

MODULE 6.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

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Learning Goals

This module provides the necessary information to understand the climate crisis from a climate justice perspective. Here we will deal with the basic concepts relating to climate science and international political spaces as well as explore the definition of climate justice itself and its organizations. We will also study the context left by COVID-19 and search for ways to collectively face the challenges of the different crises (the health, economic, financial, care crisis, etc.) while strengthening the bonds between the social, environmental, and climate justice movements.



KNOWLEDGE

- Understand the basics of climate science.
- Get to know the debates of international climate politics.
- Gain a historical perspective of the climate crisis.



ABILITIES

- Better identify the great challenges of humanity in the 21st century.
- Exercise and practice critical thinking.
- Train the intersectional and multidimensional view on global problems, such as the climate crisis.



ATTITUDES

- Be active and motivated to participate in civil society groups which are organized around Climate Justice.
- Desire to be an agent for change from the personal, collective and political spheres, in order to achieve consistency towards a society with social, environmental and climate justice.

Climate Glossary

When we tackle the climate crisis, we should bear in mind that it is a multidimensional topic that can be dealt with from very different fields such as the scientific, political, economic, social or labor world, from a global, regional or local scale, also taking into account gender perspective and a focus on geopolitical, north-south or colonial relations, etc. Moreover, literature on climate is full of abbreviations, acronyms, and words from its own lexicon that combine all these different dimensions.

Here you have a glossary that, far from being exhaustive, will be useful for reading this document and many others:

— **IPCC**: You will often hear about IPCC, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Its aim is to provide the world with objective scientific information about climate change, and its natural, political, and economic impacts and risks.

The IPCC was created in 1988 and until now it has published five major reports (1990, 1995, 2001, 2007 and 2014), as well as numerous complementary documents.

— **UNFCCC**: The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the international political space that responds to the challenges of climate change. This Convention, which is actually a kind of constitution signed by the countries, was adopted in 1992 and came into force in 1994. From the following year on, the UNFCCC has gathered yearly in the COPs (Conferences of the Parties). During these COPs results have been met, some very well-known like the Kyoto Protocol, in 1997, and the Paris Agreement, in 2015.

— **Ppm**: Stands for *parts-per-million*, which is the quantity of units of a substance to be found in each million of units. Ppm are used to measure the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

You will often hear about 350 ppm as the goal to be achieved, because it is the concentration that assures that we won't enter into a +2 °C scenario. This goal serves as the name of an international climate justice activist network, 350.org.

— **Greenhouse gases, global warming potential and CO₂ equivalent**: Although CO₂ is the most important and known greenhouse gas, there are others which must be taken very seriously in the fight against climate

change, like methane, CFCs and nitrous oxide. Each of these gases has a different effect on time impact in the atmosphere. This impact is measured with the global warming potential (GWP).

	Lifetime (yr)	GMP	
		Cumulative forcing over 20 years	Cumulative forcing over 100 years
CO ₂	b	1	1
CH ₄	12.4	84	28
N ₂ O	121.0	264	265
CF ₄	50,000.0	4880	6630
HFC-152a	1.5	506	138

Figure 6.1.
Greenhouse gases GWP.
Source: *Climate Change 2014 – Synthesis Report*.
The intergovernmental.
Panel on Climate (p. 87)

According to this table, a ton of methane (CH₄) is 84 times more polluting than CO₂ during its first 20 years in the atmosphere; a ton of nitrous oxide (N₂O), 121 times; and a ton of carbon tetrafluoride (CF₄), 50 000 times. With this reasoning, CO₂ is taken as a reference and the impact of the other greenhouse gases is transformed, through GWP, into its CO₂ equivalent, represented in this way: CO_{2eq}.

— **Carbon budget:** At a certain point, in the debates to tackle climate change, the idea of a carbon budget was adopted. Instead of talking about the emissions that had to be reduced, the accounting of the maximum CO_{2eq} that could be emitted in some scenarios started. For instance, COP-21 in Paris determined that to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C, the global carbon budget was 495 gigatons of CO₂. If we take the emission rhythm in 2019 as a reference, 43.1 gigatons, we would drain the budget in only 11.5 years.

