



What Exactly is a Green Job?

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There are many categories of work today: white-collar, blue-collar, pink-collar, and now green-collar! Thus, while the federal government in Canada is promising an increase in green-collar work, many are left wondering what exactly that means.

The Dilemma

There are many adjectives used to define work in the present-day employment vocabulary: **white-collar** often refers to salaried professionals who work in offices and management; **blue-collar** refers to people who usually work as manual laborers and are in industrial settings; **pink-collar** generally refers to jobs that are typically done by women and are commonly in the service industry. Meanwhile **green collar** cannot be so easily defined. A ‘green job’, often called a ‘green collar job’, may include many different traits and employment positions. Thus, a lot of ambiguity exists when the term is used.



The International Labour Office (ILO)¹ explains that specific definitions for a ‘green job’ or ‘green economy’ have not yet been universally decided upon.² This makes it hard to quantify or characterize so-called ‘green jobs.’ However, the ILO (2012) does state that although the classification of the term is unclear, a general premise for these jobs is that they aim to conserve or restore the natural environment. Furthermore, ILO identifies a need to collectively define the ‘green economy’ in order to accurately evaluate its size and potential growth, and also recognize the jobs that correlate with it.

The Politics

While various political representatives highly advocate the need to create ‘green jobs’, the vague definition of this term does not provide them with a very strong stance.³ In the USA, President Obama promised to allocate \$150 billion over a ten-year period to create 5 million new ‘green-collar’ jobs⁴, but what does this really mean? What kinds of jobs are being created?

¹ The International Labour Organization (ILO) - is a “UN specialized agency which seeks the promotion of social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights.” For more information on the ILO, please visit <http://www.ilo.org>

² Retrieved from:

http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/Information%20Materials/Webinars/UNEP%20GEI%20webinar_Indicators_12Dec2012_ILO.pdf

³ <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1809506,00.html>

⁴ <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1809506,00.html>



People who work on climate change mitigation or renewable energy sources are often identified as having green jobs. Nevertheless, the general public perceives a much broader array of jobs as green jobs or green collar work. For example, traditional blue-collar work like manufacturing vehicles can also be seen as green-collar work when it involves innovative solutions such as hybrids.⁵ Some might define working for public transit systems as green jobs because it discourages some people from driving cars and encourages them to lessen their ecological footprint—even though the transit vehicles are gasoline or diesel powered.

The Governmental Definition

Every governmental definition of ‘green jobs’ differs slightly because it reflects different political and economic interests; however, the emphasis always remains on the environment and sustainability. When the United Nations refers to green jobs they specify that they can be in any industry or trade, they just have to “contribute substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality.” However the United Nations also explains that green jobs must also meet demands of the longstanding labour movement including things such as safe working conditions and ethical business.



For example, the U. S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) describes ‘green jobs’ as “goods or services that preserve natural resources or enhance the environment, or positions in which work functions involve sustaining a company’s establishment through reduced resource use or enhancement of environmental initiatives”.⁶ Meanwhile, the BLS explains that their *outreach approach* in measuring green jobs includes institutions that create green goods and services and also includes the jobs associated with these; their *process approach* recognizes institutions that utilize environmentally friendly manufacturing processes and performances while incorporating the jobs associated with these as well.⁷ The table below highlights the differences and similarities in governmental definitions of ‘green jobs’ by country.

⁵ <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1809506,00.html>

⁶ <http://www.bls.gov/green/>

⁷ *ibid*



Country	Definition	Focus
Australia	“Green jobs are jobs that produce goods or provide services that benefit the environment or conserve natural resources through the use of sustainable, environmentally friendly, processes and technologies”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment - Resource use - Technological progress
Austria	Green jobs are briefly described by Statistics Austria as including “environmental production, services and trades”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment
Canada	While the Government of Canada does not currently have a formal definition of green jobs, work is underway within the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). The green jobs taxonomy combines both specific and standard nomenclatures in order to categorise industrial sectors and occupations that contribute to green economic activities. The two standard nomenclatures are the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) and the Canadian National Occupational Classification (NOC). The green jobs taxonomy is organised into five broad green domains: Environmental Protection, Green Energy, Energy Efficient Construction, Green Manufacturing and Transportation, and Green Services. Each domain aggregates several green industry sectors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energy efficiency - Transportation - Renewable Energy - Greener economic activity
Finland	A definition of green activities, entirely derived from the standard classification of economic activity, has been adopted by Statistics Finland in 2009. Green employment refers to the number of workers employed by firms having mainly green activities. In other words, firms having some green activities, but mainly other than green activities, are not included (on the other hand, not all employees in firms providing environmental goods and services could be classified as “green jobs”).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greener economic activity
Germany	Definition first adopted in 1996 when the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) commissioned a study on the estimation of environment-related employment in 1994. Since then, the definition was refined several times. Green jobs refer to employees who: <i>i</i>) produce environmental goods and services (pollution management; cleaner production and technologies; resource management) <i>ii</i>) are involved in environment related activities (e.g. environment consultants, planning and administration, nature and landscape conservation).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Produce environmental goods and services - Environmental related activities
Japan	Green jobs are defined as jobs involved in the production of environmental goods and services. This definition is based on the OECD/Eurostat classification and was adopted in 2000.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Produce environmental goods and services
United States	“The most general trait of green jobs is that they must be jobs that contribute in some way to the improvement of environmental quality.” Crucial characteristics also include: providing a sustainable family wage, health and retirement benefits, decent working conditions; green jobs should also be available to diverse workers among all races, ethnicities, and genders. ⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment - Social Agenda (ethical fair business & wages)

