



AN EQUINET
HANDBOOK

Climate Change and its Equality Implications in Focus

A Guide for Equinet Members Starting to Work on the Climate/ Equality Nexus

by Marta Pompili



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*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

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1. Premises



The present document serves a two-fold objective. First of all, it aims at summarizing the discussions and conclusions drawn from the Equinet seminar “[Climate Change and its Equality Implications in Focus: Tools for Equality Bodies](#)”, that took place in Brussels and online, on 20 and 21 November 2024.

Secondly, this paper aims at introducing to the Equinet Membership an apparently untraditional stream of work for equality experts, which only a while ago may have seemed not so strictly related to Equinet and Equality Bodies’ mandate. The aim is rather underscoring how, on the contrary, Equality Bodies’ engagement is crucial to effectively tackle climate change, being both a cause and consequence of existing inequalities.

This acknowledgment has been guiding Equinet’s engagement in this area since 2022, when it first commissioned a research report on the link between climate change and equality, with a focus on the role Equality Bodies (can) play in the area. More precisely, by focusing on the EU framework, the report titled [Preliminary Assessment of the EU Green Deal’s Impact on Equality. Survey of Current Practices and Needs of European Equality Bodies](#) analyses several specific aspects of the EU Green Deal from an equality perspective and discusses the potential role of Equality Bodies when engaging with these specific policies and legislation. As stated in the report, while few Equality Bodies had experience in this field, many of them indicated that they would be interested in building their capacity on climate policy and its equality implications. In September 2023, Equinet organized an online roundtable titled “[The EU Green Deal’s Impact on Equality. Exploring the Role and Potential of Equality Bodies](#)” to launch the report and discuss the findings with the authors and multiple stakeholders.

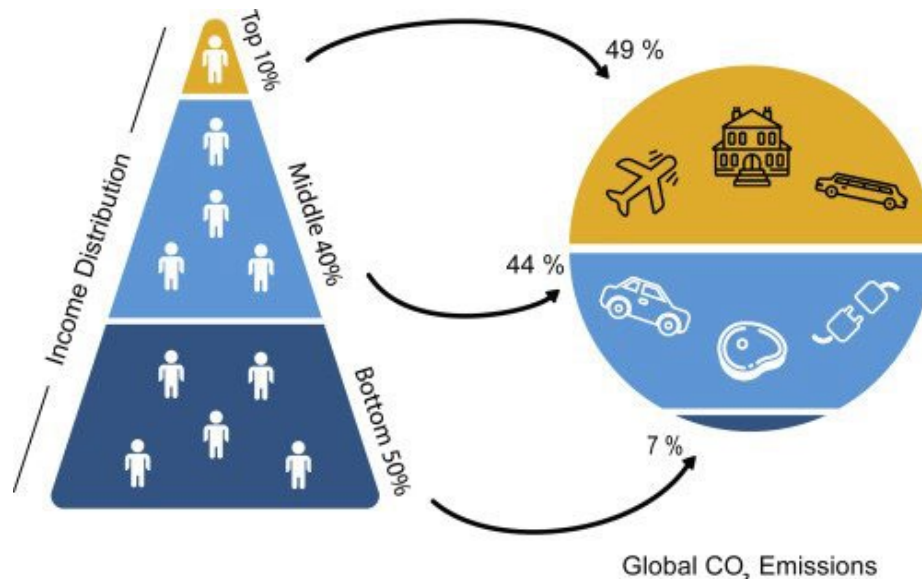
In 2024, the Equinet seminar “[Climate Change and its Equality Implications in Focus: Tools for Equality Bodies](#)” aimed to continue developing and enhancing the knowledge and understanding of Equality Bodies regarding climate change and its impact on equality, within the broader scope of environmental issues, discussing avenues to prevent and mitigate climate and social inequality, and fostering dialogue among Equality Bodies, policymakers, experts, and civil society to promote climate justice.

In the future, Equinet will continue pursuing its strategic work on the intersection between climate and equality, within the broader scope of the environment, and discussing and promoting Equality Bodies’ action in the area. It will do so through the creation of its **Climate & Equality Cluster**, an internal working structure starting its work from 2025, which will benefit from the expertise of Equinet membership and the constant exchange and dialogue with experts and partners.



2. Why should Equality Bodies be involved? An introduction to the climate/equality nexus

Climate change is one of the most pressing global challenges of our time. Its impact is far-reaching, encompassing ecosystems and societies worldwide. However, such universal impact is not distributed equally. As shown by Dr. Monika Mayrhofer's research, **inequalities and discrimination are the centre piece of the climate crisis**. On one hand, inequalities influence how we address climate change and, on the other hand, climate measures influence inequalities (either implicitly or explicitly). To give an example of how inequality drives climate change, we may consider CO₂ emissions, for which the wealthiest are disproportionately responsible. [As recently demonstrated](#), the top 10% richest in the world produce 49% of global emissions (polluting elite), while the 50% poorest only contribute 7% while having the least resources to adapt. [An analysis of the World Bank](#) considering data on subnational poverty in 134 countries finds that a one-degree Celsius increase in temperature leads to a 9.1% increase in poverty, using the US\$1.90 daily poverty threshold. Other than socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity, among others, may also have an impact on emissions. For instance, men and white people tend to have higher carbon footprints because of, inter alia, societal stereotypes such as the conception of masculinity connected to having big cars.



