THIS IS RUBBISH

WASTE LESS, SHARE MORE

THERE'S PLENTY OF FOOD TO GO ROUND

There is already enough food produced globally to feed 9 billion people[1], the number expected on the planet by 2050 – so there is plenty to go round. But an estimated third of this food is currently wasted[2]. If we reduced this waste, we could free up all the land and resources that go into growing it, to ensure nobody has to go hungry. Stunningly, the cropland freed up by halving UK food waste could produce enough food to feed 28% of people in the UK[3] – nearly three times the number of people living in food insecure households.

But if we free up all of this food and resources, that doesn't mean it will automatically get into the hands of the people who need it.

ABUNDANCE AND INEQUALITY

To create a fairer world where nobody has to go hungry, we need to end poverty itself – so that we can all can afford food and live a life of dignity.

There is enough money globally to end food poverty multiple times over – but 1% of people own 44% of the world's wealth[4] whilst approximately a quarter of the world's people are moderately to severely food insecure[5] and nearly half live on less than $5.50 a day[6].

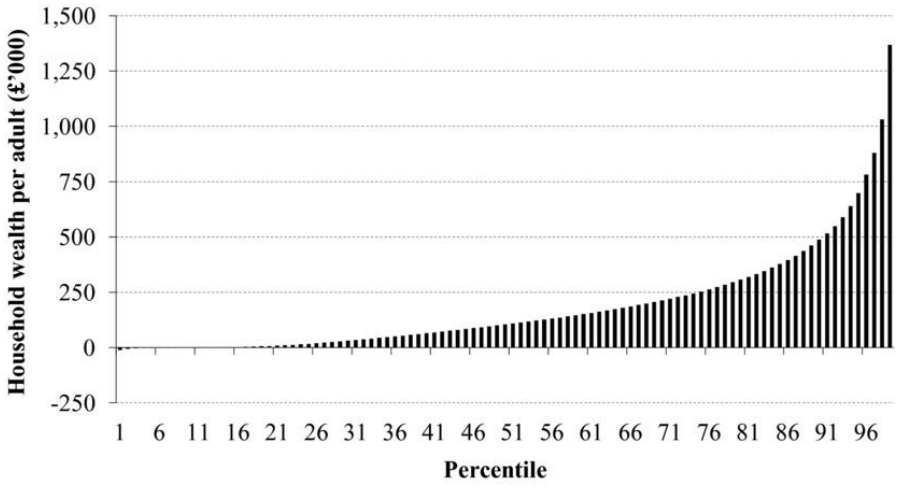
There is enough wealth in the UK to end food poverty many times over – but currently over half of the UK's wealth is concentrated in the hands just one in ten people[7], whilst an estimated 8.4 million (10%) people in the UK live in food insecure households[8].

The solution is clear: we need to share more equally the abundance we already have.

SHARING MORE FAIRLY

In difficult times like these, the only way we will get through is if we look after each other. This doesn't mean that wealth has to be punished, but it does mean that if we all want to enjoy the public services like the NHS and live in a humane society where food poverty does not exist, everybody needs to pay their fair share.

