

INTRODUCTION TO CLIMATE JUSTICE

by Young Friends of the Earth Scotland



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WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE?

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WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE?

We are facing a climate crisis. Polluting greenhouse gas emissions released into the Earth's atmosphere by human activity are causing the temperature of the planet to rise, destabilising our climate, leading to droughts, floods, tropical storms, rising sea levels, crop failure, increase in disease, species extinction and more.

The emissions which contribute to climate change are caused by things like deforestation, agriculture, and most significantly from the burning of **fossil fuels** like coal, oil and gas.

The effects of climate change are not felt equally across the world, and responsibility for climate change is also unequal. In fact, those who have contributed least to climate change are usually those who suffer most from its impacts.

Climate justice is a term which recognises this. It looks at climate change through a political, social and economic lens, as well as considering the environmental impacts. It recognises that climate change increases the inequalities and injustices which already exist in the world, and that current and past responsibility for climate change overwhelmingly lies with a few rich countries and big businesses.

Proposed solutions to climate change also have unequal impacts. The voices of the most **marginalised** are often not included in decisions and many decision-making spaces are inaccessible to them. Climate justice means solutions to the climate crisis that are **fair to all**.

This booklet will explore the roots of this unequal responsibility, how impacts are felt differently, and what kind of solutions we should be fighting for.

Marginalisation

People who are pushed into a powerless position in society are described as marginalised - they are forced to the margins. Often they are treated poorly and like they are not as important as other groups of people. Groups described as marginalised in the UK can include LGBT+ people, women, people of colour, disabled people and more.



Unequal Responsibility

Certain countries have caused far more pollution and so have a much larger responsibility for the crisis we are currently facing. Historically, industry and wealth have been concentrated in the UK, USA and EU countries meaning they're responsible for 79% of climate changing emissions made between 1850 and 2011¹. The richest 1% of the world's population are responsible for more than twice as much carbon pollution as the 3.1 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity today.²

Countries like the UK have become rich largely as a result of polluting industries and the exploitation of the rest of the world (see **capitalism** and **colonialism**). The harm they have caused to people and the planet is exactly what has made them so rich.



Responsibility for the climate crisis is not shared equally.

¹ <https://www.cgdev.org/media/who-caused-climate-change-historically>
² <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/carbon-emissions-richest-1-per-cent-more-double-emissions-poorest-half-humanity>

Unequal Impacts

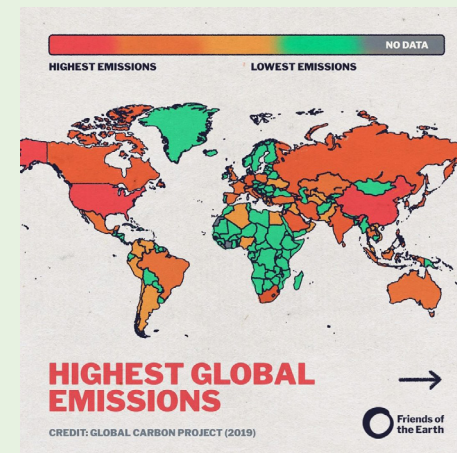
Low-income countries - who have generally contributed the least to climate breakdown - are most at risk from its impact, particularly as most of them are located closer to the Equator where climate changes are happening faster. Having less stable **infrastructure** and less resources makes places more vulnerable to natural disasters and less able to recover from the social, environmental and economic damage they cause.

Coastal areas, including small island nations in the Pacific and the Caribbean, are particularly threatened by sea level rise, coastal erosion, extreme flooding, and increased extreme weather events¹.

Extreme changes in weather, natural disasters and food and water shortages are threatening the lives of many people already living in poverty. The less access that people have to resources, the harder it is to recover from things like failed harvests, destroyed homes, and health crises.

Within countries, climate change affects people unequally often because of **race, class, gender** and **sexuality**, among other factors. **Marginalised** people often have less access to resources, aid and support during extreme weather events such as flooding.

Infrastructure
 The facilities and systems that a country uses to work effectively, such as transport systems, sewage, energy supply, education systems.



¹ Carbon map – which countries are responsible for climate change? | Environment | The Guardian

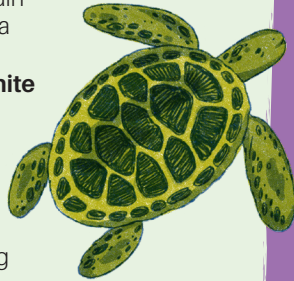


How Did We Get Here?

Colonialism

Colonialism is when one country has partial or total control over another country. Colonisers exploit their colonies economically, settling new people there, often imposing economics, language, religion and other cultural practices. Violence is used to dominate and control colonised countries.

The European colonial period started in the 15th century and lasted for hundreds of years, peaking in the early 20th century. Much of Africa, North and South America and parts of Asia were colonised by European powers. Great Britain had the largest empire, controlling almost a quarter of the world's land at its peak. European colonialism was powered by **white supremacy**: a belief that white European people were superior to the people in countries they colonised.



European colonialism allowed Europe to develop by extracting resources and using slave labour from its colonies. Europe grew rich while the countries it colonised, largely populated by people of colour, were left underdeveloped and exploited. The global inequality we see today is the legacy of this time.

A climate justice perspective looks at the climate crisis in the context of colonial history. Former colonial powers such as the UK have developed by exploiting other countries and damaging the environment in the process, and now have more resources to deal with the impacts of climate change.

