

## From shipyard to renewable energy centre: Tomorrow's jobs will be green

*The following article shows that – with resources and imagination – ways can be found to meet the twin challenges currently facing the world: the need to move towards an economy based on a much lower carbon footprint whilst at the same time bringing the world out of its present recession and finding employment. Andrew Bibby, a British journalist, reports from Odense, Denmark.*

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*greenjobs*

ODENSE – The Lindø shipyard north-west of the Danish city of Odense has produced some magnificent ships during more than ninety years of operation, including eight giant container ships, the largest currently sailing the world's oceans. But structural changes mean that Lindø's shipbuilding days will soon be over. The closure of the yard, scheduled for 2012, could lead to 8,000 direct and indirect jobs being lost.

In its place, however, the Lindø Offshore Renewables Centre (LORC) is taking shape. This ambitious initiative, which has just received a 25 million Danish krona (US\$4 million) boost, aims to become one of Europe's leading research and innovation centres for offshore renewable energy. Former Danish Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen has stepped in as LORC's chairman, and he is clearly enthusiastic about the prospects. "The activities of LORC will create tomorrow's jobs in the area. By developing future renewable energy out at sea we can improve our environment and create many thousands of jobs," he says.

The creation of "green jobs" is an area of work to which the ILO gives considerable importance. The Green Jobs Initiative, launched in 2008, brings together the ILO and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) as well as the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in a unique partnership to develop coherent policies on greening the economy.

The partnership has already been responsible for the landmark report *Green jobs: Towards decent work in a sustainable, low-carbon world* (Note 1) which helped to begin the detailed analysis necessary for what it called a "just transition" to a low-carbon and sustainable society. Overall, this report carried a message of hope: "A global transition to a low-carbon and sustainable economy can create large numbers of green jobs across many sectors of the economy, and indeed can become an engine of development."

But it also warned of the need to manage the transition carefully: as it pointed out, some existing jobs are at risk of disappearing altogether. Workers and communities dependent on mining, fossil fuels and smokestack industries, as well as companies slow to address environmental issues, face substantial challenges, it said.

### **The right time to invest in green jobs**

For the ILO's Kees van der Ree, the need to address these issues is urgent. "Some might argue that now, with the world in recession and with high unemployment, is not the right time to address the need to move to lower-carbon economies. But now is, in fact, exactly the time to invest in green jobs. Infrastructure investment is one of the main means we have of restarting growth and creating jobs. Some of the investments which are most beneficial for adapting to climate change are also very beneficial in terms of employment," he adds.

He points to examples of good practice, as for example in the construction industry, the sector which has perhaps the largest single potential of any to reduce carbon emissions. It's not just a matter of designing and constructing new buildings to meet higher environmental standards, he says, it's also about retrofitting existing buildings. He says that the ILO has been working with several governments, including that of South Africa, to help develop this work.

Van der Ree stresses the fundamental importance of a structured approach globally to the process of transition. "The win-win result from moving towards a green economy and from the creation of green jobs is not automatic. Coherent policies are needed to reap the benefits," he points out.

## **Skills for green jobs**

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One of these policy areas where the ILO is already taking a proactive role is that of skills development. Participants at the Skills for Green Jobs workshop held at the ILO's headquarters in May heard of the work being undertaken across the world to meet emerging skills gaps in new, greener, areas of work, as well to help retrain workers in the new skills they will need in the future.

"Right skills for green jobs are the prerequisite to make the transition to a greener economy happen," says Olga Strietska-Ilna, from the ILO's Skills Development and Employability Department. "Economies moving towards greener jobs benefit from great potential for job creation but also face structural change and the transformation of existing jobs. The timely supply of relevant and quality skills is indispensable for successful transformations that safeguard productivity, employment growth and development."

According to Strietska-Ilna, a number of sectors can be clearly identified as particularly affected by structural changes, and therefore in need of retraining initiatives. These include agriculture, forestry and fisheries, the extractive industries and fossil-fuel energy generation, and manufacturing, especially the automotive industry, shipbuilding and marine engineering. In some instances, new jobs can be undertaken with old skills – as she points out, a bus driver driving a bus powered by non-fossil-fuel energy still drives the bus in the same way. Sometimes, on-the-job learning or short courses may be sufficient: one example would be that of a welder working in wind turbine production.

Other changes will require more significant training or retraining, however. A car mechanic will certainly need some training to switch from a petrol-driven car to an electric car, for example, whilst emerging occupations such as solar energy technicians may well require longer continuous training or university-level study. "Workers may need knowledge about new technologies and new regulations. Changes in existing occupations happen more often at the low- and medium-skill level, whilst emerging occupations often require higher-level qualifications," says Strietska-Ilna.

In the short term, a decline in carbon-intensive industries may lead to job losses in those sectors. Strietska-Ilna calls for this development to be adequately anticipated. "Although new job opportunities arising from new low-carbon markets are estimated to offset the unemployment, those who will get green jobs are not necessarily those who will have lost their jobs. Retraining becomes crucial for the success to smooth and just transition to the green economy. Low-skilled people are especially vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the labour market will need targeted assistance."

## **Making green jobs safe**

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Skills are just one aspect of the Green Jobs Initiative. Occupational safety and health brings in another dimension, particularly in areas such as waste management and recycling, where worker conditions can in some instances be very poor. Recent activities here have helped achieve real progress at grassroots level.

One initiative undertaken by the ILO in the Asia and Pacific region, for example, has seen the development and publication of a new training manual, *Work adjustment for recycling and managing waste* (WARM), specifically focused on workers engaged in collecting waste. WARM, which has been piloted in Fiji and is now being used in other Asian and Pacific countries, looks at ways in which community energy can be engaged to help ensure safer recycling and waste handling by workers.

Initiatives such as these are multiplying rapidly, as ILO constituents across the world, from Bangladesh to Kenya and Guyana, look for guidance and direct support to address the employment

and social dimensions of climate change and a greener economy. The Green Jobs Programme in response is growing in scope and scale, and (with the International Training Centre in Turin) is putting particular emphasis on knowledge management and capacity building throughout the ILO and the UN system.

For Kees van der Ree and other colleagues at the ILO engaged in these initiatives, the message is the importance of integrating the Green Jobs Initiative with the ILO's call for decent work. "Climate change is much more than an environmental issue, we're looking at a major transformation of economies and of societies. The shift to a low-carbon and sustainable society must be as equitable as possible," he says. "Green jobs relate to two big ethical questions: one is social justice and the other is climate change and an environment which is sustainable for humans in the long term. I think one cannot be achieved without the other."

<sup>1</sup> ILO, UNEP, IOE, ITUC: *Green jobs: Towards decent work in a sustainable, low-carbon world* (Geneva, 2008).