

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICTS

### MYTHBUSTERS

The debate on climate change contains plenty of stubborn myths and vague claims. The same applies to the debate on the relationship between climate change and conflicts. It's important is that the discussion and the measures chosen are based on researched information and not on misconceptions or simplifications.

#### WHAT THE EXERCISE IS ABOUT

- Duration: 15–30 minutes.
- Examine the claims often encountered in public debate, consider how we relate to them, and together carry out fact checking.

#### THE GOAL OF THE EXERCISE

The purpose of the exercise is to encourage the questioning of frequently heard statements, to correct misconceptions on the basis of researched knowledge, and to arouse interest in critical reading and the multifaceted analysis of phenomena.

#### HOW THE EXERCISE SHOULD PROCEED

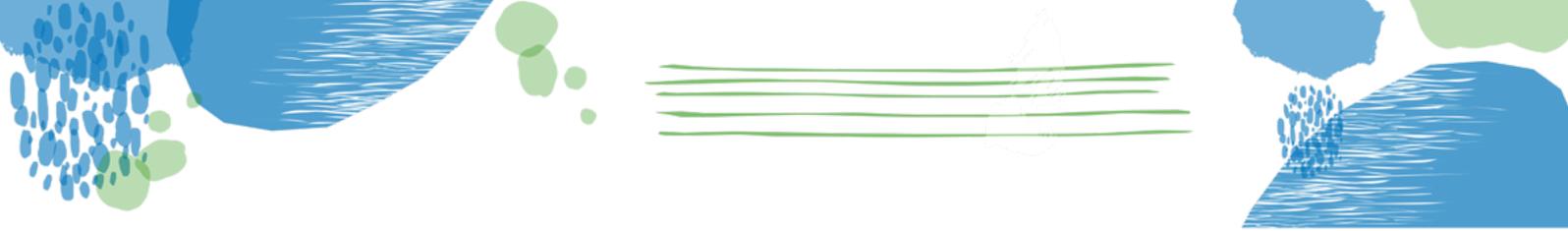
Below are some prepared statements, "myths to bust or affirm". Alternatively, you can deal with them to begin with in the discussion, e.g., by considering:

- What sorts of claims come to mind first when we think about the combination "climate change and conflicts"?
- What sorts of claims have you come across concerning this combination?
- What are the typical misconceptions that may be associated with the subject?

Some ways of going through the claims on climate and conflicts:

A. With each claim you can have a show of hands in the group about whether it is correct, false, or complicated. In each case you can also listen to a few citations justifying various opinions before examining the issue together.

B. Write down the claims on paper and cut them into strips to distribute to small groups. Give each group, say, two minutes to discuss a claim, before passing it on to another group and getting a new one. Do this until everyone has had a chance to discuss each of the claims. Then go through the answers.



## CLAIMS

**Traffic lights: Red = wrong, green = right, amber = it's complicated**

***Climate change causes conflicts.***

**Traffic light: amber**

We need more multidisciplinary research on the relationship between climate change and conflicts. But in light of current information, we can say that climate change increases the risk of conflict in situations in which there are other predisposing factors. It is not therefore a cause of conflicts by itself. Climate change may also exacerbate and complicate an existing conflict, making it more difficult to resolve. Climate change affects conflicts in different ways and in different communities.

***Climate change will cause a mass influx of refugees***

**Traffic light: red**

Climate refugees are a complex phenomenon, which is why we should be careful not to draw simplistic conclusions concerning causes and consequences. Changes in the living environment, extreme weather events, poor governance adaptation to climate change, and the potential for these factors to fuel conflicts are compelling people to migrate.

For example, the World Bank estimates that climate change will cause 140 million people to flee their homes by 2050, but the majority of climate refugees will move within states or into neighbouring regions. The need for humanitarian aid in refugee camps is growing. There is also evidence that climate change is accelerating urbanisation.

