

Just, equitable and ecological transition in the face of collapse



A Global Green New Deal: Just, equitable and ecological transition in the face of collapse

June 2025

Acknowledgements

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About War on Want

War on Want fights against the root causes of poverty and human rights violations, as part of the worldwide movement for global justice.

We do this by:

- working in partnership with grassroots social movements, trade unions and workers' organisations to empower people to fight for their rights
- running hard-hitting popular campaigns against the root causes of poverty and human rights violations
- mobilising support and building alliances for political action in support of human rights, especially workers' rights
- raising public awareness of the root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice, and empowering people to take action for change.

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Cory Marsh © War on Want

Acknowledgements: Convergence toward just, equitable and ecological transitions

This report emerged out of War on Want's longstanding campaigning, advocacy, and work with movement partners and allies globally on a range of the topics addressed in this document. It was first drafted as a source of discussion, drawing on the collective wisdom, passion and expertise of participants at a **Global Convergence on Just Transitions** held at Missenden Abbey, out of which is emerging a Global Alliance for Just Transition.

We are deeply grateful to every participant who contributed their knowledge, lived experiences and solidarity during those three days, and to all who joined us for the subsequent 'And Still We Rise' festival. Their voices – rooted in grassroots struggles, trade unions, Indigenous and peasant movements, and more – shaped this document's vision for a bolder, more urgent and radically inclusive transition – one that underpins our calls for a Global Green New Deal.

Building on our strong legacy of campaigning – and energised by ongoing discussions and insights – this report reflects our shared commitment to dismantle oppressive systems and build transformative alternatives. We invite you to use it as a foundation for ongoing dialogue, organising and alliance-building. Our deepest gratitude and solidarity go to all who continue the struggle for just, equitable and ecological futures, and who have inspired this living document of hope and resolve.

Introduction: **Unprecedented** interconnecting crises

Our societies are facing an all-encompassing set of interconnected crises precipitating wholesale systemic collapse.¹ The crises of poverty, inequality and climate breakdown are the result of political decisions made by those who hold power: governments and corporations working within a rigged global economic system. It is this fundamentally unjust system that has enabled wealth, power and influence to consolidate into the hands of a few.

Most widely discussed is climate breakdown, which requires transitions away from the unsustainable and inequitable model of extractivism and exploitation of both people and resources, including fossil fuels, that has underpinned global development. Where ‘transitions’ are taking place, they are neither at the pace nor scale needed. Tweaks to the existing global approach are not working.

This is the context in which trade unions initially, and now others, have worked hard to mainstream notions of ‘just transition’.² While transition has become inevitable, the fight is on to keep justice part

of it. Some versions of just transition frame it as solely about finding new ‘green’ jobs for workers – and even then, only workers in polluting industries, or only those based in the Global North³ – or as being simply about reducing greenhouse gasses (GHGs).⁴

While there is an urgent need for polluting industries to be decommissioned in pursuit of the 1.5°C guardrail, with efforts reflecting historical responsibility, our vision is much more expansive than the reduction of GHGs, the elimination of fossil fuels, or the creation of ‘green’ jobs for workers in the Global North.

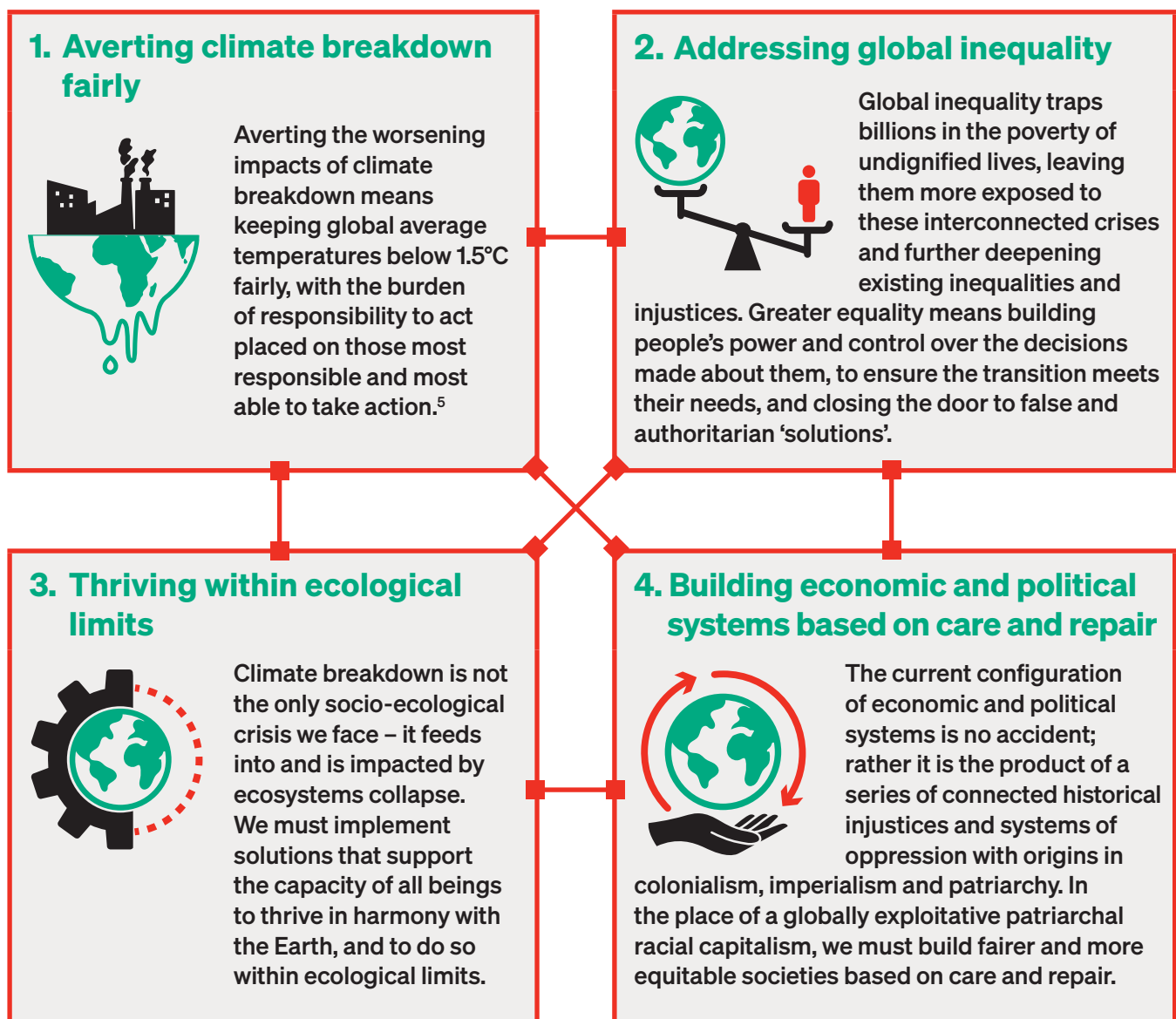
Climate justice protesters have been demanding systems change for decades. Protesters at the Global Day for Climate Justice in Trafalgar Square, London 2021.



A Global Green New Deal: Addressing four interconnected principles for transformation

Just, equitable and ecological transitions are fundamentally about justice – inseparable from equity and fairness. Justice for all people, waged and unwaged, and justice for our planet and all its beings. To secure justice, we must imagine and build alternative systems which better address the root causes of the socio-ecological collapse we are experiencing. Basing these systems on values of care and repair is critical to winning the widespread popular support needed for transitions to be successful.

Just, equitable and ecological transitions vary depending on local, national and regional contexts. Here we identify four critical interconnecting principles directed at major intersecting elements of the crises we face and foundational to our vision of a Global Green New Deal. All proposed responses to the crises we face must be considered in relation to these. They are:



We stand at a unique moment where the need for transition is widely acknowledged, representing a window of opportunity for the radical transformations necessary to implement these four interconnected principles. These are our best hope for responding to the multiple crises.

Facing climate collapse

The climate is collapsing. We are experiencing the unravelling of the global climate system in accordance with the most horrifying projections of climate science.⁶ Failure of those most responsible to act appropriately means we are “moving close to the brink of multiple risk tipping points ... driving us towards potential catastrophe.”⁷ Scientists state that the Earth is leaving the relatively stable period under which humans co-evolved – the ‘Holocene’ – and moving towards a new trajectory of irreversible and unpredictable conditions.⁸ The scale and extent of this change is impossible to overstate.

A fundamental and profound shift is taking place whereby the stable ecosystems and species alongside which human societies co-evolved are disappearing.⁹ This means destabilisation of all of the systems on which societies depend.¹⁰ Climate breakdown touches every aspect of how people live, and whether or not we survive or thrive: from the cultivation of food, to what shelter we can seek in the face of growing storms, to the extent of our political and civil freedoms and human rights.

Already, at an average temperature rise of 1.5°C, the grim list of climate breakdown-related weather impacts is tragically long and growing longer.¹¹ To take only a few recent examples, ‘once-in-a-century flooding’ in 2023 displaced over half a million people and directly impacted over 1.5 million in Somalia¹² on top of the worst drought for 40 years.¹³ Unprecedented floods devastated Pakistan in 2022, impacting 33 million – many of whom remain seriously affected.¹⁴ In 2024, 200,000 people were displaced by ‘record-breaking’ typhoons in the Philippines.¹⁵

The fragility of our corporate-controlled industrial food systems is also revealed by shocks linked to climate breakdown: from potato failures in the UK and France, to monsoon damage to rice in India, cocoa collapse in Ghana and the Ivory Coast,¹⁶ and the imperilling of freshwater supplies in the Himalayas.¹⁷ Temperature records are smashed day-on-day, month-on-month and year-on-year,¹⁸ killing the frail and infirm, as well as migrant labourers and those forced to work outdoors.¹⁹

This catastrophic trajectory is intimately tied to questions of how the life-giving resources of the world are distributed: questions of power, politics and equity. On the plus side, the insight of people campaigning for justice – that we need wholesale systems change – is increasingly recognised by

even mainstream, typically conservative, bodies such as the World Economic Forum²⁰ and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).²¹ The recent IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, for example, noted we urgently need: “fundamental changes to how society functions, including changes to underlying values, worldviews, ideologies, social structures, political and economic systems, and power relationships.”²²

There is a failure to follow this finding through to its logical conclusion, however: the need to fully remake our societies along more just, equitable and ecological lines. Without this remaking, any transitions will fail even on their own narrow terms, because they won’t be addressing the root causes of the interconnected crises.



Chor Kamber village, Pakistan four months after the deadly floods of 2022. The school and health centre were destroyed and the only access was by boat.



Copper ore extraction in Kolwezi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2011. Copper extraction is associated with human rights abuses and ecological harm.

How did we get here?

Precarious lives globalised

To begin to face these challenges we must first understand the interlocking systems and processes combining to trap us in societies plagued by climate breakdown, ecological destruction, inequality, poverty and injustice. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated this in real time as billionaires grabbed over **US\$5 trillion** in new wealth, deepening inequality within and between societies.²³ Rich, developed countries hoarded life-saving equipment and refused to share life-saving vaccines. The profits of big pharmaceutical corporations were valued above the lives of people in the Global South, resulting in at least 1.5 million excess deaths.²⁴ The pandemic laid bare just how profoundly ill-suited societies currently are to looking after those made most precarious during moments of acute shock.²⁵

The world's biggest emitters of greenhouse gasses are spending up to **15 times** as much on arming their borders as they are on climate finance. The UK has spent approximately **\$2.7 billion** on border militarisation per year between 2013 and 2018, and just **\$1.3 billion** on climate financing.²⁶

A disastrous maldistribution of resources – a globally extractive system of uneven exchange – is already causing untold harm to the majority of the world's population, whether through lack of food, exposure to military violence, or otherwise jeopardising the means to live dignified lives. People face debilitating debt from Sri Lanka to Egypt, from Haiti to Zambia.²⁷ Even within richer countries, poorer people suffer the indignities of indebtedness,²⁸ leaving aside the debts owed by those societies – especially by their rich – to the global poor.²⁹ Reliable, affordable healthcare is out of reach for the majority of the global population.³⁰ Hundreds of millions face hunger and malnutrition, while peasants across the world – who produce most people's nutrition – are increasingly marginalised, exploited and expelled from their lands.³¹ Life-sustaining ecological cycles that underpin our societies are being ruptured.³²

2 billion workers worldwide make up the informal economy with little to no access to labour or social protections³³

Many people are excluded from wage labour, un- or under-employed,³⁴ while those who are employed increasingly experience precarious, stressful and poor-quality jobs.³⁵ These people are disproportionately burdened with the costs of transition, creating fertile ground for dangerous policies and false 'solutions' proposed by governments, be they far-right extremists or moderates that have weaponised poverty against climate action. This 'Reactionary International' is capitalising on the combination of debilitating inequality, climate and ecological breakdown, and the absence of justice in transition to discredit both climate action as well as wider measures to ameliorate inequality.³⁶

Avoidable militarised violence – often in contexts of resource scarcity, stress or competition – is leading to staggering harm, loss of life and displacement.³⁷ Genocide unfolds in Palestine and Sudan, while the peaceful protests of millions go unheeded by the world's most powerful governments, exposing the hard limits of so-called democratic societies and the notion of disposability of some peoples.³⁸ The 'business as (un)usual' model preferred by the rich and powerful threatens to condemn billions to unnecessary suffering and death – what some are calling 'eco-apartheid'.³⁹ To understand how and why social systems are content to sacrifice billions to indignity, we must understand that our presents and futures are shaped by the past.

Patriarchal racial capitalism

The world's poor and marginalised – people who are othered as Indigenous, Black, Brown, of colour, disabled, women, non-normative or working class, and much of non-human nature too – are deliberately positioned as inferior or even expendable in the hierarchies of current systems.⁴⁰ Their vulnerability and disposability is a useful feature of these systems, not a bug. It is a system referred to as 'racial capitalism', which emerged out of colonial and imperial expansion by Western Europeans to the so-called 'new world', and which created racial hierarchies to justify brutal systems of slavery, genocide and apartheid.⁴¹

These colonial structures were also inherently patriarchal.⁴² They devalued Indigenous women's roles, exploited women's labour in plantations and domestic servitude, and denied women access to education, legal rights and autonomy.⁴³ Racial capitalist and patriarchal societies and economies became dominant through the transition from pre-industrial to industrial capitalist societies.

The Industrial Revolution in the UK and Europe was fuelled by the spoils of colonial theft and accelerated by carbon-intensive imperialist expansion.⁴⁴ Coloniser countries engineered global rules to enable wealth extraction on a massive scale:⁴⁵ the UK drained nearly \$45 billion from India alone between the years 1765 to 1938, for instance.⁴⁶ The trade in enslaved peoples is estimated to have contributed 3.5% to Britain's economy between 1750 and 1833, equivalent to around \$129.51 billion in today's money.⁴⁷





Lack of rain and rising temperatures affect the maize harvest in Ghana's Upper West Region.

Imperialism in Africa was profoundly harmful, as European colonising countries took over the most desirable land for their own private or economic use, and restructured food systems away from production for local consumption towards cash crops grown for export markets in Europe.^{48,49} Minerals were extensively mined and exported, with companies able to maximise profits through the exploitation of cheap and forced labour from the very communities that had been forcibly removed from the land.⁵⁰

Growth in the global North depends on a \$10 trillion annual extraction of labour, land, energy, and materials from the Global South – enough to end extreme poverty 70 times over⁵¹

This stolen wealth enabled the build-up of key infrastructure, from physical buildings to banking systems, in the Global North. Similar extraction and exploitation continue today in the form of the large-scale corporate capture of resources in the Global South for markets in the Global North.⁵² The global fashion industry is a key example: a driver of poverty, debt and stark inequality, and a major cause of ecological and climate damage.

Profit accumulation is at the heart of the fashion industry, driving the race to the bottom when it comes to labour and environmental standards. The industry employs around 75 million factory workers worldwide, yet less than 2% earn a living wage.⁵³ This exploitation primarily impacts women who make up approximately 80% of garment workers, with many facing gender-based discrimination, harassment and violence in the workplace.

It should be no surprise that the systems birthed out of imperialism and colonialism mirror the violence, dispossession, patriarchy and dehumanisation of their parents. The racial capitalism of the present entails a “shift towards rendering some [people] disposable in order to safeguard the survival of others”.⁵⁴ Responses to people seeking safety from military violence or economic deprivation include the dehumanising call to “let people drown” in the Mediterranean, as people with more material security are trained to become “comfortable with the culling” of those made disposable.⁵⁵ This “capitalist catastrophism is resolving itself into a global system of eco-apartheid in which a green transition for some is secured by putting the exploited and oppressed majority in harm’s way.”⁵⁶

How we get out of here: putting the justice into transition

“ We need an exit ramp off the highway to climate hell.