(Source: <http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/Chap%204%20Web%20Annex.pdf>)

⁸ http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/mctf_one_staff_report_final.pdf



The common theme in ‘green jobs’ definitions amongst many countries is reducing environmental impacts. Additionally, both the United Nations and the United States specify that a green job should also include adequate wages and working conditions, and at a higher level, social justice. Meanwhile, Australia and Germany advocate that a green job should be mainly focused on the conservation of natural resources. Since there is no global consensus on the definition of ‘green jobs’, it is difficult to measure the number and types of green jobs being created.

The original “green” jobs characterized by labour in farming and forestry have been decreasing. Due to technological advancements, many machines have taken over individual green labour jobs in these areas. In 1971 the estimated amount of farm operators in Canada was 367,195 and in 2001 it decreased to 346,200 farming jobs despite that the overall population in Canada nearly doubled.

Similar trends happened in the forestry industry as well. This type of natural resource extraction is considered green or sustainable, in that the trees that are harvested must then be *successfully* replaced. In 1971 there were approximately 74,380 forestry jobs. While in 2000 the amount of forestry jobs was estimated at 74,145—and this number decreased to 54,454 jobs by 2006. Industry restructuring likely depleted many of these jobs. High-tech machines have increased efficiency and decreased the amount of farming and forestry labour positions that the industries once needed.

The Industry Definition

While certain governments, such as the United States, provide incentives to the public sector to provide more ‘green jobs’, the industry has developed its own approaches in dealing with ‘green jobs’. Despite some of the controversial issues associated with Walmart, they *can* be considered a forward-thinking company when addressing ‘green jobs’. In 2008, Walmart launched the Walmart Green Jobs Council.⁹ This Council consists of representatives from real estate, store operations, logistics and sustainability within their retail distribution as well as representatives from their suppliers from an assortment of industries. Presently, Walmart loosely defines green jobs as jobs to help overcome the issue of diminishing natural resources and to conserve the environment for future generations.¹⁰

⁹ <http://news.walmart.com/news-archive/2008/12/02/walmart-launches-green-jobs-council>

¹⁰ *ibid.*



The increasing dependency and usage of automobiles has increased greenhouse gases which are considered to impact the environment negatively. Automobile industries have been trying to curb this negative effect with new engine design and new technologies in hybrid vehicles. According to Toyota's Green Initiative, they define green jobs as, "employment that contributes to protecting the environment and reducing humanity's carbon footprint."¹¹ Furthermore, Toyota's Green Initiative explains the need for "climate-proofing" the economy by investing in new innovative technologies and infrastructure that will consequently result in green job creation. Toyota then explains that, "the green job sector is broad, and will eventually span a wide array of skills, educational backgrounds, and occupational profiles."¹²

It is important to note that there is a difference between 'green jobs' and jobs where individuals work with the natural environment. Certain companies might provide 'environmental jobs' that may not necessarily be considered 'green jobs'. For example, engineers may work in the environmental field (i.e. mining, oil extraction), but they may not actively work on improving the quality of the natural environment. It is often argued that the focus on natural resource extraction and operational performance may contribute to negative impacts on the natural environment.

