**Questionnaire in relation to Human Rights Council resolution 47/24**

**on human rights and climate change**

**Contribution of Notre Affaire à Tous - France**

**Impacts of the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations**

Contrary to popular belief, France is already affected by climate change. The countries in the southern hemisphere are more vulnerable to climate change, but so is France, which the NGO Germanwatch ranked 15th in the Global Climate Risk Index for the period 1999-2018[[1]](#footnote-1). This ranking is largely due to overseas territories whose geography makes them particularly vulnerable to climate change. The diversity of the French territory leads vulnerable people to face different problems depending on where they live: heatwaves, floods, coastal destructions, fires, storms, etc. are already impacting and will have further impacts on human rights in every part of France.

The vulnerability of people in France to climate change is diverse:

* geographical, physical, i.e., depending on which territory or area they live in;
* economic, due to their work (directly impacted by climate change: farmers for example) but also their income (poverty, lack of savings, etc.);
* social, because of a lack of economic means, of the discrimination they may suffer from, for example related to gender, race, age, etc.;
* health, because of their age (young children, elderly people), their physical and mental state (pregnant women, sick people, etc.).

Many human rights are already affected in France due to a lack of climate action: right to life, to health, to food, to water and sanitation, to housing, to a healthy environment, to work and to education.

**Concerning the right to life**: extreme weather events endanger human lives and cause injuries and death. Drought and food shortages contribute to political instability and conflict, resulting in deaths, injuries, and displacement of millions of people. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change will cause 250 000 deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress. Elderly people are mostly impacted by heat waves. In 2018, 8000 people over 65 died because of extreme heat. Because of its aging population, France is particularly vulnerable to these heatwaves. During the 2003 heatwave in France, the death rate increased more than 85% for women over 75, and 51% for men in the same age group[[2]](#footnote-2). Gender inequalities are leading to poorer living conditions, less access to basic supplies, a situation which threatens the right to life and to a healthy environment.

**Work-related human rights impacts:** it is often the least well-paid workers in the most physical occupations who are most exposed to climate risks and extreme weather events and therefore to difficult working conditions. This is the case of outdoor workers (construction, agriculture, farmers, bicycle delivery drivers, bus and truck drivers, etc.) and indoor workers in jobs subject to high heat (workers in foundries, dry cleaners, etc.). The risks they are facing are mostly heat strokes and higher risks of work accidents. Farmers are also directly impacted by climate change. During the 2020 summer in France, 12 deadly work-related accidents occurred due to extreme heat.

**Right to health:** climate change impacts cause greater risks of injury and disease (because of more intense fires, heat waves, heat amplified levels of smog) that could exacerbate respiratory disorders. The Lancet considers climate change as the most important global threat on public health in the 21st century. Beyond the problems caused by heat waves, the risks of respiratory diseases, infectious diseases, dermatological risks, and allergies are also higher. In France, there are more and more allergies, and more diseases directly linked to climate factors such as cholera and anthrax, but above all the development of diseases not present in metropolitan France in the past (especially vector diseases via mosquitoes, e.g. dengue). Overseas territories are particularly affected and suffer from more frequent epidemics. In 2005 and 2006, the chikungunya epidemic affected a quarter of the population of the Reunion, killing 258 people.

**Right to housing**: the climate crisis and extreme weather events threaten the right to housing of already impoverished populations. The victims live in poorly insulated, poorly vegetated, polluted, and overpopulated areas, or in territories that are particularly exposed to climate change. Suffering from energy insecurity, or lacking the financial resources to move, the poorest populations are the most vulnerable to see their right to adequate housing threatened. The multiplication of heat waves and recurrent cold waves lead to an increase in energy costs, and consequently an increased risk for some people to be unable to afford energy costs, particularly for heating, and thus find themselves in a situation of energy insecurity. While climate change is likely to increase energy insecurity, this in turn is a factor that aggravates vulnerability to cold and heat.Unsurprisingly, the unequal conditions of housing and access to energy for heating make the most precarious more vulnerable to these health risks. In general, there is a strong association between excess winter deaths and housing and heating system energy efficiency[[3]](#footnote-3). Numerous studies document the links between excess mortality during heat waves and social inequalities. In the list of socio-economic factors aggravating the risk of excess mortality, the quality of housing plays an important role: in 2003, many victims of the heat wave were elderly people living in cramped housing with only one window, often under the roof. Thus, "*in Paris in 2003, living under the roof increased the risk of mortality fourfold*"[[4]](#footnote-4).

