

After the 2015 Paris Agreement and the IPCC's 2018 report, there was a widely-shared consensus that the 1.5 °C target is non-negotiable. Small island states and climate-vulnerable nations used scientific evidence to argue that a 2 °C target would expose them to unacceptable risks. But in 2024, for the first time in human climate history, the average global temperature was indeed 1.55 °C warmer than it was between 1850 and 1900. This threshold will most likely be broken again in the coming years as climate change accelerates.

The global community is responding to this with calls to do more. In the prevailing view, this is not meant as a strategy shift, but rather a strengthening of the agreed climate protection strategy based on Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The dominant view is that the annual COPs (negotiations between the States) have been crucial in building international climate institutions, norms, and agreements. While this is true, these agreements have not delivered the necessary emissions reductions as greenhouse gas emissions continue to reach new heights each year. What if “more of the same” will not help? What if the whole approach to political, state-centric climate action is unlikely to succeed? What if individual action, not collective action, is the solution? Humanity's failure to meet the 1.5 °C target should at least prompt some consideration of this idea.

One strategy that has never been tried since the world community became aware of the climate crisis is the serious implementation of a Personal Carbon Footprint (PerCF). Let's imagine every individual on the planet had calculated their annual PerCF since the first IPCC report in 1990, year by year. A significant share of the 8 billion people that currently inhabit this planet would likely have reduced their PerCF because awareness would have led to action. It is debatable whether humankind would be better off in 2026, as we are in reality, without the PerCF at the heart of a climate protection strategy. Yet, it is difficult to imagine we could be worse off given the continued increase in greenhouse gas emissions over time.

This IGJR issue embarks on this thought experiment. It explores the PerCF as a paradigm shift, moving beyond the current top-down approach of state-level emissions targets. Without buying into this approach, we want to examine its premises further. In this paradigm, emission reductions are not solely a technical or policy challenge; rather, they are fundamentally a question of accountability and responsibility. The PerCF's underlying assumption replaces the motto: *'Politicians should solve the climate problem for us'* with, *'I should solve the climate problem as much as I can.'* Rather than treating climate action primarily as a task for state institutions, this approach places it squarely with every individual. Since NDCs have formed the centrepiece of humanity's climate protection strategy, the premise of such an alternative paradigm instead places Personally Determined Contributions (PDCs) as the centrepiece. This is not about politics; it is about me and you, him and her. The sum of all individual emissions is the total emissions of humankind, also known as anthropogenic climate effect. In a world defined by mass consumption and interconnected supply chains, individual choices regarding diet, travel, housing, and investment aggregate into collective outcomes.

Let's end this thought experiment about a strategy shift in humanity's ambitions to halt the climate crisis. Individual and collective responsibility are not mutually exclusive. Climate protection goals and projects must be facilitated from 'above', but they must equally be supported from 'below'. It is undisputed that the state must promote a net-zero society through guidelines and incentive structures, e.g. by pricing greenhouse gas emissions, expanding renewable energies, and promoting the energy-efficient refurbishment of buildings. The state must also guarantee the infrastructure for this change, by building hydrogen and CO₂ pipelines, electric car charging points, grid-scale energy storage and power lines.

Yet consumer decisions can drive sociopolitical change. If, for example, enough people chose trains and buses over short-haul flights out of ethical conviction, politicians would be incentivised to increase the frequency of non-airborne transport. Airlines would eventually stop offering these short flights because of a lack of customer demand.

PerCFs matter, but they matter within social, economic, and legal structures that both enable and constrain individual action. Understanding climate responsibility therefore requires attention to both personal conduct and systemic conditions.

This is the debate in which this issue's two original articles are situated. First, Adumaro Amabogha and Thomas Aneni explore how the PerCF can be equitably addressed to encourage reducing individual emissions in contemporary Nigeria. The article utilises consumption-based accounting and the subsistence-luxury emissions distinction to argue for a progressive bifurcated carbon tax, a national clean energy access fund, and a digital PerCF tracker.

In the second article, Masako Ichihara interrogates the legal avenues for establishing obligations for individuals to reduce their PerCF. By analysing the *Milieudefensie vs. Royal Dutch Shell* case and international human rights instruments, she argues that a legal foundation for individuals to reduce their emissions could be derived to maintain a stable global climate.

The issue concludes with two book reviews that further investigate the relationships between present and future generations. Firstly, Jason Adolph reviews the anthology *Phenomenology and Future Generations* (2024) edited by Mathias Fritsch, Ferdinando Menga and Rebecca van der Post, which attempts to re-establish the importance of the phenomenological (experience-centred) tradition for contemporary problems such as climate change. Secondly, turning to Germany, Ben Jagasia reviews *After Us, the Future* (2025), written by Marcel Fratzscher and only available in German. In this book, the president of the German Institute for Economic Research explores why the age-old promise of economic growth leading to positive outcomes no longer holds. Claiming that the present intergenerational contract has been broken, Fratzscher criticises the current presentism in German economic policies. He proposes a new intergenerational contract based on autonomy, universalism, and humanism.

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