António Guterres, UN Secretary General⁵⁷

Our collective challenge is to propose just, ecological and equitable transitions that systematically remake the world, dismantling the racialised and patriarchal capitalist systems that created the catastrophic present. These cannot be technocratic solutions that simply swap one energy-intensive material throughput (greenhouse gasses or carbon) for another while leaving corporate control with its models of extraction and exploitation intact. We must be holistic, moving beyond siloed understandings and organising coherent responses. Global economic, financial, corporate, legal and political systems are presented as inevitable – yet they are collapsing in real time, exposed for their inadequacy to address the multiple crises we face. This failure is an opportunity to build life-giving and mutually supportive societies and economies based on the necessary care and repair.

Alternative visions are both necessary and possible, and will enable us to build power globally to secure better societies for all. These visions are to be found everywhere – from the praxis of Indigenous movements, activists and trades unionists, to those battling for justice on the front lines of struggle everywhere.⁵⁸ A range of organisations, scholars and movements have begun the work of sketching out what just, ecological and equitable transitions could and should look like. War on Want draws on key aspects of these sketches, grounding our work in the political analysis and realities of our partner organisations and movements in the Global South, with insights from our own campaigning and

research, to reaffirm our vision for a Global Green New Deal based on the needs of the present and future, while addressing the injustices of the past.⁵⁹

To challenge the systemic power maintaining the status quo – and, worse, weaponising it against justice – we must build solidarity across grassroots movements, revealing the shared interests of those in the Global North and South in confronting and overturning patriarchal racial capitalism.

We identify 10 areas of intervention as part of a framework that is essential to this vision of just, equitable and ecological transition. For each of these areas we suggest pathways to solutions in the form of a vision and set of interventions which would form part of a Global Green New Deal.

10 areas of intervention

1. **Equitable fair shares of efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C**
2. **Securing the right to renewable energy through public ownership**
3. **Dignity and resilience for all in the face of 1.5°C+**
4. **The right to food, land and water**
5. **Thriving well within the planet's ecological limits**
6. **Radical equality: urgent redistribution of wealth and resources**
7. **Transforming the global economy: debt, trade and tax**
8. **An end to false solutions**
9. **Guarantee the right to stay and the right to move**
10. **Defend and extend democracy to prevent the slide into fascism**

Part 1: Climate and energy

UNFCCC/Klara Worth CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0



Civil society action at the
COP27 held in Sharm El-Sheikh,
Egypt, November 2022

1. Equitable fair shares of efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C

Climate justice requires rapidly and equitably decarbonising all human activity to minimise the worst aspects of climate breakdown. The 1.5°C global heating guardrail was conceived to prevent some of the worst excesses of runaway climate disaster.⁶⁰ The IPCC states unequivocally that over 1.5°C the “risk of extreme impoverishment increases for low-income people experiencing repeated and successive climatic events” and that we are likely to experience “species extinctions and ... major biome shifts which cannot be reversed on human timescales.”⁶¹

The science is clear that we are already heading toward the worst scenarios of unthinkable global heating of 2.5°C–2.9°C or higher, with 1.5°C nearly out of reach.⁶² This means devastating consequences for human societies (most immediately those in the Global South), an unravelling of our ecosystems, and widespread disaster for billions of people.⁶³

Existing emissions reductions pathways and plans developed by governments don’t even get us to 1.5°C, let alone fairly. Many pathways modelled by the IPCC present the inequalities and injustices of the current system as inevitable and would even exacerbate them.⁶⁴ They also rest upon assumptions around the removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere based on unproven technologies.⁶⁵ All while not even reducing emissions fast enough to prevent heating over 1.5°C.



Climate breakdown

The burden for emissions reduction efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C is not shared fairly. A small elite in a few corporations and countries bear disproportionate responsibility for current, historical and projected future GHG emissions. The rich have blown way past their share of the global atmospheric budget.⁶⁶

The energy consumption of the ten countries with the highest per capita GDP is **more than 100 times greater** than the average energy consumption of the ten poorest countries.⁶⁷ The **bottom 50%** of the world’s population emitted **only 12%** of global emissions in 2019, while the **top 10%** emitted **48%** of the total.⁶⁸

Historically, Global North countries contributed 57% of cumulative GHG emissions between 1850 and 2019.⁶⁹ The world’s least developed countries contributed just 0.4% of CO₂ from fossil fuel combustion and industrial processes.

Under the long-established principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), those who have caused and benefited the most from emissions have the capacity and an obligation to undertake a bigger share of the action to rapidly reduce emissions, while supporting those who have emitted less.⁷⁰ Failure to do so will mean failure to avert the worst of climate breakdown everywhere, not just for those on the front lines.



Global inequality

Global heating and breaching of the 1.5°C guardrail is entangled with aspects of inequality (see also sections 6 and 7).

Climate breakdown is a double injustice unfolding under a system that sacrifices the poor, those who are Black, Brown and Indigenous, women and those made most marginal. Firstly, because those who are most impacted, who are losing their lives and livelihoods, are those who have done the least to cause this crisis. Secondly, because due to disproportionate impacts, climate breakdown exacerbates existing inequalities and injustices. It does this by destroying homes, livelihoods and essential infrastructure, deepening poverty, forcing displacement, and limiting access to food, water and healthcare, denying many in the Global South the fundamental right to live with dignity.

Intense droughts, floods, storms, heatwaves and other climate-driven disasters claimed more than 11,500 lives and affected at least 148 million people around the world in 2024, with true figures likely higher due to missing data⁷¹

Global climate science-policy-practice itself reproduces inequality through its neocolonial assumptions. The IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report presupposes existing global inequities in its various scenarios,⁷² which "disregard the required future energy needs of the Global South to meet developmental goals"⁷³ and ignore the historical responsibility of the Global North, placing the

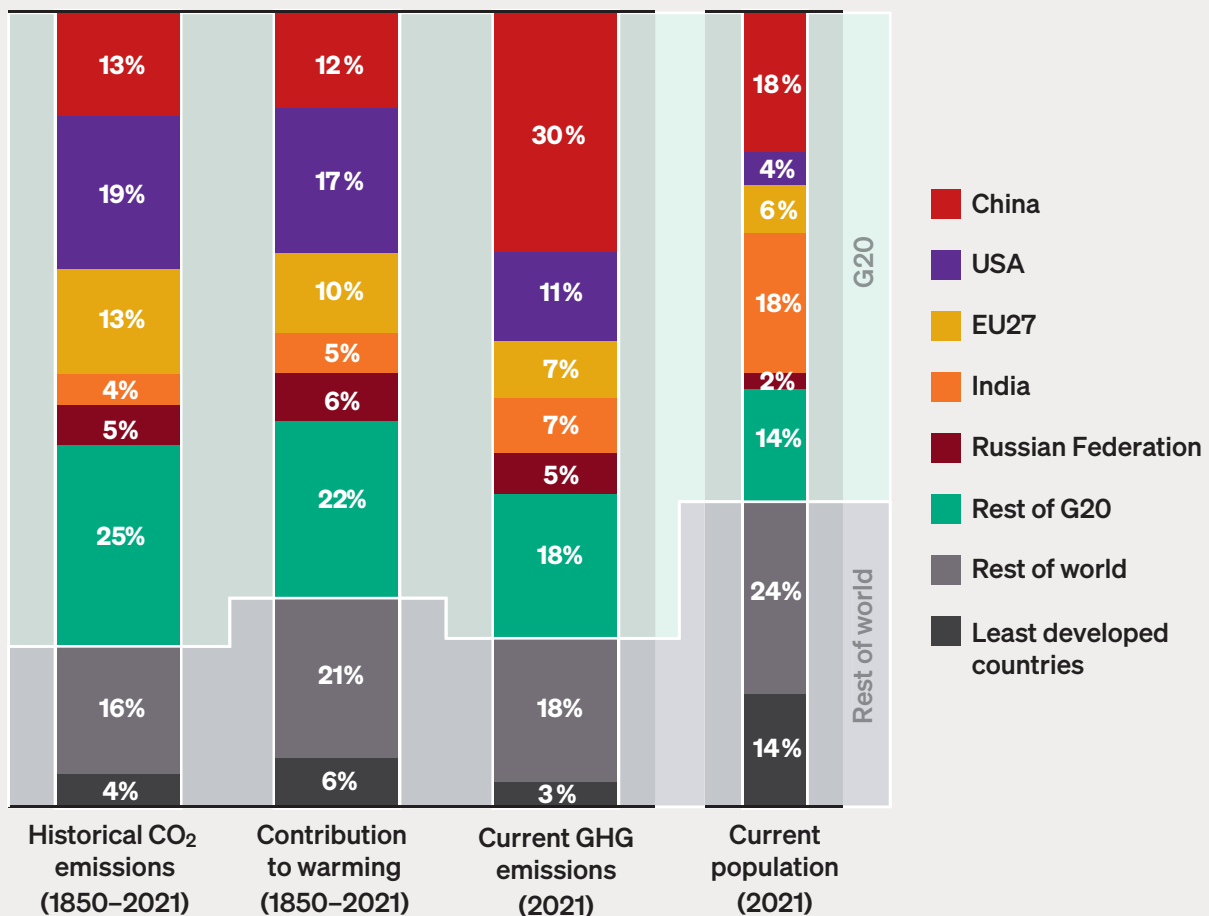
burden for emissions reductions disproportionately on Global South countries. There is a failure in these scientific models to imagine other, more egalitarian worlds: "across all scenarios, the current global inequalities in incomes, energy use, and emissions, are projected to continue even in 2050."⁷⁴



Ecological limits

The extractive fossil capitalist infrastructure responsible for breaching 1.5°C is exacerbating the collapse of our ecosystems and breaching of the planet's ecological limits, polluting our planet and harming people.⁷⁵ The collapse in ecosystems – which includes biodiversity loss, mass extinctions and pollinator die-offs – is not just bad for Nature, but bad for all of us who rely on it to live.

Figure 1: Current and historic contributions to climate change
(% share by countries or regions)



Adapted from Emissions Gap Report 2023: Broken Record, United Nations Environment Programme.



Political and economic systems

The fossil capitalist economic and political system arose out of, and requires continued expansion of, fossil fuel consumption for the benefit of a tiny few.⁷⁶ This system facilitates the disproportionate power, control and influence by wealthy individuals and corporations; the majority of such wealth is fossil fuels related.⁷⁷

Where major polluters and governments are pretending to take climate breakdown seriously, the concept of ‘net zero’ has gained prominence. It is used as cover to avoid meaningful climate action, and for the maintenance or even extension of the economic and political status quo.⁷⁸ Net zero allows continued pollution under the illusion of future carbon capture technologies or tree plantations. These promises lack integrity, permitting the use of offsets and relying on unproven, risky technologies (see section 9). This approach shifts the burden of carbon sequestration onto land in the Global South, exacerbating inequalities and driving a form of ‘carbon colonialism’ while deferring real emissions reductions. Instead of relying on ‘net zero by 2050’ – which is too little, too late – we need climate plans that radically and rapidly reduce emissions to ‘real zero’ now.

The overwhelming responsibility for the production of, and capacity to reduce, emissions lies with the ultra-rich, not ordinary people.⁷⁹ Even in the richer Global North, economic and political systems not beneficial to most people are driving this.⁸⁰ The poorest are least responsible and have least power over decisions made about them.

VISION AND INTERVENTIONS

Fair shares to rapidly halt warming

To achieve the necessary changes, governments and corporations most responsible for climate change, and those with the most wealth, power and capacity, must act first to rapidly phase out fossil fuels fairly and equitably.

1. Allocate carbon budgets fairly according to CBDR-RC

A fair share allocation of the carbon budget for 1.5°C must be based on common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, with transition shared fairly according to each entity’s historical climate debt.⁸¹ Global North countries must adopt real zero targets for 2030 in their new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), with Global South countries adopting 2050 targets without relying on unproven and dangerous ‘net zero’ technologies.⁸²

2. Support the transition with climate finance and technology transfers

Achieving no more than 1.5°C requires the equitable fair sharing of atmospheric space, underpinned by new and additional grant-based climate finance and technology transfers to Global South countries as set out in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to ensure that they have sufficient energy for productive and sustainable economies (see section 2). A downpayment of the climate debt from rich developed countries is calculated at \$5 trillion a year.⁸³

3. A fair phase-out of fossil fuel extraction

We need an immediate stop to all new extraction of gas, oil and coal in the Global North, with an equitable and planned agreement on the phase-out of extraction globally. Countries heavily dependent on fossil fuels for state revenues, with limited budgets, must be granted access to essential technology and finance along with more time to transition, while wealthier producers must phase out earlier and at a faster pace, in line with fair share calculations.⁸⁴ All of this must be underpinned by the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty for an equitable agreement on phasing out of fossil fuels.⁸⁵ This work also requires the ongoing development and resourcing of an action-oriented Just Transition Mechanism at the UNFCCC.

2. Securing the right to renewable energy through public ownership

The current global energy model is deeply flawed, perpetuating inequality (as evidenced by widespread energy poverty) while also driving unsustainable overconsumption, with its related ecological devastation and the overshoot of the 1.5°C guardrail.⁸⁶ Efforts to ecologically and equitably transition our energy systems away from the known harms of greenhouse gasses remain woefully inadequate, with considerable expansion in fossil fuel production planned globally.⁸⁷ The battlegrounds over the extraction, production and distribution of energy are questions of ownership, access, extraction of resources, infrastructure development and the organisation of work.



Climate breakdown

Climate breakdown is primarily driven by the consumption of fossil fuels, with fossil fuel corporations and the system of fossil capitalism responsible for the overwhelming majority of greenhouse gas emissions. A tiny few fossil corporations make huge profits while contributing to the crisis through their extensive role in energy production. One-third of all emissions between 1750 to 2023 is attributed to just 26 producers.⁸⁸

treats energy as a commodity, enabling the wealthy owners of fossil fuel companies to profit immensely while people freeze and bake, unable to afford indoor heating or cooling.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, the energy transition plans of Global North countries assume a significant increase in energy overconsumption.⁹⁸

\$7 trillion of public spending subsidies were provided for fossil fuels in 2022

Five of the world's wealthiest countries have least dependence on fossil fuels and yet are responsible for over half of all planned fossil fuel expansion to 2050: the United States, Canada, Australia, Norway and the United Kingdom.⁸⁹ Despite the known causes and harms of climate breakdown, \$7 trillion of public spending subsidies were provided for fossil fuels in 2022.⁹⁰ Those who got rich from fossil capitalism should be pumping money into just, equitable and ecological transitions, not further fossil fuel development.⁹¹



Global inequality

Current energy systems are deeply unequal in terms of energy access and use.⁹² Energy poverty leaves billions underserved globally,⁹³ with over 2 billion people lacking access to clean cooking⁹⁴ and millions in the Global North unable to afford energy bills.⁹⁵ In 2021, the top 10% of emitters produced nearly half of global CO₂ emissions from energy use, while the bottom 10% contributed just 0.2%.⁹⁶ Privatisation

One-third of all emissions between 1750 to 2023 is attributed to just 26 producers



Ecological limits

Harmful energy systems, built on inefficient and unfairly distributed patterns of consumption and production, undermine the capacity of all beings to thrive in harmony with the Earth. They violate the planet's ecological boundaries and contribute to the broader socio-ecological crisis of ecosystems collapse. The fossil fuel industry pollutes the planet and harms people, creating toxic sacrifice zones.⁹⁹ Destruction is not limited to fossil fuels, however, but extends to the extraction of minerals essential for generating renewable energy¹⁰⁰ and the production of bioenergy, which competes with food resources and contributes to deforestation.¹⁰¹

The demand for critical minerals – those minerals necessary for an expansion in renewables – is projected to nearly triple by 2030 and grow over 3.5 times by 2050, reaching nearly 40 million tonnes.¹⁰² Yet, as a recent report found, “[g]overnments and mining companies the world over are not meeting their minimum responsibilities to protect human life and the environment ... causing widespread human rights abuses, social harm and environmental damage which is pushing planetary boundaries to breaking point.”¹⁰³

The ecological crisis won't be resolved by merely swapping high carbon energy for other sources. We need a true energy transition, not energy expansion perpetuating overconsumption and systemic inequalities.

“ Any decarbonisation of the economy must be accompanied by its democratisation.”¹⁰⁴



Economic and political systems

Our economic and political systems co-evolved alongside our energy systems.¹⁰⁵ White supremacist colonial expansion was powered by fossil fuels. Indeed, the extraction and appropriation of human beings as forms of ‘energy’ dispensable to the imperial core started with the transatlantic trade in enslaved people.¹⁰⁶ This continues today with the outsized control of political and economic systems through the power and wealth of big polluters with ties to the resurgent far-right.¹⁰⁷ This is why we are witnessing a systematic undermining of climate efforts by the privately-owned, profit-driven fossil fuel industry.¹⁰⁸ This industry counts for a vast number of cases where states attempting to transition energy systems are sued by investors through Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms.¹⁰⁹ Elsewhere they are actively blocking action, as in the case of Rockhopper, a UK-based oil

and gas company which sued Italy for banning new oil drilling near its coast and won over €190 million in compensation.¹¹⁰ Even where renewable energy is being generated in the Global South, it is too often produced for the Global North.¹¹¹ All of this shows the extent to which power is wielded to stymie action at all levels of economic and political systems.

