ACT NOW

What should we do?

The essentials in English: analyses and solutions for a new orientation towards sustainability and fairness

Gottfried Müller



What should we do?

in the face of climate change



What should we do?

in the face of great poverty and inequality



What should we do?

with an unjust economic system



We can act. Now.

was-sollen-wir-tun.de · Status 27 November 2026

Act now

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The essentials in English: analyses and solutions for a new orientation towards sustainability and fairness

Gottfried Müller

The English booklet of the German website was-sollen-wir-tun.de · Status 27 November 2026 · Version 2026-11-27b

How to read this booklet

This booklet summarises the German website in English. **Black** are Gottfried Müller's own words, translated faithfully. **Blue** are summaries, updates and translations prepared with AI assistance from the German pages, with sources.

All sources are clickable and open in your browser. References to other chapters jump within the booklet; "German page" links lead to the full German text on the website. The contents and the bookmarks of your PDF reader lead directly to every chapter. The footer of every page takes you back to the contents.

The website is updated continuously. The latest version of this booklet can be downloaded at was-sollen-wir-tun.de – Essentials in English.

Imprint and picture credits: see appendix (in German).

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The essentials at a glance

Climate, the resources of the Earth, global fairness – and how we can act well and effectively. A condensed English version of this German website, with sources.

Introduction

Essentials in English: why this site exists

What should we do? This site asks that question about the climate, the resources of the Earth and global fairness – and answers it with facts, sources and concrete steps. This page condenses the most important content of the German site for international readers.

This website wants to show how things stand with preserving the foundations of our life and with global justice – and what we can do, personally and politically. Without glossing over anything. For me the result (November 2026) is very clear: humanity, and above all those who hold the power to decide, are in the process of destroying the foundations of our life. To keep up prosperity in the "developed" countries, we accept blatant injustice. Many of the forces that wield power are not democratically legitimised.

The compass behind every page: justice, equal dignity of all people, respect for life, and preserving the foundations of life. In practice that means protecting nature for its own value, avoiding the suffering of sentient beings, and standing in solidarity with those who carry the burdens.

How the site works: texts in black are written by Gottfried Müller, personal and with his own subjective stance. Texts in blue are results of AI-assisted research with sources. Numbers carry their date. Where science is genuinely divided, the site says so.

> *"The only truly good reason to strive for a way of life that tries to be in harmony with nature, with people and with animals is, in the end, love and compassion. However corny that may sound. When we experience the preciousness of all forms of life and our deep connection with them, it no longer matters whether our actions make a difference on the grand scale. If we can achieve something bigger, good. But even if our actions change nothing in the course of the world: just as I tend a flower for its own sake, I can try to treat all things and beings as well as I can – for their own sake."*
>
> *Gottfried Müller, Munich, November 2026*

This page is a translation and summary prepared with AI assistance from the German pages; the author's own words are shown in black.

Climate

Climate

The facts are settled. What is missing is action – at the scale and speed the physics demands.

Humans have heated the Earth by about 1.4 °C – the science is settled. At today's emissions

the carbon budget for 1.5 °C is gone in a little over three years, and the policies actually in place lead to about 2.8 °C by 2100. The solutions exist and are mostly affordable: wind and solar, heat pumps, rail and bikes, plant-rich food, a CO2 price with social compensation. What is missing is political will – and that only comes when people demand it.

- About 1.4 °C of warming: the human-caused part was 1.37 °C in 2025 (measured global mean in 2025: 1.44 °C above 1850–1900). Source: essd.copernicus.org · German page
- From the start of 2026, about 130 billion tonnes of CO2 remain for a 50 % chance of 1.5 °C – used up in a little over three years at today's emissions. Source: essd.copernicus.org · German page
- Forecast: about 2.8 °C by 2100 with the policies in place today, about 2.6 °C if all national climate plans are implemented (UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2026; Climate Action Tracker: 2.7 °C). Source: climateactiontracker.org · German page
- Fossil CO2 emissions hit a new record in 2025 – about 38 billion tonnes, up roughly 1 %. Source: globalcarbonbudget.org · German page
- Warm-water coral reefs tip at about 1.2 °C (range 1–1.5 °C) – at today's 1.4 °C that threshold is already behind us. Source: zsl.org · German page
- Germany has cut its greenhouse gases by about 48 % since 1990 – but in 2025 by only 0.1 %. The legal target is minus 65 % by 2030. Source: umweltbundesamt.de · German page

→ Climate: the detailed English summary

Where we stand: warming is speeding up

The human-caused part of global warming reached 1.37 °C in 2025 and is currently rising by about 0.27 °C per decade – faster than ever since measurements began. The three years 2023 to 2025 were, on average, more than 1.5 °C warmer than pre-industrial times for the first time. The air contained 426.8 ppm of CO2 in 2025, about 50 % more than before industrialisation and more than at any time in at least two million years.

Responsibility is unequal. Since 1850 the USA has emitted 542 billion tonnes of CO2 – more than a fifth of the world total – followed by China (13 %) and the EU (12 %). Germany, home to just over 1 % of the world's population, is among the ten largest historical emitters. "We only account for 2 %" is no excuse: global emissions are made up of many such small shares.

→ Read more on the German page

Why it is so serious: tipping points

Warming is not a linear process. Melting ice reflects less sunlight, thawing permafrost releases methane, warmer oceans absorb less CO2 – each of these loops drives itself. Once tipping points are crossed, further warming can no longer be stopped by human action. For warm-water corals this has most likely already happened: between January 2023 and September 2025, bleaching-level heat hit about 84 % of the world's reef area. For the Atlantic overturning circulation (AMOC) and the Amazon rainforest, the Global Tipping Points Report 2025 sees a risk of tipping below 2 °C.

The consequences are already measurable. Heat kills around 546,000 people a year on average. Seven of the nine planetary boundaries are now crossed. The remaining uncertainties are about timing, not direction – and uncertainty cuts both ways. Using it to delay action is no longer acceptable.

→ Read more on the German page

Goals and reality

According to the UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2026, 1.5 °C can no longer be held without overshoot; at best, warming peaks at 1.7–1.8 °C around 2050. The new national climate plans of 113 countries cut global emissions by only about 12 % by 2035 compared with 2019 – the COP28 decision says 60 % would be needed. The Dubai summit (2023) agreed for the first time on a "transition away from fossil fuels"; Belém (2025) produced no roadmap for it.

Germany will reach about minus 62.6 % by 2030 instead of the legally required minus 65 % with current policies (UBA projections 2026), mainly because transport and buildings lag behind. At the same time, climate protection has become a legal duty: the German Constitutional Court (2021), the European Court of Human Rights (2024), the Inter-American Court (2025) and the International Court of Justice (2025) have all obliged states to act.

→ Read more on the German page

Denial: who sows doubt, and how to respond

Exxon knew. The company's own researchers projected between 1977 and 2003 a warming of about 0.2 °C per decade – mostly correctly – while its public statements contradicted its own data. The method ("stress uncertainty, manufacture controversy") had been used before on tobacco smoke, acid rain and the ozone hole. Today disinformation targets the solutions more than the science: their cost, effectiveness or fairness.

Denial follows recurring patterns – fake experts, logical fallacies, impossible expectations, cherry-picking and conspiracy myths (FLICC). If you know the tricks, you recognise them. The majority is on your side: in a survey of almost 130,000 people in 125 countries, 89 % wanted more climate action from their government. What works best is talking with people who trust you – family and friends.

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Solutions that work

Climate policy works when it is combined cleverly: of about 1,500 measures in 41 countries, 63 cut emissions significantly, on average by 19 % – mostly in a mix with CO2 prices or energy taxes. In 2025, renewables supplied more than a third of the world's electricity (33.8 %), more than coal. In Germany they reached 55.9 % of public net electricity generation. New solar and wind plants are almost everywhere the cheapest source of power.

Nature and technology help, but they do not replace cutting emissions. Drained peatlands cause about 7 % of Germany's greenhouse gases; technical CO2 removal such as direct air capture is still tiny (about 1.35 million tonnes in 2023). The policy core: an effective CO2 price whose revenue is paid back to the people, clear rules and an end to climate-damaging subsidies.

→ Read more on the German page

Acting yourself - and together

A person in Germany causes about 9.8 tonnes of CO2 equivalents a year; a climate-compatible level would be well below 1 tonne. About half of the footprint hangs on a few big points: flights, car kilometres, heating and electricity. A domestic flight emits about 290 g of greenhouse gases per passenger-kilometre, a long-distance train 26 g. Separating waste is sensible but

weighs little; living without a car saves about 2 tonnes a year, one long-haul flight less about 1.9 tonnes.

Do not hide behind offsets: many certificates do not deliver what they promise. The strongest lever is collective and political action, because it changes the rules for everyone – your "handprint", not just your footprint.

→ Read more on the German page

Resources

Resources of the Earth

Soil, forests, water, species and raw materials are finite. We are spending them as if they were not.

Humanity uses the Earth as if it had 1.73 of them; living like people in Germany would take almost three. Species, forests, water and fish stocks are shrinking, and industrial livestock farming inflicts suffering on hundreds of millions of sentient animals every year in Germany alone. Protection works where it is taken seriously – but no global target is being met fast enough. You can act directly: eat mostly plants, buy less and longer-lasting, repair, leave the car.

- Seven of nine planetary boundaries are crossed; ocean acidification was added in 2025. Source: stockholmresilience.org · German page
- Monitored populations of wild vertebrates have shrunk by 73 % on average between 1970 and 2022 (WWF Living Planet Report 2026). Source: wwf.de · German page
- 37.6 % of marine fish stocks are overfished (data 2023, FAO 2026). Source: doi.org · German page
- Our food causes roughly a third of all human-made greenhouse gases (23–42 %, mean 31 %; IPCC 2022). Source: ipcc.ch · German page
- 4.3 million hectares of tropical primary forest disappeared in 2025 – more than eleven football pitches per minute. Source: globalforestwatch.org · German page
- Germans ate 54.9 kg of meat per person in 2025 – about 1 kg a week, more than three times the maximum of 300 g recommended by the German Nutrition Society (DGE). Source: ble.de · German page

→ Resources of the Earth: the detailed English summary

Living beyond the limits

Seven of the nine planetary boundaries are crossed, all with a worsening trend (Planetary Health Check 2026); only the ozone layer and aerosols are still in the safe zone. In 2026 humanity used as much as if it had 1.73 Earths; Global Overshoot Day was 30 July, Germany's already 10 May. Raw material extraction has tripled in fifty years and could rise by another 60 % by 2060; rich countries use six times as much per person as poor ones.

Forests and water are under pressure. After the record fire year 2024, tropical primary forest loss fell by 36 % in 2025 – still 4.3 million hectares. Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon dropped to 3,335 km² in 2025/26, the lowest since records began in 1988, yet up to 47 % of the Amazon could be stressed to the point of large-scale tipping by 2050. About four billion people face severe water scarcity at least one month a year.

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Species are disappearing

Monitored wildlife populations have declined by 73 % on average since 1970. The IUCN Red List covers 172,620 species, 48,646 of them threatened with extinction; populations of 61 % of all bird species are falling. States still pay 1.4 to 3.3 trillion dollars a year in subsidies that harm nature. In Germany almost half of butterflies and burnet moths are endangered or already extinct.

The world pledged to protect 30 % of land and sea by 2030; so far about 18 % on land and 10 % at sea are protected, and the biodiversity conference in Yerevan (October 2026) found that the pace is insufficient for all 23 targets. Protection works where it is done seriously: the UN High Seas Treaty has applied since January 2026, and targeted conservation has brought the green sea turtle and the Iberian lynx back from the brink.

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End the industrial suffering of animals

In 2025, Germany slaughtered around 48.5 million pigs, cattle, sheep, goats and horses, plus more than 697 million chickens, 27.6 million turkeys and 8.3 million ducks – far more than 750 million animals. These are sentient beings, not production units. Livestock causes about 12 % of all human-made greenhouse gases (FAO); in Germany 76 % of methane comes from agriculture.

Habits are shifting: only 24 % of Germans eat meat daily (2015: 34 %). A mainly plant-based diet could prevent up to 15 million premature deaths a year (EAT-Lancet 2025). Politics moves slowly: chick culling has been banned since 2022, but the state animal-husbandry label has been postponed again, now to October 2027. You do not have to become a perfect vegan – eat clearly less meat and dairy, and start today.

→ Read more on the German page

Food and farming

About 645 million people went hungry in 2025, and for about 2.7 billion a healthy diet is unaffordable. At the same time about a fifth of food reaching shops, restaurants and homes is wasted – 1.05 billion tonnes in 2022, 60 % of it in private households. The FAO estimates the hidden costs of the food system at about 12 trillion US dollars a year, around 70 % of them due to unhealthy diets.

Germany is far from its own goal: 11.2–11.5 % of farmland was organic in 2024, against a target of 30 % by 2030. After the 2024 farmer protests, many environmental rules were weakened or withdrawn. What counts most for the climate is what is on your plate: plant-based instead of meat and dairy matters far more than “regional”.

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Waste, air and water

Germany produced 215 kg of packaging waste per person in 2023, well above the EU average of 177.8 kg. More plastic is still burned than recycled: about 61 % of 5.91 million tonnes of plastic waste went to energy recovery in 2023. A global UN plastics treaty failed in Geneva in August 2025, mainly due to oil-producing states.

Air pollution is the largest environmental health risk: worldwide it contributed to 7.9 million

deaths in 2023, and in the EU about 182,000 people died prematurely from fine particulate matter. Only 9 % of Germany's rivers, lakes and coastal waters are in good ecological condition. New EU packaging rules apply from 12 August 2026.

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Raw materials and mobility

The DR Congo supplies about 75 % of the world's cobalt; Amnesty International documented forced evictions of whole communities for new mines in 2023. In 2022 the world produced 62 million tonnes of e-waste, only 22.3 % of it demonstrably recycled properly. The EU supply-chain law was heavily weakened in 2025/26. Since 23 July 2026 Germany has a right to repair: choose repair over replacement and you get twelve extra months of warranty.

Transport is the problem child of climate policy: in 2025 it emitted 146.3 million tonnes of CO2 equivalents in Germany, 2.1 million tonnes more than in 2024. An electric car sold in Europe in 2025 causes about 73 % fewer greenhouse gases over its life than a petrol car – but fewer and shorter trips, rail, bus and bike come first. Paris shows how fast change can happen: more trips within the city are now made by bike than by car. (Mobility – German page)

→ Read more on the German page

Fairness

Global fairness

Who carries the burdens, who profits – and who decides?

The world is extremely unequal, the fight against hunger and extreme poverty has stalled, and 2025 saw more armed conflicts involving states than any year since 1946. Rich countries share responsibility – through colonial legacies, tax havens, debt, arms, wars, climate change and cut aid. At the same time democracy is in retreat, and much economic and digital power escapes democratic control. The test for fairness: would you accept a rule if you did not know where, and as whom, you would be born?

