

**FAMILIES AND  
CLIMATE CHANGE:**

**PAVING THE WAY FOR A  
FAMILY-ORIENTED CLIMATE  
POLICY IN EUROPE**



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# OVERARCHING MESSAGE

Climate change is a defining challenge of our time, with urgent ecological, economic, and social implications. Families are at the heart of sustainable development and climate action. They raise the next generation, provide care across life stages, and are crucial for a sustainable change. However, families are impacted by both the effects of climate change and the measures taken to mitigate and adapt to it. Moreover, families are a place where discussions about climate change take place, families are called upon to contribute to climate action as agents of change, and they have a vested interest in doing so – often conflicting with other interests, or restrained living conditions. Families raise children, who bear the greatest burden of the impact of climate change. This position paper outlines intersections of climate and family policy and provides recommendations to ensure that climate action is inclusive, fair, and future-proof. With this paper COFACE Families Europe calls for an integrated, rights-based, and socially-just approach to climate policy that includes social-ethical considerations and puts the family perspective at all levels first.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change and the need to fight the further worsening situation as well as to adapt to the impacts has become too obvious to be overlooked. The European Environment Agency identifies 36 major climate risks for Europe, which can be broadly categorised within ecosystems, food, health, infrastructure, economy, and finance.<sup>1</sup> Of these 36 risks, more than half (21), require more action immediately, with 8 of these being especially urgent. Ultimately, the severity of the impacts of climate change are still mitigatable. However, this depends on urgent and adequate policy responses.

Climate change has a clear impact on the lives of the current generations and their rights such as the right to life, health and food. Additionally, it is a matter of intergenerational fairness as the consequences of climate change, alongside the decisions made today, will interfere with future generations. Both a human rights-based and a social ethical approach to climate change is needed to tackle its impacts and to obtain climate justice. As family organisations, we strongly advocate for this intergenerational fairness. For the human rights approach, we highly acknowledge that there are several decisions, documents and resolutions on a global, European and national level that show the link between climate change and human rights.<sup>2</sup>

The effects of the climate crisis are closely linked to issues of global justice as well. In 2018, the 20 countries that required 90 per cent of global humanitarian aid due to climate-related disasters and displacement were responsible for just over 5 per cent of carbon emissions. Currently there are at least 3.3 billion people who live in environments threatened by the climate crisis.<sup>3</sup> The climate crisis will lead to an increasing pressure for people and families to leave their home. Even though most migration movements will take place within country borders,<sup>4</sup> this will have a major impact on the families affected. It will lead to an increasing number of families who are separated, particularly as there will be family members who cannot or do not want to migrate, often older people and people with disabilities, but also women who care for relatives and children.

The need for measures to at least limit climate change and adapt to its impacts as far as possible is highly urgent.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the social dimension coming with these developments has become increasingly present. However, it is crucial to take a particular family perspective as well. Up to now, this dimension has not been taken into account sufficiently: neither has family policy mainstreamed environmental concerns, nor has the family dimension been an integral part in environmental thinking.

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1 European Environment Agency (2024), European climate risk assessment: EEA Report. Available [online](#)

2 For instance, in 2021, the UN Human Rights Council recognised the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The Resolution of the UN Human Rights Council refers both to present and future generations and the European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2024 that Switzerland violated the European Convention on Human Rights by failing to adequately address climate change (Application no. 53600/20), 2024).

3 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022), Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability, Cambridge University Press, available [online](#).

4 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2023): GRID 2023: Global Report on Internal Displacement, available [online](#).

5 The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in July 2025 recognizes, "that climate change is an unprecedented challenge of civilizational proportions and that the well-being of present and future generations of humankind depends on our immediate and urgent response to it." At the same time it recognizes, that "clean, healthy and sustainable environment" is a human right.

## 2. EU CONTEXT

All societies within the EU are becoming increasingly affected by climate change as well as climate and environmental policy.<sup>6</sup> In 2024, Europe was the continent that warmed the fastest. It was also the warmest year since records began, with at least 335 deaths and an estimated 413,000 people affected. Temperatures are rising about twice as fast as the global average. There was a clear climatic gap to be seen in Europe: in the eastern part of Europe there was extreme heat and drought, while in the west it was warm and unusually wet and it resulted in the largest flooding since 2013. The sea surface temperature also reached record levels at 0.7 °C above average.<sup>7</sup>

The 'Europe Green Deal' is the EU's main initiative to fight and mitigate climate change by shifting to a climate-neutral economy with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It aims to make the EU's economy sustainable, and to ensure a fair and inclusive energy transition. It also aims to improve the well-being and health of citizens and future generations by providing actions concerning climate, energy, transport, agriculture, finance and regional development, industry, research and innovation and environment and oceans.<sup>8</sup>

Further laws and regulations following the Green Deal's strategy include the Fit for 55 package, which aims to combat the energy poverty risks for consumers; the Clean Industrial Deal and the EU Emissions Trading Systems (EU ETS). This trading system uses the polluter pays principle which increases the costs of polluting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The EU being a market-oriented entity, it was the world's first carbon market, hence it is aiming to reduce the overall EU carbon emissions while generating revenues to finance the green transition. To widen the scope of the measures, in 2023 ETS2 was created, which will additionally cover and address the CO2 emissions from fuel combustion in buildings, road transport and additional sectors.