Fossil fuels are also deeply connected to military violence and harm. The systematic violations of international law and genocide that Israel is committing against Palestinians would not have been possible without the support and supplies of fossil fuel giants, for example.¹¹²

Neoliberal capitalism simply cannot ‘green’ energy production voluntarily in the time available to minimise harm: the prerogatives of the profit motive and returns on investment make it impossible.¹¹³ Renewables cannot be built at sufficient scale by the private sector without convoluted financial arrangements.¹¹⁴ The ownership models promoted by most governments open up “a very real risk of a small number of large asset management firms gaining monopolistic control over key renewable energy infrastructure.”¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, fossil fuel companies are themselves rolling back on previous – inadequate – commitments made for renewable investments.¹¹⁶ We cannot afford to leave renewable energy investment decisions to the market: “shifting technological or social systems means shifting social power”.¹¹⁷

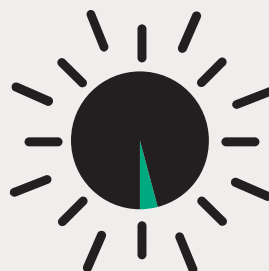
Since 2021 energy companies have made



in profits in the UK alone¹¹⁸

In 2023 the global oil and gas industry earned record income of more than

\$2.4 TRILLION



...while they invested **just 4%** of capital expenditure on renewable energy¹¹⁹



The 73-megawatt Lopburi Solar Farm in Thailand is the largest solar photovoltaic project in the world. Just energy transitions must prioritise public ownership and ecological guardrails, not corporate profits.

VISION AND INTERVENTIONS

Funded public energy with guardrails against harm

The struggle over energy is not just about shifting power sources but transforming power structures. Public ownership, democratic control and universal access to energy are critical to achieving decarbonisation that is equitable, decolonial and democratic, leaving no one behind.¹²⁰

1. The right to energy as a public good

To achieve a just transition, we must rapidly scale up renewable energy equitably, repairing historical injustices and ensuring the fair distribution of energy's benefits. Transitioning towards renewable energy sources within the time frame necessary to prevent a breach of the 1.5°C guardrail is simply not possible under the current system, where energy is treated as a profitable resource controlled by private corporations with little incentive to transition. Preventing this breach requires reclaiming energy as a public good – essential to the global commons – alongside food, water, air and land. Sufficient energy is vital for life and wellbeing and must be treated not as a commodity but as a collective right.

Public ownership is essential to ensure equitable access to energy and to end energy poverty.¹²¹

Community- and worker-controlled models can safeguard energy as a fundamental human right, ensuring that profits are reinvested locally rather than extracted by private shareholders,¹²² and ensuring workers' rights. A democratic energy system must prioritise people over profit, address systemic inequalities – including those based on gender, race, location and class – and empower communities with local control. It must also eliminate wasteful and socially unproductive energy use, particularly in destructive sectors such as arms production¹²³ and among elites.¹²⁴ Reducing overall energy demand requires not only efficiency measures but also, more profoundly, a shift toward sufficiency (see section 7, page 40.)

By democratising and embedding energy systems – and public services more broadly – under systems of territorial rights and collective governance, we empower workers, small-scale food producers and Indigenous communities, promoting sustainable industrialisation in the Global South and ensuring that the benefits of a just transition are universally shared.

2. Implement guardrails through transition: material limits and harm reduction

To protect our planet, we must respect Earth's ecological boundaries (see section 5), recognise that our resources are finite, and establish strict guardrails on extraction.¹²⁵ This means challenging the growth-at-all-costs mentality and rejecting false solutions (see section 8). The transition must also embrace a cultural shift toward sufficiency and sustainability, moving away from consumerism and overconsumption, especially in the Global North.

Harm reduction must guide our policies to ensure that energy practices do not replicate the same model of destruction embodied by the fossil fuel system. This holistic approach will ensure that the benefits of the energy transition are equitably shared, fostering global solidarity and contributing to the broader goals of social and environmental justice.¹²⁶ The extraction and processing of transition minerals must adhere to stringent governance, transparency and human rights standards.¹²⁷ Policies must ensure responsible sourcing and involve communities in decision-making, promoting equitable trade agreements and preventing resource-related conflicts.

Energy policies must prioritise ecological restoration and biodiversity, ensuring our energy solutions contribute to a thriving planet and enhance ecological integrity. Transition minerals should be managed within a circular economy framework, reducing overall demand, minimising waste and maximising resource efficiency to ensure harmony with the planet's cycles and boundaries. This includes recycling, reducing reliance on virgin materials, and investing in alternative technologies, all while adhering to strict social and environmental standards. Policies that incentivise active and mass transport systems, and reduce the size of electric vehicles (EVs) and their batteries, could cut demand for lithium by up to 92%¹²⁸ – supporting a rapid and equitable transportation transition. All entities involved in energy extraction must be held accountable for human rights and environmental impacts.

3. Create an enabling environment

A just energy transition requires an enabling environment that mobilises adequate, sustainable and responsible finance at the scale and speed necessary, particularly in the Global South. This finance must come from a mix of international and domestic sources that prioritise equity and sustainability. Public funds must support infrastructure development (including democratic and decentralised renewable energy systems), job creation and community empowerment, with a particular focus on climate finance. This funding from rich countries and companies is a crucial component of reparations for the Global North's historical and ongoing responsibility for the climate crisis.¹²⁹ Climate finance should be public, grants-based and non-debt-creating, with transparent and equitable distribution to Global South countries.

To ensure that the transition benefits all, particularly those most affected by the climate crisis, restrictive intellectual property rights that limit access to green technologies must be waived. This will allow the rapid and widespread adoption of renewable energy technologies globally, fostering innovation and collaboration.

Finally, comprehensive energy planning must be restored, with controlled supply chains and investments in new, efficient and less harmful technologies. Transparency and community involvement must be central to every aspect of energy planning, ensuring that renewable energy systems are driven by the need to provide affordable and sufficient energy for all, rather than by profitability.

3. Dignity and resilience for all in the face of 1.5°C+

1.5°C is almost dead, unless we secure radical changes to our social structures.¹³⁰ Experts predict rises of at least 2.7°C–3°C, devastating the lives of people initially (and already) in the Global South, but ultimately undermining life as we know it across our planet.¹³¹ We continue to fight for the 1.5°C guardrail because of the unthinkable hardship that breaching it would bring.

The likelihood of breaching 1.5°C, in combination with the injustices of our current societies, make the redistributive social welfare dimensions of just, ecological and equitable transitions even more crucial. In fact, these redistributive measures would better enable the social changes required to keep temperatures below 1.5°C. The interventions outlined here are therefore key to ensuring that, even as we pass 1.5°C, people everywhere are better supported to survive and thrive, building resilience in the face of unfolding climate breakdown. This is because they would mean power, wealth and resources are more evenly distributed, with the interests of protecting the status quo being replaced by the interests of securing the dignity of all.

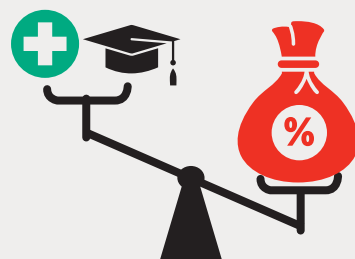


Climate breakdown

Climate breakdown further undermines the limited resilience many people have to live dignified lives, curtailing their ability to cope with ongoing shocks, strains and stresses.¹³² Temperatures are approaching and crossing 1.5°C globally, leading to more frequent and intense weather disasters. Extreme weather events become disasters due to social inequalities, and the absence of necessary public goods and services to enable people to thrive in spite of them.¹³³ The majority of those in the Global South are denied access to insurance to help cover costs of these disasters.¹³⁴ In richer societies privileged with higher levels of insurance cover, social protection is being rolled back and harm and risk are further privatised. Those wealthy enough buy luxury insurance which funds private emergency services, while ordinary people find themselves ‘uninsurable’ according to the ruthless calculations of the insurance market.¹³⁵



4.5 billion
over half the world's population
**lack access to
essential healthcare**¹³⁶



**48 Global South countries spend
more on debt interest payments
than on either education or health**¹³⁷



Global inequality

The fundamental reason so many people are lacking in resilience and living undignified lives is the persistence and depth of all forms of inequality.¹³⁸ Billions of people globally lack access to basic services such as healthcare, education, water, food, energy, housing and transport.¹³⁹ Over 4.1 billion people – the majority of the world's population – have no income protection.¹⁴⁰ Only 47% are covered by at least one form of social protection such as unemployment support or retirement income.¹⁴¹ Inequalities between countries mean that rich countries spend approximately 25 times more than middle-income countries on social protection (\$695 vs \$28 per person), and about 173 times more than some poor countries (\$4 per person).¹⁴² These inequalities undermine secure and dignified lives both under present conditions and under those likely to come as 1.5°C is breached.

Rich countries spend approximately 25 times more per person on social protection than middle-income countries and about 173 times more per person than some poor countries

A devastating instance of this is where Israel's destruction of the already insufficient healthcare system of Palestinians in Gaza combines with extreme heat and the sabotaging of the water system.¹⁴³

Alongside redistributive welfare policy, one of the most important sources of dignity and resilience in society is through the work of care.¹⁴⁴ Care work is the labour of caregiving, domestic work and social reproduction, including childcare, elder care and household labour, upon which all life relies.¹⁴⁵ Yet care work is too often invisible, unpaid and undervalued, with the majority undertaken by women, precarious workers and migrants on the margins. The value of unpaid care work performed by women globally in 2019 was calculated at almost \$11 trillion.¹⁴⁶



Ecological limits

The rush to keep societies on the treadmill of endless maldistributed growth and overconsumption undermines attempts to build resilience by breaching Earth's ecological limits. Water, land and livelihoods are poisoned and threatened in and around mineral extraction sites, for instance.¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, land is seized for 'green' tech projects, such as the growing of biofuels and the establishment of solar farms.¹⁴⁸



Economic and political systems

The societies we have inherited from the past, so steeped in systemic injustice and oppression, are severely ill-equipped to foster resilience in the face of climate breakdown. Our economic and political systems are shaped to enable the super-rich to hoard the means of protection at the same time as continuing to profit off the further immiseration or disposability of the impoverished.

Failed neoliberal economic policies in the Global North, and longstanding structural adjustment in the Global South, have deepened inequality, weakened workers' rights and dismantled social protections. Post-2008 financial crisis austerity has enriched the super-rich while degrading limited public services and infrastructures at a time of escalating social and environmental shocks.¹⁴⁹ Meanwhile, structural adjustment programmes have forced governments into privatising what little public services exist, eroding labour protections and limiting welfare for the vast majority.¹⁵⁰ These policies benefit the world's wealthiest individuals and corporations while precipitating social breakdown for the most marginalised – an experience long familiar to those subjected to the violence of colonialism, from Indigenous peoples to entire societies across the Global South.¹⁵¹

Low-wage economies mean that almost half of the world – 3.5 billion people – are trapped in poverty, earning less than the equivalent of \$6.85 a day

Beyond a lack of access to social welfare and public services, people's dignity is undermined by insecure, low-paid and precarious work designed to maximise shareholder profits. The growth of the platform, digital and gig economies is replicating this form of labour exploitation.¹⁵² Automation risks even more workers being forced into insecure, precarious work, or left without work at all.¹⁵³ Low-wage economies mean that almost half of the world – 3.5 billion people – are trapped in poverty, earning less than the equivalent of \$6.85 a day.¹⁵⁴



Flood survivors in Sylhet, Bangladesh queue for clean water in 2022 while the wealthy remain insulated from crisis. Climate breakdown demands wealth redistribution.

VISION AND INTERVENTIONS

Dignified survival: building resilience amid climate breakdown and injustice

Action to limit global heating to 1.5°C in a globally egalitarian way is failing, accelerating the breakdown of essential services and protections. This makes it even more urgent to strengthen, rebuild and expand these collapsing support systems to ensure every person is able to live with dignity and in harmony with the Earth – not as charity, but as a fundamental right.

1. A living income for all

A just economy starts with guaranteeing everyone a living wage or universal basic income that meets real costs of living. Current international poverty lines – like the World Bank's \$2.15 a day¹⁵⁵ – are an insult to human dignity. Wages are being driven down by the same neoliberal playbook: privatisation, labour market deregulation and structural adjustment. Tackling extreme wealth, implementing caps on obscene wealth accumulation, and redistributing resources fairly are non-negotiable if we are serious about ending the insecurities and indignities of poverty.¹⁵⁶

2. Universal public services: a right, not a privilege

No one should have to fight for survival. Universal public services – healthcare, social care, housing, transport, education, pensions and so on – are the backbone of resilience, shielding people from climate injustice and poverty.¹⁵⁷ Yet, under austerity and market-driven policies, these essential services have been slashed, privatised and commodified, with women and girls becoming the shock absorbers of crisis, forced into unpaid or low-paid care work.¹⁵⁸ Public financing for social provision is a direct challenge to the class, patriarchal and racial hierarchies at the heart of global capitalism.¹⁵⁹

3. Decent work, not exploitation

Decent work and workers' rights are at the core of just, equitable, and ecological transitions. Work must be transformed from a system of poverty wages and precarity into one that sustains life and dignity, built upon living wages, safe conditions, workplace democracy and strong trade unions. The centrality of care work to the wellbeing of all living beings must be cemented as a core pillar of justice in and through the transition.

These measures would help to reduce inequality and address vulnerabilities produced in the face of climate breakdown and ecosystems collapse. They would make us all more resilient and would address the root causes of the crises plaguing our societies.

Part 2:

Planetary limits and the global economy



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4. The right to food, land and water

The impacts of 1.5°C global heating are already combining with the deeply unjust ways our societies are organised to pile pressure onto already strained food and water systems. Food systems are both a legacy of colonialism and are neocolonial: they prioritise Global Northern consumers – albeit in harmful, unhealthy ways – and corporate shareholders.¹⁶⁰ They are the cornerstone of commodity dependency that Global South countries have been forced to orient their economies toward by rich countries. Countries have been bullied and bribed into producing cash crops for exports, handing over control of the most fertile land, and the unsustainable use of water, to private actors, while at the same time having to import food for domestic consumption. This creates instability and precarity in the face of the vulnerabilities of unstable markets and weather patterns.



Climate breakdown

The global food system is extremely vulnerable to climate breakdown.

Devastating floods, shifting precipitation patterns and more frequent droughts, among countless other impacts, pose existential threats to food production.¹⁶¹ At the same time, industrialised agri-food systems are one of the main drivers of the climate crisis. The system is dominated by corporations treating food and its distribution primarily as profit-making enterprises. This model is responsible for between 21% to 37% of all global GHG emissions caused by human activity.¹⁶² It also uses the vast majority of land, while small farmers and peasants who produce food for the majority of the world do so on a fraction of the land.¹⁶³ ETC Group estimate that “[t]he Peasant Food Web feed[s] the equivalent of 70% of the world’s people using less than 30% of the world’s land, water and agricultural resources.”¹⁶⁴

Global food systems account for between 21% and 37% of all global greenhouse gas emissions

Land use affects climate breakdown by altering energy, water and greenhouse gas flows, with deforestation and urbanisation increasing emissions and reducing carbon sequestration capacity.¹⁶⁵ A few high- and upper-middle-income countries account for over 85% of the land use for carbon offsets, relying heavily on future land-based carbon dioxide removal, risking insufficient decarbonisation ambition in sectors like power generation and heavy industry, and highlighting the need for credible emissions reductions pathways.¹⁶⁶ Emission reduction pathways that rely heavily on land-use changes,

particularly for bioenergy production, are dangerously over-reliant on vast tracts of land, with some bioenergy crops requiring 40 to 50 times more land than solar energy to produce the same energy output.¹⁶⁷

These land grabs for false solutions exacerbate existing inequalities in land access, displace smallholders, increase emissions, and force peasants off their land and into urban slums – further marginalising the communities least responsible for the climate crisis.¹⁶⁸ In the words of La Via Campesina, these “are designed to solve the accumulation crisis, not the climate crisis.”¹⁶⁹

In 2024, 281.6 million people across 59 countries are experiencing acute hunger, 24 million more people than in 2023¹⁷⁰



Global inequality

Rampant inequality marginalises people from access to food, land and water, with the control of these commons

in the hands of a tiny elite of powerful and rich corporations. The industrial food system is rigged to generate increasing profits for corporations rather than to provide nutritious food for the global population. It focuses on an overproduction of commodities like wheat, sugar, soy and meat, wasting near to 32% of all food.¹⁷¹ Under this system, “3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet, and more than 3 billion people suffer from one or more types of malnutrition due to poor diets.”¹⁷² Disruption to food systems under climate breakdown combines with deadly inequality to produce rising food prices, further entrenching poverty and hunger.



