

Towards a Just Transition in Europe – a perspective from the European Group on Ethics

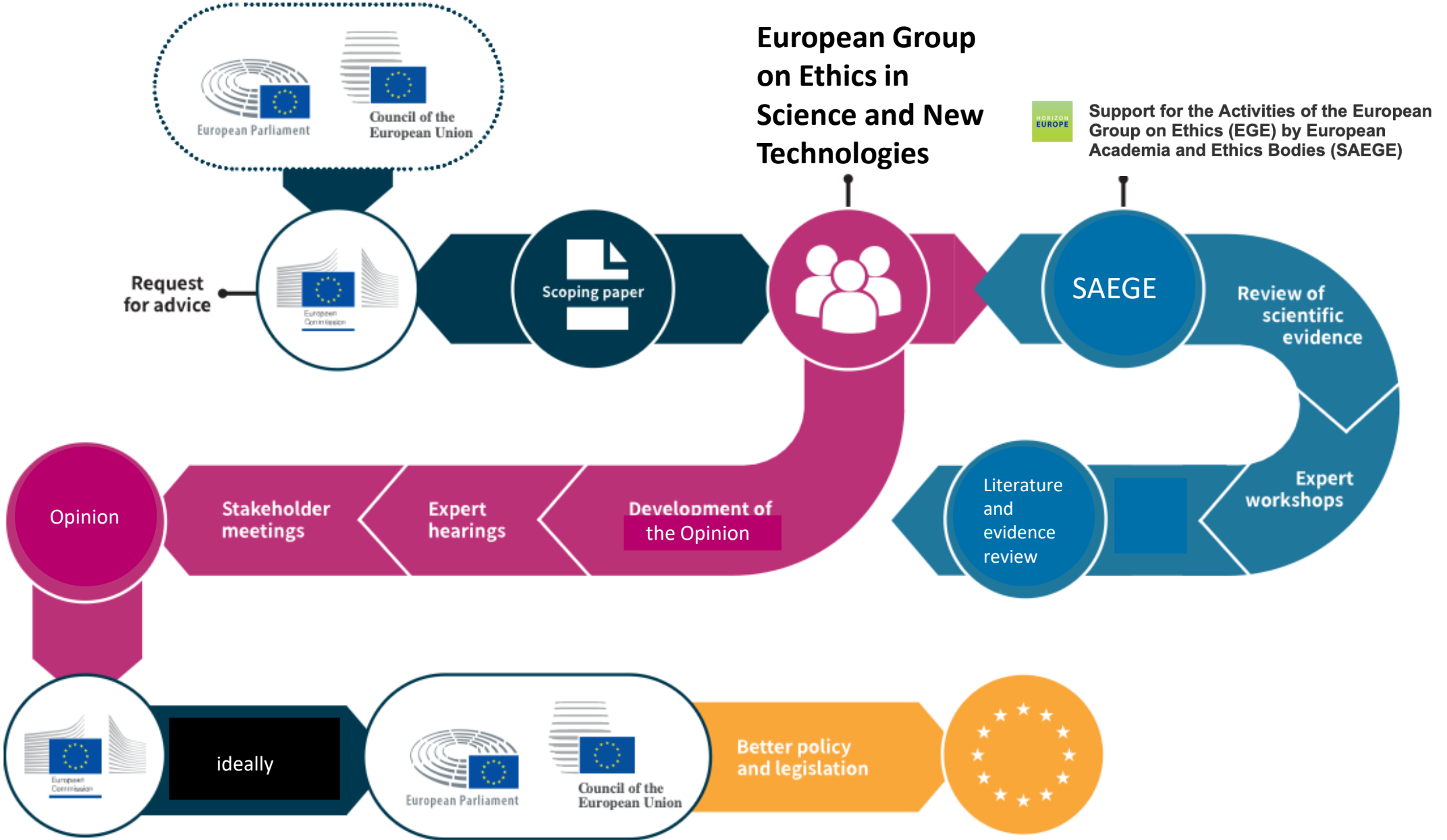
European Group
on Ethics in Science and
New Technologies



