

Zero Waste Live!

11 May 2021 - 02.00 p.m. CEST



ARE WE GETTING CLOSER TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN EUROPE?



Meadhbh Bolger

Policy and campaigns on resource justice and
new economies at Friends of the Earth Europe

Getting closer to a circular economy: the case for cutting consumption



Meadhbh Bolger, Friends of the Earth Europe

Zero Waste Europe event:

“Are we getting closer to a circular economy in Europe?”

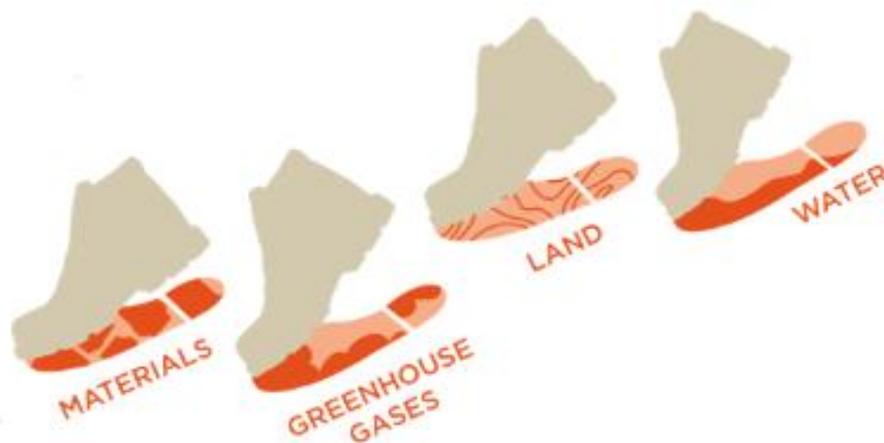
May 2021



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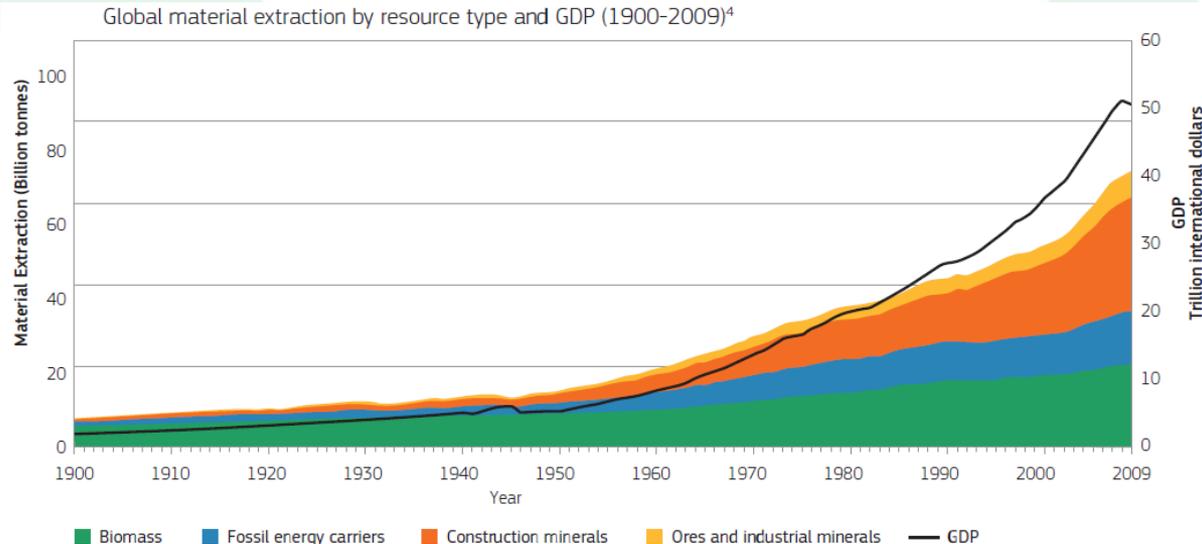
What will I talk about?

- How Europe's absolute resource consumption goes beyond sustainable and just limits
- This overconsumption is harming people and planet
- Solutions lie in reducing consumption and making it more equitable, through massive transformation away from our growth-based economy



Rapidly increasing and inequitable global consumption

- Since 1970, the global population has doubled, yet extraction of materials (including fossil fuels for energy) has tripled
- The 1.2 billion poorest people account for just 1% of the world's consumption, while the 1 billion richest account for 72%.



