

Building Blocks for Climate Justice

Climate debt and reparations

Transformative.

Solidaric.

Feasible.

Debt relief for countries of the Global South and reparations for the climate catastrophe caused by the Global North - Now!

“Developing countries” suffer a double blow: They are affected by climate change, which they have contributed very little to, and they are struggling to settle a high, unjustified debt burden. We must move one step closer to climate justice through debt cancellation and reparation payments.

Inhalt

1	Summary
2	Background
2	The (ecological) debts of colonialism
3	The effects of the climate crisis on countries in the Global South
4	The financial debt trap and its connections to climate injustice
6	Climate Reparations
6	Justification
8	What can climate reparations look like in concrete terms?
10	Climate reparations – who and how?
11	Reparations as a step towards climate justice
12	”Loss and Damages” – the discussion on reparations within the climate conferences
14	Reparations in practice
16	How do we get there ?
17	Myths and misconceptions
18	References
20	About the Project, Acknowledgements
21	Impressum

Summary

- **Cancellation of unsustainable and illegitimate debt:** Debt cancellation can create fiscal space for necessary socio-ecological investments and help to overcome externally imposed austerity policies and the extraction of oil, gas and coal. The foreign debts of many countries in the Global South are illegitimate, as they were incurred on the insistence of institutions such as the World Bank in order to finance the exploitation of natural resources for export.
- **More climate financing for the countries of the Global South in the form of unconditional transfers:** In addition to the necessary transformation, reparations can also finance adaptation measures and the management of climate impacts. Early industrialised countries have accumulated a climate debt towards countries of the Global South, which in turn justifies the money they owe.
- **A public apology in which Germany takes full responsibility for the excess emissions of the past and present:** This requires a binding pledge of financial compensation as well as drastically intensified decarbonisation in Germany in line with the Paris Agreement (i.e. by 2030 or so).



The (ecological) debts of colonialism

Global warming is inextricably linked to the simultaneous expansion of capitalism and industrialization on the basis of fossil fuels around the world. In most cases, this dual expansion could only have been achieved through (economic) violence. Without the raw materials of the so-called New World (like gold, silver, sugar cane or tobacco), the industrial revolution could not have taken place. It was thanks to advances in transport that the increasing globalization of trade was possible; first through steam navigation, then through the internal combustion engine. The spread of capitalism also brought with it the need for competition and the constant pursuit of profit. From the beginning of colonization, it became profitable to 'specialize' entire regions according to their comparative advantages, a process that destroyed entire civilizations. As a result, almost all parts of the world became dependent on each other – and thus also on increasingly environmentally damaging goods transport. The intensification was reached in the second half of the 20th century with the development of free trade, enabling the large multinational groups to set up subsidiaries all over the world.

For several years now, international debates on the global challenges of environmental protection have been driven by civil society, but also by representatives of certain countries of the Global South, who have evoked the idea of an “ecological debt” owed by certain countries to others. This term encompasses unintentional ecological damage, unpaid levies on ecological resources and borrowing from the “ecological capital” of other regions. **The underlying principle is a North-South divide in which the Western industrialized countries, i.e. the Global North, are the debtors of this “ecological debt,” while the countries of the Global South, the “Third World,” are the creditors.**

It is clear that the concept of “ecological debt” is more political than legal. It is a way of denouncing the past and present behavior of countries of the Global North, but also that of transnational corporations. The objective of this denunciation is, among other things, to bring the accused countries to recognize their historical mistakes, to pay reparations or compensation, to act differently in the future and to treat the countries of the Global South as equals.



The effects of the climate crisis on countries in the Global South

The climate crisis is highly unjust. Those who are responsible for it are the least affected (vulnerable) and vice versa - those who are least responsible are the most affected. This dividing line runs particu-

larly between rich and poor countries, but also intersectionally as a result of capitalist class inequalities, through hierarchies of gender, sexuality, physical and mental abilities as well as through racism.

→ **Responsibility:**

In a study from 2020, the “surplus” greenhouse gas emissions of various countries were calculated. “Surplus” here refers to all emissions that exceed a certain amount of per capita emissions that would allow us to stay below 350 parts per million¹ CO₂. The study concludes that the countries of the Global North are responsible for 92% of excess greenhouse gas emissions, while **the countries of the Global South are responsible for just 8% since 1850.**²

→ **Vulnerability:**

Climate vulnerability, i.e. the vulnerability of countries in relation to the climate crisis, is based on factors such as access to sanitary facilities, literacy, maternal mortality rates, political freedoms and life expectancy at birth. **There are clear differences between formerly colonized countries and former colonizing countries.** However, these differences are not only the result of a country’s geographical location, such as being close to the equator, where global warming is most severe, or close to flood-prone coasts, but are rather the result of cumulative advantages and disadvantages that have been developed and accumulated over decades in the form of institutions, norms and resources. Geographical factors add to this. The world’s poorest countries are the hardest hit by climate impacts. **A report³ published in 2021 estimates that 97% of people affected by extreme weather events since 1991 live in countries in the Global South: 189 million people are victims of extreme weather events here every year - 676,000 of which are fatalities.** The torrential rains that fell on the night of 5 May 2023 in the Kalehe area in the province of South Kivu in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which according to preliminary figures left more than 4,300 people missing and more than 400 dead due to flooding and landslides, are just one of many examples. A similar disaster occurred a few days earlier in Rwanda, causing a death toll of 130 people.



