



A GUIDE FOR CLIMATE JOURNALISM



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Introduction

Climate change is all around us. It is shaping our present and will determine our future. Extreme weather events, disruptions in the supply of food, water and energy; air, water and soil pollution; biodiversity loss; health risks; climate migration and conflicts; economic losses and inequality – under the influence of climate change, the world is changing before our eyes. Everyone is starting to realise the green energy transition has begun, and the more developed part of the world plans to decarbonize its economy in the coming decades. The global goal, defined in the 2016 [Paris Agreement](#), is to keep the rise in the global average temperature well below 2°C. Scientists warn that we are moving too slowly towards this goal, but nevertheless, we are moving.

However, the transformation towards a more sustainable society raises new challenges, new problems and potential conflicts. What technology should we use to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as safely, quickly and efficiently as possible? Who will profit from the transition and who will bear the costs? Is there a fairer world awaiting us on the other side of the climate change adaptation process, or only a deepening of existing inequalities?

Climate change is not only one of the most important, but also one of the most complex issues of the contemporary world. That makes it an indispensable area of interest for journalism dedicated to the public interest.

This guide is intended for journalists eager to begin reporting on climate change systematically and responsibly. The guide is based on the editorial experience of the Climate Portal (www.klimatski.hr), an on-line publication dedicated to reporting on the climate crisis in a constructive way. The guide aims to offer an initial framework and practical advice to help journalists navigate the complex world of climate-related topics.

In the age of fast news, sensationalist pressure and widespread disinformation, **climate journalism** has to offer more than just information: it has to be accurate, well-contextualized and educational, solution-oriented and socially responsible. Whether you're reporting on energy, health, traffic, agriculture, technology, politics, finance, crime, or human or civil rights – it is highly likely that the topic has an environmental dimension.

The guide is structured into six chapters that outline fundamental approaches to climate journalism: from understanding the

complexity of the problem, through building cooperation and finding solutions, to exposing the interests of a wealthy minority that is actively trying to sabotage climate action. We wrote it with the intention to make it usable, concrete and encouraging, because reporting on climate change doesn't have to mean reporting on the end of the world. It can mean reporting on its salvation.

1

DO NOT PANIC



Reporting on climate change can be accompanied by feelings of anxiety, powerlessness or overwhelm. This is not surprising; the problem is extremely complex, the data alarming, weather disasters are becoming more frequent, and people's confidence in the ability of public institutions to cope with a crisis of such magnitude is shaken. Therefore, the first piece of advice to all journalists beginning to cover climate issues is: do not panic.

The climate crisis is complex, but it is not chaotic. It can be understood, analyzed, broken down, and most importantly – resolved. For journalists, this means rejecting the catastrophe-oriented sensationalist approach and building a framework that helps the audience gain a better understanding of the issue and to take action.

The Climate Portal did this by setting clear thematic frameworks, i.e. sections. We articulated the various layers of the climate crisis: from cause and effect, to social and health impacts, to the ways in which information (or disinformation) shapes public discourse and political decisions. Our approach is constructive; we're pointing out that there are sustainable (or at least more sustainable) solutions to almost every problem.

Good structure helps to combat overwhelm. To establish this structure, it is necessary to get acquainted with the basic facts and [scientific consensus on climate change](#). Greenhouse gas emissions are gradually raising the temperature on Earth. The most well-known of these gasses is carbon dioxide (CO₂), but emissions of methane and nitrogen oxides also have a significant impact. The source of problematic emissions lies in human activities. Most of these activities take place in the energy and agriculture sectors, but other energy-intensive and resource-intensive industries (such as steel production or construction), transport and waste management also contribute significantly to the emissions. Decisions about land use and the care of natural habitats are also an important factor, as they significantly affect the ability of ecosystems to absorb carbon. Given that the [causes are known and measurable](#), it is also possible to assess how we can encourage climate action in our surroundings, i.e. which topics deserve public attention.

But what matters even more than structure is the message: while climate change is the greatest challenge of our time, all the technologies needed to address it already exist. We have solar panels, wind farms, electric vehicles, heat pumps, increasingly advanced

energy storage and transmission systems, sustainable agriculture solutions, and good ideas that can be transformed into public policies to protect the climate and the environment. Science and technology are constantly advancing, bringing new and useful insights. The transition to a low-carbon economy and a cleaner environment is technically feasible and economically viable in the long term (as has already been shown by countries that have invested the most in the green energy transition and have been at it the longest). What is missing is not knowledge, but the political will to take more decisive action and establish international cooperation. With the aim of creating space for discussion on climate policies and on the responsibility of political actors, the editorial board of the Climate Portal organized **pre-election debates** ahead of the European Parliament elections and local elections. Pre-election debates are not only an opportunity to get informed, ask specific questions and follow up on politicians' promises – they are also a reminder that climate action requires determination, responsibility and constant pressure from the public.

