



National approaches to environmental justice

Perspectives from Germany's Federal Environmental Ministry

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How is environmental justice understood in German government (focus: BMUV)?



Harald07/ Fotalia.com



Tempelhof Projekt, www.thf-berlin.de



How is environmental justice understood in German government (focus: BMUV)?

- **Environmental Justice (EJ):**

(unequal) social distribution of environmental burdens and resources as well as resulting health-effects

Federal Environmental Ministry (BMUV), Federal Environmental Agency (UBA); similar: German Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU)

- **Vulnerability**, susceptibility: defined on case-by-case basis

e.g. Heat Protection Plan → Elderly, children, people with pre-existing conditions, people in need of care, people living alone, people with disabilities, homeless people



How is environmental justice understood in German government (focus: BMUV)?

Wider context of German debate:

- Socially just environmental & climate policy (*)
- Social-ecological transformation
- “Just transition”
- Aarhus implementation vs. ‘cutting red tape’, ‘planning acceleration’ (i.a., related to energy infrastructures)

Cf. EEA (2023a):

- distributional justice, also re. monetary costs/benefits of env. policy
- procedural justice
- recognitional justice

(*) e.g., energy transition: government introduced income-related bonus in public funding scheme for sustainable heating systems in residential buildings



Distribution of competences for Environmental Justice

Germany acts within **multilevel governance system**



EU level:

- a) EJ with focus on unequal exposure to pollution/climate change & health:
- Number of **pollution-related EU Directives** require Member States to take action, e.g. Noise and Air Directives (→ national noise action plans)
 - **Monitoring, reports** → e.g. EEA environmental inequalities **indicator** for monitoring of 8th EAP (EEA 2023b: exposure to PM_{2.5} by people living in EU's poorest regions with those living in wealthiest regions); EEA reports 2019, 2022

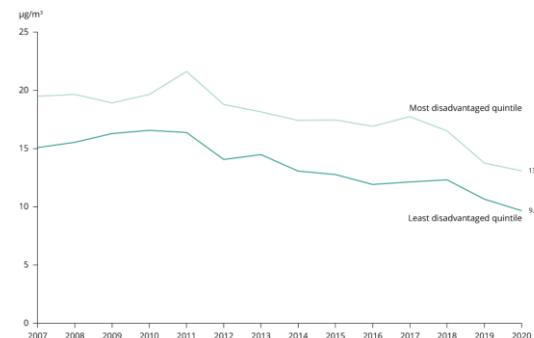


Environmental inequalities:

Will environmental inequalities decrease in the coming years?



Unlikely but uncertain, at least when it comes to air pollution, which is the scope of the currently available indicator. There has been no progress so far and there are no dedicated policies, at present, to address these environmental inequalities.





Distribution of competences for Environmental Justice



EU level:

b) EJ in context of wider debate:

- **European Green Deal:** one of three overarching goals is to leave “no person and no place left behind”
- **8th Environment Action Programme (2022-2030):** “... aims to accelerate the green transition ... in a just, equitable and inclusive way...” (Art. 1.2)
- **Just Transition Mechanism & Fund, Social Climate Fund:** supporting regions and social groups disproportionately affected by green transition
- **EU Urban Agenda** links environmental health needs with social issues such as climate adaptation, urban mobility, housing
- Information, participation, access to justice: EU implementation of **Arhus Convention**



Distribution of competences for Environmental Justice



Federal level:

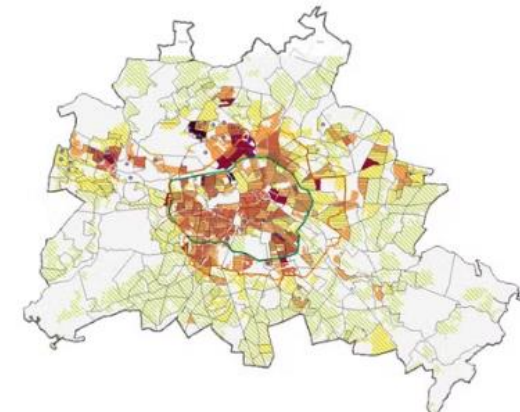
- **Federal Chancellery:** coordination of German Sustain. Dev. Strategy
- **Ministry for Environment,** e.g. climate adaptation, green spaces
- **Ministry of Health,** e.g. “Health in all Policies” approach; “Heat Protection Plan for Health” (2023)
- **Ministry for Housing / Urban Development,** e.g. Leipzig Charta (2007, 2020), urban development programme “Social cohesion” (since 2016)
- **Ministry for Transport,** e.g. National Cycling Plan (2022), National Pedestrian Traffic Strategy (under development)
- ...