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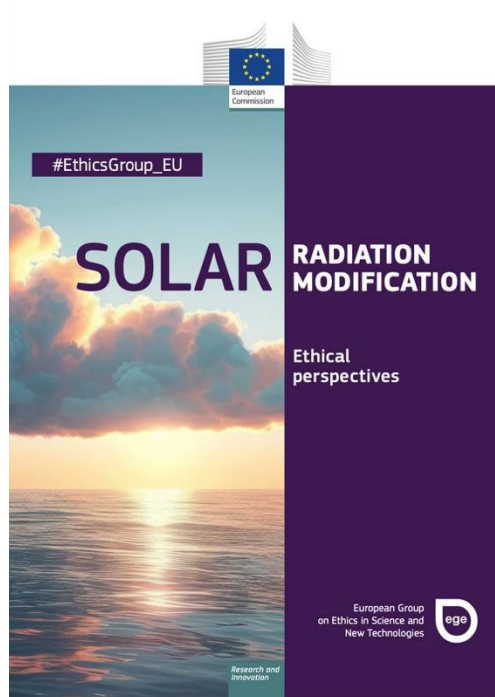


How we work



Three Opinions on ethics and the Green Transition at the request of the EC

*I. Solar Radiation Modification
(Dec. 2024)*



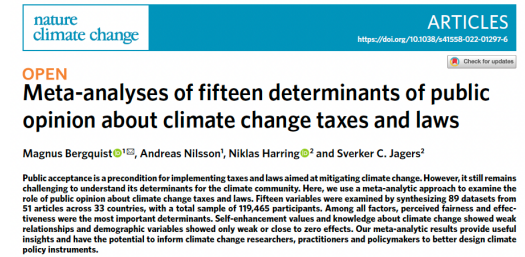
*II. The Green Transition
as a Just Transition*

