



Climate Equity Compass

A tool to guide more equitable and
inclusive climate policies and actions

Author

Valeria Righi

Researcher and consultant specialising in participatory processes, co-design and action-oriented research. For over ten years, she has worked with public institutions, civil society organisations, international networks and businesses on projects related to climate adaptation, digital inclusion, public health and social innovation. She holds a PhD in Human-Computer Interaction from Universitat Pompeu Fabra. Her work focuses on making policies, services and decision-making processes more inclusive, equitable and responsive to the needs of communities.

Contact: [linkedin.com/in/valerighi/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/valerighi/)

This work is commissioned by ActionAid Italia E.T.S., with the collaboration of Rainer Maria Baratti - Risk Management and Climate Change Officer (rainer.baratti@actionaid.org) - and Claudia Mazzanti - Programme Developer, Risk Management and Climate Change (claudia.mazzanti@actionaid.org) - It is funded by the European Climate Foundation through the "*Inclusion for a Fair Transition*" project.



This report was produced with the support of the European Climate Foundation. Responsibility for the information and opinions expressed in this report rests solely with the authors. The European Climate Foundation cannot be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained or expressed in this document.

Credits

This document has been designed using resources from [Flaticon.com](https://flaticon.com). Authors: [iconjam](#), [Freepik](#), [Design Circle](#), [Freepik](#), [Sagarkumar Gopani](#), [Elena Podgornaia](#), [Jagat Icon](#), [Magnific](#).

Contents

1. Why the Climate Equity Compass	...4
2. Who is it for & How to use it	...6
3. The four dimensions of the Compass	...10
A. Who counts?	
B. Who decides?	
C. Who benefits?	
D. Who is accountable?	
4. From analysis to action	...28
→ Worksheets	...35
→ Methodological note	...41

1. Why the Climate Equity Compass

Climate adaptation is not neutral: the most vulnerable risk remaining invisible in climate policies and action.

Some people and communities are more exposed to climate risks and have fewer resources to cope with events such as heatwaves, floods or droughts. **Their vulnerability is shaped by complex social, economic and territorial dynamics**, including income, health, access to services, racial or gender discrimination, and recognition by institutions. **Vulnerability is not simply an individual characteristic, but the result of structural and contextual conditions** that make some situations more fragile than others.

Adopting a **climate justice perspective** means looking beyond the event itself — such as a flood or heatwave — and critically examining the structural factors that determine **how risks, vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities are distributed unequally**.

Yet, in practice, many climate adaptation policies, plans and actions are driven by predominantly technical and managerial approaches that often overlook or pay insufficient attention to other key dimensions. In particular:

- ! unequal impacts across social groups are **acknowledged but not analysed**;
- ! communities are **engaged only superficially**;
- ! the distributional effects of measures **are not monitored**.

This can lead to problematic outcomes:

- ! **some communities do not benefit** from the measures taken;
- ! interventions designed to reduce risks can **create new inequalities or exacerbate existing ones**.

The Climate Equity Compass makes social inequalities in climate adaptation visible and guides the way towards more inclusive, transparent and genuinely protective policies.

There is a growing need for tools that can assess public policies — including climate adaptation plans — through an equity and social justice lens across all stages of the process: from understanding the context, to the (co-)design of measures, through to monitoring their impacts.

The Climate Equity Compass provides a simple yet structured framework for assessing whether a plan or initiative takes different social and territorial conditions into account, and for identifying potential gaps, risks and opportunities for improvement.

In this way, the tool helps **guide policies towards more equitable and inclusive solutions that respond to the real needs of communities.**

What the Compass does

It helps assess whether and how a public action:

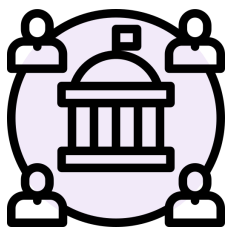
- **recognises** social and territorial differences
- **involves** the communities concerned
- **distributes** benefits and costs fairly
- **addresses** any negative impacts

Why It Is Needed

- **identifies gaps** and excluded groups
- **highlights risks of maladaptation** and new inequalities
- **identifies opportunities** for more inclusive public action

2. Who is it for & How to use it

The Climate Equity Compass is a practical tool for those who design, review or assess climate adaptation actions and policies.



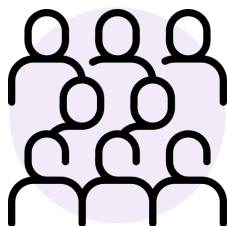
Public authorities and policymakers

- **Who uses the Compass:**
Local and regional authorities (technical departments, environmental offices, urban planning offices, social services, civil protection, etc.).
- **What it is for:**
 - Assess whether adaptation plans, urban strategies or sectoral programmes adequately take into account **social differences** and **conditions of greater vulnerability** to climate risks.
 - Guide the **review or design** of measures so that they are more equitable, transparent and able to strengthen communities experiencing vulnerability.
 - Support **communication with civil society** by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of a plan/policy.



The Compass can be used at any stage of the planning cycle, for example when **designing** a new plan, **reviewing** an existing one, or **assessing specific measures** (e.g. urban regeneration, green infrastructure, early warning systems).

2. Who is it for & How to use it



Civil society organisations and activists

- **Who uses the Compass:**
Environmental organisations, neighbourhood and grassroots associations, civil society and activist networks, social inclusion organisations, civic collectives and community groups, researchers and independent consultants.
- **What it is for:**
 - **Critically assess** public plans and projects, identifying **gaps, critical issues and opportunities for improvement** in terms of equity and social justice.
 - **Develop questions, observations and demands** to bring to the attention of public authorities, based on clear evidence rather than opinions alone.
 - **Support advocacy and accountability** towards citizens, affected communities and the media, making gaps and strengths visible.

The Compass acts as a bridge between citizens, communities experiencing vulnerability and public authorities, facilitating more concrete dialogue around risks, priorities and responsibilities.

2. Who is it for & How to use it

1

Select the plan or action to assess

The first step is to choose the document to which the Compass is to be applied. This could be a climate adaptation plan, an urban strategy, a sectoral programme or a specific intervention measure.

2

Assess the plan or action using the indicators

The plan or action is assessed using 13 indicators, grouped into four dimensions. For each indicator, assign a score on a scale from 0 to 3, where higher scores indicate a stronger integration of equity considerations. Intermediate scores may also be used (e.g. 1.5 or 2.5).

3

Use the diagnostic prompts

For each indicator, guiding questions and diagnostic prompts are provided. These are not exhaustive lists, but tools to help identify relevant evidence in the text and correctly interpret the assessment scale.

4

Visualise and interpret the results

Once the assessment is complete, plot the score on the corresponding axis of the *Equity Radar*, with 0 at the centre and 3 towards the outer edge (see Fig. 1). The resulting chart provides an immediate overview of strengths and gaps across the different dimensions of justice, showing where the approach is more equitable and where concrete action is still needed.

2. Who is it for & How to use it

Assessment scale

0 – Status quo / exclusionary: no reference is made to distributional effects or vulnerable groups; the approach may reinforce existing inequalities.

1 – Recognised: equity issues or “vulnerable groups” are mentioned in general terms, but without concrete actions or specific measures.