A worker on a palm oil plantation in Ivory Coast. Industrial monocultures displace communities and destroy ecosystems.

Water crises demonstrate the perils of entrusting water to corporations, leaving the poorest without reliable access to this life-giving necessity.¹⁷³

Global injustice in land ownership and access is evident in the widespread exclusion and dispossession of marginalised communities.¹⁷⁴ Indigenous peoples worldwide face systemic barriers to land rights, displacement and loss of traditional territories due to agribusiness, mining and infrastructure projects.¹⁷⁵ Smallholder farmers across the Global South, who contribute significantly to food production, frequently lack secure land tenure, making them vulnerable to land grabs and evictions by large corporations.¹⁷⁶



Ecological limits

Industrial agriculture and the corporate exploitation of food, land and water systems is a major contributor to the breaching of our planet's ecological limits, undermining the capacity of all beings to thrive within planetary boundaries. Industrial farming practices deplete soil health and biodiversity, turning fertile land into barren deserts, while excessive water extraction and pollution from agrochemicals contaminates freshwater sources, devastating aquatic ecosystems and reducing the availability of clean water for both people and wildlife.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, highly hazardous fossil fuel-based agrochemicals – agrottoxics – are the cause of a public health crisis in many countries of the Global South, with farmers and rural communities being directly exposed.¹⁷⁸ Land injustices, such as enclosure and plantation models, encourage deforestation, habitat destruction and unsustainable land use practices, which further lead to the loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystems.



Economic and political systems

The failures of our food, land and water systems bear witness to histories of colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy. Monoculture plantations are a relic of colonial land practices. Not only do they strip the soil of nutrients, they also disrupt local food systems and force dependency on global supply chains. Large-scale land acquisitions for agribusiness, biofuels and biomass displace Indigenous communities, perpetuating processes of marginalisation which began centuries ago. Land ownership patterns are a harmful legacy of colonisation processes and the racial capitalist economic and political systems left in its wake.¹⁷⁹

Industrialised food production also relies upon oil-derived or oil-based inputs (such as agrochemicals or fuel for farm machinery), the production of only limited plant varieties (monocultures), the patenting of seeds and ancestral agricultural knowledge, and the corporate concentration of the supply chain from farm to fork. Six major corporate conglomerates control 58% of the global seed market and 77.6% of the global agrochemicals (pesticide) market.¹⁸⁰

People's access to clean, safe water is also profoundly undermined by these systems. The Flint water crisis is a stark example, where predominantly Black and low-income residents were exposed to lead-contaminated water due to cost-cutting measures by state-appointed managers.¹⁸¹ Similarly, in South Africa the apartheid legacy affects water distribution, with wealthier white areas receiving reliable supplies while Black townships and rural areas face severe shortages.¹⁸² Privatisation efforts have made water

unaffordable for many poor households, illustrating how commodification under racial capitalism prioritises profit over human rights, perpetuating environmental and social injustices.¹⁸³ Roughly 70% of global water consumption is used for farming activities;¹⁸⁴ many of the world's most important agricultural zones are running out of water, squeezed by the depletion of aquifers and droughts exacerbated by climate change and deforestation.¹⁸⁵ Conflicts over water allow huge profits for investors and corporate agribusinesses, who benefit from high returns on short-term investments in water-heavy, export-oriented agribusinesses.

VISION AND INTERVENTIONS

Food sovereignty, land and water justice

Just, equitable and ecological transitions must centre those who work the land and produce our food – rural communities, Indigenous peoples, peasants, pastoralists and nomads. Too often, so-called climate solutions deepen existing injustices, accelerating the dispossession and exploitation of rural areas by state-backed profiteers and even well-intentioned climate advocates. We must reject models that serve profit over people and instead prioritise peasant agroecology, land justice and food sovereignty as the foundation of a just transition.

1. Food sovereignty, not corporate control

The right to food is a fundamental human right. Food should not be a commodity for speculation or an asset to be traded on financial markets. Food sovereignty is “the fundamental right of all peoples, nations and states to control food and agricultural systems and policies, ensuring everyone has adequate, affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food”.¹⁸⁶

Dismantling corporate control of our food systems is essential. In place of agribusiness solutions that deplete ecosystems and prioritise profit over sustainability, peasant agroecology is a solution that integrates the social, political and technical dimensions of food production. It has the potential to drastically reduce the dependence on fossil fuels in agri-food systems by using less fossil fuel-based chemicals and technologies.¹⁸⁷ Better still, it actively cools the Earth and the wealth of biodiversity within agroecological systems makes food systems more resilient to climate disasters.¹⁸⁸

To reverse decades of corporate capture, governments must remove harmful laws and regulations that undermine local food producers,

while financing and promoting sustainable, community-led food production at local, national and global levels. Seed sovereignty must also be prioritised, rejecting corporate patents and control over seeds and ensuring that local crop varieties can thrive. These plants are part of the ecosystem they evolved in and are essential for ecosystems health, biodiversity and climate resilience.

2. Land and water justice: finish with financialisation

Land and water grabs force rural communities from their homes to expand monoculture exports, resource extraction and financial speculation. Land must be decommodified and protected as a common good, not an investment asset for offshore wealth funds and corporate profiteers. The financialisation of land and water must end – these resources must be reclaimed for the communities that depend on them.

A just, equitable and ecological transition demands land reform and people-centred regulations that protect smallholder farmers, Indigenous peoples, pastoralists and fisherfolk, ensuring their territorial rights are upheld. Human rights protections must be codified into law, with governments incorporating the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP) at national levels to guarantee rights to water, land and safe working conditions. Public, community and cooperative land ownership must be expanded while restricting large-scale land holdings, with local stewardship and democratic decision-making structures such as Local Land Assemblies¹⁸⁹ ensuring people have control over the land they live and work on.

Land, food and water belong to the people – not to corporations, private investors or the 1%. Only a global food system based on food sovereignty, which includes in its core principles the right to land, food and water, can deliver ecologically sound and equitable ways to feed the world's people in ways that keep us below a temperature rise of 1.5°C. A model based on food sovereignty is also the only way to ensure issues of inequality and poverty are addressed, including redressing historical injustices and systems of exploitation which are rampant in current global food production; it also offers the best way to ensure food production and distribution thrives within planetary boundaries.

- For more on this topic see War on Want's report [Profiting from Hunger](#)

5. Thriving well within the planet's ecological limits

Human society is dependent on the Earth's biodiversity – the variety of life in all its forms, from genes and bacteria to entire ecosystems such as forests or coral reefs. Nature provides essential elements to sustain life – food, clean water, medicines – and sustains Earth's processes such as carbon storage and water recycling. Over half of global GDP is dependent on Nature. More than one billion people rely on forests for their livelihoods, and the land and oceans absorb more than half of all carbon emissions. Yet between 2010 and 2020, the UN estimated that the net loss of forests globally was 4.7 million hectares per year.¹⁹⁰

We are experiencing a sixth mass extinction event.¹⁹¹ Mass extinction is one of six out of nine 'planetary boundaries' currently being breached; the others are biosphere integrity (significant loss of species and ecosystems), land-system change (deforestation and land degradation), freshwater use, biogeochemical flows (excess nitrogen and phosphorus), and novel entities (human-made pollution such as microplastics and radioactive waste).¹⁹² The causes and effects of these breaches are deeply unevenly distributed. Those who contributed least are most impacted and at risk.¹⁹³

“The very material world we inhabit is undergoing what is for modern humans, an unprecedented shift into deep instability.”¹⁹⁴

The scale of these catastrophes leads some, such as Moira Millán, a Mapuche *weychafe* ('protective warrior' in Mapudungun) and founder of the *Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas y Diversidades por el Buen Vivir* (Indigenous Women's Movement for Good Living) in Argentina to propose the concept of 'terricide'. Terricide synthesises various forms of destruction, including ecocide (the killing of ecosystems), genocide (the killing of peoples), epistemicide (the killing of diverse cultural understandings) and feminicide (violence against women). It also encompasses crimes against children and marginalised communities, like forced labour and homophobia. The concept emphasises that preserving ecosystems necessitates fighting for Indigenous peoples who embody respect for the land and reciprocal living, thus highlighting the interconnectedness of Nature, spirituality, culture and sacred spaces.¹⁹⁵



Climate breakdown

Climate breakdown is destroying our ecosystems and undermining our capacity to live within the planet's ecological limits even before 1.5°C is breached. At the same time, climate breakdown is being used to justify 'solutions' that actually threaten further ecosystems collapse, such as land grabbing and extractivism, in the clamour for the minerals necessary for large-scale decarbonisation and electrification.¹⁹⁶ Further, "analysis reveals that more than half of the ETM [energy transition minerals and metals] resource base is located on or near the lands of Indigenous and peasant peoples" – groups already disproportionately marginalised by global inequality.¹⁹⁷

An estimated 4 billion people rely primarily on natural medicines for their health care and some 70% of drugs used for cancer are natural or are synthetic products inspired by Nature¹⁹⁸



Global inequality

The fact that "a relatively smaller part of the world population claims too much of the Earth's resources at the expense of others who cannot claim enough to satisfy basic needs" prevents the fair allocation and redistribution needed to address ecosystems crises equitably.¹⁹⁹ Presently, the impact of excess resource consumption in the North is offshored to the South.²⁰⁰ Workers in the garment industries of South Asia have pinpointed the problems with any transition failing to include wholesale social reorganisation and just redistribution.²⁰¹



Ecological limits

Ecosystems, the very support systems of the planet on which all life depends, are under existential threat due to the breaching of our planet's ecological limits.²⁰² The structure and logics of capitalist societies mean the most popular responses to climate breakdown themselves threaten to open up a whole new set of ecologically destructive dynamics.

Mainstream climate 'transition' plans misguidedly focus only on the immediate cause of climate breakdown, greenhouse gasses (GHGs). This neglects the broader socio-structural context which leads to emissions as well as related inequalities. Capitalism, the world's richest people and the world's largest industries consume 'cheap nature', or free natural capital annually, without which they would not be profitable.²⁰³ Even if swapping fossil fuel energy production for renewables were possible, the myriad unequal outcomes and harms of deeply exploitative extractive capitalism would persist in other sectors.²⁰⁴



Economic and political systems

Current systems are fundamentally incompatible with respect for Nature's ecological limits. They reward and require endless growth, the absence of which is experienced as a crisis ('recession'). GDP – the standard measure – is an inadequate measure of socio-economic

health which does not capture most of what makes life meaningful and dignified.²⁰⁵ Societies fixated on economic growth are deeply unhappy²⁰⁶ even with access to abundant resources,²⁰⁷ with people working 'bullshit jobs'²⁰⁸ and trapped on treadmills of production. Capitalism's endlessly profit-driven focus leads to the overproduction of non-essential, ecologically destructive goods and services such as weapons, inequality-driven forms of conspicuous overconsumption (e.g. SUVs²⁰⁹ and fast fashion²¹⁰), and underinvestment in key areas like care, public services, renewable energy and public transport.

In the last 60 years, at least 40% of all intrastate conflicts have a link to natural resources²¹¹

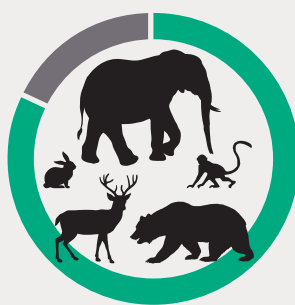
These systems are based on global extractive structures of 'ecologically unequal exchange', "which synchronously feed excessive Global North consumption with undervalued commodities and labour from the Global South, enclose global atmospheric commons ... and displace ecological harm disproportionately onto the South".²¹²

Due to the gaping global inequalities mentioned above, the overwhelming majority of the world's population stand to gain considerably from a more even spread of the planet's life-sustaining materials. It is the excessive, unnecessary, unsatisfactory and polluting forms of overconsumption which must end.



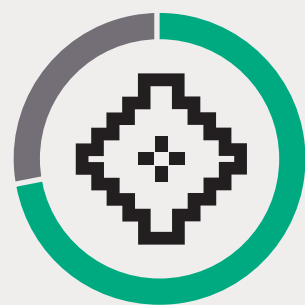
47%

Natural ecosystems have declined by **47%** on average relative to their earliest estimated states*



82%

The global biomass of wild mammals has fallen by **82%***



72%

72% of indicators developed by Indigenous peoples and local communities show ongoing deterioration of elements of Nature important to them

*Since pre-history. Figures taken from Global assessment report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, IPBES, 2019.



Indigenous community members walking while chanting slogans during a solidarity rally with the Dakota Access Pipeline protesters on 5 November, 2016 in Toronto, Canada.

VISION AND INTERVENTIONS

Centring Indigenous wisdom, sovereignty, and the intrinsic rights of Nature

For too long, global systems rooted in colonialism and capitalism have exploited the Earth as a resource, overlooking its role as a living, breathing entity that must be respected, nurtured and protected. In a reimagined framework, Indigenous voices, sovereignty and ecological knowledge must be at the centre, guiding our policies and practices. These communities have maintained a relationship with the Earth that many are only now beginning to understand: that we are not separate from the Earth but inherently part of its complex web.

1. Recognise the Earth's rightful custodians

We must urgently reframe our relationship with the Earth by recognising Indigenous and traditional communities as rightful custodians of our planet's biodiversity and ecosystems. This includes those on the front lines of the transition, whose lands and livelihoods are increasingly threatened by the extraction of so-called critical or transition minerals. This means not

only acknowledging the plurality and diversity of custodianship but also committing to the decolonisation of land and governance systems.

Published in 2023, the 'Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South'²¹³ urges us to go beyond carbon counting and recognise the value of the intangible: life, joy and connection, time with family and loved ones, public abundance and the commons, liberation and justice.

2. Enshrine the rights of Nature

We must enshrine the rights of Nature, alongside human rights, within our legal and ethical frameworks, affirming Nature's status not as a commodity but as a subject of intrinsic value with legal rights to exist, regenerate and be restored. We must recognise Indigenous sovereignty as a foundational element of Earth stewardship. By granting legal standing to Nature, actively upholding the land rights of Indigenous peoples, and challenging the capitalist systems that commodify our planet, we commit to a radical, equitable and future-enabling jurisprudence. This is crucial for ensuring that the biodiversity and ecosystems critical to our shared existence are preserved for future generations.

3. Nature is not for sale: rejecting biodiversity markets, protecting the commons

To fully embrace this reimagined relationship, we must reject the commodification of Nature through market-driven schemes like biodiversity crediting and offsetting. These false solutions (see section 9) are dangerous distractions, designed to allow corporations and wealthy nations to continue their destructive practices under the guise of 'offsetting' their impacts elsewhere. Instead of trading ecosystems as commodities, we need enforceable protections that recognise the intrinsic value of Nature.

This means upholding the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, who have long been the true stewards of our planet's biodiversity, and ensuring that our economic systems do not push nations into extractivism to sustain economic stability. This must include radically transforming global supply chains, grounding them in environmental and social justice, and ensuring accountability across all stages of resource extraction, processing and trade. Protecting Indigenous knowledge about plants, seeds and traditional medicines from biopiracy is crucial, as this knowledge must remain a commons, outside the reach of intellectual property rights that seek to commodify it for profit.

4. Beyond destructive growth-based systems

At the heart of this struggle is the need to address the root causes of biodiversity loss. We must confront the dominant economic models which produce collapse and destitution: neoliberal globalisation, post-neoliberal authoritarianism, untrammelled corporate power, land grabbing, extractivism and industrial agriculture. The current international financial and monetary systems are also significant and under-recognised drivers of biodiversity loss.

To achieve the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF),²¹⁴ we must dismantle the political-economic structures that make relentless extraction both profitable and necessary. This includes recognising and addressing the broader conditions that push states towards extractivism, often at the expense of their own citizens' long-term wellbeing.

Overconsumption by wealthy nations and elites must be named as a central driver of ecological collapse, requiring a profound rethinking of global consumption patterns. Sectors like fashion and consumer electronics illustrate how current growth models drive unsustainable resource use and social exploitation, and illustrate the urgent need to place the experiences, voices and rights of workers in the supply chains central to just transition debates.

■ For more on this topic see War on Want's report *Fashioning the Future*

We need to move beyond endless growth-based measures of success to adopt principles of post-growth or degrowth, which reject the impossible pursuit of endless growth and instead prioritise ecological balance, community wellbeing and social equity, adopting alternative wellbeing indicators that reflect human and ecological flourishing.²¹⁵ This shift must also address unsustainable material consumption by adopting principles of a circular economy – rethinking how, what, and how much we extract and consume, not just how we produce energy.