**Summary of any relevant data that captures how the adverse effects of climate change have affected people in vulnerable situations, taking into account multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination**

Climate inequalities are reinforced by social inequalities: some populations are more exposed to and impacted by climate change than others. This is linked to geographical but also social inequalities and existing discriminations (racism, patriarchy, socio-economic inequalities, etc.). The impacts of climate change are born and reinforced in the existing social context. A vicious circle is created: social inequalities induce differentiated impacts of climate change which will themselves reinforce social inequalities. People are therefore more affected, and in addition climate change increases and reinforces these inequalities.

For example, the loss of a job due to the consequences of climate change (e.g., floods, reduced snow cover, etc.) is leading to an increased risk of poverty, leading itself to less economic means to protect oneself against the impacts of climate change (decent housing, access to water and food, etc.).

**Climate change impacts, inequalities, and intersectionality: concrete examples**

There are four major axes of inequalities when dealing with climate issues: socio-economic status, generational inequalities, gender, and ethnic minorities.

Regarding socio-economic status, the poorest are the most affected by climate change. There are nearly 9 million people under the poverty line in France affected because they are more exposed and more vulnerable due to a lack of economic means, of the type of housing they live in, the areas they live and work in that are more exposed to pollution and climate risks. They are also often workers with difficult working conditions (bicycle delivery, construction work, seasonal work, etc.). They also have less capacity to adapt: no economic resources to renovate their housing, less ability to move when their home is threatened by rising waters, difficult access to social resources (isolation, lack of access to information, lack of access to public services, etc.). All these elements are important to consider as climate change contributes to the increase of poverty. According to the World Bank, 100 million more people could fall into poverty by 2030 due to climate change.

There are also generational inequalities, in terms of impacts and responsibility. In a somewhat extreme schematic way: on the one hand, older people have a more fragile health that makes them particularly vulnerable (high heat, natural disasters...) and a weaker capacity to adapt (disability, lack of autonomy, social isolation). For example, during the 2003 heat wave: 90% of the victims were over 65 years old. On the other hand, younger and future generations are the least responsible for climate change, but they will suffer the full force of its health, social, and economic consequences. They already suffer from eco-anxiety. A child born in 2019 will face a world that is 4°C warmer on average by the time he or she is 71 (The Lancet, 2019).

In terms of gender inequalities: if due to their overrepresentation in certain professions, men are affected (e.g., construction workers), it is generally women who are the most impacted by climate change. Globally, women are 14 times more likely to die in natural disasters than men. Gender-based violence increases in post-disaster situations as well as during population displacement and migration. Why women? They already suffer from socio-economic inequalities and are poorer than men. During the 2003 heat wave in France the excess mortality in women aged 75 and over was +85%. For men of the same age group, it was +51%.

Ethnic minorities also face multiple oppressions: socio-economic inequalities, territorial segregation, difficulties in accessing public services, difficult access to justice, infringement of their fundamental rights, etc. This context amplifies the elements described above. In France, there are only a few studies on this situation but there are still clear impacts on people of color, especially in working-class neighborhoods (during the 2003 heat wave, Seine-Saint-Denis, one of the poorest territory of France, suffered an excess mortality of +160%), for Roma and travelers minorities (e.g.: 70% of “reception areas” are in a degraded environment), indigenous peoples of the overseas territories (Kanak of New Caledonia and six indigenous peoples of Guyana who live in very sensitive areas with direct impact on their way of life, their identity and their culture).

In addition to the four main axes mentioned here, people with disabilities are also more impacted by climate change because of their health problems, more difficulty to move to less exposed places, more difficulty to escape during a disaster, and specific oxygen needs. During the heat waves in North America this summer a person died as a result of the power cuts.

**The specific case of French overseas territories**

The issue of overseas territories is particularly revealing when studying climate impacts on human rights: the consequences of colonization, racism, poverty are more important than in metropolitan France, as well as difficulties of access to natural goods of first necessity (in particular water). All these elements are added to an increased vulnerability of these territories to climate change because of their geography. These areas are broadly concerned by the rising sea levels and various islands will disappear in the near future.

