
MANIFESTO

FOR AN INTERGENERATIONALLY JUST POST-GROWTH EUROPEAN ECONOMY

May 2023



The science is clear: as young people, we are set to inherit an uninhabitable planet. The eco-social crisis has put our future at risk—defeating the objectives of intergenerational justice—and it is already impacting the lives of many around the world. This crisis is driven by the current capitalist economic system—our obsession with endless pursuit of growth and profit is at odds with finite planetary boundaries and human wellbeing. We must put an end to it! Alongside hundreds of youth-led social movements around the world protesting against the endless exploitation and extraction that characterises the current system, we, as youth organisations, demand a post-growth and post-colonial society. In this manifesto, we call for a change in the current economic system and introduce specific and actionable policy proposals directed at EU policymakers, outlining how this change can be achieved.

Introducing the scene: Why do we need a new economic system?

1. Our world is facing an eco-social crisis threatening the lives of future generations. The eco-social crisis is manifested through complex and interlinking environmental and social emergencies from climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution to ever-worsening inequality, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, widespread political instability, food shortages, mental health crises and many others. Put simply, we are exceeding several planetary boundaries while depreciating quality of life, hence human wellbeing—for current and, particularly, future generations.

2. This eco-social crisis is driven by the global capitalist system, centred around perpetual economic expansion (growth) and accumulation. The current system is organised around profit maximisation rather than the fulfilment of human needs, which is reflected in the endless extraction of materials and exploitation of labour, especially in the Global South. Capitalism is rooted in colonialism, which enabled the rise of the cultural, political, and economic dominance of the Global North through the oppression and exploitation of the Global South and sustains this unequal power relationship through perpetuating neo-imperial exploitation. This system relies on an ideology based on competition and individualism, which helps deprioritise collective welfare and incentivise private accumulation at all costs.

3. Our obsession with economic expansion clashes with finite planetary boundaries. A constant desire to increase economic output requires an ever-increasing quantity of inputs—both labour and resources—driving overproduction and overconsumption. Under capitalism, inputs need to be obtained as cheaply as possible, introducing pressures to source cheaper labour, depress wages and undermine labour and environmental regulation.

4. While the EU attempts to tackle some of these challenges through the European Green Deal, a much wider socioeconomic and ecological transformation is needed. The European Green Deal endorses green growth as a solution, promising a green and just transition through gradual reductions in fossil fuels, decoupling resource use from economic growth, sustainable finance, and the development of green technologies. Green growth, however, fails to address the underlying causes of the current crisis, which are rooted in the global capitalist system and stem from the pervasive pursuit of economic growth.

5. The impacts of this eco-social crisis are unequal. The consequences of the crisis work along the well-known structures of oppression delineated along the lines of gender, sexuality, nationality, racialised identities, ethnicity, physical ability and the intersections of these structures and identities, compounding existing inequalities. As we discuss the futures of youth, we must acknowledge that this crisis is the lived reality of many youths in the Global South—whose countries are most affected by the crisis caused by the overproduction and -consumption of the Global North—and impacts women and people of colour (POC) most. Solutions which do not prioritise reversing this unequal exchange not only further exclude marginalised voices from the climate discourse but also drive imperialist environmentalism, powering the Global North's transition through exploiting the Global South.

Solutions: Policy proposals for a post-growth and post-colonial future

1. To incentivise a green and just transition, the EU must reform its fiscal framework. The EU's current fiscal framework prioritises macroeconomic objectives such as GDP growth and maintaining stable budget deficits and debt levels. Its strict fiscal rules limit Member States' flexibility and resources to pursue a green and just transition through long-term sustainable investments. The EU should open the necessary fiscal space for large-scale public investments to support a transition towards a wellbeing economy. The economic governance reform should further include a progressive tax reform. Currently, taxes in the EU are neither green nor fair.¹ Tax reform should move the fiscal burden away from labour and towards environmentally-harmful, high-income and resource-intensive industries and individuals.

2. We must halt overproduction and -consumption, and prioritise resource redistribution. We must eliminate overproduction through downscaling the manufacturing of resource-intensive goods and services such as the meat industry, automotive industry, fashion, and long-distance travel for leisure/business², and limit material and energy use across all stages of the value chain. This requires democratising resource distribution and economic decision-making, through, for example, cooperative forms of ownership. Moreover, we must prioritise decolonial justice before the ecological sustainability of the Global North through reverting unequal distribution of resources, ending resource and labour exploitation across the supply chain, funding Loss & Damages, and empowering the transition of the Global South through financial support and capacity- and technology-sharing.³

3. Policymaking priorities need to shift towards wellbeing and social services. The EU should allocate more resources to fund social and public services, striving for a system of universal basic services, including affordable housing⁴, green job guarantees, high-quality healthcare including mental healthcare, accessible primary and secondary education, including free tertiary education, public transportation and environmental protection. Additionally, the EU should push for an implementation of a universal basic income scheme across its Member States.⁵ These measures are key to improving children's wellbeing, reducing socioeconomic disparities and eradicating youth poverty.