- The richest 10 % own three quarters of global wealth, the poorer half of humanity only 2 % (World Inequality Report 2026). Source: wir2026.wid.world · German page
- About 824 million people lived in extreme poverty (under 3 US dollars a day) in 2024; the World Bank estimates about 811 million for 2026 – roughly one person in ten. Source: worldbank.org · German page
- About 645 million people went hungry in 2025 – almost 8 % of humanity, about one person in 13 (UN SOFI 2026). Source: doi.org · German page
- 117.8 million people were displaced at the end of 2025, more than two thirds within their own country; 65 % of refugees live in neighbouring countries. Source: uno-fluechtlingshilfe.de · German page
- 74 % of the world's people live in autocracies (V-Dem 2026); only 21 % live in countries Freedom House rates as "free". Source: v-dem.net · German page
- Billionaires' wealth rose by 2.5 trillion to 18.3 trillion US dollars in 2025 (Oxfam, January 2026). Source: oxfam.de · German page

→ Global fairness: the detailed English summary

Poverty, persecution and war

Around 811 million people live in extreme poverty in 2026, and progress has come to a standstill. 266 million people in 47 countries faced acute food crises in 2025; famine was confirmed in Gaza and Sudan. There were 65 armed conflicts involving states – more than ever since 1946 – and about 244,600 people were killed. At the end of 2025, 117.8 million people were displaced; the largest crisis is the war in Sudan.

Rich states carry a documented share of responsibility: colonial legacies, tax havens, debt, arms exports, wars, climate change and cut aid. This applies to the West, but also to China, Russia and the Gulf states. Most refugees stay close to home, and the very poorest often cannot afford to flee. A humane but not naive policy protects the persecuted reliably, opens legal routes for work, helps the neighbouring countries of crises, tackles root causes – and enforces rules fairly and quickly.

If you donate: the most effective health programmes achieve around 100 times as much as average ones. Look for evidence of impact, not just a low overhead rate.

→ Read more on the German page

Overcoming inequality

Inequality is extreme and growing at the top: billionaires' wealth reached 18.3 trillion US dollars in 2025. In Germany the richest 10 % of households own 54 % of net wealth, while the median household has 103,200 euros (Bundesbank, 2023); about 13.3 million people (16.1 %) count as poor. Chances still depend on origin: of 100 children from academic families, 78 start university – from families without a degree, only 25.

There are concrete ways out. A global minimum tax of 2 % on billionaires' wealth could raise 200–250 billion US dollars a year (Zucman report for the G20, 2024); so far no country has implemented it. A UN tax convention is being negotiated – without the USA.

→ Read more on the German page

Gender justice - for women and for men

The site compares 19 countries and draws a clear picture: women have less power, less money and – among older people – less education. Women earn less per hour almost everywhere, from 96 % of men's wages in Poland to 84 % in Germany and 71 % in South Korea. In Nigeria one young woman in three was married as a child; in Egypt 87 % of women have undergone genital mutilation.

Men die earlier in all 19 countries, take their own lives far more often and are more often victims of homicide; young men are falling behind in education. Not every difference is an injustice. The test is John Rawls' "veil of ignorance": would you accept this rule if you did not know whether you would be born a girl or a boy – and in which country?

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Limiting illegitimate power

You do not need conspiracy theories to see the problem: political decisions, even in democracies, are heavily shaped by capital interests, and states struggle to assert themselves against global corporations. Freedom House records the 20th consecutive year of declining freedom. Conspiracy myths even serve the powerful – they divert anger towards invisible enemies instead of real, provable abuses of power.

Those abuses are documented: the EU fined Apple (500 million euros), Meta (200 million) and Google (2.95 billion for its ad business, 890 million under the Digital Markets Act); US courts found that Google abused a monopoly. Four corporations control 61 % of the pesticide market; Edeka, Rewe, Aldi and the Schwarz Group take more than 90 % of German grocery sales (Federal Cartel Office, 2025). Democracy can defend itself – with citizens' assemblies, lobbying rules, antitrust law, and the digital alternatives you choose every day.

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A sustainable economic system

The author's position: today's capitalism is not compatible with sustainable economics. The common good is not its goal but at best a side effect that has to be wrested from it by law – and an economy that uses ever more raw materials and energy cannot grow forever on a finite planet. Fossil energy alone causes about 7 trillion dollars a year in costs that nobody pays in the price (IMF).

Rich countries are decoupling growth from emissions far too slowly: at the pace of the best performers they would need more than 220 years to cut emissions by 95 %. Laws do work – Germany has almost halved its CO2 since 1990 – but no country yet combines a good life for all with a consumption the planet can bear. A merely "green" capitalism is not enough: end the growth of consumption, put the costs of nature into prices, tie ownership to responsibility and clear the way for common-good businesses. About 50 million people lived in modern slavery in 2021.

→ Read more on the German page

Future issues: AI and genetics

AI is a new dimension of economic power, held by very few companies. At least 700 million people use leading AI systems every week. Almost 40 % of jobs worldwide are exposed to AI, about 60 % in rich countries. Data centres used about 415 TWh of electricity in 2024 – around 1.5 % of world power – and could more than double by 2030.

Genetics could create a new form of inequality: the first CRISPR therapy costs about 2.2 million euros per patient in Germany, and US start-ups already sell embryo screening with genetic risk scores. Professional societies warn that such selection is scientifically immature. (Genetics – German page)

→ Read more on the German page

What to do

What should we do?

Values, knowledge, psychology – and the steps that make the biggest difference.

Knowing is not enough – we know, and we still do too little. Act as a consumer and as a citizen; you need both. Your biggest personal levers are the car, flights, electricity, heating and food. But without laws, prices and good infrastructure, individuals stay overwhelmed – so political pressure is essential. Behaviour is contagious, and most people want change but think they are alone. Do what you can, as long as it keeps you well. You do not have to be perfect to start.

- The average carbon footprint in Germany is about 9.8 tonnes per person and year; the goal

is below 1 tonne. Source: umweltbundesamt.de · German page

- 69 % of people worldwide would give 1 % of their income for climate protection – but they estimate that only about 43 % of others would. Source: nature.com · German page
- In an experiment, a committed minority of about 25 % was enough to tip a group norm. Source: asc.upenn.edu · German page
- The top 10 % of earners and consumers cause 35 to 45 % of emissions. Source: ipcc.ch · German page
- Only 36 % of the measurable UN sustainability sub-targets are on track or making moderate progress; 15 % are worse than in 2015. Source: unstats.un.org · German page

→ What should we do?: the detailed English summary

Our value compass

At the beginning there is no theory but an experience: the direct experience of connectedness with everything that lives. Everything that exists has a value that cannot be proven or derived – it can only be experienced, above all in silence. From it follow the dignity of all beings and of nature itself, and four values that guide every topic of the site.

Justice: ideally, it makes no difference to a good life where, with which skin colour or which gender a person is born. Equal dignity: every person has the same basic dignity and rights – it is decided with refugees, minorities and people in other countries whether we have really taken this in. Respect for life: animals, plants and ecosystems are more than resources; respect applies to the individual animal that suffers, the species that dies out and the ecosystem that collapses – and highly developed animals are fellow sentient beings. Preserving the foundations of life: the planet's limits are not negotiable. One rule for knowledge: the values stand firm; the data can be wrong and are corrected as soon as we know better.

Research supports a shared core: in reports from 60 societies, the same seven moral rules – helping family and group, reciprocity, courage, respect, fair sharing and respect for property – were judged good in 961 of 962 observations.

→ Read more on the German page

Why we know and still do not act

Science gives no final proof, but it tests its claims together and in public – that is what makes it trustworthy. Uncertainty is no reason to wait: the greater the uncertainty, the greater the expected damage. Yet knowledge alone does not lead to action. Feelings, habits, group belonging and the structures around us work just as strongly. We push the threat away, as some people do with the diagnosis of a serious illness.

What helps is concrete: correct false claims directly and promptly – fact checks almost never backfire. Make it visible that others care too, because people cooperate when they see others do the same. Guilt about a specific act moves people to make amends; shame mainly leads to withdrawal when nothing seems salvageable. Climate anxiety is widespread: 59 % of young people in ten countries were very or extremely worried in 2021.

→ Read more on the German page

Goals and political action

Eleven years into the UN 2030 Agenda, only 36 % of measurable sub-targets are on track or

progressing moderately. The goals contain a built-in contradiction: goal 8 wants permanent growth, the environmental goals want limits. No country yet meets the basic needs of all its people within planetary boundaries.

The big levers lie with laws, prices and infrastructure. Germany has had a CO2 price since 2021, but there is still no climate dividend paid back to citizens, and the 2030 target (minus 65 %) will be missed on current projections. Courts have become an important route (German Constitutional Court 2021, European Court of Human Rights 2024, International Court of Justice 2025). Citizens' assemblies make bold proposals, but politicians implement few of them. Broad non-violent movements work – the "3.5 % rule" is an observation, not a law of nature. Vote, speak up, join initiatives: act together.

→ Read more on the German page

The checklist: what matters most

Do what is possible for you, as long as it does you good – do not let anyone tell you that you must be consistent in everything or not start at all. Eat mainly plants: what is on your plate counts far more than whether it is regional. Avoid the car wherever possible, switch to bike and public transport, and avoid flying, including for work. If a flight is unavoidable, see a high-standard offset as a donation, not as compensation.

Buy only what gives you lasting joy and lasts long. Choose green electricity with a credible label, and keep your money at a sustainable bank. Pick a group that works for the foundations of life and for fairness, and support it with money or time. Vote for a party that actively protects the foundations of life – judge it by how it votes, not just by its programme. And take at least a quarter of an hour every day free of all distractions, simply to be present.

→ Read more on the German page

Spiritual paths

You can despair of the world when you feel powerless in the face of injustice and the destruction of the foundations of life. But even if our efforts seem insignificant for world events, it makes a lot of sense to live as mindfully as possible. A path into the experience of connectedness can be silence: deep, objectless meditation leads to an experience of being undivided – beyond all religions, denominations and ideologies.

The German page lists centres and groups from Zen, Vipassana, Tibetan Buddhism and Christian mysticism that can accompany you on such a path – many of them also outside Germany. Research is sober: meditation helps measurably, but moderately; that mindfulness alone makes people more environmentally friendly is barely proven so far.

→ Read more on the German page

Act

What you can do - starting today

Take the big levers first: eat mostly plants, leave the car wherever you can, avoid flying, switch to genuinely green electricity and move your money to a sustainable bank. Buy less, buy durable, repair. These steps cut your footprint far more than separating waste ever will.

Then widen your handprint. Talk about the climate, species and fairness with people who trust you – most of them want change too and think they are alone. Join a group, support

organisations whose impact is proven, vote for those who protect the foundations of life, and hold politicians to how they vote. Personal and political action belong together.

And do it for the right reason: not because it is guaranteed to save the world, but because people, animals and nature are precious – for their own sake.

The full website is in German. Your browser's built-in translation works well on every page, and each German page starts with a short summary ("Auf einen Blick") and offers the same choice: "Schnell informiert" (quick read) or "Deep Dive". Found an error? Write to akimuno@posteo.de.

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PART I

Climate

What we know about global heating, why it is denied, which targets apply and how we can stop it.

Climate

What we know about global heating, why we still do so little, which goals the world has set itself and which solutions work – a summary of the German pages on climate, as of November 2026.

Overview

Climate

The facts are settled – what is missing is action at the scale and speed the physics demands.

Global heating driven by greenhouse gases is not a linear process. If we do not finally take effective action, we are heading for tipping points that will cause a climate catastrophe we can then no longer stop. These basic facts can no longer reasonably be doubted. At most there are quantitative uncertainties – for example about when certain tipping points will be reached. These remaining uncertainties are used in political debate to delay action. Given the dramatic consequences of irreversible global heating, this is no longer acceptable.

You may think: I already know all about climate change. Wrong. Perhaps some corner of our brain knows the facts. But if you and I had really grasped how serious the threat is – would any of us still sit quietly? We know it – and we do not know it. If we were truly aware of what we are doing by carrying on as before, we would start acting decisively at once.

Changing how we travel, heat, eat and consume is necessary, but not sufficient. Without the right framework set by political decision-makers, climate change cannot be stopped – and that includes a high CO2 price whose revenue is paid back to the people, so that it causes no social hardship. Especially in democratic states, everyone is therefore called upon to act politically as well: join one of the groups that are already fighting climate change, get involved in parties and campaigns, and make it clear to all politicians: if you do not act effectively now, you will not be elected again.

- In 2025 the global mean temperature was about 1.44 °C above the pre-industrial level (1850–1900); the eleven years 2015 to 2025 are the eleven warmest on record. Source: wmo.int · German page
- Humans are the cause: in the scientific literature, agreement on this is over 99 %. Source: iopscience.iop.org · German page
- In 2025 the air contained 426.8 ppm of CO2 on average – about 50 % more than before industrialisation and more than at any time in at least two million years. Source: wmo.int · German page
- From the start of 2026 about 130 billion tonnes of CO2 remain for 1.5 °C – at today's emissions that lasts a little over three years. Source: essd.copernicus.org · German page
- Forecast: with the policies in place today the world is heading for about 2.8 °C by 2100 (UN Environment Programme), 2.7 °C according to the Climate Action Tracker; 2.6 °C if all national climate plans are implemented. Source: climateactiontracker.org · German page
- Germany emitted 649 million tonnes of CO2 equivalents in 2025 – 48 % less than in 1990, but only 0.1 % less than in 2024. The law requires minus 65 % by 2030 and net greenhouse gas neutrality by 2045. Source: umweltbundesamt.de · German page

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Facts

Facts and analyses on climate change

Climate change is no longer a forecast – it is measured. The human-caused part of warming reached 1.37 °C in 2025 and is rising faster than ever since measurements began. The page explains what we measure, the causes and tipping points, who emits how much, and what the consequences are – worldwide and in Germany.

- The human-caused part of warming was 1.37 °C above the 1850–1900 average in 2025, and it is currently growing by about 0.27 °C per decade (2016–2025). Source: essd.copernicus.org
- Fossil CO2 emissions reached a new record of about 38.1 billion tonnes in 2025 (+1.1 %). Source: globalcarbonbudget.org
- Since 1850 the USA has emitted 542 billion tonnes of CO2 – more than a fifth of the world total. China follows with 13 %, the EU with 12 %. Source: carbonbrief.org
- Germany has become about 2.5 °C warmer since regular measurements began in 1881 – clearly more than global warming. Source: dkkv.org

Warming is speeding up

The pace has clearly increased: from 1980 to 2005 the rate was about 0.18 °C per decade, today it is about 0.27 °C. Depending on the data set, 2025 was 1.44 °C (WMO) or 1.47 °C (Copernicus) warmer than pre-industrial times; 2023–2025 together were above 1.5 °C on average for the first time.

Part of the acceleration comes from cleaner air: sulphurous exhaust (aerosols) reflects sunlight and currently masks about half a degree of warming – and this mask is partly falling away. How much that adds is disputed: most studies put the effect of the new shipping rules at only about 0.04 °C; James Hansen and colleagues estimate much more, but their value is seen as an outlier. Everyone agrees that warming has become faster – the dispute is only about how much.

Tipping points

The decisive problem is that climate change is not a linear process. When certain tipping points are reached, feedback effects set in. These lead to a rise in temperature that cannot be reversed for centuries.

According to the Global Tipping Points Report 2025, warm-water coral reefs tip at about 1.2 °C (range 1 to 1.5 °C) – at today's warming of about 1.4 °C this point has been passed. The Amazon rainforest is at risk of large-scale dieback below 2 °C. On the Atlantic overturning circulation (AMOC) research is divided: the PIK sees it collapsing after 2100 in all high-emission scenarios, while a Met Office study finds a collapse in the next 75 years unlikely. Whether the AMOC tips in this century or the next is open – its weakening is certain.

Who causes how much?

Shares of today's emissions: China 32 %, USA 13 %, India 8 %, EU 6 %.

