From droughts to fires

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Over the past couple of years, Europe has struggled to adapt to and mitigate the negative consequences of climate events driven by the stark realities of climate change. Every weather season has been affected, especially summer. Floods, fires and drought have hit Europe, along with high air and sea temperatures (World Meteorological Organisation, 2026; European Commission, 2026). Temperatures in Europe are rising even faster than on other continents (C3S; ECMWF; WMO, 2026). These events have caused billions of euros in damage and losses across economic and non economic spheres. The negative impacts have diverted necessary funding away from other areas of need, such as education and health. They have also caused non economic losses that affect traditional ways of life across communities. Recent climate change related events have shown that European countries are not well prepared to cope with, let alone adapt to and mitigate, the negative impacts of climate change.

As far as reconstruction and compensation are concerned, Europe has been privileged to be among the most developed parts of the Global North and has allocated funds to mitigate negative impacts through various financial mechanisms at national and regional levels, mostly at the EU level. Moreover, European countries have placed climate change adaptation and mitigation at the forefront of public poli-

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cy, particularly in policy and normative areas. However, the lack of real, lasting impacts on the ground is well known. Nonetheless, local communities are very much aware of the negative impacts of climate change. This spring, residents around the Brenner highway in Austria have been protesting by closing the highway due to unreasonably high volumes of both cargo and heavy vehicle traffic (Reuters, 2026).

Other countries have faced similar problems, such as Slovenia, which throughout the year faces a very high burden of transit traffic on its highways, including cargo traffic that arrives every year, as well as personal vehicle traffic. However, governments have largely stayed at the normative and policy level and have rarely moved beyond these promises. They have rarely fully implemented their commitments on the ground. Slovenia is an example of such a coherence gap. It is well known for its rich natural biodiversity, with forests covering two thirds of its territory. Nonetheless, climate change adaptation policies are lacking in practice, and much has been drafted only as compensation and reconstruction after climate change induced natural events or disasters, such as floods in 2023.

Slovenia appears strongly committed to combating climate change and protecting the environment. It was one of the first European countries to include the right to a healthy living environment in its constitution. It is strongly committed in principle (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2015), but in practice, progress has been limited (OECD, 2025). During 2022-2026, the government rhetorically emphasized combating climate change at the state level, even establishing a Climate Change Council and Ambassador-at-Large for climate diplomacy. However, in practice, these bodies have had no real impact because they lack the competence to engineer meaningful reform. Openness to public discussion of climate change in Slovenian society has not really changed. Nonetheless, the adverse effects of climate change have not disappeared. If anything, they have intensified, particularly

in summers, with high temperatures leading to droughts that have caused millions of euros in damage, which the government itself then needs to compensate farmers for. It has also led to unnecessary deaths from rising temperatures and poor air quality.

Despite warnings from various independent monitors, authorities pay little attention to poor air quality. Ljubljana ranks, for instance, 652nd among European cities for air quality (European Environment Agency, 2026; Radilovič et al., 2024). The municipality of Ljubljana, however, questioned the findings of an independent air quality monitoring study that ranked Ljubljana at the bottom of the list (T.L.Š., 2026). Nonetheless, little has been done in practice to adapt to and mitigate climate change. Traffic has continued to increase due to Slovenia's transit location. Cargo traffic also still relies heavily on Slovenian highways. It passes through ordinary city neighbourhoods within a few tens of meters, directly affecting air quality and the livelihoods of Ljubljana's residents, particularly older adults and their children (Virdo et al., 2022). Public and private investment to reduce pollution and emissions is urgently needed (United Nations, 2026). The climate situation appears to worsen every year. Residents in Slovenia and other European countries are becoming increasingly aware of its negative effects, raising concerns in policy circles and pressuring politicians to act.

Overall, a coherence gap exists between normative promises and their realisation in practice, and a growing governance gap exists in both government and the private sector. The private sector in Europe unreasonably blames the green transition for a lack of competitiveness, as if its own policies had not made the European car industry particularly uncompetitive compared with its Asian counterparts, particularly Chinese ones (European Parliament, 2024; European Commission, 2025). Private sector resistance has led to reduced regulation in the business environment and in human rights in the European Union, where this year companies' obliga-

tions to report and conduct due diligence have been diminished, or at least reduced, with some parts, including the initially obligatory climate change transition plan, completely cut. Nonetheless, the private sector also recognises its responsibility, and regulators must enforce these obligations.

Nonetheless, Slovenia and Europe are at a critical juncture that will also shape the next steps in climate change adaptation and mitigation. Europe will need to take the lead by adopting measures within its own territory and by leading abroad through its contributions to the United Nations loss and damage fund for climate change. Otherwise, the future for future generations, especially those not yet born, will look bleak. A lack of action on the ground will create a real gap in human rights and environmental compliance across stakeholders and generations.

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