It is important to note here that colonialism is not something 'from the past' but rather something that is very much still prevalent (some countries still have colonies!) and has had lasting impacts. For example, countries in the **Global North** benefit from manufacturing fast fashion clothes in formerly colonised countries, continuing previous patterns¹. This is an example of how old colonial powers continue to indirectly maintain economic control over former colonies, while also making profits from them.

¹ Colonialism in Fashion: Brands Are Today's Colonial Masters (remake.world)

Global North and Global South?

The terms Global North and Global South are used to group countries by their economic, social and political characteristics. They don't necessarily refer to the physical north and south of the world. These terms come up a lot in discussions about global justice.

The Global North typically refers to rich, economically developed countries including Europe, North America and Australia. The Global South typically refers to low-income, developing, often formerly colonised countries (see **colonialism**), including regions of South America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania.

We are using these terms here, but acknowledge that they are imperfect and do not allow much room for nuance.

Capitalism

Capitalism is our current dominant economic system. Under capitalism, trade and industry are controlled by private owners with the ultimate motive of creating ever-increasing profit for those owners at all costs. The search for profit for those at the top usually requires a worsening of conditions and pay for those at the bottom.

Big businesses, and many politicians, often resist laws and regulations that protect workers, communities and the environment to make the cost of running their business cheaper. For example, to make more profit a company might move their manufacturing to a country with fewer health and safety requirements, fewer environmental protections and much lower wages. This means under capitalism we see massive inequality: in 2018 the world's richest 26 people owned as much wealth as the poorest 50% of the global population¹, and this gap has since widened.

Capitalism exists through the exploitation of nature as well as paid and unpaid workers.

The capitalist system treats nature as a resource which can be exploited and consumed in order to produce more profit. With deforestation, agriculture and the burning of fossil fuels driving the climate crisis, the capitalist model of continual growth of profit is in direct conflict with our need to limit temperature rises. We cannot have infinite economic growth on a finite planet.

Both colonialism and capitalism rely on the exploitation of people, land and nature. In fact, we wouldn't have the economic system we have today without the global exploitation and increase of wealth that happened through colonialism, particularly through the system of slavery. Both systems are tightly intertwined and depend on creating and maintaining inequalities, which are reproduced in the effects of climate change.

We need an economic system that is driven by the needs of people and the planet, not by the profits of a wealthy few.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/jan/21/world-26-richest-people-own-as-much-as-poorest-50-per-cent-oxfam-report>

Global Wealth



In 2018 the world's richest 26 people owned as much wealth as the poorest 50% of the global population

Intersections Of Climate Justice



INTERSECTIONS OF CLIMATE JUSTICE

This section will breakdown some of the key **intersections** of climate justice.

Climate change increases social injustice. Social inequalities create different vulnerabilities and increase risk to impacts of climate change such as extreme weather events or sea level rise¹. While some places are inherently more vulnerable to physical impacts, risk is also increased by economic, political and social factors. Our identities (such as gender, sexuality, race, class, nationality, age, ability) define our power within society and often affect the resources we may be able to access to respond to climate change.

The term **intersectionality** was coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989.² It describes how different forms of oppression and inequality interact on multiple levels, often at the same time. It helps us understand social inequalities and describe the ways in which oppressive systems such as racism, sexism, homophobia and others are interconnected and cannot be looked at separately from one another. Intersectionality can help us to see how many different struggles for justice are interconnected and require solidarity between movements.

While we have split issues of climate justice into different categories for the purpose of this guide, we recognise that issues are often interrelated and not easily separated. For example, a woman of colour will experience the impacts of climate change in a unique way because of both her race and her gender.

¹ A Guide to Climate Violence, Climate violence emerges from the... | by Daniel Voskoboynik
² Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics". University of Chicago Legal Forum.

Racial Justice

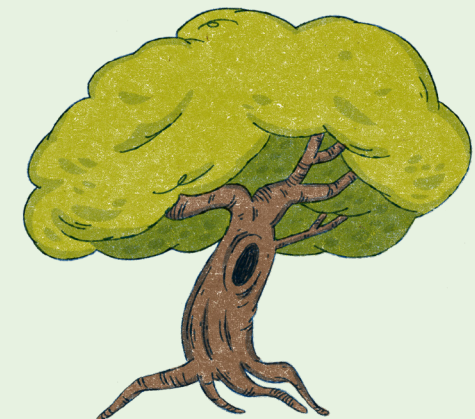
The climate crisis is a racist crisis. The systems of **colonialism** and **capitalism** have left legacies which contribute to the climate crisis and uphold racial oppression. On a global scale; the rich former colonial powers produce the majority of historical greenhouse gas emissions, while poorer countries with majority populations of colour experience the most extreme impacts of climate change.

The systemic oppression of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) communities in the Global North means they are more likely to suffer from the effects of climate change. Black communities are exposed to higher levels of air pollution compared to white communities, and contaminated waste sites are more likely to be located in areas with higher populations of colour.

For example, in the USA, Black, Latinx, and Native American communities are 50% more vulnerable to wildfires compared to other communities, and Native Americans are 6 times more at risk due to forced relocation to remote reservations and having less access to resources to allow them to rebuild and recover after a fire.¹ In London, UK, studies have found that deprived areas or areas with higher proportions of people from non-white backgrounds also have higher levels of air pollution².

