

# Communicating climate justice with young adults in Europe

## A MESSAGING GUIDE



This guide was created with the financial support of the EU. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Climate Outreach and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EC. This messaging guide is based on the '[Communicating climate justice with young adults in Europe](#)' report.

## Climate Outreach

Climate Outreach is passionate about widening and deepening public engagement with climate change. Through our audience research, practical guides and consultancy services, we help organisations engage diverse audiences beyond the usual suspects. We focus on building and sustaining cross-societal support for climate action, overcoming political polarisation, and turning concern into action. We have nearly two decades of experience working with a range of global partners including government, international bodies, media and NGOs.

We'd love to hear any feedback on this resource at [info@climateoutreach.org](mailto:info@climateoutreach.org).

## SPARK

This project is being undertaken as part of SPARK, a four-year European Commission (EC) funded project that aims to build the awareness, capacity and active engagement of European Union (EU) citizens, particularly young people, with efforts to bring about climate justice. SPARK is delivered by a consortium of 20 civil society organisations across 13 European countries. See: <https://sparkachange.eu>.

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## Acknowledgments

We would first like to thank the SPARK consortium, and in particular the dedicated partner organisations who collaborated to deliver the research upon which this guide is based: Asociația România în Tranziție, Romania; Centre for Transport and Energy, Czech Republic; CliMates, France; Friends of the Earth, Hungary; Oxfam Belgium; Oxfam France; Oxfam GB; Oxfam Germany; Oxfam Intermón, Spain; Oxfam Novib, the Netherlands; Zaļā Brīvība, Latvia; ZERO, Portugal; 11.11.11, Belgium. We would also like to extend our appreciation to Jenny Gellatly, whose diligent work over the past two years contributed immensely to the research and provided the building blocks for this guide.

A big thank you and credit also goes to the UK-based Framing Climate Justice project carried out by the Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC), 350.org and the New Economy Organisers Network (NEON), upon which this work builds.

Last but not least, a huge thank you to the research participants who gave their time to exploring what climate justice means to them.

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**Cite as:** Al-Amin, H., Webster, R., Kaoukji, D. and Sawas, A. (2023). *Communicating climate justice with young adults in Europe: A messaging guide*. Oxford: Climate Outreach.

**Cover photo:** Protest during the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in November 2021 in Glasgow, UK. Photo credit: ANDY BUCHANAN/AFP via Getty Images

**JULY 2023**

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# Introduction

## Who is this guide for?

This guide is for – but not limited to – any campaigner, educator, social movement or civil society group that wants to engage young adults in Europe on climate justice in a way that connects with their concerns, language and values.

Those working with concerned but inactive young adults – those who express worry about climate change, but who are not yet taking significant action in their own lives – will especially find nuanced guidance for positive engagement.

## What is the guide based on?

Climate Outreach led a 2-year audience research endeavour as part of the EC-funded SPARK consortium project. SPARK aims to build the awareness, capacity and active engagement of EU citizens, particularly young people, with efforts to bring about climate justice.

The research was based on a desk review and online survey of more than 6,000 young adults in Europe, in addition to 20 narrative workshops facilitated by partners within the consortium with young adults concerned about climate change. The workshops explored narratives on addressing imbalances of wealth and power, grassroots action and taking responsibility for exploitative systems. The study culminated in the creation of the '**Communicating climate justice with young adults in Europe**' report in October 2022. Climate Outreach conducted further analysis of the results in May 2023 to create this guide.

Young adults participating in the narrative workshops. Photo credit: Javier Gacio/Oxfam Intermon



**Table 1:** Research methods underpinning this messaging guide

	Pan-European online survey of young adults	Narrative workshops with concerned young adults
When	April 2021	Summer 2021
Number of participants	6,038 participants	139 participants across 20 workshops
Participating countries	6 countries: Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom	9 countries: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Spain
Participants' characteristics	Broadly representative of young adults aged 18–35 (across gender, age and region within each country, and also ethnicity within the UK)	Young adults aged 18–29 who expressed concern about climate change but are largely not acting on this; centre- or left-leaning politically
Objective	To explore perceptions of, and attitudes towards, climate justice ideas in broad terms	To explore language and narratives around climate change and its solutions in more detail



**NOTE**

In this guide we suggest real-life examples that we think would currently resonate well with young audiences. These have not been tested in our research, however, and their reception may vary from one audience to another.