Climate journalism should therefore provide realistic hope, not false peace. Instead of an image of destruction and ruin, it should offer a roadmap to the future. By informing and

educating the public about the causes, consequences and solutions of climate change, we are making progress, raising awareness of the problem and encouraging just climate action. But it's too much work for anyone to do alone. You'll need allies.

Useful resources:

- [Climate Portal editorial concept and work methodology](#)

Our stories:

- [The climate crisis can seem unsolvable. However, there's good news, too](#)
- [Climate anxiety on the rise](#)
- [Rio Tinto i lithium mining in Serbia: Opportunity for development or environmental disaster?](#)

Our pre-election debates:

- [Climate policies debate: What can the EU do in the fight against climate crisis?](#)
- [Zagreb pre-election debate: What to do with waste, traffic and air quality?](#)

2.

**WE ARE
STRONGER
TOGETHER**



No one can understand climate change all by themselves, including journalists. The climate crisis affects almost all aspects of society and no one can independently capture its full complexity. That is why it is essential to build networks with experts and organizations dealing with climate change and environmental protection.

These associates come from various fields: scientists, engineers, doctors, urbanists, economists, agronomists, activists, researchers, NGOs, lawyers, politicians, international organizations. Their expertise helps to understand the topic, provides a bigger picture and points to certain links that may not be visible at first glance.

Collaboration with the scientific community is of particular importance. It enables journalists to avoid superficial interpretation or misinterpretation of data and to report on complex topics with a good foundation. An eloquent scientist can help interpret the data, explain technical concepts, assess the reliability of a source, and refer you to additional materials. The same applies to civil society organizations, which often have valuable knowledge “from the field” and analyses of public policies and legislative processes. Local communities and local activist initiatives

should also be consulted when discussing the consequences of climate change on people's lives as they represent valuable sources of information on environmental destruction that endanger human health and the environment.

As part of this process, it is important to develop long-term relationships, based on trust and mutual respect. A good interlocutor is not here to give a single statement, but to be our partner in understanding the topics that will develop and re-emerge over time. Journalists who regularly communicate with the scientific, activist and local communities recognize new trends faster, detect threats earlier and spot disinformation more easily. These skills are important for finding relevant topics and for conducting high-quality and contextualized reporting. Introducing knowledgeable and professional interlocutors into the public space improves the quality of the entire public debate and helps to focus the attention of the interested public on the things that really matter.

In an age when many feel confused, overwhelmed and discouraged, connecting with others who share the idea that constructive action is necessary empowers both journalists and their audiences. Just as the climate crisis cannot be resolved in isolation, climate journalism cannot be created in a vacuum.

Useful resources:

- [Collaboration between Climate Portal and the Department of Sociology, University of Zadar](#)
- [Data collected in research by University of Zadar and Climate Portal](#)

Our stories:

- [Atlantic salmon farming in the Adriatic Sea serial](#)
- [Attempt to devastate Una River source by building a small hydroelectric power plant series](#)
- [Illegal waste disposal serial](#)

3.

FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS



Climate change is often portrayed in the media through the lens of disaster: fires, floods, droughts, species extinction, crop failure, sea level rise, dangerous heat waves. Such events are news items and should be reported. But if this is the only way journalism approaches the climate crisis, then it is not fulfilling its social function. If we keep telling the audience that everything has gotten worse and will keep getting worse, without explaining how and why and what can be done, we are spreading helplessness instead of information.

Apathy, a sense of hopelessness and giving up on participating in public life altogether are understandable reactions to being constantly bombarded with bad news. People disengage emotionally when they feel that the problem goes beyond their ability to make a difference. The climate crisis begins to be perceived as something distant, abstract and inevitable; as a natural force, rather than a political and social problem with specific causes and solutions.

That is why it is important to develop **solution-focused journalism**. It is an approach which does not ignore the seriousness of the problem, but which actively seeks examples where problems are recognized and something is

being done about them, whether through public policies, technological innovations or collective practices. This type of reporting builds a bridge between global knowledge and local experience, helping readers understand that change is possible, that it is already happening, and that it is possible to engage with it.

In other words, it's a type of responsible journalism that sees a way out but doesn't romanticize it. Such an approach avoids the other extreme – groundless techno-optimism – and instead builds realistic hope based on facts.

