costs. They will also be able to reap the benefits related to producing and using renewable energies. Energy initiatives aimed at Québec as a whole must also consider the realities of these communities.

Fairness for future generations

During their lifetime, members of future generations are more likely to experience the fallout of global warming. Efforts to decarbonize the economy must be accelerated so that the cost of required economic and social changes does not fall on future generations alone. The same applies to adapting to climate change, which needs to take place now to limit its impact on future generations.

Québec has set an ambitious GHG emissions reduction target for 2030 to support its journey to carbon neutrality by 2050, which will enable it to address the intergenerational equity issue based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities based on respective capacities and different national situations set out in the Paris Agreement. The government also revises and improves the 2030 PGE implementation plan every year, setting out the efforts required to reduce Québec's GHG emission levels.

The government is also ensuring that Québec's clean electricity, which is essential to the transition, is used first and foremost to support GHG reduction efforts and prevent carbon lock-in. As a result, generations in the 2030s and 2040s will be able to continue the climate transition at the lowest possible cost.

Carbon lock-in can occur when major investments are planned in sectors and long-lived infrastructures with high emissions of greenhouse gases, which could counter climate change mitigation objectives.

In terms of adaptation, Québec assesses and considers projected risks not only in the short and medium term (2030–2050) but also in the long term (2050–2100) when implementing adaptation measures aimed at minimizing future risks. The ban on building in flood-prone areas is a real-world example of a measure that limits the risk of losses for future generations and prevents imposing a major collective financial burden.

Competitiveness of economic sectors and companies

All economic sectors emit greenhouse gases (GHGs) and are called to further contribute to decarbonizing our province. Québec established itself as a leader by introducing carbon pricing (a cap-and-trade system for GHG emissions allowances) and various regulations to accelerate movement in this area.

Ultimately, companies able to produce and provide low-carbon products and services will have a growing competitive edge in our future economy. In the short term, however, the gap between Québec's regulatory measures and those in place worldwide, as well as the investments required to reduce GHG emissions, may place some companies competing globally at a disadvantage. In addition, climate change risks will become an increasingly important factor in companies' business strategies and entail additional costs.

The government implemented support and financial mechanisms to enable economic sectors to decarbonize, become resilient to the impacts of climate change, seize favourable opportunities stemming from the climate transition and, where necessary, limit its impact on competitiveness. A consultation process based on dialogue between companies and the government helped advance the carbon market and financial aid mechanisms in line with the decarbonization imperative, while still taking competition issues into account.

Part of this approach also includes investment assistance and research and development programs focused on clean and disruptive technologies to identify future GHG emission reduction solutions.

Matching skills with labour needs

The impacts of transition and climate change on employment and labour will become more pronounced over this decade and those to follow. There will be increased or shifted demand for certain jobs upskilling needs and more. Certain sectors may also be more affected.

The transition at hand calls for monitoring the evolution of the labour market and adopting a forward-looking approach to ensure training and requalification offers align with future labour needs. The availability of a skilled workforce will also be crucial so that shortages do not impede the transition. Similarly, students and workers must be adequately trained to fully contribute to tomorrow's society and economy and take advantage of future opportunities.

While the climate transition is expected to positively affect the economy and employment in Québec, it is necessary to identify situations that may require workers to move or retrain.

The Government of Québec addresses these challenges by focusing on developing and building on the range of vocational, technical, academic and continuing education training required for the climate transition.

Interdepartmental work involving numerous partners, including the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) and the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail (CPMT), will also continue over the next few years. Studying the impact of climate change and transition on employment and labour will help determine the support required for affected workers and the necessary actions to deploy.

International climate cooperation

The climate crisis is exacerbating the fragility of some countries more vulnerable to climate change. These are generally developing countries that do not bear historical responsibility for increasing GHG emissions and have few resources to adapt. As a result, Québec is taking action not only on its territory but also in support of other states.

Given the need to achieve carbon neutrality globally, Québec has moved in this direction and provides technical support to other jurisdictions in its areas of expertise, such as carbon pricing and climate change adaptation, as part of international climate cooperation efforts.

Similarly, in recent years, the Government of Québec has contributed to various multilateral funds, including the Least Developed Countries Fund and the United Nations Adaptation Fund, to help developing countries adapt and build resilience to the effects of climate change.

For several years now, Québec has also supported implementing climate change mitigation and adaptation projects in certain vulnerable countries in the French-speaking world in collaboration with local communities through the International Climate Cooperation Program (ICCP).

Social dialogue: a prerequisite for a successful just transition

Social dialogue is a core component to ensure the Government of Québec's climate action is part of a just transition. This process can be seen as a collective discussion on the climate transition, shedding light on people's concerns and opportunities in that regard. Social dialogue helps to fine-tune government measures so that they are fairer and more effective as environmental, economic and social drivers.

To this end, the MELCCFP launched the *Stratégie de mobilisation pour l'action climatique* (Climate action engagement strategy). Specifically, it lays the groundwork for climate dialogues to create forums for open and transparent discussion on climate issues, including just transition.

Several actions related to the climate transition will also require increasingly closer consultation with stakeholders to ensure they are truly just. This concern is clearly shown in the government's work aiming to ensure a just climate transition for workers, which is based on consultations and an ongoing dialogue between various stakeholders, including labour market partners.



**Environnement,
Lutte contre
les changements
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To learn more about the 2030 Plan for a Green Economy, head to:
<https://www.quebec.ca/en/government/policies-orientations/plan-green-economy>.