4. Intergenerational justice requires equal employment opportunities and career choices for young people. Too many green jobs remain out of reach for young people due to accessibility and affordability barriers. To remove these obstacles, the EU should introduce a mandatory minimum wage and ban unpaid internships and traineeships across Member States. The EU should encourage national thresholds for the share of temporary employees, incentivise the conversion of temporary contracts into permanent ones, and ensure free training for temporary workers.⁷ To safeguard employees' rights, it should further aim to protect collective bargaining and strengthen union rights. Crucially, the EU must strengthen hiring and employment protections for POC, LGBTQIA people, and people with disabilities.

5. Instead of artificially sustaining an already dying—and deadly—fossil fuel industry, the EU should seek to dismantle it. Environmental damage and labour exploitation are at the heart of fossil fuel companies' business models. The EU should phase out all fossil production by 2034, in line with the 1.5C goal⁸, and halt the development of all new fossil fuel infrastructure, including both import terminals and drilling projects, some of which are currently treated as priority projects in a direct breach of EU's own laws and the Paris Agreement.^{9,10} This must include an immediate end to all fossil fuel subsidies—which in many Member States outstrip subsidies to renewable energy^{11,12,13}—including direct subsidies, tax benefits and consumption subsidies, which help artificially maintain fossil fuels' competitiveness compared to green alternatives. These funds should instead be directed to green alternatives and the development of a connected European energy grid and infrastructure. The EU should further withdraw from the Energy Charter Treaty, which enables corporations to sue countries over fossil fuel subsidy phase-outs.¹⁴

5. We need to fundamentally rethink our financial-monetary system. Our current system fails to provide the incentives and guidance needed to transition to a post-growth and ecologically viable society. The EU needs to regulate, localise, de-financialise, decommodify, and reorient money and finance. First, we need a well-defined "public taxonomy" of socially valuable economic activities, which should receive small to no interest rates, long maturities, and "no collateralisation" to guide financial institutions based or operating in the EU.¹⁵ Second, we need strong financial regulation and disconnection of pensions and risk-sharing institutions from financial markets

financial markets to ensure a flourishing life for both current and future generations. Third, the lending and debt system needs to be reconstructed by introducing and expanding locally rooted and low-interest public banking and by emphasising long-term investments to reduce growth pressures. This must be done with the Global South in mind, cancelling all debt and shifting the system of development assistance from rigid conditionality to solidarity, emphasising bottom-up participatory and reflexive development.

6. To further intergenerational justice, the EU should adopt the Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis IBPA framework in policy-making. Socio-economic and climate policies have redistributive impacts.¹⁶ Adopting a policy without considering its effects on underrepresented groups, particularly youth and marginalised communities, is not only irresponsible but potentially harmful. To ensure equitable impact, the EU should adopt the IBPA framework at all stages of policy design, implementation and evaluation. IBPA is a tested solution¹⁷, developed and refined through an iterative, participatory process inclusive of multiple sectors.¹⁸ Its adoption should be complemented by intersectional approaches to data collection and analysis including drawing on qualitative data, including knowledges of the Global South.

Young people, especially those of marginalised identities, are at the forefront of the current crisis. To ensure that they are not left behind in the transition to a post-growth economic system, we additionally call for active support and engagement of youth across the following dimensions

7. The EU must end “youth-washing” and ensure meaningful youth participation in formal policy processes. While currently young people are sometimes consulted on policy to increase its legitimacy, their “advice” is neither legally binding nor do they have sufficient power to hold policymakers accountable—this is youth-washing! The EU and its Member States should develop formal channels of youth involvement throughout the whole policymaking process at the EU, national, regional, and local levels, prioritising the representation of marginalised communities. To further ensure that youth participation is meaningful, minimum quotas of young representatives for local and national governments should be mandated. The EU should establish a permanent forum, alongside temporary formats such as youth assemblies, to enable youth to develop and deliberate policy proposals addressing the transition to a post-growth system.

8. Enable young people to design their own future through supporting youth-led initiatives. An intergenerationally just future is one imagined and designed by young people, which requires not only involving young people in top-down policy processes but also supporting youth-led grassroots initiatives. The EU and its Member States should increase funding for youth-led projects and organisations, establish structured platforms and programmes with significant resources to encourage youth-led initiatives, and ensure that information on funding mechanisms and application processes is accessible and transparent. Ensuring young people's voices are being heard also means legislating to protect their right to protest and discouraging punitive tactics deployed by Member States to disperse protesters.

NOTE: This manifesto was drafted and promoted as a time-bound project between Generation Climate Europe (GCE) and the Federation of Young European Greens (FYEG). This manifesto does not constitute a direct affiliation or endorsement of FYEG's political platform, role or activities.

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