— **Tipping points:** These are one of the most relevant aspects to bear in mind in order to understand the climate emergency and crisis. Tipping points are thresholds in which a small change can push the system towards a completely new state. We face a non-linear reality in complex ecosystem relations. That is to say, from a certain point, global warming can be on auto-pilot because feedback cycles exist. For example, temperature increase differentials can cause the thaw of the permafrost (permanent ice) in places such as Siberia, Alaska, the north of Canada, Patagonia, Antarctica, etc. This permafrost accumulates methane from dead plants and animals, and when this methane is released it contributes to an increase in the CO_{2eq} concentration in the atmosphere, which causes the Earth's surface temperature to rise. From a certain threshold, this cycle does not need human action.

The Climate Crisis and the State of the World

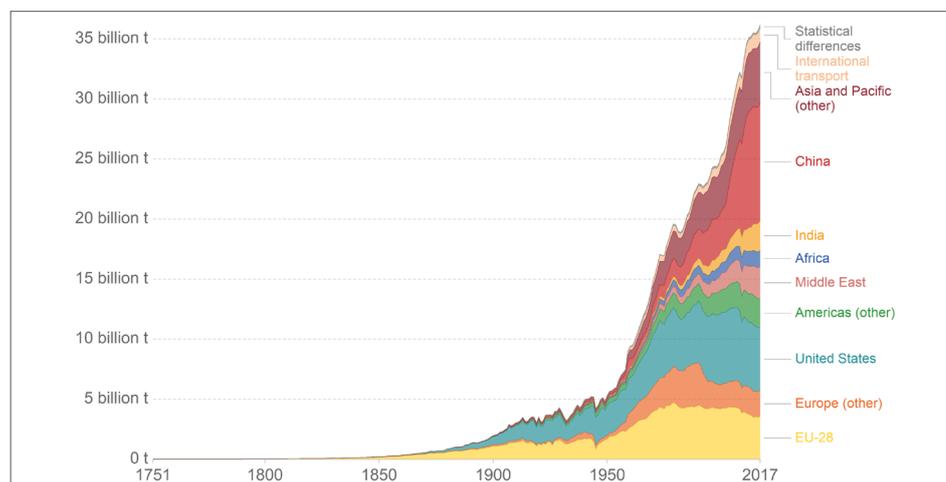
In the 21st century there is a strong scientific consensus that confirms the direct correlation between greenhouse gas emissions from human activity (anthropogenic) and the increase in the average temperature of planet Earth.

However, this started well before this century, with the industrial revolution and specifically with economic globalization. With the discovery of the steam engine in the 18th century came an increase in the production capacity that had never been experienced before, but it wasn't until the beginning of the 20th century that we were able to talk about a real boom in production and fossil fuel consumption. First it was coal, then petrol and finally, natural gas that became an indispensable element for the economy.

By the mid 20th century, capitalism was interconnected, standardized and homogenized through a process called globalization. It took advantage of the fall of the Communist bloc to prevail as the hegemonic economic model. Production became specialized and was relocated, the consumption of goods and services skyrocketed, population increased exponentially, and economic growth, with GDP as its indicator, became the measure of the economy's health and of virtually all things. This process would not have been possible without cheap and abundant energy and natural resources, nor the externalization of the social and environmental costs derived from their use.

One of the collateral damages caused by this energetic and material voracity of the economic system was climate change. Massive burning of fossil fuel and deforestation, to respond to the constant thirst of GDP growth, led to massive greenhouse gas emission and the alteration of climate regimes.

Figure 6.2.
Annual emissions
by region, 1751-2017.
Source: [Our World in Data](#).



The first internationally recognized document to speak about the climate crisis was written in 1972, *The Limits to Growth*, popularly known as the Meadows Report, under the leadership of scientist Donella Meadows and with the participation of Dennis Meadows. This report warned that the dynamics of exponential GDP growth and population expansion at a global scale could collide with the limits of our planet.

But it was not until 1988 that IPCC published its report. Then in 1992, at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, the international political spaces necessary to debate this global problem were established. Soon after that, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was set up. Its foundational text includes a principle that summarizes the past, present and future of the fight against the climate crisis and starts to penetrate into climate justice: responsibilities are common but differentiated.

