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Climate Crisis

Climate justice calls for a fairer, healthier, more stable future

Shift towards climate justice is essential for our collective future

Jennie Stephens

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A boy cools off in water during hot weather in Karachi, Pakistan, earlier this month. Photograph: Shahzaib Akber/EPA

Recent record-breaking [heatwaves](#) brought death and disruption across Europe, India, and Southeast Asia. With temperatures well over 40 degrees in many places, vulnerable people and marginalised communities were most impacted by heat-related misery, hardship and loss of life. At the same time, tech billionaires and their big-tech companies are worsening this climate suffering by expanding fossil-fuelled [data centres](#) to power the [AI](#) hype.

The widening gap between these two realities illustrates the structural injustices of the climate crisis. The simultaneous proliferation of both climate suffering and fossil-fuelled [corporate profits](#) demonstrates the need for transformative systemic change to disrupt the dangerous concentration of wealth and corporate power that dismisses climate impacts, perpetuates [fossil fuel reliance](#), and fuels [war and militarisation](#). As the scale of injustice becomes more clear, the call for climate justice is getting louder around the world.

Climate justice is both a concept and a growing social movement. Climate justice as a concept recognises that those suffering the most from climate chaos have contributed the least, and those who contributed the most can better protect themselves from climate harms, leaving others exposed. Climate justice as a movement strives to rectify these injustices, calling for fossil fuel phase-out, constraining corporate power, and an urgent transformation toward a more healthy, just and stable future.

[Artificial intelligence spells a real climate disaster]

The distributional injustices of who benefits and who suffers from the climate crisis are evident globally and locally. Resource- and energy-intensive, high-consumption lifestyles of the global north have devastating climate impacts for the global south, triggering calls for climate reparations. Across different regions, some countries and communities are suffering more than others. Locally, affluent urban neighbourhoods are often cooler than poorer neighbourhoods because of more trees, parks and green space. More privileged households may have access to air conditioning while lower-income households do not, which in extreme heat can be a life-or-death difference.

The climate justice movement broadens the climate agenda beyond narrow, technology-focused carbon emission reductions toward a transformative vision of alternative economic systems that would prioritise human rights and deliver quality housing, food, healthcare, education and a healthy, stable environment for all

Children and youth have contributed the least to the climate crisis, yet their futures are being threatened. This massive intergenerational injustice has mobilised a global youth climate justice movement including the National Youth Council of Ireland and its [climate justice charter](#).

Climate justice also includes procedural justice – recognising inequities in whose voices are prioritised and who is excluded from climate decision-making. Women, LGBTQ+ people, young people, older people and people with disabilities are more vulnerable to climate-induced heatwaves, floods, fires and droughts, yet they are often excluded from climate policymaking. On the other hand, powerful multinational corporations profiting from fossil fuels have huge policy influence.

In Ireland, The [Feminist Communities for Climate Justice](#) network works on procedural justice with diverse communities to transform Irish climate policies to be more just, inclusive and community-based. On the global stage, small-island Pacific nations facing the existential threat of climate-induced sea level rise are prominent climate justice advocates pushing for an international fossil-fuel phase-out [treaty](#).

Importantly, from a climate justice perspective, the climate crisis is not a scientific problem to be solved with technocratic solutions. Rather, the climate crisis is a devastating symptom of an extractive system that concentrates wealth and power among large corporate interests that strategically invest to erode democratic processes, perpetuate fossil fuel reliance and block transformative climate policy.

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Climate justice questions the power structures and cultural norms guiding humanity on a destructive path of deteriorating conditions, ecological decline and worsening suffering, inequality and polarisation. Climate justice acknowledges the [mounting evidence](#) that suggests the current extractive, exploitative, growth-focused economic system is no longer serving humanity well. In fact, the system is the main problem as described by the popular climate justice slogan ‘System Change, not Climate Change’.

The climate justice work of Dublin’s [Bohemian](#) football club provides an example of an effort to catalyse economic system change. Their [community wealth-building](#) strategy supports local investment in

regenerative and community-owned initiatives to facilitate structural transformation.

Ireland has yet to embrace a climate justice approach as a national priority. Fossil-fuelled data centres continue to be built while climate policy exacerbates inequities by prioritising inadequate individualised [techno-fixes](#), such as [electric vehicles](#) and solar panels, that are inaccessible to many.

But as the injustices worsen, the transformative potential of climate justice is resonating widely. By prioritising the needs of people and communities over ecologically-destructive corporate interests, the shift towards climate justice is essential for our collective future and our shared democracy.

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