Alongside the ETS the Social Climate Fund (SCF) aims to alleviate the social and economic impacts of the climate transition. To achieve this, the SCF provides EU Member States with dedicated funding to directly support the most affected vulnerable groups, notably households in energy or transport poverty. Each Member

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6 Wheat yields are expected to reduce by 49% by 2050 in Southern Europe. Wildfires are impacting crop yield and the GDP of several Southern EU nations. In the EU more broadly, the annual cost of droughts on agriculture, energy, and public water supply is EUR 9 billion. Rising sea levels put over 30% of the EU's total GDP at risk. (see European Commission. Climate Change. Consequences of Climate Change. (Accessed 25/06/24) Available [online](#)).

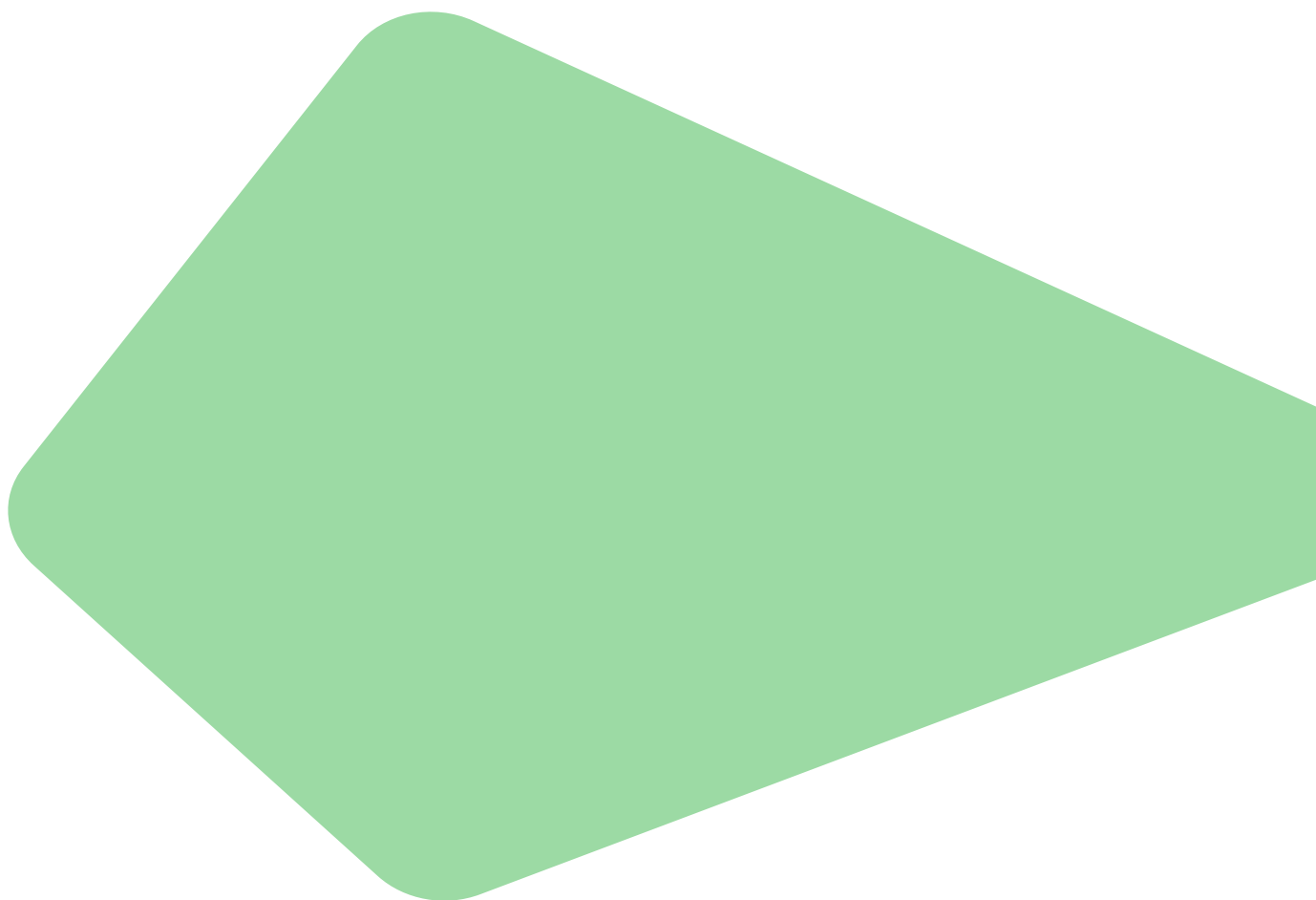
7 Copernicus (2024) European State of the Climate report. Available [online](#)

8 European Green Deal (2019). Available [online](#)

State had to create their Social Climate Plans by June 2025, detailing how they will use the SCF funds. These reporting schemes may lead to a stronger commitment of the member states, however, this will have to be further monitored and evaluated.