These issues are made worse by already existing inequalities in public health and access to healthcare.

Environmental racism is a term coined by African American civil rights leader Benjamin Chavis in 1982 to describe the policies and practices that force communities of colour to live near sources of toxic waste and pollution, endangering their health, homes and livelihoods. Environmental racism also happens on an international scale, for example the dumping of polluting electronic and textile waste in the Global South.



¹ Racial, ethnic minorities face greater vulnerability to wildfires | UW News (washington.edu)

² <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/london-toxic-air-black-ethnic-minorities-b1937488.html>

Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples are people who are native to a country or region which has since been colonised or settled by another dominant group. There are thousands of unique Indigenous Peoples across the world, such as the Saami of Northern Europe, the Lakota of North America, and the Maori of New Zealand.

Indigenous Peoples make up less than 5% of the world's population, yet protect 80% of global biodiversity¹.

They have been some of the first to feel the changing conditions of our climate due to their close relationship with and dependence on the natural environment and its resources. Increasing temperatures, heat waves, droughts and wildfires will impact the availability of many crucial natural resources used by Indigenous people for food, medicine and culturally significant practices.



Credit Friends of the Earth International

¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/can-indigenous-land-stewardship-protect-biodiversity->



The Pacific Climate Warriors march at COP26, Glasgow. Credit Friends of the Earth International

Due to the past and present colonisation and a declining amount of fertile and habitable land, many Indigenous communities struggle to adapt to rapidly changing environmental conditions.

Indigenous communities are also often on the front lines of harm caused by mining and drilling industries, state violence and negligence. They are among those who risk the most to challenge environmentally harmful industries and stand up for their land and climate justice, yet they are the least visible in mainstream media on climate change and activism.

Land defenders and environmental activists have been risking their lives for years to stand up for what's right: in 2019 a devastating total of 212 land and environmental activists were killed that we know of. Indigenous people make up a huge portion of this group, with over a third of those murdered being Indigenous².



² <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/press-releases/global-witness-reports-227-land-and-environmental-activists-murdered-single-year-worst-figure-record/>

Migrant Justice

As the climate crisis intensifies and more of our planet becomes unlivable, people are forced to migrate. We are already seeing people losing their homes and livelihoods, forced to flee due to flooding, drought and sea level rise. People need to cross borders to survive. Estimates suggest there are already more than 40 million environmental refugees.

However, our current system of borders makes migration difficult. In fact, the places least affected by climate change, such as Europe, have increasingly hostile migration and asylum policies, making it very difficult for migrants to seek safety. The legal status of climate and environmental refugees is also uncertain compared to people fleeing conflict and persecution.



The lowest income people and areas of New Orleans were hit the hardest by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Credit: NOAA

Class

Working class people and people from low-income areas are likely to experience the effects of climate change more intensely, particularly in the Global South. For example, global warming is causing crop yields to suffer, especially in arid countries, causing many low-income populations to experience malnutrition and food scarcity.

Corporations seeking to increase profit lines push the cost of running their business onto workers (and the environment) through cutting pay, terms and conditions and health and safety. This creates and maintains poverty which makes people more vulnerable to climate impacts, and gives companies power to force people to stay in unsafe workplaces. In 2021, 6 workers at an Amazon warehouse were reportedly killed when they had to work during a tornado¹. (see **capitalism**)

Additionally, low-income people are impacted the most in instances of natural disasters and often have fewer resources to rebuild or relocate. This may also be worsened by existing conflicts and political instability.

Studies have shown that across the world people living in low-income areas and communities of colour are more exposed to polluted air containing hazardous substances. Some of these substances are associated with conditions such as asthma, cardiovascular issues and cancer (see **environmental racism** and **racial justice**).

Working class people often face additional barriers when it comes to climate activism, such as having less spare time, less access to resources, and facing prejudice from people of other class backgrounds.

"low-income people
are impacted the most"

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/jan/18/amazon-wrongful-death-law-suit-illinois-tornado-warehouse>

Gender

Existing gender inequalities mean that women and people of other marginalised genders (see **LGBT+**) will experience and respond to climate change differently. Across the world, women have less power. They are often poorer, have less access to education, and are frequently excluded from decision-making processes.

Women are more likely to be impacted by climate change due to gendered responsibilities, such as being responsible for gathering and producing food, collecting water and sourcing fuel for heating and cooking. These tasks will become more difficult due to extreme weather events and a changing climate.

In times of crisis when tensions run high, women can become more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. In addition, women often have more limited access to resources and information which may impact how well they are able to respond to extreme weather events. When disaster strikes women, who are often looking after children and the elderly, are the last to evacuate, leading to higher female death tolls. Around 90% of the 150,000 people killed in the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone were women¹.



Credit Friends of the Earth International

1 https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/disaster_and_gender_statistics.pdf

LGBT+

LGBT+ people are marginalised in most societies across the world, leaving many lacking power and resources. Times of crisis can see them marginalised even further.

Transgender people, especially transgender people of colour, face heightened suffering at all stages of the natural disasters which are becoming more frequent in our changing climate. During Hurricane Katrina, transgender people faced discrimination in emergency shelters, and some were even turned away¹. Over a decade later, the Black gay community of New Orleans has yet to fully recover².