Source: [Fergus Green and Noel Healy \(2022\) How Inequality Fuels Climate Change: The climate case for a Green New Deal, One Earth, Volume 5, Issue 6, 635 – 649.](#)

Discrimination and inequality therefore play a key role in climate change. Accordingly, without addressing intersecting inequalities in all climate policies, we will not be able to effectively tackle the existential challenges posed by climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has confirmed that climate change will increase the magnitude and frequency of extreme events (hazards), by turning them into human-made disasters and thereby critically increasing the number of the latter. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), a disaster is defined as:

“A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic, and environmental losses and impacts.”

Despite the relatively little research carried out with regard to inequalities in disasters in Europe, [studies](#) show that, for example, the heatwave of 2022 was the disaster with the most fatalities experienced by Europe between 30 May and 4 September 2022, causing an estimated 61,672 heat-related deaths, with a higher burden on women. Relative to population, researchers estimated 56% more heat-related deaths in women than in men since 2003. Gender, age, socio-economic disadvantage, housing, social isolation, educational status, and literacy were decisive factors when experiencing the impact of the heatwave.

In the United States, by analysing more than six decades of death rates from US hurricanes and their gendered naming, a [study](#) confirmed that feminine-named hurricanes (vs. masculine-named hurricanes) cause significantly more deaths, apparently because they lead to lower perceived risk and consequently less preparedness to take action. Using names such as Eloise or Charlie for referencing hurricanes has been thought by meteorologists to enhance the clarity and recall of storm information, but brings with itself a social factor, namely widely held gender stereotypes, with potentially deadly consequences.

This example shows the importance of language as well as how the adverse effects of climate change and discrimination may interact in a subtle way. Climate policies may therefore (re)produce inequality, also given the unequal participation and representation of marginalized or disadvantaged persons and groups in climate decisions. Whether they are mitigation, adaptation or loss and damage-related policies, all climate policies require equality mainstreaming. Moreover, intersectionality is an important concept also in the context of climate change as it draws attention to the interaction of different dimensions of social inequality and takes into consideration specific local contexts.



3. The context: EU and international frameworks



Over the last three decades, the international climate change regime has shifted and expanded its focus as the climate continues to change. The United Nations have progressively moved on one hand, towards the incorporation of considerations around climate change into the UN human rights framework and, on the other hand, the development of human rights obligations within the international climate change regime.

The progressive integration of human rights in the international climate change regime dates back to the 1992 [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC) negotiated in Rio, which established the foundational principles of international climate governance but did not explicitly reference human rights, while however incorporating concepts like intergenerational equity and sustainable development. The [Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC](#), adopted in 1997 and entered into force in 2005, operationalized the UNFCCC and remained largely technocratic, focusing on market mechanisms. Later adopted at COP16, the 2010 [Cancun Agreements](#) marked a turning point by explicitly referencing human rights in the climate regime. The preamble, for example, stated that “Parties should fully respect human rights in all climate change-related actions.” Furthermore, the Agreements introduced frameworks for adaptation and finance emphasizing the need to support certain population groups, thereby acknowledging the disproportionate vulnerability of indigenous peoples, women, and the poor, among others. Discussions and debates in the lead-up to and in the Paris Climate Conference in 2015 concerned various human rights. The Paris Agreement marked the most explicit integration of human rights within the climate change regime. Adopted at COP21, it represented a paradigm shift in climate governance with its universal and inclusive approach. The Agreement’s Preamble emphasized that climate action should respect, promote, and consider obligations on human rights, gender equality, and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, highlighted the need to consider developmental needs and capacities while addressing climate change, established mechanisms for supporting persons in vulnerable situations, and recognized the role of diverse voices in equitable climate governance. While the Paris Agreement did not create binding human rights obligations, it mainstreamed considerations with key human rights dimensions.

On the other hand, the UN international human rights framework has also progressively evolved by incorporating climate change considerations into different human rights mechanisms (treaty bodies, Universal Periodic Review (UPR), special procedures). Treaty bodies have referred to different human rights in connection to climate change. Among others, the Human Rights Committee (CCPR) addressed climate change as it relates to the right to life under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In General Comment No. 36 (2018) on the right to life (Article 6), the Committee explicitly recognized that environmental degradation, including climate change, threatens the right to life. Most notably, in 2022 the Committee evaluated the case [Daniel Billy et al. v. Australia](#) which marked the first time the CCPR recognized that a state's failure to take adequate climate action could violate human rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in this case precisely the right to culture (Article 27) and the right to private, family, and home life (Article 17) of indigenous peoples living on low-lying islands in the Torres Strait between mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has extensively linked climate change to rights under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), including the rights to health, food, water, and adequate housing. In particular, General Comment No.