In July 2025, the European Commission proposed an amendment to the EU Climate Law, setting a 2040 EU climate target of 90% reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions, compared to 1990 levels (a target which has been officially endorsed by the Council of the EU). This follows the Commission Political Guidelines for 2024-2029 but still has to be submitted to the European Parliament and the Council.<sup>9</sup> Whether this proposal will be adopted and what kind of impact it may have, remains to be seen.

It is very positive that the European Commission has acknowledged the importance of fighting climate change and that there are clear positives that have developed on the European level, like European Green Deal. Those need to be supported. However, preparedness still lags significantly behind risk mitigation. Therefore, even though there have been important steps taken, there is a need more than ever to step up actions to combat and mitigate the climate crisis. The European institutions should intensify these activities and avoid negative social effects, which bear negatively on families.

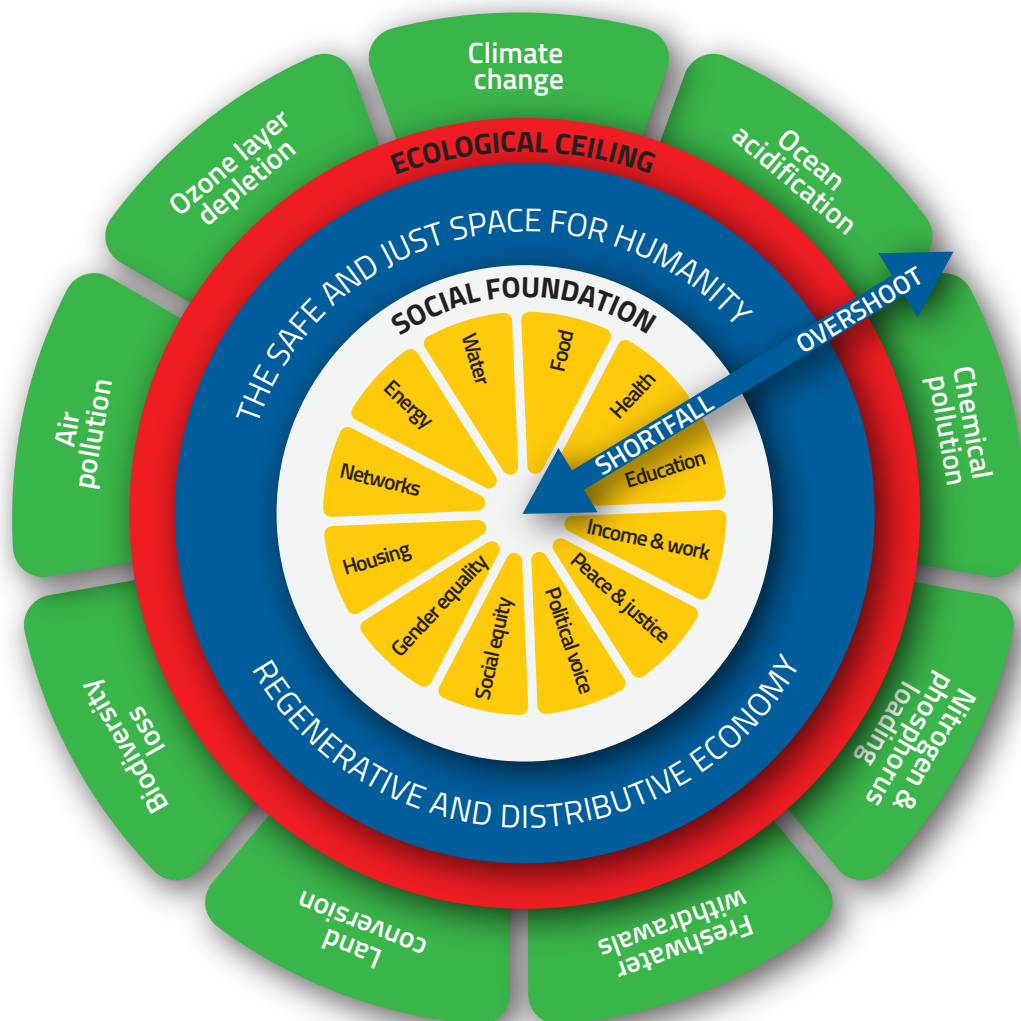


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<sup>9</sup> European Commission (2025), Press release: EU's Climate Law presents a new way to get to 2040 . Available [online](#)

### 3. FAMILIES AT THE CROSSROADS OF VULNERABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

The so-called Brundtland report “Our common Future” more than 35 years ago highlighted the need for a “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.<sup>10</sup>



This aim is inherent for families as the intergenerational aspect is an integral part of family life. Policies that frame the conditions for family life, however, to some extent seem contradictory for families as key economic agents. On the one hand, financial economic growth and consumer spending is seen as the base of economy and wealth, and on the other hand families are instructed to moderate their consumption to preserve environmental resources.

