R2 Climate Adaptation Is Justice: Care for Europe’s Vulnerable Territories

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Motion text

Hope is green – but hope alone will not hold back floodwaters, stop megafires, or prevent hillsides from collapsing.

Across Europe, especially in the Mediterranean basin**, the climate crisis is no longer a warning but a lived reality**. The 1.5°C objective is slipping out of reach. Emissions continue to rise, fossil fuel expansion persists, and political courage remains insufficient.

From floods in Valencia to landslides in Sicily and megafires across Southern and Central Europe, the pattern is clear. Climate impacts are intensifying and unevenly distributed. **Inland, mountainous, and rural territories – often politically invisible – are on the frontline.**

These regions are already strained by austerity, depopulation, and extractivist land use. Small farmers, forest workers, and elderly populations are paying the highest price for a crisis they did not create.

Where infrastructure is fragile and public services weakened, **climate breakdown becomes a multiplier of injustice**.

Climate adaptation is therefore a matter of justice.

Mitigation remains essential, but it will not protect vulnerable communities already facing irreversible impacts.

Adaptation must become a central political priority, rooted in CARE, solidarity, and structural transformation.

This crisis is not only environmental but systemic. It **is rooted in capitalism,** which is inherently structured around extractivism, where ecosystems are treated as infinite resources to be exploited in the pursuit of continuous growth. Such

a model reinforces territorial and class inequalities, and undermines the resilience of the very systems on which it relies on.

Addressing this crisis **requires a systemic shift towards** approaches that overcome this perpetual growth, such as **post-growth economy**, which understands and prioritises ecological limits, redistribution and collective well-being over accumulation and profit.

Ecosystems are weakening as socio-economic vulnerabilities deepen. **Europe’s vulnerable territories** are not spaces to abandon or exploit — they **are essential socio-ecological infrastructures that require CARE**. Their resilience is directly linked to that of the entire continent.

Inland areas sustain biodiversity and provide vital ecosystem services: water regulation, soil regeneration, pollination, climate regulation, and protection against extreme events. Yet **these systems are under growing pressure**. Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, and extreme events interact with habitat fragmentation and resource overexploitation.

Fragile systems also mean rising tensions, including conflicts between human activities and wildlife. These conflicts reflect policy failures — lack of coordination, scientific grounding, and community participation — not ecological imbalance.

Adaptation cannot be reduced to technological fixes or urban-centric policies. It must be grounded in the care of socio-ecological systems and the **interdependence between communities and their environments**.

Inland territories must be recognised as both vulnerable spaces and strategic laboratories for ecocentric adaptation. **Healthy ecosystems are among the most effective defenses against climate impacts**.

Agriculture is a foundational socio-ecological infrastructure. Caring for agricultural systems means recognising soil as a common good. Soil degradation, erosion, and loss of organic matter are reducing the capacity of land to retain water and withstand shocks, while monocultures increase vulnerability.

A transition toward agroecological practices is essential: crop diversification, soil restoration, improved water retention, and reduced dependence on unsustainable irrigation. Farmers must be supported in adapting to climate change, including through resilient crop varieties.

Rural landscapes are also protective infrastructures. Hedges, terraces, woodlands, and small water networks are essential defenses against hydrogeological instability, desertification, and biodiversity loss.

Without a public strategy centered on care, vulnerable territories risk losing not only economic viability, but also identity, cohesion, and future prospects.

A different path exists: one of care, where these areas become laboratories of socio-ecological adaptation and collective well-being.

We call on European institutions to recognise the central role of inland territories in the climate transition and adopt a justice-driven approach to adaptation based on **CARE**.

We therefore demand:

- Recognition of inland, rural, and mountainous areas as key to European climate resilience, **integration of agricultural adaptation into EU policies**, and restoration of rural landscapes as protections against desertification, floods, and biodiversity loss.

- Recognition of agriculture as core climate and food infrastructure, **support for agroecological transitions** that build resilience, and investment in water-smart farming to reduce vulnerability to climate shocks.

- **An EU framework treating soil as a common good** with targets for organic matter, erosion, and water retention, alongside large-scale ecosystem restoration and connectivity in vulnerable inland areas.

- Alignment of agricultural, environmental, and rural policies toward resilient, non-extractive systems;

- **Support for farmers** through resilient crops, technical assistance, and local knowledge; meaningful involvement in adaptation strategies; programmes strengthening their role **as socio-ecological custodians**; and investment in environmental monitoring, restoration, and green jobs.

- **The promotion of decentralized renewable energy systems**, including small-scale solar, wind, and sustainable biomass, to reduce dependence on centralized grids and strengthen energy security;

- **The recognition and support of energy communities**, enabling local ownership and governance of energy production and ensuring that economic benefits remain in rural areas;

- **Structural investment in climate-proof rural infrastructure**, upgrading roads, bridges, and transport networks to withstand floods, landslides, and extreme heat, particularly in mountainous and remote regions;

- **The prioritization of nature-based infrastructure**, including wetlands, floodplains, and reforestation, to complement or replace grey infrastructure and enhance natural water management and disaster risk reduction;

- Support for resilient buildings and settlements through the **retrofitting of homes and public infrastructure** for energy efficiency and climate adaptation, using locally appropriate materials and designs;

Adaptation is not optional. It is the ground on which climate justice will either stand or fail. To care for inland territories is to care for Europe’s future — without this shift, we will remain trapped in permanent emergency, reacting to crises instead of preventing them.

Reason

The international situation is crazy but let's not forget the climate crisis, which is hitting hard.
Mitigation remains essential, but it will not protect communities already facing irreversible impacts. Adaptation must become a central political priority, rooted in care, solidarity, and structural transformation.