The financial debt trap and its connections to climate injustice

Countries in the Global South are suffering a double burden: they are affected by climate change for which they are not responsible, and they have to pay back an inordinate financial debt. In the 1990s, attempts were made to equate the financial debt accumulated by countries of the Global South, particularly in Latin America, with the ecological debt accumulated by countries of the Global North⁴: the latter were asked to write off the financial debt of countries in the Global South, in order to compensate them for the ecological debt. This was never implemented.

The issues of debt and climate change are deeply interlinked and should therefore be addressed together. Poor countries face an immense debt burden, largely due to unsustainable indebtedness and the global trade and financial system that forces an unequal exchange of resources, goods and money to the detriment of the global poor. After some payment demands were dropped in the 1990s following major campaigns by activists, these debts have risen again, especially since the COVID crisis. 135 out of 148 countries in the world's less industrialized nations are now classified as "critically indebted."⁵ However, this debt conceals who really owes whom. The Global North countries are disproportionately more responsible for the climate crisis, resulting in a climate debt that is immeasurably larger than the financial debt "owed" by the Global South countries. And this climate debt is just the tip of the iceberg of the much larger debt accumulated through centuries of colonial enslavement, exploitation and appropriation.⁶

As the Global South countries are more exposed to climate risks, they are forced to borrow more, leading to higher interest rates on their already untenable and unjust foreign debts. On the one hand, the effects of climate change are increasingly wor-

sening the debt situation of poor countries. On the other hand, high levels of debt prevent these countries from investing significantly in climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, as a large proportion of their resources are used for debt repayments. High levels of debt force these countries to extract and sell their natural resources (forests, oil etc.) in order to quickly obtain money, thereby negatively impacting the climate and biodiversity. In addition, these countries are unable to respond adequately to emergencies faced, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis. After all, debt forces governments to cut public spending, particularly in the social sector, which primarily affects women and children, who are already among the most vulnerable groups in society.

The climate crisis we are facing today cannot be solved without a serious discussion on debt and justice. Perpetuating illegitimate financial debts of the South to the North, which leads to inequality, extractivism, exploitation of natural resources and illegitimate wealth transfer, keeps countries and their populations in a situation of economic dependency.

It is imperative to combine the struggles for social and climate justice with the demand for debt cancellation for the poorer countries, to ensure that they can leave their fossil fuels in the ground and shape a just transition. A very illustrative and striking example of such an approach is the cancellation of Germany's debt after the Second World War, which made the country's "economic miracle" possible. So if the country responsible for the Second World War could have its debts canceled at the time, surely they can also be canceled to enable a just transition in the Global South!

The triple crisis of countries of the Global South

Low- and middle-income countries are facing a triple crisis: **the financial debt crisis, the economic crisis and, more recently, the COVID-19 health crisis**, which has only just subsided and whose impact on the population's cost of living is still being felt. **The consequences of climate change not only bring their own risks, but also exacerbate the existing vulnerabilities of those countries.** Combined, these crises threaten what little progress has been made in education, health and food security in recent decades and could set back the fight against poverty by 10 years, and in some regions such as sub-Saharan Africa by as much as 30 years.⁷

In structural terms, this triple crisis threatens the respect for human rights and jeopardizes the future of billions of people. Nevertheless, the focus is currently on the rights of creditors and not on the rights and livelihoods of people in the Global South. **Debt relief is therefore not an act of charity, but rather an essential prerequisite for the retention of those countries' own resources so that they can be prioritized for climate mitigation and self-determined development goals, which in turn contributes to the respect of human rights and the reduction of gender inequalities.**

Furthermore, climate justice, i.e., the need to include issues of equity and justice in addressing climate change, can not be seen as something that takes place outside a system that simultaneously perpetuates discrimination. **In this sense, climate justice cannot be dissociated from economic justice and thus from the issue of debt in low- and middle-income countries.**



Justification

The moral arguments for reparations are very compelling and require a systemic change. **Such a transformation involves not only the recognition of climate debt, but also reparations and restitution for the numerous financial, social and environmental debts incurred by countries of the Global North to those of the Global South during the colonial past and through the neo-colonial dynamics of today.** These are debts for imperialist conquests, slavery and colonization. It is for the destruction of cultures, the exploitation of wealth and the monopolization of land and resources, all of which continue to this day, particularly due to a debt system that allows the countries of the Global North to interfere in the domestic politics of the countries of the Global South. The unequal global trading system, based on neo-colonial power inequalities, allows the Global North to extract the equivalent of over 10 trillion dollars a year from the Global South. This amounts to 30 times the sum that the countries of the Global South receive as “development aid”⁸ and enough to end extreme poverty 70 times over worldwide. In total, the Global North has squeezed over \$4 trillion in interest payments out of the Global South since the 1980s alone.⁹ Not only is the Global North responsible for the highest greenhouse gas emissions historically, but it also exploits and colonizes most of the countries of the Global South through its multinational corporations, which systematically plunder their natural resources. **Much of the emissions result from the exploitation of the South, fueling a system of unsustainable consumption and waste in the privileged classes of the rich countries, at the cost of the increasing destruction and sacrifice of the populations of the Global South. Financial colonialism must therefore be reversed.**