Homeless people are particularly vulnerable to the erratic weather events brought by climate change. In the UK, 24% of homeless youth are LGBT+³. In Kingston, Jamaica, many LGBT+ young people live in makeshift camps outside the city which can be flattened or flooded by hurricanes⁴.

LGBT+ people are also more likely to have trouble crossing borders to escape conflict and disaster.

Capitalism and **colonialism** fuel climate change, but are also a part of LGBT+ oppression. The same colonising forces which brought environmental destruction and exploitation also repressed and attempted to wipe out the diversity of sexuality and gender in Indigenous communities across the world. The effects of this still linger in many countries today.



No pride on a dead planet! YFoES marching at COP26. Credit Young Friends of the Earth Scotland

1 <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2014/08/29/lgbt-advocates-gulf-coast-remain-resolve-hurricane-katrina/>
 2 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hurricane-katrina-strugg_b_6074408
 3 <https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/many-young-lgbt-people-britain-homeless/>
 4 <https://grist.org/article/what-the-queer-community-brings-to-the-fight-for-climate-justice/>

WE WANT
A LIVEABLE
PLANET

The text 'WE WANT A LIVEABLE PLANET' is displayed in large, bold, white letters with a 3D effect and a red-to-white gradient. Each letter is filled with a different nature or energy-related illustration: 'W' has a bunch of grapes; 'E' has a green leaf; 'A' has horizontal green lines; 'N' has a green leafy branch; 'L' has a green leaf; 'I' has a green leaf; 'V' has a green leaf; 'E' has a green leaf; 'A' has a green leaf; 'B' has a green leaf; 'L' has a green leaf; 'E' has a green leaf; 'P' has a green smiley face; 'L' has a green leaf; 'A' has a green leaf; 'N' has a green leaf; 'E' has a green leaf; 'T' has a green leaf. The background is a blurred image of a field with wind turbines under a blue sky.

Disability Justice

Disabled people are more severely affected by the impacts of climate change due to social, economic and political systems which unfairly disadvantage them, meaning they may not be able to access the services and resources needed to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions caused by climate change.

Disabled people are often among the worst affected in an emergency, with disproportionately higher¹ mortality rates and the least access to emergency support².

Disabled people have often been excluded from the climate movement due to ableist climate narratives and solutions, inaccessible physical and digital spaces, and the inaccessibility of protests, to name just a few issues.

Proposed climate solutions often negatively impact disabled people as their needs have not been considered, which can be described as **eco-ableism**. Examples of this include removing disabled parking bays to make room for cycle lines, promoting active travel without realising that some disabled people cannot walk, wheel or cycle, or the debate on banning plastic straws in the UK which led to the policing of disabled people's use of straws which they need to drink safely.



"often...disabled people[s] needs have **not been considered**"

¹ <https://psmag.com/environment/fixing-americas-disability-disaster-response>

² <https://newmobility.com/climate-change-and-disability/>

Intergenerational Justice

Intergenerational justice is based on the idea that present generations have the responsibility to make sure that the needs and interests of future generations are protected.

In the context of climate, intergenerational justice means that present generations are responsible for preserving the environment for future generations by conserving biodiversity and ecosystems, responsibly using natural resources, and developing solutions to tackle climate change¹.

The concept of intergenerational justice raises questions about the responsibilities of the present generation towards future generations. It also highlights the importance of youth being represented and involved in climate decision making, as the decisions made will decide the futures of younger generations.

However, in the Global North acting on climate change is regularly discussed as important "for our children's future", which ignores the way people in many parts of the world are already being impacted, and can make climate change seem like a distant issue.



School strikers marching in Edinburgh. Credit Friends of the Earth Scotland

¹ <https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/920-climate-change-and-intergenerational-justice.html>

Speciesism

While climate justice tends to focus on human issues, it is important to consider how the climate crisis affects species other than humans. Speciesism refers to one species having power over and oppressing another. Speciesism highlights the assumption of human superiority leading to the exploitation of non-human life.

We are currently in a mass extinction event. Human activity and the exploitation of nature for profit is killing wildlife at an unprecedented rate, both directly and through climate change.

Humans have transformed over 70% of land on Earth and are using about three-quarters of freshwater resources¹. Large-scale deforestation, particularly of rainforests, has reduced biodiversity, kills thousands of non-human species (as well as humans) and contributes significantly to increased climate change that affects all life forms on Earth. Agriculture is a leading cause of soil degradation, deforestation, pollution and biodiversity loss. It is decreasing wild spaces and driving out countless species from their natural habitats.

A human centred view of nature sees nature and humans as separate, but humans are part of nature and depend on well-functioning ecosystems for our survival. Climate change is an extreme example of the human consequences when we destroy nature. An alternative is an interconnected view of nature which understands that the mistreatment of the environment means mistreatment of humans and animals.



¹ <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/what-is-mass-extinction-and-are-we-facing-a-sixth-one.html>



Deforestation removes natural habitats and worsens climate change. Photo by Karsten Winegeart on Unsplash.

Mistakes and Unjust Solutions



MISTAKES AND UNJUST SOLUTIONS

It's clear we need to find solutions to the climate crisis which centre around justice, and tackle systems of power and inequality. We need to build a world that is fair for people and the planet.

Environmentalists and the climate movement have not always acted with justice in mind. In fact, the history of the environmental movement has very murky roots. Today there are many proposals for tackling the climate crisis which aren't fair to everyone and won't deliver the justice that we need. In this section we explore some of the past mistakes of the environmental movement, and examine some of the most common problematic proposals.