<sup>10</sup> Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1984). Available [online](#)

COFACE Families Europe has taken this idea up, basing its vision on the Doughnut economics model by Kate Raworth.<sup>11</sup> It consists of two concentric rings: 1. a social foundation, to ensure that no one is left falling short on life's essentials, and 2. an ecological ceiling, to ensure that humanity does not collectively overshoot the planetary boundaries. Between these two sets of boundaries lies a space that is both ecologically safe and socially just.<sup>12</sup> This also may require examining the role of the debt based monetary system, that is inherently dependent on continuous economic growth and consumer spending, and less on a sustainable consuming and where it might counteract the respect of boundaries set forth in Kate Raworth's work.<sup>13</sup>

## Challenges and effects on families

Families as a whole, as well as their individual members, are in multiple ways affected as they are increasingly vulnerable due to climate change and the efforts of mitigation. Families feel several direct and indirect impacts of climate change already. For instance, increasing occurrence of extreme weather events are a burden both materially and in terms of mental and physical health for all family members, particularly for the very young and the very old members. Furthermore, families face increasing economic challenges due to rising costs in several areas caused by climate change.

Besides the effects families already feel due to climate change, they are simultaneously affected by the measures taken to limit further climate change and the mitigation of the effects. Those effects currently meet families in a situation in which they have faced additional crises. Financial crises, war, energy crises have been continuously threatening families. The psychological toll of all these crises can be profound. Constant exposure to them can erode a sense of security and well-being. Parents may feel guilt or helplessness about the world their children are inheriting, and children may feel overwhelmed about their future, both potentially leading to chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma. An important factor to meet those stress factors can be resilience. However, the resilience of families has continuously declined and as a double effect, the more vulnerable families are, the least 'resilient' they are against shocks (including the consequences of climate change and the policies designed for adaptation).<sup>14</sup>

Thus, families are, just like in other fields of daily life, squeezed between different demands coming from inside the family as well as from the outside. Children in families might be worried about their future and can place pressure on their parents and grandparents. There might even be blaming because of past and present behaviour. Feeling pressure from the outside, families find themselves being the last link in a chain onto which the responsibility for action is "dumped". While they might see that other actors like the economic sector and politics frequently do not take climate change seriously enough and avoid passing relevant laws, families know that they

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11 COFACE (2021), 2021-2030 Strategic Framework. Available [online](#)

12 Website: Doughnut Economics. Available [online](#).

13 COFACE Key Findings (2018), Expert seminar on Economics at the service of society. Available [online](#)

14 M.Daly (2024), Exploring resilience with families: An overview report. rEUsilience Working Paper Series 8. Available [online](#)



can make an important contribution through their behaviour such as through their transport, consumer, nutrition and other choices. The reaction to this might lead into two different directions: it may lead to moral overload but also to sustainable action.

At the end, families will have the challenge of coping with dilemmas. For example, to balance their preferred environmental behaviour vs. financial constraints or the available options on site. In addition, advertising, numerous different labels and media reports complicate the decision-making of families. This leads to obvious uncertainty regarding the “right” behaviour to adopt. This distress meets families who are already disproportionately burdened by care work and the challenge of balancing family and professional life. Families strive to resolve such conflicting goals, but are dependent on adequate framework conditions and need appropriate support.

## **Families as change agents**

On the other hand, families as the base of society play a significant role not only as being affected, but as being most relevant actors as well.<sup>15</sup> They can be major change agents for transformation. Most families are aware of their potential impact and show interest in a more responsible and environmentally-friendly way of life.

Family is the place where children are mainly brought up, and hence helps children develop responsible attitudes and behaviour, not least through parental role models (practices like energy saving, recycling and selective sorting of waste, use of public transport, etc.). Then, the family is a natural model of spontaneous solidarity and mutual self-help within our societies. Parents help their children; children help their parents and one another. This natural social cohesion will be more important in the future, not least in view of the challenges ahead.

The family unit is the ideal place for putting resource pooling, sustainable management, food, water and energy saving into practice. This makes families one of the key players in creating awareness of and putting into practice a more environmentally-friendly lifestyle. Therefore, political framework conditions that promote climate-friendly action should pay particular attention to families as a target group.

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<sup>15</sup> That is why a lot of political measures targeting families end up in being tips for families how to live in an ecological useful way instead of changing the framework conditions.

## 4. DIVERSITY OF FAMILIES AND CAREGIVING DYNAMICS IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Today's family life is diverse. Families can have different forms, components, be in different stages and life situations. Also, within a family the forms and situations may change to certain circumstances or simply over the lifetime. This diversity is very much appreciated and all forms are to be supported. However, regarding climate change and its impacts the challenges and impacts for those families might slightly differ. For instance, it is well known that single parent families are at high risk of poverty and social exclusion. They often live in relatively small housing and often in rented spaces. They often spend a high amount of their income on goods of daily life, like housing and nutrition. Therefore, they depend largely on the availability and costs of those. For instance, on the one hand, as they live in relatively small places they have a lower use of energy, but only few possibilities to reduce it on their own initiative, like investing in better isolation. Large families, on the other hand, also face higher risk of poverty, simply because of the number of family members. Even though they tend to live in larger spaces, the space that is used per person is relatively low as they share the space. Living more often in rural areas than single parents, they face different mobility challenges. Patchwork families often have challenges to organise their life, as more family pieces have to be brought together. Families with disabled members face high challenges of care responsibilities that need the respective mobility and sometimes infrastructure. Caring for people outside the household in general means having high needs for being mobile, the longer the distance is, the more mobility it needs. For transnational families this is particularly the case. For instance, the need for caring over a long distance might counteract with the need to reduce mobility.