How we measure material consumption – the material footprint indicator

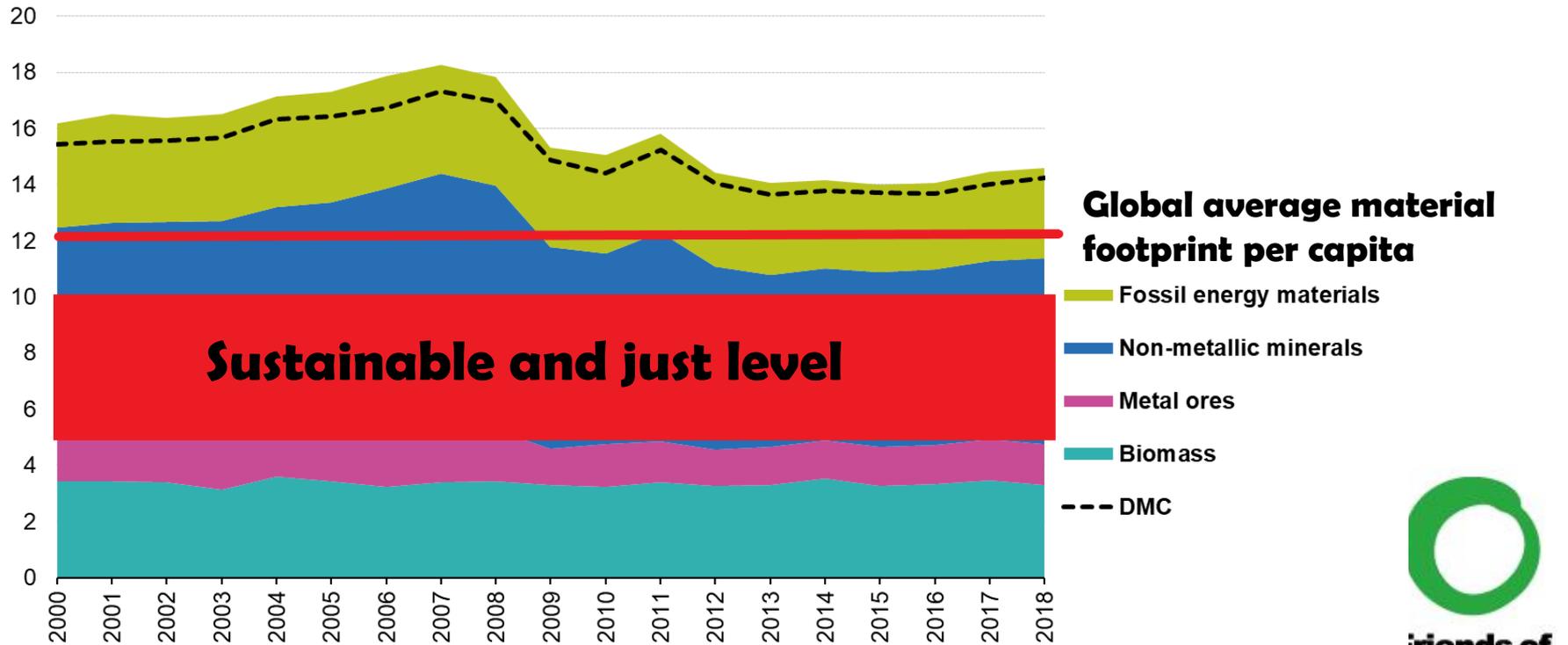
- The material footprint, or raw material consumption (RMC), indicator: measures the total mass of raw materials – biomass, fossil fuels, metals and non-metallic minerals – that are extracted along entire supply chains in order to produce the final products or services consumed in a country or region.