Concerning water, for example: currently, in French Guiana, 4.5% of the inhabitants do not have access to basic drinking water services (about 35,000 people) and in Mayotte, 16.3% of the inhabitants do not have access to safe drinking water services (about 41,000 people). However, with the phenomena of salinization on the one hand and drought on the other, not to mention the potential damage caused by extreme weather events, water is becoming a scarce commodity and access to it will be even more limited. In New Caledonia, the island of Ouvéa has seen its freshwater wells dry up or become contaminated by salt water, forcing a redefinition of the island's supply arrangements. Two water desalination plants are in operation, one in the north and one in the south. The lack of water has a direct impact on agriculture. Yields decrease, which affects the amount of food available and the price of food, resulting in violations of the right to food as some people no longer have access to sufficient quality food.

It is essential to think about climate change in the context of current social discrimination and inequalities. We cannot have environmental justice without social justice and any action to combat climate change must be as inclusive as possible. Inequalities and discriminations combine with each other. A black woman is more likely to be in a precarious work situation and therefore in poverty. She is then more likely to suffer the consequences of racial discrimination, gender discrimination and socio-economic inequalities. She is also more likely to have inadequate housing, in a polluted/risky area with poor access to environmental amenities, with financial difficulties to pay for quality food and water (whose prices are increasing because of climate change).

**Mechanisms and tools that are in place to measure and monitor the impacts of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations.**

Only a few mechanisms exist to measure and monitor the impacts of climate change on people's human rights in France. One major issue comes from the fact that when measuring tools in place and the data collected are not developed and thought of in terms of human rights. The narrative behind these mechanisms and tools is based on territories and natural risks, and not on people's fundamental rights and human vulnerabilities.

Most mechanisms and tools are highly sectorized, focusing on one specific area. But in terms of human rights, one sector affects many others. For example, difficulties in accessing water do not only have an impact on the right to water and sanitation, but also on the right to adequate housing, the right to health and the right to life. However, nowadays in France, no mechanism or tool is currently available to make these links, which are essential for true monitoring of the effective enjoyment of human rights.

In France, there is no mechanism or tool monitoring climate injustices and inequalities. On the contrary, the available indicators are themselves synonymous with inequalities and two-tiered consideration of populations. For example, the indicator of population exposure to climate risk, calculated since 1982, calculates an index for each French municipality by cross-referencing data relating to the population density of this municipality and the number of foreseeable natural risks identified in the same municipality (floods, forest fires, storms, avalanches and land movements). It only considers the spatial distribution of the number of climatic risks and that of the populations. It does not include individual risks and potential human rights violations at all.

At the local level, there are similar issues. The “Agence de l'Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l'Energie” (ADEME) supervised by the Ministry of Ecology and the Ministry of Research published in 2012 a [document](https://librairie.ademe.fr/changement-climatique-et-energie/3510-diagnostic-de-vulnerabilite-d-un-territoire-au-changement-climatique-9782358383400.html) to help local authorities establish a diagnosis of the territory's vulnerability to climate change. This document includes various indicators linked with vulnerabilities (percentage of population over 65 years old, etc.). It is thus much wider than at the national level. But issues can still be pointed out:

* Problem 1: it is up to each local authority to measure its territory's vulnerability. There is no compilation of data from each territory at the national level. However, the obligation to ensure the full respect of human rights is the responsibility of the State.
* Problem 2: there is an additional step to be taken between assessing vulnerability and impacts on populations on the one hand, and human rights violations on the other. This step is not taken here.

**Examples of good practices and challenges in the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations in the context of the adverse effects of climate change.**

One important issue that should be considered is the prevention of risks instead of the responses to the consequences after they occur. For example, in the case of significant damage due to an extreme weather event linked to climate change.

Mechanisms should be implemented to help people facing violations of their rights to adequate housing because of rising sea levels and coastal destruction, for example.

1. David Eckstein, Vera Künzel, Laura Schäfer, Maik Winges, Global Climate Risk Index 2020, Who Suffers Most from Extreme Weather Events? Weather-Related Loss Events in 2018 and 1999 to 2018, Germanwatch, December 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Marine JOBERT, "Climate change threatened our ancestors," *Journal de l'Environnement*, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sabine HOST, Dorothée GRANGE, Lucile METTETAL, Ute DUBOIS,“Précarité énergétique et santé : état des connaissances et  situation en Ile-de-France”, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Report No. 1455 - Volume 1 of the National Assembly on behalf of the Committee of Inquiry into the Health and Social Consequences of the Heatwave [↑](#footnote-ref-4)