This sentence means that all countries in the world have certain responsibilities in the fight against the climate crisis, but these responsibilities differentiate, they won't be equal for all countries.

Some results have been met in the UNFCCC, some as well-known as the Kyoto Protocol, 1997, or the Paris Agreement, 2015. From 2008 to 2012, the Kyoto Protocol forced industrialized countries to reduce their emissions 5 % compared to their emissions in 1990. The Paris Agreement intends to achieve an emission reduction which doesn't surpass 2 °C and obtain a desirable scenario of 1.5 °C with the voluntary contribution of the signatory countries.

Despite this apparent commitment of international agreements, the problem is still worsening, and in the 21st century climate change has become a climate crisis and emergency. The strong tensions of a competitive international context are not helping to achieve the cooperation accords, which are often watered-down by countries' conflicting interests.

In conclusion, the UNFCCC has not shown any capacity or intention to attack the core of the problem: the economic system of growth linked to the massive burning of fossil fuels and the advance of deforestation. The consequence of this ineffectiveness is reflected in the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C, published on October 8th 2018, which warned that we have 12 years left to act with forcefulness in order to mend the climate problem.

WHO OWNS THE ATMOSPHERE?

Does it sound like an absurd question to you? Well, it seems that some countries, without answering it, have just appropriated it. Look carefully at these three graphs:

Figure 6.3.
Annual emissions in tons of CO_{2eq}.
Formulation based on data from the World Data Bank.

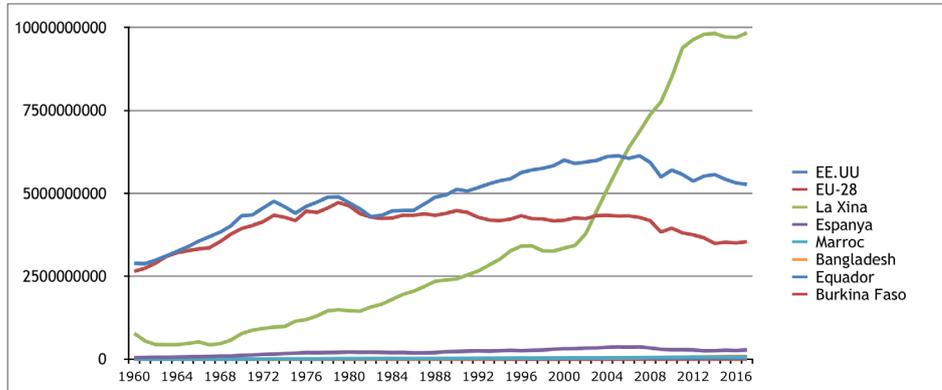


Figure 6.4.
Accumulated emissions in tons of CO_{2eq}.
Formulation based on data from the World Data Bank.

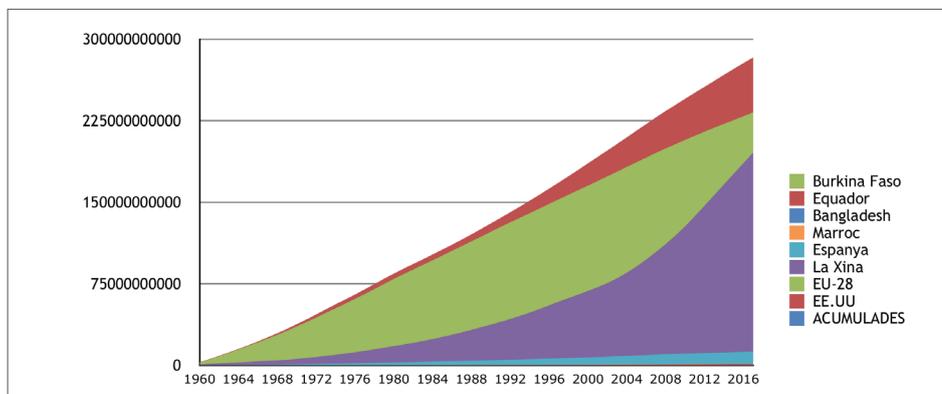
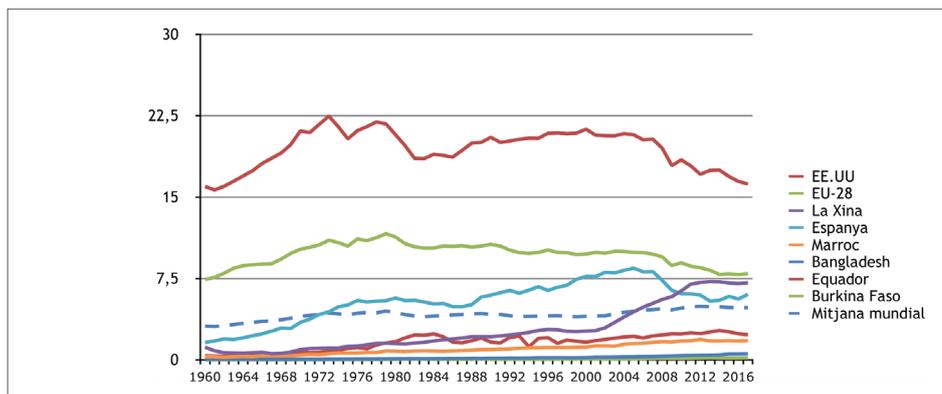