**Supporting families therefore means to acknowledge these different situations, adapt to their needs and find ways for a fair distribution of obligations and burdens.**

This includes a gender-sensitive approach to climate change as women and men to some extent experience the impacts of the climate change differently. For example, women are overrepresented in care work and the amount of care work may increase in the future, not only because of demographic changes, but also due to health impacts of climate change, or due to natural disasters.<sup>16</sup> This might put additional burdens on those who are mainly responsible for caring. Some studies in EU countries also suggest that women are more sensitive to heatwaves. Mothers often have different mobility needs as well. For instance, as they are the ones taking a larger share of the caring, their daily mobility focuses more on care obligations, like school, shopping and other daily tasks while fathers more often commute to work.

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<sup>16</sup> EIGE (2012), Review of the Implementation in the EU of area K of the Beijing Platform for Action: Women and the Environment Gender Equality and Climate Change. Available [online](#)

## 5. CLIMATE JUSTICE AND SOCIAL EQUITY

COFACE Families Europe notes and emphasises that effects and quality of environmental change are unequally distributed. Those who have contributed the least, are often the most vulnerable concerning the effects. Not only are specific groups most vulnerable to climate change, but also to action aimed at mitigating and adapting to it. This is most clear on a global level,<sup>17</sup> but also true for the national and European level.<sup>18</sup> As climate change is itself an exacerbator of inequalities, it is essential that climate action not only adapts ecologically but also takes into account these inequalities to produce fair and balanced outcomes within society to ensure that nobody is left behind. For this to happen, social and climate policy must integrate and depend on each other.

The socio-economic factor is an important marker for family life. This is especially true for a high proportion of large families, single parent families (and especially single mothers), families with disabilities and families with a migrant background that find themselves at risk of poverty or in poverty. The socio-economic factor often implies a multiple injustice from a climate perspective: socio-economically disadvantaged population groups contribute less to climate change emissions than others.<sup>19</sup> The reasons for this are mainly the comparatively little mobility patterns and consumption levels as well as more likely smaller or even overcrowded living spaces.

At the same time, socio-economically disadvantaged families are more affected by the negative impacts: for example, they are more likely to live in areas with high air pollution, in non-insulated housing, without air-conditioning and experiencing general health risks, leading to e.g. an increased mortality rate especially amongst older people during heat waves. Additionally, they spend a relatively high amount of their household income on goods for their daily life, which cannot be postponed like luxury items. Therefore, they are particularly affected by price increases, which may result from the impacts of climate change or the measures to fight it (for example potential climate taxes). Households having a high economic status can escape more easily from the negative effects by being more mobile, making adaptations in their housing, replacing activities or just being able to afford the increasing prices of their goods.

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17 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). Human Development Report 2019: Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century (New York, 2019).

18 Fn on global impact; but still focusing on Europe here. (Negative systemic impacts are shifted to other world regions. / family policy in Europe not at the expense of families in other regions and countries)

19 A German study shows that the 10% richest households emit on average four times more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions than households at the other end of the income scale. In addition, the two upper income deciles emit more CO<sub>2</sub> than all other households combined. See: AGORA, Klimaschutz auf Kurs bringen. Wie eine CO<sub>2</sub>-Bepreisung sozial ausgewogen wirkt, 10; 31; available [online](#).

There is a need for society to act in a more environmentally-friendly way. This includes the family level. But families do not necessarily choose a sustainable lifestyle and consumption style in addition. Thus, politics should both enable and support all families to take part in sustainable action. One key aspect is to change external framework conditions that nudge people to live in a more environmentally-friendly way. Sustainable lifestyles must be attractive, affordable and available for all families and be seen as a crucial matter of public services. Only then will climate action become independent of individual resources and facilities. But, depending on the kind of measures, public climate action itself might lead to very different levels of impacts on families. Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of regulatory measures.

There are regulations that are based on economic effects (e.g. a tax on carbon emissions, or V.A.T. increases for meat or dairy products). They aim at affecting everyone equally through higher prices. While this, on the one hand, could be seen as a fair way to proceed, making climate-damaging behaviour more expensive affects families with less available household income relatively more than those with more income. Being rich might even lead to no need for behavioural change. Some types of families, especially single parent families, large families, families with disabilities and families with a migration background are often within those groups having economic difficulties so they might be off worse than others. Therefore, a single focus on market and price driven climate action strategies is likely to worsen the situation for families, particularly for the socio-economically disadvantaged but also for middle-income families. That is, if these measures are not accompanied by any social mitigation measures.

There are also regulatory measures like speed regulations and bans on short-distance flights. Similar problems arise with simple bans (e.g. on fuel cars or fossil heating systems). Families without scope of action – also, but not only due to income – would be extremely affected, while others could easily afford the renewing costs or have alternatives at hand. Therefore, sufficient sustainable options and financial support especially for those more vulnerable or a balance between different economically strong groups (as in the case of ecological tax reforms) are necessary.