The Non-Government Organizations' Definition

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) approach 'green jobs' in a more comprehensive manner. The difference between the industry and NGOs is that NGOs provide a much broader focus including many "non-environmental" characteristics of jobs. Phil Angelides, the chair of the Apollo Alliance - an association of labor, business and environmental groups advocating green employment -



states that in order to classify a job as a green job "it has to pay decent wages and benefits that can support a family. It has to be part of a real career path, with upward mobility. And it needs to reduce waste and pollution and benefit the environment"¹³. He emphasizes, "you don't want to greenwash, you don't want to call something a green collar job that

¹¹ <http://www.toyotagreen.com/connected/articles/hope-in-the-green-job-market#.UgPCLBwdRoY>

¹² <http://www.toyotagreen.com/connected/articles/hope-in-the-green-job-market#.UgPCLBwdRoY>

¹³ <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1809506,00.html>



doesn't have the wages or background to support it."¹⁴ Similarly, David Thompson of the Sierra Club proclaims that 'green jobs' must include the following criteria: 'good jobs'; safe, healthy, equitable; traditional occupations; new occupations, community-based; training programs; and greening the economy. One can argue that these NGO positions are using the lack of clarity on the green jobs definition as an opening to promote a much broader social agenda.

On the other hand, there are NGOs and associations that only focus on the environmental aspect of 'green jobs'. For example, GoodWork Canada defines a green job as "any job or self-employment that *genuinely* contributes to a more sustainable world."¹⁵ This definition however raises other questions such as what does genuine mean and how is a more sustainable world measured?

Listed in the diagram below is what the Sierra Club defines as a green job. This definition is quite extensive and covers quite different aspects of a job, including those that are linked to an overall social agenda.

New Occupations...

occupations that we haven't ever seen before and can't imagine yet. These are the kinds of jobs that will be held by young adults and youth currently in the education system—people who have new skill sets, new aspirations for their careers, and new expectations of their governments

Safe, healthy and equitable workplaces...

comply with occupational health and safety standards, provide pay equity, and respect the right of workers to organize and create labour unions.

Community-based...

green jobs are spread across the land. They are located in rural areas and urban areas. They are smaller and more evenly distributed than mega-projects, and they enable workers to stay with their families and live in their communities.

Green the economy... will reduce pollution, improve the environment and help build the new, green economy. They will make our economy more stable and less vulnerable to oil markets, reduce our energy consumption and pollution, clean our air and rivers, and diversify our economy—all while building a sustainable, stable future for our children.

Good Jobs... local jobs with a pension, and with fair wages that support families and communities. They can be entry-level jobs, if they are on a career ladder that a worker can climb up, or they can be mid-career or peak-career jobs. They are stable and less susceptible to volatile global commodity prices

Traditional Occupations... like construction, manufacturing, engineering, finance, or other fields. They are familiar occupations, but apply such skills to initiatives that improve the environment.

Training Programs... Green jobs will be supported by training programs, where needed. The shift to a new, green economy will create demand for new skills and new workers. In order to satisfy the demand, training programs will be needed to ensure an adequate supply of skills

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ <http://www.goodwork.ca/define-green-job.html>



Conclusion

The question of what can be considered a ‘green job’ can only be answered individually or within the organization that is using this terminology. At this moment, there is no universally agreed upon definition of ‘green jobs’ nor are there guidance criteria to classify a job as ‘green’. That being said, most governments—especially those that are trying to promote green jobs and a green economy—do provide a vague definition of ‘green jobs’. It is important to note that when a government, NGO or the industry defines the term ‘green jobs’, that definition will reflect the political, economic and environmental interests of that organization. Thus, careful consideration must be given before that same definition is applied elsewhere.

In June of 2013 the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) released an interesting report titled *Labor’s Green Jobs Efforts Highlight Challenges of Targeted Training Programs fro Emerging Industries*. The federal audit indicates that while almost a half-billion U.S. taxpayer dollars were allocated towards training workers for “green jobs,” only 55% of the people that were trained were placed in new jobs that were linked directly or indirectly towards “beneficial environmental outcome.”¹⁶ The main highlighted reason as to why the green jobs did not follow through after funding and training was granted is because several alternative energy and hybrid car companies are not doing as well as planned—many have even gone bankrupt. Also a contributing factor is that “green job” training programs were established before there were clear job definitions for the industry. While having broad definitions of what green jobs are can give institutions flexibility in what characteristics of sustainability they want to imply by being “green,” the vagueness can also lead to governments and industries claiming they are creating “green jobs” when they may barely or not at all reduce environmental impacts. Meanwhile, NGOs that promote sustainability, conservation, and other various environmental issues tend to have very complex definitions of ‘green jobs’ that bring in other social agendas which further contribute to confusing what a green job really is. Achieving a universal definition of what a green job is might help society more accurately gauge green job creation—but this will require agreement amongst key stakeholders. Given the differing perspectives, this is not likely to be attained in the near future.

¹⁶ <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/655331.pdf>



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¹ <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1809506,00.html>