Figure 6.5.
Emissions per capita in tons of CO_{2eq}.
Formulation based on data from the World Data Bank.



You can find the translation in the Annex

In the first graph it can be seen that since 2006 China has been the largest emitter but, in reality, historical responsibilities reflected in the second graph, and emissions per capita registered in the third one, clearly point to the USA and the EU as a whole. Countries like Morocco and Ecuador, but especially Bangladesh and Burkina Faso, which are hardly seen in the figure, hold very little responsibility.

Therefore, some countries have self-appointed the right to use the atmosphere and, if we had more precise data, we could see that realities are also very uneven within borders.

Climate Justice

Having seen the scientific and political historical development in the previous section, we should acknowledge the response from civil society. Different ecological, social, peasant and indigenous organizations, among others, have been warning us for a long time that the call to action is urgent in order to prevent the serious and irreversible effects of global warming. Many of them are recognized under the umbrella of climate justice.

¹ Definition by Observatori del Deute en la Globalització (Observatory of Debt in Globalization), from Masters Group at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (not yet published).

Climate justice¹ refers to the recognition of the contribution of human beings to climate change, with an unequal distribution of both responsibilities and impacts, according to social, economic, territorial, gender, ethnic, class, race, age circumstances, etc. Hence, to exercise climate justice means to actively adopt this intersectional perspective and to face the climate crisis by pointing at inequalities, oppressive systems, and power dynamics that sustain them: capitalism, neocolonialism, racism, etc.

The term climate justice appears at the beginning of the 2000s. It is inspired by the tradition of environmental justice, which was coined in the USA within the grassroots activism of the civil rights movement in the 1980s. The environmental justice organizations have since been trying to widen the prevailing discourse of conventional environment. The intent was to move forward from a practice which was more focused on the consequences of environmental degradation and based on environmental management towards an analysis of the causes and the incorporation of issues such as social justice and equality.

This sense of unequal justice and distribution of responsibilities and impacts, in the case of climate, can be reinforced in three dimensions:

Gender-differentiated impacts caused by the climate crisis

Gender-differentiated impacts more seriously affect women in the Global South, who have contributed very little in gas emissions. Patriarchal societies mean that women receive less formal education and, thus, have less information about the effects of the climate crisis. Natural disasters, which are in many cases induced by global warming, can cause these women to be displaced and this increases their vulnerability to sexual assault, violence, and other human rights infringements. Moreover, they are usually in charge of fetching water and food, and in times of scarcity this task becomes more complicated and they often suffer from malnutrition and illness.

A tough example of this differentiated impact, although it does not stem from the climate crisis but from an extreme natural phenomenon, was the tsunami in Indonesia in 2004. The death toll resulted in a total of female casualties four times higher than that of male victims. One of the reasons for the difference was that women were with their children and died in their efforts to save them. Another reason was that most women, contrary to men, could not swim and the tsunami's penetration inland was a deadly trap for them.

CO₂ trading, compensation projects and CO₂lonialism

Soon after the summit that resulted in the Kyoto Protocol (1997), Flexible Mechanisms were established to facilitate industrialized countries to help them reach their goals. Basically, these instruments were trade proposals that turned CO₂ into merchandise and a financial asset.