Climate policies must include redistributive mechanisms to avoid worsening inequalities. They must thereby take into account that wherever financial measures refer to the household income, it must be weighed according to care obligations and members to adequately address the diversity of family and household realities. Additionally, all public measures must be reconsidered under the aim of climate action and mitigation. A sustainable lifestyle predominantly is not an individual task and cannot be solved by individual engagement of families alone. To allow everyone to participate in the necessary social-ecological transformation, the Member States need to enforce and to invest in an overall sustainable framing.

## 6. CROSS-SECTORAL CLIMATE ACTION BEYOND FAMILY POLICY

Climate change can be expected to bring about far-reaching structural changes in societies. To be truly prepared, efforts must be holistic and integrated with other policy areas to ensure responses do not exacerbate existing inequalities. It will be crucial for families that negative developments and side effects, such as the widening of social-economic disparities, are avoided or at least cushioned. The upcoming challenges must be met by including multiple sectors and policy fields. Beyond both family and climate policy fields, measures can also be taken in related fields to mitigate the impact of climate change on families.

### **Taxation and redistribution**

Using the cost approach and internalisation of external costs have gained prominence in several European countries and is a popular measure for pushing for sustainable behavior. This is often done through environmental taxes. This is a useful approach and is to be supported, but the negative side effects of such measures for the socio-economically weaker families in society must be taken into account. Therefore, if such measures are adopted, it is important to think about what is done with the additional financial income that is generated for the state. There are several proposals that aim to use such income to support lower-income groups to be able to afford the additional costs or maybe even have additional financial support for families most affected by climate change. The European Trading Systems (ETS) use this monetary approach, which should provide incentives for sustainable behaviour. Unfortunately, the current ETS 2 foresees to spend only 37,5 % of the income on social transfers, which is unlikely to be enough to have a socially fair cushion. At national as well as at European level there should be additional measures to cushion those burdens or to set the basis for alternative ecological sound behaviours.

### **Labour market policies**

Aligning labour market policy with climate adaptation goals can be done by strengthening the legal frameworks to protect workers from extreme heat. This includes measures which requires companies to suspend or reduce working hours during official heat alerts (yellow, orange, or red), especially for outdoor work; measures to mandate the inclusion of climate risk protocols in collective agreements, ensuring that workers are informed and protected during extreme weather events; as well as a rethink of employment leave policy to grant additional days of paid leave if workers cannot safely reach their workplace due to climate-related hazards (applicable to any extreme weather events such as floods, fires or heatwaves).

## Digitalisation and sustainability

These should go hand in hand. On the one hand, digital tools can support the achievement of environmental goals.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, digital products and services themselves have a significant impact on the climate and the environment. The development and use of technologies should be sustainable by design. With electronic waste (e-waste) being one of the fastest growing solid waste streams in the world, it is important that manufacturers design products that can be easily and affordably repaired to extend the lifespan of digital devices.

## Mental health

There is a psychological strain that is caused by the concern about climate change. Often family members feel powerless in the face of the enormous task of tackling climate change and there might even be intense discussions about to deal with those within the family. There is growing evidence that heatwaves can significantly affect mental wellbeing - leading to increased anxiety, irritability, sleep disturbances, and even exacerbating existing mental health conditions. And there even are indications of links between climate change and intimate partner violence. That is the warning from a new issue brief by the UN Spotlight Initiative, which finds that climate change is intensifying the social and economic stresses that are fuelling increased levels of violence against women and girls.<sup>21</sup> Family organisations experience in their daily practice of counselling and supporting increasing mental health impacts of climate change, particularly in the context of extreme heat. To counteract those, investments in mental health services should be expanded. The support structures, political framework conditions and opportunities for participation for families are needed. They promote resilience and self-efficacy and make it easier for families to strengthen themselves mentally and recognise opportunities for action, even in times of crisis.

## Education

Through education on climate change, a rational, informed way of dealing with climate change should be achieved, preventing climate anxiety as well as climate ignorance. Climate anxiety is rising among youth and families and the needed resilience to cope with it has declined in the past years because of too many crises. It will be needed to find solutions to rebuild the resilience of families. For minors, schools can play an important role for both learning about the climate crises and building up resilience. For instance, schools with green spaces improve students' wellbeing in many ways, a sustainable learning environment can contribute to climate resilience and at the same time engage and motivate students for a sustainable behaviour. This should be helped by including climate literacy and emotional resilience into curricula. Life-long learning and adult education in this field should also be encouraged, providing incentives to engage in non-formal education (e.g. through NGO-run workshops or e-learning courses) to boost knowledge and understanding of climate change. This can include for instance education and resources that empower parents and children to adopt climate-smart eating habits, the importance of recycling, and more.