## Why is this guide needed?

Climate advocates around the world, including youth movements like Fridays For Future, are increasingly calling for 'climate justice'. But while the term is becoming more mainstreamed, journalists and activists do not share a common understanding of what it really means – let alone the wider public.

Through our research we identified that young adults in Europe have a limited understanding of what climate justice means in practice, although they support many of its principles. Young people want to take action on climate change, but a number of barriers stand in their way – and if not used carefully, the language of climate justice could make these barriers worse.

This guide is therefore designed to support communicators in engaging young European adults in climate justice conversations in a way that explains the term and its underlying principles effectively.

## What is in this guide?

Here we provide suggestions on the best ways to talk about climate justice with young adults in Europe. We include a quick reference list of dos and don'ts, and three top tips for communicating climate justice. We then present suggested approaches for discussing specific topics: addressing imbalances of wealth and power, encouraging grassroots action and explaining responsibility for exploitative systems. This includes specific keywords, phrases and examples that resonate well with young European adults. We also provide guidance on what not to say or how not to frame your messaging on climate justice.

We also present the evidence that formed the basis for our suggestions: on young adults' current beliefs regarding climate justice, the principles they support, the gaps in their understanding and barriers to action. This should help you identify entry points and establish relevant ways to connect with your young audience.

We recognise that young European adults are not a homogenous group, and our research findings reveal differences and some contradictions. The recommendations presented here draw particularly on our discussions with concerned but inactive young adults, and can be used to effectively tailor messaging for this group. However, we have prioritised approaches that are also most likely to resonate well across a broad spectrum of young adults in any given European country.

### NOTE

In this guide, we use 'global south' and 'global north' to describe the countries affected by histories of colonisation and global economic power imbalances. We are aware these are contested terms, and use them here as the best available wording to concisely describe these country groupings.





# Understanding climate justice

The concept of climate justice was originally developed by activists in the global south. Rather than focusing solely on the problem of rising global emissions, applying a climate justice lens means understanding and addressing the root causes and drivers of climate change. This includes a deep understanding of how climate change is linked to an unjust global economic system, tracing its historical roots back to colonialism and slavery.

At its core is the understanding that climate change has a greater impact on marginalised groups of people who are the least responsible for causing the problem, such as racialized minorities, women, children, disabled people, etc. This applies in countries all around the world.

Solutions proposed by those applying a climate justice lens include changing the way power and resources are distributed and payment of reparations, and put to the fore the most affected groups in decision-making. Ultimately, these solutions aim to allow everyone to live a life with basic rights and freedoms without relying on fossil fuels or unsustainable extraction of natural resources.

## EXAMPLE

### Electric vehicles and climate justice

For many, transitioning into electric vehicles seems like the best way to move away from fossil fuel extraction in the automotive industry. While this may sound like it will reduce emissions and our carbon footprint, there is an entirely different perspective – a climate justice one – that still needs to be collectively explored if policymakers, businesses and consumers are to see the full picture.

Mainstreaming electric vehicles in the global north entails a larger demand for lithium from the global south. Lithium is used in manufacturing batteries for electric vehicles, and is obtained through mining. This has a negative impact on ecosystems, indigenous communities and access to water in countries in the global south.

A climate justice lens means thinking differently about what climate action should look like and its impact on communities all over the world.



# Quick dos and don'ts when talking about climate justice

## Do

- ✔ Explain the term 'climate justice' explicitly before using it.
- ✔ Use young people's belief in the principles of equality, the polluter pays and solidarity as entry points to discussions on redistribution, historical responsibility and collective climate action.
- ✔ Offer a broad scope of possibilities for action, including practical activities with tangible outcomes such as land restoration, tree planting, food-growing initiatives, etc.
- ✔ Provide a positive outlook on the future and reassure young adults that it is not too late to act together.

## Don't

- ✘ Use blaming techniques or divisive language to pin responsibility on some actors more than others.
- ✘ Use words that suggest 'taking away' decision-making power or resources from a certain group.
- ✘ Demand lifestyle changes from young people.
- ✘ Place a responsibility to take strike action on them.