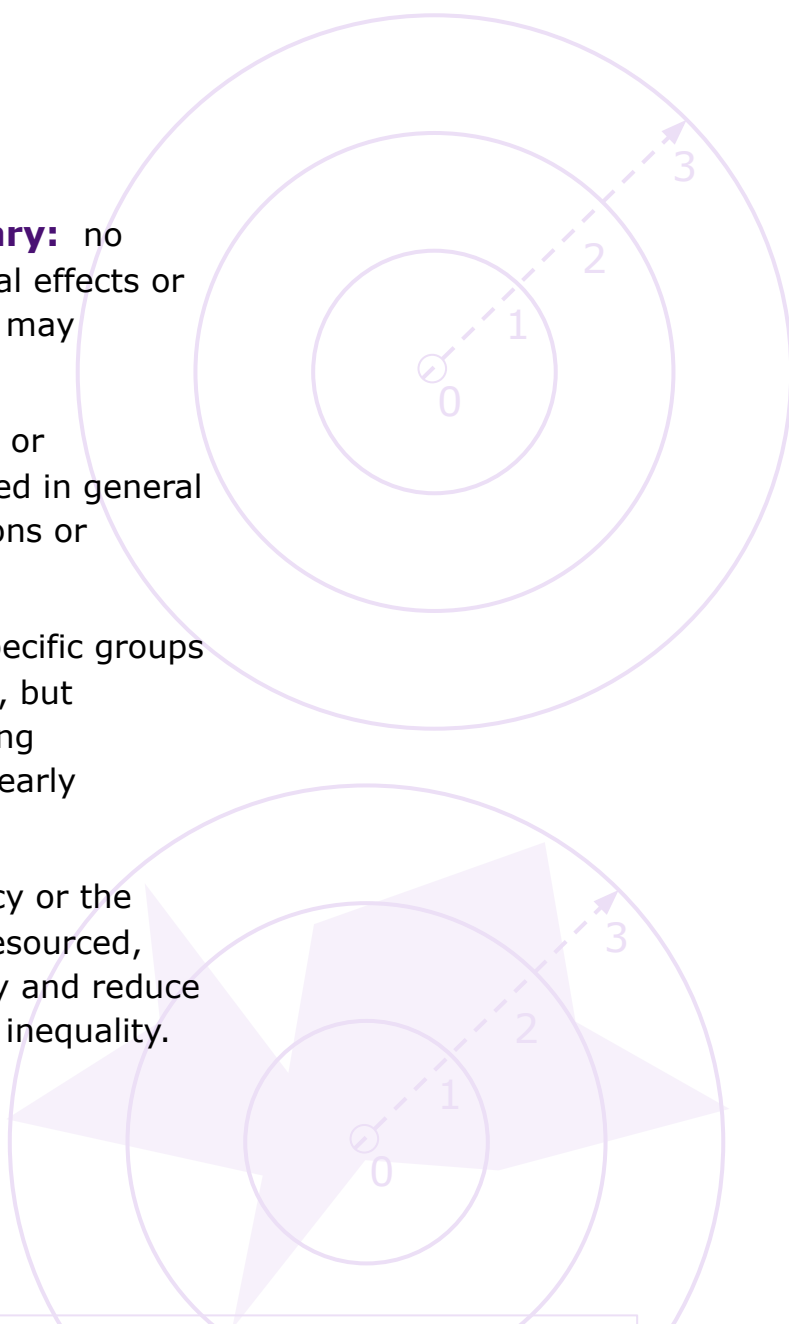
2 – Partially operational: specific groups or targeted actions are identified, but resources, mandates or monitoring mechanisms are limited or not clearly defined.

3 – Justice-centred: the policy or the action is proactive, adequately resourced, and explicitly designed to identify and reduce situations of marginalisation and inequality.

Fig. 1. The **Equity Radar** displays the scores assigned to the different Compass indicators, making strengths and areas for improvement immediately visible.



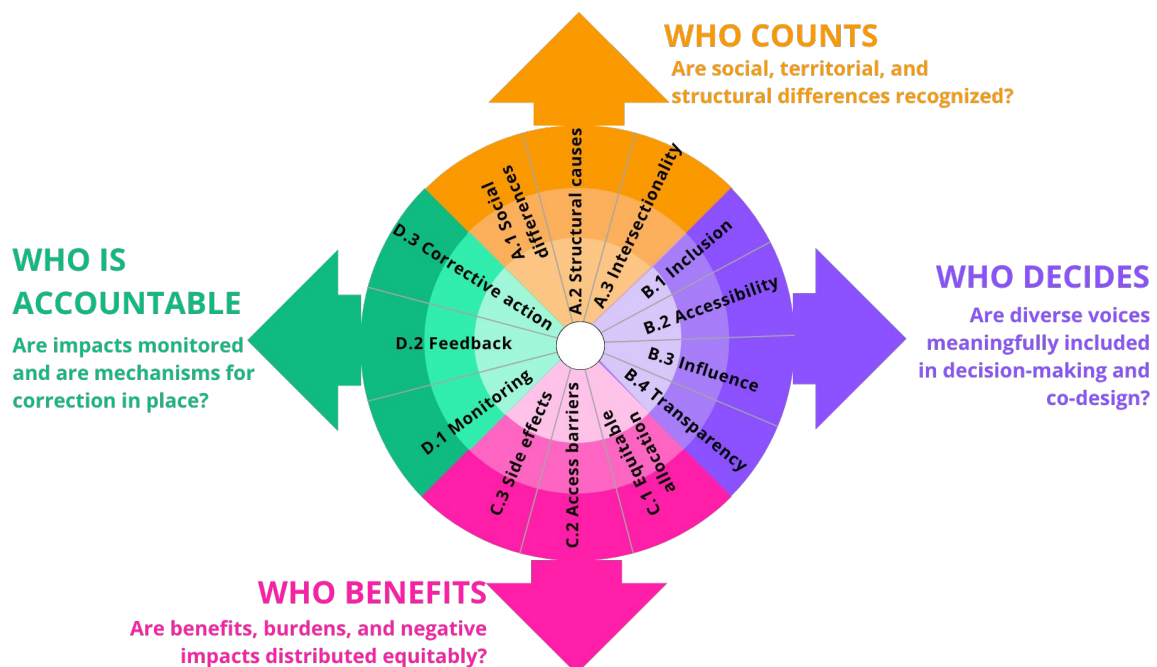
Use the [Assessment Sheet](#) to record your scores and then plot them on the [Equity Radar](#). You may also use intermediate scores (e.g. 1.5 or 2.5). Some indicators cover several elements, which you may want to score differently. In these cases, give the indicator an overall score and note your observations.

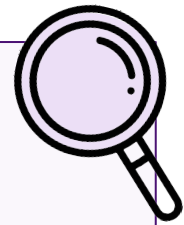


3. The four dimensions of the Compass

The Climate Equity Compass turns climate justice concepts into an operational framework.

The four dimensions of the Compass provide a lens for examining **who is visible, who has a voice, who truly benefits, and who can hold a policy, action or plan to account**. Each dimension consists of three to four indicators. The following pages explain each indicator in detail, with prompts to help you interpret them critically.





BEFORE YOU START : LOOK AT THE CONTEXT

Before starting the assessment, take a few minutes to look at the territory being analysed: **Who is most exposed to climate risks?**
Who has already experienced significant climate-related events?
Who has less capacity to adapt?

Look beyond broad categories: vulnerability arises from concrete conditions, local contexts and structural barriers. It may result from isolation, precarious work, limited access to services, information and support networks, or from institutional exclusion.

This step helps ground the analysis in the specific characteristics of the territory before moving on to the indicators. To support this reflection, we propose two tools (Table 1 and the Wheel of Power) that offer prompts for identifying the groups most vulnerable in your context.

TABLE 1. Groups most exposed to the effects of climate change, according to the literature

Vulnerable groups	Factors contributing to vulnerability
Low-income communities	Limited resources, limited access to healthcare, inadequate housing, economic instability.
Older people	Physical and cognitive decline, social isolation, dependence on others for care, reduced mobility. .
Children	Dependence on adults for care, limited mobility, vulnerability to heat stress and respiratory diseases.
People with physical and/or intellectual disabilities	Limited access to support services, physical, communication and language barriers, dependence on specific infrastructure, health complications.
Women	Gender inequality, disproportionate care responsibilities, lower economic status, limited decision-making power, pregnancy.
People experiencing homelessness	Lack of access to safe shelter, vulnerability to extreme weather conditions, economic and social instability.
Rural populations	Limited access to healthcare and emergency services, isolation, dependence on agriculture, vulnerability to droughts and floods.
People experiencing mental health conditions	Social isolation, difficulties accessing healthcare and psychological support, greater vulnerability to environmental and social stressors.
People with a migrant background and refugees	Legal exclusion, difficulties accessing healthcare, challenges with integration and securing a livelihood, housing instability, language barriers.
Informal and precarious workers	Lack of labour rights, economic insecurity, limited access to housing.
Outdoor workers	Exposure to extreme weather conditions, lack of workplace protections.



