

Just food system transition

requires a policy bringing together different objectives and a broad range of stakeholders

Mitigating and adapting to climate change requires major changes in the food system. Given the scale of the changes needed, it is appropriate to talk about a system-wide transition.

Just food system transition takes into account the effects of climate action on nutrition, livelihoods and the environment.

- The most important function of the food system is to produce good nutrition for all. When planning climate action, we must take care to ensure that this objective is not jeopardised. At its best, climate action supports healthy eating.
- The effects of climate action on agriculture can be significant and vary from region to region. In Finland, this is especially the case for peatlands used for agriculture. Compensatory measures are needed if climate action disproportionately harms the well-being or livelihoods of some groups. Transition periods alleviate the need for reimbursement.
- Climate policy must also take into account the impact of the action on biodiversity, water use and quality, and animal welfare.
- Fairness requires looking near and far. The effects of the food system's climate action on the nutrition, livelihoods and environment of the populations of other countries must be considered.
- Just transition is based on broad inclusion. The concerned groups must be able to participate in the planning of actions at an early stage. Special attention is needed for the inclusion of marginalised groups such as children and young people.



Climate action impacts the entire food system

The European Union (EU) aims to be carbon neutral by 2050, which means tightening up the targets for 2035. The EU's Farm to Fork programme outlines that achieving climate objectives and moving towards a more sustainable and healthier food system will require significant changes throughout the food system from production to consumption, from processing to food waste and from international trade to advertising.¹ The actions carried out in the food system alone will not solve climate change. However, climate change is affecting the conditions for food production around the world in many ways. Therefore, ensuring a global sustainable food supply requires both mitigation and adaptation measures.²

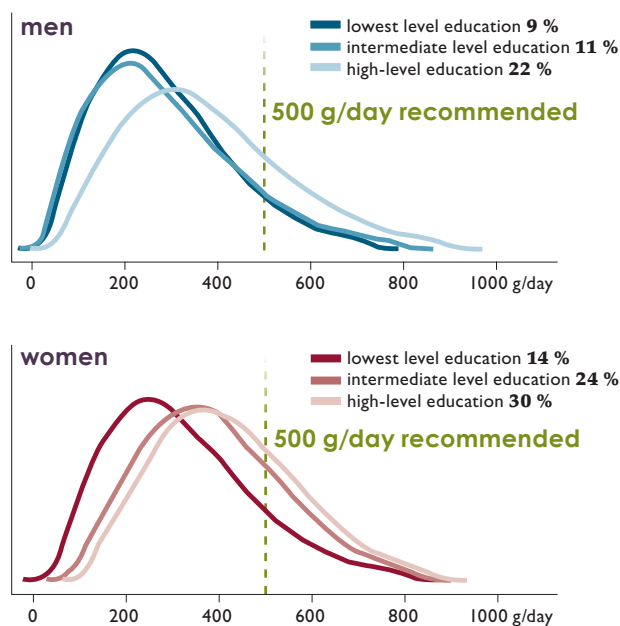
In Finland, changes in the use of arable land, the management of the carbon stock of arable land and changes in eating habits are effective ways of reducing the climate impact of the food system. Reducing

emissions from peatlands is particularly important because they account for more than half of all greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture (CO₂-eq) in Finland.³ Changes in production methods can affect the carbon stock of fields, as well as emissions from animal manure and rumination. Emissions from food consumption would be significantly reduced with more plant- and fish-based eating habits,⁴ which would also improve the healthiness of our diets.⁵ A reduction in livestock production would lead to a reduction of arable land which, in turn, would reduce emissions. In addition, from a resource efficiency perspective, it is important to reduce food waste.

It is estimated that by 2035, climate emissions from the food system could be reduced by at least a third.

Nutrition

The changes in eating habits required by the transition are most pronounced for groups whose diets are now the furthest from climate-friendly. In Finland, people with only elementary education eat fewer vegetables, fruits and berries. Climate action must not make it more difficult for the most vulnerable to have access to good nutrition.