We must shift away from the failed 'fortress conservation' model and towards sustainable practices that promote ecological justice. By redirecting resources to support agroecology and community-led conservation, we can protect biodiversity while also enabling and guaranteeing food sovereignty, land rights and social equity. Crucially, this must include direct and equitable finance to the communities most affected by biodiversity loss, ensuring they have the resources needed to lead these efforts.

5. Accountability for those who have profited from destruction

Finally, we must hold accountable those most responsible for environmental destruction. Billionaires and powerful corporations that have profited from exploiting the Earth must bear the costs of transitioning towards futures of justice and equity. This is not about creating a new asset class to trade; it's about demanding they repair the damage they've done and support the communities most affected by their actions. Only through global cooperation, reparative finance and a commitment to ecological justice can we ensure that our conservation efforts are effective, equitable and long-term.

6. Radical equality: urgent redistribution of wealth and resources

One of the biggest obstacles to just, ecological and equitable transitions is the devastating and growing levels of inequality people experience within and across societies globally. This is because opponents claim the costs of radical transition are unaffordable – yet the necessary wealth is available. Truly just, equitable and ecological transition for all is affordable if underpinned by a rational and fair distribution of wealth and resources to pay for the necessary changes.

Global redistribution is also morally necessary to repair centuries of exploitative resource flows from the Global South to Global North, and from workers to owners of capital. This means undoing exploitative systems which emerged out of patriarchal and racialised processes of colonialism and instead building equal economies and societies based on care and repair.

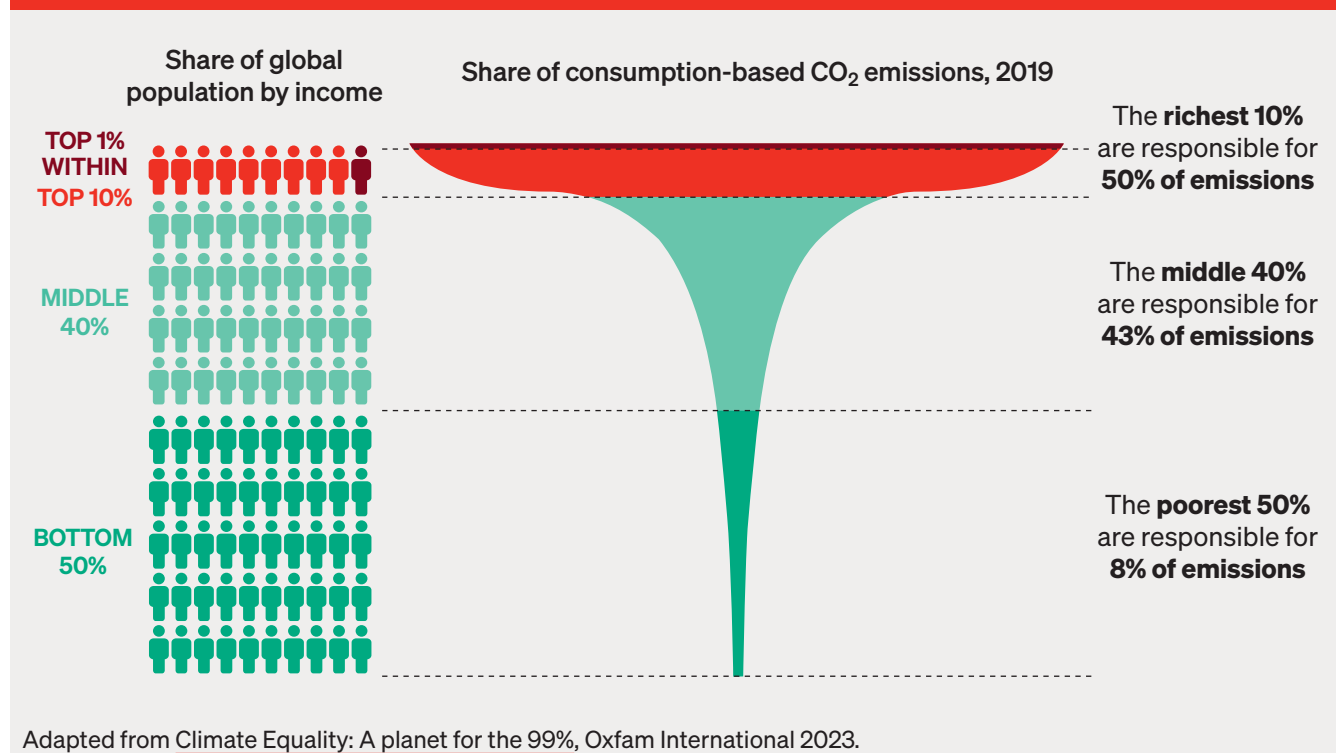
In 2019 the **super-rich 1% (77,000 people) were responsible for the same amount of carbon emissions as the **poorest 66%** (5 billion people)²¹⁶**



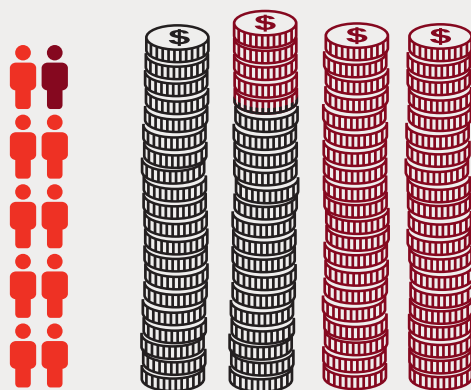
Climate breakdown

Climate breakdown is exacerbated by the growing levels of obscene inequality within society because inequality incentivises the actions of the super-rich who gain wealth and power at the expense of people and planet. Historical responsibility, equity and fair shares in emissions reductions are neglected because these essential measures are not perceived to be in the best interests of those at the top of the inequality scale.

Figure 2: Global income groups and associated consumption emissions in 2019

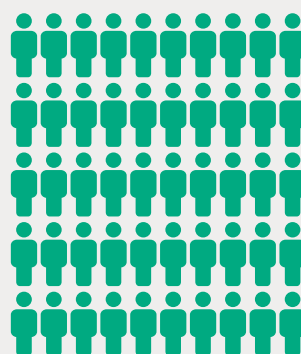
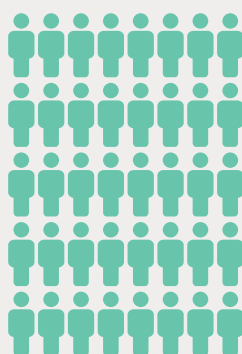


The **richest 10%**
of the world's
population
own over
80%
of global wealth



The **top 1%**
alone control
44.5%
– almost half

The next **40%**
of people hold
just over
18%
of global
wealth



And the
poorest half
of humanity?
**less than
1%**



Data extrapolated from [Global Wealth Report 2023](#), Credit Suisse AG, a UBS Group company

A 2023 report by Oxfam highlights the myriad ways the top 1% super-rich, and to a lesser but significant extent the richest 10% of the world's population, have a vastly outsized contribution to climate-related harms. This is in terms of: immediate causes, via responsibilities for emissions generation; indirect causes, by blocking actions which would radically reorganise society along more egalitarian lines; and financing and investments in fossil fuels.

Climate breakdown and ecological destruction are not only made worse by inequality but also worsen existing inequalities. Those most exposed to shocks and disasters are often least well-resourced to respond.²¹⁷ 89% of the 1.5 billion people exposed to floods live in low- and middle-income countries, and as disasters hit people are pushed further down the inequality scale by the costs they incur.²¹⁸ Extreme climate events now occur weekly, costing vulnerable countries up to \$300 billion annually – yet developing nations spent \$372 billion on debt servicing in 2020 alone.²¹⁹ Conservative estimates of the costs of reaching 'net zero', however limited that concept is, are \$0.9-2.1 trillion per year from 2021 to 2050. By comparison, the global economy and financial markets are worth \$110 trillion per year.²²⁰



Global inequality

Inequality in the present is connected to historical injustices, and threatens to lock in future injustices as our climate breaks down and ecosystems collapse. Some countries, companies and their owners have become incredibly wealthy while presiding over the degradations of social and ecological life. As Oxfam recently reported, "In 2024, total billionaire wealth increased by \$2 trillion, with 204 new billionaires created. This is an average of almost four new billionaires per week."²²¹

The world's richest 1% today owns more wealth than 95% of humanity. The wealth of the world's five richest men has more than doubled since 2019, soaring from \$506 billion to over \$1.1 trillion.²²¹

Wealth is not the only area of inequality which is contributing to disaster. Patriarchy exposes women and non-gender conforming people to significant harms in unequal societies.²²² These are compounded by climate breakdown: women are 14 times more likely to perish in a disaster, and women represent 80% of people displaced by extreme weather.²²³

16% of the world's population experience significant disabilities and are 4 times more likely to die in the event of disaster

The World Health Organization estimates that 1.3 billion – 16% of the world's population – experience significant disabilities, facing structural inequalities that impact their socioeconomic status and deny them the right to live with dignity.²²⁴ People with disabilities are 4 times more likely to die in the event of a disaster because of a lack of access to information or because evacuation procedures are inaccessible.²²⁵

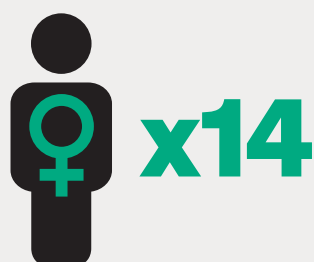
Current economic models deprioritise and devalue certain kinds of work, particularly feminised forms of under- or unpaid care work and domestic labour: 76% of unpaid care work is conducted by women.²²⁶

Staggeringly, “the value of unpaid care work performed by women globally in 2019 was calculated at almost \$11 trillion. While this may still be an underestimation, it is greater than the GDP of all but four countries.”²²⁷ A fundamental political recognition and policy priority for gender equality is essential to the dismantling of the patriarchy, which goes hand in hand with racial capitalism.

Inequality is not solely economic but constitutes a distortion of all relationships between people – from race, gender and disability to nationality and migration status (see section 9). All forms of inequality undermine people's capacities to survive and thrive.²²⁸ Inequality structures people's decision-making power, access to information, formal education, healthcare, food, control over working conditions and so on.

The average Belgian has 180 times more voting power in the World Bank than the average Ethiopian²²⁹

Overall, it is well documented that unequal societies are less productive, more stressful, less cohesive, and generally ‘worse’ not only for those at the bottom end of the inequality scale but even those at the top.²³⁰ Equal societies better enable all to live in dignity no matter what shocks occur.



Women are 14 times more likely to perish in a disaster, and represent 80% of people displaced by extreme weather



76% of unpaid care work is performed by women and in 2019 was valued at \$11 trillion



Child receiving malaria testing and treatment in Sierra Leone, August 2021. Community health workers provide healthcare to billions; the majority are women of colour and are unpaid or underpaid for their work.



Ecological limits

Inequality undermines the capacity of all beings to thrive in harmony with the Earth, and within our planet's ecological limits. Gross levels of inequality both cause and result from the breaching of planetary boundaries due to the overconsumption and overextraction of resources by a minority, to the detriment of the collective commons.

Inequality extends to our relationship with our planet and its beings, with only limited and belated efforts in the mainstream to reconceive these relationships in terms of legal protections or rights for the environment.²³¹



Economic and political systems

Contemporary inequality is a systemic feature of how our societies developed from colonialism into contemporary economic and political systems of corporate racial capitalism. Historical injustices birthed contemporary oppressions. Disparities are entrenched through mechanisms such as patriarchy, colonial exploitation, systemic racism and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few.

Unequal exchange

Between 1960 and 2018 a total of **\$62 trillion** has been extracted from the Global South to the Global North through unequal trade. This amounts to **\$152 trillion** when accounting for lost growth.

In 2017, the most recent year of data, drain through unequal exchange amounted to **\$2.2 trillion**.

For perspective, \$2.2 trillion is enough to end extreme poverty fifteen times over. For the North, this represents \$2.2 trillion in savings, which can be invested in technological development, military power, etc, while maintaining high consumption levels.²³²

VISION AND INTERVENTIONS

Rebuilding societies based on equality, care and repair

The scale of the crises we face demands nothing less than a complete overhaul of how wealth and resources are distributed. A handful of the world's wealthiest individuals and corporations hoard more wealth than could ever be spent in billions of lifetimes.²³³ To better weather present and coming storms, the obscene levels of inequality that condemn billions to survive on far less than what is needed for a dignified life must be undone. Tackling extreme inequality is not only morally necessary but also the only way to secure the resources necessary to guarantee universal public services and high-quality social protection, and to build resilience in the face of intensifying crises.

1. Reparative justice for systemic transformation

The long-standing promise that 'development' would lead to justice and equality has failed, as it was always embedded in a global economic system rigged to preserve the power and wealth of former colonial powers and their corporations. Colonialism and imperialism were so violent and destructive that they left behind a morally stained legacy. Undoing this legacy requires demanding reparative justice, including but not limited to radical economic redistribution. Reparations are not about charity, but about historical and structural accountability.²³⁴ The crises described here cannot be addressed without fundamentally redistributing not only wealth, but resources – and power itself – via a radical reimagining of power and governance (see section 10).

A true just transition must partly be funded through climate reparations as part of both a broader package of climate finance and a more widespread radical redistribution. This is necessary to acknowledge and correct centuries of 'ecologically unequal exchange' – the systematic looting of the Global South's resources to fuel the Global North's wealth (see section 7).²³⁵ Calls for reparative justice are gaining momentum through global movements demanding accountability from those who continue to benefit from historical and ongoing exploitation.²³⁶

Reparations must go beyond token financial commitments; they require the countries and corporations most responsible for climate breakdown, inequality, ecological crisis and economic and political systems to:

- Stop doing harm by immediately cutting their carbon emissions at the pace necessary to limit global heating to 1.5°C.
- Repair the harm done by providing finance and technology to support adaptation and resilience, ensuring communities can survive and thrive in a warming world.
- Compensate for irreparable harm by making direct payments to Global South countries for loss and damage caused by climate breakdown.

2. A care economy: rebuilding societies around life, not profit

A key aspect of dismantling harmfully unequal systems involves understanding and undoing gendered inequalities. Feminist economic approaches offer essential alternatives that challenge these oppressive structures.²³⁷ In place of deeply unequal, neocolonial, extractive economic models, we must centre an economy of care. This means recognising all forms of care work – interpersonal, self-care and care for non-human beings – to restore relational and ecosystemic balances.²³⁸ Care must no longer be seen as an individual burden or a 'woman's role' but as a collective responsibility, shared by all and supported by policies that guarantee universal public services and social protection.

Crucially, many forms of care exist outside capitalist processes of accumulation, providing a foundation for societies that move beyond capitalist logics of extraction and exploitation. This is not an abstract vision; communities around the world have long practised shared, collective care for each other and through the management of commons – land, water, food and energy – showing that alternative systems based on cooperation, solidarity and sufficiency are both possible and necessary.²³⁹ These models must now be strengthened and expanded, laying the groundwork for a just and dignified future for all.

7. Transforming the global economy: debt, trade and tax

The current global economic system is rigged in favour of the 1% who hold outsized wealth, power and influence. It is structured to perpetuate fossil fuel dependency, deepen inequality, exploit ecosystems and maintain neocolonial power dynamics. It socialises the costs and privatises the gains of capitalist economies, shifting the burden of responsibility to act onto those people and countries least responsible and least able.²⁴⁰

Debt, trade and tax rules are three key features of the current global economic order designed to protect predominantly Global Northern corporate and elite interests at the expense of people and the planet. They must be fundamentally overhauled. We examine each of these features (debt, trade, tax) in terms of our four principles (climate breakdown, inequality, ecological limits and economic and political structures) below.



Climate breakdown

The global economy is built on a 'fossil capitalist' model that locks in unfair, high-emissions pathways.²⁴¹ Deeply indebted countries cannot afford measures to arrest the impacts of climate breakdown, and extreme climate disasters are heavily exacerbating debt crises.²⁴²

In 2022, flooding in Pakistan displaced 33 million people, killed over 1,400 and caused \$40 billion in damage. Despite an IMF loan of \$1.1 billion, Pakistan, with \$130 billion of debt, needs billions more for recovery.²⁴³

Tax breaks for fossil fuel corporations and trade agreements promoting extractive exports keep Global South countries dependent on carbon-intensive industries, undermining climate action.²⁴⁴ A new wave of green protectionism undermines the principle of fair shares, penalising Global South countries despite their minimal responsibility for carbon emissions by shifting the burden onto them while undermining their right to development (see box).²⁴⁵ At the same time, the financialisation of climate action – through carbon markets, green bonds and speculative ESG investments – funnels public funds into corporate coffers rather than meaningful mitigation or adaptation measures.

Right to development: An inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised. This right derives from the UN Declaration on the Right to Development that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1986.



Global inequality

The global economic system both depends upon and produces inequality, both domestically within countries and between them, trapping billions in undignified lives. Debt is a tool that reproduces and extends inequality: countries in the Global South spent an average of 14.3% of government revenue on foreign debt payments in 2023, an increase from 6.4% in 2010.²⁴⁶ Indebted countries allocate more funds to paying interest than they do to essential services like healthcare, education and climate initiatives.