The Racist History Of The Environmental Movement

Early Global North environmentalists in the late 1800s, such as Scottish-born John Muir, saw humans and nature as completely separate. The creation of national parks involved displacing **Indigenous Peoples** from their lands, often violently, in order to preserve an idea of 'pristine nature'.

Many of the people involved at the start of this environmental movement held racist and prejudiced views. They treated marginalised and nature-dependent communities as a threat to wildlife.

Fast forward to the 1970s and a new wave of environmentalism led to many new environmental laws, but shared much in common with older, exclusionary ways of thinking¹. Conservation strategies continued to ignore the existence of Indigenous people, and many environmental laws were written with no attention to the unequal vulnerability of low-income and marginalised groups.

The environmental movement we see now has historically been dominated by white, middle and upper-class people, and mostly focused on their concerns. It has a history of colonialism, racism, and exclusion, where environmental institutions were created by wealthy white men². We see a lot of these same patterns play out today.



¹ <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/environmentalism-is-racist-history>

² <https://www.vice.com/en/article/bjwvn8/the-environmental-movement-needs-to-reckon-with-its-racist-history>

Overpopulation Arguments

It is very important that we challenge the idea that there are simply too many people being born on Earth, and that population control is a solution to the climate crisis.

Population growth is mostly happening in low-income countries in the Global South, yet we know that the world wealthiest 10% of people produce up to half of the world's consumption based emissions, while the poorest half of humanity contributes only 10%¹.

Overpopulation arguments feed into a dangerous and racist narrative that the increasing population in countries in the Global South is driving climate change, rather than overconsumption in the Global North. It distracts from the real drivers of climate change, and lets rich countries and big polluters off the hook.

Attempts at controlling population growth in the past have led to incidents of harmful forced sterilisation in countries such as India and China. Birth control and family planning should be available to people across the world freely and without coercion.



¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/02/worlds-richest-10-produce-half-of-global-carbon-emissions-says-oxfam>

Richest 10%
produce 50% of emissions

Poorest 50%
produce 10% of emissions

Focussing on Individual Behaviour

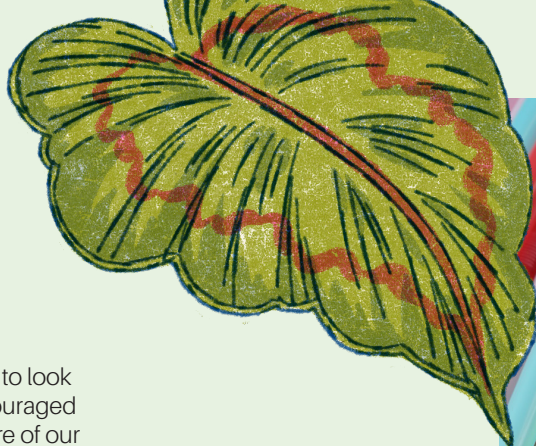
When it comes to environmental issues we are often told to look at our own behaviours before anything else. We are encouraged to make small changes to our lifestyles, like recycling more of our waste, driving less, avoiding single use plastics, or buying from brands marketed as sustainable. These actions can be helpful, and looking at our own habits can help us feel more connected to the wider issue. However, when we only focus on our behaviour as individuals, we are missing the bigger picture.

The changes we can make as individuals will always be limited by the system that we're in, and many common sustainable changes aren't affordable or accessible for everyone. For example, we can't recycle if the infrastructure doesn't exist, cycle to work if there are no safe cycle lines, or take public transport if it's too expensive.

When making 'sustainable' lifestyle choices is seen as the morally correct thing to do, but those choices are inaccessible to some people, such as low income communities or disabled people, then those people are wrongly blamed for their contribution to the climate crisis. Actually, research suggests that the wealthier someone is, the more carbon they produce, even if they make 'green' choices.¹

Did you know that the term '**carbon footprint**' was first popularised by oil giant BP?

¹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0013916517710685>



The blanket banning of single-use plastic can have negative effects on people who rely on these items for health and disability reasons. Photo by FLY:D on Unsplash.

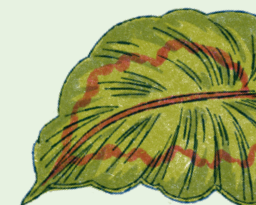
Although not always the case, many companies and products that are marketed as 'sustainable', still have significant environmental and social impacts. For example, electric cars still emit some of the most toxic particles for human health from the brakes and tires². They are also made with lithium, a metal often mined in Global South countries causing displacement of communities, using huge amounts of water and continuing the cycle of extraction and exploitation by big corporations and the Global North.

Focussing on the habits of the general public means we don't acknowledge the differences in power and responsibility of different groups. It takes the onus off big businesses, polluters and governments, and displaces responsibility onto the general public instead. We know that just 100 companies are responsible for 71% of global emissions since 1988.³ Did you know that the term 'carbon footprint' was first popularised by oil giant BP? There's a reason big businesses have pushed the narrative that responsibility to tackle climate change lies with the general public: it acts as a distraction.

