



The Member States' Engagement on Climate Change at the UN

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This study examines the engagement of states on climate change in key intergovernmental forums from 2021 to 2024, namely the United Nations General Assembly (GA), Human Rights Council (HRC), High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties (UNFCCC COP). It analyzes statements and relevant voting to illuminate state positions on key climate priorities, including climate action, climate finance, human rights, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR).

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Abbreviations

BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

CBDR: Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (and Respective Capabilities)

COP: Conference of the Parties (of the UNFCCC)

EU: European Union

GA: United Nations General Assembly

GRULAC: Group of Latin American and Caribbean States

HLPF: High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

HRC: United Nations Human Rights Council

ICJ: International Court of Justice

IMF: International Monetary Fund

JUSCANZ: Group of like-minded liberal countries that are not members of the EU¹

LMG: The "Like-Minded Group", consisting of mostly authoritarian countries²

NDCs: Nationally Determined Contributions

OHCHR: United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

OIC: Organization of Islamic Cooperation

SIDS: Small Island Developing States

UNEA: United Nations Environment Assembly

UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

WEOG: Western European and Others Group

¹ In most UN bodies where JUSCANZ is active, it includes 15 countries: Andorra, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Liechtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

² In a previous study we conducted for KAS we found 47 countries that have signed on to any LMG statement between 2018-2022: Algeria, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, China, Cuba, DPRK (North Korea), Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

Executive Summary

This study examines the engagement of states on climate change in intergovernmental forums from 2021 to 2024, focusing on the European Union's (EU) role and interactions with other states and groups. The report provides tailored insights into how the EU can reinforce its leadership and partnerships in climate diplomacy and dedicates attention to Germany's contributions. Through an analysis of statements, voting patterns and thematic priorities across inter-governmental bodies like the United Nations General Assembly (GA), Human Rights Council (HRC), and UNFCCC COP, the report identifies states' priorities and points out challenges and opportunities.

The findings reveal a complex landscape, where shared global challenges coexist with persistent geopolitical and value-based divisions. While multilateral forums emphasize cooperation to tackle climate change, differences in priorities, tone, and emphasis create friction. Developed countries, including EU member states, lead on themes like climate action and human rights integration, whereas developing countries emphasize climate finance, equity-driven solutions, and historical responsibility.

The EU emerges as a key actor in advancing global climate action, consistently advocating for the phasing out of fossil fuels, renewable energy transitions and human rights-based approaches. However, its similar role as the largest contributor of climate finance may be undercut by the more vocal demands of developing countries for climate finance and its rivals' utilization of the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) to criticize developed countries. Germany appears to prioritize human rights and was also a member of the core group presenting the request to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to provide an advisory opinion on legal obligations in the context of climate change.

The study highlights evolving geopolitical dynamics that influence climate diplomacy. The shared commitment of the EU and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean (GRULAC) to human rights offers opportunities to strengthen coalition-building. A better reflection of understanding to the concerns of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other developing countries, particularly around climate finance, would also strengthen the EU's position and capacity for effective multilateral engagement. This is especially critical in the face of China's efforts to sow division and Russia's attempts to spoil multilateral climate ambitions. The evolving stance of the US underscores the urgent need for agile and context-specific strategies.

Building on these findings, the report offers actionable recommendations to strengthen the EU's role in climate diplomacy by addressing the challenges and opportunities identified:

1. Acknowledge and support developing countries' mitigation efforts.
2. Prioritize mitigation solutions in the EU to protect its reputation for fighting climate change.
3. Increase engagement on climate finance including by highlighting fulfilled EU pledges, supporting developing countries' calls for loan restructuring and improved grant mechanisms, and advocating to address funding gaps for mitigation efforts.
4. Seek a common EU position on debt relief and financial institutions.
5. Advocate for human rights integration also at the UNFCCC COP and UNEA.
6. Partner with GRULAC on initiatives advocating for human rights integration.
7. Seek a common EU position on legal accountability, in anticipation of the ICJ's advisory opinion and form a shared understanding with GRULAC and SIDS.
8. Collaborate with like-minded developing countries to clarify the distinction between CBDR and human rights.
9. Consider seeking a more nuanced clarification from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on CBDR.
10. Further investigate the roles of China and Taiwan and their influence on SIDS, as this may impact coalition-building.
11. Maintain close contacts with US representatives to anticipate changes.
12. Maintain Russia's isolation to prevent spoiling of multilateral climate action.

The report's insights align with the overarching goal of enhancing the EU's climate leadership while navigating the complex interplay of geopolitical alliances and thematic priorities. By implementing these recommendations, the EU can bolster partnerships with developing countries, counteract divisive narratives in multilateral forums, and ultimately, achieve greater success in advancing equitable and ambitious climate action.

Introduction

Purpose and Scope

This study examines the engagement of states on climate change in key intergovernmental forums from 2021 to 2024, namely the United Nations General Assembly (GA), Human Rights Council (HRC), High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties (UNFCCC COP).

The analysis of a large sample of statements and some relevant voting is aimed at illuminating how states position themselves in relation to key climate priorities and to each other. In particular, the analysis focuses on the main themes of climate action, climate finance, and human rights, as well as the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR).