Trade rules and mechanisms such as Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms allow corporations to sue governments that attempt to regulate emissions or implement climate action, blocking the kind of systemic change needed. ISDS are often binding and enforceable, unlike human rights and climate treaties, thereby exacerbating economic inequality.²⁴⁷ At the same time, tax policies facilitate extreme wealth concentration by enabling elites and corporations predominantly in the Global North to hoard wealth, denying revenues which could provide public services and deliver reparative justice to the Global South.

Figure 3: Annual net financial flows from the Global South to the Global North

The annual net financial flows from the Global South to the Global North vastly exceed the climate finance commitments by wealthy countries (which remain undelivered).



Reproduced from Just Transition: A Climate, Energy and Development Vision for Africa, Sokona, Y. et al. 2023.



Ecological limits

The global capitalist economic system relies on 'cheap nature' – the exploitation of natural resources and labour at minimal cost to maximise profit and encourage overconsumption.²⁴⁸ This neglects long-term environmental and social consequences and undermines the capacity of beings to thrive in harmony with the earth, and within planetary boundaries.

Dominant debt relationships neglect ecological debts: the Global North's overconsumption and long-term exploitation of the Global South's resources through practices like deforestation, mining and industrial agriculture. In fact, financially indebted countries are often forced to prioritise export commodities linked to environmental destruction, such as mining and deforestation, to service external debts.²⁴⁹

Trade liberalisation assumes that endless economic growth from infinite material extraction is possible and desirable on a planet with finite resources. This harms ecologies and communities near extraction sites – not only fossil fuels but even in the rush to renewables²⁵⁰ – forcing the Global South to intensify resource exploitation.²⁵¹ The tax system itself then drives ecological harm by treating Nature as an 'externality' which can be freely degraded due to lax environmental taxation rules, while deregulation and tax havens have led to the financialisation of sectors which are critical to human and ecological wellbeing, like food.²⁵²



Economic and political systems

The global economic system, rooted in colonial plunder, continues to entrench imperial dominance, enriching the core economies while subordinating the periphery.²⁵³ Decarbonisation cannot occur without economic decolonisation and the undoing of trade rules which enshrine structural deficits (unequal exchange) in the Global South that generate debt crises.²⁵⁴

In 2023, the richest 1% in the Global North were paid \$263 billion by the Global South through the financial system – over \$30 million an hour²⁵⁵

Stripped of capital, Global South countries are trapped in debt cycles, reliant upon highly conditional loans and forced to prioritise creditor demands over public needs, perpetuating colonial-era economic subjugation.²⁵⁶

Trade agreements institutionalise the economic subordination of Global South countries. The Global North is allowed to subsidise their farmers and low-carbon technology sectors, while barring the Global South from doing the same, decimating livelihoods and prohibiting just, equitable and ecological transitions.²⁵⁷ They also advance corporate intellectual property rights, impeding

poorer countries from accessing essential technologies. Liberalisation policies, meanwhile, increase the Global South's dependence on commodity export markets in the Global North, maintaining the unequal, racialised division of labour forged through colonial extraction. All this prevents industrialisation, discourages localised supply chains and self-reliance, and undermines countries' capacities to implement transitional policies.

As of 2024, more money is flowing out of developing countries to service their debts than is flowing into their governments from external sources²⁵⁸

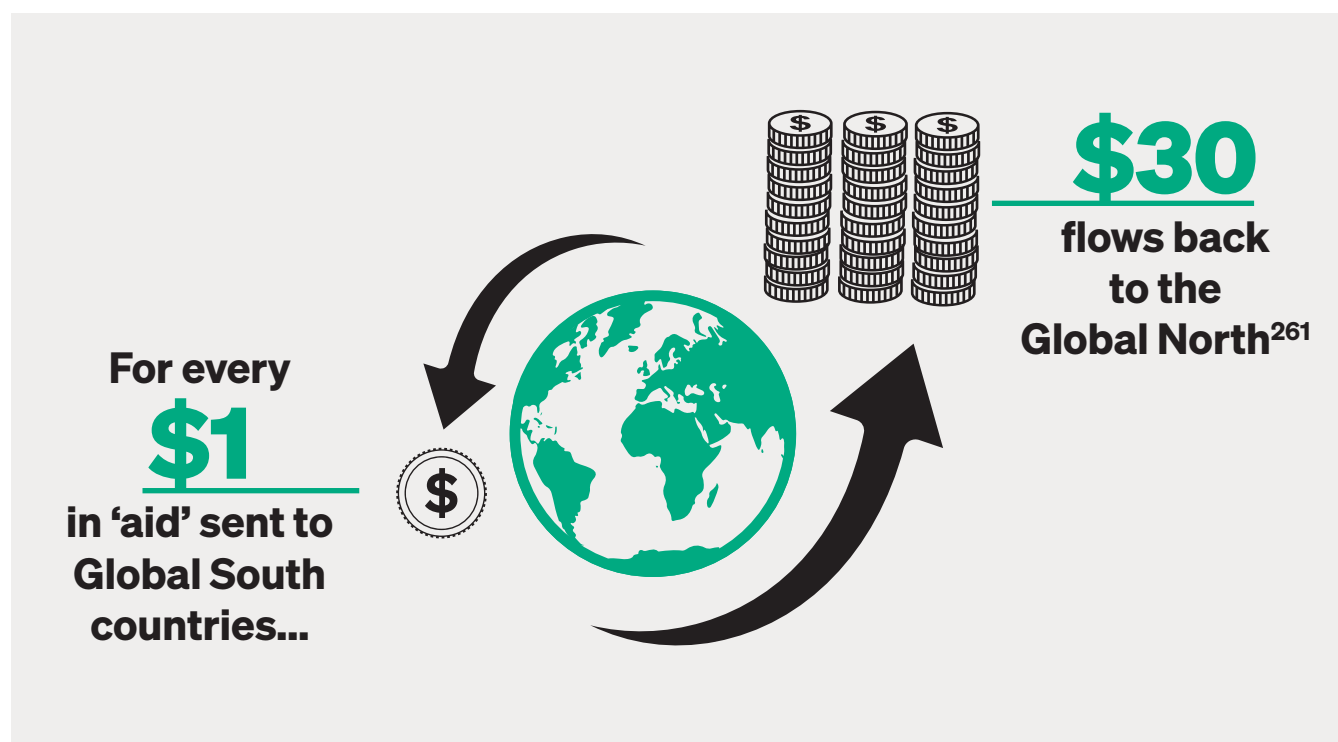
The asymmetries of the global trade regime and the vulnerabilities it produces have been sharply highlighted by the ongoing trade war waged by the United States under President Donald Trump in 2025. For instance, Lesotho faced a 50% tariff on its exports to the U.S, threatening over 12,000 jobs in its garment industry, while Madagascar's vanilla exports were subjected to a 47% tariff, jeopardising a key sector of its economy. This exposes how deeply the economies of many Global South countries remain tied to narrow export sectors and to the whims of Global North trade policy.²⁵⁹

Tax havens emerged as a tool for wealthy individuals, countries and their corporations to hoard wealth post-colonisation, stripping newly independent states of essential capital.²⁶⁰ Formerly colonised countries find their ability to respond to economic, health and climate crises sabotaged by capital flight, low levels of tax enforcement, and an international system for regulating tax rules dominated by the Global North and OECD, to the exclusion of the Global South.

VISION AND INTERVENTIONS

En route to transformation

Nothing short of a fundamental overhaul of the global economic systems that rule our lives will allow just, ecological and equitable transitions to take place. In their place we must build economies that centre the right to live with dignity and in harmony with the planet – with class, racial and gender equality at their core. A truly just economic system requires reclaiming wealth and resources for people and the planet – not for corporations and elites. This means ending fossil fuel subsidies, restructuring unfair trade agreements, and cancelling illegitimate debt, enabling Global South nations the fiscal space to pursue equitable and globally just industrial strategies. Pending the wholesale decolonisation of our economies, we propose the following reforms toward transformation to economies based on care and repair.





People in Sri Lanka queuing for essentials amid the debt crisis in 2022. Wealth is extracted from the Global South, denying communities basic necessities such as access to energy.

1. Cancel all debt – public and private

The immediate cancellation of all illegitimate debt is essential to enabling Global South countries to invest in public services, climate mitigation and adaptation. A huge share of debt owed by Global South governments to private creditors is governed by English law. The UK must take the lead by legislating compulsory debt relief measures for private bondholders operating under English law and ensuring meaningful debt cancellation mechanisms.

The IMF and World Bank's neoliberal policies, including austerity measures imposed on hundreds of countries, exacerbate global inequality by forcing cuts to essential public spending. These institutions must be held accountable for their role in entrenching economic dependency, restricting sovereign development and undermining just climate action. A global debt architecture overhaul, including a UN framework convention for regulating sovereign debt, is needed to break this cycle.

Cancelling Global South debt is not climate reparations – this debt is unjust. Debt cancellation should never be paid as a form of climate finance; it should be on top of it. A reparative justice framework for climate and ecological debts must redress centuries of exploitation, forcing major polluters to pay for the destruction they

have caused. This includes regulating banks that fund the climate crisis and making high-emission industries finance a just transition. These reparations must directly benefit frontline communities and acknowledge the role of colonial extraction in driving today's inequalities.

2. A just trade system for economic sovereignty within planetary boundaries

Trade agreements must be reformed to enable all people economic sovereignty over their resources and renewable energy. Global South nations must be supported to strengthen South-South trade and secure fairer trade terms, including agricultural import quotas and local content policies.

Trade justice requires challenging overconsumption in the Global North and supporting localised supply chains. Global South nations must have access to essential technologies, such as those necessary for climate action, free from WTO-imposed intellectual property restrictions and barriers, including through technology transfers.

ISDS mechanisms must be eliminated to prevent corporations from blocking just energy transitions. Trade deals that enforce privatisation of public services must also be overturned, ensuring governments can regain control over essential infrastructure.

3. Repurpose the global tax regime

A bold and just global tax regime is key to raising the money owed to pay climate debts and redistribute resources to fund just, equitable and ecological transitions.²⁶² Corporations and the ultra-wealthy must contribute their fair share through corporate income taxes, wealth taxes, and the recovery of lost tax revenues from tax havens and evasion. These measures should be complemented by a financial transaction tax, windfall taxes on excessive corporate profits, and progressive transport levies to ensure the financial burden of climate action is borne by those most responsible for the crisis. Additionally, a higher minimum corporate tax floor than that proposed by the OECD is necessary to prevent a race to the bottom and ensure sufficient revenues for climate and social spending.

A mere 4% tax-to-GDP ratio increase in wealthy countries could generate \$2 trillion for grants-based climate finance²⁶³

A Climate Damages Tax and a Climate Finance Withholding Mechanism should be implemented to hold polluters accountable and ensure funding for adaptation measures and climate-related losses and damages. Fairer global taxation must ensure that corporations pay taxes where they operate rather than shifting profits to headquarters in the Global North – a move essential to tackling global inequality.

Crucially, we need a robust and ambitious UN Tax Convention to coordinate this overhaul of global tax architecture and to ensure that that Global South countries have a say in international tax rules.

Taxing polluters is essential but insufficient. To tackle the climate crisis, such measures must be part of a broader strategy to phase out fossil fuel extraction and dismantle the financial support sustaining it. This means ending subsidies, tax breaks and public funding for fossil fuel industries alongside any new taxes or levies. It is incoherent to impose financial accountability while still rewarding polluters.

4. Delink through strengthening economic sovereignty

These reforms all require delinking from exploitative global trade and financial systems by strengthening economic sovereignty and South-South cooperation. Delinking challenges

neocolonial dependencies that trap countries in extractivism, debt and corporate-controlled trade.²⁶⁴ By reducing reliance on WTO and IMF-imposed constraints, nations can prioritise local industries and public services, with the fiscal space necessary to secure just, equitable and ecological transitions without corporate or creditor interference.

The US dollar's dominance gives the United States outsized power over global trade and finance, enabling sanctions, asset seizures and economic coercion.²⁶⁵ For the Global South, monetary sovereignty – control over currency and monetary policy – is also crucial to reduce dependence and vulnerability to external shocks. It allows countries to invest locally, protect industries, and strengthen economic resilience.

5. Alternative economic visions: degrowth toward dignity

Beyond the urgent reforms noted above, we need radically different economic visions. To safeguard the capacity of all beings to thrive in harmony with the Earth and within planetary boundaries, we must pursue degrowth in the Global North, underpinned by public luxury – where public services and facilities are properly resourced globally, and private sufficiency – where all have enough to live a comfortable and dignified life without overburdening our home planet.²⁶⁶

Degrowth would rebalance the material and energy use of the global economy by scaling down the most wasteful and harmful social and economic activity in high-income nations with high levels of per capita consumption.²⁶⁷ Growth could instead be carefully stewarded for socially useful and ecologically sound areas, encompassing proper valuation and recognition of the care labour required for all social reproduction.²⁶⁸

Shifts away from growthist dogmas of overconsumption and models of economic development can be experienced as a shifting to greater non-material and extra-material abundance, instead of the austerity people rightly fear and campaign against.²⁶⁹ To be clear, the costs of a degrowth transition must be borne by the global super-rich who owe greater ecological debts and who command outsized power, not those most exploited in the Global South and in the Global North.²⁷⁰

■ **For more on these topics see [War on Want's Global Economy briefing series](#)**

Part 3:

The future we want



UK Climate Justice Coalition protest outside BP's London HQ to coincide with the COP28 UN climate change conference, December 2023.

© Andy Solomon/Shutterstock

8. An end to false solutions

As climate breakdown unfolds, powerful actors are positioning themselves to profit from disaster. Fossil fuel companies plan to drill in the Arctic as ice melts,²⁷¹ while corporations like G4S, Serco and Halliburton gain from the expansion of private detention centres, militarised security and exploitative aid contracts.²⁷² Extractive industries continue harmful mining practices, greenwashing their operations under the guise of ‘sustainability’. Governments and corporations promote false solutions such as carbon markets, ‘nature-based solutions’, geoengineering, regressive taxes and corporate agribusiness; these are dangerous distractions that fail to address the root causes of crisis and instead reinforce the same inequalities and systems that caused it.²⁷³

False solutions not only allow polluters to continue business as usual, but also lay the groundwork for reactionary, far-right and authoritarian forces.²⁷⁴ These reactionary politicians and their supporters are successfully exploiting the fact that ‘green’ policies which do not also redistribute wealth, resources and power are likely to alienate people. This is seen with anti-Low Traffic Neighbourhood conspiracies,²⁷⁵ mobilisations against ‘green’ farming policies,²⁷⁶ the AfD in Germany stoking fears around domestic heat pumps,²⁷⁷ and (plausible) claims that workers will lose jobs in the energy transition, as well as the (less plausible) claim that it is only the ‘drill-baby-drill’ policies of the far-right which will secure livelihoods.



Climate breakdown

Carbon pricing schemes and offset markets (e.g. REDD) fail to reduce emissions fairly, allowing continued fossil fuel extraction under the illusion that market forces will drive significant reductions.²⁷⁸ The European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) has been criticised for setting caps too high and giving out too many free allowances, minimising actual reductions.²⁷⁹ These systems perpetuate environmental harm, disproportionately benefiting wealthier corporations and states that can afford to buy their way out of reductions while continuing to pollute. The illusion of tree planting as a solution for carbon offsetting is also promoted as the answer to global GHG emissions. However, the track record of tree planting is abysmal, and sowing monocultures of trees is often ecologically inappropriate, doing more harm than good.²⁸⁰

The fossil fuel industry and governments are increasingly banking on carbon capture and storage as a technological ‘fix’, allowing continued pollution while capturing carbon – despite its unproven efficacy at scale and deep financial and environmental risks.²⁸¹

Geoengineering solutions, including ‘solar radiation management’ (blocking out the sun) and ocean fertilisation (disrupting marine ecosystems by inducing rapid growth in plant life) are high-risk interventions that serve as a smokescreen for fossil fuel corporations seeking to delay action.²⁸² Rather than fairly transitioning away from fossil fuels, these measures externalise risk and disproportionately impact communities in the Global South, while reinforcing the power of the polluters responsible for the crisis.

Our garment worker partners across the Global South have warned that to be truly just, transitions must prioritise the most precarious rather than offloading the burden of change onto those with the least power.

Read our report [*Fashioning the Future: Fixing the fashion industry for workers and climate*](#)



Global inequality

False solutions entrench and deepen existing inequalities. Carbon markets and nature-based solutions have driven land grabs, stripping Indigenous communities, peasants and rural populations of their land under the pretext of conservation.²⁸³ The Liberia–Blue Carbon deal, granting an Emirati company rights over 10% of Liberia’s land for carbon offset projects, illustrates how these schemes rob Global South nations of sovereignty while enriching private investors.²⁸⁴



© Franck Legros

Farmers are mobilising against agricultural and economic policies which are endangering their livelihoods with protests in over 65 countries in 2024.

