



**Friedrich  
Ebert  
Stiftung**

John Mark Mwanika

## African Trade Unions Take Labour Demands on Just Transition to Berlin

From 26–30 January 2026, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Trade Union Competence Centre for Sub-Saharan Africa (TUCC) convened an African trade union delegation to Berlin under the theme “Labour Demands in Just Transition Debates in Africa and Europe.”

The incoming took place against a backdrop of escalating climate impacts, contested climate finance negotiations, and growing political pressure in Europe to dilute human rights and supply chain due diligence frameworks. Rather than a study visit, the Berlin programme was deliberately designed as a political intervention creating space for African trade unions to articulate worker-centred just transition demands directly to German policymakers, parliamentarians, trade unions, and policy institutes.

### Reclaiming Just Transition as a Labour Question

Across the week, African trade unions consistently challenged often technocratic and finance-driven approaches to just transition. Participants emphasised that a just transition cannot be reduced to emissions targets, investment volumes, or energy capacity alone. Instead, it must be measured by its impact on jobs, livelihoods, rights, and dignity, particularly in African contexts marked by widespread informality, limited fiscal space, and weak social protection systems.

The incoming enabled trade unions to bring these realities into direct dialogue with German institutions that increasingly shape global climate and development policy.

### Engaging German Institutions

The programme combined internal strategy sessions with high-level engagements across Germany’s political landscape, including meetings with the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), Members of the German Bundestag, and federal ministries responsible for development, climate, finance, and labour policy.

Discussions with German trade unions explored experiences from Germany’s coal phase-out, including negotiated timelines, income protection, retraining, and regional development support. African unions welcomed these insights while cautioning against policy transfer divorced from context. They stressed that African just transition pathways must prioritise public investment, social dialogue, and institutional strengthening, rather than market-led adjustment alone.

Meetings with parliamentarians and ministries revealed both openness and conflicting interests. While German counterparts reaffirmed commitments to climate ambition and decent work, they also acknowledged political pressures to weaken supply chain legislation and constrain public spending—dynamics that resonate strongly with African trade union concerns.

## Climate Finance as a Political Fault Line

Climate finance emerged as a central point of contention. African trade unions strongly criticised loan-based climate finance models, arguing that they exacerbate debt distress and undermine governments' ability to invest in jobs, wages, and public services.

Across engagements with development, climate, and finance institutions, participants called for grant-based climate finance, debt relief, and explicit labour and social conditionalities.

Workers, they argued, must be recognised not as peripheral stakeholders but as affected constituencies whose lives are directly shaped by climate finance decisions.

## From Dialogue to Political Influence

An internal reflection session at the end of the week confirmed the political value of the Berlin incoming. Participants highlighted the importance of early engagement with German institutions, the strategic benefit of meeting without Global North trade unions present, and the need to systematically follow up on labour demands raised.

The Berlin visit is therefore understood not as an endpoint, but as a springboard for sustained political engagement throughout 2026—strengthening coordination through TUCC's Advisory and Advocacy Group on Just Transition (AAG) and deepening labour-led intervention in global just transition debates.

The message from Berlin was clear: there is no just transition without workers—and African trade unions are the central stakeholders and partners to shape it democratically and socially just.