In an effort to inform the European Union's decision-making on climate change policy and its engagement in inter-governmental bodies, the analysis focuses on the position of the EU. The EU stands out in its commitment to both climate action and human rights, although because of fewer mentions of climate finance, it may appear less prioritized compared to the EU's focus on climate action and human rights. In turn, such a perception could undermine collaboration with developing countries. All that is said with the understanding that this report only analyzes the volume of statements and voting, not Euros or tons of CO₂ emissions. It provides unique insights into political and diplomatic engagement, rather than environmental or economic metrics.

The analysis of statements and resolutions helps to identify trends in the EU's engagement, potential allies, and challenges. A broad range of groups are examined, particularly various groups of developing countries and authoritarian countries, as well as a few states of interest, including Germany, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

Significance

The analysis is timely as the world grapples with increasingly severe climate crises, from rising temperatures to catastrophic weather events, which disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. The statements from developing countries, including small island developing states or least developed countries (SIDS/LDCs), conveyed an urgent need for greater support, but also for deeper understanding. In this context, the role of multilateral bodies and coalitions in advancing meaningful climate dialogue and action is critical. Based on their statements, Germany and the EU are among the most keen actors to promote climate action.

The insights drawn by this study can support stronger collaboration between the EU and other states and groups and position them better

to tackle climate change together. The EU's intrinsic commitment to multilateralism may not require political will for collaboration. It requires the data to support decision-making and strategy. The data can inform choices on the content of statements in each UN body and which partnerships to strengthen.

Key Questions

This study addresses critical questions central to the global climate discourse:

- How does the EU fare in voting within the UN General Assembly with countries from other regions? Is climate change an area where the EU and other like-minded countries have managed to create a satisfying discourse and dialogue with partner countries from other regions? Or are other authoritarian countries more skilled at doing this?
- To what extent do leading authoritarian states manage to build coalitions against the EU and like-minded partners? What focus do they set? Are environmental questions used to promote their own narratives?
- Is the discourse on climate consistent with common climate challenges (particularly among SIDS) or are there still differences observed depending on alignment based on geopolitics or values?
- How controversial is climate change? What are specific areas of disagreement? How important is the dissent when it comes to more thorny issues such as climate finance or CBDR?
- Who are the EU's strongest allies?

Conclusion of the Introduction

By exploring these questions, this study not only seeks to document the positions of states but also to provide actionable insights into how alliances and narratives in climate diplomacy are shaping outcomes. The findings will inform recommendations for enhancing the EU's role as a climate leader while navigating geopolitical challenges and divergent priorities.

Methodology

Data Sources

The study analyzed 722 statements from five major intergovernmental bodies (GA, HRC, HLPF, UNEA, UNFCCC COP) in 2021–24. It was designed to draw conclusions and provide recommendations based on a snapshot of the current positions of member states, rather than an analysis of their development. For example, an analysis of the gradual shift towards universally recognizing the right to a healthy environment would have required a much larger data sample over a longer period. Voting was also examined, although there were not many such cases and even some of those were tied to other geopolitical considerations, rather than positions on climate change.

While the focus of the study was on the positions expressed by member states, it involved contextual analysis to account for intervening variables, such as differences across different inter-governmental bodies, including in their focus, the number of sessions and level of states' representation.

Analytical Framework

In the preliminary examination of statements, it was found that states mostly expressed positions on three main themes: climate action, climate finance and human rights. Therefore, it was chosen to focus on recording whether states expressed a position on those topics. Related themes were also tracked, such as debt relief, legal accountability and common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR). However, calls for technology transfer were not tracked separately, as for many states it was implicit in the request for climate finance. It was also considered unnecessary to note states' reporting of adaptation or mitigation efforts, as all were expected to do so, and it was beyond the scope of this study to differentiate the quality of actual or committed emission reductions.

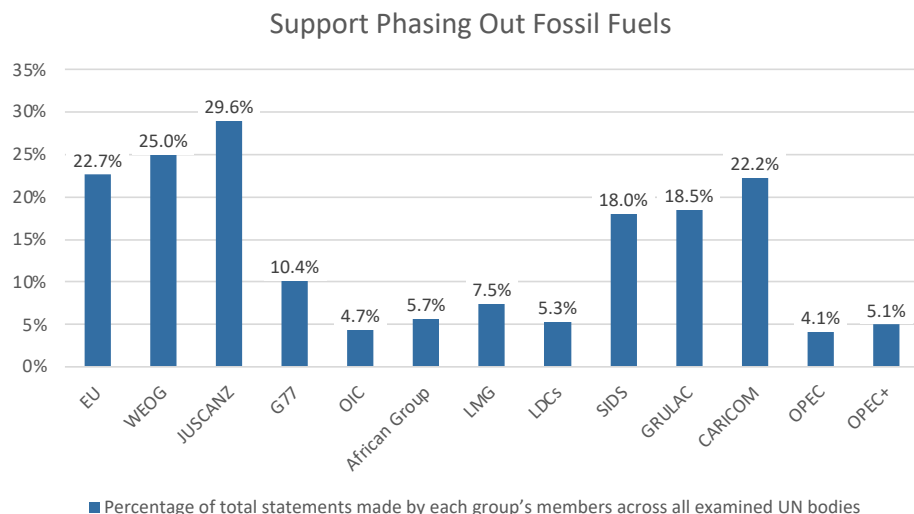
On the other hand, as opposition to climate action, finance and human rights was rare, any sign of ambivalence was noted in this study. Even questioning commitments or obligations to phase out natural gas, promote human rights in climate change action or provide climate finance represented a break from consensus. In addition, while it would be challenging to account for differences in the tone of statements, they may also be relevant. For example, statements differed in whether they pointed fingers to developed countries, spoke of historical responsibilities, or used particularly harsh terms. Statements varied in outlook—pessimistic, optimistic, or neutral—and in focus, whether directed inward to highlight domestic efforts and challenges, or outward to emphasize global action.