Young woman waters plants in an urban garden in front of a power station. Photo credit: fotografixx/iStock





# Three top tips for communicating climate justice

## 1. Build awareness and understanding of what climate justice really means

### CONTEXT

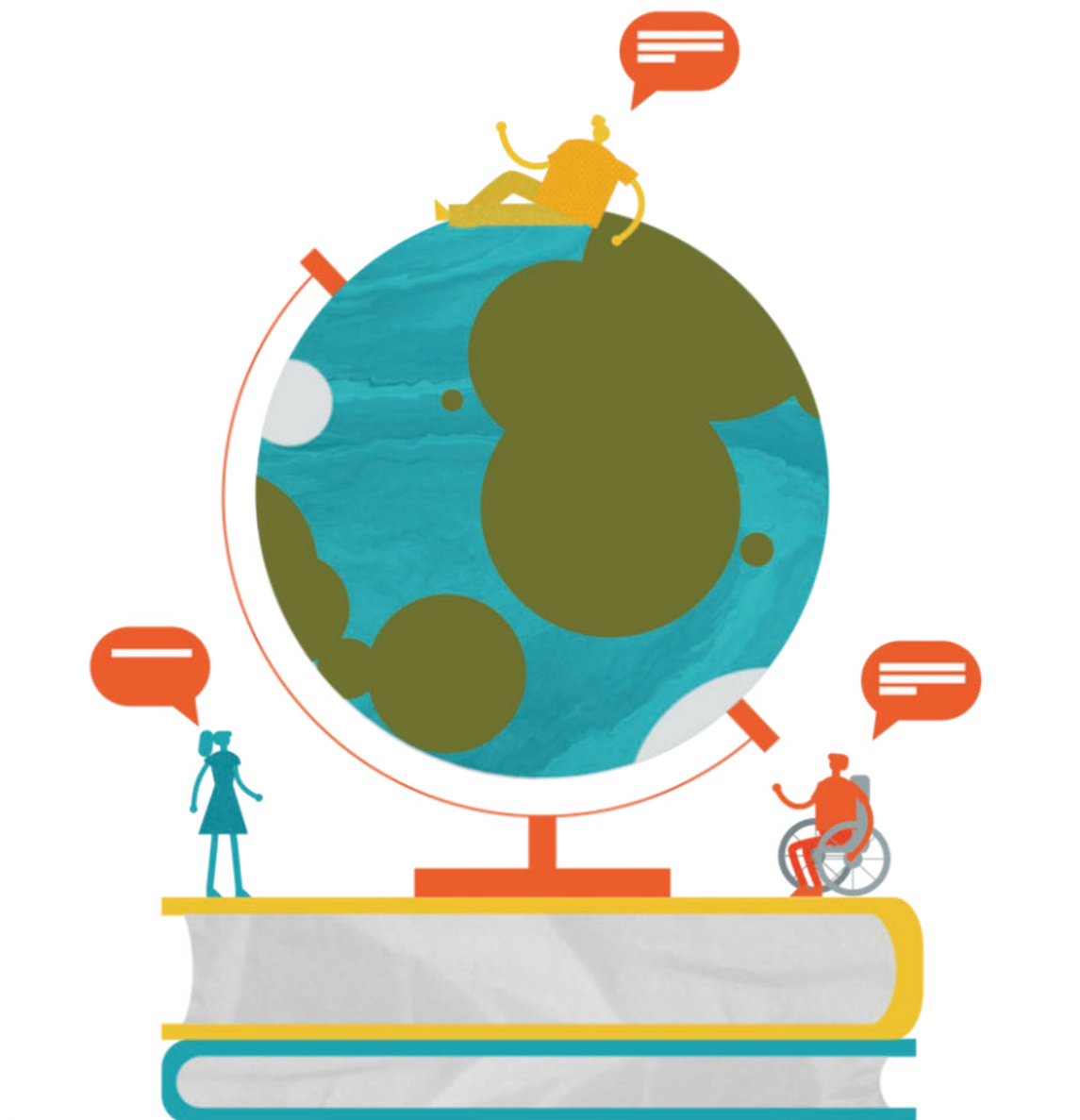
Young European adults **agree with many of the core principles** of climate justice – for example, that tackling climate change means transforming society and the economy, and that the people and communities most affected should have more of a say in decisions about solutions. But at the same time, their **understanding of these issues often appears fairly superficial**. Even those worried about climate change have not encountered some of the core ideas behind a justice-based analysis.