Looking at CO2 emissions by country, the steep rise in China stands out. One could say: aha, the Chinese are to blame; as long as THEY emit so much, it hardly helps if WE save here. But

you know that this is a fallacy. Part of China's emissions come from producing goods that we import. And per head, we in Germany, imports included, still emit more than a person in China. What use is it if a factory here has symbolic solar panels on the roof and a biotope on its grounds, when the steel comes from Chinese coal-fired blast furnaces? It always comes down to the same thing: consuming less means more quality of life for our future.

The consequences - and who bears them

Heat is the deadliest extreme event. In summer 2024 an estimated 62,775 people in Europe died from heat, about 6,300 of them in Germany. Since 2017 the German forest has become a carbon source, mainly because trees died from drought, heat and bark beetles.

The nations that have contributed most to global heating are the least directly affected. The harshest effects of climate change are expected in the countries around the equator, which have contributed least to it.

Wealth matters, too: a person from the richest 0.1 % emits over 800 kg of CO_2 every day, a person from the poorer half of humanity about 2 kg.

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Denial

Climate change denial

Over 99 % of the scientific literature agrees that humans are causing climate change. Doubt is sown on purpose – by fossil companies, think tanks and lobby groups – and today it targets the solutions more than the science. Knowing the tricks, and talking with people who trust you, helps.

- Exxon's own researchers projected between 1977 and 2003 a warming of about 0.2 °C per decade from fossil fuels – and were mostly right. Publicly, the company said something else. Source: idw-online.de
- On YouTube, the claim "climate solutions don't work" grew from 9 % (2018) to 30 % of all denial statements (2023); 12,058 videos from 96 channels were analysed. Source: skepticalscience.com
- A review of 300 studies names fossil companies, politically connected interests and think tanks close to them as the main drivers of climate disinformation. Source: ipie.info
- In a survey of almost 130,000 people in 125 countries, 89 % demanded more climate action from their government. Source: uni-bonn.de

Who sows doubt

There are plenty of websites that try to play down or even deny the human share in today's global temperature rise. Should the arguments of people who claim that the sun revolves around the Earth (and that the Earth is flat) get as much space as the great majority of scientists? That would obviously be nonsense. And this is not about being right – it is about our survival.

The method is older than the climate debate: the same few scientists helped for decades to play down the dangers of tobacco smoke, acid rain, the ozone hole and climate change. The formula: stress uncertainty, create controversy – as long as there is doubt, no law is passed. According to leaks, the US Heartland Institute was funded by Exxon Mobil and by foundations

of the Koch brothers. Correctiv calls the German association EIKE the “little brother of Heartland”.

The name “European Institute for Climate and Energy” is – to put it mildly – misleading. It is a lobby association that has nothing to do with science.

“Climate researchers are only after the money”

Politics, capital and business – by far the most powerful levels – come under MASSIVE PRESSURE from the results of climate research. If there were serious research showing that we could carry on burning coal and consuming like mad, that research would receive record funding. To me the only plausible reason why this does not happen is: there is simply NO serious research that could refute man-made climate change.

Recognising the tricks

The arguments change, the techniques stay the same. FLICC names five of them: fake experts, logical fallacies, impossible expectations, cherry-picking and conspiracy myths. More often than open denial, one hears excuses for delay today; a study (Lamb et al., 2020) found four basic patterns: shifting responsibility, promoting non-solutions, stressing only the downsides, and giving up. Even doom – “it’s too late anyway” – is such an excuse.

Why facts alone are not enough - and what helps

Changing behaviour needs the energy of determination – and every doubt acts like poison. That is why all claims that climate change is not caused by humans are highly effective, however absurd they may be.

What helps is “prebunking”: in a YouTube field trial, viewers recognised manipulation techniques about 5 % better after a short clip. People also underestimate how many others want climate action: 69 % would give 1 % of their income, but this willingness is underestimated by 26 percentage points. A new study (Tiede, Maur, Betsch, 2026) warns, however, that correcting this misperception alone did not raise willingness to donate; practical hurdles and political conditions matter more. Talking within family and among friends works.

It makes sense in any case to correct the way we live now. What we must do to stop climate change has many positive effects beyond that: we can gain quality of life for ourselves and our descendants. That is worth standing up for even if climate change did not come – which cannot be the case, because it is already here.

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Goals

Goals: stopping global heating

What the world has set itself, how far it is from that, what courts and movements demand – and why every tenth of a degree counts. 1.5 °C can no longer be held without overshoot, and the national plans fall far short of what is needed.

- The new climate plans of 113 countries with 69 % of global emissions cut global emissions by only about 12 % by 2035 compared with 2019 – the COP28 decision says 60 % would be needed. Source: unfccc.int

- According to the UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2026, 1.5 °C can no longer be held without overshoot; at best warming peaks at 1.7–1.8 °C around 2050. Source: climatechangenews.com
- With current policies, Germany will cut its emissions by 62.6 % instead of 65 % by 2030 (UBA projections 2026). Source: umweltbundesamt.de
- The European Court of Human Rights (2024), the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (2025) and the International Court of Justice (2025) have obliged states to effective climate protection. Source: lto.de

Targets: incentive or ceiling?

George Monbiot has argued that targets can tempt officials to underperform: “There is no safe level of global heating: every increment kills.”

I have experienced this paradox of targets myself, in a field I know well: the staffing floors in hospital nursing in Germany (PpUGV) in 2019. Because nursing was so badly understaffed, minimum staffing was to be ensured. The floor was set at the level that 25 % of hospitals fell below – and 75 % exceeded. The result was a new target: compliance with the floor, which in itself already meant staffing below an adequate level. In the end the floor increasingly became a ceiling. Exactly the same madness is happening right now with the so-called “climate targets”. Nevertheless we present the goals of the United Nations and the Paris Agreement, because we see them as instruments for concrete and verifiable agreements.

What “overshooting 1.5 °C” really means

2024 was about 1.55 °C above the pre-industrial level, probably the first calendar year above 1.5 °C. A single year above 1.5 °C does not yet mean the Paris goal has failed, because the goal refers to the average over many years. Overshoot means that the Earth first becomes warmer than 1.5 °C and is later supposed to cool down again – which is only possible if CO2 is taken back out of the air. To get back to 1.5 °C by 2100, about 320 billion tonnes of CO2 would have to be removed and stored permanently – roughly eight years of today’s global emissions. Whether that is feasible is open.

The Paris Agreement today

Paris does not tell any country how much to cut; each submits its own plan every five years. The first global stocktake in Dubai (2023) found that greenhouse gases must fall by 43 % by 2030 and by 60 % by 2035 compared with 2019 for 1.5 °C. The same decision mentions fossil fuels for the first time, but no clear phase-out was agreed. Belém (COP30, 2025) produced no roadmap away from coal, oil and gas; in April 2026, 56 countries therefore met in Santa Marta (Colombia) for a first conference on phasing out fossil fuels, outside the UN negotiations.

Germany, the EU, the courts and the movements

Electricity and industry are making progress; transport and buildings lag behind. Transport exceeds its permitted amount by 187 million tonnes by 2030, buildings by almost 110 million tonnes. The EU wants to cut emissions by 90 % by 2040, but may cover up to 5 percentage points with foreign credits.

Courts are stepping in. On 23 July 2025 the International Court of Justice ruled unanimously that climate protection is an obligation under international law. In a case brought by a man from Peru against the energy company RWE, the Higher Regional Court of Hamm (Germany)

ruled on 28 May 2025 that large emitters can be held liable for the consequences of climate change – although his own claim was dismissed.

The movements formulated their demands in 2019: Fridays for Future called for net zero and 100 % renewable energy supply in Germany by 2035; Extinction Rebellion for net zero by 2025 – a deadline that has passed.

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Solutions

Solutions: how we can stop climate change

The means are known and mostly affordable – what counts is speed and scale. Climate policy works when it is cleverly combined, wind and solar are now the cheapest new power, and nature and technology can help but never replace cutting emissions.

- Of about 1,500 climate policy measures in 41 countries (1998–2022), 63 cut emissions significantly, on average by 19 % – mostly in a mix with CO2 prices or energy taxes (PIK/MCC, Science 2024). Source: idw-online.de
- In 2025, for the first time, renewables supplied more than a third of the world's electricity (33.8 %) – more than coal (33.0 %). Source: ember-energy.org
- In Germany renewables provided 55.9 % of public net electricity generation in 2025; wind and solar were the two largest sources for the first time. Source: idw-online.de
- 91 % of the large renewable plants built in 2024 produced cheaper power than the cheapest fossil alternative; battery storage became 93 % cheaper since 2010. Source: balkangreenenergynews.com

What policy must do

After the ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court of 24 March 2021, the German Climate Protection Act was tightened: minus 65 % by 2030, minus 88 % by 2040, net greenhouse gas neutrality by 2045. Since 2024, however, the targets for individual sectors are no longer binding. The CO2 price for heating and fuel is 55 to 65 euros per tonne in 2026 and stays in this range in 2027; from 2028 the European emissions trading for buildings and transport (ETS 2) is due to start. A climate dividend that pays the revenue back per head does not exist in Germany so far.

The CO2 price is far too low. Much higher prices are needed – with the revenue returned in full to the citizens. Instead, since 2026 the commuter allowance has been 38 cents per kilometre, from the very first kilometre. Complete nonsense. It is like betting on red and black at the same time in roulette. And with non-binding targets we will get nowhere: what is needed is clear annual targets with consequences if they are missed. That is the invitation to us not to give up until sufficient and effective measures against global heating have been pushed through.

What demonstrably works

It is not the number of measures that counts, but their combination: packages in which prices play a role were particularly effective, while bans alone showed no clear effect. Norway's switch to electric cars only succeeded together with tax and price incentives; in 2025, 95.9 % of all new cars there were fully electric. According to the IPCC, measures costing at most 100 US

dollars per tonne of CO2 could at least halve global emissions by 2030. And a CO2 price works: since EU emissions trading started in 2005, emissions from the plants covered have fallen by 51 % across the EU.

Nature and technology: helpful, but no substitute

The widely quoted 2019 tree-planting study overestimated the potential of new trees roughly fivefold. More than 90 % of Germany's peat soils have been drained; in 2023 they released about 50.8 million tonnes of CO2 equivalents – about 7 % of all German greenhouse gases. Rewetting them pays off, but only in addition to a rapid fossil exit. New technical removal methods took only about 1.35 million tonnes of CO2 out of the air in 2023 – less than 0.1 % of all CO2 removal. A UN expert panel concluded that dimming the sun is not ready for use and no substitute for rapid emission cuts.

So far, humans have found a technical solution for everything – surely that must work for the climate, too. This illusion can be a strong obstacle to a real change in how we do business and how we live. This is not directed against modern technology: we need it for sustainable energy generation, distribution and storage, for intelligent transport systems and much more. But there is no technical solution that would allow large parts of humanity to live the lifestyle that is common today in the rich North.

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Act yourself

Climate change: act now yourself

A person in Germany causes about 9.8 tonnes of CO2 equivalents a year; climate-compatible would be well below 1 tonne. About half of the footprint hangs on a few "big points". Even stronger is acting together and politically – your "handprint", not just your footprint.

- On average a person in Germany causes about 9.8 tonnes of CO2 equivalents a year – for the first time less than 10 tonnes (UBA, March 2026). Climate-compatible would be well below 1 tonne. Source: umweltbundesamt.de
- A domestic flight causes about 290 grams of greenhouse gases per passenger-kilometre, a long-distance train 26 grams, a pedelec 3 grams (UBA, reference year 2024). Source: umweltbundesamt.de
- An electric car sold in Europe in 2025 causes about 73 % less greenhouse gas over its whole life than a petrol car (ICCT, July 2025). Source: thedriven.io
- Many green electricity tariffs bring no additional benefit for the climate; real benefit is guaranteed by tariffs with the Grüner-Strom-Label or EnergieVision (formerly ok-power). Source: verbraucherzentrale.de

Your footprint in numbers

The German average breaks down like this: other consumption 2.5 t, mobility 2.1 t, housing 1.9 t, food 1.6 t, public infrastructure 1.1 t, electricity 0.6 t. Nobody can save the share for schools, roads or administration on their own – only politics can change that. The differences are large: the most climate-friendly 10 % manage with about 7 tonnes, the 10 % with the largest footprint cause 17.7 tonnes (survey of 2016). Living without a car saves on average about 2 tonnes of CO2 equivalents a year, one long-haul flight less about 1.9 tonnes, a purely plant-based diet about 0.9 tonnes.

On the move

Use means of transport in this order: bicycle, e-bike, public transport, buses and trains, car sharing – and only if it really has to be, your own car. Do without flights wherever possible. If you buy a car, drive it as long as it lasts. An SUV with a 400-hp electric drive has nothing to do with ecology, and SUVs are embarrassing anyway in view of climate change.

Building an electric car causes about 40 % more emissions, but this backpack is paid off after about 17,000 kilometres. Hybrids save only about 20 %, plug-in hybrids about 30 %.

At home, when shopping, eating and banking

Balcony solar systems may now feed in up to 800 watts at the inverter, with up to 2,000 watts of module output; since October 2024 tenants and flat owners can demand one. Lowering room temperature by one degree saves about 6 % of heating costs.

The most important thing: reduce your meat consumption. Every schnitzel you do not eat is a success!

Not only meat counts: cheese causes on average 5.7 kg of CO2e per kilogram – more than pork (4.6 kg). Money matters, too: the world's 65 largest banks gave about 906 billion US dollars to oil, gas and coal companies in 2025. The UBA advises switching your current account to an ecological bank; in an energy cooperative even small amounts make you co-owner of solar and wind plants.

Together - and personally

In a survey of almost 130,000 people in 125 countries, 69 % were willing to give 1 % of their income for climate protection – but on average people believed that only 43 % of their fellow citizens would be willing. Whoever believes they are in the minority tends to stay silent; that is why talking matters.

At first I worked as a nurse. But then I studied and became – hard to believe – a management consultant. I became a frequent flyer and flew at least twice every week – within Germany! However much I could kick myself today for having gone along with all that, that is how it was. My father lives on another continent, so every two years I fly to see him. I now offset these flights via atmosfair, but of course that is only a drop in the ocean. It would be much better not to blow this CO2 into the air at all.

→ Read more on the German page

Act

What you can do

There are two ways in: changing your personal behaviour and lifestyle, and political action to limit global heating in time. They do not exclude each other but complement each other. We will not achieve the necessary change through a personally mindful life alone, nor through intellectual debate alone, nor through energetic protest alone – each needs the other.

Start with the big points: replace flights with the train and car journeys with bike, bus or train; if you need a car, an electric one is clearly the better choice. Switch to a labelled green electricity tariff, consider a balcony solar system or – as a homeowner – a heat pump. Eat mostly plants, buy less and longer-lasting things, and move your money to an ecological bank

or an energy cooperative. Do not hide behind offsets: many certificates do not deliver what they promise – the flight that does not happen achieves most.

Then use your handprint: talk about the climate with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours, vote, and join a group – for example Fridays for Future, Parents for Future, Scientists for Future, GermanZero or one of the environmental associations such as BUND, NABU or Germanwatch. If a wind farm is planned in your municipality, have your say. Worry, anger or grief about the climate crisis are appropriate; climate action together with others is the most effective – and the most comforting.

This page is a translation and summary prepared with AI assistance from the German pages; the author's own words are shown in black.

More in English: Essentials in English · What should we do? · Resources of the Earth · Global fairness

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PART II

Resources of the Earth

Species loss, farming and food, the suffering of animals, raw materials, waste and mobility.

Resources of the Earth

Soil, forests, water, species and raw materials are finite. This page sums up what the German pages on the resources of the Earth say – how much we use, where the planet's limits lie and what has changed since 2019.

