

1. Title ENLENS proposal

Energy transition infrastructures and the displacement of populations in Europe

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3. Societal case

The transition to sustainable energy is a global imperative, yet its relationship to migration and human mobility - and immobility - remains underexplored. Energy transition projects - from hydroelectric dams and wind farms to lithium mining and nuclear waste storage - often result in forced population displacement or impose involuntary immobility on affected communities (SDGs 1 and 7). Even in highly regulated European countries, energy projects can displace people through expropriation, rising costs or environmental degradation (SDGs 8 and 13). The forced relocation of communities near the Garzweiler (Germany) and Turów (Poland) mines illustrates how fossil fuel phase-outs cause localised displacement (SDG 10 - target 10.3). Resettlement due to dam construction or climate-related water management exposes tensions between environmental planning and local attachments (SDG 6). Large-scale solar projects lead to land dispossession, particularly in rural farming communities (SDG 9). While some groups are displaced due to environmental degradation or land acquisition, others resist relocation and demonstrate resilience despite the risks (SDG 15). This project aims to explore how energy transition infrastructure is generating new forms of displacement, resistance and place attachment in European contexts, and conversely, whether and how governments and industry are responding to these challenges by adjusting their policies and strategies of displacement and resettlement.

4. Scientific case

The scientific case of the project concerns the tensions between circulation and place attachment in the context of critical energy infrastructures for the European energy transition.¹² These infrastructures simultaneously demand the circulation of materials, labour, and energy while imposing fixity—both through their physical presence in landscapes and the displacement or immobilization of human populations.³ While labour migration in relation to the energy transition has received attention, the specific tensions of local displacement that generate conflicts between affected communities, industries and policy makers have been under-studied in the literature on just transition and migration.^{4 5} The project aims to develop a framework to examine them through three interconnected dimensions:

1. The effects of displacement and immobility on affected communities.
2. The resistance of populations to relocation and strategies of resilience.
3. Governance responses by governments and industries.

The project will investigate four cases of energy transition infrastructures and displacement of populations:

- The Turnu Măgurele–Nikopol hydropower project at the border between Romania and Bulgaria that is likely to increase the flood risk for over 100 towns and villages.
- The large-scale solar project in Guadalhorce Valley (Spain) that has resulted in the expropriation of 600 agricultural estates.
- The Barroso Lithium mine (Portugal) where locals are afraid of environmental degradation and think that their homes are at stake.
- The Fosen Vind Project (Norway) that leads to the displacement of Sami reindeer herding activities.

The project will provide a conceptual framework that identifies and categorises the relationships and tensions between circulation, place attachment and resistance in the context of energy transition infrastructures, which can be used to evaluate government and industry policies.⁶

5. Contribution to the aims and success indicators of ENLENS (max 300 words in total).

A.

The main contribution of this project concerns the development of the dimension of displacement and human migration in ENLENS. While climate change migration⁷ and labour migration related to the energy transition have received increasing attention, less attention has been paid to displacement in Europe related to the above-mentioned energy transition infrastructures. The overall aim is to broaden the research on the energy transition and displacement and connect this to the study of “climate mobilities”. Researchers involved in this proposal joined the Environment and Climate Mobilities Network and are collaborating with the renowned specialists in this field.

B.

The framework the project will develop offers an innovative interdisciplinary perspective that builds on the disciplines (Political Science, Migration Studies, STS, Economics, Environmental Ethics and Politics) and specific expertise of the researchers involved:

- Infrastructures and migration from a Philosophy of Technology perspective (Dijstelbloem).
- Migration politics and policy and International Relations (Vigneswaran).
- Environmental Ethics and Politics (van Wingerden and Hickey).
- Business and economics (Scalera)

This project builds on the IP-FRS mid-size project “climate-induced displacement” Institutionally, it is related to the Amsterdam Research Centre for Migration (ARC-M), the A Sustainable Future (ASF) research platform and the Institute for Advanced Study at the UvA (IAS).

C.

The outreach and dissemination of the project will consist of an academic workshop and two papers in scientific journals. Based on that, the project-team will produce a white paper that addresses the relationship between energy transition infrastructures and population displacement, highlighting the understudied component of place attachment and resistance to mobility policies.

6. Budget

The PIs from the three involved faculties (FGw, FMG and FEB – FNWI participates budget neutral) each request an amount of 15 k€, **€45.000** in total. Because funding for research time has become problematic at the faculties involved, the PIs would like to use the budget in the following way:

- €10.000 (4x€2.500) Site visits and interviews by researchers at four selected representative cases.
- €20.000 (4x€5.000) Research assistance to aid in collecting materials for developing the framework and studying the four representative cases.
- €10.000 (4x€2.500) Translation and local assistance for the site visits
- €5.000: An expert workshop to examine and develop the framework.

The innovative and exploratory nature of the project and the focus on developing a framework makes it difficult to find funding from other 'normal' budgets. Meanwhile, conducting these case studies and developing this framework is likely to be a crucial step in linking research on climate change migration, labour migration related to energy transition, and energy transition infrastructure and population displacement in Europe - the focus of this project.

References

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- ² Bogojević, S. (2024). The European Green Deal, the rush for critical raw materials, and colonialism. *Transnational Legal Theory*, 15(4), 600–615. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20414005.2024.2399408>
- ³ Dunlap, A. (2021). Spreading ‘green’ infrastructural harm: mapping conflicts and socio-ecological disruptions within the European Union’s transnational energy grid. *Globalizations*, 20(6), 907–931. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2021.1996518>
- ⁴ Shah, E., Vos, J., Veldwisch, G. J., Boelens, R., & Duarte-Abadía, B. (2019). Environmental justice movements in globalising networks: a critical discussion on social resistance against large dams. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 48(5), 1008–1032. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2019.1669566>
- ⁵ Fjellheim, E. M. (2023). “You can kill us with dialogue:” critical perspectives on wind energy development in a nordic-saami green colonial context. *Hum. Rights Rev.* 24, 25–51. doi:10.1007/s12142-023-00678-4
- ⁶ Valkenburg, G. (2024). Energy Justice as Epistemic Justice. *Ethics, Policy & Environment*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21550085.2024.2418789>
- ⁷ Dijstelbloem, H. (2023). Moving the Immovable: Climate Change and the Multiple Tensions between Mobility and Immobility. *Tecnoscienza*, 14(2 (28)), 51-68. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2038-3460/18771>