Far from being progressive, false solutions are favoured by the ruling class because they sustain current power structures. They enable the creation of new markets, exploit precarious labour pools, and justify further rollbacks of social protections, widening the gap between rich and poor. They also undermine both equality and ecological restoration, providing fertile ground for far-right forces to exploit economic anxiety with claims that ‘green’ policies unfairly burden the working class while allowing corporate polluters to escape accountability.²⁸⁵



Ecological limits

Rather than curbing ecological destruction, false solutions accelerate it. They commodify Nature by putting a price on the sky, forests, waters, oceans and soils, turning essential commons like land, seeds and biodiversity into profit-driven assets for polluters and financial speculators.²⁸⁶ They lead to land grabs and exploitation of Indigenous peoples, peasant farmers and low-income communities, while failing to address the root causes of deforestation and industrial agriculture’s massive emissions. Agrofuels and BECCS (bioenergy with carbon capture and storage) have diverted vast tracts of land from food production, exacerbating hunger while prioritising the needs of energy corporations.²⁸⁷

False solutions in agri-food systems are also ubiquitous. From lab-grown meat to vertical farming, from genetically modified seeds to novel gene-editing technologies such as CRISPR, these technological solutions are entrenched in a vision of a farming system without farmers. In this vision, large swathes of land are automated for industrial production, data and digital control and regulate production, and technological fixes tinker around the edges without addressing the core issue of land rights and supporting policies for smallholder farmers, who are the primary contributors to global nutrition.²⁸⁸



Economic and political systems

The socio-economic systems responsible for false solutions are the same ones that have driven climate breakdown and entrenched inequality. The economic and political structures of colonialism, imperialism and racial capitalism continue to shape today’s profit-driven responses to crisis. Fossil fuel corporations and agribusiness giants wield immense influence over decision-making, ensuring that policies prioritise market-based solutions that protect their profits.

VISION AND INTERVENTIONS

No profiting in and from catastrophe

Solutions that fail to centre Nature, equality, justice and human rights risk repeating patterns of destruction and harm. Instead, we must campaign for well-founded policies that advance a just and equitable transition for all. This requires an outright rejection of false solutions in all their forms and an urgent shift towards community-driven, transformative alternatives.

1. Reject solutions and dismantle industries that deepen environmental destruction

The financialisation and commodification of Nature must be challenged, rejecting carbon markets, nature-based solutions and ‘techno-fix’ schemes that enable land grabs, displace Indigenous peoples and deepen environmental destruction. Securing accountability through binding regulations is also crucial. Strengthening or creating international legal frameworks to hold both governments and corporations accountable for harmful policies and supply chain abuses will ensure transparency and enforceability.

Dismantling damaging industries, including the military-industrial complex (see section 10), must be a priority. We must also expose and end the cycle of greenwashing and overconsumption. The global economy is flooded with supposedly eco-friendly products – electric SUVs, ‘biodegradable’ plastics, carbon-neutral branded goods – that encourage unchecked consumption while maintaining emissions and resource extraction. The push for ever-expanding consumer markets must be challenged, promoting degrowth alternatives that prioritise meeting real social needs (sufficiency) over profit-driven waste.

2. Build collective power to demand and implement transformative solutions

In response to false solutions and the authoritarianism they enable, we must challenge the power of rich elites to dictate crisis responses. This means building collective power to implement transformative, community-led real solutions. Corporations and wealthy governments cannot be entrusted with leadership of processes of climate or ecosystems repair when their intent is to safeguard profit and the deeply unequal economic and political structures that sustain their power.

Their solutions will only drive deeper inequality, sacrifice communities in the Global South, and push ecosystems further to collapse, ensuring that the 1.5°C guardrail is breached year after year.

This is why a radical Global Green New Deal framework to deliver just, equitable and ecological transitions is needed – one that: prevents catastrophic climate breakdown by staying below 1.5°C without shifting the burden onto those least responsible; tackles global inequality that traps billions in poverty and powerlessness; halts escalating ecosystem collapse that undermines all life; and transforms the economic and political systems born of colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy into fairer societies rooted in care and repair.

3. Invest in solutions from impacted communities

Amplifying and investing in solutions from impacted communities is essential. We must end false solutions that displace rural and Indigenous communities. Those on the front lines of crisis have the deepest understanding of local challenges and the most effective adaptation and resilience strategies. Their leadership must be central in designing and implementing climate policies. We must invest in agroecology and food sovereignty, centring sustainable, community-led agricultural models that protect both people and the planet.

False solutions, whether promoted by eco-fascists or liberal market environmentalists, lead to the same end result: a militarised, authoritarian world system in which people and Nature remain at the mercy of corporate profiteers. The only way forward is to dismantle the systems of extraction and oppression, centre justice, and build the collective power necessary to create genuine, lasting change.

9. Guarantee the right to stay and the right to move

Who gets to stay? Who gets to move?

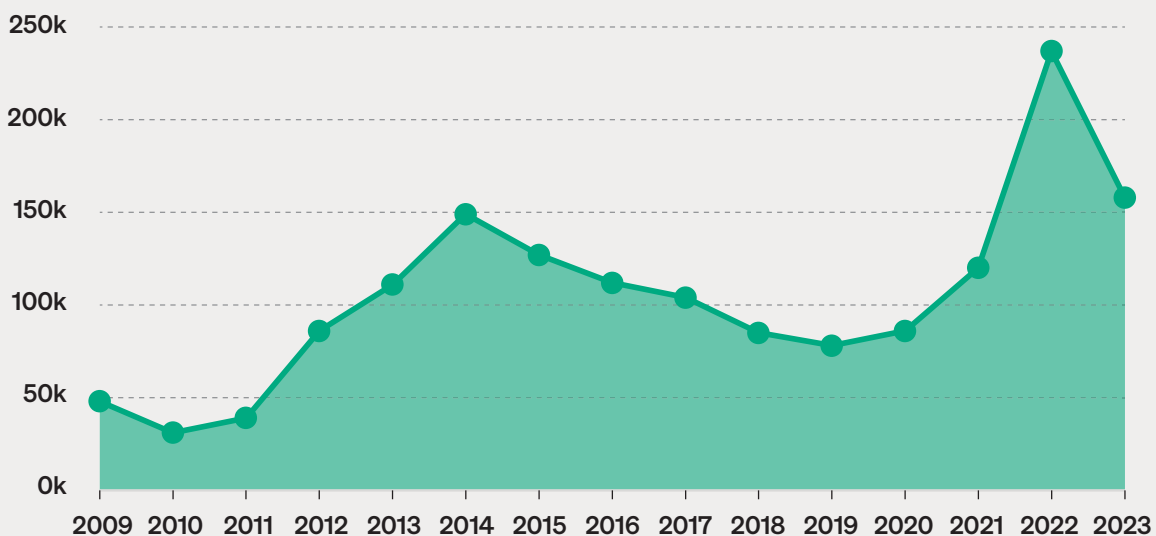
Movement is as old as humanity, yet certain people seeking to move are increasingly categorised as ‘undesirable’ and criminalised.²⁸⁹ Citizens from Global North countries, and disproportionately those who are wealthy and white, move freely across borders for business, leisure or relocation.²⁹⁰ Meanwhile, poorer, more vulnerable people, especially those racialised as ‘other’, are vilified and scapegoated for problems created by capitalists, with migration blamed for the consequences of inequality. Everyone should have the right to move, not just the rich and wealthy.

Over 117.3 million people were forcibly displaced at the end of 2023; this equates to more than 1 in every 69 people on Earth

At the same time that movement is criminalised, people and communities globally are systematically being denied the right to stay where they live. Communities living on land desired by corporations face land grabs, forcing them to move. From Palestine, Sudan and Syria to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Western Sahara, Myanmar and beyond, people are forcibly displaced due to ongoing military and paramilitary violence. These same people increasingly face militarised borders and criminalisation when they try to move.²⁹¹

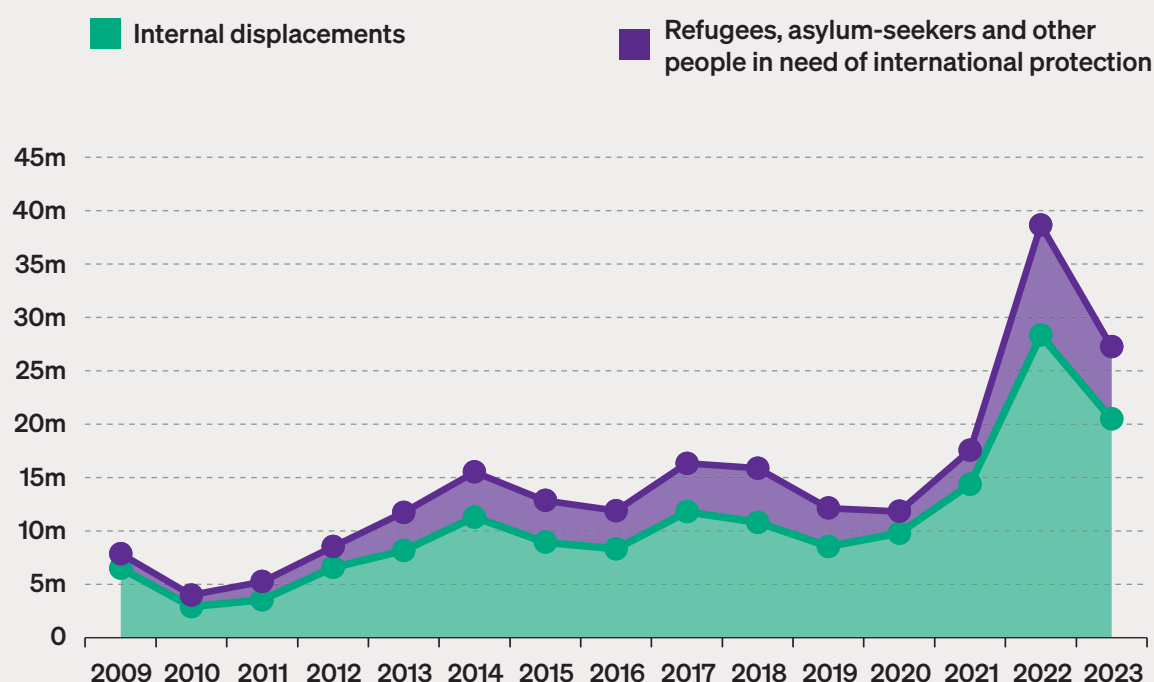
While there are difficulties in attempting to straightforwardly define the causes of displacement,²⁹² it is calculated that by 2023, 117.3 million people were forcibly displaced, with military violence as a key cause.²⁹³ As of June 2024 the figures were as high as 122.6 million people.²⁹⁴ The vast majority of these are either internally displaced, or are hosted by lower-income countries.²⁹⁵ According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, the number of internally displaced people due to conflicts grew sharply by 5.8 million to reach 68.3 million at the end of 2023.

Figure 4: Conflict-related fatalities 2009-2023



Adapted from UNHCR Global Trends report 2023. Data on conflict-related deaths provided by the [Uppsala Conflict Data Program](#). Data for 2023 is sourced from the UCDP Candidate Event Dataset, with conflict events with the highest degree of uncertainty excluded. Fatalities combine state-based violence, non-state violence and one-sided violence.

Figure 5: People forced to flee each year 2009-2023



Adapted from UNHCR [Global Trends report 2023](#). This figure includes estimates of new internal displacements. These refer to movements, and are a comprehensive cumulative figure of displacement. Depending on certain situations the same people can be displaced several times over a given period and would therefore be reported multiple times in the cumulative figures. Figures vary depending on how displaced people are counted.

The rich are weaponising and militarising borders, just as militarised responses to climate breakdown and the consequences of deep inequality get worse, leading people to need to move. In the context of 'Fortress Europe', the Greek coast guard has been found to drown people,²⁹⁶ while Serbian police strip Afghan, Syrian and Somali people naked and force them into the Macedonian forests.²⁹⁷ In the US the Texas governor places razor wire in the Rio Grande river.²⁹⁸ This is how Global North regimes are militarising, criminalising and brutalising people who are denied the right to stay.

futures.³⁰⁰ Countries already facing climate and inequality crises are unable to meet the needs of their own internal refugees, let alone those that cross their borders.³⁰¹ As rising temperatures lead to increased desertification and collapses in food production, many more are forced from their lands, placing even greater pressure on countries trapped in debt and subject to economic inequality. Societies in turmoil, without the resources or support needed to deal with these impacts, cannot be expected to commit to ongoing action to limit warming to 1.5°C – nor is it fair to expect them to do so.

More than 2,200 people died in the Mediterranean Sea trying to reach Europe in 2024²⁹⁹



Climate breakdown

Climate breakdown, combined with deep global societal and economic dysfunction and inequality, is already making places uninhabitable and undermining livelihoods, forcing many to leave their homes, families and friends and risk their dignity and security to seek liveable



Global inequality

The complex realities of migration are being misrepresented as a problem by right-wing media and politicians in rich countries. This is to obscure the fact that the world is organised along harmful, unequal lines where life-giving resources are hoarded by a tiny few, forcing others to build lives without access to essentials. Stripped of the ability to build dignified lives, people are denied the right to stay and exposed to harm as they seek to move. Perversely, the movement of people within the global working and underemployed

classes who sit at the bottom of deeply racist hierarchies is criminalised, even as societies depend on the labour of these 'disposable' people.

Low- and middle-income countries hosted 71% of the world's refugees and other people in need of international protection³⁰²



Ecological limits

The breaching of our planet's ecological limits resulting in ecosystems collapse is making it increasingly difficult for beings to sustain dignified lives in harmony with the Earth. Many places are experiencing the dying of rivers, deforestation, species die-off and water scarcity. Respecting planetary boundaries would better protect the right of people to stay in their homelands and to move freely without duress when they choose.

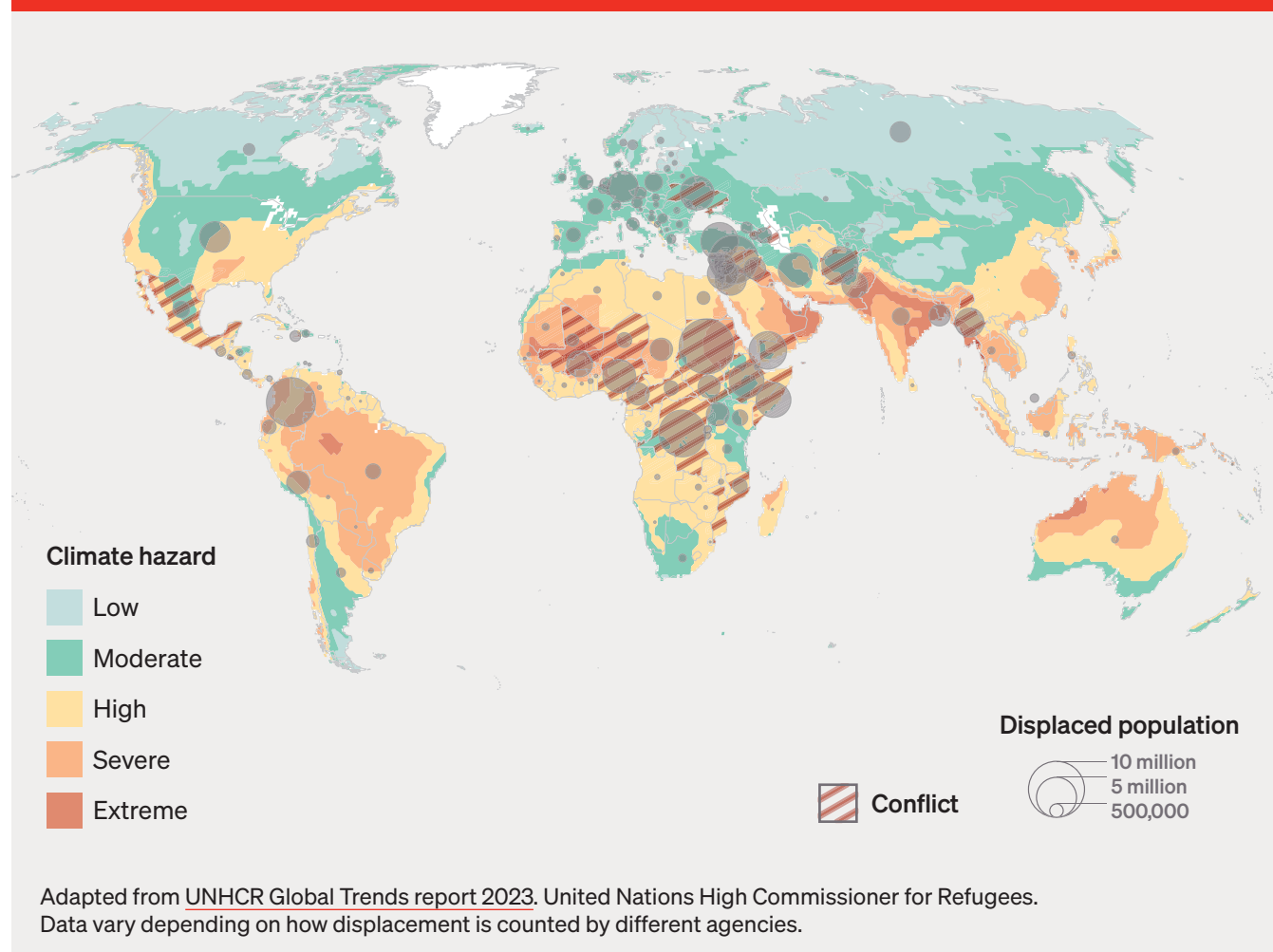


Economic and political systems

Our economic and political systems increasingly profit from stranded or fleeing people, through placing them in for-profit prisons and detention centres, toxic debates fuelled by racist rhetoric, and the scapegoating of migrants. Financial systems often disregard the costs borne by those needing to move or unable to stay. Meanwhile, the ruthless exploitation of both regular and irregular migrant labour remains highly profitable for countless businesses. This exploitation is a feature of interconnected historical injustices and systems of oppression, particularly the categorisation of people according to racist hierarchies that emerged along with racial capitalism out of colonialism.³⁰³

Figure 6: Climate-related hazards

Countries with more than one conflict-related death per 100,000 (2022) and the number of forcibly displaced people per country (2023)





Catania, Sicily, April 2023: a boat with about 500 people on board is towed into the port by the Italian authorities.