Overall, the main challenges included data variability between UN bodies, groups, and states, as well as the subjective interpretation of support or ambivalence in each statement, as elaborated in the following analysis of themes. The focus of the analysis was mainly on the differences between groups of states, while some key actors were highlighted. In addition, the study elaborated on the position of Germany and the EU in relation to the various themes and other groups, with the aim to provide tailored conclusions and recommendations to their decision-makers. This methodology forms the foundation for the thematic and geopolitical insights that follow, providing a basis for the tailored recommendations presented later.

Climate Change Action

Climate action remains the central focus of multilateral discussions, with the phase-out of fossil fuels emerging as a key priority. As displayed in the chart, the examination of 722 statements across various UN bodies shows that developed countries (represented by the EU, WEOG and JUSCANZ) dedicate greater attention to advocating for this transition, with CARICOM coming close.³ Of the 95 statements supporting a fossil fuel phase-out, nearly a quarter originated from the EU or its member states.



It is notable that this priority was expressed in the GA and the COP far more often than in the other UN bodies. Curiously, such specific references to fossil fuels were less common in joint statements than the topics of climate finance and human rights.

³ WEOG: Western European and Others Group; JUSCANZ: A group of Western and like-minded countries that are not EU members, including Japan and Republic of Korea; and CARICOM: Caribbean Community.

Ambivalence, although rare, was observed in 15 statements, including from the Gulf Cooperation Council (with additional expressions from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates in their national capacity), Iran, the US, Russia, Poland, Greece, Mozambique, and Côte d'Ivoire. In total, those were 10 states speaking in their national capacity. In contrast, 67 states supported fossil fuels phase-out, including 13 EU member states.

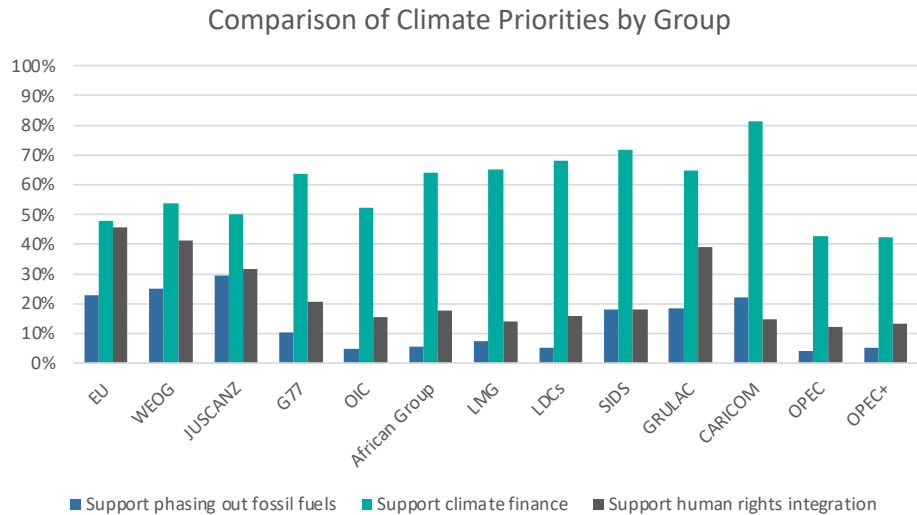
Ambivalent states expressed the need for a "just transition", noting the costs of transitioning away from fossil fuels. For example, Saudi Arabia [emphasized](#) different national capabilities (as part of CBDR) and a potential conflict between phasing out fossil fuels and a just transition, due to associated costs.

Developing countries frequently highlighted their mitigation efforts, including forestation, noting their role as carbon sinks, and called for adequate compensation. States also referred to energy efficiency, and on some occasions referred to transportation. Few of them referred to emissions from agricultural activities or waste.

Climate Finance

The chart below illustrates the percentage of statements from member states in each group that addressed one of three climate priorities: phasing out fossil fuels, climate finance, and human rights integration. Climate finance (represented by the tall orange columns) emerged as the most widely shared priority, with developing countries advocating for it more strongly than developed ones – more than three times as frequently as they addressed human rights (except in GRULAC, where the difference was smaller).⁴ Climate finance was raised in more statements (416 out of 722) and by more states (168 out of 193) than any other theme. Any expression of support for the importance of climate finance was counted. When developed countries acknowledged it, they often framed it in terms of their own contributions.

⁴ GRULAC: Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries.



In addition to the quantity, developing countries often adopted a stronger tone when demanding funding, emphasizing their minimal contribution to global warming, the urgency for equitable solutions, and at times, links to historical injustices. They were particularly assertive regarding the then unfulfilled pledge of 100 billion USD a year in global climate finance.⁵ The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) proposed the potential elaboration of climate reparations.⁶

Debt relief was mentioned in 28 statements, almost exclusively from developing countries, with 23 also addressing broader climate finance. If debt relief is too difficult to speak of, addressing alternatives such as fulfilling financial pledges, IMF and World Bank reform and loan restructuring could also resonate well with developing countries.