15 (2002) on the right to water (Articles 11 and 12) and No. 14 (2000) on the right to health (Article 12) highlighted the need for States to protect these rights in the context of environmental challenges, including climate change. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has also recognized the gendered impacts of climate change and encouraged states to incorporate gender perspectives into climate action. Its General Recommendation No. 37 (2018) specifically addresses the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change, urging states to ensure women's participation and leadership in climate governance, while General Recommendation No. 39 (2022) is specifically dedicated to the rights of indigenous women and girls including when threatened by climate change. As well, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has linked climate change to children's rights to health, survival, and development under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) through General comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24) and General Comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment, which focuses particularly on climate change.

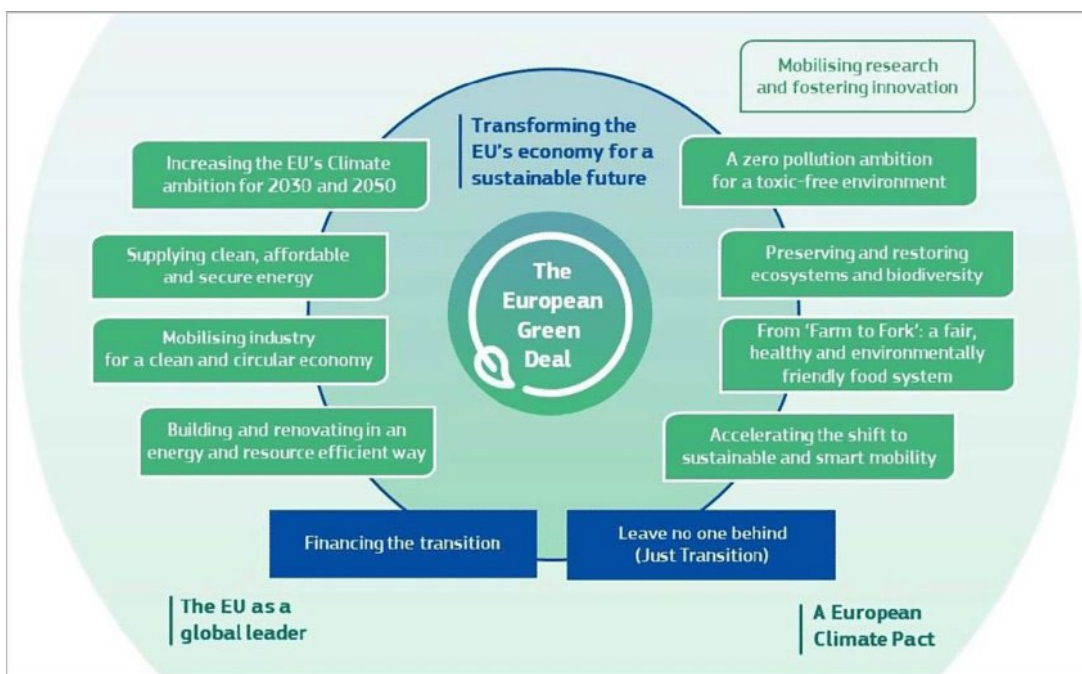
Most notably, the Human Rights Council (HRC) has adopted a series of resolutions emphasizing the importance of countering climate change's adverse effects against persons with disabilities, older persons, and persons in vulnerable situations, among others. In 2021 it adopted a [landmark resolution \(48/14\)](#) recognizing for the first time that **having a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a human right**. Through its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) – involving a periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 United Nations Member States – the HRC has directly addressed Member States with recommendations concerning their (lack of) human rights/equality-sensitive climate policies. Between 2008 and 2018, States made 114 recommendations explicitly addressing climate change. Nauru, Kiribati, the United States of America, Samoa and Tuvalu received the largest number of climate change-related recommendations during the first and second UPR cycles. The Maldives, the Philippines, Haiti, Sierra Leone and Bangladesh were the States that made most climate-related recommendations during these two cycles. [The special procedures of the Human Rights Council](#) – comprising independent experts, special rapporteurs, and working groups – have also been at the forefront of integrating climate change into human rights discussions. Among others, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment has been instrumental in articulating the relationship between a healthy environment and human rights, as well as the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights whose reports have underscored the disproportionate effects of climate change on the poorest populations; the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples' Rights has highlighted how climate change threatens indigenous peoples' lands, resources, and cultural heritage, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change (established by the HRC in 2021) has marked a significant institutional commitment to this issue.