The moral demand for reparations can also be legally negotiated. Those responsible for the climate crisis, both governments and companies, have known about the effects of burning fossil fuels, other emissions and land use change since at least the early 1990s, and major emitters such as Shell and Total even much earlier.¹⁰ The Global North therefore has had enough time to act and prevent the damage. However, it has failed to take appropriate measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thereby blocking effective climate policy measures at national and international level.

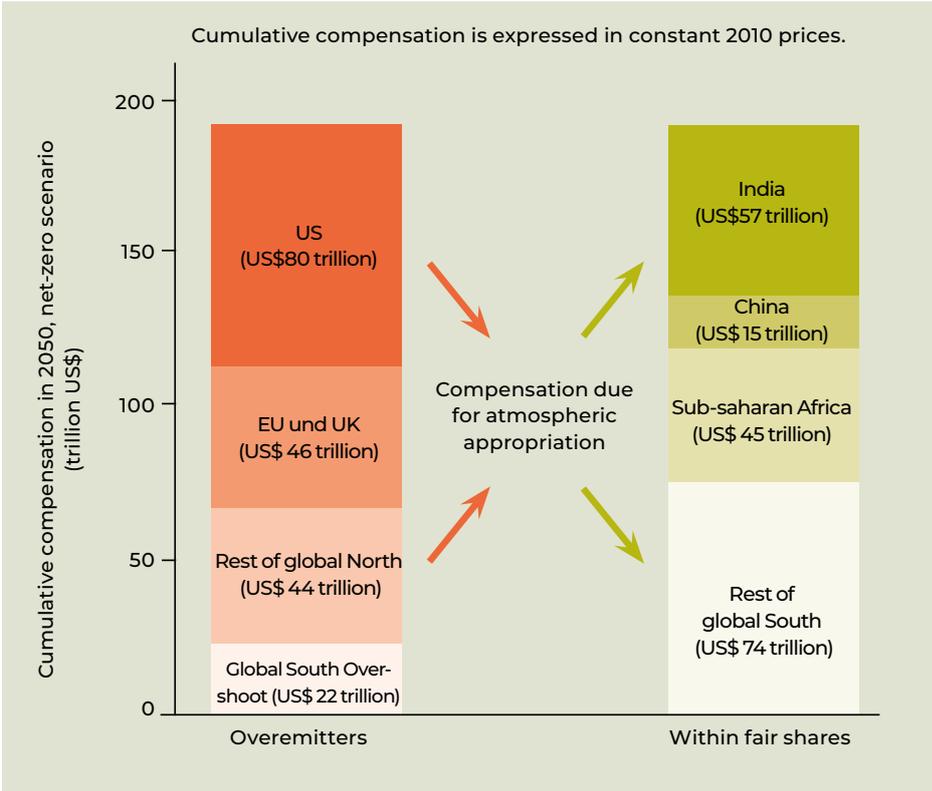
Moreover, emissions in the Global North have increased even more since the dangers of rising CO₂ concentrations were recognized, further increasing the harm to the Most Affected People and Areas (MAPAs).¹¹ The responsible countries have accumulated much more funding and resources over this period to invest in their own adaptation. This has been done in part through economic development that has led to increasing emissions and has been (and still is) largely based on the exploitation of the Global South, which in turn has severely limited the ability of MAPAs to protect and to adapt to climate change. According to the United Nations, people in Africa, South Asia and Central and South America are 15 times more likely to die from extreme weather events than the richer half of humanity.¹²

While it is obvious that the Global South’s debt to the Global North is largely illegitimate, the North’s debt to the South must be recognized as legitimate for several reasons:

- Colonial history and slavery
- historical responsibility and climate debt
- vulnerability
- unequal capacities to cope with climate disasters

We believe that the terms „**developing countries**“ and „**developed countries**“ perpetuate a very destructive ideology of development and do not serve as neutral descriptions of groups of countries. Nevertheless, in cases where we wish to reproduce the official terminology, we have chosen to use the terms and place them in quotation marks.

Figure 1: Cumulative compensation due from overshooting country groups to undershooting country groups (relative to 1.5°C fair shares) based on the historical period from 1960 to 2019 and net-zero scenario from 2020 to 2050



Source: Fanning, A.L., Hickel, J. Compensation for atmospheric appropriation. Nat Sustain 6, 1077–1086 (2023).

