

Flash brief

The EU's global climate leadership

From leading by example to shared leadership

The EU has substantively changed its negotiation strategy in the global climate regime after the failure to reach an agreement at COP-15 in 2009. The move towards a more **bottom-up approach** takes more seriously the concerns of other actors, including states in the Global South. This change has reinvigorated the EU's role on the international level and was instrumental for reaching the Paris Agreement. However, it also led to a weaker agreement in substance, relying on member states' willingness to implement policies to meet an ambitious target.

Make agreements more binding

The EU has to find ways to make the regime more binding. Relying on targets, voluntary Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) combined with discursive pressure will not be enough. Instead of only pressuring others, the EU itself has to considerably step up its targets and measures to improve its credibility: the 2030 and 2050 goals need to be reconsidered, the Emissions Trading

System reformed, a carbon tax introduced. Moreover, the EU should push for a **more stringent implementation of the Paris instruments** - the Katowice rulebook was a good starting point in this respect. The EU should focus on the specific capabilities of individual states in order to get the best out of each member state and achieve the target of the climate regime.

Top-down vs. bottom-up approach in climate negotiations

Top-down approach: Centralised, uniform and legally binding rules for greenhouse gas reductions. This approach was used when negotiating the Kyoto Protocol.

Bottom-up approach: Voluntary Nationally Determined Contributions of members. More focus on flexible arrangements and consultations with vulnerable groups. This approach was partly used when negotiating the Paris Agreement.





The adherence to a specific legal structure that imposes binding and inflexible emission cuts onto states has been seen as one of the reasons for the failure to reach a global climate agreement in Copenhagen in 2009 (Photo: Australian Science Media Centre (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0))

Foster a broad dialogue

In order to truly respect cultural diversity and divergent interests in the climate regime, the EU ought to further broaden its diplomatic activities and seek the inclusion of NGOs, indigenous peoples, youth movements and local organisations. This needs to go beyond mere participation in conferences. It means to explicitly **engage with the proposals from non-state actors**, including feedback on which recommendations the EU takes up and which ones they do not, and considering ways in which non-state actors may be included as equal partners in a more inclusive climate regime.

Empower local actors

The EU has become a key provider of climate-development aid. In doing so, the EU should **truly empower local actors**. They ought to be consulted already in the planning phase of climate-development policies. Local approaches should be taken more seriously.

Above all, funding procedures must be simplified in order to make them accessible. Ultimately, the EU needs to go beyond isolated climate-development aid measures. This includes the abolishment of unsustainable subsidies in agriculture, energy and automobiles as well as the insertion of green climate provisions in trade agreements.

Key takeaways for the EU

- 🌐 Make agreements more binding: the EU should push for a more stringent implementation of the Paris instruments and lead by example.
- 🌐 Foster a broad dialogue: the EU ought to further broaden its diplomatic activities and seek the inclusion of NGOs, indigenous peoples, youth movements and local organisations.
- 🌐 Empower local actors: the EU ought to consult local actors in the planning phase of climate development policies.

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Further readings

von Lucke, F. (2019) 'Principled Pragmatism in Climate Policy? The EU and Changing Practices of Climate Justice', *GLOBUS Research Paper 2/2019*

von Lucke, F. (2017) 'O Justice, Where Art Thou? Developing a New Take on Climate Justice', *GLOBUS Research Paper 1/2017*.

von Lucke, F. (2017) 'Climate Justice from Kyoto to Paris', *Global Justice Blog*.

Reconsidering European Contributions to Global Justice (GLOBUS) is a research project that critically examines the EU's contribution to global justice.

GLOBUS studies the contents and conduct of the EU's External policies with a focus on climate justice, migration, trade and development, peace and conflict resolution, gender and human rights.

Coordinator: ARENA Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo



Funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme Grant Agreement no. 693609

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