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Call for papers

The New Political Economy of Welfare Systems in Times of Climate Change

Sciences Po Paris, 11-12 June, 2026

We are pleased to invite papers for an international conference on “The New Political Economy of Welfare Systems in Times of Climate Change”, organised by the International Network for Social Policy Teaching and Research, Sciences Po Paris, and University of Hamburg.

Organizing committee: Bruno Palier (Sciences Po Paris), Matteo Mandelli (Sciences Po Paris), Katharina Zimmermann (University of Hamburg), Neil Gilbert (UC Berkeley), Douglas Besharov (University of Maryland).

Background: Humanity is entering a new climate age, and so does the welfare state. With more and more planetary boundaries getting crossed (Rockström et al. 2023), extreme weather events increase in frequency and environmental degradation accelerates, thereby also posing risks to human health, property, infrastructure, and food supplies. At the same time, climate change mitigation and adaptation attempts often imply economic transitions that can lead to job losses, skill devaluation, poverty, stranded assets, or rising costs for energy, food, and housing. Besides confronting individuals with social risks such as property loss, sickness, poverty and unemployment, climate change and ‘green’ economic transitions also impose serious challenges for welfare systems. They can lead to rising consumption prices, decreasing tax and social contribution revenues, and higher social expenditure for health, active labour market policies, pensions, and social assistance. Furthermore, welfare systems are confronted with systemic trade-offs between environmental and social goals, such as investing in the ecological transition at the expense of existing social spending, or reducing consumption while counting on GDP growth to finance increasing demand.

While the new social risks for individuals increase and reshape the nature of inequality and vulnerability both within welfare societies and on a global scale, welfare systems face mounting challenges. These pressures exacerbate the scarcity of already limited resources, fuelling deep social cleavages and intensifying political divisions. These divisions manifest across redistributive struggles (e.g., rising costs of living, property loss, or stranded assets), sectoral and regional conflicts (e.g., labor market transformations in specific industries, regions disproportionately affected by extreme weather events, or regulations impacting particular markets like mobility and finance), and lifestyle debates (e.g., shifts towards veganism or individual motorized mobility). These divisions are increasingly politicized, instrumentalized in political debates and are perhaps defining new political cleavages.

Recent years have seen substantial shifts in political landscapes, party systems, social movements, and public opinion driven by these emerging cleavages. For instance, movements like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion galvanized public attention to climate issues, initially boosting support for green parties and environmental policies before encountering backlash or declining momentum. Meanwhile, trade unions grapple with balancing jobs-versus-environment dilemmas, right-wing populist parties exploit these tensions to consolidate their support by framing climate policies as threats to national interests or individual freedoms, and public opinion itself remains fragmented, reflecting the polarized and contentious nature of these debates. Relatedly, conflicts arise regarding the political and societal feasibility of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies, as well as the role welfare systems should play in enabling, buffering, and legitimizing economic transitions. Therefore, new policies are emerging that try to address both environmental and social challenges, such as just transition policies, meanwhile some environmental policies are abandoned because of their social consequences (see for instance the carbon tax in France after the Yellow Jackets movements or the ban on combustion-engine cars).

Welfare systems must navigate new tensions, such as balancing investments in the green transition with the continued provision of social services. However, they are uniquely positioned to drive change by adding a social complement to environmental policies either through compensation or social investment, or by integrating environmental considerations into their policies, such as through green taxation, sustainable public investments, or targeted subsidies for renewable energy and eco-friendly behaviors. At the same time, the growth dependency of welfare states adds a layer of complexity to these reforms. Most welfare systems rely on economic growth to sustain tax revenues, fund social programs, and meet rising demand for public services. This dependency creates a structural challenge when pursuing policies like significant reductions in carbon-intensive industries, which could threaten the very financial foundation of welfare systems.

Paper Topics: Although a growing number of studies prescribe how welfare systems should change in the era of the ecological crisis, an empirical assessment of the new political economy of welfare systems in times of climate change is still missing – one that examines existing risks, emerging and existing institutional responses (or a lack thereof), and political dynamics. We aim to fill this gap by developing a novel theoretical framework and bringing together new empirical insights. To this end, we seek contributions that engage with the following overarching questions:

- What are the new *social risks* that arise directly from climate change and the ecological crisis, and indirectly from the policies pursuing the so-called green transition? (See [this working paper on social-ecological risks](#))
- To what extent and how are different existing welfare *institutions*, with their peculiar set of policies and governance structures, addressing and preventing (or not) new socio-ecological risks?
- Which *political conflicts and coalitions* are triggered by new socio-ecological risks both on the demand and supply sides of the political sphere (public opinion, social movements, parties, civil society, trade unions and employer associations, bureaucracies, interest groups), and what is their impact on institutional changes?

We encourage empirical contributions that are comparative in nature, highlighting similarities and differences across the world, and addressing multiple levels of governance: local-regional, national, and supranational. Both qualitative and quantitative studies (and mixed methods) are welcome.

Possible Publications: At the author's option, papers will be reviewed for a possible Oxford University Press Book on *The New Political Economy of Welfare Systems in Times of Climate Change*. Presenting at the conference is not required to have a paper considered for the OUP Book, and presenting at the conference does not bind nor guarantee authors to submitting their papers to OUP.

Submissions: We invite scholars from comparative welfare state research, political economy, and related fields to submit abstracts of 600-800 words. Please send your abstracts via the google form [to be found here](#) by January 12, 2026. Selected applicants will be notified within a month after the application deadline. Conference papers should be sent in advance, three weeks before the conference at the latest. Papers should be approximately 15-20 pages long.

Fees: Please note that there will be a 200 Euros conference registration fee if the paper is accepted, which covers catering (coffee and lunches), and includes a conference dinner. Traveling and accommodation costs cannot be covered by the conference organizers.

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