On the basis of a “fair share” approach for the remaining CO2 budget to limit global warming to below 1.5 degrees Celsius, a recent study calculated that even in very ambitious scenarios, rich industrialized countries would be responsible for excessive greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and would therefore have to pay 170 trillion US dollars in climate reparations. The study concludes that the countries with the highest pollution levels would have to pay

almost USD 6 billion a year to countries with historically low emissions levels, thereby supporting the latter’s transition away from fossil fuels, even if they have not used their “fair share” (i.e. appropriate share) of the global carbon budget.¹³ Germany, one of the most polluting countries, would have to make annual per capita compensation payments of more than USD 4,000 by 2050.

Figure 2: Top 5 over-emitting countries

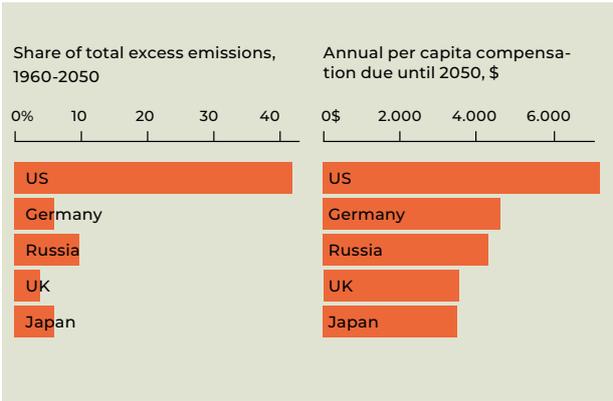
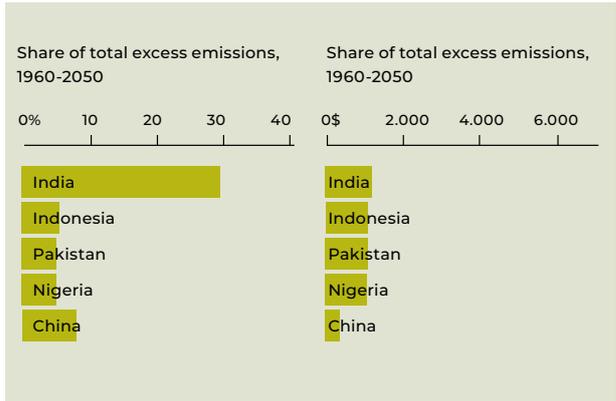


Figure 3: Top 5 low-emitting countries



Source: Fanning, A.L., Hickel, J. Compensation for atmospheric appropriation. Nat Sustain 6, 1077–1086 (2023).



What can climate reparations look like in concrete terms?

Climate reparations are strategies and measures that a state takes to redress past and present systemic injustices related to the climate crisis and to transform the (global) economy to ensure climate justice, well-being and equality for all people globally. Countries and communities that have been affected by colonialism, slavery and poverty have contributed the least to global emissions, are bearing the brunt of the damage caused by global warming and have fewer resources to cope with its effects. Conversely, the countries, companies and communities that have contributed the most to the climate catastrophe and are therefore responsible for it have benefited from the use of fossil fuels for centuries and have thus incurred an immense climate debt.

Climate reparations aim to reverse this injustice by addressing the root causes of the climate crisis and by repaying the climate debt. While it will not be possible to undo the damage done, reparations can mitigate consequences, prevent harm to future generations and create a fairer world. **It is therefore crucial not only to question the financial debt of the Global South to the Global North, but also to highlight the historical, climatic and ecological debt of the North to the Global South** for colonizing and enslaving a large part of the planet, for being the largest emitter of 230 greenhouse gases, and for plundering resources and destroying the environment. These debts must be recognized as they are on a significantly higher level than financial debts can be.

There are three forms of reparations recognized in international law, of which only two can be applied to the climate crisis. The first – restitution in kind, i.e. the restoration of what has been damaged - is impossible, as many of the effects of global warming are irreversible and will drastically worsen and in some cases even destroy the living conditions of billions of people. The second is compensation, for example in the form of compensation payments. The third, recognition, involves questions of reparations. It begins with an apology and with clearly admitting the truth about what happened. But it also includes the complicated issue of a guarantee that the injustice will not be repeated.

Maxine Burkett proposed an initial definition of climate reparations, which includes three key elements:

1. an apology,
2. a monetary or other form of compensation that gives actual or symbolic weight to that apology, and, most importantly,
3. an undertaking by the perpetrator not to repeat the offense, also known as the “guarantee of non-repetition.”¹⁴

All three elements are equally important and demonstrate that climate reparations include a form of cultural recognition in addition to a form of material compensation (which can be in financial form or through the exchange of other resources): The assumption of full responsibility for all excess emissions (e.g. above an equal, fair share that includes historical emissions) and a commitment to end the damage - which in the case of the climate emergency amounts to nothing less than rapid decarbonization and a systemic and structural transformation of the global economy. **This means ending the colonial and ongoing exploitation of people and planet by the extractive economy and distributing power and resources more equitably.**



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Climate reparations – who and how?