Overview

Resources of the Earth

The limit is not set by the reserves in the ground but by what the planet can bear – and we are already far beyond it.

It is perfectly clear that all mineral resources and natural conditions are limited. So we have to assume that we live on a planet with limited resources. No technology conceivable today changes that. The only course of action that can be called realistic is one that takes the limits of resources as its yardstick and considers not only the present generation but also the fate of future generations. As simple as these sentences sound and as irrefutable as they may be, they are still not the basis of current political action and economic activity, and probably never were. Unlike in the past, however, we are now able to exploit and pollute the planet to such a degree that the foundations of life for future generations will be irretrievably destroyed. Maximum plunder of all resources is going on.

Two issues are of special, overriding importance for the use of the Earth's resources: on the "demand side", overpopulation – which is often used as a pretext for the burden on the planet, to distract from the fact that it is the rich nations and the rich sections of society that are plundering the planet, not the mass of the poorer. On the other side, the destruction of ecosystems for the sake of exploitation, shown by the example of the destruction of (primary) forests.

The numbers back this up. Seven of the nine planetary boundaries are crossed, and the Planetary Health Check 2026 shows a worsening trend for all seven; only the ozone layer and aerosols are still in the safe zone. There is no population explosion: according to the UN, the world population will peak in the mid-2080s at about 10.3 billion and fall slightly to 10.2 billion by 2100. What overloads the planet is the lifestyle of the richer countries and sections of society. Forests and water show the pressure most clearly: in the Brazilian Amazon, deforestation fell in 2025/26 to its lowest level since measurements began in 1988, but researchers warn that 10 to 47 % of the Amazon forest could be under so much stress by 2050 that it may tip on a large scale. Since January 2026 the UN University has spoken of an "era of global water bankruptcy".

It is almost unbelievable how much we know (or could know – if we cared). The destruction is recorded very precisely, the causes are known, the interactions with our economic system and lifestyle are well analysed, as are the social and economic dynamics in the countries concerned. The massacre of the foundations of life on our home planet is taking place before our eyes.

- Seven of nine planetary boundaries are crossed – ocean acidification was added in 2025;

the Planetary Health Check 2026 confirms a worsening trend for all seven. Source: idw-online.de · German page

- In 2026 humanity uses as much as if it had 1.73 Earths; Global Overshoot Day was 30 July 2026. If everyone lived like people in Germany, it would take almost three Earths – Germany's overshoot day was already 10 May. Source: overshoot.footprintnetwork.org · German page
- Raw material extraction has tripled in fifty years and could rise by another 60 % by 2060; rich countries use six times as much per person as poor ones (International Resource Panel 2024). Source: resourcepanel.org · German page
- World population (2024: almost 8.2 billion) will peak at about 10.3 billion in the mid-2080s and fall slightly to 10.2 billion by 2100; in 63 countries, including Germany, the peak has already passed (UN). Source: un.org · German page
- After the record fire year 2024, tropical primary forest loss fell by 36 % in 2025 – yet 4.3 million hectares disappeared, more than eleven football pitches per minute. Source: africa.wri.org · German page
- About four billion people suffer severe water scarcity for at least one month a year. Source: unu.edu · German page

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Biodiversity

Species extinction

We are living through the largest mass extinction since the age of the dinosaurs. Monitored wildlife populations have shrunk by almost three quarters since 1970, and no global target for protecting nature is being met fast enough. Yet targeted protection works – and it starts with how we shop, eat and vote.

- Monitored wildlife populations worldwide shrank by 73 % on average between 1970 and 2022 (WWF Living Planet Report 2026). Source: wwf.de
- The IUCN Red List now covers 172,620 species, 48,646 of them threatened with extinction (October 2025); populations of 61 % of all bird species are declining. Source: iucn.org
- 37.6 % of marine fish stocks are overfished (FAO 2026); from 2023 to April 2025 bleaching-level heat hit 83.7 % of the world's coral reef area – more than ever before. Source: science.feedback.org
- The world aims to protect 30 % of land and sea by 2030; so far about 18 % on land and 10 % at sea are protected. Source: giz.de

How fast species are disappearing

Biological diversity in its entirety – not just individual special species – is the foundation of our life. Species that have died out cannot be brought back. The extinction of species can trigger systemic domino effects, because species are food and habitat for one another.

At present the largest mass extinction since the age of the dinosaurs is taking place. Worldwide, species are currently dying out 100 to 1,000 times faster than before human influence began. In the last 500 years more than 300 species of land vertebrates have become extinct. (Scientists for Future)

The latest reports confirm the picture. The IUCN Red List covers 172,620 species, of which 48,646 are threatened with extinction. The UN biodiversity council IPBES showed in 2024

that biodiversity has been declining by 2 to 6 % per decade for 30 to 50 years – while states pay 1.4 to 3.3 trillion dollars a year in subsidies that harm nature. The main drivers are loss of habitat through farming, deforestation and land take for settlements and transport, invasive species, and overuse through over-collecting, overfishing and overhunting.

Insects, butterflies and the seas

In Germany, about a third of the roughly 72,000 known species of animals, plants and fungi are threatened, and the Red List of December 2025 shows that almost half of butterflies and burnet moths are endangered or already extinct. In the oceans, 37.6 % of fish stocks are overfished, and a third of marine mammals are threatened; among reef-building corals the figure is 44 %. Between 2023 and April 2025, bleaching-level heat hit 83.7 % of the world's coral reef area.

Goals, results - and good news

In the Global Biodiversity Framework the world pledged to protect 30 % of land and sea by 2030. About 18 % on land and 10 % at sea have been reached, and the biodiversity conference in Yerevan (October 2026) found that the pace is insufficient for every one of the 23 targets. There is also real progress: the UN High Seas Treaty has applied since January 2026, the EU obliges its member states to restore nature, and targeted protection has brought the green sea turtle and the Iberian lynx out of the danger zone. Change can also start locally: "Save the bees" became the most successful popular petition in Bavaria so far, with 18.4 % of those entitled to vote taking part.

This topic in particular shows how all the different problems are connected – because they have the same root: our strange way of doing business and consuming. But as with climate change: personal action alone is not enough. We have to put on political pressure – and just as clearly as we are currently doing on climate change.

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Food

Agriculture and food

The world produces enough food, yet hundreds of millions go hungry while a fifth of food is thrown away. Industrial farming drains soils, water and forests, and its hidden costs run into trillions. Germany is far from its own organic farming target, and after the 2024 farmer protests many environmental rules were weakened.

- About 645 million people went hungry in 2025 – about 7.8 % of the world population; for about 2.7 billion people a healthy diet is too expensive. Source: fao.org
- About a fifth of the food that reaches shops, restaurants and households is wasted: 1.05 billion tonnes in 2022, 60 % of it in private households. Source: unric.org
- The FAO estimates the hidden costs of our food system at around 12 trillion US dollars a year; about 70 % of them are due to unhealthy diets. Source: fao.org
- In 2024, 11.2 to 11.5 % of Germany's farmland was farmed organically; the target is 30 % by 2030. Source: umweltbundesamt.de

Hunger amid plenty

Even in the 21st century, hunger shapes the reality of life for 800 million people worldwide. At first sight it seems paradoxical that around a third of the world's food is produced on small farms of less than 2 hectares, although these farm only about 12 % of agricultural land – and yet the majority of the hungry are themselves farmers, farm workers, herders or fishers. Moreover, the food produced today would in theory be enough to feed 12 billion people.

The UN's current estimate is lower: about 645 million people went hungry in 2025, around 7.8 % of the world population. In 2024, 150.2 million children under five were stunted in their growth (23.2 %), while 35.5 million children were overweight.

What food really costs

Food is cheap only because much of its cost is paid elsewhere. The FAO puts the hidden costs of the food system at about 12 trillion US dollars a year, around 70 % of them from unhealthy diets. At the same time about a fifth of the food that reaches shops, restaurants and homes is wasted – 1.05 billion tonnes in 2022, 60 % of it in private households. Water is part of the bill too: 1 kg of boneless beef stands for about 15,500 litres of virtual water, and 92 % of global water use goes into growing food.

Forests, fish and farm policy

In the Amazon, less forest was cleared than ever since measurements began (3,335 km² from August 2025 to July 2026). But the soy moratorium that protected the forest for years is practically at an end in 2026, and the EU deforestation regulation will only apply from 30 December 2026. At sea, 37.6 % of fish stocks are overfished, and more than half of fish and seafood now comes from aquaculture (53 % in 2024).

Germany is far from its own goal: in 2024, 11.2 to 11.5 % of farmland was organic, against a target of 30 % by 2030. After the farmer protests of 2024, politicians relaxed or withdrew many environmental requirements, including the EU pesticide law and the obligation to leave land fallow. The agricultural diesel tax relief has been back in full since 2026.

→ Read more on the German page

Animals

Ending the industrial suffering of animals

Every year Germany alone slaughters far more than 750 million animals – sentient beings, not production units. Factory farming harms the animals, the climate and our health. You do not have to become a perfect vegan: every meal without meat counts.

- In 2025 Germany slaughtered around 48.5 million pigs, cattle, sheep, goats and horses, plus more than 697 million chickens, 27.6 million turkeys and 8.3 million ducks – together far more than 750 million animals (Destatis). Source: destatis.de
- Meat consumption in Germany rose again to 54.9 kg per person in 2025, 1.4 kg more than in 2024; poultry reached a record 14.7 kg (BZL, provisional). Source: lebensmittelpraxis.de
- Livestock farming causes about 12 % of all human-made greenhouse gases (FAO); in Germany 76 % of methane comes from agriculture. Source: fao.org
- A mainly plant-based diet could prevent up to 15 million premature deaths a year (EAT-Lancet report 2025). Source: wur.nl

Why less meat

Because meat consumption has such extreme effects – it goes hand in hand with cruelty (to the animals), injustice (with regard to world food) and environmental destruction (climate change) – the meat-eating lifestyle needs defence mechanisms. This makes it possible to systematically blank out the consequences of eating meat. We have (at least in the industrialised nations) a free choice of how we eat. Carnism is no less an ideology than the one attributed to the vegan way of life. But at some point the wall in our heads begins to crack. The more the suffering comes to the surface. The more the drastic consequences for climate change become clear. The more people open their hearts again to their non-human fellow creatures.

Research supports this. According to the FAO, livestock caused 14.5 % of human-made greenhouse gases in its 2013 report; the recalculation of 2023 gives about 12 %. In Germany 76 % of methane comes from agriculture, mainly from the stomachs of ruminants. The EAT-Lancet report 2025 finds that food systems cause about 30 % of greenhouse gases, and that a mainly plant-based diet could prevent up to 15 million premature deaths a year.

Habits are changing

After years of decline, people in Germany eat slightly more meat again: 54.9 kg per person in 2025. At the same time habits are changing: only 24 % eat meat or sausage every day (2015: 34 %), 37 % call themselves flexitarians, 7 % vegetarian and 2 % vegan (Nutrition Report 2025).

Goals and politics

A clear definition of minimum conditions for keeping animals that ensures in qualitative terms that the animals do not suffer and can live a life appropriate to their species. A ban on cruel factory farming and slaughter. This ban makes sense even if more and more meat from factory farming is devoured in other countries – because every single animal counts as a sentient being.

Politics moves slowly. Chick culling has been banned in Germany since 2022, but only in German hatcheries. The state animal husbandry label (law of 2023) has been postponed several times – most recently in October 2026 to October 2027 – and for now it applies only to pork. Cultivated meat is approved in Singapore, the USA, Israel and Australia/New Zealand; in the EU and Switzerland applications are pending, but there is no approval yet (as of August 2026).

No need to be perfect

First of all, you can stop thinking that you EITHER have to become a strict vegan in plastic shoes, OR it doesn't matter anyway. The trap here is the demand for absolute consistency. Kill-all arguments of this kind, inner or spoken, paralyse any change. Surely the truth is this: every single vegan meal is a reason for joy, because no animal had to suffer for it. And it is also a success for ecology and the carbon balance. Please do not let any meat-industry labels lull you.

→ Read more on the German page

Raw materials

Raw materials

Humanity extracts ever more raw materials, and the people in the mining regions pay the

price – most visibly in the cobalt mines of the Congo. Rules to protect them are being weakened rather than strengthened. The most effective personal step is to use devices for a long time, and since 2026 a right to repair helps.

- Without a change of course, raw material extraction could rise by 60 % by 2060 compared with 2020. Source: resourcepanel.org
- The DR Congo supplies around 75 % of the world's cobalt; in 2023 Amnesty International documented forced evictions of whole communities for new cobalt and copper mines. Source: amnesty.org.uk
- In 2022 the world produced 62 million tonnes of e-waste, only 22.3 % of it demonstrably recycled properly; Germany collected only 28.7 % in 2024 instead of the required 65 %. Source: unitar.org
- Since 23 July 2026 Germany has a right to repair: anyone who chooses repair instead of replacement gets twelve months of extra warranty. Source: ihk.de

Cobalt and the Congo

Lithium-ion batteries need relatively large amounts of cobalt. 50–60 % of the cobalt mined worldwide comes from the Congo. (Today it is around 75 %.) A large part of the mining in the Congo is in the hands of a few large international companies. These companies receive concessions, which they implement among other things with forced resettlements – which means people's land is taken from them by force in exchange for compensation and they are resettled, sometimes in areas where it is hardly possible to live.

Because only very few profit from the country's great cobalt wealth, people try to dig cobalt out of the ground directly around their huts. To do this they dig unsecured pits and tunnels. Children are very often used in these narrow tunnels to get the cobalt out of the earth. These children earn a minimum per day and have to toil for up to 12 hours. The health consequences are dramatic, because the toxic cobalt dust settles in the lungs.

Even if only a small part of Congolese cobalt comes from child labour (most of it is shovelled by the corporations), according to one estimate up to 40,000 boys and girls in the Congo are affected.

The children in the Congo's cobalt pits are not an isolated case. According to the ILO and UNICEF, almost 138 million children work worldwide, 54 million of them in hazardous work that harms their health, safety or development (estimate for 2024).

More extraction, more dependence, more e-waste

E-waste is growing fast: 62 million tonnes in 2022, only 22.3 % of it demonstrably recycled properly. In 2024 Germany collected only 28.7 % of old devices instead of the required 65 %. A new conflict is opening on the seabed: there are still no international rules for deep-sea mining; more than 45 states are calling for a moratorium, while the USA is preparing to go it alone.

Rules: decided, then weakened

In 2024 the EU set targets for critical raw materials: by 2030 at least 25 % of demand is to come from recycling, and no more than 65 % of any raw material from a single non-EU country. The EU supply chain law, by contrast, was heavily weakened in 2025/26: it now applies only to companies with more than 5,000 employees and 1.5 billion euros in turnover.

As long as the population cannot really share in the country's cobalt wealth – in secured and controlled mines where child labour is prohibited – there will be no fundamental change. Change can only be achieved if new contracts with the Congo can be reached and the large international companies are no longer allowed to exploit the country.

→ Read more on the German page

Pollution

Waste, water and air pollution

Germany produces far more packaging waste than the EU average, and more plastic is still burned than recycled. Air pollution is the largest environmental risk to health worldwide, and only a small share of German waters are in good condition. New EU rules help – but the easiest step is still to buy only what you really need.