Expected hand-over
end 2025

*III. The Value of
Nature*

Expected handover 2026

Public acceptance of climate policies: Evidence

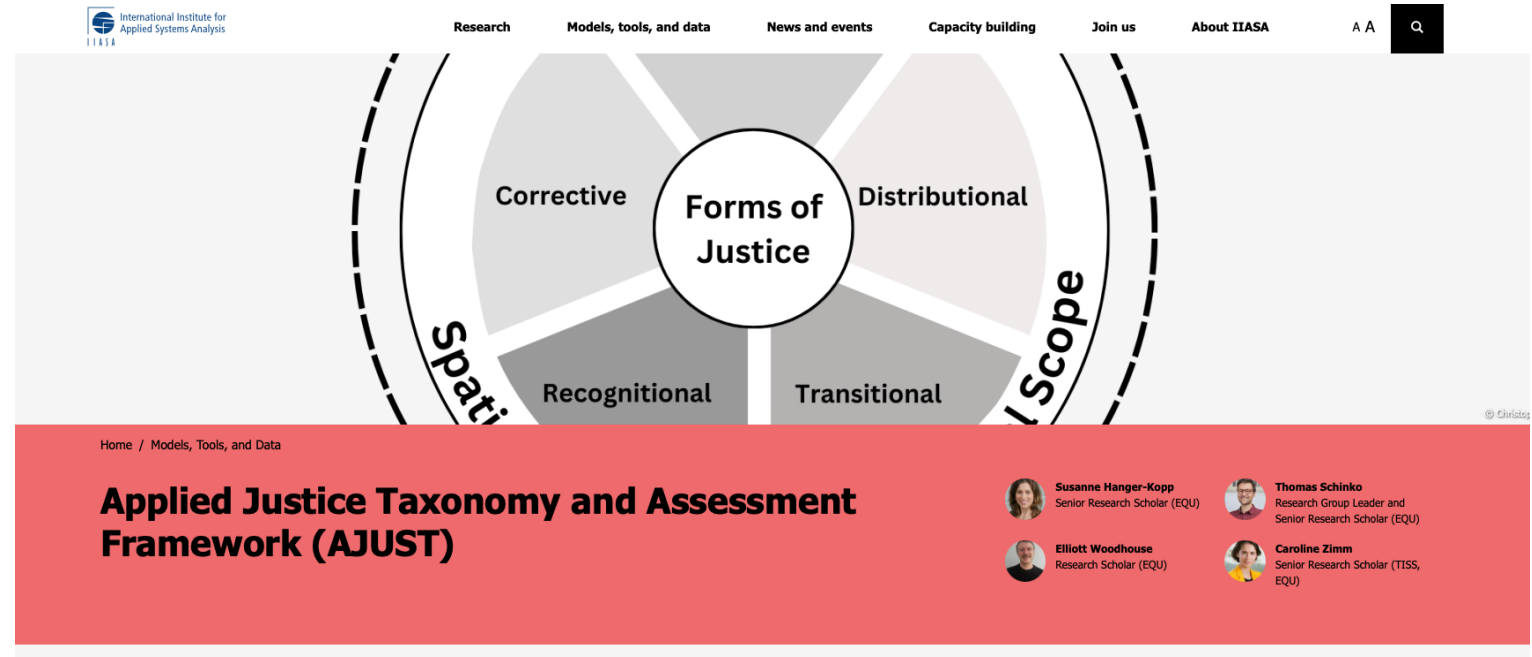


- Broad concern about climate change, but **urgency varies**
- **Fairness & effectiveness** > cost level
- **Trust in government** crucial for support
- Opposition higher where **public transport is poor**
- **Concerns:** misuse, corruption, free-riding
- **Framing & communication** strongly shape acceptance
- Make **visible co-benefits** (health, jobs, cleaner air)
- **Reduce inequality** and involve citizens as **partners**, not targets



Five dimensions of justice relevant for the Just Transition (JT)

Justice-by-design:
integrating justice
considerations throughout
the policy life cycle





Distributional justice – fair allocation of burdens and benefits (including non-economic aspects of well-being)

➡ e.g. JT Mechanism: JTFund (2021); Social Climate Fund (2023); Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

Procedural justice – fair processes by which decisions are made; inclusion of (diverse) stakeholders who are affected

➡ e.g. Territorial JT Plans for coal regions: structured consultations with local authorities, trade unions, civil society organisations, affected workers

Recognitional justice – ensuring that disadvantaged and marginalised groups are included and that their unique knowledge is recognised

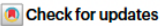
➡ acknowledging that women, youth, members of Indigenous communities, or migrant workers may experience the Green Transition differently

Corrective justice – seeks to correct past and recent harms (e.g. impacts of colonial practices) through compensatory measures

➡ e.g. JT Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) with South Africa, Indonesia, Vietnam, Senegal

Transitional justice – highlight that trade-offs are inevitable; must be justifiable and managed

➡ managing consequences of structural changes: social protection programmes, education and training, communication



The psychology of zero-sum beliefs

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Abstract

People often hold zero-sum beliefs (subjective beliefs that, independent of the actual distribution of resources, one party's gains are inevitably accrued at other parties' expense) about interpersonal, intergroup and international relations. In this Review, we synthesize social, cognitive, evolutionary and organizational psychology research on zero-sum beliefs. In doing so, we examine when, why and how such beliefs emerge and what their consequences are for individuals, groups and society. Although zero-sum beliefs have been mostly conceptualized as an individual difference and a generalized mindset, their emergence and expression are sensitive to cognitive, motivational and contextual forces. Specifically, we identify three broad psychological channels that elicit zero-sum beliefs: intrapersonal and situational forces that elicit threat, generate real or imagined resource scarcity, and inhibit deliberation. This systematic study of zero-sum beliefs advances our understanding of how these beliefs arise, how they influence people's behaviour and, we hope, how they can be mitigated.