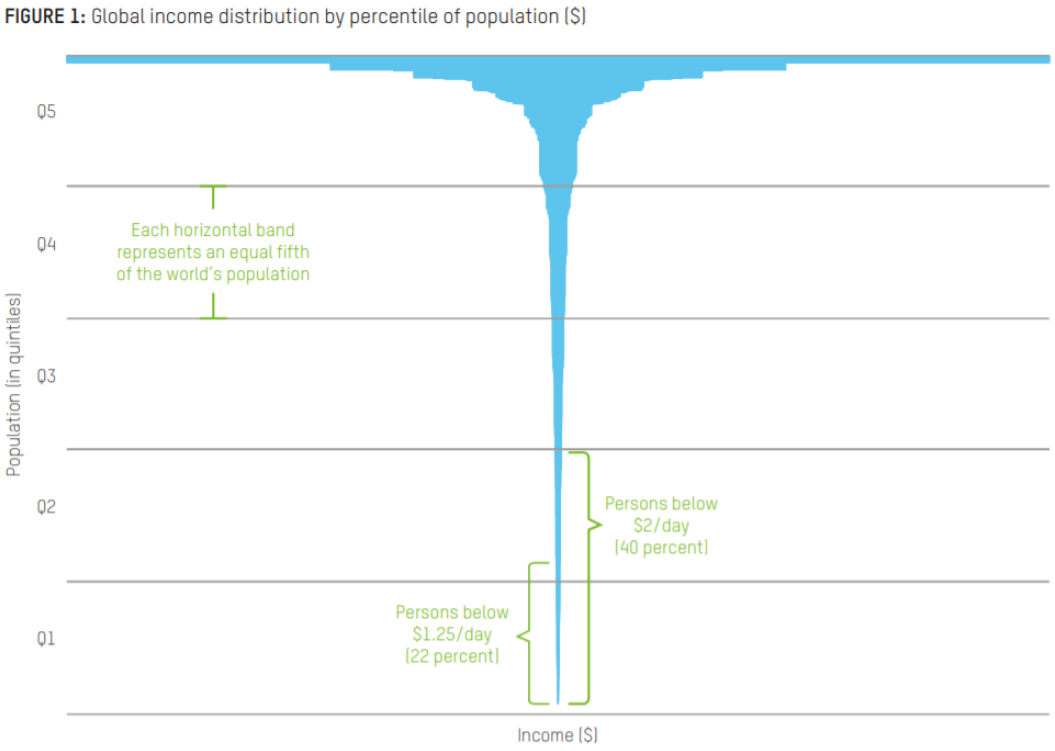
Currently inequality is out of control, both globally and in the UK. This graph shows the current distribution of wealth in the UK[9]:



Roughly 10% people in the UK live in food insecure households[10]. From the graph above, you can see how little wealth would have to be shared from the wealthiest 10% on the right hand side of the graph (people with household wealth over about £500,000), to the poorest 10% on the left side of the graph, to end food poverty in the UK forever.

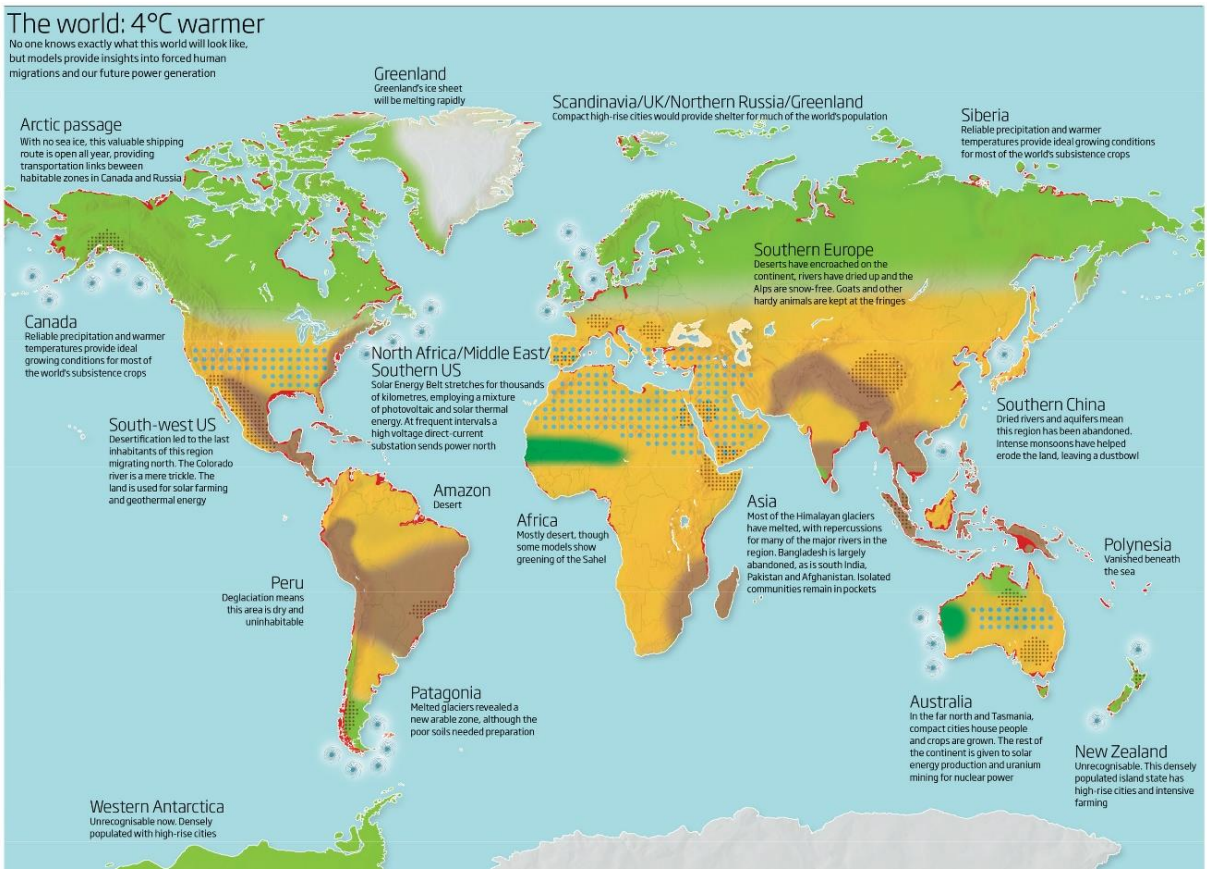
Most people in the UK, from across the political spectrum, agree that wealth taxes need to rise[11]. A group of the super-wealthy have even asked to be taxed more[12]. Rich countries like the UK used to have more progressive taxes – but we have slowly redesigned the system so society has become more unequal[13]. This is a wasted opportunity to end food poverty forever.