- Germany produced 215 kg of packaging waste per person in 2023 – clearly more than the EU average of 177.8 kg. Source: umweltpakt.bayern.de
- Of 5.91 million tonnes of plastic waste in 2023, around 61 % was burned for energy and only just over 38 % recycled as material. Source: umweltbundesamt.de
- Air pollution contributed to 7.9 million deaths worldwide in 2023; in the EU around 182,000 people died prematurely from fine particulate matter. Source: stateofglobalair.org
- Only 9 % of Germany's rivers, lakes and coastal waters are in good ecological condition; not a single surface water body reaches good chemical status. Source: umweltbundesamt.de

How much waste - and where it goes

Germany produces a great deal of packaging waste: 215 kg per person in 2023, compared with an EU average of 177.8 kg. With plastics, more is still burned than recycled: of 5.91 million tonnes of plastic waste in 2023, around 61 % was used for energy and only just over 38 % as material; recycled plastic makes up only 15 % of the amount processed. A global UN plastics treaty failed in Geneva in August 2025, mainly because of resistance from oil-producing states; the next decisive round is not planned until early 2027.

Air and water

Air pollution is the largest environmental risk to health: worldwide it contributed to 7.9 million deaths in 2023, and in the EU around 182,000 people died prematurely from fine particulate matter – far fewer than in 2005, but still very many. Germany meets today's air quality limits, but from 2030 much stricter EU values apply, which are still exceeded at many monitoring stations today. Our waters are in poor condition: only 9 % of rivers, lakes and coastal waters are ecologically good.

But microplastics also come from clothing: a single 6-kilogram wash load of synthetic fabrics can release up to 700,000 microfibres into the environment. Microfibres are unintentionally taken in by marine life and water birds or mistaken for food and eaten.

New rules and better habits

The new EU Packaging Regulation applies from 12 August 2026: less packaging waste per person, recyclable packaging by 2030 and limits on PFAS in food packaging.

My conclusion: if you don't like open filter coffee or open espresso, at least switch to filter pads. Neither aluminium capsules nor their plastic relatives are environmentally sound. The ecologically and socially best way to enjoy coffee is to choose loose organic coffee – ideally with the Fairtrade label. Tea (here too: organic and fair) is, by the way, an ecologically much better alternative to coffee. A cup of coffee uses 140 litres of water in its production – for tea it is only 30 litres.

→ Read more on the German page

Mobility

Mobility

Transport is the problem child of climate protection: in Germany its emissions are rising again, and cars keep getting bigger. Electric cars are much better than their reputation, but they are no licence to carry on as before. What is needed is a revolution in local transport – cities built for people, not for cars.

- In 2025 transport in Germany emitted 146.3 million tonnes of CO2 equivalents, 2.1 million tonnes more than in 2024 (German Environment Agency). Source: umweltbundesamt.de
- On 1 January 2026 almost 49.5 million cars were registered in Germany; in 2025 every third new car was an SUV, almost every fifth fully electric (19.1 %). Source: kba.de
- An electric car sold in Europe in 2025 causes around 73 % fewer greenhouse gases over its whole life than a petrol car, production included (ICCT 2025). Source: electrive.com
- In Paris more trips within the city are now made by bike (11.2 %) than by car (4.3 %). Source: thelocal.fr

Transport and the climate

In 2025 transport in Germany emitted 146.3 million tonnes of CO2 equivalents, 2.1 million tonnes more than in 2024. Its share of all greenhouse gases rose from 13.1 % (1990) to about 22.3 % (2024), because transport has hardly cut its emissions while other sectors have reduced theirs considerably. Cars travelled 562.3 billion kilometres in 2025, on average 10,616 kilometres each, and the average occupancy of cars is 33 %.

SUVs: an arms race on the road

SUVs are an expression of dominance, of HIGH STATUS: I am stronger, bigger, more powerful and I control the situation. The front ends of these cars are deliberately and purposefully designed to look more and more aggressive.

That is why appeals, voluntary commitments and calls to car buyers are of no use. Psychologically speaking, that is nonsense. The only thing that helps here is to ban such vehicles. And this ban will only come if we, together as citizens, realise what vicious circle we have fallen for and decide together, democratically, to stop it.

A revolution in local transport

Imagine a city without traffic jams. Where everyone gets to their destination quickly without poisoning the environment. Where you can ride a bike with children without risking your life. This is how it could work: in cities, individual traffic is consistently switched to trams and (electric) buses. New technologies also make possible a self-driving minibus system on

demand, which is also suitable for rural areas. Car-sharing complements the system where cars are really needed, for example for transport. And on the roads, cyclists (electric bikes) get priority.

Overall, such a transport system would be much more effective (in the end everyone gets to their destination faster) than today's traffic chaos. In this way cities could become living spaces again. Of course this only works if roads and parking spaces for private cars are drastically restricted and cut back.

Drives, tickets and what works

An electric car sold in Europe in 2025 causes around 73 % fewer greenhouse gases over its life than a petrol car. For cars, hydrogen is not a good solution as things stand: a fuel cell car needs two to three times as much electricity per kilometre as a battery car, and hydrogen filling stations for cars are being closed. The Deutschlandticket costs 63 euros in 2026 and had around 14.6 million users at the end of 2025; according to the federal evaluation it saves about 2.5 million tonnes of CO2 a year. Paris shows how fast things can change: more trips within the city are now made by bike than by car.

→ Read more on the German page

Act

What you can do

Start with your plate: eat mostly plants. Every meal without meat counts – you do not have to be perfect. If you eat meat, make sure it comes from genuinely species-appropriate farming with short or no transport, and do not let industry labels lull you. Give up fish where you can, buy organic, ideally from associations with stricter rules, and buy only as much food as you will actually use.

Use means of transport in this order: 1. bicycle, 2. e-bike, 3. public transport, buses and trains, 4. a rented car and only if absolutely necessary, 5. a car of your own – and avoid flying wherever possible.

Buy less and use things for longer. The first, simplest and most important step against waste: think about what you really need when you shop – a good old shopping list helps. Repair instead of replacing; since 23 July 2026 the German right to repair gives you twelve extra months of warranty if you do. Return old devices so that their raw materials can be recovered.

And act politically. Your shopping, eating and avoiding waste also help against species extinction, because all these problems share the same root. But personal action alone is not enough: support initiatives for nature, animals and liveable cities, join campaigns such as Critical Mass or local citizens' initiatives, and put pressure on politicians – just as clearly as on the climate.

This page is a translation and summary prepared with AI assistance from the German pages; the author's own words are shown in black.

More in English: Essentials in English · What should we do? · Climate · Global fairness

> Status: 27.11.2026 ·

PART III

Global fairness

Poverty, inequality, illegitimate power and an economy that serves everyone.

Global fairness

Who carries the burdens, who profits – and who decides? A summary of the German section on poverty and flight, inequality, illegitimate power and a fair, sustainable economy.

Overview

Global fairness

Would you accept the rules of this world if you did not know where, and as whom, you would be born?

Imagine you could choose, before your birth, the society you want to be born into. But you would not know how intelligent you will be; where you will be born; how educated, how rich, how loving your parents are and which religion they belong to; what colour your skin is; whether you will be a man or a woman; whether you will be heterosexual, homosexual or transsexual; whether you will be disabled or not. What would the rules of the society you chose look like? This thought experiment was devised by John Rawls and became known as THE VEIL OF IGNORANCE.

I think one thing is fairly certain: very few people would want to choose a society in which a few own most of the wealth and so have a vastly disproportionate influence on political decisions; in which the parents' education is one of the most important factors in their children's education; in which women get less pay than men for the same work; in which you face hostility as a migrant – a society like ours. Or a society in which, as a member of the poor majority (90 %), you have hardly any chance of further education; in which most of the land belongs to a few large landowners; in which the government is corrupt and despotic; and in which the country is poor and heavily indebted and must therefore submit to the dictates of the rich countries – as is the case in most countries of the Global South.

The global capitalist economic system leads to exploitation and extreme inequality. The gap between countries has narrowed somewhat since 1980 – but within most states it is growing, and more and more wealth is piling up at the top. Where inequality leads to great poverty and lack of opportunity, the pressure to migrate rises. The interplay of unregulated global capitalism, the illegitimate power structures it props up, which endanger democracy, and the resulting inequality is fatal for the future of human life together.

- The richest 10 % own three quarters of all wealth, the poorer half of humanity only 2 % (World Inequality Report 2026). Source: wir2026.wid.world · German page
- 3.7 billion people live in countries that spend more on interest than on education or health (UNCTAD). Source: unctad.org · German page
- A research team around Jason Hickel calculates that the Global North appropriated, net, about 826 billion hours of labour from the South through unequal trade in 2021. The method of calculation is disputed among researchers. Source: phys.org · German page
- Only 36 % of the measurable targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals are on track or making moderate progress – and official development aid fell by a record 23 % in 2025.

Source: unstats.un.org · German page

- Courts are strengthening the rights of the weaker: Germany's Federal Constitutional Court has protected the freedom of future generations since 2021, and in 2025 the International Court of Justice found that climate protection is an obligation under international law. Source: bundesverfassungsgericht.de · German page
- A global tax convention has been under negotiation at the United Nations since 2025; the next round takes place in Nairobi from 30 November to 10 December 2026 – without the USA. Source: taxnews.ey.com · German page

→ German overview page ·

Poverty and flight

Poverty, persecution and war

Around 811 million people live in extreme poverty, progress has come to a standstill, and more armed conflicts involving states were counted in 2025 than ever since 1946. Rich states share responsibility for this. The page asks what all this has to do with us – and argues for a migration policy that is humane, but not naive.

- Around 811 million people live in extreme poverty in 2026, on less than 3 US dollars a day – one person in ten. Source: worldbank.org
- In 2025 there were 65 armed conflicts involving states – more than ever since 1946. About 244,600 people were killed. Source: uu.se
- 117.8 million people were displaced at the end of 2025, a good two thirds within their own country; 65 % of refugees live in neighbouring countries. Source: uno-fluechtlingshilfe.de

Does this have anything to do with me?

Does this have anything to do with us? Do I have anything to do with it? What is my answer? The news is full of reports about trouble spots, wars, disasters and poverty. And I, at least, find it hard to cope with the huge numbers that keep being mentioned: thousands are threatened by hunger, thousands are fleeing. That overwhelms my ability to react emotionally at all. Somehow this news just rolls off by now. What does all this have to do with us, with me? On this page I want to explore this question and try to find an answer with which I could also look into the eyes of the people who are actually affected by one of the global emergencies.

About 645 million people went hungry in 2025; 266 million in 47 countries were in an acute food crisis, and famine was confirmed in Gaza and Sudan. The largest displacement crisis is the war in Sudan. Rich states carry a documented share of responsibility – through colonial legacies, tax havens, debt, arms, wars, climate change and cut aid. This applies to the West, but also to China, Russia and the Gulf states. Nobody can seriously calculate an exact percentage.

The logic of the death penalty

From an open letter to Italy's then interior minister Matteo Salvini (July 2019): The assertion that rescuing refugees in the Mediterranean encourages traffickers to carry on sounds somehow plausible. Nevertheless, one has to realise what logic lies behind it. It is the logic of the death penalty: if you want to stop refugees from trying to cross the Mediterranean in dinghies, you can only do so by letting them drown. Only that in this case the "delinquents" have done nothing wrong. On the contrary: they are victims of unbearable living conditions.

Yes, we must stop smugglers from enriching themselves on refugees. But that does NOT mean doing NOTHING for people who are in such great need that they get into life-threatening dinghies to reach the saving Europe.

The research supports this: people who reached Italy across the Mediterranean most often name violence and war as their reason (58 %), followed by economic hardship (23 %). There is no evidence that rescue makes more people flee – but smugglers partly exploit it for even more dangerous crossings.

Humane, but not naive

It is quite obvious that we cannot help these people by taking them ALL into Europe. But even if we cannot simply take everyone in: building a fortress with impenetrable external borders is no solution either. That could only be a solution if the fate of these people were none of our business. But it is – not only because the actions of rich states often help to cause the poverty, but simply because they are human beings. Children who are just as lovable as our own. People who have the same basic needs as we do. Naivety is no solution. But anyone who only builds big border fences and otherwise doesn't give a damn about how people in other parts of the world are doing, while profiting from the fact that large groups of people cannot defend themselves against exploitation, must at least take responsibility for that and stop making excuses.

In Germany, asylum numbers have fallen sharply: from January to October 2026 there were 56,942 first applications. Nine years after arrival, 64 % of the refugees who came in 2015 were in work. A humane but not naive policy protects the persecuted reliably, opens legal routes for work, helps the neighbouring countries of crises, tackles the causes – and enforces rules fairly and quickly.

→ Read more on the German page

Inequality

Overcoming inequality

Wealth is extremely unequally distributed – between North and South and within countries, and at the very top it grows fastest. The author considers this inequality illegitimate and calls for redistribution and an absolute limit on the concentration of wealth. Concrete instruments exist, from a minimum tax on billionaires to higher inheritance taxes.

- Billionaires' wealth rose by 2.5 trillion to 18.3 trillion US dollars in 2025. Germany has 172 billionaires – a third more than the year before (Oxfam, January 2026). Source: l-iz.de
- In Germany the richest 10 % of households own 54 % of net wealth; the median household has 103,200 euros (Bundesbank, 2023). Source: publikationen.bundesbank.de
- A global minimum tax of 2 % of billionaires' wealth could raise 200 to 250 billion US dollars a year (Zucman report for the G20, 2024). Source: taxobservatory.world

Not legitimate - least of all by "performance"

We see extreme inequality – between North and South and within countries. Between countries the gap has narrowed somewhat since 1980, mainly because China and India have caught up. But within many countries it has grown, and at the very top wealth is growing fastest. This extreme inequality cannot be legitimised (least of all by "performance"). The

wealth accumulated by the rich has nothing to do with their contribution to the common good (if anything, the opposite). Extreme inequality does harm in many ways: it shifts power, disrupts democratic processes and contributes to extremist or populist political attitudes (AfD …).

That is why we say: we need, first, redistribution that brings the imbalance back into equilibrium – for example through high inheritance taxes and by paying environmental CO_2 taxes back in inverse proportion to income and wealth. And second, we need an absolute limit on the concentration of wealth, to be set in a democratic process. Society needs no billionaires and no corporations that can escape democratic control by the state.

Inequality in Germany

Germany is stable in terms of income, but not equal: the Gini coefficient has been around 0.3 since 2020. At the same time, according to the Paritätische poverty report 2026, about 13.3 million people (16.1 %) count as poor. Chances still depend heavily on family background: of 100 children from academic families, 78 start university – where the parents have no degree, only 25.

The consequences of inequality are scientifically disputed: a large meta-analysis (Nature, 2026) found no direct effect on well-being and mental health on average – but it did find one among people with little money. Other studies show that people who perceive their society as very unequal are more inclined to vote for populist parties.

Ways to more justice

The minimum tax on billionaires has not yet been implemented anywhere; Brazil adopted a minimum tax on high incomes in 2025. In Germany, the Federal Constitutional Court has been examining since October 2026 whether the tax advantages for inherited companies are compatible with the Basic Law. In 2025 inheritance and gift tax raised 21.4 billion euros – more than ever before.

As individuals we can influence this problem (almost) only through elections. But through the way we consume we can make sure, on a small scale, that smaller businesses survive too. There are good alternatives to WhatsApp, Amazon or Nestlé. In food retail it is harder: people with little money shop at the discounter, and that is not their fault. Those who can afford it support farm shops, weekly markets and cooperatives. Above all, though, politicians must limit the market power of Edeka, Rewe, Aldi and Lidl.

→ Read more on the German page

Gender justice

Gender justice

Equal rights, equal opportunities and equal dignity – for women and for men. The page sets the figures for both sexes side by side in 19 countries on every continent. The result: there are disadvantages on both sides, but they are unequally distributed and of different weight – and some injustices are so blatant that there is nothing to weigh up.