The **WHEEL OF POWER** is a visual framework commonly used in discussions of privilege, power and intersectionality. It shows how privilege and power tend to be concentrated at the centre (more advantaged groups) and decrease towards the outer edges (more marginalised groups). In this way, it helps visualise inequalities across different identities and social positions.

This tool can help broaden the one's perspective and recognise identities and circumstances which from observer's point of view, might otherwise be overlooked. **Some groups and situations may remain invisible unless they are actively looked for.**

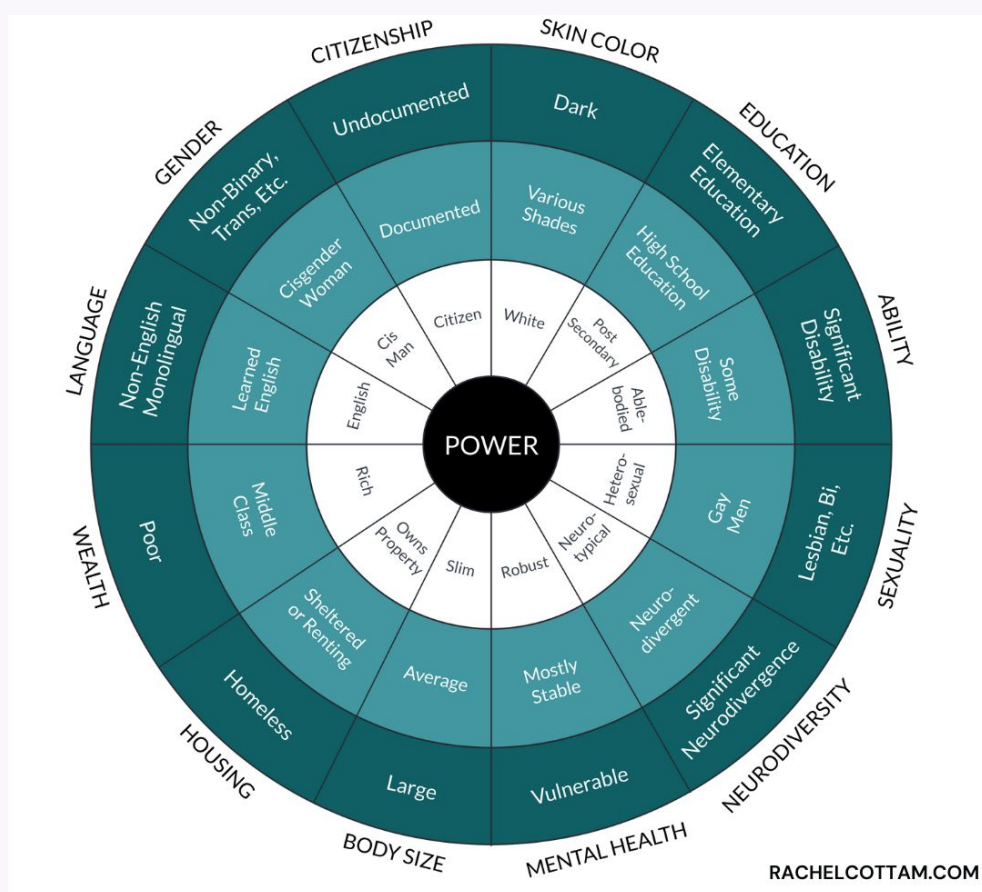


Fig. 2. Wheel of Power and Privilege, adapted from Cottam, R. (2024). "What is the Wheel of Privilege?", Rachel Cottam Blog. Available [online](#).



Take note of the groups, situations and areas that emerge as most exposed in the context, and bear them in mind when assessing the indicators. Record them in the Vulnerability Profile worksheet, which can be found at the end of this guide.

A.WHO COUNTS

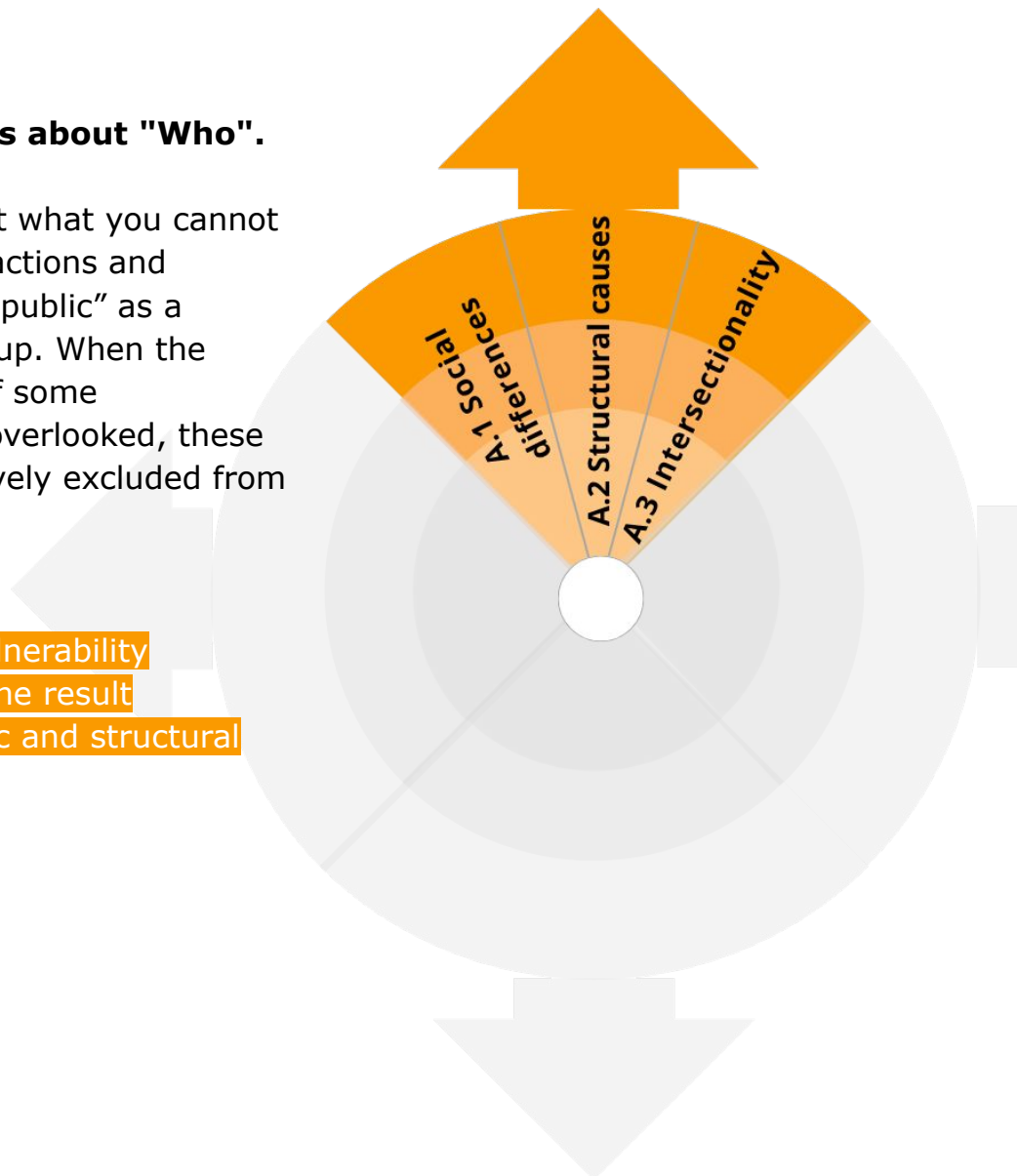
Recognition Justice

Are social, territorial and structural differences recognised?

This dimension is about "Who".