Globally, the picture is even more stark – here is how income is currently shared globally[14]:



A SAFE FUTURE ON A SAFE PLANET

It's frightening to see the climate crisis looming, and we can all at times feel powerless to stop it. The lifestyles of people living in the UK are especially polluting, so we have greater power and responsibility to change. We must take responsibility for this and try to fix it. The map below shows the world if it warms to the level of 4 degrees[15]:



That this could be our future is a terrifying thought. 1.2 billion people could be displaced by climate change by 2050 – fleeing their country and looking for somewhere safe to live[16].

But to have any chance of success in combatting climate breakdown, we also need to recognise we cannot do this alone. Recycling a bit more or driving the car a bit less, can feel comically insignificant compared with the scale of climate crisis. The truth is that our society can make it very difficult for us to be sustainable, and that isn't our fault.

But our society is designed by humans – and we can redesign it together so that it is easier for us all to live sustainable lives. To save our collective future on this planet from disaster, we all have to work together, and invest our fair share into making this happen.

We should start from the principle that those of us most able to invest in a green transition should contribute more, since the alternative is that all of us will suffer[17]. Since the wealthiest 10% of us in the UK (people with household wealth over about £500,000) own over 50% of the UK's wealth, it should be uncontroversial for the wealthiest to pay a little extra in tax to support a green transition, so that all of us can live in a safe future world.

Another important reason why it is fairer for the wealthiest to contribute more is that the wealthiest cause a hugely unfair share of the UK's emissions. The wealthiest 1% of the UK on average cause 11 times more emissions per person that the poorest half of people in the UK – and were the only group whose emissions did not fall between 1990 and 2015[18]. Collectively, the lifestyles of the richest 10% of people in the UK resulted in nearly as many emissions as the poorest half of the UK put together[19]. If you'd like some perspective, the richest 1% have incomes over £92,000 per year, and the richest 10% have incomes over £41,000 per year (after tax)[20]. The richest among us may therefore also have to spend less on luxury commodities and travel like flights – as part of a shift away from endless consumption to a wellbeing economy, where we can all focus on happiness over consumerism.

It is also important to remember that the government can borrow money to finance green investment, which is a safe long-term investment which will yield solid returns over time and avoid the catastrophic costs of dealing with climate crises. Interest rates are at all-time lows, and government spending will stimulate the economy, boosting government tax revenues to pay back the money borrowed. A shift to a low carbon economy is easily affordable – the Committee on Climate Change recently estimated that it would cost less than 1% of the UK's GDP per year to reach net zero by 2050, once fuel savings are factored in[21]. For perspective, the UK currently spends about 2% of its GDP on the military and defence[22], 10% of healthcare[23] and about 4% on education[24]. If we value a future that is safe for us and our children as much as these other aspects of our society, then surely we can make this valuable investment rather than waiting for disaster. If we spent 2% of UK GDP on a more rapid green transition, then we could reach net zero far faster than by 2050. To create a safe future for the planet, the UK will have to reduce emissions far more rapidly than by 2050 (see box "An Unfair Share of the Planet's Resources" below).