- Women earn less per hour almost everywhere: from 96 % of men's wages in Poland and 84 % in Germany to 73 % in Nigeria and 71 % in South Korea. Source: ec.europa.eu

- Men live shorter lives in all 19 countries – 7.4 years less in Poland, 7.0 in South Africa, 6.1 in Brazil, 4.7 in Germany. Source: data.worldbank.org
- Men take their own lives 1.2 times (India) to 6.3 times (Poland) as often as women. Source: data.worldbank.org

Why this page exists

You cannot make a website about injustice in the world without also addressing gender justice. There is crying injustice here. At the same time there are strong feminist movements. And there are already counter-movements that are completely backward-looking. I myself, as a German man, have also come across attitudes and demands labelled feminist that rather provoked resistance in me. I want to deal with all this here – always on the basis of the equal dignity of all people and an idea of justice that arises above all from applying John Rawls' "veil of ignorance".

What the numbers show

Power is still male: only in Mexico do roughly as many women as men sit in parliament; Nigeria (4 %), India (14 %) and Japan (15 %) are furthest away. Where girls lose most: in Nigeria one young woman in three was married as a child, in India a good one in five. In Egypt 87 % of women have undergone genital mutilation, and only 18 % are in the labour force.

Men, meanwhile, are victims of homicide 8 times as often in Mexico and almost 9 times as often in Brazil. Young men are falling behind in education: in most countries far more women than men now go to university – in Poland 99 to 63, in Norway 115 to 77 (gross enrolment ratio). All 19 states support women and girls in a targeted way; state programmes for men and boys exist in 7 countries, hardly at all in 3 and not at all in 9. Women do more unpaid work everywhere, men more paid work; added together, both work about equally long in many countries.

Compensation without new injustice

Not every difference is an injustice. The test is the veil of ignorance: would you accept this rule if you did not know whether you would be born a girl or a boy? The page proposes three rules for fair compensation: new posts go to women and men roughly in proportion to the share who qualified for them (cascade model) – no catch-up quota that makes young people pay for old injustices; preference only where qualifications are equal, limited in time and reviewed regularly; and starting earlier, in both directions – good childcare and transparent selection, and equally men in care, education and primary schools, reading support for boys and men's health.

→ Read more on the German page

Future issue

Future issue genetics: humanity divides

Genome editing has arrived in medicine – so far only in body cells that are not inherited. The author fears that genetic "optimisation" will one day be affordable for only a small part of humanity, and that humanity will divide as a result. Start-ups are already selling embryo tests with genetic risk scores.

- The first CRISPR therapy, Casgevy, has been approved in the EU since February 2024 (sickle cell disease, beta thalassaemia). Source: ema.europa.eu
- For Germany the manufacturer stated costs of around 2.2 million euros per patient. Source: aerzteblatt.de
- Heliospect offers embryo tests with genetic risk scores for up to 50,000 dollars for 100 embryos. Source: theguardian.com

Where the law draws the line

Interventions in the germ line – heritable changes in embryos – are still considered inadmissible internationally. In Germany they are a criminal offence (Section 5 of the Embryo Protection Act, up to five years in prison). He Jiankui, who created gene-edited twins in 2018, was sentenced to three years in prison. The International Summit on Human Genome Editing 2023 called the cost of the new therapies "unsustainable" and demands fair access.

Even so, start-ups mainly from the USA are pushing into the market; firms such as Preventive are raising millions for research into embryo editing. Professional societies warn that selecting embryos by polygenic scores is scientifically immature and is not recommended for clinical use. Expensive procedures could deepen existing inequality – the WHO warns of exactly this.

A new dimension of inequality

We created this topic because it will probably overshadow everything we know about inequality from human history so far. The problem is that only a small part of humanity will be able to afford these new possibilities. Just as the blessings of modern medicine benefit only a small part of humanity today, so it will be with genetic "optimisation". In the long run this means that humanity divides, because the new genetic traits will be passed on to the offspring. Homo sapiens and Neanderthal 2.0.

Is that bad? If we look at how we treat all living beings that have less power and fewer possibilities than we do – whether in industrial livestock farming or with regard to the people who live in poorer countries – then all we can say is: God help us. There is no reason to assume that there will be a peaceful coexistence of equal dignity between new and old human races. Unless a gene is found that brings ethical responsibility and compassion to fruition – for that, too, is part of human nature.

→ Read more on the German page

Power

Limiting illegitimate power

Where power escapes democratic control – in states, corporations and online – democracy is hollowed out. Most people in the world now live in autocracies. But democracy can defend itself: through elections, courts and fines against tech giants.

- 74 % of the world's people live in autocracies today. For the average person, democracy is back at the level of 1978, according to V-Dem. Source: v-dem.net
- Freedom House records the 20th consecutive year of declining freedom. Only 21 % of the world's population live in countries rated "free". Source: freedomhouse.org
- The EU fined Apple (500 million euros), Meta (200 million euros) and Google (2.95 billion euros over its advertising business, 890 million euros under the Digital Markets Act). Source:

germany.representation.ec.europa.eu

You don’t need a conspiracy theory

But what happens if state power becomes increasingly powerless? And democratic processes are undermined or corrupted in more or less subtle ways? You don’t need a conspiracy theory to see it: in many decisions, even in democratic states, democratic processes are undermined. Political opinion-forming and decisions are massively influenced by capital interests, enforced not only through lobbying but through other means of pressure (“then we’ll just go abroad”). States are less and less able to prevail against international corporations. Even on taxes the states are hardly making progress: a global minimum tax of 15 % has applied in many countries since 2024 – but in 2026 US corporations were largely exempted under pressure from the USA.

The number of democratic states is small. Autocrats dominate politics worldwide: Putin, the severely narcissistic Trump, China’s heads of state and so on. Under Donald Trump, according to V-Dem, the USA no longer counts as a liberal democracy for the first time in more than 50 years. Even elected heads of state can in practice suppress democracy or even reduce it to absurdity. Formal democracy is no guarantee that a country seriously asks about the needs and the will of its citizens. Trump sends his regards!

Democracy can defend itself

The indices do not fully agree: the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index sees a stabilisation in 2025 after eight years of decline. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán was voted out in April 2026 after 16 years; in Brazil, former president Bolsonaro was convicted in 2025 of attempting a coup. US courts found that Google abused a monopoly. No corporation has been broken up so far; for Google’s advertising business, the European Commission considers a partial sale necessary.

It is in our hands. Every single one of us has the chance to contribute to limiting illegitimate power – for example through the media we use and the way we consume.

→ Read more on the German page

Conspiracy myths

Conspiracy “theories”

Conspiracy belief is not a fringe issue, and it undermines trust in democracy. The author asks who actually benefits from conspiracy myths – and answers: the powerful, because the myths divert attention from real, provable abuses of power that are happening in plain sight.

- According to the Mitte study 2024/25, 18.2 % of people in Germany lack trust in democratic elections – three times as many as four years earlier. Source: fes.de
- In Germany’s 2025 federal election, a Russian campaign used language models for fakes. Source: correctiv.org
- In 2026 the Federal Cartel Office prohibited Amazon from controlling the prices of other sellers on its marketplace. Source: bundeskartellamt.de

Who benefits from conspiracy myths?

If I had built up complex power structures that cannot be democratically controlled, I would

have to expect a certain unease to spread among the population. In such a situation it would be most welcome to me if people instead put conspiracy fairy tales into the world and started fighting windmills. Invisible, hidden enemies. A secret world government, chemtrails, supposed forced vaccinations, a “plandemic”. Wonderful – nothing better could happen to me as one of the powerful. The unease is diverted away from me.

And there would be a big extra benefit: the debate about illegitimate power structures would be banished to the realm of the irrational. Whenever someone now tried to expose illegitimate power structures, I could smile smugly and say that this was surely a conspiracy theory. And the critics of power would be out of the discourse of reasonable people.

The real problems are in plain sight

The well-known activities of Google/Alphabet alone already exceed anything a conspiracy theorist could even have dreamed up 25 years ago. Extreme wealth in the hands of individuals and small groups also means enormous influence that escapes democratic control. And why on earth would I still need conspiracy theories? Conspiracy theories are a distraction (which itself is of course NOT a conspiracy) that can stop us from dealing with the actual problems that lie in plain sight before all our eyes.

Research shows that people who believe in conspiracy narratives trust state institutions much less. According to the Leipzig Authoritarianism Study 2024, conspiracy mentality is no longer as high as in 2020, but it remains more common in the West of Germany than in the East. When talking to relatives, mockery does not help: first get informed, talk in private, ask questions – and get help if there is danger.

→ Read more on the German page

Surveillance

Digital control

We have got used to our data being collected – for advertising, but increasingly also for surveillance and manipulation. The EU is starting to set limits, while state spyware hits journalists even in Europe. The page also puts China’s surveillance state into realistic perspective.

- Meta had to pay 200 million euros in 2025 under the Digital Markets Act because users had no real choice with “consent or pay”. Source: noerr.com
- The EU AI Act has banned certain AI practices since February 2025; the strict rules for high-risk AI only come from 2 December 2027 – 16 months later than planned. Source: kpmg.com
- A US court permanently banned the Pegasus maker NSO in 2025 from attacking WhatsApp users; the judge cut the damages from 167 to about 4 million dollars. Source: netzpolitik.org

From data collection to manipulation

And does anyone get upset about it? Most people just shrug it off. Even from China you hear that people often see the “Social Credit System” quite positively – after all, it seems to make life easier. Many see it as protection against fraud and corruption. And if people here willingly hand over their data? Let them, nobody is forcing them. But it is not that simple. Particularly

piquant: the big internet players are able to steer even the debate that is held about them, about how they handle our data and about permission to manipulate people – if that debate is held at all.

AI chatbots can shift voters by a few percentage points (studies in Nature and Science, 2025). In Germany's 2025 federal election, Russia used AI-supported fakes. Chat control – scanning private messages – remains contested in the EU: in October 2026 there was no agreement, and encrypted content is to remain exempt.

China - and Europe

There is no single points account for all citizens in China. The social credit system mainly concerns companies. The surveillance apparatus is nevertheless real. State spyware hits journalists in Europe too: in 2025 Paragon spyware was detected on phones in Italy.

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Corporate power

Economic monopolies

Who dominates the markets – from the supermarket to seeds, pharmaceuticals, the internet, media and arms, down to the funds in the background – where this power is abused, and what courts and authorities do about it. Courts have found abuse, but no corporation has been broken up.

- In October 2026 Google's Chrome browser had a worldwide market share of about 67 % on desktop and about 69 % across all devices. Source: gs.statcounter.com
- In agriculture, four corporations control 61 % of the pesticide market. Source: evangelisch.de
- In German food retail, more than 90 % of sales in 2025 went to Edeka, Rewe, Aldi and the Schwarz Group (Federal Cartel Office). Source: lebensmittelpraxis.de

Google in court

In 2024 a US court found that Google holds an illegal search monopoly. Google does not have to sell Chrome; instead, exclusive contracts are banned and data must be shared. Both sides have appealed. In advertising technology, too, Google lost in court in 2025, but it is not being broken up; a monitor will supervise Google for six years. In the glyphosate dispute, the US Supreme Court sided with Monsanto/Bayer in June 2026, so many lawsuits over missing warning labels have fallen away. Bayer became number one in agrochemicals through its takeover of Monsanto in 2018.

Why we keep going on about corporations

Why do we keep going on about corporations when it comes to the development of illegitimate power structures? Because the concentration of market power harms everyone in the long run. Corporations have so much economic power that they can buy up particularly innovative or up-and-coming companies – and push competitors out of the market. The result is always the same: every time somebody has a good new idea, their start-up gets bought up. So that we keep spooning up the corporate stew, alternatives are withheld from us and power stays nicely concentrated.

The most independent browser is Mozilla Firefox: behind it is a non-profit foundation, not a corporation. There is one catch: Mozilla gets around three quarters of its income for having Google preset as the search engine. So even the most important alternative depends on the monopolist's money – one more reason why politics must intervene here.

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Democracy

Democratising and limiting power

Goals and ways for democratic control of power: from citizens' assemblies and lobbying rules to digital alternatives you can use today. Every person who chooses alternatives helps keep a niche alive in which other providers can survive.

- The German Bundestag's first citizens' assembly ("Nutrition in transition") made nine recommendations in 2024, such as free lunches in day-care centres and schools. The Bundestag did not vote on them. Source: bundestag.de
- Ireland is seen as a pioneer: it has held six citizens' assemblies so far, most recently on biodiversity and drug policy (2022/2023). Source: citizensassembly.ie
- The Bundestag's lobby register gathered more than 7,000 entries from 2022 to 2024. According to LobbyControl, the "lobby footprint" in draft laws has hardly any effect. Source: bundestag.de

Not against Google, but for freedom

We need to limit Google's power not because Google is primarily evil, but simply because Google has too much uncontrolled and by now uncontrollable power. So it is not against Google but for freedom. By choosing alternatives to Google, Amazon and co., minorities really do have a strong effect: we will not push the monopolists out of pole position (and perhaps that isn't even necessary), but we can preserve niches in which other providers can keep developing – like in a biotope.

Even if the hurdles may be high: it is not true that we can do nothing against monopolies and illegitimate influence – we just lack determination. It is in our hands; in the end we have the power, even if as individuals we are only one in several billion of the world's population.

Tools that already exist

Systemic consensus-building helps large groups decide: everyone writes down how high their RESISTANCE is to each proposed solution – 0 points means no resistance, 10 points maximum resistance. The solution with the lowest total of resistance points is implemented.

Digital sovereignty is becoming an issue for public administration: the public company ZenDiS is developing openDesk, open-source office software for authorities. Ecosia and Qwant are building a European search index. Startpage has been majority-owned by the US company System1 since 2019. Maps.me was sold and rebuilt; its founders now make Organic Maps. Waze has belonged to Google since 2013 and is no alternative.

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Economy

Creating a sustainable economic system

Small changes within the existing economic system will not be enough. The author's answer: capitalism as it is today cannot become sustainable – what is needed is a market economy in which the common good is the goal, not a side effect. At the same time, protection of human rights in supply chains is being weakened.

- The EU supply chain law (CSDDD) was drastically reduced by the omnibus package: it now applies only to companies with more than 5,000 employees and more than 1.5 billion euros turnover, and from July 2029. Source: consilium.europa.eu
- Fairtrade products had sales of 3.14 billion euros in Germany in 2025 (about 38 euros per person). The market share is 5 % for coffee, 17 % for bananas, 21 % for cocoa. Source: fairtrade.net
- About 50 million people lived in modern slavery in 2021 (ILO). From 14 December 2027 the EU bans products made with forced labour from its market. Source: ilo.org

Capitalism cannot become sustainable as it is

If we want a life-friendly world for all people, small changes within the existing economic system will not be enough. As long as money exists primarily to multiply itself, something is fundamentally wrong. We need a completely new paradigm of economic activity in which social and ecological criteria and the benefit to the common good are truly understood as values. Within the current liberal-capitalist system this will not work. Nor with voluntary commitments. It takes strong, democratically controlled institutions to create binding rules and enforce them.

My answer: as it is today, capitalism cannot become sustainable. A system whose goal is to multiply capital, which dumps the costs for nature and people elsewhere and which depends on ever more consumption destroys its own foundations in the long run – and ours. But I do not believe that we must or can wait for a big change of system. We need a transformation so deep that something fundamentally different stands at the end: a market economy in which the common good is the goal and not the side effect, in which the consumption of raw materials and energy falls and life still gets better. And for that, politics comes first – not the shopping basket.