Ambivalence on climate finance was rare, with the US [challenging](#) the claim to a human rights obligation for compensation for loss and damage, while OHCHR emphasized universal responsibility to remedy climate harm.⁷ Saudi Arabia [refuted](#) an earlier OHCHR report, which called for high-income countries, rather than developed countries, to support investments in developing countries.⁸

24 of the 27 EU member states (excluding Croatia, Cyprus, and Romania) were observed supporting climate finance, surpassing EU backing for human rights integration (17) and phasing out fossil fuels (13). Furthermore, the topic appeared in 42 national statements of EU member states, more than human rights (40) and fossil fuels (20). However, the sheer volume of climate finance statements globally risks overshadowing the EU's voice, especially in the HRC and UNEA.

⁵ It was only in May 2024, that the OECD announced that the \$100B pledge had been met in 2022.

⁶ Report of the Secretary-General, Analytical study on the impact of loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights, exploring equity, [A/HRC/57/30](#), 28 August 2024, para 51.

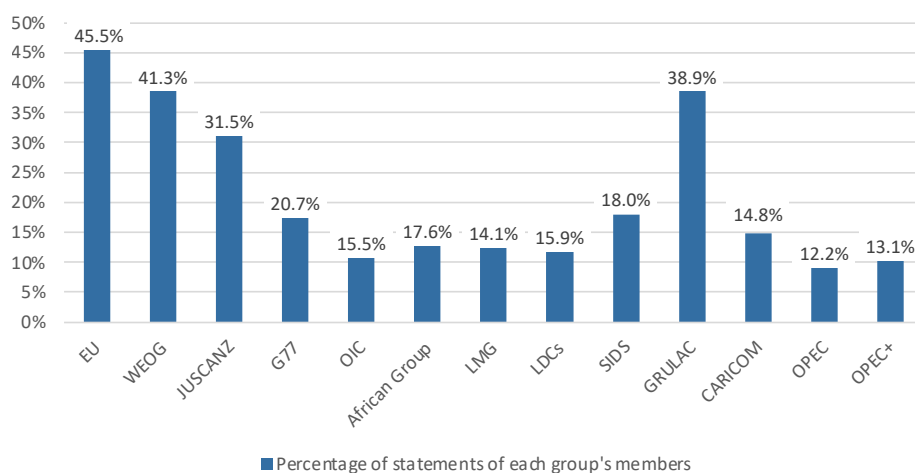
⁷ Ibid., para 54.

⁸ Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Measures for minimizing the adverse impact of climate change on the full realization of the right to food, [A/HRC/55/37](#), 1 February 2024, para 42.

Human Rights

Human rights integration into climate action was a topic where the EU and WEOG led, as shown in the chart, followed by GRULAC. Authoritarian groups like the LMG and OPEC demonstrated much lower support. Not surprisingly, human rights were addressed most often in the HRC (48% of its statements), followed by the HLPF (27%).⁹ Outside of these forums, human rights were often framed through a commitment to civil society participation and attention to women and groups in vulnerable situations.

Support Human Rights Integration



The analysis was based on any statement expressing some commitment to human rights and excluded those that only noted the harm caused by climate disasters. In analyzing these commitments, differing approaches to human rights framing among states were observed. Some states framed human rights in terms of national vulnerability, particularly for SIDS and LDCs, without acknowledging individual rights or risks to specific groups. States' interpretations of collective rights, including the right to development, vary significantly.

Concerns regarding human rights integration were only noted from China,¹⁰ opposing a human rights-based approach to climate change, and Russia,¹¹ rejecting the link between climate change and human rights, as well as the mandate or capacity of the Human Rights Council

⁹ UN Women found that the Second Committee of the General Assembly, which usually involves the same experts as in HLPF, [demonstrates](#) high levels of gender mainstreaming into its resolutions, including the consideration of women's rights, second only to the Third Committee, which focuses on human rights.

¹⁰ China's statement in the Human Rights Council's 48th session, adoption of the resolution on the Special Rapporteur on climate change, 8 October 2021.

¹¹ Russia's statement in the Human Rights Council's 55th session, interactive dialogue on the report of the High Commissioner on climate change and food, 14 March 2024.

and OHCHR to address climate change. Less radical, though also undermining human rights commitments, was the understanding that promoting and protecting human rights was conditional on funding.

OHCHR recently noted that loss and damage could hinder states' capacity to allocate resources for human rights, necessitating increased funding.¹²

Legal Accountability

It was also attempted to measure the level of support for legal accountability, although it may mean different things to different countries. Support for legal accountability was most often voiced by GRULAC and SIDS, with 7% of their statements. 3% of the statements of EU members appeared to advocate for legal accountability.

A resolution from 2023 led by Vanuatu and a cross-regional core group requested an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ). It aimed to clarify the rights and obligations of States under international law in relation to the adverse effects of climate change, especially with respect to SIDS and other developing countries particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, and importantly, to achieve climate justice.