As well as sharing the burden of paying climate change more fairly, wasting less can also contribute to reducing the UK's emissions. Halving the UK's food waste, and planting trees on the 3 million hectares of grassland this would save, would reduce and offset the equivalent of 11% of the UK's total emissions[25].

WASTE LESS, SHARE MORE

Wasting less will require governments to regulate businesses, to make sure they take ambitious action. It's important for consumers to reduce their food waste too, but it's only half of the picture.

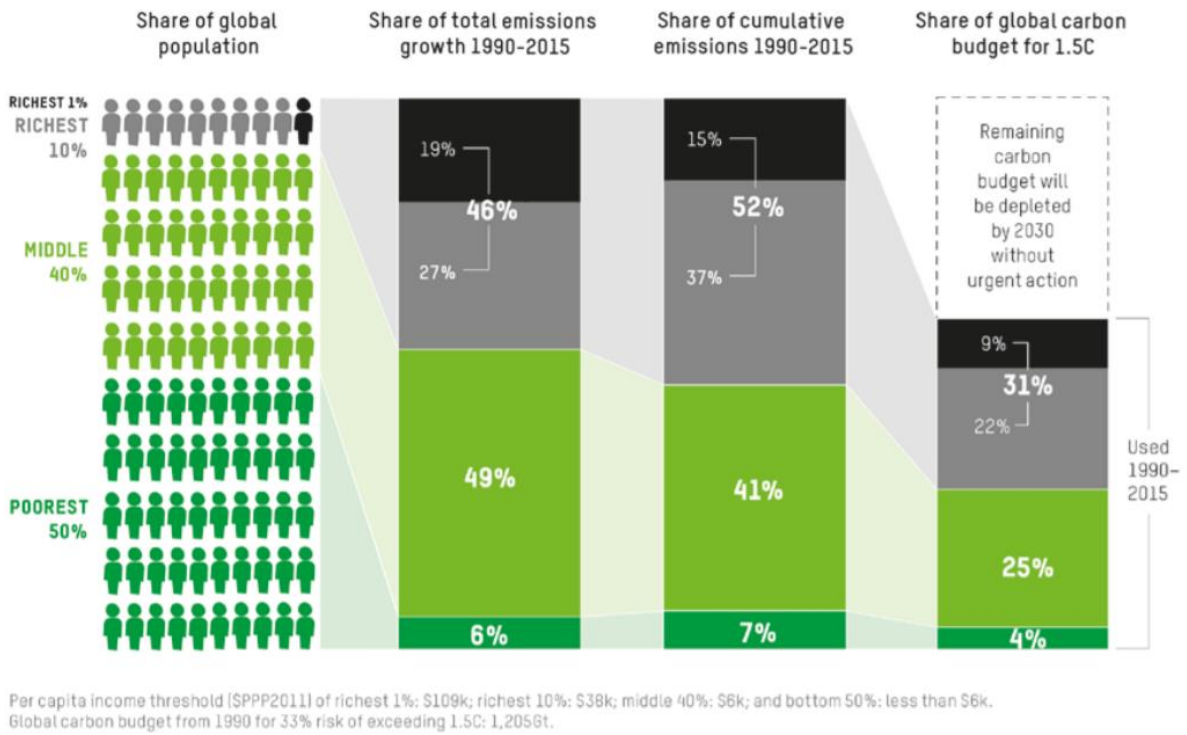
Sharing more will require us to distribute income more equally in the first place through tools such as raising minimum wages, trade fairer between countries, and create a fairer more progressive tax system so those with the broadest shoulders pay their fair share to create a fair society – including shutting down global tax havens.

Another solution to sharing food more equally is to redesign the food system so it allocates food more on the basis of need rather than wealth. To do this, we can invest in proper social safety nets to ensure nobody goes hungry, and build community-owned food systems that are less driven by profits.