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<sup>20</sup> COFACE (2025), Digitalisation Principles for creating a better internet and web for all. Available [online](#)

<sup>21</sup> UN News Global Perspectives Human Stories (2025), Climate crisis driving surge in gender-based violence, UN study finds. Available [online](#)



## Civil protection emergency support

Increased climate resilience requires comprehensive disaster preparedness and responsive infrastructure. Families need local adaptation measures (e.g. flood defences, heat shelters, cooling centres during heat waves), information and training on measures taken in disaster scenarios to ensure safety and continuity of life. First responders to climate change related disasters are typically NGOs which help families in the short-term by providing food, water and shelter. Funding should be redirected not only to short-term support, but also to long-term support to help families rebuild their lives following disasters. It has to be taken into account, that families may be hindered to escape in case of nature disasters or face difficulties in doing so due to care responsibilities.

## Housing and energy

Housing and Energy contribute largely to climate change, yet they can on the other hand be a central tool to achieve progress, and finally the costs for housing and energy are a large factor in family budgets. Especially for low-income families, those costs can represent a huge burden. Families will contend with differentiated capacities to adapt to the challenges arising here. For instance, those families who choose and are able to adapt heating through air conditioning spend an average of 42% more on electricity.<sup>22</sup> Many families cannot afford this option, though. Families mostly include (young) children and / or older persons. For both, increased heat exposure can have severe consequences, particularly for those with chronic illnesses. Single parent households and large families (i.e. children in households with three or more siblings) are more likely to suffer from energy poverty. While it is reasonable to increase the prices of the use of non-renewable energy, this has a direct impact on the daily struggle of some families. This is especially true for families in special situations. For instance, families with members with disabilities who may have a greater demand for energy because of the longer periods of time spent at home, or an increased need for cooling and / or heating due to specific health conditions.

Besides aiming to change behaviour through economic and political measures like raising prices for non-renewable energy, there are additional measures that are being taken. For example, in some countries there are campaigns to encourage energy savings and the change to renewable energy on an individual level. Those are necessary flanking measures, which must be supported and more widespread. Still, it is important to note that not all energy saving measures are in the hands of the families. For example, thermal insulation cannot be influenced by tenants. Among families affected by poverty, the proportion of those living in rental housing is above average. They have to rely on the owner of the building, who then might share the investments costs with the tenants. As for families that are homeowners, they may not be the target of renovation funds (which typically target larger scale public and private institutions, and not individual households).<sup>23</sup> Fundings must be scaled according to income to, on the one hand, reach those who cannot afford renovation costs themselves and to avoid deadweight effects. On the other hand, those fundings need to be granted according to per capita

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22 European Economic and Social Committee (2024). The cost of climate change on households and families in the EU. Study. Available [online](#)

23 COFACE (2023). Policy brief: A families-sensitive approach in European and national measures to tackle energy poverty. Available [online](#)

income instead of household income to consider financial limitations of families due to maintenance responsibilities for their children.

## **Mobility and infrastructure**

Mobility is one of the most important drivers of climate change and therefore one of the most important fields to invest in. It is another field where the impacts on low and high-income families differ significantly. Usually low-income households drive less, travel less and have smaller cars and a higher share of public transportation usage. Families often need to rely on a certain mobility as they have many care-related routes to take in their daily life. Electric cars have received high attention and support. While this is laudable, this particularly addresses high income families as the prices for those cars remain relatively high. To be an option for all families, more needs to be done to make such cars more affordable. While making motorised individual mobility less endangering is an important step, it is even more important to tackle the question of how mobility can be ensured with less individual (motorised) mobility. Public and other means of transport (bicycles, etc.) must also be prioritised.

COFACE therefore supports essential investment in developing accessible and affordable public transport infrastructure. A particular focus is needed on public transport being intermodal, and accessible for particular user groups (older persons, persons with disabilities, families with small children). This is true for both urban and rural regions, even though in the latter this is undoubtedly more difficult to achieve. Achieving this is not only a question of how mobility works. It is intrinsically linked to adjustments in other public infrastructure such as schools, childcare, doctors, hospitals, and supermarkets, in order to achieve shorter daily distances. Thus, urban planning needs rethinking to ensure access to shops and other services close to housing. This high priority not only serves the environment, it also serves to support time-saving and work-life balance of families, and to repopulate more rural areas. To make public transport more attractive for families, local authorities should consider discounts for children.

## **Food and nutrition**

Food and nutrition play an obvious important role in the daily life of families. On the one hand, families are eager to have healthy nutrition, on the other hand food and nutrition are a major factor in daily expenditure and especially in the past years with inflation and rising costs of living. Climate change poses a serious threat to food security and family nutrition, particularly for vulnerable households.<sup>24</sup> Extreme weather, rising temperatures, and biodiversity loss are disrupting agricultural systems, driving up food prices, and reducing access to healthy, nutritious food. These challenges have a direct impact on children's health and development, making climate-resilient nutrition a matter of children's rights and family well-being. At the same time, families are key actors in shaping more sustainable food systems through everyday choices around diet, food waste, and consumption. Public policies that support sustainable agriculture, local food systems, and affordable access to nutritious and affordable food for all families should be prioritised.