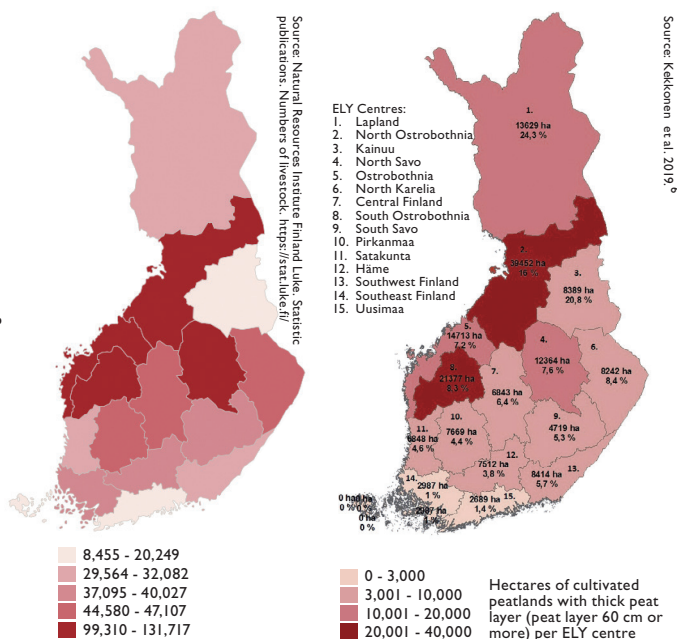


Source: FinRavinto 2017 study, JUST-FOOD WP4, unpublished. © SYKE 2020.

The proportion of people who eat vegetables, fruit and berries according to the recommendations varies by education and gender.

Livelihood

Climate action has a strong impact on agriculture as switching to more plant- and fish-based diets would reduce the demand for meat and dairy products. The regional economic impact can also be significant. For example, there are many cultivated peatlands in the northern regions and coastal areas, where the share of animal production is also emphasised. On the other hand, agriculture can offer climate solutions by enhancing carbon sequestration on mineral lands.



The number of livestock (2020) and area of peatlands (2016) are strongly distributed regionally.

A just transition in a food system requires splitting the justice questions into smaller units

Just transition is an important principle in the EU's green development programme European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy. The roots of the political debate on just transition lie in the trade union movement. As early as the beginning of the 21st century, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) called for attention to the economic and employment effects of climate action. Social and economic policies can support investment, employment and training in new industries.

In research, the concept of just transition has a strong foundation in the studies of environmental justice and sustainability transition.^{7,8} The research emphasises the identification of the benefits and harms of climate action, but also the recognition of social and cultural values and contextual factors as part of decision-making. In a just transition, the various parties must be guaranteed equal opportunities to participate and be heard in the decision-making.

The just transition in a food system must take into account all dimensions of justice

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| Distributive justice | Distribution of material and immaterial harms and benefits of the transition. |
| Recognitive justice | Taking dignity and special needs of different people into account in the transition activities and discussions. |
| Procedural justice | Equal opportunities for different groups to participate and be heard in the decision-making. |
| Restorative justice | Compensating the unreasonable harms that are difficult to avoid caused by climate action. |