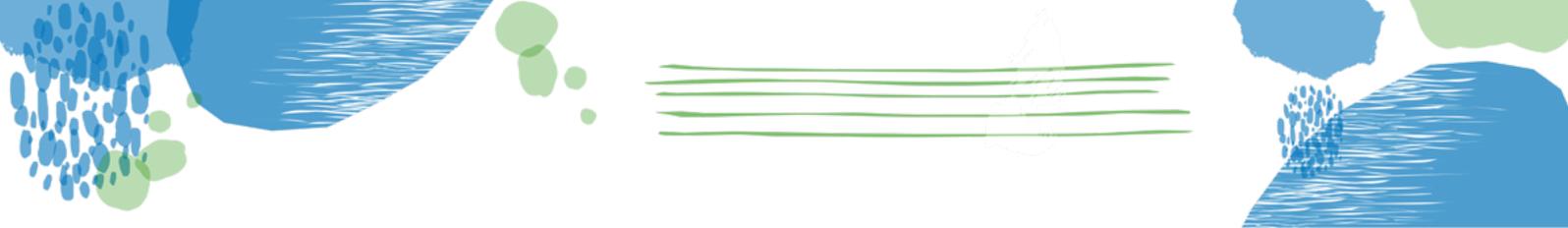
***Conflicts linked to climate change do not affect us***

**Traffic light: red**

What and where are the conflicts that are linked to climate change?

It is true that armed conflicts linked to climate change in one way or another happen in countries other than Finland. But conflicts around the world affect Europe and Finland. Regional tensions further afield may affect the security situation in Finland's neighbouring areas. On the other hand, Finnish peacekeeping expertise is being utilised throughout the world in resolving and preventing local armed conflicts.

We are also involved in the broader sense that countries producing the least amounts of the emissions that accelerate global warming will suffer the most from climate change. At the same time, those that are actually responsible, the wealthy industrialised countries, like Finland, will face the least impact from the effects of climate change. In addressing the global injustice of this "conflict" we have a significant role to play in how we act to mitigate climate change and pay our own climate debt.



Climate change has an obvious link to intergenerational conflict: younger generations feel that the generations causing the problem do nowhere near enough to curb climate change, even though they have the power to make major decisions. With the climate strikes by children and young people in 2019, it was noticeable that when foregrounding, on their own terms, the threats and fears that concern them and the hopes for corresponding measures to tackle them, the older generations often opposed them.

There is at least one perspective linked to conflict prevention. When more action is taken in Finland and in other wealthy countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change, we must ensure that social justice is realised. If the measures lead to a group experiencing injustice, the seeds of conflict are easily sown.

***The choices and actions of a single person are insignificant in mitigating climate change.***

**Traffic light: red**

It is clear that tackling the climate crisis will necessarily require social action and political decisions, even systemic change. However, this does not negate the scope for individuals to make a difference.

Professor Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen had an interesting thought experiment on his blog<sup>1</sup>: Think about the figures for Apple phone sales. Are they not backed by countless individual purchasing decisions? Why is it harder for us to imagine the successful mass impact of individual environmental actions?

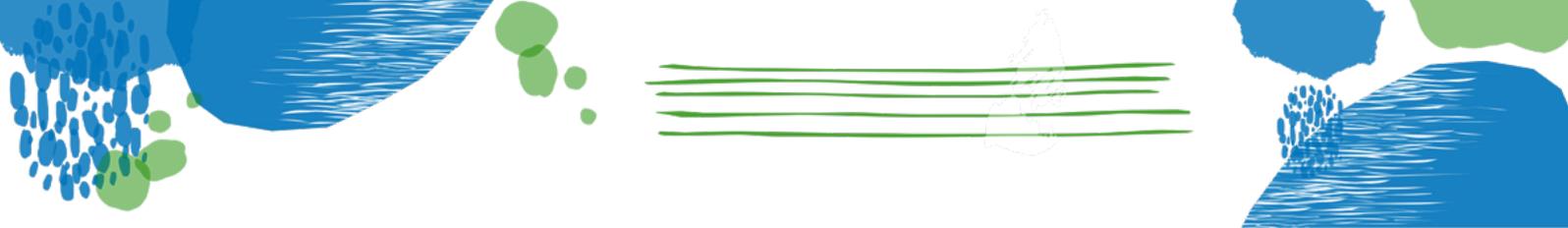
When we consider individual choices, it is also worthwhile to take a look at the average carbon footprint of people in other countries. The emissions of the average Finnish person are almost six times more than the average person in India. Individual choice matters particularly in countries with the highest average carbon footprint globally.