Climate change is a system level problem that needs systemic solutions addressing the way we run and structure our society. Individual behaviour change doesn't address the root causes of climate change or the sheer scale of the problem. As individuals we don't have the power to significantly change systems with our habits.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/16/electric-cars-are-not-a-magic-bullet-for-air-pollution>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jul/10/100-fossil-fuel-companies-investors-responsible-71-global-emissions-cdp-study-climate-change>



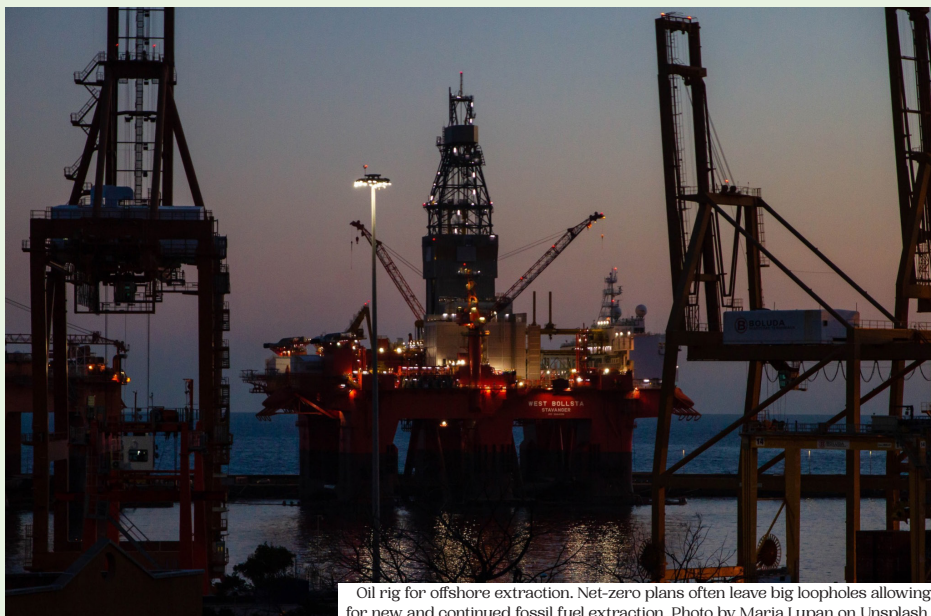
Net-Zero



The language of net-zero has been widely accepted as ambitious climate action. The UK has committed to reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, and Scotland by 2045. Net-zero simply means that any greenhouse gas emissions released into the atmosphere must be balanced by absorbing an equivalent amount back out of the atmosphere.

However, net-zero emissions is not the same as zero emissions, and leaves the door open to the false promise that we can continue to pump out carbon emissions for as long as we like, so long as we offset them with things like tree planting, peatland restoration or technologies like Carbon Capture and Storage (see **carbon offsetting** and **technological fixes**)¹.

Setting far-off global goals is often used to delay and distract from meaningful climate action now. Meaningful climate action requires us to focus on the actual *reduction* of emissions, and how close we are to real zero.



Oil rig for offshore extraction. Net-zero plans often leave big loopholes allowing for new and continued fossil fuel extraction. Photo by Maria Lupan on Unsplash.

¹ https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/The-Big-Con_EN.pdf

Carbon Offsetting

An increasingly attractive option for governments, big companies and individuals alike, offsetting allows polluters to continue business as usual, then pay someone else to reduce or absorb emissions for them – usually in a different country.

Offsetting schemes have been full of scandals, and it is incredibly difficult to prove that they are successful on large scales. These schemes often involve buying up large areas of land in the Global South in order to use it to offset rich countries' carbon by planting trees. By paying for projects to happen in other countries, often in the Global South, offsetting schemes are often accused of modern **colonialism**.

These schemes allow polluters to simply pay to continue, rather than committing to real reductions in emissions.



Credit Friends of the Earth International

Green Growth And Market Solutions

We know that a capitalist economy has helped to create the crisis that we are in, yet some people still look to that same system for answers. Many support the idea of 'green growth', arguing that we need continued economic growth for a functional society. However, we cannot have infinite growth on a finite planet, and that profit usually means people or the planet are being exploited further down the chain. There is no such thing as truly green growth.

Some climate solutions that exist firmly within the capitalist system include carbon markets and carbon taxes. These are based on the argument that we need to price carbon emissions to ensure polluters are taxed, and that by taxing corporations who emit the most they will be motivated to reduce their emissions drastically. Carbon credits can then be traded. This has proved problematic as there is no direct way to calculate and credit carbon (in the past carbon has been priced disastrously low).

This tactic does not prevent pollution, it only deters it. It also allows those most responsible to avoid cutting their emissions by buying carbon credits which allow them to pollute more. We need solutions which challenge our current economic system and benefit people and the planet - not just the rich.

Technological Fixes

Politicians have increasingly advocated for technological fixes to the climate crisis, such as carbon capture and storage (CCS), hydrogen and even geoengineering. The idea behind CCS is to suck carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and store it underground, forever. However, even if this did work it would use huge amounts of energy to run the technology, not to mention the risks for local communities, wildlife and the climate if carbon leaked out of the storage facilities.

Hydrogen is talked about as a way to meet our energy needs. However, the 'cheap' way to make hydrogen is from the fossil fuel, gas. There are some cases where it might make sense to use hydrogen as a fuel, as long as you make it by using renewable energy. But it's unlikely that the hydrogen infrastructure needed would be ready before we reach dangerous levels of climate change.