You cannot protect what you cannot see. Many plans, actions and policies treat "the public" as a homogeneous group. When the specific realities of some communities are overlooked, these groups are effectively excluded from the solution.

It ensures that vulnerability is understood as the result of social, economic and structural conditions.



A.WHO COUNTS

Recognition Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
A.1 Social differences	0 — No recognition	No mention is made of differential impacts or social and territorial inequalities
<i>Is it recognised that climate impacts and adaptive capacity vary across different groups in society?</i>	1 — Generic mention	“Vulnerable groups” are mentioned as a broad category, without naming or describing them in detail.
	2 — General identification	Specific groups are identified (e.g. older people, migrants, disadvantaged neighbourhoods), but descriptions remain general and are not supported by localised data.
	3 — Localized analysis	Disaggregated data or maps are used to identify precisely who is most exposed and where, highlighting differences across groups and areas.

A.WHO COUNTS

Recognition Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
A.2 Structural causes <i>Is it analysed why some groups are more vulnerable to climate impacts?</i>	0 — No discussion	Vulnerability is presented as an inherent characteristic of people, without any analysis of its social, economic or territorial causes.
	1 — Generic mention	Factors such as poverty or age are mentioned, but there is no explanation of how they relate to climate risks.
	2 — Analysis of contributing factors	Contributing factors are identified, but they are not systematically linked to broader inequalities.
	3 — Systemic link	The policy explicitly explains how social, economic or territorial inequalities create patterns of vulnerability and how these intersect with climate risks.



This indicator assesses whether the root causes of vulnerability are analysed, rather than simply identifying who is most exposed to climate risks. It is important to ask, for example: why do some people live in hotter neighbourhoods?

At **level 2 (contributing factors)**, issues such as “poor-quality housing” are identified, but the analysis remains general and does not explain how these factors are connected to broader systems (e.g. housing policies).

At **level 3 (systemic link)**, the analysis goes further. The response is not limited to addressing the symptoms (e.g. providing fans), but seek to identify and change the conditions that create vulnerability, making actions more effective and equitable in the long term.

A.WHO COUNTS

Recognition Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
A.3 Intersectionality <i>Is it recognised that vulnerability factors can overlap?</i>	0 — No recognition	Groups are treated as separate silos, with no mention of overlapping or combined factors of disadvantage.
	1 — Generic mention	"Multiple challenges" or "different factors" are mentioned, but without specifying concrete combinations.
	2 — Identification of combinations	Situations where factors overlap are identified and described (e.g. "migrants in flood-prone areas", "migrant women in hot neighbourhoods").
	3 — Systemic intersectional analysis	Data or narratives are used to show how combinations of factors (e.g. gender + age + precarious work) create unique barriers to adaptation, integrating an intersectional approach into policies and measures.



This indicator differs from A.1 because it takes into account how social factors combine (e.g. gender + age + class + migration status), which give rise to complex and overlapping profiles that go beyond commonly recognised social groups. In short, **A.1** focuses on **distinct groups** (e.g. older people; people with a migrant background), while **A.3** focuses on **how these factors intersect** (e.g. older people with a migrant background) and the **new risk situations** that may result.

B.WHO DECIDES

Procedural Justice

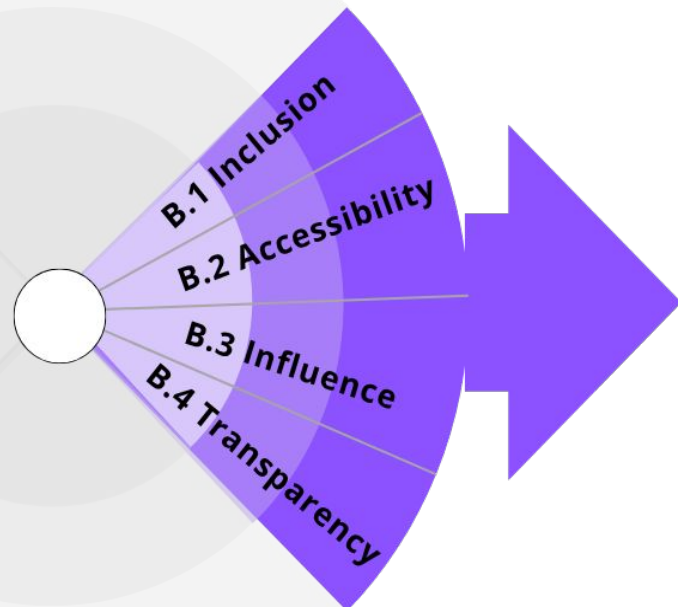
Is participation open, inclusive and accessible, and do people have clear information to take action and have a say?

This dimension is about "How".

A plan designed without involving the people who directly experience climate risks, or without providing them with clear information about threats and what to do in an emergency, is unlikely to be effective.

Knowledge does not belong only to experts: it also stems from people's experiences, neighbourhoods and from the stories of those most exposed. Equity is not only about the final measures, but also about how they are defined, who has had the opportunity to speak, and whose voices have been heard.

This dimension assesses whether people — particularly those experiencing greater vulnerability — have access to the information and spaces they need to understand, participate and take action.



B.WHO DECIDES

Procedural Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
B.1 Inclusive participation <i>Were the groups most affected by climate risks involved in defining the proposed measures?</i>	0 — No involvement	Measures were defined internally by experts or public officials.
	1 — Limited consultation	Consultation was open to everyone, with no targeted efforts to engage groups experiencing vulnerability.
	2 — Targeted consultation	Consultation specifically targeted groups experiencing vulnerability, but decision-making power remained with the public authority.
	3 — Co-design	Communities experiencing vulnerability were involved from the outset, helping to identify problems and priorities rather than simply commenting on measures that had already been defined.



This indicator focuses on the participation of groups experiencing greater vulnerability to climate risks (those identified in the *Vulnerability Profile* worksheet), rather than on participation in general. While engaging the wider population is always valuable, here it is important to ask **who** is actually invited and **how much influence** they have over decisions.

If the measure being assessed does not provide a collaborative design based on the principles of consultation and co-creation, all indicators in this dimension will score zero. This indicator highlights that participation is not only about **having consultation sessions, but also about who has a seat at the table.**

B.WHO DECIDES

Procedural Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
B.2 Accessible participation <i>Have potential barriers to participation (language differences, timing, location, lack of compensation) been reduced so that different groups can effectively take part in the process?</i>	0 — Nessuna evidenza / no participation 1 — Barriers recognised 2 - Basic accessibility measures 3 - Structured accessibility	E.g., meetings are scheduled during working hours, held at the municipal offices, with no specific support for groups experiencing vulnerability. Participation barriers are acknowledged, but no measures are planned to address them. Factors such as the timing and location of meetings are considered, but there are few structural support measures. Concrete measures are provided (e.g. childcare, translation, online and in-person options, expense reimbursement, meals) to facilitate participation and value participants' time.
B.3 Real influence <i>Did public participation meaningfully influence the final decisions?</i>	0 — No evidence / no participation 1 — Influence unclear 2 — Partial integration 3 — Direct impact	The final plan appears unchanged despite the consultations. Participation took place, but it is impossible to determine whether it led to any changes. Few community suggestions were incorporated into the final plan or recorded as "ideas for the future". Clear evidence that specific community requests led to changes in the proposed measures or budget.

B.WHO DECIDES

Procedural Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
B.4 Information transparency <i>Is there a clear, accessible and timely way for people involved to access information about the plan/action/policy, its implementation and monitoring, and the climate risks that affect them (including in an emergency)?</i>	0 — No evidence 1 — Limited and unclear information 2 — Accessible and descriptive information 3 — Clear, localised and enabling information	No accessible information. Some information is available, but it is technical, poorly localised or not translated. Channels exist but are not well communicated or do not reach people experiencing vulnerability. Information materials (documents, websites, leaflets) are available in understandable languages and through offline and digital channels, but training opportunities are limited. People are aware of the risks, but understanding and practical preparedness remain insufficient for many groups. Territory-specific information (e.g. risk maps, guidance for neighbourhoods, streets and buildings) is explained in simple language, in multiple languages and accessible formats. Information and training opportunities (e.g. meetings, materials, visual signs) help raise awareness of the measure and/or risks and build capacity to respond in an emergency, with particular attention to groups experiencing vulnerability.



