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Guiding Package

**Topic 1:** Overproduction and its impact on climate change

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**Abstract**

As the world’s population continues to grow, all production rates continue to grow even faster, surpassing the average and reasonable levels necessary, meaning that the world is constantly producing more than necessary; exhausting resources even further, releasing more polluting carbon emissions into the atmosphere, and leading to at least a third of all products to go to waste. Unfortunately, all that waste customarily fills up in our water and in our air, only exacerbating climate change.

The number of cases concerning overproduction have been rapidly increasing over the years. Simply put, overproduction is when companies produce too much of something compared to the demand for services and goods. It is often a result of previous over-investments, excess productive capacity[[1]](#footnote-0), which is unprofitable or produces an excess level of supply[[2]](#footnote-1). Overproduction affects immensely various sectors in our society such as health, education, equity and empowerment.

The regular abuse and exploitation of natural resources, toxicwaste[[3]](#footnote-2), the release of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping greenhouse gases[[4]](#footnote-3), changes the composition of the atmosphere and results in the accumulation of heat in the Earth’s system. In response, the earth's climate has countered higher temperatures in the atmosphere, rising sea level and ice melting.

**Introduction**

 Human activities, pollution, overpopulation, and overproduction are all driving up the earth’s temperature and fundamentally changing the world around us. The main causes of the phenomenon are known as “the greenhouse effects”. Gasses in the atmosphere, such as water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and chloro-fluorocarbons let the sun’s light in, but keep some of the heat from escaping, like the glass walls of a greenhouse. The more greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the more heat gets trapped, strengthening the greenhouse effect and increasing the earth’s temperature.

 Human activities are ultimately increasing the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Most chemical processes in industries and in factories as well as many farming activities all contribute to the constant growth of greenhouse gases; this growth of greenhouse gases is causing more energy and more heat to be trapped in the atmosphere. In addition, different repercussions of overproduction can be both overconsumptionandunderconsumption[[5]](#footnote-4), both are now threats to true sustainability.

Overconsumption causes industries and companies to raise their production rates in order to fit the population’s demand, and as a result damage the environment in the process; the biggest environmental consequence of overconsumption is a reduction in the planet's carrying capacity. Excessive unsustainable consumption will exceed the long-term carrying capacity of its environment and subsequent resource depletion, environmental degradation and reduced ecosystem health, and in some cases can also lead to excessive economical debt. On the other hand, other countries suffer from underconsumption. Underconsumption leads certain countries to unfortunately have higher rates of waste due to them not being consumed in the first place. With industries still producing the same amounts of products, a cycle of overproduction and underconsumption continues, only exhausting the environment’s ressources further and can also result in business depression and economic depression.

 Moreover, many states have tried simply reusing and recycling products and not letting them go to waste but have soon stopped applying that policy due to its inconsistency to show results. Internationally, multiple countries have considered applying more strict laws in factories and in industries such as, limiting their general production rate, lowering their products’ prices significantly in order to make them attainable for more people, applying laws that stop them from starting production early to eliminate all chances of possibly overproducing, and others who tried incorporating more green and sustainable methods into their production.

**Key Terms**

**1- Climate Change:** Climate change refers to the long-term changes in the climate that occur over decades and centuries , that are especially caused by human activities as a result of unbalancing the weather of Earth.[[6]](#footnote-5)

**2- Greenhouse Gases:** Greenhouse gases are gases in Earth’s atmosphere that trap heat. They let the sun’s heat and radiation pass through the atmosphere, but they prevent the heat that the sun brings from leaving the atmosphere, thus contributing to the greenhouse effect.[[7]](#footnote-6)

**3- Overproduction:** The [action](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/action) of [producing](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/produce) more of something than is [needed](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/needed), or [producing](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/produce) too much.[[8]](#footnote-7)

**4- Overconsumption:** A situation where the use of a natural resource has exceeded the sustainable capacity of a system. A prolonged pattern of overconsumption leads to the eventual loss of resource bases.[[9]](#footnote-8)

**5- Underconsumption:** The purchase of services at levels that fall below the available supply.[[10]](#footnote-9)

**6- Toxic Waste:** Unwanted chemicals that are the result of manufacturing or industry and that cause harm, pollute the air and contaminate soil and water.[[11]](#footnote-10)

**7- Economic Deflation:** A general decline in prices for goods and services.[[12]](#footnote-11)

**8- Excessive productive capacity:** A condition that occurs when demand for a product is less than the amount of product that a business could potentially supply to the market. When a firm is producing at a lower scale of output than it has been designed for, it creates excess capacity.[[13]](#footnote-12)

**9- Excess level of supply:** Excess supply occurs when the quantity supplied is higher than the quantity demanded, causing its market price to fall.[[14]](#footnote-13)

**Background Information**

 Human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels (caused by industries and overproduction) have increased the amount of CO2 in the atmosphere by more than third since the industrial revolution[[15]](#footnote-14) which started in the UK in 1760, and ended in 1840. The rapid increase in greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere has warmed the planet at an alarming rate. While earth’s climate has fluctuated in the past, atmospheric carbon dioxide hasn’t reached today’s levels in thousands of years. Climate change has irreversible repercussions that affect our oceans, our weather, our food sources, and health.