AN UNFAIR SHARE OF THE PLANET'S RESOURCES

A minority of rich countries, including the UK, have the biggest ability to prevent climate crisis for the world – because we are currently using up a hugely unfair share of the planet's resources, not leaving space for anyone else. We all want to see a fairer, kinder world – and if we redesign the system so that we don't have to use up so many emissions and land just to live our lives, we can free up enough space for everyone else to live a good life without destroying the planet. But we have to act quickly. Between 1990 and 2015, over half of the world's emissions are caused by just 10% of the world's people[26]: - you can see this in the diagram from Oxfam below:

Figure 6: Summary of headline findings from Oxfam and SEI's new research



Source: (Oxfam, 2020b)

This means the wealthiest 10% of people globally have already emitted a third of the emissions the whole world can emit before it exceeds a safe 1.5 degrees of global heating – burning through a vastly unfair share of the world's carbon budget so there's none left to help the rest of the world achieve a good standard of life. The world's richest 1% alone caused two times more emissions than the poorest 50% combined[27] - even though the poorest will be most affected by the climate emergency. The wealthiest live mainly in rich regions like Europe, the United States and increasingly China[28]. Meanwhile, the lifestyles of the poorest half of humanity (just under 4 billion people) cause only 7% of global carbon emissions[29]. This inequality extends to food and land because people in richer countries eat higher impact foods. The diet of the average Indian, Nigerian or Thai citizen requires about 4 times less land per person than the diet of the average Brit – mainly because they eat less meat[30].

It is scary to find out that rich countries cause most of global emissions – but it also means we have more power to save both ourselves and the rest of the world. It makes our task simpler – to ensure we have a safe planet for everyone to live on, we need to:

1. As quickly as possible shrink the environmental impact of the richest 1.5 billion people's lifestyles.
2. Ensure that the rest of the planet meets their needs without growing their carbon emissions too much – by providing support through technology transfer and climate finance.

Point 1 means that richer countries like the UK will need to reduce their emissions to net zero far sooner than 2050 to give the planet a chance of survival. Extinction Rebellion have called for net zero emissions by 2025, and both Labour and the Green Party called for a target of net zero by 2030 (or early 2030s) in the 2019 elections. Academic studies which champion climate equity have backed up the need for net zero being reached by rich countries like the UK closer to 2030[31]. Based on the UK's wealth and historical responsibility for emissions, the Climate Equity Reference Calculator shows that the UK needs to reduce its emissions by about 150-200% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels[32]. In practice this means reducing its own emissions to as close to zero as possible by 2030, and providing lots of climate finance to help other countries achieve emissions reductions too (which helps with point 2, above).

Although most people in countries like China and India are a long way off having such high emissions as in Europe and the US, these countries' emissions are growing in the process of pulling their peoples out of poverty and producing products exported to wealthier countries like the UK. It is thus essential for us to provide some monetary support and tech transfer to help countries around the world reduce poverty and thrive whilst avoiding growing their emissions too much – especially when their emissions are tied to products we consume, or we have a history of exploiting those countries through colonialism, debt or resource and wealth extraction. We can build a kinder, more collaborative global society to replace the out-dated models of the past. But to do so, we will have to challenge the powerful interests of polluting corporations who are determined to keep the status quo to preserve their profits.