Where things stand

Germany's supply chain law is to be watered down: the reporting obligation is to be dropped, and there are to be fines only for serious violations. Rich countries are decoupling growth and emissions too slowly: at the pace of the best 11 countries they would need more than 220 years on average to cut their emissions by 95 % (Vogel & Hickel 2023). The IPCC sees a mitigation potential of 40–70 % by 2050 in changes in behaviour and demand.

A study in Nature (2025) links environmental and social need: the richest 20 % of countries, with 15 % of the people, cause over 40 % of the overload of the Earth; the poorest 40 % of countries bear over 60 % of the global shortfall in basic needs. Fairness and sustainability belong together. The Economy for the Common Good, now called ECOnGOOD internationally, offers a model: around 1,000 companies and organisations have drawn up a common-good balance sheet.

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Future issue

Future issue artificial intelligence and robotics

AI will play a central role in all future forms of economic activity – and in the question of (illegitimate) power. The author warns that owners of AI and robots will extend their dominance, while many workers lose their importance and their bargaining power. AI changes jobs, consumes a lot of energy and is entering warfare.

- At least 700 million people use leading AI systems every week (International AI Safety Report 2026). Source: internationalaisafetyreport.org
- According to the IMF, almost 40 % of employment worldwide is exposed to AI, around 60 % in rich countries. Source: imf.org
- Data centres used about 415 TWh of electricity in 2024, about 1.5 % of world power; by 2030 it could be more than twice as much. Source: iea.org

A new dimension of economic power

With the help of artificial intelligence and robotics, the richer classes – the owners of the means of production – will be able to extend their dominance further. Many people lose their importance as producers or service providers. Specialists are needed, but no longer the ordinary worker or the ordinary clerk. With that, the social power that trade unions, for example, were able to exercise in the past is lost too. Large parts of the population become ever more powerless, in the truest sense of the word.

And who actually programs AI and feeds it with basic assumptions and goals? Here too it is quite clear that today oligopolies can decide, completely uncontrolled, what goes into the systems. Once AI systems have developed themselves further, they are so complex that no human being understands any more what they are actually doing.

What we know today

According to the ILO, a change in jobs is more likely than their disappearance. In Germany, machines could already take over at least 70 % of the tasks in 38 % of jobs (IAB 2024); the share of businesses using generative AI rose from 5 % (2023) to 24 % (2025). An overall effect on employment cannot yet be measured, but first studies show fewer entry-level jobs for young people in occupations close to AI. Germany has the third-highest robot density in the world, with 449 industrial robots per 10,000 employees; China installs more than half of all new robots.

In 2025, 156 states voted at the UN for negotiations on rules for autonomous weapons; a binding treaty is still missing.

And in warfare: if you leave the decision to kill to a machine, the last inhibitions fall away … Nevertheless, despite all assurances, the development of such systems is being pushed ahead massively. To wage wars it will no longer be necessary to have many soldiers who risk their lives, but enough economic power to deploy armies of self-learning drones.

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Act

What you can do

Buy cocoa, chocolate, coffee and bananas with the Fairtrade label or from fair-trade importers

such as GEPA. Eat less meat, especially from factory farming – most imported soya ends up in animal feed. Watch out for palm oil in ready meals and cosmetics. Use your mobile phone and laptop for longer, have them repaired and recycle old devices – that reduces the demand for cobalt and coltan. Buy less and longer-lasting clothing, preferably second-hand or with the “Grüner Knopf” (Green Button) label. Put your money in a sustainable bank that does not finance arms companies.

Support organisations that campaign for fair rules, e.g. Initiative Lieferkettengesetz, Netzwerk Steuergerechtigkeit, erlassjahr.de, Brot für die Welt or Misereor. Talk to your members of parliament: for a strong supply chain law, the UN tax convention, debt relief and reliable development cooperation.

Limit digital power in everyday life. Most people use WhatsApp, but you can agree with your best friends to use Threema or Signal instead; once a few friends are on an alternative platform, there is a chance that more will follow. Search first with other search engines such as Ecosia. And Amazon threatens to become a monopolist: look for the product via a search engine or a price-comparison site such as idealo.de – you will find many other web shops there, often cheaper than Amazon. Too much power and influence in one hand is simply harmful.

If you donate, look closely: experts estimate that the most effective health programmes achieve around 100 times as much as average ones – laypeople assume a difference of only about 1.5 times. Three questions help: Does the money arrive? Does it work – is there evidence that people’s lives improve, and by how much per euro? And does it do no harm?

This page is a translation and summary prepared with AI assistance from the German pages; the author’s own words are shown in black.

More in English: Essentials in English · What should we do? · Climate · Resources of the Earth

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PART IV

What should we do?

Values, reliable knowledge, psychology, goals, political and personal action – and spiritual paths.

What should we do?

Values, facts, psychology, goals, political and personal action, spiritual paths – what we can orient ourselves by, and how we can act effectively.

Overview

What should we do?

Knowing is not enough – act as a consumer and as a citizen, and do it for the right reason.

What we can orient ourselves by, what we know for certain, why we still do so little – and how we can act effectively, personally and politically.

Everyone can act: as a consumer and as a citizen – the two belong together. The biggest personal levers are the car, flights, electricity, heating and food. Behaviour is contagious, and most people want more climate protection but underestimate how many others want it too. Without laws, prices and good options, however, individuals remain overwhelmed – that is why political pressure is needed. Together we achieve more: in initiatives, citizens' assemblies, in court and at the ballot box.

Footprint or system change? Both. People often argue whether it depends on individuals or on politics. Research says this is not a contradiction. The IPCC estimates that demand-side strategies – living, travelling and eating differently, supported by suitable infrastructure and technology – can cut emissions in these areas by 40 to 70 per cent by 2050 compared with what would be expected without them. That only works if politics and infrastructure make it easy. Personal action makes you credible and is contagious. Political action changes the rules for everyone.

- The carbon footprint in Germany is 9.8 tonnes per person; the goal is below 1 tonne. Source: umweltbundesamt.de · German page
- In 125 countries, 89 % of people want more political action against the climate crisis. Source: econ.uni-bonn.de · German page
- 69 % of people worldwide say they would give 1 % of their income every month for climate protection – but they estimate that only about 43 % of others would. (The question was about willingness; nobody actually paid.) Source: nature.com · German page
- In laboratory experiments, a committed minority of about 25 % was enough to tip a group norm. Model calculations give thresholds between 10 and 40 %. This cannot be transferred one to one to a whole society. Source: asc.upenn.edu · German page
- Demand-side strategies can cut emissions in housing, mobility and food by 40 to 70 % by 2050 – if infrastructure and technology support them. Source: ipcc.ch · German page

→ German overview page ·

Ethics

Ethics of sustainability: are there universal values?

The value compass of the site rests on an experience, not a theory: connectedness with everything that lives. From it follow four values – justice, equal dignity, respect for life and

preserving the foundations of life. Morality is a lighthouse, not a straitjacket, and "renunciation" is the wrong word for giving up what was never ours.

- In reports from 60 societies, the same seven rules – helping family and group, reciprocity, courage, respect, fair sharing and respect for others' property – were almost always judged good: in 961 of 962 observations. Source: ora.ox.ac.uk
- The psychology of values finds ten basic values that are recognised in all cultures. What differs is mainly how strongly they are weighted. Source: scholarworks.gvsu.edu
- Since 2022 the UN has also recognised a human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Source: digitallibrary.un.org
- Guilt about a specific act moves people to make amends. Shame can do so too, as long as the mistake can be put right; if nothing seems salvageable, it tends to trigger withdrawal or defensiveness. Source: pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

Experience comes first

At the beginning there is no theory but an experience: the direct experience of connectedness with everything that lives. Everything that exists has a "value" that cannot be proven or derived – the intellect cannot get there. It cannot be justified any further, only experienced, above all in silence. From this experience follows the dignity of all beings and of nature itself. And from it follow four values that give the basic orientation for every topic of this site.

Justice: ideally, it makes no difference to a good life where, with which skin colour or which gender a person is born. Equal dignity: easy as long as we mean our neighbours, harder when it comes to refugees, minorities or people in other countries. Respect for life: for the individual animal that suffers, the species that dies out and the ecosystem that collapses. Preserving the foundations of life: the planet's limits are not negotiable.

And one rule for dealing with knowledge: our values stand firm. They determine which questions we ask and which practices and ideas we approve of. Our data, on the other hand, can be wrong – we correct them as soon as we know better.

Morality is a lighthouse

People misunderstand the point of morality: to set yourself more than you would without it. That includes the fact that most people do not fully live up to their own moral standards. Morality is like a lighthouse, a goal that as a rule has not yet been reached (which does not mean you can sit back because of that). If you take the degree of agreement between your own actions and your moral conviction as the measure of morality, the most moral person suddenly becomes the one who sets himself no goals at all and says: "That's just how I am, I have my weaknesses and I stand by them."

It is this constant misunderstanding that ethics only has to do with prohibitions. The question is not only: "What should we NOT do?" but: "What should we do?" Alongside the aim of avoiding avoidable suffering for oneself and other beings stands, as an equal aim, seeking and promoting joy, flourishing and happiness for oneself and other beings.

Renunciation is the wrong word

So it would be more accurate to say that we should stop appropriating what is not justified, rather than that we are renouncing something that is ours by right. Meeting every person's

needs costs a certain amount of resources and energy. The only question is: how large is that amount? It turns out that there is simply no reasonable ethical system conceivable that would allow richer people to consume an extremely disproportionate share of resources and to live disproportionately at the expense of the foundations of life of other people and living beings, now and in the future. And because we have no claim to it, the word renunciation is wrong too. Not everything that is usual or permitted is ours by right.

The dignity of being

Human dignity cannot depend only on cognitive abilities. Then whoever has greater cognitive abilities would be endowed with more dignity than whoever has fewer. That is obviously nonsense. Personally, I believe something quite different: we cannot justify dignity at all. At least not on a cognitive level. But we can intuit that there is something we call dignity, and that it rests on a reality. What it is escapes our ability to express it in language. I believe that what is meant by dignity points to our deeper way of being, to a level of being that can only be recognised in transpersonal experience. In the end it is about the dignity of being, not about specific potentials of Homo sapiens.

→ Read more on the German page

Facts

Facts: is there reliable knowledge?

Science provides no final proof, but it tests its claims again and again, jointly and in public – and that is what makes it trustworthy. On human-made climate change the agreement is overwhelming, and many numbers have got worse since 2019. Uncertainty is no reason to wait.

- More than 99 % of peer-reviewed scientific papers agree: humans are causing climate change. Source: cals.cornell.edu
- Human-caused warming stood at 1.37 °C in 2025. At current emissions, the CO2 budget for 1.5 °C will last only about three more years. Source: eurekalert.org
- Seven of nine planetary boundaries have been crossed. Since 2025 ocean acidification has been one of them. Source: stockholmresilience.org
- The years 2023 to 2025 were, on average, above 1.5 °C for the first time. Warm-water coral reefs have already passed their tipping point (about 1.2 °C). Source: zsl.org

Science gives no proof - only probabilities

Science does NOT deliver PROOF. It is characterised above all by offering hypotheses – possible explanations for phenomena. In Karl Popper's understanding of science, these must in principle be falsifiable. In the end, science can only make statements about the probability that a hypothesis is true. If the probability that a hypothesis is correct is 99 %, it obviously makes sense to trust it more than an assumption that is 95 % likely to be false. But absolute certainty does not exist in science.

For the climate there is a ready-made scale: the IPCC attaches probabilities to its key statements – "virtually certain" means 99 to 100 per cent, "very likely" 90 to 100 per cent. And uncertainty is no reason to wait: the greater the uncertainty, the greater, on average, the damage to be expected.

What has changed since 2019

The page summarises the facts that Scientists for Future compiled in 2019. The core statements still hold, but many numbers have worsened. Global average temperature has already risen by about 1.4 °C compared with 1850–1900, and the rise is accelerating – currently by about 0.27 °C per decade. The eleven years from 2015 to 2025 were the eleven warmest since measurements began; the warmest was 2024.

Instead of falling, CO2 emissions keep rising, most recently by about 1 % a year to a new record. With current policies the world is heading for up to 2.8 °C of warming this century, according to the UN Environment Programme (October 2026) – a projection; if all climate pledges are kept, it is 2.6 °C. From the start of 2026, about 130 billion tonnes of CO2 remain in the budget for 1.5 °C (central estimate).

False information - and what helps

Many people fall for false reports because they do not look closely – less because of partisanship. Short reminders to pay attention to accuracy and "pre-bunking" against manipulation tricks help, but only a little and only briefly. Pausing before you share remains right; on its own it is not enough against disinformation. Trust in science is relatively high worldwide: in Germany, according to the Science Barometer 2026, 56 per cent of people strongly trust science and research (2025: 54 per cent).

Beyond data and facts

Ethical considerations are often discredited and smiled at as do-gooding, as being a "goody-goody" or the like. Don't worry – we don't need to improve the world at all, because the world in itself is already "good". But we do have to change something about how we act.

Many people in the rich world secretly believe that they (= I and my children) will get away with it. That they can carry on with their lifestyle at the expense of all other people, animals and ecosystems living now and in the future. A seductive thought – and one of the real reasons why we do not get into action.

→ Read more on the German page

Psychology

Psychology for sustainable behaviour

Knowledge alone does not lead to action: feelings, habits, group belonging and the structures around us play their part. We push the threat away, justify ourselves and underestimate how many others want change. What helps: clear rules instead of appeals, visible examples, and a life that shows giving up waste is not a loss.

- In the largest behavioural study on the climate (59,440 people, 63 countries), all messages were only weakly effective. A letter to a person in the future achieved the most. Source: pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov
- Climate anxiety is widespread: 59 % of young people in ten countries were very or extremely worried in 2021. There are no fixed phases of grief or change. Source: researchportal.bath.ac.uk
- About half of people cooperate if the others do too. Fair rules protect this willingness. Source: econpapers.repec.org

- Fact checks almost never backfire. Correcting is worthwhile – ideally right after someone has seen the false report. Source: news.mit.edu

“I can’t do anything anyway”

The most effective strategy against cognitive dissonance is this: “I can’t do anything and can’t change anything” – so I am not (co-)responsible either. Sounds logical, doesn’t it? The catch is: it is not the truth. We can change things and we do have influence. Every one of us. And that also applies to the big issues this web portal is about. We can do something! That is why we have an unavoidable responsibility. Whether I do something or not – the consequences of this doing and not-doing are and remain my responsibility, as long as I have a choice in how I act – and in the vast majority of cases we do.

Short-term reward - and the way beyond it

Our behaviour is steered above all by what makes us feel better right now. That is why it is so hard for us to align our actions with their long-term consequences. That only works if we make the long-term consequences of our behaviour so clear to ourselves, and internalise them so deeply, that we already feel better NOW when we respect them. Awareness of consequences that cannot be experienced directly is the pivot for changing behaviour.

The page’s research summary adds nuance: short-term reward steers us strongly, but not alone. Values, goals, identity and the behaviour of the people around us steer just as much.

And this is where spiritual experience matters for the whole topic of sustainability: when I EXPERIENCE that I am deeply connected with all beings, I also become capable of compassion and sympathetic joy. And if we practise compassion and sympathetic joy (before we are all enlightened), we may grow a little into this experience of connectedness. Sharing, then, not as asceticism but as the fulfilment of what we most deeply are.

