



Rising voices, green choices: Europe's equality drive against climate change

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Abstract: Climate change is closely linked to the imperative for social justice. As addressed at the Fundamental Rights Forum 2024, it is crucial to tackle inequalities, elevate marginalised groups and establish comprehensive policies that account for a sustainable future.

The European Union (EU) is currently at a crucial crossroads where its efforts towards climate change and social justice intersect. The [Fundamental Rights Forum 2024](#), organised by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), brought together notable figures and advocates who worked to untangle the complex issues related to these two imperatives. Their [enlightening conversations](#) provide an insight into their vision for achieving a sustainable, fairer future for all.

Revealing disparities and marginalised communities

In order to achieve the goal of stopping or at least reducing climate change, the inclusion of marginalised communities is crucial and therefore disparities should be revealed. [Force of Nature](#) Founder Clover Hogan made a compelling declaration at the forum, stating that the climate crisis extends beyond being just an environmental concern and is in fact linked to long-standing inequalities. Her insightful evaluation debunked the notion of individual accountability by exposing fundamental injustices ingrained within systems. A staggering truth lies in how carbon emissions from only 1 percent of people with wealth are equal to those emitted by 66 percent among society's poorest members. This reveals an

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urgent necessity for changing our approach towards acting on climate, putting justice and equity at its forefront.

Empowering underrepresented communities

How is it possible to strengthen underrepresented communities? In agreement with Hogan, Jeroen Schokkenbroek, the Director of [Equal Rights and Dignity](#) at the Council of Europe, [highlighted](#) disparities that exist within developed regions like the Global North. In particular, marginalised communities such as Roma have been made more vulnerable by COVID-19's impact on their lives; existing inequalities are only exacerbated by this crisis. At the forum Schokkenbroek echoed the importance of cooperation through joint programs to promote social integration while focusing attention on grassroots-level inequities. Ultimately, we must uplift those whose voices have traditionally gone unheard if true progress is to be achieved in our pursuit towards collective sustainability goals without leaving anyone behind along the way.

Human rights as the cornerstone of climate action

By viewing human rights as the fundamental basis for climate action Elena Kountouri Tapiero, UN OHCHR's [Regional Representative for Europe](#), [highlighted](#) the inseparability of human rights and climate justice. Her passionate appeal for accessible legal structures and strong safeguarding of defenders resonated with those present at the gathering. She emphasised that it is not enough to put activism high on the agenda, participatory activities and youth dialogues must be included as well as actions on the ground and developing innovative citizens engagement tools. It is evident that overcoming critical obstacles on our quest towards climate activism requires upholding each individual's basic rights. There should be an effective monitoring system focusing on these discrepancies, which have posed a significant [hurdle](#) along all efforts undertaken so far.

Inclusive solutions and policy gaps

Besides focusing on human rights, there are further obstacles to overcome. [Inclusive solutions](#) are necessary to bridge policy gaps. Although there has been an abundance of [policy guidance](#), promoting inclusive climate action still presents a significant gap. At the forum Schokkenbroek drew attention to the lack of explicit strategies within the Council of Europe which aim at resolving such a crucial matter. His appeal for filling policy gaps and incorporating different viewpoints into decision-making processes strikes a chord with many people.

The role of technology in climate solutions

[Technology](#) is often touted as a key player in mitigating climate change. However, as Clover Hogan pointed out, it is crucial to consider the ethical implications. For example, the demand for electric vehicles has led to a surge in [cobalt mining](#) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where working conditions are deplorable. Addressing climate change must involve creating sustainable technologies that do not exploit vulnerable communities. Thus, [equitable access to clean technology](#) is essential in bridging the gap between environmental goals and social justice.

The European Climate Law and collaborative efforts

Certainly, inclusivity constitutes the foundation stone in developing effective climate policies. Policymakers must take heed and respond promptly to Schokkenbroek's plea for transformational change. The overall goal in all processes and approaches should be moving towards a future that is sustainable. It is evident that a collaborative approach is imperative to steer towards sustainable solutions amidst the intricate issues of climate change and inequality. The [European Climate Law](#) represents a significant step towards this goal. This legislative framework aims to ensure that all EU policies contribute to climate neutrality by 2050. It underscores the necessity of integrating climate considerations into every aspect of policymaking, thereby fostering an environment where sustainability and equity are prioritised.

Towards a sustainable future

The conversations at the Fundamental Rights Forum 2024 act as an urgent summons for action, rallying efforts to leverage equality in tackling environmental challenges. Empowering underrepresented individuals, bridging policy discrepancies, and highlighting [justice-based approaches](#) within [eco-friendly initiatives](#) would enable Europe's leadership role in forging a more equitable and environmentally conscious future for humanity collectively. To summarise, it is abundantly clear that the EU needs to combine the growing demand for change with eco-friendly measures in order to achieve equality while combating climate change. We should take heed of what we have learned so far and work together towards a comprehensive transformation anchored by justice, fairness and sustainability.

Call to action

It is high time we stop talking about change but actually act on our shared plans. Let us [empower communities](#) and create an inclusive world where everyone has equal opportunities to thrive personally, their voices matter too. Including local solutions, resources and approaches could bring entirely new ways of thinking about problems caused by climate change and hopefully contribute effectively to stop climate change entirely. To achieve this, it is essential to promote educational initiatives and raise awareness about the interconnectedness of climate change and social justice. Public campaigns, workshops, and community programs can help individuals understand the importance of equitable climate action. As Clover Hogan [emphasised](#), changing the narrative from individual blame to systemic accountability is crucial in mobilising collective efforts and fostering a sense of shared responsibility.

Furthermore, governments and policymakers must prioritise creating and implementing inclusive policies that reflect the diverse needs of all communities. As highlighted by [Elena Kountouri Tapiero](#), legal frameworks should be accessible and protective of human rights defenders, ensuring that they can safely advocate for change. This involves not only passing progressive laws but also ensuring their enforcement and providing avenues for marginalised voices to be heard and represented in decision-making processes.

Lastly, international cooperation and solidarity are vital in addressing the global nature of climate change. The insights [shared](#) by Jeroen Schokkenbroek on the disparities within the Global North underscore the importance of collaborative

efforts across borders. By working together and sharing knowledge, resources, and strategies, countries can support each other in building resilient and inclusive societies. This includes fostering partnerships with non-governmental organisations, private sectors, and local communities to create a united front against climate change.

The journey towards a sustainable and equitable future requires concerted action from all sectors of society. By integrating [social justice into climate initiatives](#) and ensuring that no one is left behind, we can pave the way for a healthier planet and a fairer world. The FRA Forum 2024 has laid the groundwork; now, it is up to us to carry forward the torch of change.