Currently, around 2,01 billion metric tons of solid waste are produced annually. The World Bank estimates overall waste generation will increase to 3.40 billion metric tons by 2050. An estimated 13.5% of today's waste is recycled and 5.5% is composted.

Climate change has had negative effects on almost everything, but the damage that it has caused on the climate and the environment is almost irreversible. When it comes to the ocean, ice sheets such as Greenland and Antarctica are melting. The extra water that was once held in glaciers causes sea levels to rise, and spills out of the oceans, flooding coastal regions. Rising sea levels also have an impact on the concentration of the salt in oceans and seas. When more ice is melted, and there is more water added to the oceans, the concentration of salt diminishes, which is dangerous to the lives of sea creatures since their natural habitat is salty water. This could lead up to the extinction of several types of aquatic creatures. Another major factor that has changed because of climate change is the weather. Warmer temperatures make weather more extreme. This means, not only more tense major storms, heavy snowfalls, and tsunamis, but also longer and more frequent droughts. These changes in weather cause challenges not only for humans, but also animals and other living creatures on this planet.

Another category that has been heavily affected by climate change is the life aspect. The aspect of life necessities that are no longer provided. Growing crops becomes more difficult. The areas where plants and animals once lived can shift, and water supplies are diminished, which cause droughts, and extinctions of living organisms. In addition to creating new and agricultural challenges, climate change can directly affect people’s physical health. In urban areas, the warmer atmosphere creates an environment that traps and increases the amount of smog. This is because the smog contains ozone particles which increase rapidly at higher temperatures. Exposure to higher levels of smog can cause health problems such as asthma, heart disease, and even lung cancer.

Multiple countries like the United States, Switzerland, Japan and Turkey started recognizing their involvement and called for urgent action to curb overproduction. However, no apparent actions have been taken and production rates continue to rise alarmingly, which sadly continues to strip the earth of its natural resources, such as forests, fish, soil, minerals and water, consequently collapsing ecosystems, habitats and endangers the survival of countless species. The policies suggested for controlling and restraining overproduction have only been fit to apply to developed countries due to high economical demands and yet have not been followed through. Furthermore, overproduction continues to impact climate change terribly.

The common responsibility for climate change must be assumed by all countries, but the policies for developed and developing countries demand different approaches. The success of these policies depend on all countries establishing programmes with common objectives to tackle overproduction and climate change.

**Major Countries Involved**

The United States of America:The numbers of overproduction and waste caused by overproduction in the United States is one of the highest in the world. The US wastes 40% of its food every single year, and 50% of all produce. Waste caused by overproduction has a staggering price tag costing the US at least $218 billion dollars per year. Food production in general in the US uses 15.5% of the total energy budget, 50% of all land and 80% of all water consumed. The US consumes approximately 17% of the entire world’s energy, consequently, the US emits more greenhouse gases and produces more waste than any other country in the world. Already having experienced the Great Depression at the end of the 1920s due to multiple causes, one of them being overproduction, the US still continues to play a huge part in the world’s overproduction crisis.

The People’s Republic of China:The fashion industry accounts for 10% of all carbon emissions, China alone wastes around 26 million tons of clothes every single year. It is the second largest importer of products in the world, and the world’s fastest growing consumer, as well as the world’s biggest manufacturing economy. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, demands on all types of products suddenly dropped because of lockdowns and their restrictions. Therefore, China has become the home of global overproduction. All interventions made by China were either stopping further investment whenever they suspect a case of overproduction or ordering multiple companies and factories to stop their production and facilities. While many claim that this approach has helped them avoid price falls by forcing production cuts and enabling different companies to generate profits. Unfortunately, these results were only short-lived, and many companies and businesses fell back into overproduction.

The Republic of India:Since independence, India’s economy is one of the fastest growing in the world, but while their economy level is growing so are their production levels. In terms of global production, India leads with a lot of agricultural production. Yet with all the agricultural wealth, India is facing an agriculture concern of its own. It’s estimated that 194 million Indians go hungry every day due to their food wastage. According to the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture organization this problem is connected to their massive food wastage every year; about $14 billion worth of food is wasted and more than 40% of all food goes to waste every single year. Which is exhausting more natural resources every single year with more than half of all products going to waste. All solutions proposed by the Indian government were to improve transportations so that food wouldn’t get wasted while getting transported, but have yet to tackle the root of the problem, which is overproduction.