Therefore, to focus on solutions means:

- to analyze critically whether the proposed solutions are effective
- to understand what made them possible (or what's holding them back)
- to explore who benefits from them (and at what price), and discern real solutions from greenwashing
- to understand the good and bad aspects of proposed solutions and open a discussion on the pros and cons
- to show that systemic changes are possible, but not necessarily simple.

Here's what it looks like in practice: if you are reporting on a heat wave, you should explain why such events are becoming more frequent, what behavior is causing their increased frequency, and what can be done to adapt (e.g. how cities can reduce the effects of extreme temperatures through greening, cold zone planning, or improving social services). If you're writing about air pollution, investigate the causes (e.g. traffic, landfills, industrial emissions, or a combination of factors) and report on the efforts of people who are developing public policies to, e.g., encourage cycling, use public transport, or manage waste more efficiently. Explore if there is a technology that can help and how others have dealt with similar issues. Stories that draw a clear link between cause and effect and offer solutions to complex social problems inform and educate their audiences while also encouraging people to act.

The climate crisis requires profound and systematic social changes, which is why journalism has to be more than a notary of disaster. It should be a tool that helps the public see the direction that will lead us towards a sustainable future. Focusing on solutions means that problems should not be covered up; they should be openly talked about and shown to be solvable – but only if we take them seriously enough, with the knowledge and will to act.

Useful resources:

- [Climate Portal editorial concept and work methodology](#)

Our stories:

- [Agricultural innovations serial](#)
- [How thousand-year-old olive trees on the Island of Pag cope with increasing temperatures](#)
- [Humana Nova – how to turn old textile into something useful](#)

4

THE ISSUE OF RESPONSIBILITY



It is often said that the climate crisis is a global problem, shared by everyone. This is true; we all contribute to some extent to greenhouse gas emissions and we are all threatened by the resulting warming. But this does not mean that everyone is equally responsible for climate change and its harmful consequences. True journalism has to distinguish individual responsibility from structural responsibility, it has to recognize which people are the most responsible for the problem and why nothing has changed for years, although all the data was available in time.

For more than 50 years, the fossil fuel (oil, gas, coal) industry has known that its business is causing global warming. Internal documents of the world's major fossil companies show that their scientists warned about the harmful effects of greenhouse gas emissions no later than in the 1970s. Instead of sharing these insights with the public and starting the transition to clean energy, corporations chose a path of denial, manipulation and lobbying against climate policies. They bribed politicians and experts and financed propaganda and disinformation campaigns with the aim of enabling undisturbed consumption of fossil fuels for as long as possible. They use those same manipulation tactics today, which is how they got to be among the most profita-

ble companies in the world. Their decision to pretend that nothing was happening made it impossible to prevent massive damage and save countless lives.

The damage done by their business is suffered most by those who contributed to the problem the least: the poor and vulnerable inhabitants of the countries of the so-called Global South. They do not have the political power or financial security to protect themselves from the effects of the climate crisis. That is why climate journalism has to raise the issue of **climate justice**. This includes naming those responsible for historical and current greenhouse gas emissions, pointing out who has profited and who is paying the price, and advocating for a just transition in which the rich and powerful assume most of the cost of fixing the crisis from which they have profited.

A just transition includes not only a fair distribution of costs within a country, but also international solidarity. Historical polluters from richer countries owe financial and technological support to countries that emitted the least greenhouse gases, but who are, due to their geographical position, most exposed to the consequences of climate change, such as droughts, floods, famine, migration... Cli-

mate finance, mechanisms to compensate for losses and damages, debt write-offs, international investments in adaptation – these are all topics that journalists need to report on in order to fully capture the complexities of climate change.

Likewise, it is necessary to clearly communicate who is hindering progress today. It's not abstract forces, but specific people with names, positions and interests: lobbying groups, political parties, business associations, owners of mining and energy companies. Addressing responsibility does not mean producing enemies, but telling the truth about power. Without this, there will be no transition whatsoever, especially not a just one.

Useful resources:

- [The history of climate crisis denial](#)
- [The production of suspicion and the attack on science: an analysis of disinformation concerning the climate crisis in Croatia](#)

Our stories:

- [How wealth affects attitudes to climate change](#)
- [Reportage from Ghana, a country pushed into even deeper poverty by climate change](#)
- [The climate crisis threatens the poor the most](#)

5

BETWEEN REALITY AND PERCEPTION



Climate science is no longer a matter of debate. For decades, there has been a firm consensus that climate change is real, that it is largely caused by human activity, and that it poses a serious threat to life as we know it. Scientists know without a doubt what is causing the climate crisis, what the consequences are, and what needs to be done to mitigate them. However, this consensus is not always clearly understood by the public.

