

Greta Thunberg says EU recovery plan fails to tackle climate crisis

Exclusive: Activist says €750bn fund shows leaders not treating global heating as emergency

Matthew Taylor *Environment correspondent*

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Greta Thunberg: 'As long as the climate crisis is not being treated as a crisis, the changes that are necessary will not happen.' Photograph: Johanna Geron/Reuters

Greta Thunberg has accused EU politicians of failing to acknowledge the scale of the climate crisis and said its €750bn Covid-19 recovery plan does not do enough to tackle the issue.

The climate campaigner said the package of measures **agreed by EU leaders** proved that politicians were still not treating climate change as an emergency.

“They are still denying the fact and ignoring the fact that we are facing a climate emergency, and the climate crisis has still not once been treated as a crisis,” Thunberg told the Guardian. “As long as the climate crisis is not being treated as a crisis, the changes that are necessary will not happen.”

EU leaders **reached agreement** on the recovery fund in the early hours of Tuesday and pledged that 30% of the package would go towards climate policies, but few details were given.

Thunberg, 17, and other leaders of the school strikes movement across **Europe** said the package was inadequate.

Luisa Neubauer, 24, a central figure in Germany's school strikes movement, said young people were becoming increasingly frustrated with politicians.

“We are asking our leaders to take care of the most fundamental thing: the safety of us, the safety of people around the world, the safety of our futures,” Neubauer said. “It is worrying on a democratic level when you ask for such substantial things, which seem so obvious, and yet you see how leaders are widely ignoring it, or not considering it to be as important as other things.”

Another prominent school striker, Adélaïde Charlier, 19, from Belgium, said politicians who adopted the language of climate action without following up with urgent policy measures were worse than climate deniers.

“When leaders minimise the climate crisis, I feel it is more dangerous than leaders that outright deny it ... because then we actually feel we can rely on them and we are actually on the right path and that is dangerous and wrong.”

The group has written an open letter to EU leaders demanding they act immediately to avoid the worst effects of the climate crisis.

The letter, signed by 80,000 people **including some of the world's leading scientists**, argues that the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that most leaders are able to act swiftly and decisively when they deem it necessary, but that the same urgency has been missing in the response to climate change.

“It is now clearer than ever that the climate crisis has never once been treated as a crisis, neither from the politicians, media, business nor finance. And the longer we keep pretending that we are on a reliable path to lower emissions and that the actions required to avoid a climate disaster are available within today's system ... the more precious time we will lose,” it says.

The letter argues that the climate and ecological emergency can only be addressed by tackling the underlying “social and racial injustices and oppression that have laid the foundations of our modern world”.

Earlier this year the EU **unveiled its green new deal** proposals, which it said aimed to transform the bloc from a high- to a **low-carbon economy** without reducing prosperity and while improving people's quality of life. The climate strikers dismissed the EU's target of net zero emissions by 2050 as dangerously unambitious.

Thunberg, who this week was **awarded Portugal's Gulbenkian prize for humanity** and pledged the €1m (\$1.15m) award to groups working to protect the environment and halt climate change, said it was up to ordinary people to stand up and demand that politicians rise to the challenge.

"I see the hope in democracy and in people," she said. "If people become aware of what is happening then we can accomplish anything, we can put pressure on people in power ... if we just decide we have had enough then that will change everything."

Greta Thunberg gives €1m award money to climate groups

Influential climate campaigner says Gulbenkian rights award gave her 'more money than I can begin to imagine'

Agence France-Presse

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Greta Thunberg has been awarded a Portuguese rights award and promptly pledged the €1m (\$1.15m) prize to groups working to protect the environment and halt climate change.

"That is more money than I can begin to imagine, but all the prize money will be donated, through my foundation, to different organisations and projects who are working to help people on the front line, affected by the climate crisis and ecological crisis," the Swedish teenager said in a video posted online on Monday.

She was awarded the Gulbenkian prize for humanity for the way she "has been able to mobilise younger generations for the cause of climate change and her tenacious struggle to alter a status quo that persists", Jorge Sampaio, chair of the prize jury, said earlier.

The first €100,000 of the prize money will go to the “SOS Amazonia” campaign led by Fridays For Future Brazil to tackle the coronavirus outbreak in the Amazon.

Pandemic shows climate has never been treated as crisis, say scientists

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Another €100,000 will go to the Stop Ecocide Foundation “to support their work to make ecocide an international crime”, Thunberg [said on Twitter](#).

The €1m is the largest prize won by the 17-year-old environmental campaigner who has also won Amnesty International’s top human rights prize and the Swedish Right Livelihood Award, often presented as an alternative Nobel.

She said on Monday she was “extremely honoured” to receive the annual Gulbenkian prize.

Thunberg and three other young climate activists on Thursday launched an appeal to EU leaders to “face up to the climate emergency”, in an open letter signed by 150 scientists and a host of celebrities.

Pandemic shows climate has never been treated as crisis, say scientists

Letter also signed by Greta Thunberg urges EU leaders to act immediately on global heating

[Matthew Taylor](#)

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A climate protest in Duesseldorf, Germany, last week. Photograph: Sascha Steinbach/EPA

Greta Thunberg and some of the world's leading climate scientists have written to EU leaders demanding they act immediately to avoid the worst impacts of the unfolding climate and ecological emergency.

The **letter**, which is being sent before a European council meeting starting on Friday, says the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that most leaders are able to act swiftly and decisively, but the same urgency had been missing in politicians' response to the climate crisis.

“It is now clearer than ever that the climate crisis has never once been treated as a crisis, neither from the politicians, media, business nor finance. And the longer we keep pretending that we are on a reliable path to lower emissions and that the actions required to avoid a climate disaster are available within today's system ... the more precious time we will lose,” it says.

The EU **unveiled its green new deal** proposal this year, aiming to transform the bloc from a high to a **low-carbon economy** without reducing prosperity and while improving people's quality of life, through cleaner air and water, better health and a thriving natural world.

But the authors of the letter dismiss its target of net zero emissions by 2050 as dangerously unambitious. “Net zero emissions by 2050 for the EU – as well as for other financially fortunate parts of the world – equals surrender,” they say.

They add that the target is based on a carbon budget that gives only a 50% chance of limiting global heating to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, the figure set out in the 2015 Paris agreement.

“That is just a statistical flip of a coin, which doesn’t even include some of the key factors such as the global aspect of equity, most tipping points and feedback loops, as well as already built in additional warming hidden by toxic air pollution. So in reality it is much less than a 50% chance.”

The letter also argues that the climate and ecological emergency can only be addressed by tackling the underlying “social and racial injustices and oppression that have laid the foundations of our modern world”.

It says the EU, with its political and economic clout, has a moral obligation to lead the fight to create a fair and more sustainable world.

“We understand and know very well that the world is complicated and that what we are asking for may not be easy. The changes necessary to safeguard humanity may seem very unrealistic. But it is much more unrealistic to believe that our society would be able to survive the global heating we’re heading for, as well as other disastrous ecological consequences of today’s business as usual.”

Thunberg and the other signatories – including the scientists **Michael Mann** and **Johan Rockström** – call on EU leaders to immediately halt all investments in fossil fuel exploration and extraction and end subsidies. They say the EU must advocate to make ecocide an international crime and establish annual, binding carbon budgets.