The UN disaster risk reduction framework has also progressively evolved over time with its latest agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), which emphasizes the need for inclusive disaster risk reduction strategies and recognizes the disproportionate impact of climate-related disasters on vulnerable groups. However, there has to be a **broader and more people-centred preventive approach to disaster risk reduction**, which needs to be multi-hazard and multisectoral, inclusive, and accessible to be efficient and effective. While recognizing their leading, regulatory, and coordination role, Governments should engage with relevant stakeholders, including women, children



and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners, and older persons in the design and implementation of policies, plans, and standards. There is a need for the public and private sectors and civil society organizations, as well as academia and scientific and research institutions, to work more closely together and to create opportunities for collaboration.

In the European Union context, the Green Deal Climate law (EU) 2018/1999 constitutes a comprehensive strategy aimed at transforming the EU into a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy, by ensuring no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050 and economic growth decoupled from resource use. Furthermore, the Fit for 55 plan aims to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. One-third of the €1.8 trillion investments from the NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan, and the EU's seven-year budget will finance the European Green Deal.



Source: [The EU Green Deal – a roadmap to sustainable economies.](#)

Together with the EU Green Deal and the Fit for 55, the 8th Environment Action Programme, the European Pillar of Social Rights constitute the EU policy and legal framework addressing the climate and fundamental rights and equality nexus, to be read in line with UN Sustainable Development Goals and the principle to “leave no one behind”. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights also enshrines such principles, by including the right to environmental protection (Article 27), a principle which should be considered in conjunction with the right to non-discrimination (Article 21), and the principle of equality between women and men (Article 23), among others.

Furthermore, the [Just Transition Mechanism](#) aims to ensure that the transition towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way, leaving no one behind, by providing targeted support to help

mobilize around €55 billion over the period 2021-2027 in the most affected regions, i.e. that are the most carbon-intensive or with the most people working in fossil fuels, to alleviate the socio-economic impact of the transition. Member States can get access by preparing territorial just transition plans that cover the period up to 2030, identifying the territories that should get the most support. The plans should also set out ways to best address social, economic, and environmental challenges.

In this sense, the [Social Climate Fund \(2027-2032\)](#) is an additional key solidarity tool providing Member States with dedicated funding so that the most affected vulnerable groups, such as households in energy or transport poverty, are directly supported, and not left behind during the green transition. Member States may use the SCF to support structural measures and investments in energy efficiency and renovation of buildings, clean heating and cooling, and integration of renewable energy, as well as in zero- and low-emission mobility solutions.

The EU framework further includes the [Energy Efficiency Directive \(revised EU/2023/1791\)](#), requiring Member States to ensure that the competent authorities take actions to mitigate significant negative direct or indirect impacts of energy efficiency measures on energy-poor, low-income households or vulnerable groups when designing and implementing energy efficiency measures, and the [Common Provisions Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021](#), laying down rules to govern 8 EU funds and enabling conditionality. The regulation provides a horizontal principle to ensure respect for fundamental rights and compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the implementation of the funds, however without including notably the upcoming Social Climate Fund (2026) and the Next Generation Fund (2021-2026).

Despite the complex theoretical architecture grounded in principle on the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Union of Equality, the existing framework, however, is still largely human rights- and equality-blind in practice. It lacks an explicit grounding on the human rights approach, reinforces existing inequalities, places excessively disproportionate burdens on groups in vulnerable situations without addressing documented adverse effects on specific grounds of discrimination in a systematic manner, with energy poverty hitting those already at the margins and lacking equal access to essential services (mostly people of different ethnic or immigrant backgrounds, as found by [FRA research](#)). Lack of data, especially disaggregated data to picture adverse effects on groups in particularly vulnerable situations, and systematic monitoring and enforcement also still remain critical challenges. Finally, human rights and equality considerations tend to be ex-post concerns, if at all taken into account, while it is critical that the approach shifts towards the effective undertaking of **ex-ante human rights and equality impact assessments of climate policy**.


Finally, the Council of Europe (CoE) has increasingly recognized the intersection between climate and environmental issues, human rights, and equality. While the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) does not explicitly mention the right to a healthy environment, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has interpreted certain rights under the ECHR to encompass environmental concerns. Key provisions include Article 2 (Right to Life) which the ECtHR has linked to environmental harm, particularly where states fail to mitigate or prevent risks that threaten human lives, Article 8 (Right to Respect for Private and Family Life) which has been interpreted to include protection from severe

environmental pollution or degradation that affects individuals' well-being and home life, and Article 14 (Prohibition of Discrimination) acknowledging that environmental harms that disproportionately affect vulnerable groups may implicate equality concerns under this article.