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<sup>24</sup> European Environment Agency (2024), European climate risk assessment: EEA Report. Available [online](#)



## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an urgent need to halt climate change in order to ensure a sustainable life for future generations, which is an inherent interest of families. At the same time families have a strong interest in a good quality of life, health of all family members and all generations in the present. Thus, families have a key role to play in addressing the sustainable development challenges ahead, but are also particularly affected by those challenges. The sooner measures are taken to mitigate risks and stop the development of the current climate changing process, the greater the chances are to limit the severity of the measures and at the same time prevent families from being negatively affected by climate change. **The responsibility for creating structural conditions that enable families to make climate-friendly decisions lies at the political level, and more impetus should be given here to make climate protection easier for families in their everyday lives.** A family-oriented climate that aims to limit climate change, mitigating its effects and adapting to the impacts must on the one hand be consequent and follow ambitious goals and include all society. Such a policy has to create a political framework that actively supports and enables climate-friendly behaviour at the individual level. At the same time, it has to create compensation or alternatives especially for those who might be threatened in their basic existence either by effects of climate change or the measures fighting against it.

A fair distribution of costs and income must ensure that negative distribution effects are prevented. Families with children, who already play a big role in building the future by raising and teaching children on climate change, should of course be actively included through different accessible participatory formats and diverse communicative tools in climate policy measures and actions. Those who can bear it and those who contribute more to climate change should nevertheless be responsabilised to engage actively climate action and mitigation.

Climate policies must include redistributive mechanisms to avoid worsening inequalities. They must thereby take into account that wherever financial measures refer to the household income, it must be weighed according to care obligations and members to adequately address the diversity of family and household realities. Additionally, all public measures must be reconsidered under the aim of climate action and mitigation. A sustainable lifestyle cannot be achieved by individual engagement of families alone. To allow everyone to participate in the necessary social-ecological transformation, the politics on European level and of the Member States need to enforce and to invest in an overall sustainable framing. Thus, it is very positive that the European Commission has acknowledged these challenges and has developed respective answers. COFACE calls on the responsible bodies of the European states and on the European level to strengthen and intensify those efforts to combat and mitigate the climate changes.

COFACE calls for an open and positive approach in organising necessary debates on the right measures in climate policy. These discussions themselves should not be seen as a threat. When arguing in favour of taking into account family and social factors in climate policy, this should be done with the goal of supporting measures for climate protection and at the same time finding synergies between those fields. If this is done consequently, a family-oriented climate policy can contribute to improving the quality of life and participation of disadvantaged families.

- ➔ It is needed to follow **strong climate targets** and policies that protect families and their children from catastrophic climate change, including limiting global warming to an average of less than 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels for the rest of the century.
- ➔ **Families can be agents of change.** Therefore, political framework conditions that promote climate-friendly action should pay particular attention to families. At the same time those policies should encourage families to adopt sustainable lifestyles and give them the needed access to resources to live this lifestyle.
- ➔ **Family organisations play a special role in the socio-ecological transformation.** The role of family organisations as intermediaries between families and politics should also receive greater recognition within developing climate policy. At the same time, the organisations are working on improving their own sustainability. Therefore, the funding concepts of these organisations in the future should take into account the financial challenges associated with transitioning towards greater sustainability. The family organisations themselves should seek to establish an enduring collaboration or joint workshops with climate NGOs to discuss the integration of climate and family policy.
- ➔ **Policies should take children's physical and mental health as a central point.**<sup>25</sup> Children are the least responsible for climate change, yet they bear the greatest burden of its impact. The (non-) decisions that are taken today will have massive impacts on the next generations.
- ➔ **Political processes and public policies to mitigate climate change should be transparent and participatory.** This not only leads to greater acceptance, but also makes new resources available to those involved in order to reach the best possible decisions.
- ➔ **Support families wishing to undertake energy renovation**, by helping them access national and EU funds. Resources, family composition, and geographical situation should all be considered as criteria to ensure families in more vulnerable situations are also covered by these funds.

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25 The COFACE Child Compass adopted in 2020 offers a conceptual framework situating the child and their family at the core of a system with 5 priority and interlinked spheres of influence on individual child and family health and well-being: Education, Community, Digital Technology, Economy, and Environment. Available [online](#)

- ➔ **Programmes and policies are needed at the local level** that help families to be more resilient to acute impacts of climate change. These include disaster risk assessments and prevention planning, psychological first aid, and more.
- ➔ **Sustainable consumption means sustainable goods.** Sustainable consumption is only viable if sustainable offers exist, are visible, and are financially accessible. Hence product durability should be promoted.
- ➔ **Sustainable food systems must be prioritised.** Climate change poses a serious threat to food security and family nutrition, particularly for vulnerable households. Public policies should support sustainable agriculture, local food systems, and affordable access to nutritious and affordable food for all families.
- ➔ **Accelerate the phasing out of phasing out fossil fuels.** The process should include the decrease of the use of plastic, for instance by the increase and more efficient use of recycling and gradually eliminating single-use packaging, especially plastic packaging like bottles.
- ➔ **Align labour policy with climate adaptation goals.** This can be done by strengthening the legal frameworks to protect workers from extreme heat through clear climate risk protocols to suspend or reduce working hours during official heat waves; and grant additional paid leave for workers who cannot safely reach their workplace due to climate-related hazards (this is not just for summer plans, but any extreme weather events such as floods, fires or heatwaves).








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