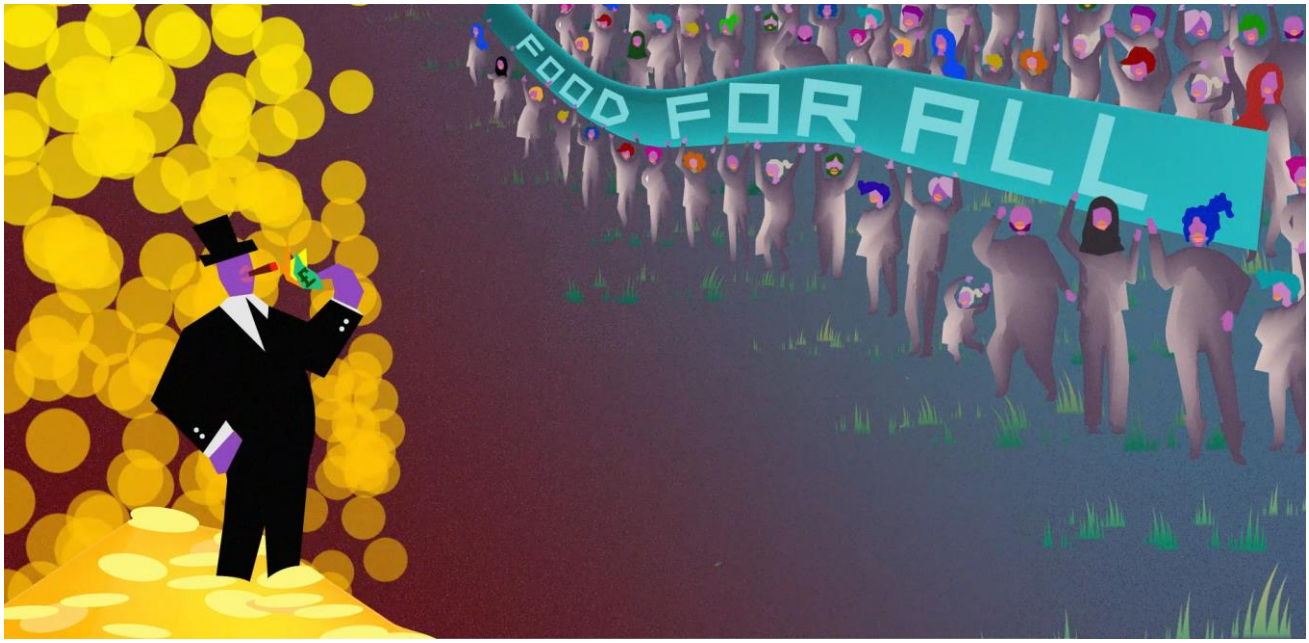
THE TRAP OF FALSE SCARCITY

People in the UK, like many countries around the world, have been told we live in times of austerity. There is not enough to go round, and the services we and our families rely on have to be cut. It has been an exhausting and bleak time, made worse by the recent pandemic.

If there is such an abundance of food and wealth, why does it seem like there is never enough?

The short answer is: most people are left out.

Just 5% of all new income generated since 1990 went to the poorest 60% of humanity – at this rate, to ensure every person earns above $5/day the global economy would have to grow to 175 times its present size[33]. In the UK, the past decade has seen more and more people pushed into food poverty with stagnating wages, whilst a minority of corporations have made a fortune.



When wealth is spread so unfairly, this creates an impossible choice – we either accept that:

1. Most people will never have enough to live a good life, or
2. The economy needs to exponentially grow before enough money 'trickles down' to the poorest, growing so large that it threatens the survival of the Earth, and us on it.

Trapped by this choice, it is easy to think that humans are doomed. There is not enough to go round so we are condemned to either never have enough, or overwhelm and destroy the earth in our attempt to meet our needs.

But the solution to this dilemma is surprisingly simple once we realise there is enough to go round already. We just need to design a system which wastes less, and shares the abundance we do have more equally.

Once we share more equally, the economy does not have to grow to infinite dangerous degrees to ensure everyone has enough, and we can all enjoy a safe future. Some powerful interests will resist these changes, but ultimately it is in everyone's interests to achieve this better future, so we must come together to achieve it.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] (Stuart, 2009)
[2] (FAO, 2011)
[3] (Feedback, 2020)
[4] (Credit Suisse, 2020)
[5] (FAO and IFAD, 2020, p. xix)
[6] (World Bank, 2018)
[7] In most European countries, the richest 10% own roughly 60% of the wealth, and the poorest half of the population own less than 5% (Piketty, 2014, p. 257). The estimate that in the UK the richest 10% of households hold over 50% of the UK's wealth is likely to be an underestimate (Alvaredo, Atkinson and Morelli, 2016).
[8] (End Hunger UK, 2019)
[9] (Crawford, Innes and O'Dea, 2016)
[10] (End Hunger UK, 2019)
[11] (Tax Justice UK, 2020)
[12] (Neate, 2020)
[13] (Lawson *et al.*, 2019, p. 62)
[14] (Oxfam International, 2014, p. 30 Figure 1)
[15] http://bigthink.com/strange-maps/what-the-world-will-look-like-4degc-warmer
[16] (Henley, 2020)
[17] (Crawford, Innes and O'Dea, 2016)
[18] (Oxfam, 2020a, p. 5; Stubley, 2020)
[19] (Oxfam, 2020a, p. 5; Stubley, 2020)
[20] (Oxfam, 2020a, p. 5; Stubley, 2020)
[21] (Committee on Climate Change, 2020)
[22] (Ministry of Defence, 2020)
[23] (ONS, 2020)
[24] (Bolton, 2020)
[25] (Feedback, 2020)
[26] (Oxfam, 2020b, p. 9)
[27] (Oxfam, 2020b, p. 9)
[28] (Oxfam, 2020b, p. 7)
[29] (Oxfam, 2015)
[30] (Ritchie, 2017)
[31] (Hickel and Kallis, 2019; Jackson, 2019)
[32] (Climate Equity Reference, 2019)
[33] (Woodward, 2015)