Germany, Portugal and Romania were among the leaders of the resolution.¹³ Resolution 77/276 was adopted by consensus and co-sponsored by 121 member states.¹⁴ Germany expressed the hope that the advisory opinion would provide a legal motivation for all states, including emerging and high-emitting developing countries, to build greater ambition into the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and take meaningful action to curb emissions and protect human rights.¹⁵

While the resolution enjoyed broad support, the US raised concerns about its impact on collective efforts.¹⁶ When the ICJ's advisory opinion is published, it may solidify a global consensus towards climate action, climate finance and human rights integration, but it may also push the new US administration further away. As of the time this study is published, the court is still receiving statements and comments.¹⁷

12 Report of the Secretary-General, Analytical study on the impact of loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights, exploring equity, [A/HRC/57/30](#), 28 August 2024, para 10.

13 The resolution was presented in the General Assembly by the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, joined by Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Germany, Liechtenstein, the Federated States of Micronesia, Morocco, Mozambique, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Uganda and Viet Nam.

14 General Assembly, official records, [A/77/PV.64](#), 29 March 2023, p.2.

15 [A/77/PV.64](#), p. 18.

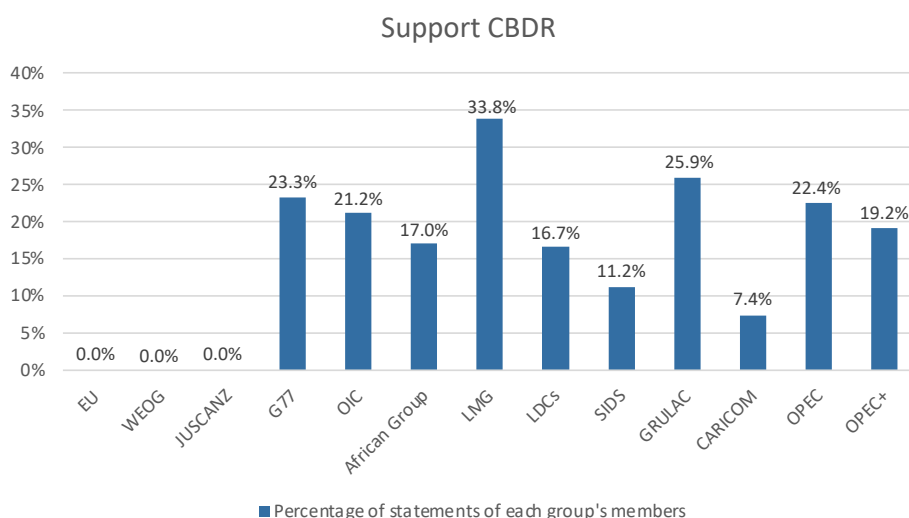
16 *Ibid.* p. 28.

17 Vanuatu ICJ Initiative, [ICJAO Proceedings](#), accessed on 28 February 2025.

Common but Differentiated Responsibilities

The principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” (CBDR) garnered significant support (17% of all statements), though outside consensus. It meant, according to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, that the countries that have historically contributed most to climate change and those that are currently the main contributors shall assist the countries most affected by climate change but least able to cope with its impact.¹⁸

CBDR was most often invoked by the LMG, followed by GRULAC, the G77 and the OIC. A small group of states, the BRICS, was literally off the charts, with 42% of its members' statements supporting CBDR.¹⁹



Support for CBDR was most frequently voiced in the HRC (23% of its statements), but was lower in HLPF (15%), UNEA (13%), the GA (10%) and the COP (9%). However, it was met with reservations emphasizing the universality of human rights over differentiated responsibilities, including from [France](#), [the UK](#) and [Costa Rica](#), as well as [the EU](#) as a whole, delivering a recurring statement noting the following:

“The cardinal principle of universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights must be the guiding light of all our work at the Council and must be universally respected, regardless of a country’s economic condition. It is thus imperative to stress that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in light of different national circumstances, cannot be applied to, nor conflated with, human rights; nor is it the only relevant principle to be considered as regards climate action.”

¹⁸ Report of the Secretary-General, Analytical study on the impact of loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights, exploring equity, [A/HRC/57/30](#), 28 August 2024, para 22.

¹⁹ The BRICS includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

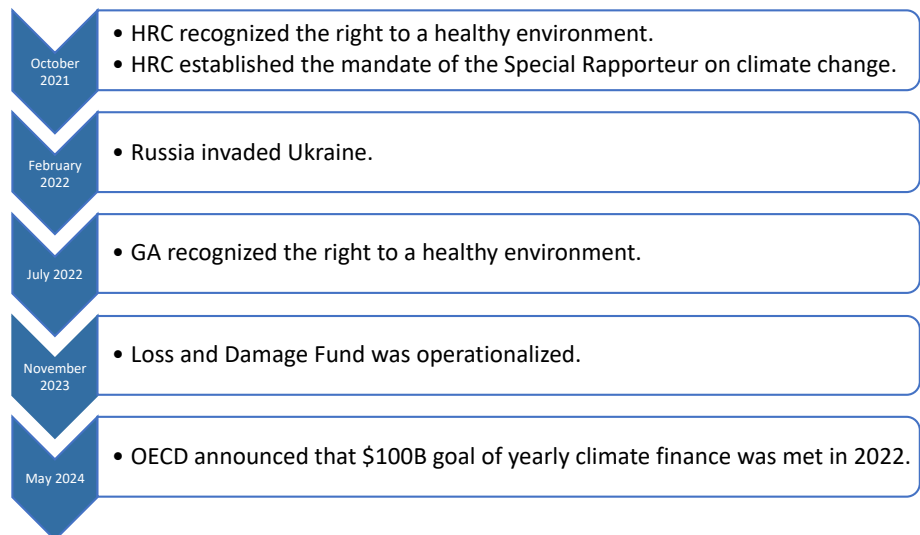
Developing countries sharing similar positions on human rights with the EU, such as Costa Rica, offer untapped potential for bridging divides on CBDR. On the other hand, China and other authoritarian countries exploit it to deepen division between developing countries and developed countries.