The ECtHR has gradually shaped its approach to climate litigation, which is experiencing a significant momentum both in Europe and across the globe with judicial bodies adjudicating similar cases and drafting advisory opinions, reflecting a growing acknowledgment of climate and environmental challenges. From initial cases primarily about localized environmental issues, the Court has progressively moved to address broader claims and, finally, climate-specific cases, by increasingly utilizing arguments invoking intergenerational equity, the precautionary principle, and the need for systemic state action to mitigate climate impacts, acknowledging a strong nexus between climate concerns, human rights, and equality.

In the landmark case [Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland](#), four women and an association of senior women (Senior Women for Climate Protection Switzerland) took the Swiss government to the European Court of Human Rights in November 2020 alleging that their health was threatened by heat waves made increasingly worse by the climate crisis. While the Court declared the four women's complaint inadmissible due to a lack of victim status under the Convention, it found that the association had the right (*locus standi*) to bring a complaint regarding the threats arising from climate change in the respondent State. The Court held that the special feature of climate change as a common concern of humankind and the need to promote intergenerational burden-sharing rendered it appropriate, under certain circumstances, to allow legal action by associations in the context of climate change, in essence allowing a form of collective action in such cases. On 9 April 2024, the Court ruled in favour of the association, finding a violation of Article 8 and Article 6 § 1. The Court found that Article 8 of the Convention encompasses a right to effective protection by the State authorities from the serious adverse effects of climate change on lives, health, well-being and quality of life. The Court found that Switzerland failed to comply with its positive obligations under the Convention concerning climate change, with critical gaps in establishing a relevant domestic regulatory framework, and failing to act in time and in an appropriate way. In addition, the Court found that Article 6 § 1 of the Convention applied to the applicant association's complaint concerning effective implementation of the mitigation measures under existing domestic law.

Despite the prominent roles of the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and the conclusions of the [European Committee of the European Social Charter](#) - which has interpreted certain provisions to encompass environmental concerns, particularly when they impact social rights - affirming the inter-connections between climate, environment, and human rights, the Council of Europe does not still provide for a binding right to healthy and clean environment within its jurisdiction. Accordingly, ongoing discussions concern the potential adoption of an **Additional Protocol to the ECHR on the Right to a Healthy Environment**, in line with political commitments made in last year's [Reykjavik Declaration](#). Alternatives may concern an Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter and/or a standalone Convention on Human Rights and the Environment.



4. How can Equality Bodies act to foster equality-sensitive climate policy?

Equality bodies can contribute profoundly to the success of a fair climate policy, as they have a great deal of knowledge about the (re)production of inequality structures on the ground, in national, regional, and local contexts. Given this specific unique expertise, they can make a significant contribution to creating fairer local, national, and international mitigation and adaptation policies, by making sure that inequality is not exacerbated, thereby contributing to reducing emissions.

Equality Bodies, civil society, and all organizations engaged on the ground, have critical roles to help change human rights mechanisms and act as bridges between the people impacted and the international and EU frameworks. The main element of a human rights-based approach is to put people first and that is the perspective that Equality Bodies can bring to the table by, for instance:

1. **Reflecting on climate change-related implications of equality initiatives and vice versa.** Considering that climate change is both a cause and consequence of inequality, it is necessary, on one hand, that Equality Bodies monitor the development of equality measures, which could and should be conceived in a way to promote sustainable behaviours. On the other hand, climate measures should incorporate equality mainstreaming to make sure that they do not target specific groups in vulnerable situations, whose vulnerability may be exacerbated, and that rather place the burden of adaptation and mitigation proportionately and mostly on the polluting elites.
2. **Contributing to the work of UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures,** when possible, by fostering an equality- and climate-sensitive review of national measures and policies in place. While several multi-mandate National Equality Bodies have experience in submitting, for example, parallel reports to UN Treaty Bodies (such as the CEDAW, CRPD, or CERD), these reports often lack climate-related considerations, despite – as described above – the links that these bodies have enshrined in their activities. It is therefore essential that Equality Bodies move towards including such considerations when undertaking international reporting, in order to ensure a holistic approach to equality and justice, which includes climate justice.
3. **Intervening in climate change law-making at the national and local level,** ensuring that an equality perspective is included in national climate strategies, as well as in the implementation of EU Green Deal policies, by establishing contacts with the relevant national authorities and engaging in regular consultations, giving recommendations, and exchanging expertise in order to contribute to breaking the silos between climate and equality experts.
4. **Contributing to the EU Social Climate Fund through the development of National Social Climate Plans** following a country-wide consultation, in which Equality Bodies may play a crucial role in shedding light on specific equality implications of climate policies in certain local areas and advocating for structural measures. It is advisable that, to ensure effective intervention in this consultative process, Equality Bodies contact the relevant [designated national authorities](#) responsible for the drafting of the plans (often being Ministries of Environment and/or Climate) in order to ensure engagement in discussions with civil society and relevant stakeholders. Member States will have to submit these plans to the European Commission by **June 2025**.