We recommend that climate justice communicators therefore:

- **Avoid making assumptions about young people's understanding of 'climate justice' and related technical terms:** The evidence suggests that currently most young European adults don't understand what 'climate justice' means. Terms such as 'historical responsibility', 'exploitative systems' and 'extractive economies' can be similarly opaque.
- **Build awareness of the key intellectual principles behind the climate justice analysis, for example:**
  - » **How the past has led to the present** – Even concerned young adults don't readily connect the harms caused by the current global economy with the past, particularly colonial history, racism and slavery.
  - » **How climate change makes gender inequalities worse** – Find ways of making the impacts more visible. Use authentic imagery and real stories that young Europeans can connect with, such as the 2003 European heatwave where more women than men died.
  - » **How and why people affected by racism and other forms of structural marginalisation are more impacted by climate change, in the global north as well as the global south** – Use relatable case studies, for example the case of Hurricane Katrina in the USA in 2005. Predominantly black neighbourhoods, and especially black, working-class women, were severely disproportionately affected by the disaster in both the immediate and long term.



- **Be prepared to discuss climate justice issues authentically and openly, allowing space to explore contradictions and difficulties**, with relevant examples that young European adults can connect to:
  - » To take one example, the majority of young adults support the idea of **reparations**. This climate justice principle – often seen as controversial by politicians – says that rich countries should compensate poor countries for damages caused by the climate crisis.
  - » But when given the opportunity to discuss the idea, even young adults worried by climate change ask important questions – for example, does paying loss and damage costs mean a government has permission to continue harming in the future? Who pays, and who decides who pays? Can money really make up for losses of livelihood, land and lives?
  - » To build genuine support, address these confusions and concerns, providing concrete examples as much as possible.



## 2. Use language that connects rather than divides

### CONTEXT

*When asked about their ideal society, workshop participants said it would be more equal – for example, in relation to opportunities, decision-making power and wealth. Participants freely expressed criticism of those with a lot of wealth and power, but many reacted against messaging that expressed this view. These concerned young adults believe that **blame or guilt is counterproductive** to global collective action because it creates division rather than unity. They expressed a desire for a greater sense of community and of care for one another and the natural world; more cooperation and civic engagement; and a more sustainable and environmentally friendly society.*

From testing three narratives with concerned young adults, we recommend that communicators:

- **Draw on young people's awareness that climate change impacts people all over the world (both locally and globally) and especially people who are least responsible for causing it:** Focus on young adults' belief that we should all live in a safe and healthy place without going beyond what our earth can handle.
- **Connect with young people's desire for a more equal and caring world:** Articulate solutions underpinned by principles of social equity and justice, and show how these can be achieved in practice. Give local and global examples of where these already exist – for example in solidarity economy initiatives in Europe, the USA, Asia, Latin America and Africa. This may help to generate hope in human nature, and the possibility of alternative approaches for a better future.
- **Avoid placing the responsibility of tackling climate change solely on the shoulders of young people:** Instead, empower young adults by emphasising the importance of collective action and solidarity with people and communities on the frontlines of climate change to bring about system change.
- **Explain the polluter pays principle, particularly with regard to the role of governments, corporations, individuals and other actors:** Young adults have questions regarding how this works in reality.
- **Be careful when explaining historical responsibility to young audiences:** Young adults recognise that action on climate change means taking responsibility for past and current wrongs. However, use words like 'slavery', 'colonialism' and 'capitalism' carefully and relate them to young people's daily lives and realities. Used on their own, these terms can create psychological distance between the young person and the issue.