This indicator is essential to procedural justice because it assesses whether people, particularly those experiencing greater vulnerability, have real, clear and timely access to information on risks, policies and monitoring. **Without transparent information, people cannot participate meaningfully, respond in an emergency or prepare adequately to adapt:** power remains in the hands of those who already have access to information, rather than those most affected.

C.WHO BENEFITS

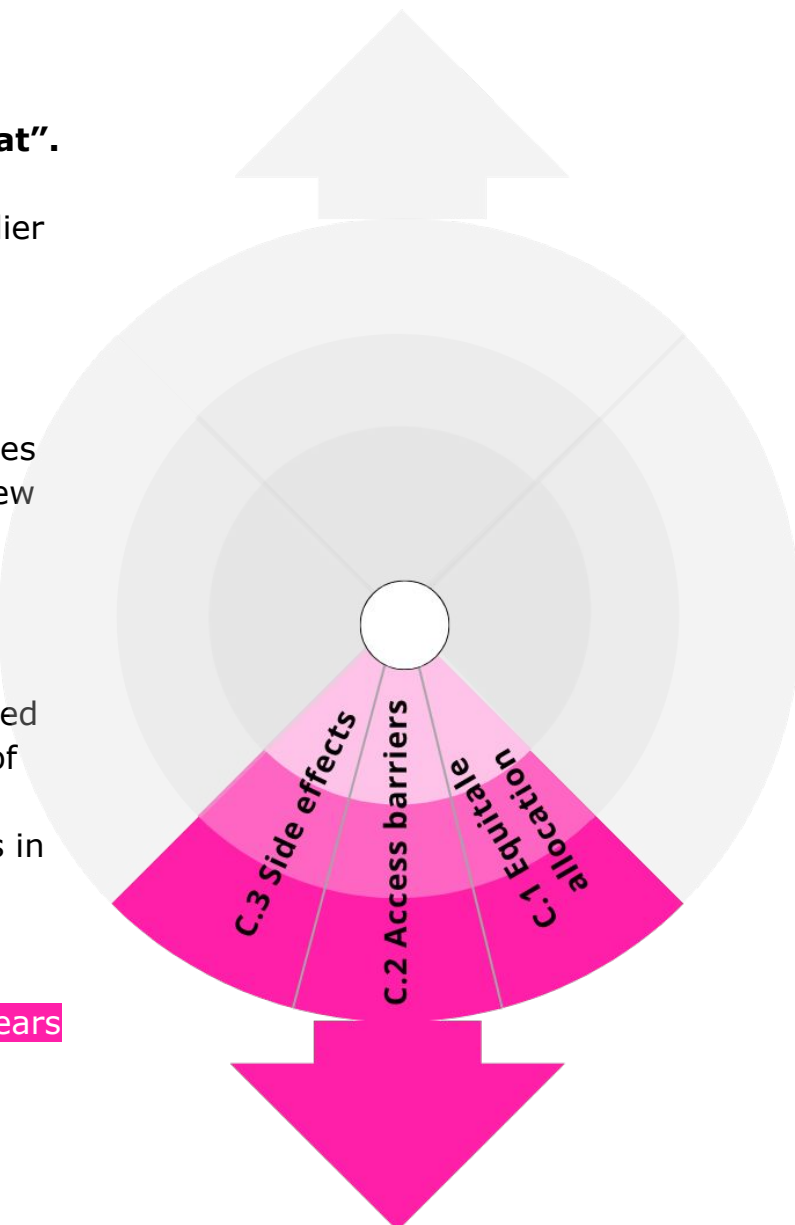
Distributive Justice

Are benefits, burdens and negative impacts distributed fairly?

This dimension is about “What”.

Climate change acts as a multiplier of inequality: it tends to affect people with fewer resources and protections more severely. Distributive justice is the most visible form of justice: it examines whether the benefits (such as new green spaces or protective measures) and costs (such as energy-efficiency renovation requirements) of planned or implemented measures are shared fairly. It also considers the risk of maladaptation — when an intervention improves conditions in one area but makes life more difficult for people elsewhere.

It assesses who benefits, who bears the burdens, and whether adaptation reinforces existing inequalities.



C.WHO BENEFITS

Distributive Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
C.1 Equitable allocation	0 — No prioritisation	No specifically targeted measures are planned.
Are populations and areas facing the highest climate risks or greatest vulnerability given priority?	1 — Ambiguous prioritisation	Vulnerable groups are said to require particular attention, but this is not translated into concrete measures.
	2 — Some targeted measures	Some actions prioritise specific populations (e.g. cooling centres for older people or flood protection in vulnerable neighbourhoods).
	3 — Systematic prioritisation	Resources are systematically directed towards the most vulnerable areas or disadvantaged populations, based on a structured analysis of risks and disparities. The basis and implementation of priorities are clearly explained, including budgets, timelines and selection criteria, avoiding ad hoc or arbitrary interventions.

C.WHO BENEFITS

Distributive Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
C.2 Access barriers	0 — No recognition	It assumes that if a measure exists, everyone can access and use it.
Are barriers that could prevent people from benefiting from the planned actions addressed?	1 — General awareness	It recognises that some people may face difficulties in accessing or using the measure.
	2 — Partial correction	Some barriers are identified and addressed, but only partially or only for certain groups (e.g. translated information leaflets).
	3 — Integrated accessibility design	Access barriers are systematically analysed across different dimensions, with explicit mechanisms to ensure equitable access.



This indicator assesses whether the plan recognises that, even when measures are available, some populations may face barriers to accessing them. These barriers can be economic, administrative, informational or digital. Give the indicator an overall score and use the Assessment Sheet to note specific areas for improvement.

Examples of barriers

- Complex administrative procedures
- Services available only digitally
- Co-funding requirements
- Language barriers

Examples of enabling factors

- Financial assistance programmes
- Place-based information and communication strategies
- Simplified administrative procedures
- Targeted support for vulnerable households
- Language or accessibility measures

C.WHO BENEFITS

Distributive Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
C.3 Side effects	0 — No evidence	Measures are assumed to be “positive” for everyone, without considering differential impacts.
Does the measure assess in advance whether it could generate unintended effects, disproportionate costs, or shift risks and burdens onto groups already experiencing vulnerability?	1 — Generic mention	The possibility of risks is acknowledged, but no mitigation measures are planned.
	2 — Risks identified	Specific risks are identified and there is a commitment to monitor them, but no preventive or corrective actions are integrated.
	3 — Integrated mitigation	Potential negative impacts are systematically assessed and mitigation strategies are incorporated into the measures.



