

## MCC Press Release

# Saving energy – if not now, when?

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In view of the economic consequences of the Ukraine war, the time has come for “demand-side climate solutions”, writes Felix Creutzig in the top journal *Nature*.

**Berlin, 14/06/2022.** That we must not only make the energy supply fossil-free, but also curb energy demand, was a core message of the [latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#). For the first time, there was a chapter on “demand-side climate solutions”, where policy aims at behavioural changes in mobility, housing, and diet. Now, the scientist in charge of this chapter specifies the relevance of such solutions in the context of the current energy price crisis. The three-page comment by [Felix Creutzig](#), Coordinating Lead Author of the IPCC, and group leader at the Berlin-based climate research institute MCC (Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change), is published in the renowned journal *Nature*.

“The war in Ukraine has triggered an energy and resource crisis,” Creutzig argues. This requires decisive action, just like the climate crisis – “and fortunately, both agendas overlap. Demand-led solutions are efficient, quick and cheap. Designed and implemented with care, they can lower greenhouse-gas emissions and climate risks, as well as reduce dependence on Russian exports today.” In short, he says, this means that policy should also support behavioural changes where possible: “Grow more food and less fodder, drive and fly less, turn down the thermostat.”

This is a pointed statement, but it underlines the core message of the article: many a climate protection measure that has been discussed endlessly, may now simply be implemented, given the economic and energy policy consequences of the Ukraine war. For citizens, this is less about new regulations or bans than about new decision-making choices. Scientists speak of “choice architecture”: through incentives, infrastructures, but also information and education, politics can influence energy use behaviour in an encouraging way.

With a view to fuel prices, for example, governments could persuade employers to allow home working as much as possible, even after the end of the coronavirus pandemic. Also, they might encourage cycling by further developing the concept of urban pop-up bike lanes that emerged in the pandemic. Saving of electricity could be promoted, for example, by means of time-dependent tariffs or digital success indicators placed in the household. And in the event of a gas shortage next winter, policymakers could influence the social norm with an appeal to accept 19 degrees Celsius room temperature whenever possible.

The topic of nutrition, which is important for the climate, also takes on additional relevance in the current crisis. Creutzig points out that animal fodder accounts for more than half of agricultural production in the

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USA and the EU. If in Europe alone, one third of the corresponding area were to be converted to wheat and other cereals for human consumption at the next sowing season, this would already completely compensate for the current loss of Ukraine as a major supplier, which is a great threat to the Global South. Only 12 percent of the calories contained in animal feed ultimately end up in human food, which is why dietary behaviour is highly relevant to the climate. Politicians can influence this, for example, by setting targets for canteens to offer mainly meat-free meals.

In line with IPCC calculations, and understanding climate crisis in the context of the energy and resource crisis, the article ends with a provocative statement: with a ten-point set of demand-side climate solutions, the EU could replace 20 percent of Russian gas and 60 percent of oil supplies within one year. At the same time, provided that all industrialised countries worldwide as well as the East Asian emerging countries follow suit, this would reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 2.9 percent. The ten points also include much-discussed topics such as speed limits, car-free Sundays, and short-haul flights. But the debates are changing: “Without such steps,” warns Creutzig in his article, governments might at best “slow down the fuel-price spiral in the near term.”

**Reference of the cited article:**

Creutzig, F., 2020, Fuel crisis: slash demand in 3 sectors to protect economies and climate, *Nature*  
<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-01616-z>

**About MCC**

MCC explores and provides solution-oriented policy portfolios for climate mitigation, for governing the global commons in general, and for enhancing the many aspects of human well-being. Our seven working groups are active in fields like economic growth and development, resources and international trade, cities and infrastructure, governance, and scientific policy advice. Co-founded by the Mercator Foundation and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. | [www.mcc-berlin.net/en](http://www.mcc-berlin.net/en) | [https://twitter.com/MCC\\_Berlin](https://twitter.com/MCC_Berlin)

**Media contact:**

Ulrich von Lampe  
Head of Press and Public Relations  
Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change (MCC)  
Telephone: +49 (0) 30 338 5537 201 / Mobile: +49 (0) 171 1964 449  
Email: [lampe@mcc-berlin.net](mailto:lampe@mcc-berlin.net)

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