Reparations can take various forms. They can be implemented by regional bodies (e.g. the European Union), national governments (e.g. the German government) or at state and municipal level (e.g. Berlin). Private companies (e.g. the carbon majors and other large emitters), private organizations, networks or individuals (e.g. in transnational solidarity networks) can also pay them, or they can result from political measures, legal action or voluntary contributions. They can be financial, but can also take other forms, such as the direct transfer of resources, labor or technology, or the release of patents. While all of these approaches are important, the political dimension will be particularly relevant given the scale of the climate debt and the changes it will require.

The following measures give an impression of the **forms that climate reparations** can take:

- **As an internationalist addition to the often implicitly “national” proposals for a universal basic income (UBI), part of the compensation could consist of global “unconditional cash transfers” to individuals**, ideally weighed according to the level of disadvantage suffered, similar to a global UBI for climate justice.¹⁵ (See dossier on → Basic Income and Other Social Guarantees).
- **A massive scale-up of funding for climate adaptation - this should ideally be framed from an intersectional justice perspective, both in the North and the South, and as part of a transformative adaptation agenda.** In addition, this could include Global North-funded efforts to clean up the ecological mess - through restoration, reducing carbon emissions and restoring indigenous and communal land rights.
- **The commitment of not repeating the offense – i.e., not continuing with large-scale overshoots of the agreed emission limits and not simply wrapping the imperial way of life in a “green” guise - could be fulfilled through the willingness of the countries of the Global North to shrink their economies and thus create space for self-determined development in the countries of the Global South.**¹⁶

Reparations as a step towards climate justice

The aim of climate reparations, which includes debt cancellation, is to increase climate security through:

- Support for financing mitigation (reduction of global warming), adaptation and loss and damage,
- The creation of fiscal room for manoeuvre for necessary eco-social investments and an end to externally imposed austerity measures and the expansion of fossil fuels.
- Acceleration of decarbonisation efforts in the Global North by a guarantee of non-repetition and a recognition of historical climate debt.

Apart from these climate-related goals, the demand for reparations can include the following:

- Uniting the MAPA - those groups and areas disproportionately affected by climate change, such as indigenous communities, people affected by racism, women, LGBTIQ+ people, young, poorer people and the Global South - behind a common framework that articulates causes, responsibilities, violations and demands.
- Highlight the extent of the dangers, injustices and inequalities faced by MAPA and emphasise the urgency and scale of the remedial action required.
- Become a comprehensive guiding principle for climate-related justice claims, identifying the main parties responsible and demanding concrete material compensation.
- Create the conditions for global justice (“world building”).¹⁷

”Loss and Damages” – the discussion on reparations within the climate conferences

Currently, there are no dedicated negotiations on ecological reparations at international political level - the governments of the Global North actively avoid the topic and the term. However, relevant debates have been introduced into the UN climate process by movements and governments of the Global South.

The issue of compensation for damage resulting from climate change has been one of the main points of contention in international climate negotiations over the last 30 years. At the Rio Summit in 1992, which led to the adoption of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), small island states had already pointed out the existence of irreversible damage caused by rising sea levels and proposed the creation of a compensation mechanism.

The term “loss and damage” applies to the irreversible damage caused by climate change, be it the consequences of sudden weather events such as hurricanes or floods or more gradual effects such as rising sea levels or droughts. This damage is anything but insignificant: in the long term, it could account for two thirds of all global climate damage. Against the opposition of several industrialized countries, the concept of loss and damage was enshrined in the Paris Agreement in 2015. Article 8 of the agreement recognizes the need to “prevent, minimize and respond to loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change.” Loss and damage is thus recognized as a fully-fledged area of action for the international community, as the third pillar of the international climate regime alongside mitigation and adaptation.

At present, existing climate financing is only intended for efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) or for adaptation measures to protect against the effects of global warming. However, the most vulnerable countries, those most affected by loss and damages, are calling for the implementation of a new mechanism financed by the largest emitters to address the already irreversible impacts of climate change.

The issue of financing losses and damage has always been sidelined by the rich countries, above all the United States and the European Union. They have repeatedly refused to set up a new fund for fear of being held legally responsible for their historic contributions to climate change. Instead, as part of the UN talks, two institutions were established: the Warsaw International Mechanism (2013), which aims to improve understanding, exchange and action on loss and damage, and the Santiago Network 236 (2019), which connects vulnerable countries with providers of technical assistance.

At COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, the pressure was increased, but no new funding was agreed. Instead, the Glasgow Dialogue was launched to discuss how to finance activities to prevent loss and damage until 2024. Global South countries continued to push for the issue to be placed on the official negotiating agenda at COP27.