Geopolitics

Beyond political principles, the statements and voting were also influenced by geopolitical factors, such as relevant developments, group dynamics and the influence of China and Taiwan. Other topics, such as Ukraine and Gaza often featured in climate change statements. However, while such additions may affect how statements are perceived or the number of words remaining available to address climate change, these additions probably did not hinder states from expressing their national positions on climate change.

Relevant Developments

From 2021 to 2024, key events shaped inter-governmental climate discussions, such as the recognition of the right to a healthy environment, Russia's reduced ability to spoil negotiations after invading Ukraine and becoming relatively isolated, and the push to operationalize the Loss and Damage Fund and meet climate finance goals.



SIDS

The existential concerns of SIDS are expressed in relatively high advocacy for phasing out fossil fuels and providing climate finance, yet they are not in the lead. They also expressed relatively low support for human rights integration (18% of members' statements), possibly reflecting concerns about capacity.

While not so many statements articulated a call for legal accountability, SIDS were in the lead on this matter, along with GRULAC (at 7%, compared to 4% or less in other groups). In addition, the GA resolution requesting the ICJ advisory opinion was spearheaded by Vanuatu.

As to the potential of geopolitical considerations affecting SIDS' engagement, beyond their limited capacity, there may be hints towards the roles of China and Taiwan in their engagement. Very few inter-governmental bodies allow for Taiwan's participation, even as an observer, due to China's strong objection and its continued claim for sovereignty over Taiwan. However, statements by SIDS indicate that Taiwan may be significantly invested in supporting their climate action and they therefore advocate for it having a seat at the table in multilateral climate discussions. This may also explain shifts in voting on US-led amendments to GA resolutions opposing Chinese terminology. However, more information or investigation beyond resolutions and statements at the UN may be needed to draw conclusions.

The question of Taiwan may offer SIDS significant bargaining power to buy climate finance from either Taiwan or China. However, it makes for an unpredictable political landscape that may conflict with holistic and principled climate action.

Authoritarian States

Largely authoritarian groups like the LMG and OPEC showed minimal support for human rights integration. The LMG was also the most vocal group on CBDR, aside from the BRICS, which may be indicative of some hijacking of this agenda. Some of the most authoritarian countries sometimes referred to sanctions, as unilateral coercive measures undermining their ability to take more climate action. A dedicated discussion on China and Russia follows in the next section.

Western and Other Like-Minded Countries

It almost goes without saying that other Western and like-minded countries, the EU's strongest allies, are similar on the climate agenda. The study largely identifies the members of the Western European and Others Group (WEOG) and most of the Eastern European Group (EEG) as representing the political "West". For the sake of verification, the table below notes that Western and like-minded groups (EU, WEOG, JUSCANZ) broadly aligned on climate priorities, though JUSCANZ showed slightly less support for human rights integration.²⁰

²⁰ WEOG includes, among others, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel. JUSCANZ includes those and other like-minded countries not members of the EU, such as Japan, Republic of Korea and Switzerland.

	EU	WEOG	JUSCANZ
Support phasing out fossil fuels	23%	25%	30%
Support climate finance	48%	54%	50%
Support human rights integration	45%	41%	31%
Support CBDR	0%	0%	0%

EU Positioning

As evident from the previous thematic sections, the EU was positioned at the extreme on each theme – either being the most supportive (on climate action and human rights), or the least supportive (on climate finance and CBDR). This refers to public statements and how they may be perceived, rather than the EU's actual climate finance contributions, where it is the largest provider globally.²¹

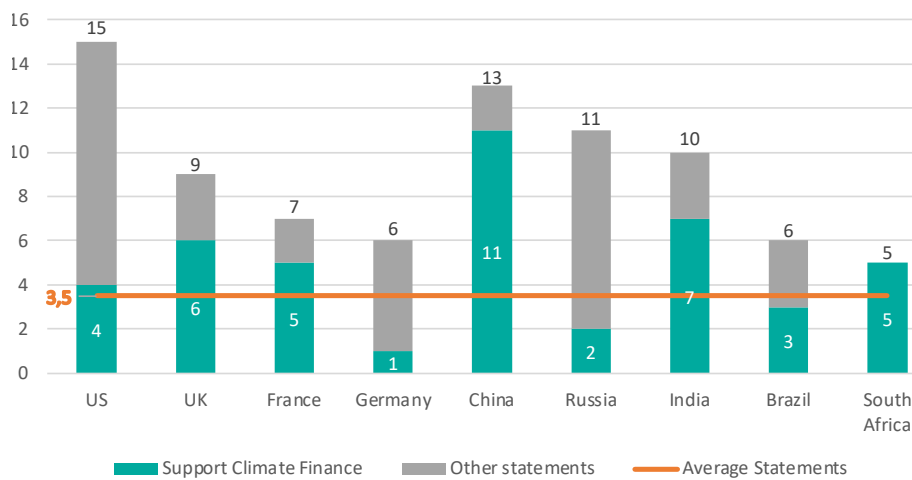
The next section explores the EU's challenges, including opposition from Russia, conflict with China's ambitions, and expected detachment from a new isolationist US administration, increasingly unbound by legal obligations.

