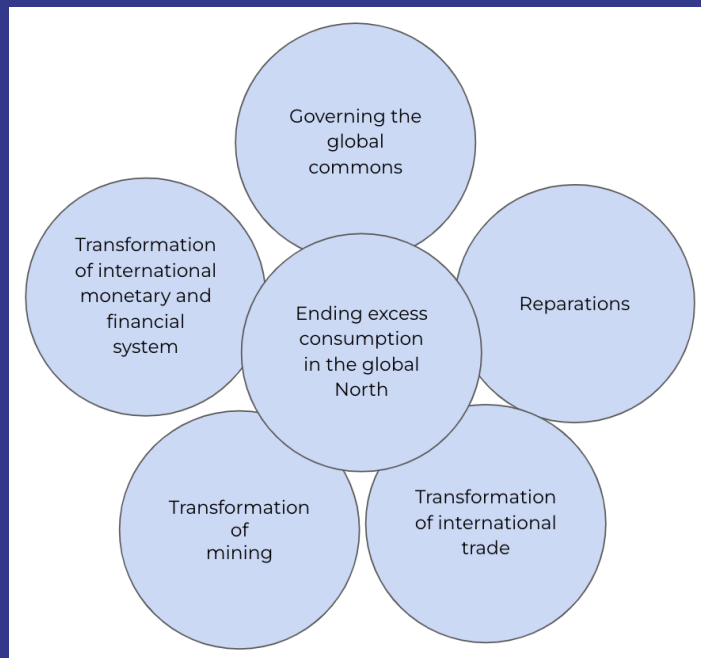


Addressing International Environmental Inequalities through Sufficiency Policies

FULFILL works with decision makers engaged with macroeconomic policies that shape the impacts that European economies have on the rest of the world through trade deals and international institutions. This policy brief explains how achieving true sustainability requires rethinking economic structures, prioritizing equity, and holding major polluters accountable. Through sufficiency-oriented strategies, the EU can position itself as a global leader in climate justice, forging a path towards a resilient and equitable future for all.

The Global North is disproportionately responsible for ecological degradation, exceeding its fair atmospheric share by 121%, while the Global South remains under its fair share (Hickel, 2020). Moreover, high-income nations account for 74% of global excess material use, a driving force behind ecological collapse, economic dependencies, and continued exploitation of natural resources in lower-income regions (Hickel et al., 2022). The wealthiest 10% globally generate over 50% of emissions, with the top 1% emitting up to 175 times more than the bottom 10%. This exacerbates carbon inequalities within and across nations, necessitating targeted measures to curb excessive emissions from luxury consumption. Sufficiency policies—limiting excessive consumption, restructuring trade, and ensuring ecological reparations—are essential for environmental justice, economic stability, and a truly sustainable global transition. To redress these imbalances, this policy brief proposes six interlinked policies.



While discussing environmental inequalities at the level of nations has merits given the dynamics of ecologically unequal exchange, national statistics conceal differences among social classes within countries as highlighted in FULFILL report D3.1. In the period 1990-2020, the richest 10% at the global level cumulatively generated 52% of emissions, the middle 40% was responsible for 41%, and the poorest 50% for just 7% (Gore, 2020). While the richest 10% of individuals at the global level make up a higher share of the population of countries in the Global North than of countries in the Global South, it should be borne in mind that a sizable number of them live in the latter. In the pursuit of fair climate policymaking, it would make more sense to overcome the dichotomy between Global North and South—that has often led to an impasse in international climate negotiations—and focus instead on citizens with a high carbon footprint regarding the country they live in (Chancel et al., 2024).

If we focus on India as a case study, we discover that the top 10% of the Indian population holds 77% of the total national wealth (Oxfam, 2023). The stark economic inequalities are reflected also in the unequal distribution of responsibility for CO₂ emissions. The national average per person emission in India is currently 2.2 tonnes of CO₂. However, the bottom 50 percent emits on average only 1 tCO₂ per capita while the top 10 percent 8.8 tCO₂ per capita (Bhattacharya, 2020). These findings provide a vital policy insight: India has the potential opportunity to utilize the synergistic relationship between CO₂ emission and economic inequality to jointly address the environmental and socio-economic sustainability challenges. Most of the emission reduction in India to meet the targets of the Paris Agreement must come from the top 10% of India's population whose emissions are higher than the world average emissions.