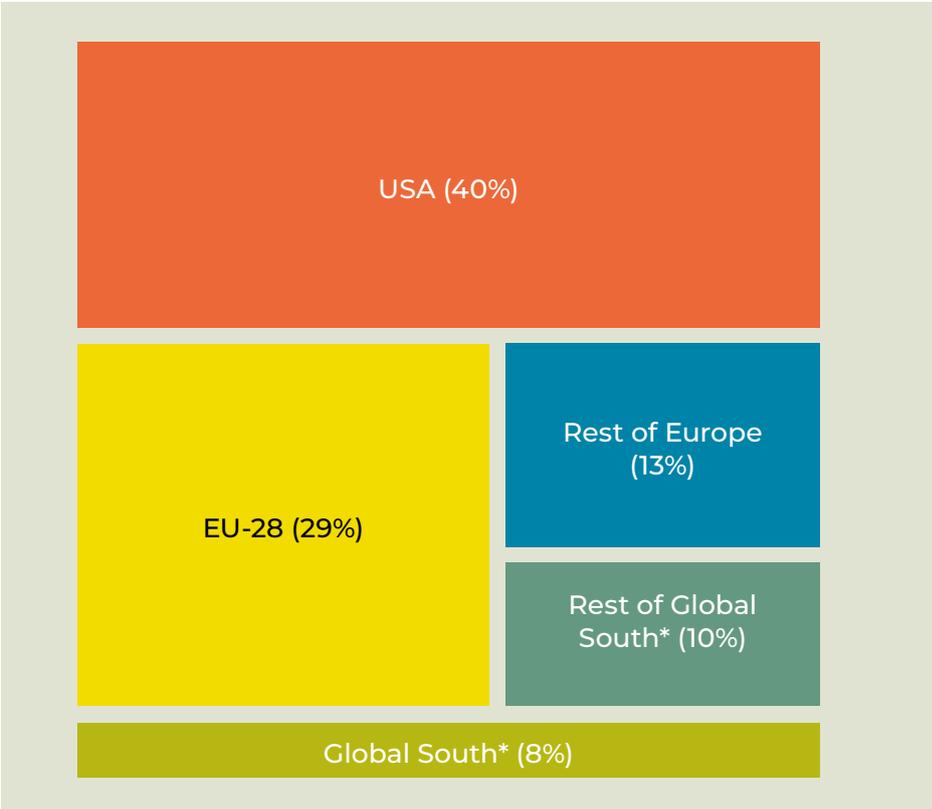
UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said at the pre-COP27: „An agreement on loss and damage will be the main litmus test for the COP. [...] We know that people and nations are suffering now. They need meaningful decisions now. Failure to act on loss and damage will lead to greater loss of trust and more climate damage. This is a moral imperative that cannot be ignored and COP27 must be the place for action on loss and damage.”¹⁸ Guterres proposed a one-off tax on the super profits of oil and gas companies as an additional source of revenue. Other avenues under discussion include the redirection of subsidies for fossil fuels and debt cancellation for countries in the Global South.

At COP27, the Parties recognized for the first time the need to provide financial support to the most vulnerable countries already suffering from climate impacts. It was agreed to set up a “Loss and Damage” fund to provide financial support to help these “developing countries” cope with the irreversible damage caused by global warming. The decision, which was received with great applause, is the result of a demand that the Southern countries have been

making for thirty years. While agreement has been reached on the most difficult points on the agenda, including a mechanism for loss and damage, the major issue of financing has not yet been resolved.¹⁹

At the UN General Assembly in New York in 2022, Denmark announced that it would provide 13 million dollars to compensate for losses and damage. The way had already been paved by Scotland, followed by the Walloon region (Belgium) and Germany at COP26, which together agreed to contribute over 10 million euros. While these commitments appear to be an important step, they fall well short of what is needed: the cost of loss and damage in the countries of the Global South is estimated to be between 290 and 580 billion US dollars per year²⁰ by 2030 and up to 1.7 trillion US dollars by 2050.²¹

Figure: Responsibility for excess emissions



*For the purposes of this analysis, the term Global North refers to the USA, Canada, Europe, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, whereas the term Global South refers to the rest of the world: Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia

Quelle: Hickel, J. (2020). Quantifying national responsibility for climate breakdown: an equality-based attribution approach for carbon dioxide emissions in excess of the planetary boundary. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 4(9), e399-e404.

Reparations in practice

So far, there are no examples of a comprehensive design of climate reparations. However, some political measures contain elements of climate reparations or are frequently mentioned in debates on climate reparations and can therefore serve as an initial orientation.

Climate or ecological reparations have been among the core demands of international movements for global justice since at least the 1990s. Communities and organizations from the MAPA group, especially in the Global South, are the most obvious actors calling for climate reparations, some of which also include governments. Demands for debt cancellation were and are also supported by trade unions, also mainly from the Global South. Both demands have been taken up in part by movements in the Global North, but are not yet at the center of the current movement discourse.²²

There have been and still are campaigns calling for debt cancellation for the Global South's financial debt, which is sometimes justified with reference to ecological debt.