Sweden: In 2017, it was estimated that in Sweden the quantity of just household waste was around 4,8 million tons and was around 10 million tons every single year. With hopes of reducing waste and reducing their environmental impact; Sweden has followed the European Union (EU) action plans to tackle overproduction. By which many companies have started acknowledging their contribution to overproduction and its consequences on both the environment and the economy and therefore multiple companies started recycling their own unsold products as well as waste from nearby companies to raw materials that can be re-used to create other products.

**Major Organizations Involved**

**Global Programme of action for the protection of the Marine Environment (GPA):** GPA was created as a unique intergovernmental mechanism to counter the issue of land-based pollution. The GPA was adopted by 108 Governments, and the European Commission at an intergovernmental conference convened in Washington, D.C., in 1995. The main goals of this programme is sustaining effective actions to tackle all land-based impacts, specifically those resulting from sewage, persistent organic pollutants, radioactive substances, heavy metals, oils, nutrients, sediment mobilization and toxic chemicals. The Intergovernmental Review Meeting (IGR) is a part of the programme and is a forum where governments and other stakeholders meet to review the status of the implementation of the GPA and decide on the action to be taken to strengthen its implementation. So far, IGR has been organized every 5 years; in 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016.

**Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD):** The Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development was established by the ACC following the Earth Summit (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) held in Rio in 1992. The IACSD’s mandate was to identify major policy issues and follow-up to the Earth Summit to ensure effective co-operation and coordination of the UN system in the implementation of Agenda 21. Agenda 21 reflects a global consensus, political and economical commitment at the highest level on development and environment cooperation.

**Earth Island Institute:** Earth Island Institute was founded in 1982 by the famous environmentalist David Bower. For almost four decades, Earth Island has been the organizational home to more than 200 grassroots environmental action projects and currently has a vibrant network of more than 75 projects. Earth Island Institute provides support to environmental action projects and to the next generation of environmental leaders in order to achieve solutions to the crises threatening the survival of life on Earth. In 2019, Earth Island Institute has sued 10 different companies including Coke, Pepsi and Nestle for their contribution to toxic waste. Their lawsuit seeks to hold corporations accountable for their share of plastic and toxic waste and their claims that their products are recyclable when they are not.

**The Nature Conservancy (TNC):** The Nature Conservancy is a global environmental organization with headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. As of 2021, it works through affiliates and branches in 79 countries and territories, as well as every state in the United States. TNC was founded in 1951, and now has over one million members globally and has protected more than 480,500 km2 of land and thousands of miles of rivers worldwide. TNC’s main objective is to tackle the dual threats of accelerated climate change, unprecedented biodiversity loss and to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. TNC has set around 350$ million plans to rebuild trees after they’ve been cut and in some places where human disturbance has prevented trees from replanting themselves, for example, abandoned agricultural lands and abandoned industrial lands. They are working with big companies with high carbon dioxide footprints such as Microsoft and Amazon to help them learn how to use natural climate solutions to reduce and offset emissions in their own supply chains.

**Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS):** The Union of Concerned Scientists is a non profit organisation located in the United States. It was founded in 1969, and works to help eliminate pollution and climate change. This organisation uses science to solve these problems. In 2019, UCS sent a proposition to the United Nations telling them that they are willing to offer their services and collaborate with them in order to start using wind turbines to generate energy. The UN has not yet agreed to anything involving UCS’s proposition.

**UN Involvement**

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) operates to advance all three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental, encouraging agreement on coherent policies that make fundamental links across all three. In 2020, ECOSOC has developed a resolution : “sustainable technologies must be made available to the developing countries and must be put to use in developed countries.”

Due to overproduction becoming a major problem of today’s society, the UN has decided to highlight the importance of taking action. The UN has dedicated the 12th sustainable development goal to overproduction: “responsible consumption and production”.

In efforts to achieve that sustainable development goal, the UN has implemented a 10-year framework of programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)[[16]](#footnote-15), all countries taking action. While also maintaining the three main objectives of the SCP; decoupling environmental degradation from economic growth and separating the idea of only being able to witness economic growth at the expense of the environment, applying life cycle thinking and encouraging a life cycle of a more sustainable and green economy, sizing opportunities for developing countries and “leapfrogging” by offering opportunities such as the creation of new markets, green and decent jobs as well as generating natural resource management.