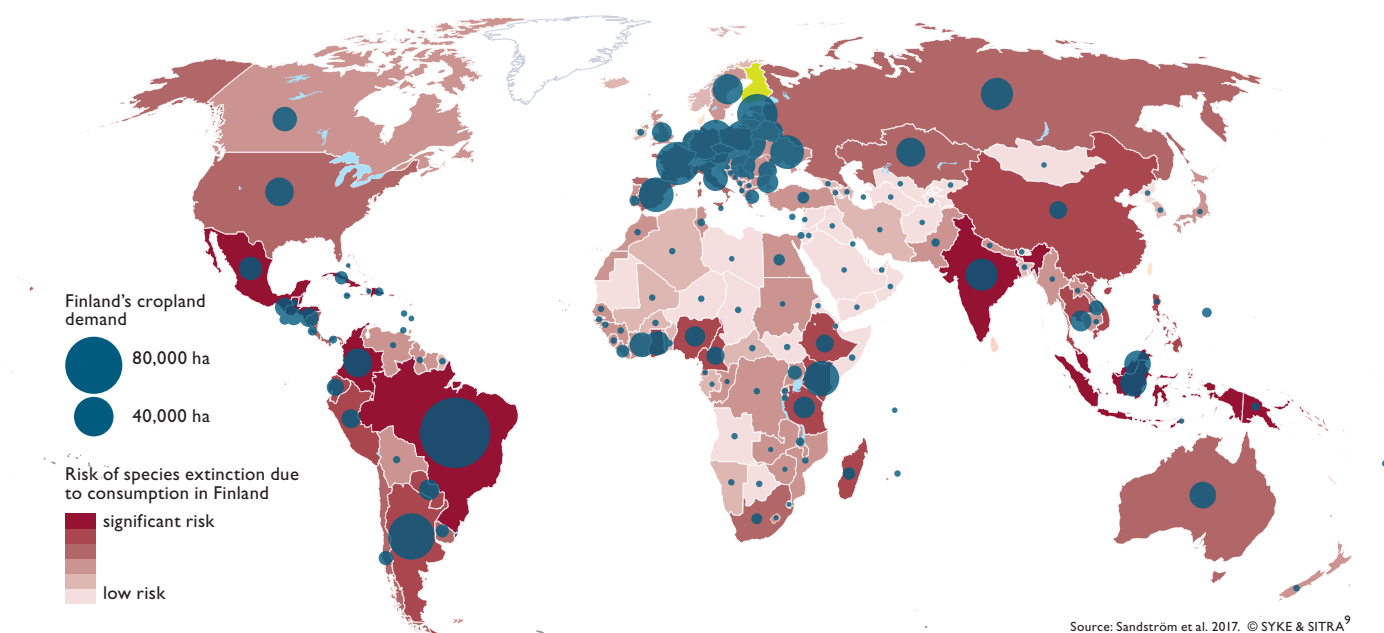
Environment

Climate action must be seen in conjunction with the protection and management of biodiversity and water resources. Sustainability in the use of natural resources is always a cross-border issue. Food consumed in Finland requires land areas and water resources around the world. National climate action is useless if it leads to environmental harms elsewhere.

Time

Short- and long-term objectives and consideration of transition periods are important tools of just transition policies. Not everyone has the same starting point for the transition. Some actions can be taken fairly and quickly; others require a transition period. Compensatory means can include training, transition support or financial compensation. Delaying climate actions is unfair to groups vulnerable to climate change.

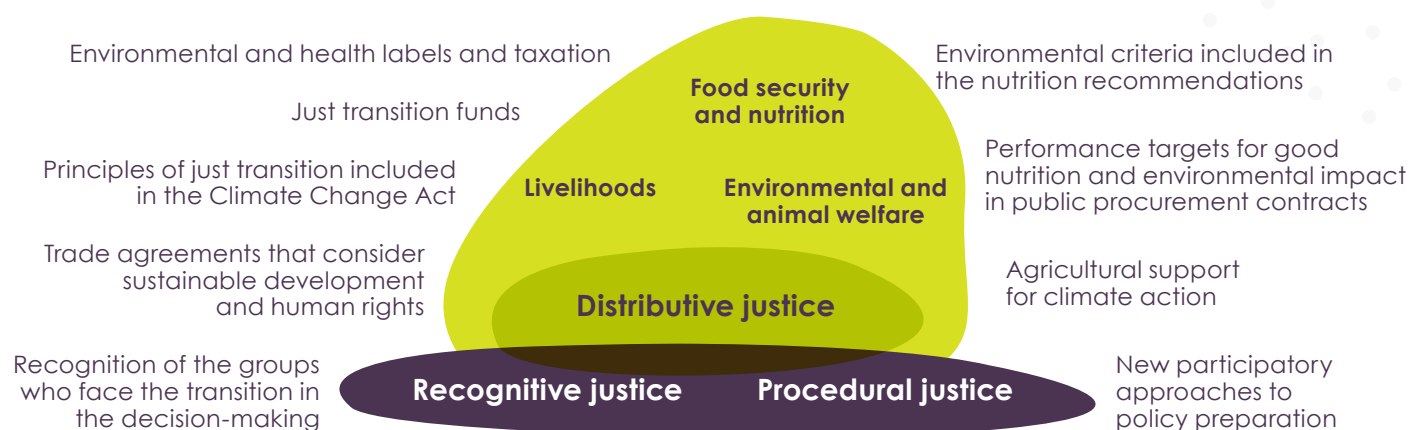
Foodstuffs consumed in Finland require land around the world



Clearing forest for agricultural use poses a threat of species extinction, especially in tropical countries.

Food policy is needed to coordinate a just transition

The just food system transition takes into account the effects on nutrition, livelihoods and the environment. For example, the following policies can support a fair transition



A just transition requires a food policy that combines and coordinates the various goals of the food system.⁴ The transition builds on existing policies and connects different policy sectors. In terms of fairness, it is important that groups who face the harms and benefits of the transition in different ways can be involved in developing and agreeing on climate actions.

The scale of the transition to a just food system calls for new ways of engagement. Community Supported Agriculture is an example of the willingness of citizens to work together for sustainability. A transition that young people could relate to can be promoted through the development of sustainable school meals. Taking into account the practical knowledge and skills of farmers is important in developing carbon-neutral production chains and climate-smart farming methods. Companies can improve the livelihoods and inclusion of workers and farmers in their supply chains through responsibility programmes and standards.

Public steering is needed to point in the right direction and set the necessary incentives and restrictions through legislation. The Climate Act can enshrine the principles of the just transition and regulate on the right to compensation for unreasonable harm. Agricultural subsidies can encourage farmers to take climate action, such as changes in farming practices and use of peatlands. Integrating environmental criteria into nutrition recommendations will help strengthen the actions for sustainable nutrition. Municipalities can also demand results from their food service providers in terms of health and environmental impacts. The development of trade agreements and corporate responsibility legislation can contribute to the realisation of sustainable development goals and human rights globally.

It is important to monitor the implementation of the just food system transition. Therefore, research-based indicators need to be created for the sustainability and fairness of the food system, allowing a comprehensive assessment of the effects of the transition.

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