- The current campaign ***Debt for Climate***, a Global South-based initiative that connects struggles for social and climate justice by bringing together labour and social and climate movements from the Global South and North, demands: “that the richest countries of the Global North begin to pay their climate debts, and this encompasses demands for reparations, loss and damage, and climate finance, which must not come in the form of loans but as interest-free payments. Debt for Climate demands the unconditional cancellation of illegitimate debts, often issued illegally and unconstitutionally.”²³
- The ***Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF)*** is an international co-operation founded in 2009 for countries in the Global South that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. At the Africa and Middle East Climate Vulnerability Forum (CVF), which took place from 27 to 29 July 2021²⁴ and represented a large and representative group of the most vulnerable countries in this region, delegates adopted several recommendations²⁵ to improve the response to the climate crisis.
- UK: It is worth noting that the ***Pan-African Reparations Coalition in Europe*** has integrated reparations into the environmental movement in the UK. It has strategically built proximity to movements such as Extinction Rebellion (XR) through the “Stop the Maangamizi” campaign, co-founding the internationalist solidarity network Extinction Rebellion shortly after the founding of XR in 2018. Through the influence of the “Stop the Maangamizi” campaign, XR and the XR-Being the Change Affinity Network, a separate grouping within XR, have adopted the “repair the planet” appeal in support of the Pan-African Reparations Coalition in Europe.²⁶

- The **campaign in the UK, called *Climate Reparations***²⁷, calls for systemic change to be achieved through UK government policies that stop destruction (i.e. stopping fossil fuel projects, infrastructure and hostile migration policies) and that “start by offering communities here and around the world the care and compensation they need to protect themselves and repair the damage already done” (i.e. making polluters pay climate reparations, invest in housing and green jobs, and pay for the climate damage the UK is causing globally).²⁸
- **There are a few lawsuits against large CO2 emitters such as the energy company RWE or cement manufacturers** - for climate-related losses and damages, including from a farmer in Peru and islanders from Pari, Indonesia. They calculate the companies’ percentage share of total emissions (e.g. Holcim (Switzerland) AG²⁹ has been responsible for 0.4% of global emissions since 1950) and demand this percentage as compensation for the damage caused locally.
- The **Pacific island state of Vanuatu** has supplemented its commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement with cost estimates for “loss and damage” due to the effects of global warming.³⁰
- A **coalition of Pacific countries**, led by Vanuatu and supported by Australia and New Zealand, is working to get the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to issue a “counter-opinion” on climate change. They hope the ICJ will issue an advisory opinion on countries’ obligations to protect the rights of “present and future generations from the adverse effects of climate change.”³¹
- The ***Make Big Polluters Pay* campaign**, which was launched by civil society organizations around the UNFCCC process.³²
- The **Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Amor Mottley**, has spoken out very strongly in favor of reparations.³³

How do we get there ?

Achieving climate repairs is a challenge. It has to start by influencing the public discourse. **On the one hand, the issue of reparations is a centerpiece of climate and global justice, a prerequisite for a healing process between the Global North and South and an important measure to stop further injustices and environmental degradation in the Global South.** On the other hand, the topic is rarely discussed in Germany - outside of the climate negotiations - and only a few initiatives or NGOs are concerned with this issue. When it is discussed, it is often in close connection with the UN process on loss and damage and to the exclusion of more far-reaching demands from the Global South.

In order for reparations to become a reality, the most important step at present is to create a narrative, public awareness and growing support for reparations. The current climate justice movements and initiatives have the potential to be a key starting point for raising awareness of the issue. Climate reparations should be a key demand of climate justice groups and should be on the same level as the demand for a coal phase-out or a humane migration policy.

To get to this point, the **following steps are required:**

- An **internal discussion of the topic** in order to acquire the necessary knowledge.
- **Learning about colonialism, white supremacy, critical whiteness, intersectional justice** and the overall demands for reparations, especially from marginalized people and the Global South.
- **Supporting and collaborating with organisations from and with links to the Global South** (see → Reparations in practice) to ensure that this does not become a discussion about the Global South, but remains a discussion led by voices from the Global South

Myths and misconceptions

We believe that there are still many myths, characterized by a belief in the financial debt of the countries of the Global South and a lack of knowledge about the many historical and current damages caused by colonialism and the climate crisis, that represent a major obstacle to supporting climate reparations.

“Reparations are not feasible – they will never be implemented”



While many proposals for climate justice may appear utopian, there are a number of actors fighting to make them a reality (strong social movements, governments in the Global South). In addition, successful court cases have resulted in reparations and international negotiations on related issues such as loss and damage are already taking place. Finally, even though it may be a utopian demand, there can be no global justice without ecological reparations, making them an important goal for a good life for all.

“What about China/the USA/...? Why should Germany pay when others are also responsible?”



Even if all the countries with excess emissions should eventually settle their debts, it is important that the worst offenders take the first steps. In this respect, Germany is responsible for a large part of the historical excess emissions - much more than China - and continues to have high per capita emissions.

“Reparations are about punishing the Global North”



Ecological reparations are not a form of punishment for the Global North, but an attempt to end the exploitation of the Global South and repair the damage done in the past. The goal is a just and peaceful world in which living standards are equalized worldwide so that all people have equal opportunities in life.

“Decarbonization is already difficult enough for the Global North, let’s not make it even more difficult by including reparations.”