One of these mechanisms was called Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The CDM were clean projects that companies from industrialized countries could develop in non-industrialized countries. Thus, they could obtain Certified Emission Reductions (CER) and deduct them from their moral and financial obligations, or sell them in carbon trading, which was also created under Kyoto.

When CDMs came into operation, companies saw CERs as an incentive and passed projects that were already in their portfolios as CDMs. Furthermore, local communities and indigenous people from the Global South suffered the effects of these projects, which range from insufficient consultation processes to alterations on biodiversity and displacement of communities.

As a consequence, climate justice movements denounced that, under the excuse of emission reduction, colonial dynamics were being reproduced



by enriched countries against impoverished countries. Then, they coined the expression CO₂lonialism, which in spite of being unpronounceable condenses the denouncing of CDMs and other mechanisms such as REDD, created under the same logic.

Ecological debt, climate debt and external debt

Ecological debt is defined as the debt incurred by industrialized countries to the rest of the nations because of historical and present spoliation of natural resources, non-repaired environmental damages and free usage of global environmental space for waste disposal. One of its categories is climate debt, which means that a debt exists between those countries that have made a larger use of the atmosphere to dispose of greenhouse gases than those that have not.

In the section above, we ask ourselves who owns the atmosphere. So, if we consider it as a common entity, something shared by all people but also with other living creatures, we must recognize that some nations have used it more than others. Mainly, industrialized countries have disposed of enormous amounts of CO₂ and non-industrialized countries have emitted much smaller quantities.

If we make a historical calculation and compare, for instance, the greatest emitter, the USA, with a country with very low emissions like Burkina Faso, we can identify a huge difference. The USA, despite representing between 4 and 5 % of the world's population, has emitted 22 % of total emissions since 1960. Whereas Burkina Faso, being 0.2 % of the world's population, has produced 0.004 % of total emissions.

But we could still go beyond this. The abovementioned Flexible Mechanisms enabled the creation of carbon trading to exchange and speculate with emission credits. The market sets a price for a ton of its raw material, CO₂. In parallel, Burkina Faso belongs to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries, with a debt of 3056 million dollars.² What would happen if we quantified atmosphere usage in monetary terms? Wouldn't the countries that have used more CO₂ than the world average be debtors? And those nations which have used less, would be creditors?

² External debt on 31st December 2017, according to IndexMundi.

It must be clarified that this kind of exercise does not intend to reinforce the carbon trading proposal, but to emphasize that considerations about debt are related to what is or is not included.

Figure 6.6.
Amount and market value
of USA and Burkina Faso
emissions 2008-2017.
Formulation based on data
from the World Bank Data
and Ember-climate.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	TOTAL
USA – Excess emissions regarding the world average – Gigatons of CO ₂	4,74	4,50	4,08	4,22	4,04	3,82	3,97	4,01	3,87	3,76	41,01
USA – Climate debt in million \$ (debtor)	97.683	92.754	84.162	87.088	83.351	78.774	81.820	82.706	79.832	77.515	845.686
Burkina Faso – Excess emissions regarding the world average – Gigatons of CO ₂	-0,06	-0,07	-0,07	-0,07	-0,08	-0,08	-0,08	-0,08	-0,08	-0,09	-0,76
Burkina Faso – Climate debt in million \$ (creditor)	-1.326	-1.390	-1.400	-1.498	-1.583	-1.631	-1.667	-1.717	-1.747	-1.786	-15.746

This table reflects the unequal use of the atmosphere if we compare the USA and Burkina Faso. For each year, the annual average per capita is calculated and multiplied by the number of citizens in that country. Making these calculations, the USA produces excess emissions every year, whereas Burkina Faso does not use its entire share. If we take the price of a ton of CO₂ in the USA market, \$20.62/ton, we can deduct that Burkina Faso could clear its debt in only two years. In contrast, the USA has used the atmosphere in excess due to its economic development and has an accumulated climate debt for the decade between 2008 and 2017 of 846 000 million dollars.

Therefore, we can ask the question: Who owes whom?