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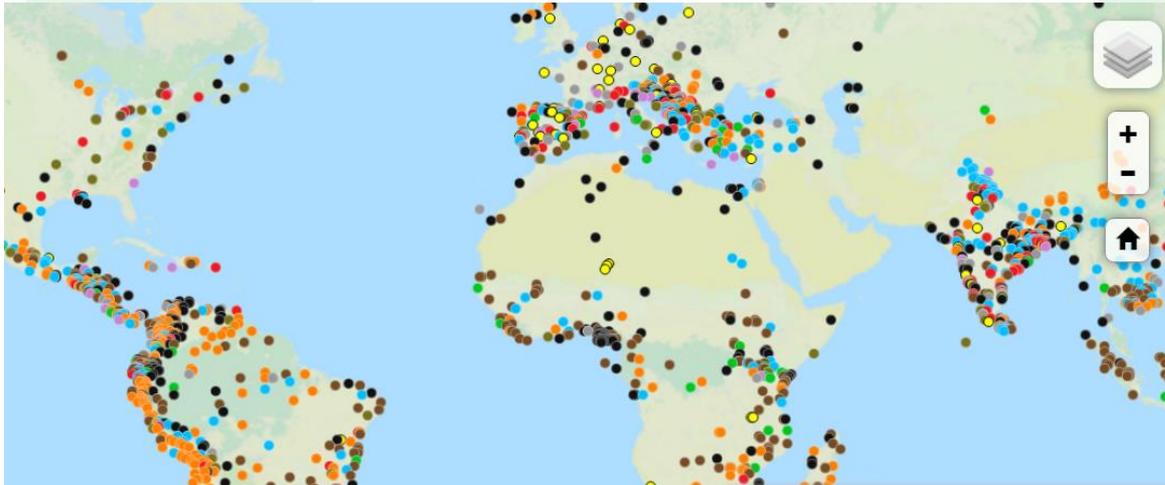
EU material footprint and sustainable and just level

- The EU material footprint of 14.5 tonnes per capita is approximately double a sustainable and just level



Impacts of our material consumption

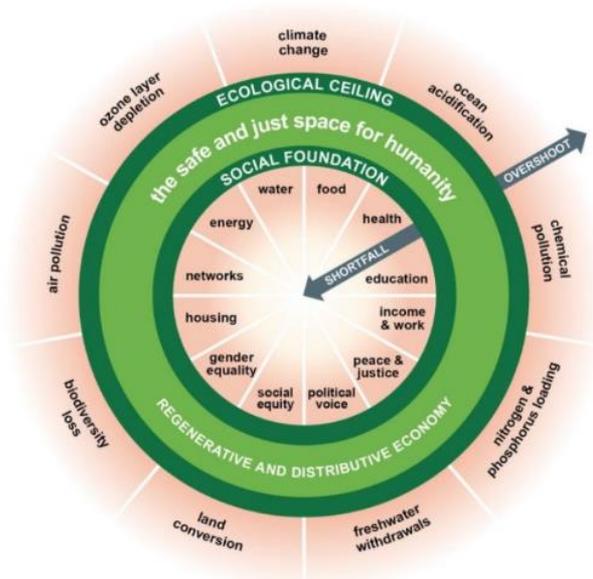
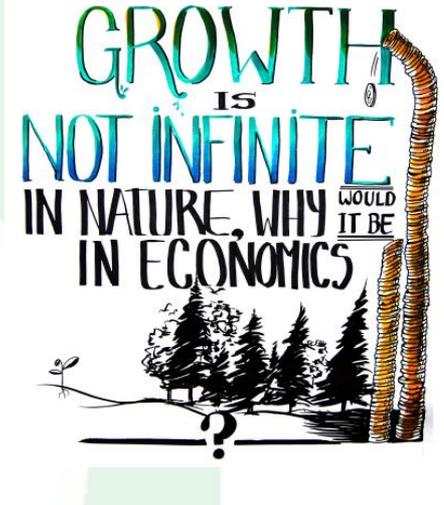
- Directly correlated with local and global environmental harms, human health impacts and conflicts
- EU highly reliant on imports (20%), most coming from poorer countries and regions



- More material consumption = more waste
- Relatively low potential for recycling and circularity

How do we reduce material consumption?

- “Growth is culturally, politically and institutionally ingrained”, EEA
- Material wealth beyond a certain level does not lead to corresponding increases in happiness, well-being or health.
- Not up to individuals and behavioural change. The responsibility is on governments to drive the transition away from the growth-based economic system



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A binding EU material footprint reduction target

- In EU Circular Economy Action Plan monitoring framework, Parliament asking for targets.
- We have emissions reduction targets for climate, we need the same for material reduction in circular economy policies – they must be designed with this as the goal.
- Complex task but doable and necessary!



Degrowth policies in action – at all levels

- Shrink sectors of economic activity that are ecologically destructive and offer little if any social benefit, can grow other socially useful and less environmentally impactful areas. Some examples:
 1. Transport – greater safe bike infrastructure, accessible public transport, reduction in private cars and air travel
 2. Infrastructure – resisting new developments e.g. consumer-culture driven like shopping centres; roads; opening of new mines
 3. Products – reusable packaging in DRS; ensuring right to repair; stopping planned obsolescence; strictly regulating the advertisement industry

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