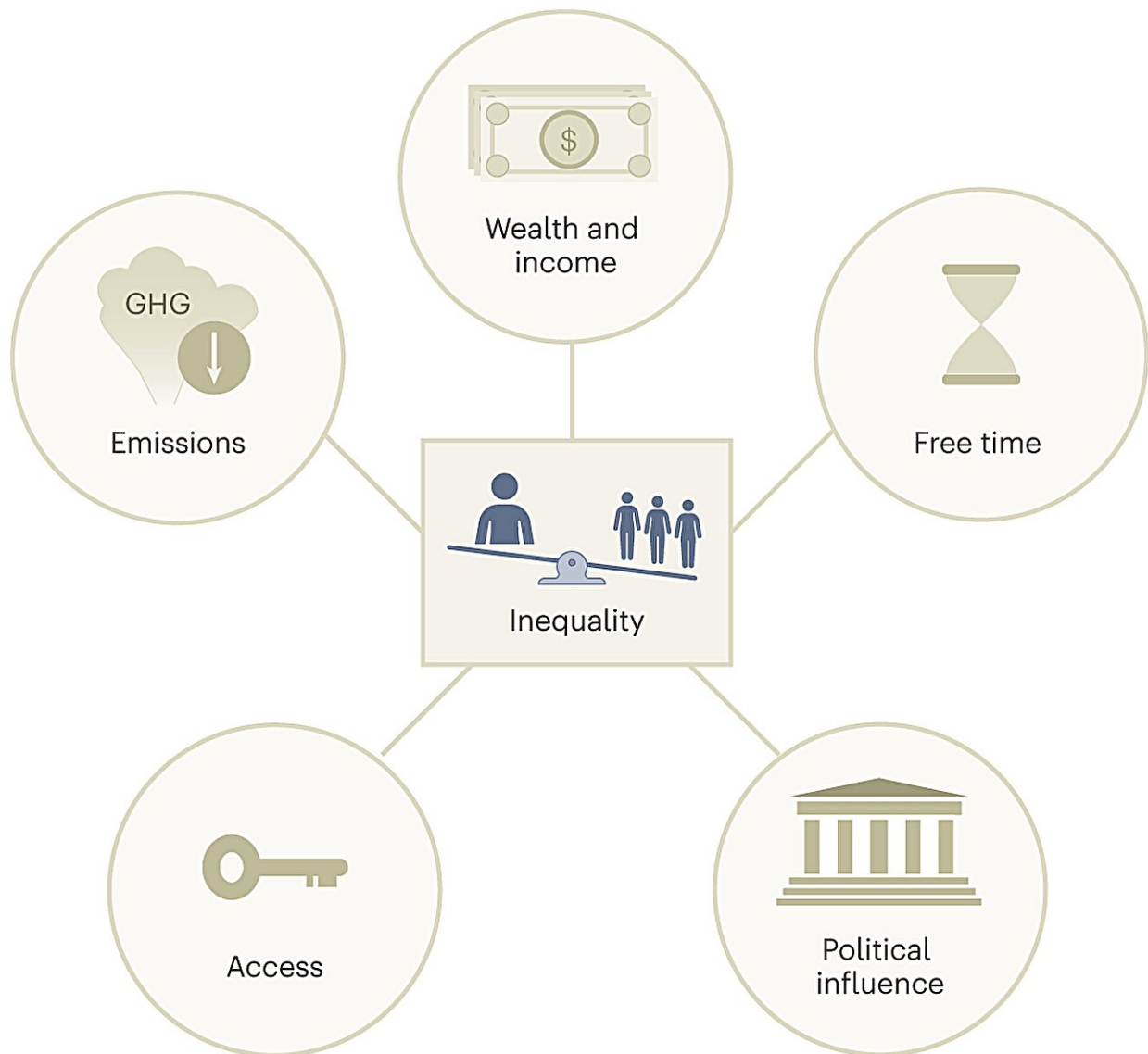


Reducing inequality is essential in tackling climate crisis, researchers argue

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Inequalities hinder a just transition to net zero and constrain who can feasibly adopt additional low-carbon behaviors. These include inequalities in GHG

emissions, wealth and income, free time, political influence and access to low-carbon options such as public transport and insulation subsidy schemes. Credit: *Nature Climate Change* (2023). DOI: 10.1038/s41558-023-01900-4

Promoting climate-friendly behaviors will be more successful in societies where everyone has the capacity: financially, physically, and timewise, to make changes.

In a [report](#) just published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, researchers argue that tackling inequality is vital in moving the world toward Net-Zero—because inequality constrains who can feasibly adopt low-carbon behaviors.

They say that changes are needed across society if we are to mitigate climate change effectively. Although [wealthy people](#) have very large carbon footprints, they often have the means to reduce their [carbon footprint](#) more easily than those on [lower incomes](#).

The researchers say there is lack of political recognition of the barriers that can make it difficult for people to change to more climate-friendly behaviors.

They suggest that policymakers provide equal opportunities for low-carbon behaviors across all income brackets of society.

The report defines inequality in various ways: in terms of wealth and income, political influence, free time, and access to low-carbon options such as public transport and housing insulation subsidies.

"It's increasingly acknowledged that there's inequality in terms of who causes [climate change](#) and who suffers the consequences, but there's far

less attention being paid to the effect of inequality in changing behaviors to reduce [carbon emissions](#)," said Dr. Charlotte Kukowski, a postdoctoral researcher in the University of Cambridge Departments of Psychology and Zoology, and first author of the report.

She added, "People on lower incomes can be more restricted in the things they can do to help reduce their carbon footprint, in terms of the cost and time associated with doing things differently."

The researchers found that deep-rooted inequalities can restrict people's capacity to switch to lower-carbon behaviors in many ways. For example:

- Insulating a house in the U.K. can be costly, and government subsidies are generally only available for homeowners; renters have little control over the houses they live in. The U.K. has large numbers of old, badly insulated houses that require more energy to heat than new-build homes. The researchers call for appropriate government schemes that make it more feasible for people in lower income groups to reduce the carbon emissions of their home.
- Cooking more meat-free meals: plant-based meat alternatives currently tend to be less affordable than the [animal products](#) they are trying to replace.
- Eating more plant-based foods instead of meat and animal-derived products is one of the most effective changes an individual can make in reducing their carbon footprint.
- Buying an electric car or an electric bike is a substantial upfront cost, and people who aren't in permanent employment often can't benefit from tax breaks or financing available through employer schemes. Other low-carbon transport options—such as using [public transport](#) instead of a private car—are made less feasible for many due to poor services, particularly in rural areas.

Sometimes the lower-carbon options are more expensive—and this makes them less accessible to people on lower incomes.

"If you have more money you're likely to cause more carbon emissions, but you're also more likely to have greater ability to change the things you do and reduce those emissions," said Dr. Emma Garnett, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oxford and second author of the report.

She added, "Interventions targeting high-emitting individuals are urgently needed, but also many areas where there are lower-carbon choices—like food and transport—need everyone to be involved."

The researchers say that campaigns to encourage people to switch to lower-carbon behaviors have tended to focus on providing information. While this is important in helping people understand the issues, there can still be many barriers to making changes.

They suggest a range of policy interventions, such as urban planning to include bus and bike lanes and pedestrian-friendly routes, progressive taxation rates on wealth and [income](#), and employer-subsidized low-carbon meal options.

More information: Charlotte A. Kukowski et al, Tackling inequality is essential for behaviour change for net zero, *Nature Climate Change* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41558-023-01900-4](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-023-01900-4)

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