COVID-19 and Climate Justice: Rethinking Ourselves in a Time of Crises

Climate justice movements were blooming in 2019. Climate issues were also more incorporated into political agendas. New climate justice groups were created, such as the international youth networks Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion and By 2020 We Rise Up; and local groups in Catalonia like ClimAcció, Barris pel Clima, Families for Future, Teachers for Future, 350BCN and Moviment per la Justícia Climàtica. Similarly, institutions declared climate emergency in the European Parliament (28/11/19), Spain (21/01/20), Catalonia (14/05/19) and the city of Barcelona (15/01/20). However these declarations have not been translated into the necessary actions and structural changes. Moreover, the European Green Deal was signed, inspired by the USA's Green New Deal, which intended to promote a European Climate Law to reform the economy, achieve an efficient use of resources, restore biodiversity and reduce pollution. Plus, the IPCC report released on October 8th 2018 proclaimed the rhythm of climate emergency: we had 12 years left to change it all.

But the spreading of COVID-19 has curbed this inertia and, although all crises generate opportunities, there are moments in which individual and collective experiences can be very diverse. We have to take this into account in order to connect sensibilities and empathies, because the "opportunity", at the present moment, has been at the cost and suffering of human lives.

With this in mind, we have to remain aware and try to influence the measures of economic recovery. First of all, it is true that the emissions have been noticeably reduced due to a stall in the global economy. However, the final effect is yet to be seen. In previous crises, the economic recovery was carried out using dirty systems and emissions ended up increasing in the following years.

In spite of all these precautions, the truth is that the coronavirus has completely changed our daily lives. In our hyper-accelerated societies, we have been sent to the thinking corner. Our agendas have been emptied and we have been given time, or at least we have been forced to invest our time in another way. And this is quite something. During the confinement, we had to reduce our material consumption to the essential minimum. In many cases, we had to rethink, not without tensions, the way in which we satisfy certain basic needs.

Some valuable learning can be derived if we analyze the facts using the theory of human scale development by the Chilean economist and ecologist Manfred Max-Neef. Very broadly, Max-Neef says that needs are finite, known, and practically invariable. What changes throughout time is the way in which we satisfy them, what he calls satisfiers. For example, we had to satisfy our need for subsistence which includes physical and mental health, food, work, etc. by exercising at home, writing, going out for shopping as little as possible or teleworking and performing more activities from our homes. Our leisure need has been satisfied by our highest creativity and using what was within our reach. The need for affection has been virtualized, we made calls to our relatives and friends, but also to many people with whom we had not connected for a long time.

Besides that, the pandemic has shown clear proof of the vulnerabilities of our economic system. It is not such a great idea that face masks are produced in China and that the glove stock is limited. The combination between relocation and just-in-time production – to produce right at the moment when things are “needed” to avoid storing costs – has put us all at risk. What’s more, this system is sustained on a fossil energy base, cheap and available, which does not act in favor of the necessary measures to face the climate crisis. For decades, the ecological movement has opted for the backshoring of economies as a measure to strengthen local-regional resilience. In this sense, local production of protective masks and ventilators, with industrial conversions that were unthinkable just one month before, has been a great experience.

And of course, social-need jobs have become more present than ever, those jobs that sustain life, sometimes invisible, sometimes invisibilized, mainly performed by women. Health workers, rest home staff, cleaning services, etc. are part of our health system and to recognize their task is the best formula to prevent any illness.

There were dormant values such as solidarity, creativity, care and adaptability to new conditions that are on the brink of eruption because of the COVID-19 circumstances. And this is highly valuable to building new futures. It is also a moment to be generous in our demands and to connect social, environmental and climate justice, as well as to advocate for bailout politics to be for the people and not for bailing out the economic powers.

Having a home, an income to meet basic needs, and guaranteeing self-care and care of others is precisely the way in which we can immediately get back on our feet again and conjecture about life projects under the principles of climate justice.



WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

We explain it in three closely related dimensions.

Personal dimension:

You can start by assessing the climate impact of your actions. There are several [webs that calculate the carbon footprint](#). But do not get obsessed with the results! The most important thing is your reflection about it, especially if shared with others.

One of the most relevant aspects is your rethinking of your satisfiers, how you satisfy your needs. As we are immersed in the consumer society, sometimes we do not realize what is superfluous or dispensable. You will surely be provided with some answers by simply consuming local products. You will also witness that most of our products and services have kilometric relations with many associated emissions.