Sections

Introduction

Operationalizing zero-sum beliefs

The causes of zero-sum beliefs

Consequences of zero-sum beliefs

Summary and future directions

Review article

Table 1 | Domain-specific zero-sum beliefs

Domain	Example zero-sum belief	Sample survey item or experimental design	Key finding(s)	Refs.
Immigration	Immigrants benefit at the expense of a country's citizens	"If some immigrants get richer, it means that other US-born citizens are getting poorer"	Stronger zero-sum beliefs about immigration are associated with greater conservatism and lower support for pro-immigration policies	15,26
International relations	A country's economic or geopolitical gains come at another country's expense	"A stronger Chinese economy means a weaker US economy"	Zero-sum beliefs about international relations are asymmetric: people believe that other countries gain at their own country's expense but not vice versa	17
Race relations	Black Americans gain at white Americans' expense	"More good jobs for Black people means fewer good jobs for white people"	Members of high-status racial groups endorse zero-sum beliefs about race relations when their status is threatened White Americans believe that decreasing anti-Black bias is offset by increasing anti-white bias	38,105
Gender relations	Women gain at men's expense	"As women gain social status, men lose social status"	Men endorse zero-sum beliefs about gender when they feel the gender hierarchy is under threat	19,20, 112,113
Ethnic identity	Identifying with one's country of origin comes at the expense of membership in one's adopted country	"Consider a person who immigrated to Germany five years ago from Iraq: the more 'Iraqi' he is, the less 'German' he will be"	Stronger identification with one's country of origin is perceived to constrain identification with one's adopted country	23
LGBTQ rights	Lower anti-LGBTQ bias comes at the expense of higher anti-Christian bias	"As LGBT individuals face less discrimination, Christian individuals end up facing more discrimination"	Christian people endorse zero-sum beliefs about LGBTQ rights when they feel that Christian influence is under threat	24
College grades	Higher grades for some students come at other students' expense	Participants see a distribution of grades and predict what the next grade will be	Students expect grades to be lower after seeing that many high grades have already been given	4
Corporate profits	Corporate profits come at the expense of social good	Participants estimate a business's profits and its value to society	People tend to believe that businesses with higher profits are more harmful to society	25
Labour relations	Employees benefit at a company's expense, and companies profit at employees' expense	"The push to increase business profits will inevitably hurt wages"	Stronger zero-sum beliefs about labour relations that maintain the status quo are negatively associated with conservatism	26
Economic transactions	Sellers gain at buyers' expense	Participants indicate whether transactions make buyers and sellers better off, worse off or the same as before	People tend to believe that buyers are less likely to benefit from transactions than sellers	27
Consumer products	Investment in eco-friendly products comes at the expense of product quality	"In order to make the product better for the environment, the company took resources away from making this product better quality"	Consumers believe that companies make products more eco-friendly by diverting resources away from other product features (for example, quality)	28
Public policies	Policies that benefit members of one group harm members of other groups	"The more resources the government spends on 'Blue' states, the less it can spend on 'Red' states"	Majority group members perceive policies that benefit minority group members as harmful to their ingroup	17,29
Geopolitical conflicts	Compromises benefit other countries at the expense of one's own country	"Anything that happens that's good for Palestinians must be bad for Israelis"	Stronger zero-sum perceptions of conflict are associated with negative attitudes towards geopolitical compromise	30
Social status	A person's gain in status comes at other people's expense	"When status for one person is increasing it means that status for another person is decreasing"	Viewing status as zero-sum increases people's willingness to use dominance tactics to rise in social rank	31
Logical reasoning	Support for one causal hypothesis comes at the expense of competing hypotheses	Participants indicate whether a probabilistic test result supports two, non-mutually exclusive hypotheses	People assume that evidence that supports one causal hypothesis necessarily disconfirms a competing hypothesis	32
Empathy and romantic love	Feeling empathy and/or love towards one person limits one's feelings towards other people	"In a romantic relationship, you can only fully love one person at a time"	Stronger zero-sum beliefs about love are associated with negative evaluations of people in non-monogamous relationships Stronger zero-sum beliefs about empathy are associated with lower empathy towards outgroup members	33, 34



The JT implementation gap

1. **Fragmented accountability**
2. **Limited local capacity**
3. **Weak feedback loops**
4. **Short planning horizons**
5. **Evaluation metrics**

Problems:

1. Fragmented accountability
2. Limited local capacity
3. Weak feedback loops
4. Short planning horizons
5. Evaluation metrics

Solutions:

1. **Integrate justice indicators into funding frameworks**
2. **Build administrative capacity at regional and local level**
3. **Strengthen participatory and mediating institutions**
4. **Align economic instruments with fairness objectives**
5. **Invest in skills and social protection**
6. **Ensure regulatory clarity and accountability** (unless grounded in firm evidence)
7. **Avoid zero-sum framings of policy problems**

Thank you for your attention!

With backgrounds in fields like law, natural and social sciences,
philosophy and ethics



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