*"If someone is trying to find other people who support them by looking for a common enemy, I think that's a very, very bad method. I think it's the worst possible, because it's about creating tension between people, and I think it's very unworkable, it's been done a few times by humanity and it didn't turn out right."*

–WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, HUNGARY



### 3. Focus on ideas, inspiration and infrastructure for building action

#### CONTEXT

*Young European adults concerned about climate change recognise the big changes that need to happen. But many feel powerless in the face of big forces that they cannot control. They are motivated by the prospect of **citizen-led action**, but are sceptical about government promises to tackle the climate crisis and the ability of young people to contribute to change.*

We recommend that climate justice communicators counter this through the following approach:

- **Talk about power and change:** Stories of popular struggle, collective action and how people without power have changed the world demonstrate that it's possible to change seemingly immovable systems.
- **Focus on the changes that are needed, rather than the people in the way:** Reinforcing young adults' scepticism about formal political parties and institutions could add to feelings of powerlessness. Highlighting what governments can and should do helps demonstrate what they're not doing currently, while also encouraging people to believe change is possible.
- **Broaden the scope of possibilities for action:** Show that there are many strategies for change and that it's possible to choose where you wish to apply your efforts. To give two examples, Movement Generation's '[Strategic Framework for a Just Transition](#)' and the toolbox and network [Beautiful Trouble](#) can be used to generate ideas and case studies.
- **Emphasise that it's not too late:** Change takes time, is messy and imperfect, but it is never too late to build relationships and work in solidarity with others. This has been and always will be necessary in facing ecological and social challenges.
- **Offer different visions of the future:** Young adults express a desire for a more equal society, with a greater sense of community and care for one another. Different visions for the future could support and build on these ideas, demonstrating what this might look like.



*"In a fairer world,  
we would live better."*

–WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, SPAIN

*"Honestly, it is very hard for me  
to answer what a good life is."*

–WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, LATVIA

# What to say when you are:

Below we suggest approaches for discussing three climate justice topics with young adults: addressing imbalances of wealth and power, encouraging grassroots action and explaining responsibility for exploitative systems.

- **Words and concepts in bold** are those that our research shows resonate positively with young adults and/or reflect language that young people currently use themselves.
- **Highlighted words** are frames that we especially recommend for effectively engaging young people.
- ***Bold phrases in italic*** are where we suggest using a specific whole phrase in your conversations.

## Addressing imbalances of wealth and power

Start by reaching out to young people's belief in equality and fairness. Emphasise that **we should all have a safe and healthy place to live**. Stemming from that same principle, build awareness of who is affected by climate change and how. Explain how **climate change destroys lives, cultures and ecosystems** both locally and globally. Use relevant real-life examples that point out the imbalance, showcasing that **those who are least responsible for causing climate change are the most impacted by it**.

Be mindful of how those who are most impacted by climate change are portrayed. Although it is important to highlight how some people experience disproportionate impacts due to structural power imbalances, avoid using terms like 'vulnerable people' when referring to women, disabled people, people living in poverty, young people, older people, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of colour) and LGBTQI+. Instead, **carefully explain how and why certain groups are affected more by climate change than others**. Give clear examples of how social exclusion puts marginalised people in more vulnerable positions.



Lastly, when discussing power and wealth redistribution, avoid confrontational language that suggests taking away decision-making power or resources. This kind of language sparks fear of polarisation, exclusion and further division. Instead, use language that offers a more balanced approach, such as: *it is time to change to create a more **balanced/equal/equitable** world, or it is time to stand with people and communities on the frontlines of climate change to bring about system change.*

## EXAMPLES

- **Heatwaves in Europe:** women – particularly those who live in low-income households or have reduced mobility – are more likely to die or face heat-related health problems due to inadequate access to cooling technologies<sup>1</sup>. In the 2003 heatwave in Europe, more women than men died.<sup>2</sup>
- **Air pollution in Europe:** people from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to live in areas with higher levels of air pollution due to increased emissions. This is further exacerbated by climate change, and places these communities at increased risk of health problems.<sup>3,4</sup>
- **Energy poverty in Europe:** low-income households often lack access to affordable and energy-efficient housing. This increases their energy consumption through use of inefficient technologies.<sup>5</sup>

Women from the Masai community take part in a Global Climate Strike organised by Fridays For Future, to demand climate reparations and action from world leaders. Photo credit: TONY KARUMBA/AFP via Getty Images





## Discussing grassroots action

When talking about climate and grassroots action, start with making clear how **we go well beyond what our earth can handle**. Use concrete examples of the physical impacts of climate change, and link current climatic conditions with human behaviours. After establishing this awareness, move on to focus on **the worldwide need for change through forming alliances** – this resonates more positively with young adults than saying ‘ordinary’ people can create change together because it feels more empowering.