Turn into a critical consumer! The magazine [Ethical Consumer](#) is a great guide. You can also look at the Catalan magazine [Opcions](#).

Collective dimension:

The individual dimension has many limitations, so it is essential to be part of climate justice groups or organizations that bear its principles in mind. Under the section "Other resources of interest" you will find information about several organizations and networks for climate justice.

Political dimension:

Personal changes are political changes, and collective organization is also a political one. In fact, if we differentiate here a political dimension it is because, especially from the group level, we have to formulate proposals that go beyond that, that intend to transform in a broader sense. These intervention proposals can be varied, from demands to institutions, calls for mobilization or action of a community, neighborhood, group, network, etc.

On the week of the 20th to the 27th September 2019 there was a [Global Climate Strike](#).

In October 2019 there was an [International Rebellion](#), a wave of actions for climate emergency.

Some actions consisted of blocking infrastructures, like [this](#) or [this](#) in Spain.

Both demands to institutions and strikes or civil disobedience require very intense work including debate, dialogue, and coordination. If you are part of an organization it will be easier for you to participate in these kinds of interventions that seek to transform our society.



SELF-STUDY ACTIVITY

This activity has been designed to be done online or in person, following the contents of the section “What can you do about it”. What would be most stimulating is to call your friends for a gathering, even better if the group is diverse. There is no need to have any previous knowledge about the topic.

1. Each one has to calculate his or her carbon footprint. This exercise can be done beforehand, though it is also enriching to do it together. You will need computers for that. When you get your results, you can debate them openly.

2. Secondly, the most important thing is to try to transcend the numbers of the previous step and go for qualitative aspects.

What impacts can these results have on climate and people of other places? Is it fair that our carbon footprints are so big when the atmosphere belongs to everybody?

We can think about the satisfiers (see section “COVID-19 and Climate Justice: Rethinking Ourselves in a Time of Crises”). What need lies behind our action? Can we identify it? Could we satisfy it in some other way?

You can again have an open debate. It is essential not to question each other, as every person has an individual and family history, among others, that has led him or her to their current situation. It is difficult to place these preexisting conditions in the activity because it would take too long, but try to respect everyone’s opinions, no matter how different they may be.

3. Some solutions could be achieved by consuming locally. Do you know your neighborhood, village, town or city well? Could you place the shops, groups, or projects that offer an alternative on a map?

You can get some global ideas [here](#). You can also visit [a map for Solidarity Economy in Catalonia](#).

4. Is there a group near you that is involved in climate justice? Which one?

Contact them! It would be interesting to do a brief reflection on what you have been debating during the activity. Once you have it clear, ask them about their meeting dynamics and stop by and get to know them. Do not get impatient! Sometimes organizations can take a long time to answer because they are volunteers with lots of things to do, so insist if necessary.



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 **OTHER RESOURCES OF INTEREST****Networks and groups for climate justice:**

Fridays for Future: international movement mainly made up of students and youth, which demands firm action against global warming. It gained public relevance thanks to the appearance of Greta Thunberg, who protested in front of the Swedish government during August 2018.

Extinction Rebellion: global movement to influence governments and environmental policies through nonviolent resistance to put an end to the massive extinction of species and global warming.

By 2020 We Rise Up: international campaign mainly European, which demands climate justice. It intends to connect movements and fights to escalate civil disobedience with waves of action.

All these movements have their branches in Spain, and both Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion have local networks in different regions of Catalonia, Valencian Country, Balearic Islands, and Andorra (SCI Catalunya's area).

There are also other groups with climate justice among their demands, such as food sovereignty groups, initiatives for transition, communal life projects, etc.

Service Civil International: Our organization has a line of work called Climate for Peace, and you can ask your local branch for more information.

Other local groups in Catalonia:

[Moviment per la Justícia Climàtica](#), [ClimAcció](#), [Families for Future Barcelona](#), [Teachers for Future](#), [350.BCN](#), [local group for Climate Justice of SCI Catalunya](#).