Despite repeated commitments to carbon neutrality and the formation of a coalition to phase out coal since COP26, there is as yet no concrete plan to phase out coal, which is often referred to as the “dirtiest” fossil fuel of all. Many countries in the Global North still base their economies on coal, which provides their electricity and fuels their growth, especially after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Germany, for example, has recommissioned some coal-fired power plants in response to the major energy crisis. Under no circumstances should these difficulties in decarbonization interfere with action to repair the damage caused by climate change, as a) countries in the Global South are experiencing enormous tragedies right now as a result of the extreme climate phenomena of recent years and b) a lack of financial resources is driving countries in the Global South down an exploitative, fossil fuel “development” path that undermines efforts to mitigate climate change.

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About the Project

→ This dossier is part of our project

**Building: Blocks for Climate Justice -
Solidaric. Transformative. Feasible.**

With this project, we developed effective climate policy measures for the socio-ecological transformation over the next 5-10 years. The measures are aimed at structural changes to our growth-based, profit-oriented and globalised economic system. They focus on social rather than technical innovations, and there is a high level of social acceptance for the measures and therefore a realistic prospect of implementation. In the sense of a revolutionary realpolitik, these are the first steps which must be followed by others in order to enable a good future for all.

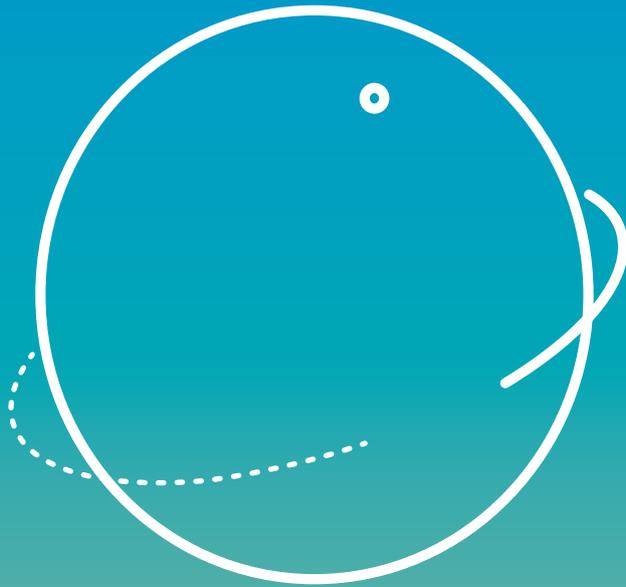
We have already formulated what this future could look like:

→ **Utopia for the year 2048.**

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Disclaimer: The contents of the result do not necessarily reflect the position of the persons named.



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Authors

Oumarou F. Mfochivé, Matthias Schmelzer

Editing & Proofreading

Lasse Thiele, Carolina Achilles,
Katharina Talanow

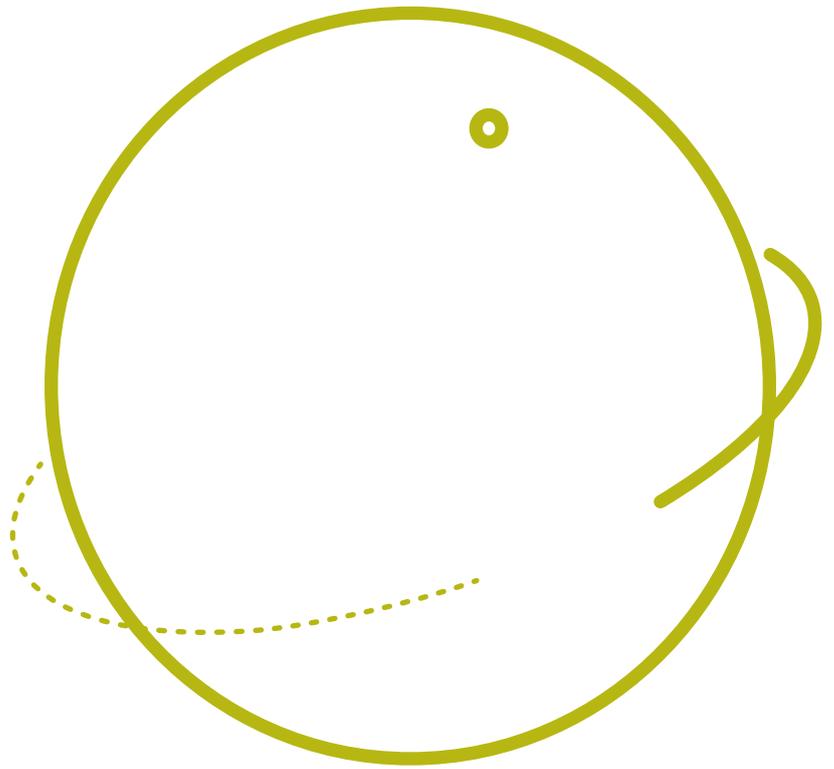
Editing & Proofreading

Kai Kuhnhenh, Divij Kapur

Design

Diana Neumerkel, Lu Kohnen

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