²¹ European Council, [Europe's contribution to climate finance \(in €bn\)](#), 19 November 2024, last accessed 25 November 2024.

The P5, BRICS and Germany

Additional details are noted on several key states below. The following chart demonstrates their level of engagement, based on their number of statements. Compare this to the average number of statements among all states (excluding a few that have not delivered any statement). The chart also notes the number of statements supporting climate finance, (while the numbers on fossil fuels and human rights were less significant).

Climate Finance among All Statements



Germany

Germany, which was positioned as a leader in human rights advocacy (67% of its 6 statements), also co-led the request to the ICJ to provide an advisory opinion on legal obligations. However, it addressed climate finance in 1 of the 6 statements (17%), trailing the EU average (48%).

France and the UK

As former COP hosts, both countries demonstrated significant support for climate finance (5 of 7 statements by France and 6 of 9 statements by the UK). France was also the only Western country observed to explicitly mention debt relief. In addition, both countries were vocal against conflating CBDR with human rights.

USA

The Biden administration supported climate action and human rights in about a third of its statements, but maintained its view about no legal obligations. The stance that there are no legal obligations is likely to persist under the second Trump administration and as may already be observed, will likely be compounded by reduced climate funding and climate action.

China

In a clear effort to portray itself as a leader of developing countries, China called for climate finance in 85% of its statements recorded (11 of 13), a little more than the average of any group of states. It also disproportionately invoked CBDR in 69% of its statements (9 of 13) to counter the West, compared to 34% at most by any other group (the LMG).

Its statements prominently featured national terminology and the Belt and Road Initiative. However, it comes at a cost for developing countries in the GA resolution titled “the protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind.” Instead of standing united, several members of the G77 and China group, which tables the above mentioned resolution annually in the Second Committee of the GA, support the annual US amendment against the paragraph containing Chinese terminology, or vote against the paragraph. India [criticized](#) China for propagating a political agenda, arguing that “environmentally sound, open and shared manner” lacked clearly agreed meaning and relevance.

China also faces sensitivity over statements, mostly from SIDS, which called to include Taiwan as an observer (8 such cases were noted). Several of those speakers also expressed appreciation for Taiwan’s climate funding.

Russia

As on various other topics, Russia disrupted multilateral efforts, including by calling for a vote on resolutions that enjoyed wide support and presenting amendments. Examples included the resolutions to recognize the right to a healthy environment, first in the HRC and later in the GA, as well as the HRC resolution to create the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on climate change. On the latter, Russia was the only state voting against, but China, Eritrea, India and Japan abstained.

In such cases, the EU voted against Russia. For other states, the position was clear on principle questions, so the overwhelming majority supported those resolutions, but they were split when voting on amendments on various nuances. At least in the HRC, it was evident that the EU could count on the shared positions of GRULAC members, with the exception of Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia, who sometimes choose to be absent on Russian priorities, rather than vote with or against their region. Russia’s partial isolation following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine limited its influence.

The BRICS

One key feature of the BRICS is its high support for CBDR (except Russia). This represents an important gap vis-à-vis developed countries. Perhaps bridges could be found with India, which can understand China's misuse of this agenda, in view of its skepticism about China; as well as Brazil, who might respond to Costa Rica's warning not to conflate CBDR with human rights, in view of its prioritization of human rights and regional affinity.

India is the fourth most engaged state on climate change, based on the study's sample of 722 statements. It was the only BRICS member voting against China in the General Assembly (regarding the use of its terminology in a Second Committee resolution). It was also one of few states abstaining on the HRC resolution recognizing the right to a healthy environment (alongside China, Russia and Japan), although it supported the GA resolution recognizing the right later on.²² It is also worth noting India's expressed interest in technology transfer, in addition to climate finance.

Brazil stands out from this group in expressing support for human rights integration, including vulnerable groups such as Indigenous Peoples, as well as women.

²² Human Rights Council, [Voting on A/HRC/48/L.23/Rev.1: The human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#), 8 October 2021.

Recommendations

The analysis reveals a complex landscape of engagement on climate change, shaped by thematic and geopolitical dynamics. While the EU leads in advocating for climate action and human rights integration, its relatively subdued emphasis on climate finance and its rivals' utilization of CBDR may undermine closer understanding and collaboration with developing countries, particularly in multilateral forums. Developing countries, including SIDS and GRULAC members, consistently call for stronger financial commitments and equity-driven solutions, while authoritarian states often leverage CBDR to drive division.

Though groups like GRULAC and SIDS exhibit diversity in national priorities and political alignments, this heterogeneity does not preclude collaboration on shared climate issues. Rather than seeking full alignment with these groups, the EU can focus on building coalitions around shared priorities, as recommended below. The geopolitical influence of actors like China and Taiwan on SIDS, the evolving stance of the U.S., and Russia's partial isolation further underscore the importance of tailored strategies to strengthen alliances and advance EU priorities. The following recommendations aim to address these challenges and opportunities, enhancing the EU's leadership and fostering global collaboration on climate change.