Measures such as urban greening, flood protection or building renovation can reduce climate risks, but may also have unintended consequences. For example, urban greening can lower temperatures while increasing property values and contributing to resident displacement; flood protection infrastructure can safeguard some areas while shifting risks to others. Similarly, energy-efficiency renovations can make buildings more resilient but also lead to higher rents. **This indicator assesses whether these risks are recognised and mitigated.**

D. WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE

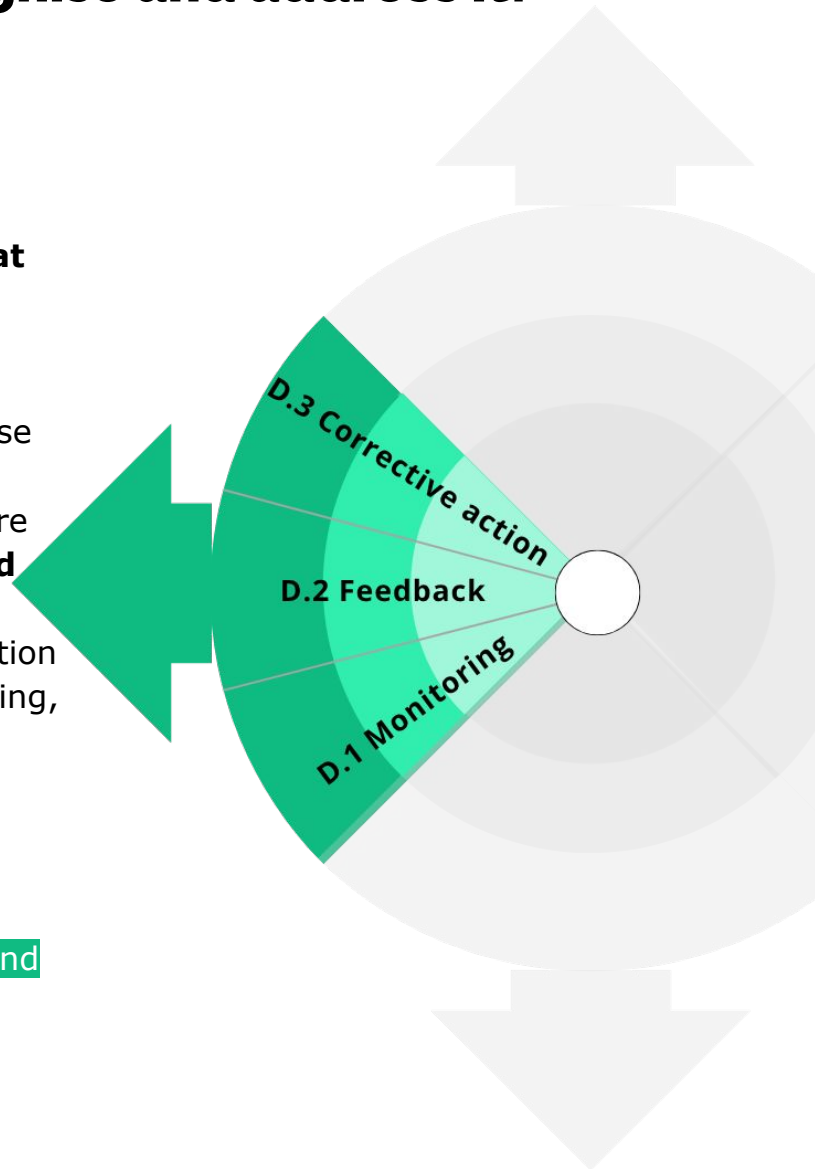
Restorative Justice

If harm or exclusion occurs, are there mechanisms to recognise and address it?

This dimension is about “What happens next”.

No public action is perfect: even well-intentioned policies can cause harm or unintended effects. This dimension assesses whether there are ways to **monitor, adapt and remedy impacts on communities**, turning public action from a static document into a living, adaptive framework that can recognise and correct mistakes.

It assesses whether concrete mechanisms exist to recognise and remedy harm before injustices become further entrenched.



D. WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE

Restorative Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
D.1 Equity-based monitoring <i>Is impact monitoring planned and/or carried out in a way that shows who actually benefits and who risks being left behind?</i>	0 — No evidence 1 — Technical monitoring 2 - Basic social monitoring 3 - Equity-focused monitoring	No data are collected during or after implementation. Technical indicators are tracked (e.g. trees planted, metres of flood barriers built), but there is no assessment of who actually benefits. General social data are collected (e.g. number of people reached), but differences between groups or areas are not analysed. Monitoring systematically assesses distributional impacts across social groups or areas, with particular attention to the vulnerability profiles identified during the initial recognition phase.
D.2 Feedback channels <i>Is there a clear and accessible way for affected people to raise concerns, file complaints or provide feedback?</i>	0 — No evidence 1 — Generic or unclear channels 2 — Dedicated channels 3 — Transparent and responsive channels	There is no way to file a complaint or provide feedback once the measures are being implemented Generic channels are used (e.g. the municipality's "Contact us" form), but they are slow or unresponsive. A dedicated contact point is provided for the measure, but with limited power to respond. A formal, publicised and accessible mechanism is in place, with an explicit mandate to respond to complaints about the equity of the measures.

D. WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE

Restorative Justice

Indicator	Assessment scale	Diagnostic prompts
D.3 Corrective action	0 — No evidence	Measures are defined as a “one-off” document, with no provision for periodic review or updates.
<i>Is there a mechanism to modify measures when monitoring shows they are causing inequities?</i>	1 — Generic mention	The document states that it “may be updated in the future”, but no clear timeline or criteria are defined
	2 — Periodic review	Scheduled reviews are planned, during which measures are reassessed, but without a systematic link to equity outcomes.
	3 — Adaptive governance	Changes to measures are explicitly linked to equity outcomes: if monitoring (D1) or feedback (D2) shows that a group is being harmed, there is a legal or administrative requirement to suspend and review the specific measure. .



The assessment of D3 also considers whether the measure can be reviewed and adjusted when negative impacts or new forms of inequity emerge during implementation.

4. From analysis to action

What story of (in)justice does your assessment reveal?

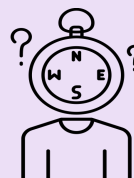
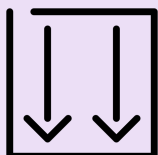
Once you have plotted your scores on the Climate Equity Radar, don't stop at the numbers: look at the patterns that emerge across the dimensions.

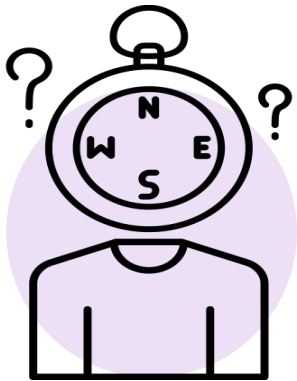
The five (in)justice archetypes set out below — Vague, Passive Observer, Top-Down, Tokenistic and Rigid — represent recurring profiles that may emerge in practice. They do not perfectly describe real-world cases, nor do they cover every possibility. Rather, they are simplified examples designed to help interpret the results and move from assessment to action.

Use them as a lens for interpretation: your case may resemble one of these archetypes, combine several, or point to the need for new ones. The goal is not to classify, but to identify priorities for improvement.

How to find your archetype

- Calculate the average score for each dimension (A, B, C, D) and compare it with the criteria proposed for each archetype.
- Identify the predominant profile, if there is one, or any combination of archetypes.
- Use the suggested actions as prompts for internal review, advocacy, or future planning.





ARCHETYPE 1

The Vague

Principles and problems are acknowledged, but in-depth analysis and concrete measures are lacking.

Typical signs

Most dimensions score in the mid-to-low range (1–1.5).

What is happening

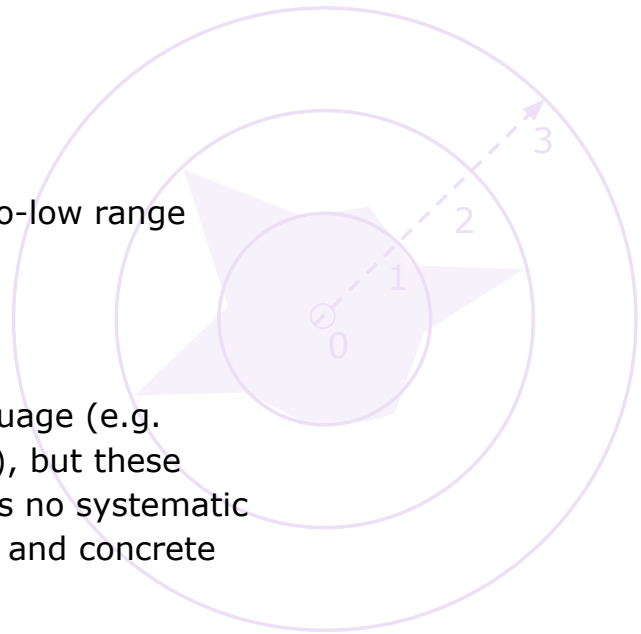
The plan uses equity-sensitive language (e.g. vulnerable groups, access, barriers), but these statements remain general. There is no systematic translation into diagnosis, priorities and concrete actions.