ANNEX

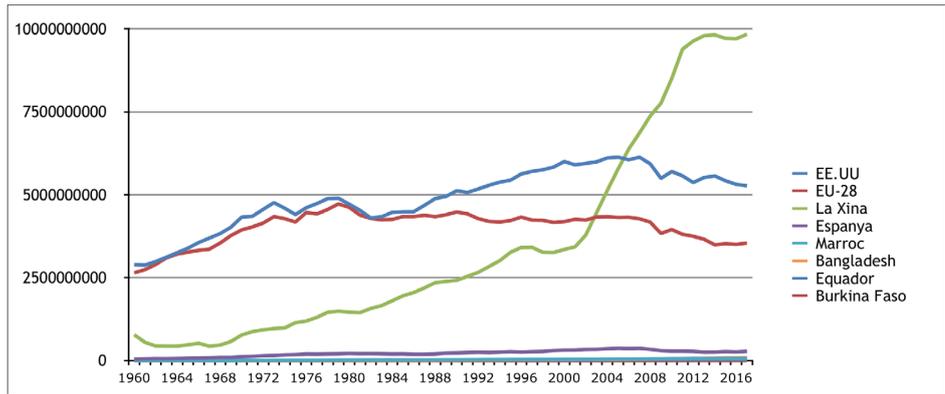


Figure 6.3

USA
 EU-28
 China
 Spain
 Morocco
 Bangladesh
 Ecuador
 Burkina Faso

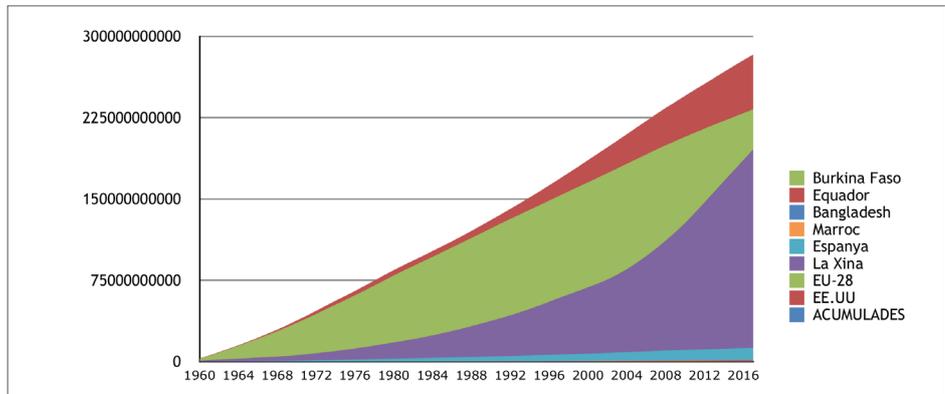


Figure 6.4

USA
 EU-28
 China
 Spain
 Morocco
 Bangladesh
 Ecuador
 Burkina Faso

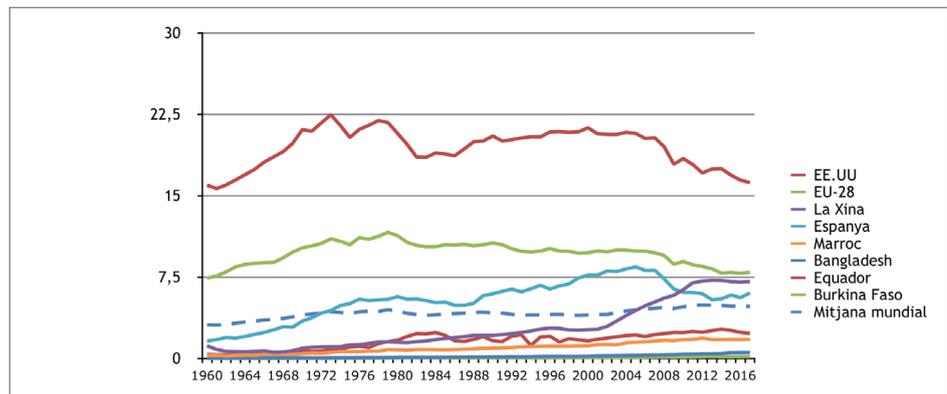


Figure 6.5

USA
 EU-28
 China
 Spain
 Morocco
 Bangladesh
 Ecuador
 Burkina Faso
 World average