Underpinning climate action is young people’s need to **rethink what a ‘good life’ looks like**. Focus on the importance of group and collective action, rather than demands for individual change of lifestyle and purchasing habits. Avoid saying things like, “No one needs new phones and new clothes every week.” Instead, **offer the possibility to envision everyone having a good life both locally and globally** without destroying the planet. Give hope that **a good life is possible, it is not too late to act, and that it is time to change how we – as a collective society – live, eat, travel and organise**.

When suggesting calls to action, include activities with tangible outcomes that assist in countering or adapting to the effects of climate change. **Promote creating change by, for example, restoring damaged land, planting trees or supporting food-growing initiatives**. These resonate well as they directly link with the previously established awareness of the physical impacts of climate change. Be aware that strike action and other forms of civil disobedience do not resonate well with all young audiences.

### EXAMPLES

- **Loss of biodiversity due to human activities** such as deforestation, overfishing and introduction of invasive species is threatening our food security and the stability of natural systems that sustain life on earth.
- **Emissions due to deforestation and heavy reliance on fossil fuels for energy production** are resulting in more frequent extreme weather events across the world, such as the 2019 heatwave in Europe and wildfires in many countries, including France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Ukraine.<sup>6,7</sup>
- **Human behaviour is causing us to experience rising sea level in coastal areas**. For example, Venice is threatened by recurrent flooding partly due to sea level rise.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg – to name a few – are also at an increased risk of flooding.<sup>9</sup>
- **Suffragette movement**: across various European countries, women fought for equality and their right to vote. Their collective action led to the achievement of women’s suffrage and advanced women’s rights.



## Explaining responsibility for exploitative systems

To explain responsibility for exploitative economic systems we suggest that you anchor your arguments in young people's belief in the polluter pays principle and their strong sense **of fairness and equality**. Appeal to young people's awareness that **action on climate change means taking responsibility for past and current wrongs**, and build their understanding of how historical events have impacted current systems and realities.

When referring to these systems and events – such as slavery, colonialism and capitalism – don't assume young people will make all the links for themselves to the way society currently functions and to climate change impacts. Encourage dialogue and reflection on how the current global economic and environmental system emerged, and how their daily lives and decisions are connected with the realities of the global inequality of climate change.

We also suggest using phrases like *ending unjust treatment of people, places and territories* to tackle climate change, as they resonate well with young people's values of equality and solidarity. The way to achieve this desired equality is best suggested by *moving together to an economy based on respecting the earth and people's rights*. Although a majority of young people are in favour of wealthy countries providing compensation to poorer countries for damages caused by climate change, solely focusing on wealthy governments to act is currently seen as overly radical or confrontational. Actions looking at wider systemic change and reconciliation sit better currently with young audiences – those which involve asking both individuals and governments to reflect on the past and take responsibility for its outcomes.

### EXAMPLES

- **Deforestation and plantation agriculture practices by colonial powers in Southeast Asia, Africa and the Americas contributed to the environmental degradation of these regions.** These practices released pollutants into the atmosphere and disrupted local ecosystems. In Indonesia and Malaysia, for example, large areas of tropical rainforests were cleared to create palm oil plantations. This led to habitat loss of many species, displacement of indigenous people and release of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>10</sup>
- **Biofuel is currently being promoted as a clean energy source and is extracted from countries in the global south.** These fuels are used primarily by countries of the global north to meet increasing energy demands. Similarly to palm oil production, obtaining these resources contributes to environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity and numerous social injustices.<sup>11</sup>
- **The fast fashion industry contributes to environmental degradation in the production, transportation and disposal stages of its supply chain.**<sup>12,13</sup> This is because its processes are energy and water intensive, and produce pollutants that enter the air, soil and water bodies. Fast fashion also intersects with principles of climate justice due to the unsafe and concerning working conditions within its factories, which predominantly employ and underpay women from low-income communities.