This is where one of the most important roles of journalism lies: helping the public to distinguish reality from perception, facts from propaganda, science from manipulation. While scientific data is becoming more accurate, the methods of those trying to sabotage climate action are becoming more sophisticated. They do not fight openly against science. Instead, they try to “muddy the water”; create the unfounded impression that there are ambiguities and doubts about the causes of climate change. This is achieved in various ways: by financing disinformation campaigns, by supporting “experts” who minimize the problem, by deliberately misinterpreting the data, by trying to discredit scientists, journalists and climate activists, and of course through ubiquitous greenwashing, a marketing tactic that companies resort to in order to make their business appear greener and more sustainable than it really is.

The public discourse on climate change is littered with inaccurate and misleading claims, so journalists shouldn't simply transfer data. Each piece of information must be adequately checked and placed in the appropriate context. For example, when a scientific study containing new data potentially relevant to the understanding of the climate crisis is published, it is important to recognize whether it comes from a relevant source and to explain what it means, but also what it does not mean. When a viral claim of climate "fraud" arises, it is necessary to recognize its source and argumentation and give readers a clear orientation: is it a legitimate suspicion or an organized attempt to deceive? Finally, it is important to raise the level of media literacy of the audience, educating them on the ubiquity of climate disinformation and the causes of its prevalence.

In this sense, the struggle for the perception of climate change is also becoming a struggle for media responsibility. Perception shapes political reality: if people do not believe that the problem is real, urgent and solvable, then they will neither seek action nor call for accountability. Without strong public pressure, changes will not happen or will not be sufficiently aligned with public interest. Climate journalism therefore has to equip the audience with the information and

knowledge they need, i.e. it has to develop **climate literacy**.

This can be done through:

- articles that simply and clearly explain how different technologies, systems or public policies work (so-called *explainers*)
- graphics, visualizations and comparisons that help understand significant trends
- critical analyses that debunk myths and false claims and return focus to what really matters
- transparency about the sources used so that readers can check for themselves the credibility of the information presented to them.

But most importantly, journalists need to be consistent and credible, constantly showing that they care about the facts, not exaggerating or trivializing, separating opinions from analyses and making an effort to understand before judging – this makes the audience more resistant to manipulation. Perception is no less important than reality. Whoever controls the narrative about the climate crisis also controls the space of political action. That's why climate journalism is important; not necessarily because it has all the answers, but because it can help society ask the right questions.

Useful resources:

- [The production of suspicion and the attack on science: an analysis of disinformation concerning the climate crisis in Croatia](#)
- [European network of standards for fact-checking](#)

Our stories:

- [Myths and facts about green technologies](#)
- [Series on the research of Croatian citizens' attitudes on climate change and climate disinformation](#)
- [Greenwashing festival at the Zagreb Fair](#)

6

CAREFUL WITH TECHNOLOGY



Technological development facilitates numerous actions for journalists that were, until very recently, complicated, expensive or both. Modern technological tools can significantly facilitate the work of editorial staff and make their stories visually more attractive and understandable to a wide audience.

We also use them in our work on the Climate Portal: we have flown drones and used satellite images to visualize the problem of accumulating waste in the environment, we have created infographics and short videos to visualize data for social media users. We also use the so-called AI tools, whose capabilities are advancing rapidly. Nowadays, more advanced AI models can help journalists in their research by collecting and processing large amounts of data very quickly. A text prompt is easily converted into audiovisual recordings adapted for distribution through popular social networks, and audio and video sharing platforms.

However, climate journalists must also bear in mind the downsides of modern technology; data servers running AI tools consume huge amounts of electrical energy and water, and the electricity used for their operation is still predominantly produced from fossil fuels. The rapid expansion of the AI industry,

accompanied by a growing hunger for resources, is therefore necessarily a topic of great interest for climate journalism.

Faktograf – Association for the Informed Public is therefore guided by the principles of transparency and frugality when using **AI technology**. We have developed and published a Code on the use of technologies based on artificial intelligence, in which we declare which tools we use, how we use them and how we make decisions about their use. Modern technologies can undoubtedly help us raise awareness of the urgent need to solve a complex set of problems that we refer to as the climate crisis. However, the same tools are also available to those who want to bring even more confusion to the public debate on the climate crisis and use disinformation and propaganda to misdirect it. The problems that modern technology can create are so serious that responsible climate journalists cannot ignore them, especially if they use the same technology themselves.

Useful resources:

- [Labour Regulation of Faktograf – Association for the Informed Public: Code on the use of technologies based on artificial intelligence](#)

Our stories:

- [How AI technology is contributing to the increase of global warming](#)
- [How disinformation is making climate change harder to deal with](#)
- [The “AI revolution” is turning into a climate catastrophe](#)

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