VISION AND INTERVENTIONS

Protecting mobility, defending dignity

In the context of climate breakdown and increasing poverty and inequality, many people are often left with little choice but to move. The majority of these people are displaced internally within their own borders, often abandoning rural areas and populating the ever expanding slums in the megacities of the Global South,³⁰⁴ or are forced to move across borders to neighbouring countries. Very few of them are able to move to the Global North.³⁰⁵ Catastrophically uneven distributions of wealth and power mean they do not have access to sufficient resources to live dignified lives where they are.³⁰⁶ The demand for equal societies, arranged in ways that respect planetary boundaries, is also a demand for conditions which will enable people to remain in their homes where they want to live.

1. Enshrine the right to stay

We must enshrine the right to stay³⁰⁷ – to protect people in the face of economic hardship, military violence and climate breakdown. This can be done by strengthening resilience, including ensuring they have social protection, adequate public services and access to food and energy (see sections 2, 3 and 4). Ending corporate

plunder, implementing reparatory justice via the redistribution of wealth, resources and power, as well as ensuring adequate climate financing, would enable people in the Global South to adapt to already unfolding climate impacts and build the resilience necessary to be able to stay in their homes when they choose to.

2. Secure the right to move and reject the securitisation of borders

We must also secure the right to move safely and with dignity. The right to move should be a fundamental human right that does not depend on people being threatened by violence, the need to seek a livelihood or facing climate impacts.³⁰⁸ The ability to travel should not be a privilege reserved for the wealthy, nor only available for those fleeing civil and political persecution, or denied their basic economic and social rights.³⁰⁹

In the face of increasing wars, climate-driven extreme weather and displacement, it is crucial to reject the securitisation and militarisation of borders and societies, as well as the reduction of migration to a mere security and displacement issue. We must actively oppose the mainstream security narrative promoted by Global North countries and media, while fostering solidarity with displaced peoples.

10. Defend and extend democracy to prevent the slide into fascism

Across the world, democracy is under attack. Corporate power has reached unprecedented heights, allowing billionaires and fossil fuel giants to dictate policy while working-class and marginalised communities are stripped of their rights. As climate breakdown intensifies, authoritarian governments – often backed by fossil fuel and corporate interests – are seizing the opportunity to crack down on dissent and criminalise resistance.

From Palestine to Yemen, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to Kashmir, to Sudan, to Ethiopia, militarism is dangerously accelerating as governments across the world prioritise security and defence over justice-centred solutions to our multiple global crises – depriving so many people the right to life, let alone the right to a dignified life. Meanwhile, multinational corporations continue to profit from weapons sales, border militarisation and the displacement of communities (see section 9).³¹⁰

As grassroots and frontline groups demand just, equitable and ecological transitions, the fossil fuel industry has ramped up efforts to influence decision-making. At COP26 in Glasgow, over 500 lobbyists were present³¹¹ – rising to over 2,400 at COP28 in Dubai and 1,700 at COP29 in Baku.³¹² These lobbyists shape policy by advising committees, meeting officials and even drafting legislation.³¹³

The fossil fuel industry's influence extends beyond policy to the violent repression of communities and environmental defenders. In the Niger Delta, Shell collaborated with the Nigerian military to crush resistance, culminating in the 1995 execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni leaders.³¹⁴ Shell has denied involvement, yet evidence points to its role in instigating and benefiting from the crackdown. Today, it continues to evade accountability for decades of pollution as affected communities pursue justice in the courts.³¹⁵

Between 2012 and 2016, more than 100 laws were proposed or enacted by governments with the aim of impeding the effective functioning of civil society organisations³¹⁶



This repression is global. In the US, fossil fuel lobbyists have driven laws criminalising protest, now adopted in 17 states³¹⁸ – with Greenpeace recently hit with an unprecedented and chilling \$660 million in court-ordered damages.³¹⁹ In the UK, anti-protest laws like the Public Order Act 2023 were shaped by think tanks linked to the fossil fuel industry.³²⁰ As the UN Special Rapporteur warned in 2024, the UK's crackdown on dissent is undermining human rights,³²¹ with Britain having the second highest eco-protest-related arrest rate in the world.³²²

Global repression of workers in 2024

- 9 in 10 countries violated the right to strike
- 8 in 10 countries denied workers the right to collective bargaining
- Almost 5 in 10 countries arbitrarily arrested or detained trade union members
- More than 4 in 10 countries denied or constrained freedom of speech or assembly³²³

These struggles are set to intensify as the global political landscape shifts further towards authoritarianism. Politicians globally are increasingly framing resource extraction as a matter of national interest, sidelining Indigenous land rights, environmental protections and frontline communities in the process.³²⁴ A contributing factor to ongoing militarism is the resurgence of global power rivalry involving the US, China, the EU and Russia.³²⁵ Rich states are engaging in proxy wars and using both

military and extra-military interventions, such as trade and industrial policies, to secure control of strategic sectors of economic influence, activity and production.³²⁶ This includes sectors deemed critical for the global energy transition.

This trajectory does not just threaten the planet – it puts those who defend it at greater risk of violence and repression in ways that echo the colonial-era plundering of land and resources. The question now is how far states and corporations will go to maintain their grip on power.



Climate breakdown

The fossil fuel industry continues to shape policies that protect corporate interests while accelerating climate breakdown.³²⁷

Rather than addressing the climate crisis, governments captured by corporate interests are actively stalling climate policies, rolling back regulations, expanding military budgets and introducing repressive laws that criminalise climate activism.³²⁸

The rise of authoritarianism and militarism is not only eroding democratic rights but also making it increasingly difficult to secure the urgent action needed to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C. Militarised climate responses, from border securitisation to increased conflict over critical materials, divert resources away from the just, equitable and ecological transitions needed to prevent further catastrophe. 'Environmental militarism' – the promotion by the military-industrial complex of militarised responses to climate breakdown – has already taken root, with governments treating climate movements as security threats rather than vital forces for change.³²⁹

The Metropolitan Police arrested more than **5,975** climate activists between 2019 and 2022



In 2023, there were **1,029** arrests, **897** of them for peacefully 'slow marching' to protest against new oil and gas projects.

The UK has the **second highest** eco-protest-related arrest rate in the world.

Figures from [Missing voices: The violent erasure of land and environmental defenders](#), Global Witness, 2024.



Anna Terra Yawalapiti, a Xingu Indigenous leader, calling for an end to police repression in Brasília, Brazil, 2019.



Global inequality

The wealthiest states and corporations are consolidating control over land, resources and political decision-making.

Corporate influence over government policy ensures that workers and marginalised communities bear the brunt of austerity, repression and climate injustice in the context of 'warfare not welfare'.³³⁰ The current political context is shifting more power and money into the hands of billionaires and corporate elites and dramatically increasing global inequality.³³¹

The influence of the wealthy elite over governments has rarely been greater, and without reclaiming democracy this wealth transfer will continue, deepening global inequality and entrenching a system that protects corporate profits over human lives.³³² The growing criminalisation of protest and dissent is a direct response to the fear that movements for justice – whether economic, racial or climate – could disrupt this consolidation of power.



Ecological limits

The fight over land, water and minerals – both for fossil fuel extraction and so-called 'green' technologies – is

driving conflict and the breaching of ecological limits, resulting in ecosystems collapse. Green colonialism is accelerating under the guise of a 'green transition', as corporations and states race to secure the raw materials needed for renewable energy and

technology production. Land grabs for lithium, cobalt and other essential minerals are already driving displacement and environmental degradation.³³³

Rather than enabling a just transition based on care and repair, the current trajectory will only further the destruction of entire ecosystems and further undermine our ability to live in harmony with the planet.



Economic and political systems

The existing economic and political system is no accident – it is the result

of centuries of colonialism, racialised capitalism and oppression, all of which are being reinforced by reactionary leaders seeking to maintain power. Current shifts further to the right and the spread of authoritarian governments threaten democracy itself. The pretence of democratic control is being replaced with more obvious forms of corporate and military rule.³³⁴

But the far-right's growing influence is not simply a result of elite manipulation – it has been fuelled by real economic hardship, declining living standards, and the misdirection of frustration toward scapegoated communities.³³⁵ The networks which constitute the 'Reactionary International' have been well-mapped, and we must identify the true villains: the corporations and political elites who profit from division while accelerating social, economic and ecological collapse.³³⁶



Police surround and violently break up an Extinction Rebellion protest in The Hague, Netherlands, June 2024.

VISION AND INTERVENTIONS

Real democracy built on redistribution

1. Reclaim democracy

If we are to prevent a further descent into authoritarianism and corporate domination, we must work to reclaim democracy from the hands of a few elites and place it back in the hands of the people. This means dismantling the infrastructure of repression, reversing the criminalisation of protest, and ensuring that democratic power extends beyond the ballot box into workplaces and across communities.

We must repeal repressive protest laws globally and enshrine the fundamental rights to protest, strike and boycott. The ability to resist injustice should not be seen as a privilege, but a necessity for a society based upon fairness and equity. Governments must be held accountable for their complicity in corporate abuses, from climate destruction to human rights violations. Legal frameworks must be strengthened to challenge corporate impunity and protect those who speak out against it.

2. Redistribution beyond wealth: power and economic democracy

Beyond resistance, we must go on the offensive in transforming political and economic systems. A just transition cannot happen under a system where billionaires hoard obscene fortunes while

public services collapse. Redistribution must go beyond taxation: decision-making power itself must be reclaimed from corporate elites and placed into the hands of workers and communities.

Models of radical democracy – citizens' assemblies, workplace democratisation and participatory decision-making – offer a pathway toward a world where people, not profiteers, control their futures.

3. End militarism and war: welfare not warfare

The militarisation of global politics and the climate crisis must be reversed. War-based economies fuel inequality, drive human rights abuses, and divert resources away from the urgent need for social and ecological transformation. We must dismantle the military-industrial complex and challenge the logic that views land, water and people as expendable in the pursuit of economic and geopolitical control. Demilitarisation is crucial in the face of scarce resources and shifts in geopolitical power imbalances. In place of militarised conflict, we must build infrastructures of care and repair.

Just as we call for an end to fossil fuel expansion, we must demand an end to war as a tool of economic and political domination. Global solidarity, rather than militarised borders and imperial ambitions, must define the response to the crises we face.

Where next? Building power to win the just, equitable and ecological vision of the world we deserve

“ We need a revival of radical trade unionism, strikes, and occupations, as well as more militant forms of political organization if we want to undermine the corporate power preserving the energy and agricultural status quo. That will be a messy and difficult process.”³³⁷

For transitions to be truly just, they must address the interconnected principles for transformation in terms of: the wider connected causes of **climate collapse**; the crisis of **inequality**; the undermining of the ability of all beings to live in balance with the Earth and within **ecological limits**; and the deeply harmful organisation of **socio-economic systems** that is a legacy of centuries of extraction and exploitation.

The transformational demands outlined here are built upon a wealth of wisdom and analysis of the crises we face and solutions needed. They are one contribution to the work of articulating the necessary transformative vision of the thriving of all beings in dignity and harmony with the planet. The key question now is how we organise to fight for and win the futures we need.

We must also prepare for the worst, while fighting for the best. We need to anticipate the many moments of opportunity for collective solidarity and movement building amid the escalating crises.

We know struggles must be global in scope, even if local in execution. They must centre the perspectives and experiences of those on the front lines of these crises. We also need to work to build solidarity between, and reveal the shared interests of, those in the Global North who otherwise might be seduced by zero sum narratives promising to extend their

Recent global research into public opinion has found:



80%
of people want
their governments
to take stronger
action to tackle the
climate crisis³³⁸



86%
endorse
pro-climate
social norms



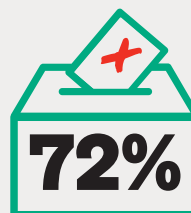
77,000
people surveyed



87
languages



77
countries



72%
support more
democratic global
governance
structures³⁴⁰



89%
demand
intensified
political action³³⁹



Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in London in 2024 for a Global Day of Action for climate justice timed to coincide with the COP29 climate talks in Baku, Azerbaijan.

relative material security, even if only briefly, at the expense of those in the Global South.³⁴¹ Fighting for transformative demands within Global North trade unions is essential, as justice for workers can only be secured by tackling the global system that undercuts wages, offshores jobs, and perpetuates exploitation by pitting worker against worker. Unorganised workers need access to tools, resources, movement infrastructure and organising support.

To advance just, ecological and equitable transitions, local, painstaking community organising will be crucial, engaging power at different scales, levels and sectors, including workers and Indigenous communities. We must build our power to dismantle systems of exploitation and oppression and to remake the world. Those who aim to maintain the status quo are hindering effective action and sowing the seeds of fear. We must counter that through strengthening global solidarity – deepening connections across all of our movements, acting together towards common goals, and recognising the challenges we face are systemic and interlinked.

The failures of existing socio-economic systems provide an opportunity to build the necessary and deserved presents and futures.³⁴² This is why our vision requires transformations in political decision-making power and processes. We need all institutions, including big corporations, to be accountable to the societies they serve, not to shareholders or unelected boards. Radical democracy and democratic participation – such as citizens' assemblies, sortitions, pueblos, and governance models practiced in Indigenous communities – are essential models and experiments en route to complete political

overhaul. Participatory mass democratic systems are necessary because they facilitate widespread involvement in decision-making by everyone impacted by the direction of transitions, helping to ensure interventions will better meet their needs.

If we look at the victories people have secured over the centuries, we can take heart that a just, equitable and ecological transition is there to be won. Every right many of us enjoy – no matter how threatened or incomplete – was won through collective struggle: from the right to vote, to freely assemble, to strike, to free speech, to education, to a decent or improved wage, to gender equality, to equality under the law, and for the abolition of slavery and formal decolonisation.³⁴³ This shows us that only collective struggle will secure the future of public luxury, private sufficiency and meaningful care and repair we all deserve.

We contribute this framework for a Global Green New Deal to support the building of our power to win alternatives and inspire action. Our vision is that this framework and the ideas within it can serve as a foundation or touchstone for our collective campaigning, organising and action. Key to this is understanding the intersecting nature of the crises we face, and insisting on connecting the dots in our analysis between the various elements of different movements – notably, but not limited to climate, environmental, economic and social justice. At War on Want we are clear that only a Global Green New Deal with commitments focusing on each of the 10 areas of intervention covered above will get us close to the just, equitable and ecological transition we desperately need.

Resources

Fashioning the Future: Fixing the fashion industry for workers and climate War on Want, 2023

Profiting from Hunger: Popular resistance to corporate food systems War on Want, 2023

A Material Transition: Exploring supply and demand solutions for renewable energy minerals War on Want, 2021

A Just(ice) Transition is a Post-Extractive Transition: Centering the extractive frontier in climate justice War on Want, 2019

The Rivers are Bleeding: British Mining in Latin America War on Want, 2019

Global Economy briefing series:

1. *Profiting from Poverty: The role of debt in the global economy* War on Want, 2023
2. *Towards Trade Justice: Changing trade for a just and sustainable planet* War on Want, 2023
3. *Tax and Climate Justice: Redistributing wealth for people and planet* War on Want, 2023
4. *The Cost-of-living Crisis: How corporate greed turned an ecological crisis into profits for the few* War on Want, 2023

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