**Figure 1:** How to have an effective conversation about climate justice: an example structured narrative for engaging with young European adults. Here, we've used the evidence-based words, phrases and concepts presented in this guide to go from introduction of the topic through to a call to action. **Remember to use real-life examples at every step of the way.**

### STEP 1

#### Raise awareness of the context



We should all have a safe and healthy place to live, now and in the future. But we are going well beyond what our earth can handle, and this has an effect on the climate. Climate change means droughts, hurricanes, floods and fires are increasing, destroying lives, cultures and ecosystems. As a result, people around the world are suffering, and the impacts of climate change do not affect people equally.

### STEP 2

#### Explain climate justice



A climate justice lens means understanding and addressing the root causes and drivers of climate change, instead of focusing solely on the problem of rising global emissions. At its core, climate justice is the understanding that climate change has a greater impact on people who are the least responsible for causing the problem, and a commitment to addressing this.

### STEP 3

#### Explain historical responsibility



Action on climate change involves taking responsibility for past and current wrongdoings. This means:

- recognising and ending the unjust treatment of people and territories around the world.
- moving away from an economy based on pollution and the extraction of resources without thought, to an economy based on respecting the earth and people's rights.
- acknowledging the damage that has already been caused to people and ecosystems.

### STEP 4

#### Lay out what needs to be done



We need to rethink what a 'good life' looks like with others, speak up, and create change. It's happening already! People and communities are demonstrating what's possible: from planting trees to taking governments to court; from protesting on the streets to setting up community energy cooperatives; from sharing items instead of owning them to seeking changes in laws and policies; from setting up neighbourhood food-growing initiatives to making polluters pay. Every action counts!

### STEP 5

#### Call to action



It is time to change to create a more balanced world. It is time to change how we live and organise as a society. It is time to stand with communities locally and globally to bring about system change, where people, communities and the planet come before profit!



# Insights informing this guide

## Current beliefs – young adults and climate justice

- Concerned young adults across Europe express deep worry about climate change – using words like “catastrophe”, “apocalypse” and “the end”.
- In our survey across different social classes and political affiliations, only 4% of respondents said they didn’t want to do anything at all to tackle climate change. At the other end of the scale, almost one in ten said they would be willing to break the law to tackle it.
- Few, however, understood what the term ‘climate justice’ means. Less than 30% thought they could explain the term to someone else. Most either didn’t make any association with social or historical inequalities and injustices, or interpreted climate justice as having something to do with laws or taxes, or ‘nature taking revenge’.

## Support for climate justice principles

But at the same time, young Europeans are supportive of many of the ideas behind the climate justice analysis – even if they don’t call it that.

### Young adults:

- **want ‘transformational change’:** 81% of those surveyed agreed that we need to transform society and change how our economy works if we are to tackle climate change.
- **understand that climate change affects some people more than others, and that it will increase the inequalities that exist today:** Over half (55%) of those surveyed agreed that the people who are the least responsible for causing climate change are suffering the worst impacts, and almost two-thirds agreed that climate change will increase existing inequalities around the world.
- **agree that people who are most affected should have more of a say:** Nearly three-quarters (72%) said that people and communities most affected by climate change should have more of a say in decisions about climate solutions.

*“Imagine that I am a girl from a poor family in Peru, and a large company comes to extract resources from my land, taking away my food so that there is one more apple in [the supermarket]. And they say, I want the apple, and I say, yes, but that means you’re taking everything away from me. Clearly, the girl from Peru should have more choice than the company.”*

–WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, SPAIN
- **agree that governments are responsible for enacting measures to tackle the climate crisis:** The vast majority (85%) of survey respondents agreed that governments should do more to support citizens to make the transition to a climate-friendly lifestyle. Many also felt their country isn’t currently doing its fair share to cut emissions.
- **support the idea of ‘compensation’ or ‘reparations’:** A majority (58%) supported the idea that wealthy countries should compensate poorer countries for damages caused by the climate crisis, while only 13% were opposed to this.

