

R7new Tax the Rich to Save the Climate

Proposers:

Agenda item: 4. Resolutions

Motion text

1 While the rich are disproportionately responsible for the climate emergency and
2 environmental degradation, it is mainly the poor who are suffering their
3 consequences. The links between the climate, environmental and social crises
4 must be recognized. They are not three separate crises, but manifestations of
5 one single problem: capitalist exploitation.

6 Between 1990 and 2015, the richest decile of the world's population was
7 responsible for more than half of greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gas
8 emissions from the "richest 1%" of our planet have increased since the Paris
9 Agreement was signed and are likely to increase even more by 2030¹. These
10 striking disparities are the result of completely different lifestyles, as
11 evidenced, for example, by disparities in airplane use. One percent of the
12 world's population is responsible for half of the emissions caused by aviation,
13 while 90% of world's population have never flown².

14 These environmental inequalities take many forms and are present at all scales.
15 On the one hand, the habits of the most affluent are more harmful to the
16 environment and contribute more to climate change than those of the least
17 affluent. On the other hand, exposure to environmental pollution and climate
18 change is unequal. Poorer people live in neighborhoods with higher pollution of
19 nitrogen dioxide³, a gas produced during the burning of fossil fuels that
20 worsens symptoms of asthma and reduces lung function growth⁴. Worryingly, the
21 World Health Organization notes for Europe that: "although air pollution levels
22 have decreased over recent years, inequalities in exposure persist"⁵. In the
23 French Île-de-France region, for example, waste treatment facilities, such as
24 incinerators, are often located in low-income neighborhoods⁶. Similarly, the
25 poorest have fewer opportunities to adapt to climate change; they tend to have
26 less access to green spaces that could help to cool off during heat waves, and
27 it is more difficult to move away from high risk areas, such as regions
28 threatened by rising sea levels and flooding. Nothing justifies that those who
29 contribute most to climate change and the destruction of our environment can
30 escape the consequences, for example by living in air-conditioned houses in
31 areas where the impacts of climate change are less.

32 The Federation of Young European Greens works for a better recognition of
33 environmental inequalities. These should be taken into account systematically by
34 public authorities. Public authorities in Europe must fight any form of
35 environmental inequality at all scales. Their efforts must go beyond encouraging
36 individual consumer action. We need a paradigm shift.

37 Moreover, we must be extremely vigilant with regard to products that promise to
38 have a lesser environmental and climatic impact. In response to the awareness of
39 the climate and environmental emergency, more and more products have been put on
40 the market that promise to be good for the planet and humanity. Organic food,
41 fair trade products, electric vehicles, and carbon offsetting programmes often
42 have a lower environmental and climate impact and are produced under better
43 working conditions, but they are by far too expensive for the majority of the
44 population. Thus, they are only accessible to the most affluent who can afford
45 the luxury of ethical and environmental consumption choices. Worse, the
46 promotion of these products conveys the idea that one must belong at least to
47 the middle class to save the world. Even if it is imperative to reduce the
48 impact of consumption on the planet and to improve the conditions of production,
49 this cannot be achieved by adding a few more fair trade products to the shelves
50 of our supermarkets. It must be a systemic change that includes helping the poor
51 and raising social and environmental standards dramatically. The wealthy don't
52 save the world. They destroy it. Capitalism relies on the exploitation of
53 workers and nature and creates these massive inequalities. To fight inequality
54 at its root cause, we need to fundamentally change our economic system. Taxing
55 wealth can only be a first step in creating an equal society.

56 FYEG is fighting against all forms of inequality, for climate justice and
57 environmental justice. Since these struggles are intimately linked, we cannot
58 fight the climate emergency without fighting social inequalities and vice versa.
59 We must fight against environmental inequalities, notably by making the
60 wealthiest pay:

- 61 • Taxes on income and capital must be more progressive, including by an
62 introduction of a wealth tax for the whole of Europe.

- 63 • We call on the European Union, or its Member States by lack of such EU
64 power, to levy a higher carbon tax rate for luxury products and on
65 European states outside the EU to introduce such analogous measure. The
66 rental, purchase and maintenance of yachts, for example, should be heavily
67 taxed according to their environmental impact. The EU should push for such
68 a Union-wide tax to be implemented as soon as possible.

- 69 • European countries should close their airspaces to private jets. The

70 Single European Sky initiative should support this prohibition. European
71 countries should also close their ports to luxury private yachts.