Distribution of competences for Environmental Justice

State level:

- 16 federal states not all states address EJ to same extent
- states that address EJ have different lead ministries, different material foci; examples:
 - Northrhine-Westfalia „Masterplan Health & Environment“ (2013-2021)
 - Berlin Environmental Justice Atlas (2021/22)
- Conference of Environment Ministers (federal + state ministers):
‘Ad-hoc (sub-) committee on Environmental Justice’

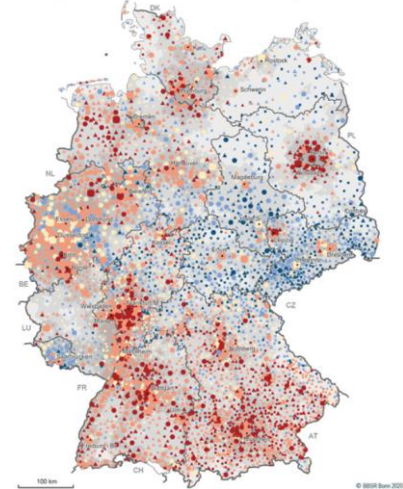




Distribution of competences for Environmental Justice

Municipal level:

- ca. 10.800 municipalities
- crucial level to implement EJ
- Good practice, e.g. Bremen, Dresden, Güstrow, Halle, Herne, Kassel, Leipzig, Mannheim, Münster, Nuremberg, Potsdam, Saarlouis... (Difu 2022)
- Municipal autonomy („kommunale Selbstverwaltung“): municipalities regulate “matters of the local community” independently within the legal framework



<https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/startseite/topmeldungen/2020-wachsend-schrumpfend.html>



Intermediate conclusions

- **Horizontal perspective:** EJ per se cuts across different ministries' remit
- **Vertical perspective:** fragmented governance arrangements across different levels → potential (!) leeway at federal level:
 - strategy-building
 - financing programmes
 - framework provisions, notably re. planning, construction & pollution control legislation



EJ activities in BMUV's remit: example climate adaptation

Climate Adaptation law (Klimaanpassungsgesetz, BMUV, 2023)

- Aim of law: „... An increase in **social inequalities** resulting from the negative effects of climate change should be prevented.“ (§ 1 KAnG)
- **Precautionary climate adaptation strategy** till 09/2025 needs to address, i.a., the “human health and care” cluster and “overarching fields of action, such as **vulnerable groups...**” (§ 3(2) KAnG)

Funding scheme „Climate adaptation in social institutions“

- Eligible for funding: organisations/facilities in **health, care and social sectors** whose target group includes at least 70 % vulnerable persons
- Funding priorities: developing concepts for sustainable climate adaptation; implementing exemplary adaptation measures; “Climate Adaptation Officers in the Social Economy”
- 2020-2023: 391 projects funded with volume of 61,57 Mio. Euro; currently proposals for new 2023 funding window being assessed



EJ activities in BMUV's remit: example urban green spaces

Natural Climate Protection Action Programme (ANK)

- 3,5 Billion Euro, 2024-2027
- Since Feb. 2024: Sub-programme “NKK” supporting local authorities in switching to near-natural municipal green space management, planting urban trees and creating or improving small parks (‘natural oases’)

National Biodiversity Strategy (under development)

- planned areas of activity: “cities/settlements” and “health”
- potential target: “walkable green accessibility in cities for 90% of the population by 2030” (cf. also draft German Sustainability Strategy 2024)

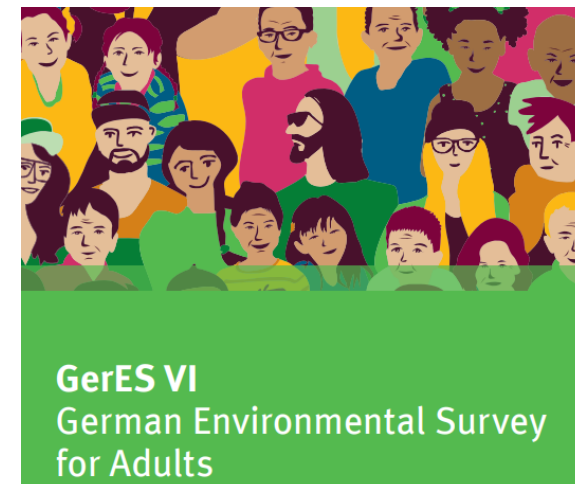


EJ activities in BMUV's remit: other activities

- **Toolbox:** <https://toolbox-umweltgerechtigkeit.de/>
- *planned:* development of **guidelines for EJ**
- **Conferences**, e.g. “Socially just: Health – Environment – Climate” (2024)
- **Research**
 - German Environmental Survey on health (since 1985; GerES VI 2023-2024)
 - Range of BMUV-funded projects

TOOLBOX UMWELTGERECHTIGKEIT

Praxisbeispiele Checklisten Lesetipps Suche





What worked well, are lessons transferrable, what can be learnt from a cross-country analysis?

- The integrated approach of EJ has been gaining attention in politics, research and practice in Germany
- What worked well? different answers for different administrative levels; easier to specify what the challenges are...
- Transferrability of lessons? To the extent, that EJ understanding & implementation context are similar...



How can the OECD advance the agenda?

OECD is already advancing the agenda!

What else...?

- Collating evidence of environmental injustice across the OECD, data on who is vulnerable!
- Sharing good practice examples of EJ policies in different political/ institutional/ cultural contexts, at different administrative levels, looking into success factors & obstacles, possibly formulate policy recommendations/ guiding principles, 'technical specifications'...
- Widen the focus of the EJ debate beyond exposure to pollution to cost of env. policy, Aarhus and Just Transition?



How can the OECD advance the agenda?

What else...?

- Stressing some aspects that tend to be neglected:
 - Env policy is a driver of justness in its own right – clean air, clean water, noise abatement, energy-efficient household appliances ease burdens rather than create them
 - Still, green transformation comes at a cost – let's not burden the poor/vulnerable groups disproportionately!
 - Polluter pays principle: Those causing the lion's share of env impacts should contribute more to financing the green transition



Federal Ministry
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Thank you for your attention!



Sources quoted

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