Afterwards, the Commission will assess the plans and disburse payments to the Member States only if the milestones and targets set in the plans are achieved.

5. **Engaging in climate litigation, given the emerging momentum in Europe.** The emerging European, as well as global, trend amongst judicial and quasi-judicial bodies recognising climate change as a human rights issue, as well as the natural progression from the existing European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case law to expand to issues of climate change, should push Equality Bodies to reflect on the possibility, when available to them, to engage in and/or contribute to human rights- and equality-based (strategic) litigation on climate change-related issues. The unique contribution of EBs could enhance the claims of individuals suffering deprivation of rights due to changing climate conditions exacerbated by a pre-existing discrimination based on one, multiple or intersectional grounds. Equality Bodies could enrich the Court's deliberations by providing expertise on broader legal and social contexts, clarifying technical and scientific matters, and highlighting marginalized, underrepresented or vulnerable populations whose rights may be affected through, for instance, the submissions of Third-Party Interventions (TPI), either in an autonomous manner, or in collaboration with other entities. To give a few examples, discussed in the Equinet Seminar as well, the Human Rights Centre of the University of Ghent has submitted a [TPI](#) in the landmark case [Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland](#), while Amnesty International has produced a [TPI](#) in collaboration with several other actors, including research institutes, individual scholars, and other Non-Governmental Organizations in the famous case [Claudia Duarte Agostinho and Others v. Portugal and 32 Other States](#).



5. Examples of Equality Bodies' actions: Equality mainstreaming in climate policy



5.1 Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (UNIA) in Belgium

In 2023, the **Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (UNIA) in Belgium** set out a series of recommendations for more inclusive mobility measures to be taken into account by the federal government. Several regional governments in Belgium developed mobility measures such as low-emission zones (LEZ), smart mileage taxation and limited access zones. While these measures aimed to guarantee more road safety, fewer traffic jams, a healthy living environment, better air quality and thus fight against climate change, particularly for socially vulnerable groups who are more likely to live in more polluted urban neighbourhoods, UNIA found that the measures may have a negative impact on the mobility and social participation of these groups, based on specific grounds of discrimination (i.e. disability, age, state of health, wealth, family responsibilities/family composition, social condition). For example, people with disabilities, the elderly and families with (young) children do not always have sufficient resources to buy an electric car; access restriction measures may have a significant impact on people with disabilities and chronically ill people who receive care and support at home; in large cities, gentrification can also impact rent and housing prices and, as a result, residents move to the more affordable outskirts and may need to struggle to afford commuting. Accordingly, UNIA published [10 recommendations for inclusive mobility measures](#) with the aim to ensure a balance between sustainable mobility and its impact on vulnerable groups.

5.2 Human Rights and Equality Commission in Ireland

The **Human Rights and Equality Commission in Ireland** has been working on climate justice since 2022. In 2023, it published a [Policy Statement on a Just Transition](#) and a related [campaign video](#) highlighting the human rights and equality issues at stake, including for structurally vulnerable groups, and calling for the establishment of a Just Transition Commission. An [annual poll](#) distributed in 2022 showed that 61% of respondents agreed that climate change is a human rights and equality issue, while only 25% believed that the Government was doing enough to address climate change. It further showed a clear agreement for using public money to subsidise renewable energy and ensure a fair transition, but not for increasing taxes on fossil fuels. Furthermore, the Irish Commission holds a good example in intervening in international reporting. Indeed, in 2023 they joined the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\) Voluntary National Review](#), compiled a list of priorities, including with reference to climate change, prior to Reporting to the UN CEDAW Committee, and contributing to the ICESCR 8th periodic review with equality/climate considerations.

5.3 Defender of Rights in France

The **Defender of Rights in France** has experience in working on the climate/equality nexus despite the difficulty for fundamental rights and equality considerations to enter the space of climate law and policy. While the Defender of Rights may address climate issues as a Children Ombudsperson, an Ombudsperson, an external oversight authority on police behaviour, a whistleblower authority, and an Equality Body, it has struggled particularly in activating the latter mandate on this front. From a children's rights perspective, the Defender has worked on ensuring the right of children to a healthy



environment and intergenerational fairness, by involving around 3300 children on discussing the issues of environment and climate change and inequality, given the assumption that some children may be more exposed to climate-related risks than others because of social and territorial inequalities (e.g. Roma children and children from over-seas territories). Accordingly, in 2024 it published an annual report on [Le droit des enfants à un environnement sain: protéger l'enfance, préserver l'avenir](#). The Defender has also worked on inequality and the right to clean water, by looking in particular at access to water in French overseas territories ([Services publics aux Antilles: garantir l'accès aux droits](#)) and Roma settlements, as well as the lack of safe housing for Roma people, often residing in halting sites proved to be placed in 51% of cases near polluting facilities. Accordingly, the Defender of Rights has submitted a recommendation to amend the French legislation concerning municipalities' competence in running halting sites and applying distance rules from polluted areas, to thereby fight Roma people's structural discrimination. Moreover, in 2025, a final report related to the right of water discussed from an anti-discrimination perspective will be published.