Furthermore, the UN and the EU have been applying a Green Public Procurement (GPP)[[17]](#footnote-16) and Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP)[[18]](#footnote-17). GPP is a process in which public authorities seek to purchase goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life-cycle. SPP is another process by which public authorities seek to achieve the appropriate balance between the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Through SPP, they can achieve key policy goals, and send strong market signals. Sustainable procurement enables governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve resource efficiency, and support recycling. Positive social outcomes include reducing poverty, improving equity, and respecting core labor standards. From an economic point of view, SPP can generate income and reduce costs.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP)[[19]](#footnote-18), the leading global environmental authority and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment, has recently coordinated two major projects in sustainable public procurement. The first is Eap Green[[20]](#footnote-19), an initiative financed by the European Union to move towards a green economy by decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation and resource depletion which ran from 2013-2016 and involved Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Belarus. The Second project is Sustainable Public Procurement and Eco-Labelling (SPPEL)[[21]](#footnote-20) a project sought to combine the two elements of ecolabelling and sustainable public procurement to stimulate the demand and supply of sustainable products in countries across the world and more specifically, the project aimed at providing capacity development and technical assistance to public and private sectors on the development and implementation of SPP policies and use of eco-labelling, it was implemented from 2013 to 2017 with activities in Vietnam, Brazil, Mongolia, Morocco, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Argentina and Chile.

 The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)[[22]](#footnote-21); the United Nation’s body for assessing the science related to climate change, was created to provide governments and policymakers with regular scientific assessments on climate change, its implications, potential future risks, as well as to put forward adaptation and mitigation options. According to their reports, they placed a goal of a maximum of 2% C Above pre-industrial levels to stabilize Carbon dioxide levels which do not constitute a grave danger to the climate. Meaning that if industries kept over consuming, but used less carbon dioxide, then this would gradually lower consequences on the climate.

**Possible Solutions**

1- Limiting the amount of carbon dioxide in order to avoid excessive greenhouse effects

2- Increase the amount of handmade objects and products to reduce the use of machines

3- Encourage industries to adopt more green and sustainable methods and systems

4- Conduct awareness campaigns that discuss the danger and the consequences of overproduction

**Guiding Questions**

1. What has your country done to try and stop overproduction? Where does your country stand on the issue of overproduction? Have there been any laws/policies suggested and/or implemented?
2. Which countries are mainly responsible for overproduction?
3. What are the consequences of producing the exact amount needed? Will it affect the economy?
4. Is it possible to maintain an economy, while also putting a stop to overproduction?
5. How does overproduction affect the economy, population and society?
6. What are the solutions that could solve the problem from its roots?
7. What have the organisations done to solve this problem?

**Useful Links**

* Agricultural overproduction and the deteriorating environment: <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/07/07/agricultural-overproduction-and-the-deteriorating-environment/>
* The effects of overproduction on future firm performance and inventory write-downs: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/itor.12734>
* Overproduction led to low prices: <https://www.iowapbs.org/iowapathways/artifact/overproduction-leads-low-prices>
* Climate change: IPCC report is “code red” for humanity: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-58130705>
* Causes of climate change: <https://ec.europa.eu/clima/change/causes_en>
* Climate change Indicators in the United States: <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators>
* Consequences of overproduction and overconsumption: <https://www.netimpact.org/blog/overproduction-overconsumption-consequences>
* Responsible consumption and production: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/>
* ECOSOC. Climate Change: <https://www.sek.es/files/pdf/servicios/Sekmun_V_Climate_Change.pdf>
* What Businesses Can Do To Stop The Epidemic Of Overproduction: <https://www.inc.com/young-entrepreneur-council/how-your-business-can-help-with-the-epidemic-of-overproduction.html>

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17. Sekmun. “*ECOSOC. Climate Change*”, January 6th, 2021. Available on: <https://www.sek.es/files/pdf/servicios/Sekmun_V_Climate_Change.pdf>
1. Key Terms Definitions [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Key Terms Definitions [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Key Terms Definitions [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Key Terms Definitions [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Key Terms Definition [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Definition of “Climate Change”: <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/climate-change/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Definition of “Greenhouse Gases”: <https://www.britannica.com/science/greenhouse-gas> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Definition of “Overproduction”: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/overproduction> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Definition of “Overconsumption”: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/overconsumption> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Definition of “Underconsumption”: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/u/underconsumption.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Definition of “Toxic Waste”: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/toxic%20waste> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Definition of “Economic Deflation”: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/deflation.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Definition of “Excess Productive supply”: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/excesscapacity.asp#:~:text=Excess%20capacity%20is%20a%20condition,for%2C%20it%20creates%20excess%20capacity>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
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15. For more information on the industrial revolution watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjK7PWmRRyg> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. The SCP goals and objectives are available on: <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/sustainable-consumption-and-production-policies> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. The Green Public Procurement objectives available on: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/public-procurement/green/> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. The Sustainable Public Procurement objectives available on: <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/sustainable-consumption-and-production-policies> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. The UNEP objectives available on: <https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. The Eap Green objectives available on: <https://www.oecd.org/environment/outreach/EaPGREEN-Brochure-English-2014.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. The SPPEL objectives available on: <https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/initiative/sustainable-public-procurement-and-ecolabelling-sppel> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. The IPCC objectives available on: <https://www.ipcc.ch/> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)