Further, **young adults that identify as being concerned about the climate crisis:**

- **support the idea of bringing ethics and morality into discussions about the climate crisis:** and particularly suggest mechanisms like the ‘polluter pays’ principle as a way of establishing responsibility.
- **want to challenge wealth and power and support equality and solidarity:** Concerned young adults responded positively to language recognising that inequalities of wealth and power are a big problem. Solutions that reflect principles of equality and solidarity also resonated well with them – for example, “We should all have a say in decisions that affect us”.
- **believe that governments should be enacting tougher measures on corporations and multinational companies:** They saw these actors as responsible for creating and continuing to drive much of the damage.

*“It is this economic system that makes us have a selfish mentality. I think that if we want a change in the future on all issues, racial justice, gender justice, climate justice... everything depends on the economic system.”*

– WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, SPAIN

## Gaps in understanding

While young adults support climate justice principles, their understanding of them is often superficial or not deeply held. This is true even of young people who are more concerned about climate change. On some topics – like the impact of climate change on gender inequalities, or the link between historical injustices and what is happening with climate change today – many young people lack the necessary background knowledge to be able to identify the linkages themselves.

**Questions that arise from young audiences include:**

- **What is ‘the system’?** Young adults concerned about climate change see it as a big, systemic problem. They often, however, don’t appear to be sure what ‘the system’ really refers to – and therefore don’t know how to fix it. In workshop discussions, participants variously referred to “capitalism”, “consumer society”, “neoliberalism”, “the free market”, “economic growth”, and “the economy” when trying to describe the system.
- **How does climate change relate to racial injustices?** Many young adults understand that climate change has a greater impact on people in poorer countries and/or in the global south. But few have a handle on how aspects of racism such as prejudice or lacking power in society can make people – even those living in richer countries – more vulnerable to climate impacts.
- **How does climate change exacerbate gender inequalities?** Only a small proportion of survey respondents (one-fifth) understood that women are more affected by the impacts of climate change than men – despite a sizable literature confirming this is so. In workshops with concerned young adults, many were confused by the idea.
- **How do colonialism and global history relate to climate change?** Young adults’ understanding of the climate crisis tends to be focused on what is happening now. Even among those concerned about climate change, very few could spontaneously draw any connections between global history and the current reality of climate change, and virtually no participants mentioned colonialism.

## Barriers to action

Young European adults want to take action on climate change. But a number of barriers stand in their way – and if not used carefully, the language of climate justice could make these barriers worse.

- **Young adults lack trust in governments:** Young people demonstrate a widespread scepticism about formal political parties and political figures, and often report feeling powerless and unable to make a difference. Many participants across different European countries voiced doubts about whether politicians will do what they promise – and expressed a desire for their political leaders to act with more integrity.

*"I want governments to be much more honest with people. To say what they're actually doing. Let's not be lied to and disrespected."*  
-WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, ROMANIA
- **Concerned young adults feel powerless:** Workshop participants conveyed a strong sense of their own powerlessness within the system, talking about the significant barriers individuals face in trying to influence change on a larger scale. Over-emphasising the problem and the power of other actors or systems, and underplaying solutions and how to achieve them together, risks deepening young adults' sense of helplessness. Workshop participants appreciated examples, visions, solutions and strategies – including concrete actions – that suggest change is possible and is happening.
- **Concerned young adults want young people to have more of a say in, but not the burden of responsibility for, solutions:** Workshop participants believed that young people should have more power and voice in climate change solutions. Occasionally, however, they expressed resistance to the idea of being the ones who should bear the burden of responsibility for fixing the problem.

*"I'm tired of always being targeted, as young people... ultimately, many of these things should not be our responsibility..."*  
-WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, SPAIN
- **Young adults are sceptical about individual behaviour change – but default to it as the only solution:** When asked what they would do about climate change, young adults tended to suggest small-scale individual behaviour changes. But at the same time, they often saw those same changes as a distraction.
- **Young adults want systemic change, but can't visualise it:** While young adults expressed annoyance at individual actions being used as a distraction from the large-scale changes that are needed, they struggled to imagine what those changes might actually be. They tended to default to alterations in individual behaviours when asked what they should do; and when asked what governments should do, to technical changes in legislation. For example, 'reducing my own carbon footprint' was the most commonly chosen action young people said they would want to be involved with. Previous research suggests that young adults may lack information on how to take part in other forms of action, or are unsure about alternatives to the status quo and the best strategies to get there.





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