5.4 Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities in Croatia

The **Croatian Ombudsman** has been implementing the human rights-based approach to climate change within its Ombudsman and National Human Rights Institution mandates since 2013, by actively monitoring and promoting the constitutional right to the healthy life and healthy environment in 2013 and the universal right to a healthy, clean and sustainable environment in 2022. Since 2023, the Ombudsman has started researching on the impacts of climate change on equality within its National Equality Body mandate. Its work has focused on: a) everyday challenges and ongoing burdens from an individual or group perspective; b) access to services and environmental pollution, improper waste management, excessive noise, biodiversity; and c) climate change-related catastrophic events (floods, fires, storms etc.) and the rights of vulnerable groups within emergencies. In these fields, the Ombudsman undertakes a wide range of actions, including:

- ✓ Investigation procedures activated either by citizens' complaints or under the Ombudswoman's own initiative cases;
- ✓ Field visits (e.g. to flooded areas, waste disposal locations, etc.);
- ✓ Interviews with stakeholders and affected citizens;
- ✓ Collection of available data;
- ✓ Analysis of national and local regulations and news coverage;
- ✓ Participation in the work of parliamentary bodies (e.g. Committee for the Protection of Environment and Nature);
- ✓ Submission of special reports to the Parliament and drafting of annual reports (e.g. with a specific chapter on the constitutional right to the healthy life and healthy environment).

An example of the latter is the Special Report on Human Rights during the Catastrophe caused by the Floods in Eastern Croatia, submitted by the Ombudsman in 2014. Its recommendations were intended and are applicable for other future emergency situations with the potential to affect the level of the exercise of human rights in the areas of protection and rescue provision, social welfare, health care, humanitarian aid, rehabilitation and reconstruction, information provision and free legal aid. In 2020, the Ombudsman also published a [Special Report on the Right to a Healthy Life and Climate Change in the Republic of Croatia \(2013-2020\) in the Context of the Global Climate Movement and the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)

5.5 Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) in Portugal

The **Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) in Portugal** provides another example of good practice given its participation in an EU-funded project, which may provide the additional resources needed to allocate time and capacity to climate-related issues within a National Equality Body. Indeed, they joined an EU project on “Tackling Climate Change with Gender Equality”, with the aim to showcase how gender equality and social and environmental justice are strictly intertwined, and establish an inclusive, long-term awareness-raising plan and global citizenship campaign to create a more equal and sustainable global society.



**6. Whom can Equality
Bodies turn to and
collaborate with? Working
together is key**



While Equality Bodies are well-placed institutions to unveil structural discriminations fuelling climate change and activate their powers to ensure that climate and social justice go hand in hand, at the same time, they can only be truly effective and strategic when they share powers, functions, and expertise with other institutions, including civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, research institutes and academia, among others. The following lines will present a few examples of the potential of National Equality Bodies' collaboration with partners.

6.1 Disability Ombudswoman in Austria

The **Disability Ombudswoman in Austria** has been involved in the field of climate change as an additional avenue to treat disability as a cross-cutting issue and to pose Equality Bodies as discourse leaders, both independently as well as in cooperation with others. This activity has arisen from the necessity of emergency concepts and strategies that are designed for and with people with disabilities in the context of natural disasters, for example, and given the acknowledgment that the climate Crisis is an inherent question of equality, with different responsibilities in the triggering of the crisis, different effects on different groups of people, including persons with disabilities. The Austrian Disability Ombudsperson is part of the Austrian Monitoring Committee on the UN CRDP and regularly cooperates with political parties and ministries thanks to an institutionalised contact established at the administrative level. Given such established cooperation and recent case-law developments including the pending case in front of the ECtHR [Müllner v. Austria](#), submitted in 2021, the Ombudsperson has started collaborating with the law firm that is handling the case as well as, more generally, with Ökobüro, a confederation of 21 Austrian organizations engaged in environmental, nature, and animal protection, with the aim to carry out investigations into discrimination against persons with disabilities, publish reports and make recommendations. Thanks to this collaboration, the Ombudsperson planned a scientific study on the intersection of environmental law and the rights of individuals with disabilities.

