

EEB CASE STUDY 2

Ethics of Pricing

The warnings from scientists and politicians around the world are getting louder. We need more drastic and global action to avoid a 1.5°C rise in average global temperature, which would lead to devastating consequences, such as heatwaves and floods.

Data from ice cores show that Earth's average temperature is rising. Scientists agree that this is a result of human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation - activities that have dramatically increased the amount of heat-trapping greenhouse gases, mainly carbon dioxide, in the atmosphere.

The Paris Agreement, therefore, aims to significantly reduce global greenhouse gas emissions in order to limit the rise in global temperatures. All major emitting countries have committed to reducing their climate impact and strengthening these commitments over time.

Although it establishes a framework for transparent monitoring, reporting and increasing countries' individual and collective climate targets, countries still set their own targets and there are no international enforcement mechanisms.

"Affordable, scalable solutions are now available to enable countries to leapfrog to cleaner, more resilient economies. The pace of change is quickening as more people are turning to renewable energy and a range of other measures that will reduce emissions and increase adaptation efforts."
(<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-action/>)

Countries try to combat pollution by introducing taxes and incentives aimed at reducing emissions by assigning a monetary value to polluting-units. This does not lead to zero emissions and in some cases does not even reduce pollution either. Instead, it seems to allow the wealthiest and largest of polluters to find excuses and buyable loopholes, while potentially leaving those less wealthy to foot the bill for real change or live in bad environmental conditions.

In a global environmental crisis, is it ethical to monetize pollution and allow wealthier actors to buy their way out of responsibility? Who sets the price of pollution, since we still do not know all the factors contributing to global warming? Does this open the door to greenwashing?

Please tackle this dilemma: Promote environmental consciousness and still need to pay for measures against climate change. Who shall pay the bill? Shall poor people live in worse environmental conditions?

The European Commission invites you into their task force to reduce the EU's CO₂ emission. What would you suggest in the face of the dilemma?