72 • Environmental and climate policies must be subjected to rigorous scrutiny
73 by an academically diverse, independent authority to identify their
74 potentially regressive impacts. We must avoid at all costs that the
75 poorest and disproportionately people of colour already exploited by the
76 capitalist economy, are disproportionately impacted by these policies.

77 • Revenues generated by the above-mentioned measures must be used to combat
78 the effects of environmental inequalities and to support the poorest.
79 Environmental and climate policies should not be a burden for poor people
80 and people of colour; they must be designed so as to benefit them.

81 • Environmental inequalities are also occurring in other parts of the world.
82 While environmental standards in Europe are slowly rising, we must make
83 sure that polluting activities are not simply moved to other parts of the
84 world, which would increase environmental inequalities. Carbon offsets are
85 not a solution and should be phased out. Firstly, they come with the
86 inherent risk that they are used by the wealthy as letters of indulgence;
87 having the financial means to be able to buy carbon offsets, those wealthy
88 can thus continue their carbon-intensive lifestyles. Secondly, carbon
89 offset projects have very frequently negative impacts on the local and
90 regional level. For carbon offsets in the Global South for example,
91 forests frequently become inaccessible to the local population, so that
92 tree growth is not hindered. Whilst such projects can have a positive
93 value on the environment, they must be a sufficient balancing of the
94 individual and collective rights of peoples, especially marginalised
95 peoples. Only when the reliability of the carbon offset project is
96 verified by an independent external organ and evaluated on the basis of
97 minimum human rights standards, can its operators sell their commodified
98 carbon certificates. Such balancing is necessary in order to ensure these
99 practices do not induce the poorest to have to pay for the carbon
100 emissions of the wealthy

101 • The EU needs to re-design its trade and foreign economic policies, to
102 ensure that when receiving crucial resources such as metals to enable the
103 green economic transition, both EU firms and countries, and those
104 countries that provide the EU with the natural resources needed are
105 appropriately compensated. This would entail expanding and ensuring
106 protections and compensation of workers in countries where the resources
107

108 are extracted, through setting greater worker rights requirements on
109 natural resource products that enter the EU single market. The EU should
110 support investment to construct natural resource processing infrastructure
111 to ensure that they gain larger shares of the value-added in the global
112 product value chain. Finally, in the process of creating or expanding
113 natural resource extraction projects, the communities affected by these
114 projects should be involved in the decision-making processes in an
equitable manner.

- 115 • The EU needs to reduce and potentially phase-out in the short- to medium-
116 term the use of carbon offsets to compensate for carbon emissions by both
117 the private and public sector. The use of carbon offsets can ameliorate
118 the effects of cap-and-trade, such as when polluters double count an
119 emission reduction. In the case of carbon offset programs deemed necessary
120 such as the UN's CORSIA scheme the EU needs to ensure that the necessity
121 and use of carbon offsets is reduced. Furthermore, that the carbon offsets
122 are part of EU certified projects, that the EU makes sure that they have
123 little to not externalities, that land prices do not rise
124 disproportionately, that the offsets are able to actually offset the carbon
125 in the short- to medium-term, and that any groups and communities affected
126 from the carbon offset projects are not excluded from the decision-making
127 processes.
- 128 • Environmental inequalities are also occurring in other parts of the world.
129 While environmental standards in Europe are slowly rising, we must make
130 sure that polluting activities are not simply moved to other parts of the
131 world, which would increase environmental inequalities. The EU's Carbon
132 Border Adjustment Mechanism would be a first step in the right direction,
133 but needs to be complemented by policies for other types of activity.

134 The Climate emergency, environmental degradation and economic inequalities are
135 intimately linked. Let's fight against all three at the same time, let's tax the
136 rich!

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139 let's tax the rich!

140 1. [https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621305/bn-](https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621305/bn-carbon-inequality-2030-051121-en.pdf)
141 [carbon-inequality-2030-051121-en.pdf](https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621305/bn-carbon-inequality-2030-051121-en.pdf)

142 2. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378020307779>
143 (Gössling, Humpe (2020): « The global scale, distribution and growth of
144 aviation: Implications for climate change »)

- 145 3. [https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/unequal-exposure-and-unequal-](https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/unequal-exposure-and-unequal-impacts)
146 [impacts](https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/unequal-exposure-and-unequal-impacts) (page 19)
- 147 4. [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health)
148 [quality-and-health](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health)
- 149 5. [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/325176/9789289054157-](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/325176/9789289054157-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
150 [eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/325176/9789289054157-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) (page 57)
- 151 6. Ludosky & Toussaint (2020): “Ensemble nous demandons justice. Pour en
152 finir avec les violences environnementales”