Some people argue for massive projects to alter the Earth's climate system, known as geoengineering. These include adding chemicals to the air to reflect sunlight, or to the ocean to reflect heat or absorb carbon. These are all unproven and potentially dangerous fixes which could have huge side effects on natural ecosystems.

These ideas are all pushed by big polluters as a way to distract from real reductions in emissions.

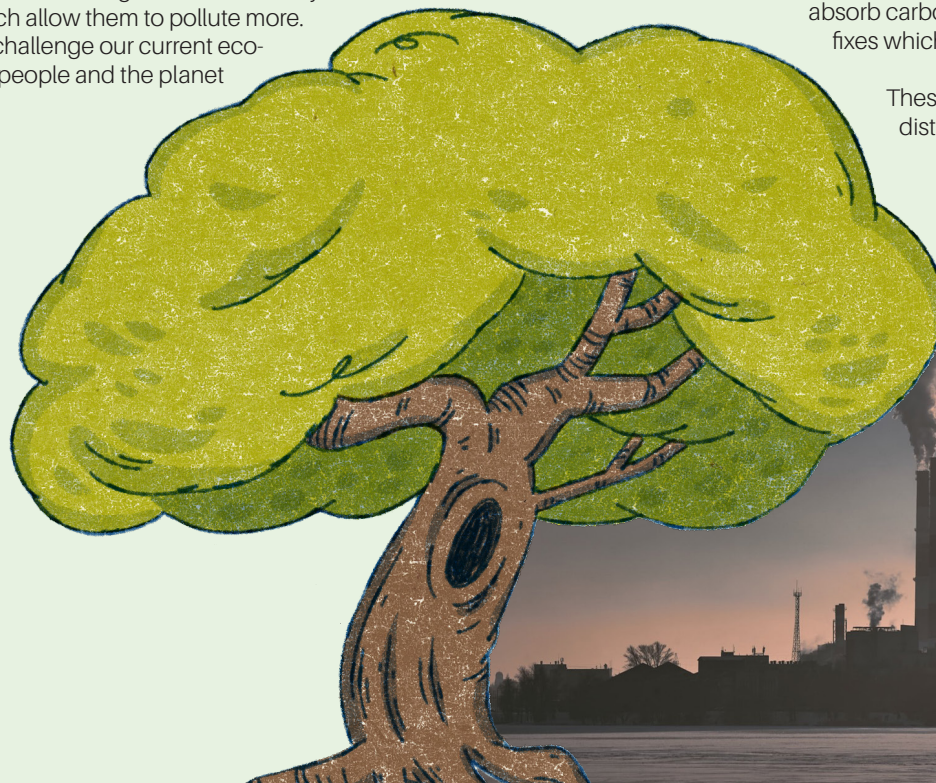
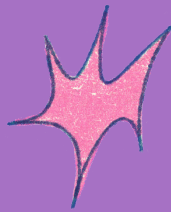


Photo by Maxim Tolchinskiy on Unsplash

Looking Forward



LOOKING FORWARD



There's no single solution to solving the climate crisis. The answers look different everywhere, but we can make sure that justice is always centred in our struggle and our vision of a better world. Here are some core principles of climate justice that can help guide us towards real solutions to the climate crisis.

System Change

System change means tackling the root causes of climate and making changes at a structural level, rather than focussing on the behaviour of individuals who don't have the power and don't hold responsibility. It means keeping the focus on those most responsible for causing harm, and challenging the systems of capitalism and colonialism. We need to make changes to policy, infrastructure and especially our economic system, moving away from a profit and growth driven system to something new where human health, wellbeing and flourishing are prioritised, as well as that of nature and animals.



Social Justice

We can't tackle the climate crisis without acknowledging the social impact of climate change, and the way these intersect with and amplify other inequalities and marginalisations. Our solutions to the climate crisis should embed social justice, with the aim of building a more inclusive and fair society as well as a stable planet. Solutions must be fair and equitable for everyone, taking into account differences in power and needs. They should not harm anyone. There can be no climate justice without racial justice, migrant justice, disability justice, queer liberation, workers rights and more. Climate justice means tackling all forms of systemic oppression, many of which share root causes. Social justice must be centred in our solutions and the way we fight for them. Climate activists must stand in solidarity with other struggles.

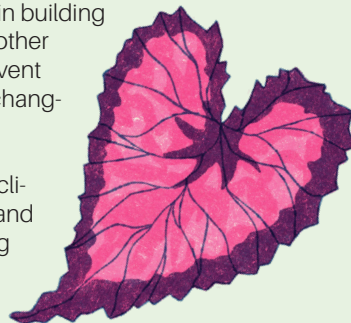


Historical Responsibility

Those who have caused the most harm through past and current emissions must take on most responsibility. This means rich countries of the Global North, wealthy corporations and wealthy individuals need to be doing the most to reduce emissions. Given the historical responsibility and role of colonialism in building the wealth of the Global North, rich countries owe other countries money and resources to reduce and prevent emissions, and adapt to the effects of our already changing climate.

Compensation for the damage of colonialism and climate change is sometimes known as reparations, and in United Nations (UN) spaces rich countries paying for the effects of climate change in low-income countries is called 'loss and damage'. The amount owed is known as climate debt.

Climate fair shares¹ is a method that enables us to work out what climate action should be taken based on the responsibility and capability of a country. The UK's fair share of climate action would be to reduce emissions by 200% by 2030². This means not only reaching zero, but supporting at least the same level of emissions reductions in low-income countries overseas. A long way from our current targets!