6.2 National Centre for Human Rights in Slovakia

The **National Centre for Human Rights in Slovakia** has a track record of cooperation with a variety of civil society organization working on climate change, biodiversity, democracy and the rule of law. In the field of climate justice, the Centre has started ad-hoc consultation and cooperation with the aim to raise awareness about the environment, equality and human rights. Accordingly, it has engaged in consultations for inputs on climate change and the right to a healthy environment in collaboration with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), submitted recommendations within legislative procedures, and participated in national roundtables on the development of indicators to assess the right to a healthy environment. The Centre has additionally worked on the protection of environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) by producing a survey in 2022 mapping the experience of EHRDs with various forms of harassment and collecting 11 cases of threats of violence and defamation. In 2024, the Centre also hosted a visit of the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention, Michel Forst, and took part in a workshop for activists and a closed-door meeting with civil servants. On climate policy, the Centre has strategically engaged in cooperation with an NGO, Climate Coalition, which has been particularly successful in involving the Centre in national high-level consultations, including a meeting with a national Ministry, on the Slovak

Climate Change Act, as well as in submitting recommendations within formal legislation procedure, and developing a media campaign for the adoption of a strong Climate Change Act. Finally, in 2025, the Centre will be part of the evaluation of the national recovery and resilience implementation plan, ensuring an equality perspective in its assessment.





7. Conclusion



Many inter-related issues arise when discussing the nexus between climate, environment and equality. Indeed, although National Equality Bodies have not been at the forefront of promoting equitable climate policy so far, as discussed, climate change is inherently a question of equality. And this is the key reason why Equality Bodies, alongside other relevant actors, have the potential to play a key role in the climate crisis and bring their equality and non-discrimination unique expertise to the core of reflections and policy-making on climate change and environmental protection. Even in this untraditional stream of work for equality experts, Equinet's work has proved and underscored how, on the contrary, the engagement of Equality Bodies, alongside climate experts, is crucial to tackling climate change effectively. Once again, even on this front, Equality Bodies, as gate openers, may be important bridges to ensure a socially and environmentally sustainable future for all.



Equinet Member Equality Bodies

ALBANIA

Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination
www.kmd.al

AUSTRIA

Austrian Disability Ombudsperson
www.behindertenanwalt.gv.at

AUSTRIA

Ombud for Equal Treatment
www.gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft.gv.at

BELGIUM

Institute for the Equality of Women and Men
www.igvm-iefh.belgium.be

BELGIUM

Unia (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities)
www.unia.be

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina
www.ombudsmen.gov.ba

BULGARIA

Commission for Protection against Discrimination
www.kzd-nondiscrimination.com

CROATIA

Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia
www.ombudsman.hr

CROATIA

Gender Equality Ombudsperson
www.prs.hr

CROATIA

Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities
www.posi.hr

CYPRUS

Office of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights
www.ombudsman.gov.cy

CZECH REPUBLIC

Public Defender of Rights
www.ochrance.cz

DENMARK

Danish Institute for Human Rights
www.humanrights.dk

ESTONIA

Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner
www.volinik.ee

FINLAND

Non-Discrimination Ombudsman
www.syrjinta.fi

FINLAND

Ombudsman for Equality
www.tasa-arvo.fi

FRANCE

Defender of Rights
www.defenseurdesdroits.fr

GEORGIA

Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia
www.ombudsman.ge

GERMANY

Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency
www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de

GREECE

Greek Ombudsman
www.synigoros.gr

HUNGARY

Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights
www.ajbh.hu

IRELAND

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
www.ihrec.ie

ITALY

National Office against Racial Discrimination
www.unar.it

KOSOVO*

Ombudsperson Institution
<https://oik-rks.org/>

LATVIA

Ombudsman's Office of the Republic of Latvia
www.tiesibsargs.lv

LITHUANIA

Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson
www.lygybe.lt

LUXEMBURG

Centre for Equal Treatment
www.cet.lu

MALTA

Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
www.crpdp.org.mt

MALTA

National Commission for the Promotion of Equality
ncpe.gov.mt

MOLDOVA

Equality Council
www.egalitate.md

MONTENEGRO

Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (Ombudsman)
www.ombudsman.co.me

NETHERLANDS

Netherlands Institute for Human Rights
www.mensenrechten.nl

NORTH MACEDONIA

Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination
www.kszd.mk

NORWAY

Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud
www.ldo.no

POLAND

Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Poland
bip.brpo.gov.pl

PORTUGAL

Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality
www.cig.gov.pt

PORTUGAL

Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment
cite.gov.pt

ROMANIA

National Council for Combating Discrimination
www.cncd.ro

SERBIA

Commissioner for Protection of Equality
www.ravnopravnost.gov.rs

SLOVAKIA

Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
www.snslnp.sk

SLOVENIA

Advocate of the Principle of Equality
www.zagovornik.si

SPAIN

Council for the Elimination of Ethnic or Racial Discrimination
igualdadynodiscriminacion.igualdad.gob.es

SPAIN

Institute of Women
www.inmujeres.gob.es

SWEDEN

Equality Ombudsman
www.do.se

UKRAINE

Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights
www.ombudsman.gov.ua

UNITED KINGDOM - GREAT BRITAIN

Equality and Human Rights Commission
www.equalityhumanrights.com

UNITED KINGDOM - NORTHERN IRELAND

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
www.equalityni.org

** This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.*



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