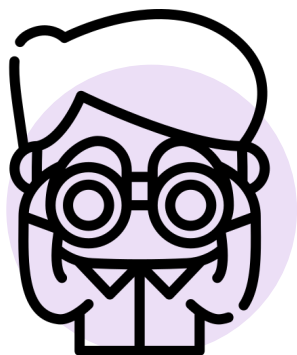
Main risks

- A gap between intention and implementation
- Actions that are difficult to verify or measure
- “Narrative equity” without impact

Possible actions

- Translate statements of principle into verifiable analysis, specifying inequalities through data or concrete evidence and avoiding generic formulations (A).
- Link each identified problem to a concrete operational measure, so that actions do not remain at the level of statements (C1).
- Define clear indicators to monitor whether measures produce real impacts for the groups identified (D1).





ARCHETYPE 2

The Passive Observer

The problem is recognised, but it is not translated into concrete action.

Typical signs

A high, C low

What is happening

There is awareness of climate inequalities and groups experiencing vulnerability, but resources, political priorities or implementation capacity are lacking.

Main risks

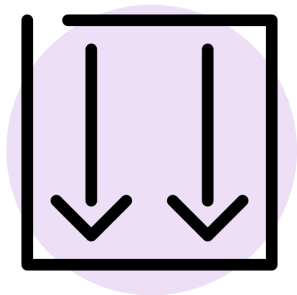
- Existing inequalities become further entrenched.
- Failure to translate evidence into concrete action can lead to loss of trust and institutional legitimacy.

Possible actions

- Check who actually benefits from the measures adopted, and whether they reach the groups most exposed or experiencing vulnerability (*D1*).
- Reallocate the budget towards high-impact measures for groups experiencing vulnerability (*C1*).
- Turn the evidence gathered into a concrete action plan, with clear priorities, timelines and responsibilities.



ARCHETYPE 3



The Top-Down

Concrete measures are in place, but the people affected are not meaningfully involved.

Typical signs

C high, B low

What is happening

Actions, investments or programmes are in place, but decisions are made centrally, with limited participation from the groups affected and little opportunity to influence decisions.

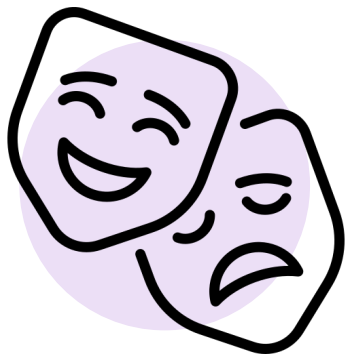
Main risks

- Solutions that do not adequately reflect people's real needs
- Resistance or conflict during implementation
- Lower public legitimacy of the measures

Possible actions

- Involve affected groups from the early stages, before decisions have already been made (*B1*).
- Create participatory spaces where people can meaningfully influence decisions, making clear what is open for discussion (*B3*).
- Set up ongoing feedback channels to gather views on adopted measures and adjust them over time (*D2*).





ARCHETYPE 4

The Tokenistic

Participation exists, but has little influence on decisions.

Typical signs

B1-B2 high, B3 low

What is happening

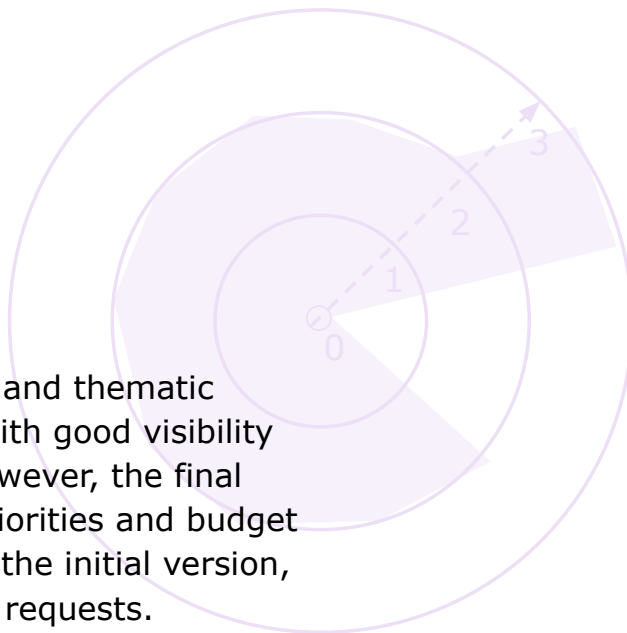
Many meetings, workshops, events and thematic discussions have been organised, with good visibility and communication. In practice, however, the final content of the plan — measures, priorities and budget — remains largely unchanged from the initial version, even when people have made clear requests.

Main risks i

- Tokenistic participation
- Loss of institutional trust
- Formal rather than meaningful engagement

Possible actions

- Clarify what is genuinely open for negotiation.
- Publicly explain how participants' contributions were used.
- Involve participants in the follow-up.





ARCHETYPE 5

The Rigid

The system struggles to adapt, learn and correct itself.

Typical signs

D low

What is happening

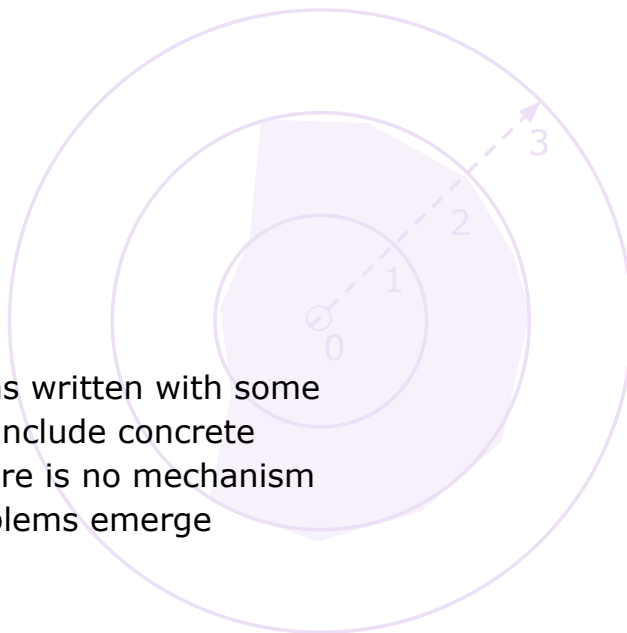
The plan tells a finished story: it was written with some level of recognition, and may even include concrete measures and participation, but there is no mechanism to change it when injustices or problems emerge during implementation.

Main risks

- Outdated measures
- Slow responses to crises
- Repeated mistakes

Possible actions

- Introduce regular reviews, feedback channels and updates following emergencies.
- Explicitly link reviews to D1 and D2 outcomes: if monitoring or feedback shows that groups are being harmed, the measure should be stopped and corrected, not simply left unchanged until the next plan update.
- Publish monitoring results and subsequent changes in clear, accessible language.





ARCHETYPE 6

The North Star

What an equitable policy looks like

Who Counts

- Makes the most vulnerable groups and areas visible through data and analysis
- Goes beyond identifying who is vulnerable to understand why
- Recognises multiple and intersectional vulnerabilities
- Uses this evidence to set priorities

Who Decides

- Involves the people most affected
- Removes barriers to participation
- Ensures that what emerges from participatory processes genuinely influences decisions and actions
- Provides accessible and transparent information, for example on risks, policies and monitoring

Who Benefits

- Prioritises the most vulnerable people and areas
- Removes barriers that prevent access to planned measures
- Considers who benefits, who bears the costs and who may experience negative impacts
- Assesses potential unintended impacts in advance

Who Is Accountable

- Monitors the effects of the measure across different groups and areas
- Provides accessible channels for feedback and concerns
- Has mechanisms to review and adjust the measure when needed, including in response to unforeseen negative impacts

Worksheets



This section provides printable materials to support the assessment, whether carried out individually or in a group. These are support tools, not rigid templates: adapt them to the context, the objectives and the level of detail required.