Why appeals don’t work - the SUV example

We need rules. Those who have already occupied their sun lounger like to denounce this as a “policy of bans” – but it is nothing more than the logical consequence of the laws of game theory. That is why appeals, voluntary commitments and calls to car buyers do not help. Psychologically speaking, that is nonsense. The only thing that helps here is to ban such vehicles. And this ban will only come if we, as citizens, together realise what vicious circle we have fallen into and decide democratically, together, to stop.

Nothing is missing

That is why it is crucial that all those who have understood how important a change of course is show with their whole life: you can live wonderfully, you can be well, you lack nothing really important, you can be glad and happy – even if you give up wasteful consumption. Good food is delicious, travelling by train is less stressful than flying, and when it comes to goods, less (of high quality) is often more. If we learn again that connectedness and being together are a source of well-being and happiness, then there is no renunciation in it. On the contrary, we gain a new quality of life.

Research supports this without exaggerating: people who live less materialistically are on average more satisfied. Meditation helps measurably, but to a moderate degree.

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Goals

Sustainability goals

What goals the world has set itself for 2030, where it stands today – and what makes good goals for a liveable future. In 2015 the world agreed on 17 goals; four years before the deadline it is off track on most of them. And the goals themselves contain a contradiction between growth and limits.

- Of the 139 sub-targets with time series, 36 % are on track or making at least moderate progress (UN report 2026). 15 % have even fallen behind the level of 2015. Source: unstats.un.org
- The Sustainable Development Report 2026 counts more strictly: only 16 % of the sub-targets are likely to be reached by 2030. Germany ranks 5th of 169 countries in the SDG Index. Source: sdgtransformationcenter.org
- The richest fifth of countries, with 15 % of the world's people, cause more than 40 % of the Earth's annual overshoot. Source: eprints.whiterose.ac.uk
- Development aid from rich countries collapsed by 23 % in 2025 – more than ever before. Source: unstats.un.org

36 or 16 per cent?

Two numbers went through the press in 2026, and both are correct – they measure different things. The UN report counts all sub-targets that are "on track" or making "moderate progress". The SDSN report asks more strictly which sub-targets will probably be fully reached by 2030. The direction is often right, the speed is not. Almost half of the sub-targets (49 per cent) are progressing too slowly, and none of the targets on gender equality is on track.

There are successes too: since 2015 almost 1 billion people have gained access to safe drinking water, and electricity now reaches 92 per cent of the world's population.

Growth versus ecology

Not all 17 goals fit together. Goal 8 demands lasting economic growth; the environmental goals demand that we protect nature. Whether both are possible at the same time is one of the great disputes of sustainability research. In 2019 the economic anthropologist Jason Hickel calculated that with 3 per cent growth a year, global resource use cannot be reduced, and emissions do not fall fast enough either. A study of 148 countries since 1992 shows that no country meets its people's basic needs while staying within planetary boundaries.

Kate Raworth's "doughnut" offers a simple picture: an inner ring as the social foundation, an outer ring as the ecological ceiling, and between them the "safe and just space" for humanity. To ensure that all people have the essentials by 2030, progress against poverty and deprivation would have to be five times faster.

What climate movements demand

Fridays for Future demand compliance with the Paris Agreement and the 1.5 °C target, and for Germany net zero by 2035. Extinction Rebellion demands citizens' assemblies. Gottfried Müller objects: a random selection of citizens can be a useful addition because it does not exclude people who are not represented in parties – but such an assembly does NOT replace

the elected parliament, nor the expertise of scientists.

Since 2019 the movement has changed strongly: several groups have given up blockades and now rely on broad participation, citizens' assemblies and the defence of democracy. Whether radical protest helps or harms is still an open question in research.

Good goals

George Monbiot says targets slow us down because people stop once they have reached them; firefighters do not set themselves a quota. Research only half agrees. Edwin Locke and Gary Latham evaluated hundreds of studies: concrete, demanding goals lead to better performance than the call to "do your best". But goals have side effects – they can narrow vision and tempt people into risky or dishonest behaviour; researchers compare them to a prescription drug.

If-then plans help turn goals into deeds: "When I drive to work on Monday, then I take the bike." The large 2024 review of 642 tests confirms that they help, but after correcting for unpublished studies the effect is smaller. A goal needs a plan of who does what by when.

→ Read more on the German page

Politics

Political action

Individuals can do a lot, but the big levers are laws, prices and infrastructure. Germany will miss its 2030 target on current projections, and much of the progress since 2021 has been rolled back. That is why it needs, more than ever, many politically active people – voting, speaking up, going to court, joining initiatives.

- In 2025 Germany emitted around 649 million tonnes of greenhouse gases, 48 % less than in 1990 – but transport and buildings are hardly making progress. Source: umweltbundesamt.de
- The 2030 target (minus 65 %) will be missed on current projections. The Council of Experts on Climate Change expects Germany to exceed its budget by 60 to 100 million tonnes by 2030. Source: expertenrat-klima.de
- There has been a CO2 price since 2021, but still no climate dividend paid back to citizens. The Bundestag rejected a motion for one on 20.03.2026. Source: bundestag.de
- Climate citizens' assemblies in six countries made 488 recommendations, about two thirds of them more ambitious than current policy. Little has been implemented. Source: leuphana.de

A miracle - and what came after

The decision of the Federal Constitutional Court of 24 March 2021 seems like a miracle to me. Since then the European Court of Human Rights (2024) and the International Court of Justice (2025) have also held states to account. In March 2021, the highest constitutional body of a large industrial nation declared the federal government's climate policy unconstitutional in key respects. The central argument was (to put it in simple words) that it is not permissible to live it up for so long that our descendants have to pay the bill.

And what came next? In 2021 suddenly everyone wanted to be a climate protector. In 2026 little of that is left: the government of CDU/CSU and SPD has scrapped the 65 % rule for new heating systems, capped the CO2 price, raised the commuter allowance and cut the air passenger tax. There is still no climate dividend. Emissions fell by only 0.1 % in 2025.

That is why we need, now and more than ever, a large number of politically active people who increase the pressure on politics and stand up for ecological reason, social fairness and a sustainable economy.

The minimum package – and what became of it

Gottfried Müller's package of "absolutely necessary minimum demands": a CO2 price as high as possible that covers the whole production and supply chain; all revenues paid back to citizens as a direct payment; an end to all environmentally harmful subsidies and consistent support for wind and solar power; bans on ecological absurdities such as domestic flights, avoidable single-use packaging, large SUVs (including oversized electric SUVs) and planned obsolescence; a ban on imports of soy, meat and palm oil from rainforest areas; and priority for walking, cycling and public transport.

The state of play in November 2026: the national CO2 price started in 2021 at 25 euros per tonne; in 2026 it lies in a corridor of 55 to 65 euros and is to stay at that level in 2027. The EU emissions trading for buildings and transport (ETS2) has been postponed to 2028. The Deutschlandticket for local and regional transport has cost 63 euros a month since January 2026.

Courts and movements

On 9 April 2024 the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favour of the Swiss KlimaSeniorinnen: too little climate protection violates the right to private and family life (Art. 8). On 23 July 2025 the International Court of Justice found unanimously that states are obliged under international law to protect the climate; the opinion is not binding but carries great weight.

Starting with yourself does not mean stopping with yourself

Starting with yourself does not mean stopping with yourself: political action is necessary now! It is no longer enough to separate a bit of rubbish and ride a bike now and then. In many areas we are heading for tipping points (climate, Amazon, species extinction, inequality, democracy). Once such tipping points are reached, the dynamics become irreversible in the long run! Policy so far – nationally and globally – is a testament to total failure in the face of global challenges.

Do not vote for a party that has the big issues of the future in its programme but does not prioritise them in political reality. It is not only about the future of the euro and keeping every job; it is about more: it is about the future of our children.

→ Read more on the German page

Acting yourself

Acting yourself: the checklist

The biggest single levers are living without a car, flying less, green electricity, a plant-based diet and renovating your home. Your own action works twice: directly and as an example. You do not have to be perfect – but offsetting is no substitute for avoiding.

- An evaluation of 771 individual measures shows the savings per person and year: living without a car around 2 tonnes and more, one long-haul flight less over 1.7 tonnes, a vegan

diet 0.9 tonnes on average – the biggest lever in food. Source: eprints.whiterose.ac.uk

- Renewable electricity saves a median of 1.6 tonnes in that evaluation – a figure that comes mainly from countries with a lot of coal power. In Germany, electricity makes up only about 0.6 tonnes of your footprint. Source: umweltbundesamt.de
- The top 10 % cause a good third to almost half of emissions – those who earn and consume a lot have the biggest lever. Source: ipcc.ch
- Small things such as plastic bags or light bulbs achieve little. In ten Canadian school textbooks the big levers were mostly missing; they mainly listed small steps. Source: iopscience.iop.org

Quick check for quick starters

Don't let anyone talk you into believing that you have to be consistent in everything, or else you needn't even start. Do what is possible for you, as long as you feel good doing it.

Vote for a party that actively works to preserve the foundations of life and for a fair economic system. Look at how it votes, not only at its programme. CDU-CSU, FDP, yes – the SPD too have done us so much damage by now, enough is enough. And the AfD is completely out of the question.

Replace meat with other tasty dishes wherever you can, and do without eggs, milk and dairy products wherever possible for you. What matters is not that you become a super-consistent vegan and get a halo, but that you eat LESS meat and dairy and make sure they come from animal husbandry that is as species-appropriate as possible.

Avoid the car wherever possible and switch to bike and public transport. Avoid flying (also for work) wherever possible – and if there is no way around a flight, offset with a provider with high standards such as atmosfair, and see it as a donation, not as compensation.

Electricity, money, power, mindfulness

Get your electricity from a renewable energy provider with the Grüner-Strom-Label or the EnergieVision seal (formerly ok-power). Put your money in a sustainable bank (e.g. GLS). Choose a group or campaign that works to preserve the foundations of our life and for more fairness, and get involved there, either financially or personally.

If you want to reduce non-legitimised power: avoid clicking on G—- sponsored search suggestions and G—- ads. Use Amazon only to search for products and then buy directly from small online shops. Switch from WhatsApp and Facebook to other providers.

Mindfulness: take at least a quarter of an hour every day in which you keep yourself free of all distractions and simply are there.

Avoid the consistency trap

It is not about all of us becoming saints, but about causing as little harm as possible. You are doing the right thing if you avoid the consistency trap: "I can't do everything that would be right, so there is no point anyway." Fortunately, that is not true. You don't have to become a vegan straight away to do something against mass animal suffering. As I said: EVERY schnitzel less is a gain.

Remember: it is not about feeling guilty because you don't manage something, but about being

glad every time you succeed in coming into harmony with nature and your fellow human beings. Every small step is a success! The action of the individual is necessary – but not sufficient.

Offsetting is no substitute for avoiding: many certificates do not deliver what they promise. Green electricity, green investments and labels only work if they set something additional in motion – look for verified labels. And the footprint is not enough: the "handprint" shows how you change structures at work, at school or in your community.

→ Read more on the German page

Spiritual paths

Spiritual paths

Silence, meditation, contemplation: centres and groups that accompany you on a path into the experience of connectedness – from Zen, Vipassana, Tibetan Buddhism and Christian mysticism. Spirituality here is not a belief system but direct experience – and a path that is not a walk in the park.

- In a survey of 1,232 regular meditators, about one in four reported particularly unpleasant experiences that they attributed to meditation. Source: journals.plos.org
- A study with practitioners and teachers from Theravāda, Zen and Tibetan Buddhism describes 59 kinds of such experiences. How burdensome they became depended partly on the relationship with teachers and the community. Source: journals.plos.org

Why this page

One can despair of the world when one feels powerless in the face of injustice and the destruction of the foundations of life. But even if our efforts may be ever so insignificant for the course of the world, it still makes a great deal of sense to live as mindfully as possible. For the underlying reason for striving for a way of life that tries to be in harmony with nature, with people and with animals is, in the end, love and compassion. However corny that may sound. When we experience the preciousness of all forms of life and our deep connection with them, it no longer matters whether our actions make a difference on the grand scale. If we can achieve something bigger, that is good. But even if our actions change nothing in the course of the world: just as I tend a flower for its own sake, I can try to treat all things and beings as well as I can – for their own sake.

Silence as a way

One way into the experience of connectedness can be silence. Deep, objectless meditation leads to an experience of connectedness, of not being separate. Beyond all religions, denominations and ideologies there is a way to a direct experience of reality that transcends all thinking. Spirituality is not a belief system, not a theory, not an edifice of ideas. Spiritual paths are paths into direct experience beyond conceptual thinking. What is experienced cannot be conveyed, yet the experience itself can happen to anyone. You cannot make such an experience happen; the way there leads rather through giving up all ideas and certainties. Most people need the guidance and support of a "master" to be able to walk such a path. In the spiritual traditions, this has nothing to do with personality cult and dependence.

How the centres were chosen

The page lists paths that have been passed on from teachers to students for centuries and lead into deep, direct experience. Esotericism – astrology, channelling, energy healing and other teachings without foundation – was deliberately left out, as were groups with a personality cult and purely commercial offers. Each organisation was checked for reports of abuse, cult-like structures or right-wing, antisemitic or anti-Muslim positions. Such a check cannot give a guarantee.

There are many other spiritual teachers, paths and traditions – shamanic ones, for example. That they are not named here is due only to the author's ignorance of these paths.

Not a walk in the park

A spiritual path is not a walk in the park. It brings us into contact with deeper layers – and that can include phases that are hard for the individual.

Yamada Kōun Roshi once said: "Zen is very simple, but not easy." I can sing a song about that, and I believe it is true of all genuine spiritual paths. Time and again it was a hard path, but today I am simply grateful for it. There is no rational answer to the deepest questions. We cannot "know" the truth. But there is something much better and more beautiful: we can experience reality directly. It has always been there and always will be. That is why I would like to encourage everyone to take the path into silence and direct experience.

→ Read more on the German page

Older page (2019)

What kind of sustainability type are you? Choose your menu.

An older page from 2019 offers a personal way in for different attitudes – from "I'm already fully committed" and "This weighs on me too much" to "I see it, but I can't change" and "I believe we will find technical solutions".

If you see it but can't change

Well, then you are in the best of company. The author of these pages is no saint either, and I see many discrepancies between what I know and how I behave. Don't let that discourage you. Nobody can be 100 % consistent (that also makes you too hard). My motto: every schnitzel less is a success.

Maybe you say: "I don't want to burden myself with such topics, it depresses me." It is quite astonishing, but you might feel better if you face things and engage actively with reality. Keeping up denial costs a great deal of strength. And secretly we sense that something is not right at all.

→ Read more on the German page

Act

What you can do - starting today

Take the big levers first: live without a car or use it as little as possible, avoid flying, eat mostly plants, switch to green electricity with a verified label, have your heating checked by an independent energy advisor, and move your money to a sustainable bank. Buy only what gives

you lasting joy and is durable. Offset unavoidable flights only with a high-standard provider – and treat it as a donation, not as a licence.

Then widen your handprint. Join a group or initiative that works for the foundations of life and for fairness – locally, in your community, or with organisations that use the courts and citizens' assemblies. Vote for parties that protect the foundations of life, and judge them by how they vote, not by their programme. Talk to people who think differently, with empathy rather than a raised finger.

Do what is possible for you, as long as it keeps you well – every small step counts, and your example is contagious. And do it for the right reason: not because it is guaranteed to change the course of the world, but because people, animals and nature are precious – for their own sake.

This page is a translation and summary prepared with AI assistance from the German pages; the author's own words are shown in black.

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