

The fight against the climate crisis must not increase inequalities, say researchers

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As the impact of climate change on communities increases, [researchers are concerned about growing inequalities.](#)

The most recent [report](#) by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stresses the importance of one aspect that is too often neglected by local action on climate change: considering the question of inequalities.

[Studies](#) show that the people, communities and groups that are the most affected by climate change are generally those who have contributed the least to the current climate crisis. Marginalized people and communities—for example, those living in poverty, racialized persons or persons with disabilities—find they have to cope with [interlinked compound crises](#) that amplify their distress and precariousness.

These groups and communities are developing initiatives to increase climate justice at the local level and redirect priorities for public action. For example, they are promoting concerted climate action around issues such as equity, self-determination, resilience, poverty reduction and well-being.

[Research](#) shows that local climate action policies that ignore different forms of inequality tend to exacerbate the harm experienced by marginalized communities. In some cases, these policies even have the effect of [delaying climate gains](#).

This issue is at the heart of our research. We are involved in the [Canada Research Chair in Urban Climate Action](#), [Urban Planning for Climate Change](#) and the [Ecological Transition](#). We have [also published](#) various [studies](#) and [articles](#) on this [issue, which we consider a crucial one](#).

It is vital to ensure that any approach to climate action takes into account issues of equity and justice, in order to prevent the fight against the climate crisis from becoming a greater social crisis within marginalized communities.

Cities, climate and inequalities

To this end, we have developed [Cities, Climate and Inequalities: A collection of research summaries](#). It brings together knowledge and research that studies the links between inequalities, climate action and the socio-ecological transition in cities and local environments. Our goal is to encourage the various players in the field to take concerted and informed actions.

This research collection was initiated by the [Canada Research Chair in Urban Climate Action](#) and the [Villes Régions Monde \(Cities, Regions, World\) network](#). Collaborators from the academic world in Québec, Ontario and British Columbia, and from the consortium on regional climatology and adaptation to climate change [Ouranos](#) contributed to its creation.

The different areas of climate action are often dealt with in silos. However, a great deal of knowledge does exist both within and outside the academic world that can help shed light on blind spots, as well as areas of progress in making a socio-ecological transition that is fairer and more just.

More than forty summaries of university, collaborative, participatory or association-based research in British Columbia, Ontario and Québec are [available online](#).

Categories of action

Climate action can take several forms. Adaptation to climate change, which consists of adapting to the present and future impacts of environmental hazards, is studied in particular by [research](#) looking at the recovery process of disaster victims who experienced the 2017 and 2019

floods in Pointe-Gatineau, Que.

A number of research studies summarized in the collection have analyzed urban social-ecological transition initiatives and their implications when it comes to community equity. One example is the research carried out by the [Conseil des Montréalaises \(Council of Montréal Women\)](#) to support a just and feminist ecological transition in Montréal.

[Research summaries](#) present frameworks explaining the dimensions of equity and justice that need to be considered when dealing with climate change.

Types of actors and approaches

Some of the research summarized also analyzes policies. For example, a number of reviews compare how equity issues are taken into account in [climate](#) and [environmental](#) plans. [Another](#) looks at ways of supporting climate action and Indigenous self-determination by studying ethical land-use planning in the Upper Columbia region of British Columbia.

Other summaries present results from participatory action research. This is the case of [Chemins de transition \(Transition Paths\)](#), which uses an anticipatory and participatory approach to map out a future path towards more responsible, fair and resilient ways of living in Québec by 2042.

Another example is the partnership research project FORJE—[FORmation collaborative pour la Justice Énergétique \(Collaborative Training for Energy Justice\)](#), which aims to develop reciprocal training practices that improve inclusion and epistemic justice in the energy transition, while taking into account the realities of struggles and eco-citizen initiatives.

Two other summaries analyze [community development actors](#) in Québec and the place they occupy in the socio-ecological transition and [adaptation to heat](#).

A number of summaries in the collection focus on populations who have been insufficiently considered but are disproportionately affected by climate change. The [Yellowhead Institute](#), for example, published a report showing that the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in climate change adaptation plans in Canada is an illusion.

Another [study](#) looked at the co-construction of a collaborative planning framework with an Anishinaabe community.

Other summaries also broach the questions of an inclusive approach to [disability](#) in climate action, of giving a voice to [immigrant and racialized communities](#) who suffer from territorial inequities, and who speak to the transformation of public space design practices to support [homeless populations](#).

Areas of activity

The search for equity in climate action must be carried out in a number of areas of activity, including housing and habitat, [social support](#), community and health, energy, mobility and greening.

For example, lack of access to sustainable mobility and housing close to public transport leads to increased dependence on the car. [One study](#) looks at how sustainable housing and electric mobility programs in Québec encourage urban sprawl and socio-economic inequalities.

Inequalities in the distribution of green spaces lead to greater vulnerability to climatic impacts such as extreme heat. They can also lead to inequalities in terms of residential stability linked to the

phenomenon of [green gentrification](#).

[Several research studies](#) also address energy poverty, i.e., the fact that households are unable to meet their needs, maintain healthy temperatures in their homes and live in dignity.

[Recent research presented in our Cities, Climate and Inequalities collection](#) on issues and initiatives across Canada addresses some of the shortcomings of climate action. Studies reveal existing analyses and approaches that can inspire greater reflexivity and help transform priorities and methods of action.

This collection of research shows that different areas of practice would benefit from strengthening existing links and conversations between the field of social issues and inclusion and those focused on approaches to [climate action](#). By increasing the visibility and accessibility of this research for different sectors, and its use in taking fairer and more equitable action on climate change, the Cities, Climate and Inequalities collection of research summaries is contributing to this effort.

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