The available materials are:

- **Vulnerability Profile**, to identify and summarise the main factors contributing to vulnerability in your area.
- **Assessment Sheet**, to support a structured, consistent and comparable analysis.
- **Equity Radar**, to quickly visualise the results and identify key strengths and areas for improvement.

VULNERABILITY PROFILE

This tool helps you identify the groups, situations and areas most exposed in the context you are analysing, as a first step before assessing the Equity Compass indicators.

Area / case analysed _____

1. Groups most exposed

Group	How are they exposed to climate risks?	Factors contributing to their vulnerability	Local evidence / observations

2. Areas most exposed

Zona / quartiere / territorio	Tipo di rischio	Chi vive / lavora lì?

3. Who might remain invisible or excluded?

Groups or people who may not be involved, heard or reached.

4. Priorities for the assessment

Which groups or areas should you keep particularly in mind when assessing the indicators?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Some guiding questions:

- Who is most affected by climate impacts here?
- Who has fewer resources to adapt or protect themselves?
- Who faces barriers to accessing information, services or decision-making?
- Who may not appear in official data but could be experiencing vulnerability?

Note: Use this worksheet as a practical support tool. You do not need to complete every section: simply record what is useful for guiding a more informed and context-sensitive assessment.

ASSESSMENT SHEET

Use the Guide to interpret the indicators and assessment scale correctly.

Indicator	Score	Comments and observations
A1. Social differences. <i>Is it recognised that climate impacts and adaptive capacities vary across society?</i>		
A2. Structural causes. <i>Are the reasons why some groups are more vulnerable to climate impacts examined?</i>		
A3. Intersectionality. <i>Is it recognised that different factors contributing to vulnerability can overlap?</i>		
B1. Inclusive participation. <i>Have the groups most affected by climate risks been involved in defining the measures?</i>		
B2 Accessible participation. <i>Have potential barriers to participation been reduced so that different groups can effectively take part in decision-making processes?</i>		
B3. Real influence. <i>Has public participation had a real influence on the final decisions?</i>		
B4. Information transparency. <i>Is clear, accessible and timely information available about the plan/action/policy, its implementation and monitoring, and relevant climate risks, including in emergencies?</i>		
C1. Equitable allocation. <i>Are groups and areas facing higher climate risks or greater vulnerability given priority?</i>		
C2. Access barriers. <i>Are barriers that could prevent people from benefiting from the planned measures addressed?</i>		
C3. Side effects. <i>Does the measure assess in advance whether it could generate unintended impacts or shift risks and burdens onto groups already experiencing vulnerability?</i>		
D1. Equity-based monitoring. <i>Is impact monitoring planned and/or implemented in a way that shows who actually benefits and who risks being left behind?</i>		
D2. Feedback channels. <i>Is there a clear and accessible way for affected people to raise concerns, submit complaints or provide feedback?</i>		
D3. Corrective action. <i>Is there a mechanism to modify measures when monitoring shows that they are causing harm or creating new inequalities?</i>		

EQUITY RADAR

Enter the score for each indicator on the radar, then connect the points with a line. The resulting profile highlights strengths and areas for improvement.



Methodological Note

The Equity Compass is developed through the integration of empirical research, a review of relevant literature and existing assessment frameworks, and a strong focus on usability. Its development builds on previous research by ActionAid [1], which explored the views, experiences and priorities of citizens through interviews and questionnaires, with the aim of identifying key concepts for a just approach to climate adaptation, grounded in people's lived experiences and everyday realities. Several themes emerging from this work informed the development of the Compass, including access to information and the ability to understand and act on it, unequal access to adaptation measures, and territorial inequalities. These insights helped connect broader principles of climate justice with the concrete barriers and experiences encountered by people and communities.

The development of the Compass is also informed by a review of existing frameworks and approaches in the scientific literature. Among the most relevant references are the *Adaptation Justice Index* [2], which provides an ex ante framework for assessing adaptation strategies and plans through four dimensions of climate justice—recognition, distribution, participation and restorative—and the *Indigenous Climate Justice Policy Analysis Tool* [3], which highlights the importance of recognising the knowledge, rights and self-determination of historically marginalised communities. The review also considered tools developed by international organisations, European networks and cooperation projects, many of which use checklists or extended questionnaires to assess climate adaptation and related policies. In several of these tools, equity is addressed as one criterion among others, alongside technical, institutional and governance considerations (e.g. [4], [5], [6]). Together, these sources provided both conceptual foundations and practical insights for defining the dimensions, indicators and diagnostic prompts of the Equity Compass.

While existing frameworks and tools offer valuable contributions, they also present some recurring limitations. They can be complex to apply, highly technical, ill-suited to specific local contexts, or difficult for non-specialist users to navigate.

In some cases, they prioritise analytical completeness over ease of use; in others, they focus on broad categories of vulnerability without leaving sufficient space to explore local conditions, lived experiences and less visible forms of exclusion. These limitations highlighted the need for a tool that could retain the core principles of climate justice while making them easier to apply to concrete policies, actions and plans.

The Equity Compass therefore seeks to strike a balance between conceptual rigour and practical usability. Rather than providing an exhaustive assessment framework, it translates key principles of climate justice into a manageable set of dimensions and indicators that can support critical reflection and comparison. Its visual approach and synthesis of results are inspired in part by tools such as the *Equity Compass* [7] and applied approaches such as *Health Impact Assessment* in urban planning [8], which facilitate the visualisation of evidence and can support dialogue among different actors involved in decision-making.

Particular attention was given to both the clarity of the content and the accessibility of the format. The Compass uses concise indicators, illustrative examples within the assessment scales, and diagnostic prompts designed to encourage reflection on the specific conditions of the territory being assessed. The accompanying worksheets provide practical support for identifying vulnerability, recording evidence and structuring the assessment, and are designed for individual or group use in different settings, including public authority, civic organisations and activist contexts. The tool also includes interpretive archetypes that help users move from scores to a broader understanding of the patterns revealed by the assessment. Rather than treating the score as an end in itself, these archetypes suggest possible directions for improvement and help translate the findings into action.

The Compass was also subjected to a review and testing phase with a group of activists, with the aim of assessing its clarity, usefulness and usability. Their feedback helped identify areas where concepts, questions and instructions could be made clearer and more accessible, and contributed to refining both the content and structure of the tool.

This process also reflects an important principle underlying the Compass itself: tools intended to support more equitable decision-making should not be developed solely from an expert perspective, but should remain open to the experiences, knowledge and feedback of those who may use them in practice. The Equity Compass is therefore conceived not as a definitive or fixed framework, but as a practical tool that can continue to evolve through use, reflection and collective learning.

References

- [1] *Coinvolgimento delle comunità in condizioni di fragilità e marginalità nelle politiche di adattamento al cambiamento climatico*. ActionAid Italia, 2025 Available at: <https://www.actionaid.it/pubblicazioni/crisi-climatica-ingiustizia-sociale/>
- [2] Juhola, S., et al. (2022). *Connecting climate justice and adaptation planning: An adaptation justice index*. Environmental Science & Policy(136), 609-619.
- [3] Jones, R., Reid, P., & Macmillan, A. (2024). *An Indigenous climate justice policy analysis tool*. Climate policy, 24(8), 1080-1095.
- [4] *Climate Change Adaptation Scoring Tool* (Euro LCP Initiative) Available at: <https://www.lcp-initiative.eu/climate-change-scoring-tool/>
- [5] *Adaptation Policy Credibility*. Tool and information available: https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/mission/solutions/tools-inactive/008_adaptation-policy-credibility-apc
- [6] UN Women. *Gender Equality Policy Scorecard for Climate Action*. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/climate-scorecard>
- [7] *The Equity Compass*. Available at: <https://yestem.org/tools/the-equity-compass/>
- [8] *Tool for Integrating Health into Urban Planning*. Diputació de Barcelona, 2022. Available at: <https://urbisalut.diba.cat/>

September 2026
CC BY-NC-SA 4.0