Climate Action

- Acknowledge and support developing countries' mitigation efforts:
 - Highlight mechanisms like technical assistance, knowledge-sharing, and EU-backed regional partnerships.
 - Welcome developing countries' role as carbon sinks and highlight the EU's financial contribution to forestation efforts.
- Prioritize targeted mitigation solutions for EU and like-minded countries to address their challenges and align messaging. Ambivalence on climate action, particularly when justifying continued fossil fuel use, may be understandable but it undermines collective political efforts.

Climate Finance

- Increase engagement on climate finance. Other groups spoke far more about climate finance, often emphatically.
 - Encourage the EU and its member states to consistently highlight their leading role as the largest climate finance contributors, improving transparency around fulfilled EU pledges.
 - Support developing countries' calls for loan restructuring and improved grant mechanisms, ensuring greater access and faster deployment during emergencies.

- Advocate for addressing funding gaps to scale up mitigation efforts, such as forestation initiatives, to unlock their full potential.
- Seek a common EU position on debt relief and changes to IMF and World Bank policies. These topics were rarely addressed by EU members, but strongly advocated by developing countries, especially in the context of climate disasters.

Human Rights

- Advocate for human rights integration also at the UNFCCC COP and UNEA. EU members were observed doing so in only 15% of their statements in those bodies.
- Partner with GRULAC on initiatives such as resolutions, joint statements and side events focused on human rights integration or the right to a healthy environment. It is the group of developing countries most closely aligned with the EU on this topic. A partnership could project broad support and strengthen this agenda against spoilers.
- Seek a common position on legal accountability, in anticipation of the ICJ's advisory opinion, as EU members have not often spoken on this topic in the context of climate change. Leverage the common position to strengthen a common understanding with GRULAC and SIDS, who have addressed the topic more often than other groups.

Common but Differentiated Responsibilities

- Collaborate with allies like Costa Rica to clarify the distinction between CBDR and human rights and amplify messages through trusted voices.
- Consider seeking clarification from OHCHR or relevant experts to promote a common understanding on the appropriate and inappropriate contexts to apply CBDR. Previous references of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to CBDR were cited without nuance about the universality of human rights, regardless of differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.

Geopolitics

- Further investigate the roles of China and Taiwan in climate discourse, focusing on their influence on SIDS. Statements and voting indicate potential influence.
- Maintain close contacts with US representatives in anticipation of quick development of rifts in cooperation and understanding. The transition may be faster than in the previous Trump

Administration, but civil servants may still be able to communicate their maneuvering room and anticipated changes.

- Continue to isolate Russia to minimize its ability to spoil climate-related inter-governmental processes.

Conclusion

Key Takeaways

This study examines the intricate interplay of thematic priorities and geopolitical dynamics shaping states' engagement on climate change. The European Union emerges as a global leader in advocating for climate action and the integration of human rights into climate governance. However, its relatively muted emphasis on climate finance and its rivals' utilization of the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) reveal areas that may benefit from further attention to foster collaboration with developing countries.

Developing countries, including SIDS and GRULAC members, prioritize climate finance, debt relief, and equity-based solutions, often underpinned by appeals to historical responsibility. Authoritarian states leverage CBDR as a tool to sow divisions between developing and developed countries, complicating the EU's efforts to build consensus. Geopolitically, the influence of China and Taiwan on SIDS, the evolving stance of the United States, and the continued isolation of Russia present both challenges and opportunities for the EU in strengthening alliances and advancing its climate priorities.

Addressing the Research Questions

1. How does the EU engage with partners across continents, and how does it compare to rivals in fostering dialogue on climate change?

The EU demonstrates strong leadership on climate action and human rights but faces competition from authoritarian states leveraging CBDR and historical grievances. Its efforts to align with developing countries could benefit from increased emphasis on climate finance.

2. What coalitions and narratives are authoritarian states building against the EU and like-minded countries, and how do they use environmental issues to promote their agendas?

Authoritarian states, particularly within the LMG and OPEC, invoke CBDR and challenge human rights integration to drive divisions. These states also raise concerns about sanctions, framing them as barriers to climate action.

3. To what extent does the climate discourse reflect shared global challenges versus geopolitical or value-based divisions?

The discourse reflects shared global challenges but differing priorities: developed countries focus on climate action and human rights, while developing countries emphasize equity, historical responsibility, and the urgent finance needs. For some groups, such as the EU and authoritarian states, these divisions reflect contrasting

values, whereas for others, positions are shaped by practical needs and realpolitik.

4. How controversial are key areas such as climate finance and CBDR, and what are the implications of these disagreements?

Climate finance garners broad support but is often framed by developing countries as a moral obligation tied to historical injustices. CBDR remains divisive, with developed countries, including the EU, opposing its conflation with human rights, creating friction with developing states.

5. Who are the EU's strongest allies in advancing its climate agenda, and how can these alliances be strengthened?

Not surprisingly, GRULAC emerges as a natural ally for the EU among developing countries, particularly on human rights. Strengthening these partnerships through collaborative initiatives and developing a shared understanding on legal accountability and CBDR could help counteract the influence of authoritarian states. Of course, it almost goes without saying that other Western and like-minded countries, the EU's strongest allies, are mostly the same on the climate agenda.

Final Reflections

This study underscores the need for the EU to strengthen partnerships and refine messaging on finance and equity. By addressing these gaps, the EU can reinforce its leadership and build stronger coalitions to advance equitable, ambitious, and sustainable climate solutions.

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