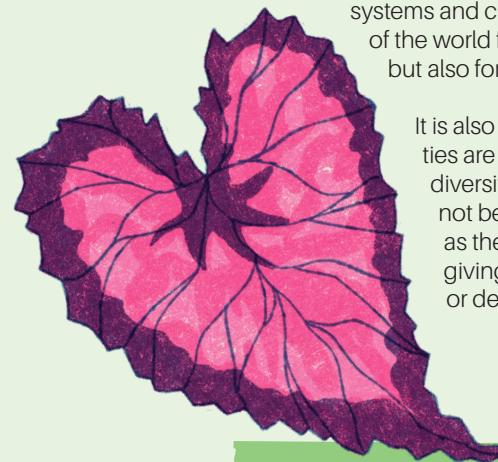
Centering The Most Affected

In the climate movement today there is often a focus on expertise from the Global North and on white climate activists from wealthy countries, like Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough, in place of **Indigenous** activists and other activists of colour who are doing vital work yet don't receive the same attention.

Climate justice means centering the voices and needs of those most affected by climate change. We need to look to leadership from people on the sharp end of climate breakdown, such as those living in the Global South, **Indigenous Peoples**, and low income communities of colour in the Global North.

People who are on the frontlines of the climate crisis often have the best knowledge and understanding of how people are affected, and also what fair and just solutions might look like. They can also be the most invested and determined to dismantle our current systems and create real change. We can look to various parts of the world for inspiration, not only for fair climate solutions, but also for lessons on how to fight and how to win.

It is also important to remember that affected communities are not all the same, and people will always have a diversity of opinions. Centering frontline voices should not be tokenistic - for example treating one person as the spokesperson for all affected peoples, or only giving people symbolic involvement in movements or decision making spaces.



"Climate justice means **centering the voices** and needs of those most affected by climate change."

¹ <https://www.foei.org/what-we-do/climate-justice-and-energy/climate-fair-shares/>

² <https://waronwant.org/resources/uks-climate-fair-share-infographic>



Keep It In The Ground

To combat climate change and prevent injustice we need to stop emissions. This means we need to stop extracting and burning fossil fuels - the main source of climate changing emissions - as well as reducing energy use and investing in renewable alternatives. We need an end to the extraction of coal, oil and gas, and we need it fast. We simply need to keep fossil fuels in the ground.

Any solution to the climate crisis that doesn't involve ending fossil fuels isn't a real solution.

Just Transition

The concept of **just transition** was born in the trade union movement. We know we need to transition away from fossil fuels and our current system that relies on them. Just transition means moving to a more sustainable economy and society in a way that's fair to everyone - including people working in polluting industries. Lots of people's livelihoods depend on polluting industries, either directly as workers or as part of the local communities that economically rely on them.

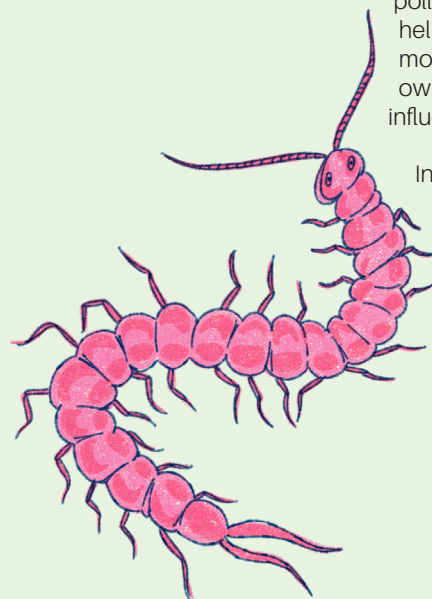
We can look to the past to see what happens when a transition away from an industry is not just or fair. In the 1980s the UK's coal industry was dismantled without much consideration of people's livelihoods or futures. Many mines closed abruptly, with workers and trade unions ignored. Many parts of the UK are still living with the consequences of this today and have not yet recovered.

A transition away from fossil fuels is inevitable, but justice is not. We need a managed and fair transition away from fossil fuels, which is led by workers, trade unions and communities, securing rights and wellbeing. The transition needed to tackle climate change is not just about our energy system, but our whole economic system and way of life. We need to make sure justice is centred and no one gets left behind.

People Power

Our solutions should not be led by those who have a vested interest in preserving our current systems. Big businesses and big polluters who are profiting from wrecking our planet will never help us achieve climate justice. Powerful corporations have more interest in stalling progress and creating loopholes for their own benefit than finding real solutions, and have a history of influencing governments and people in power.

Instead change needs to be powered by ordinary people. Whether it's bosses that need workers to make their businesses run, or politicians that need people to vote for them - when people come together we are more powerful than those at the top. We need regular people coming together to design solutions that work for us all. We need power to be shared and more people able to participate in making decisions and building a better world.



"Any solution to the climate crisis that doesn't involve ending fossil fuels **isn't a real solution.**"

CONCLUSION

Hopefully this resource has helped you understand a little better what we mean when we say climate justice.

There is much more to say about centering justice in our fight against climate change, so we encourage everyone to keep learning. If you want to find more resources, please check out our further reading list.

We already have all the solutions we need to build a better, greener world. We just need to build power and work together to make it happen!



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Illustrations by Agnes Xantippa Boman

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