Karoliina Lummaa of the BIOS research unit emphasises the resource that living according to one's values is to the individual and community. "It is nevertheless good to recognise the meanings and relevant experiences that are consciously associated with actions and choices: the more sustainable choices may seem important, useful to future generations or the life span, and thus good. When shared, such meanings and experiences also strengthen the community."<sup>2</sup>

***It doesn't matter what we do here about climate change, because Finland is such a small country.***

**Traffic light: red**

Often, people making this sort of claim equate Finland with China or India. However, it is foolish to compare Finland with its 5,5 million inhabitants to India with its more than one billion inhabitants. On the other hand, the emissions of one Finn are many times higher than that of a person in India. Instead, we should compare the EU and India. We live in a region (EU) that produces a tenth of the world's emissions. It is also good to remember that China,



for example, produces a lot of consumer goods that end up in the rest of the world, such as through cheap online stores here in Finland. The emissions resulting from these commodities are counted at the expense of the Chinese, when in fact they are part of, among other things, of the emissions burden we cause. The vast majority of the goods, equipment, food and clothing we use are produced outside Finland.

If we divide the globe into sufficiently small regions, each of them could be declared irrelevant to mitigating climate change, but would that make the problem disappear? In the face of the global challenge, we need a vision of a common mission and commitment by all.

### ***Young people cannot influence climate policy***

**Traffic light: red**

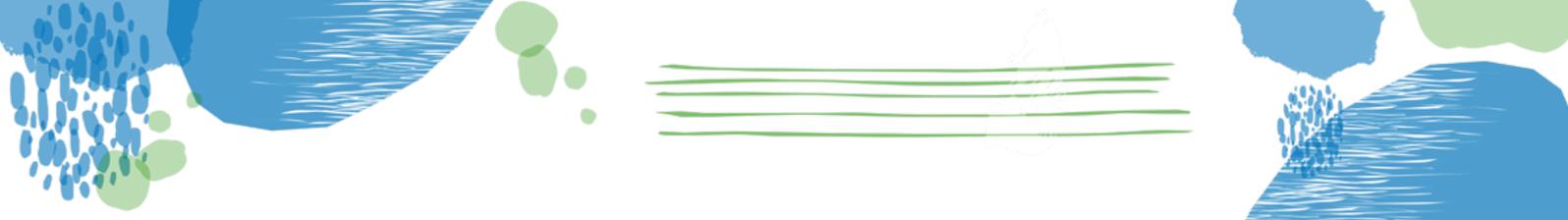
It is often reiterated that young people cannot influence decision-making because they are not yet of voting age. It is true that the most powerful are older people, but there are many ways in which young people can influence the social climate and decision-making. They can work through such things as youth councils, participatory budgeting, or NGOs, and for example using artistic expression or by organising events. There are other various ways of influencing listed in the exercise in this training pack titled **How can I make a difference?**

Feeling powerless in the face of the biggest challenge of our time makes it easy for anyone to feel small. However, we have many encouraging examples of how much even an individual so-called ordinary person can achieve. For example, the young Swede Greta Thunberg started her climate lobbying by striking, and eventually inspired thousands of people to join the struggle against climate change. She has since been invited to address high-level decision-makers.

But we should bear in mind that responsibility for solving the climate crisis rests not with the young but with adults.

Tip: For background to this exercise, the teacher may find it useful to check the Mythbuster exercise on the Ahtisaari Days website under Finland and present-day conflicts:

[http://ahtisaaripaiva.fi/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Myytinmurtajat\\_ENG.pdf](http://ahtisaaripaiva.fi/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Myytinmurtajat_ENG.pdf)



## USEFUL LINKS:

<sup>1</sup>Professor Lehtonen's blog (in Finnish): <https://alusta.uta.fi/2019/03/11/ilmastonmuutos-ja-kolme-ajatusvirhetta/>

<sup>2</sup>The full article (in Finnish): <https://bios.fi/tekojen-ja-valintojen-merkityksista/>

Teacher's Climate Guide (Maj and Tor Nessling foundation)  
<https://teachers-climate-guide.fi>