



Blog

CLIMATE POLICY (NON)SUPPORT: PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE AND NATURE PROTECTION

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Climate change has become one of the most pressing issues requiring global cooperation. Nonetheless, the rise of climate scepticism and the popularisation of anti-climate perspectives in the past few years have deteriorated the progress towards reaching net zero emissions. One of the reasons for higher support of anti-climate politics is the public perception of climate policies. They tend to be seen as top-down projects disconnected from everyday concerns of ordinary people, even though the reaching of climate targets benefits everyone. This blog aims to address the issue of communication and misaligned perspectives on what it means to deal with climate change. This will be done by a short case study on Slovakia which the Climate Change Performance Index ranks as a 'low climate performer' at 47th place (CCPI 2026).

The relationship of oneself with nature

1. Protectors of nature

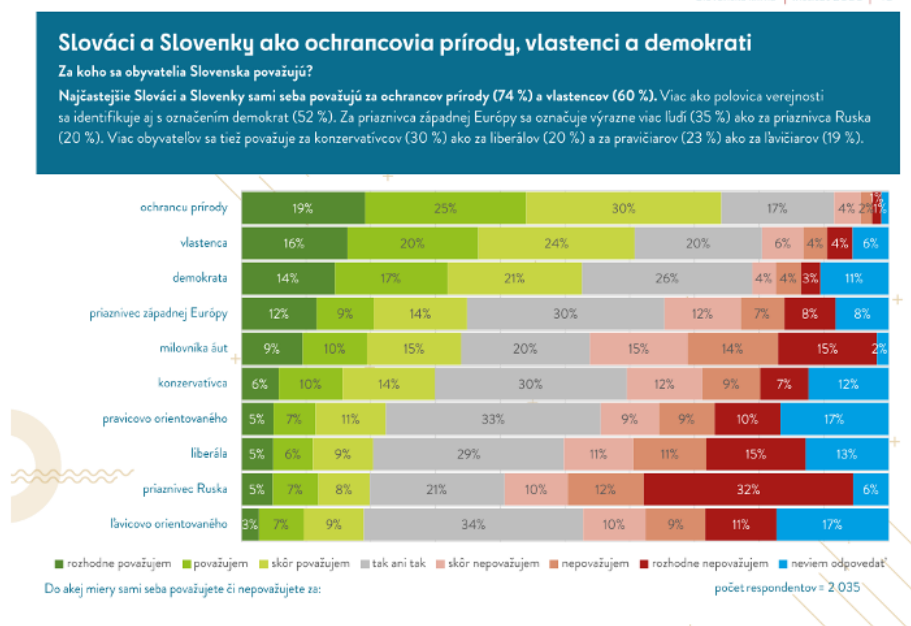
Institut 2050, which aims to understand people's positions on specific issues in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, also looks at personal identification of oneself within the respective Czech and Slovak societies. They pose the following question: "To what extent do you consider or not consider yourself to be..." one of the following options (Institut 2050 2025, 48).

Slovaks consider themselves to be first and foremost the protectors of nature, with 74% identifying themselves in this way in 2025 (Institut 2050 2025, 48). **In second place, Slovaks perceive themselves as patriots, and in third place as democrats, in line with the 2023 results.**

In Slovakia, out of all available descriptions of one's identity, Slovaks consider themselves to be first and foremost the protectors of nature, with 74% identifying

themselves in this way in 2025 (Institút 2050 2025, 48). Therefore, about 3 in 4 people in Slovakia would consider themselves as such. The percentage even slightly increased from 2023, when 72 % of Slovaks considered themselves as protectors of nature (Institút 2050 2023, 7). In second place, Slovaks perceive themselves as patriots, and in third place as democrats, in line with the 2023 results. For context, in the neighbouring Czech Republic most people would consider themselves to be first European (74%), then as patriots (71%) and only then as protectors of nature (64%). While this is still the majority of the country, the number is much lower than in Slovakia. In addition, 45% of Slovaks believe deterioration of nature is one of the most serious problems of the world, a much higher number than that of the EU average (33%) (European Commission 2025).

Graph 1
(Institút 2050 2025, 48)



2. Nature connectedness

In the past few years, increased attention has been given to nature connectedness

While there are multiple definitions of what nature connectedness means, it essentially describes a person's emotional and cultural connection to nature, particularly regarding a person's perception of being one with nature (Richardson et al. 2026).

and its effects on the support of pro-environmental sentiments in climate research. While there are multiple definitions of what nature connectedness means, it essentially describes a person's emotional and cultural connection to nature, particularly regarding a person's perception of being *one with nature* (Richardson et al. 2026). Simply put, a person with higher nature connectedness would consider himself/herself as being a part of nature, rather than nature being

something separate from oneself.

It is widely accepted that higher levels of nature connectedness in society have a causal effect on pro-environmental behaviour (Richardson et al. 2026) and can aid in better health and emotional wellbeing (Mikusiński et al. 2023), while lower levels of nature connectedness are associated with biodiversity loss (Richardson et al. 2026). Therefore, efforts to increase nature-connectedness of populations should be implemented, as they have an impact on the support of pro-environmental action.

According to a large-scale study on nature connectedness, with almost 60 thousand respondents across 61 countries, Slovakia was put on the 31st place and is definitely not among the most nature-connected nations (Richardson et al. 2026). Within the EU, the top three countries are Croatia, Bulgaria and Latvia. With the exception of France, all other Western countries are one of the least nature-

connected nations, including the UK, the Netherlands, Canada, Germany or Spain. Surprisingly, even countries which are well renowned for their nature, such as Norway or Switzerland, take the 51st and 52nd place, far behind Slovakia.

Support of climate policy and action

Based on the data shown above, Slovaks largely consider themselves to be protectors of nature on one hand but lack nature connectedness on the other.

Based on the data shown above, Slovaks largely consider themselves to be protectors of nature on one hand but lack nature connectedness on the other. Furthermore, Slovakia is far from being a leader in climate policies (CCPI 2026), and therefore, there seems to be an

inconsistency between the self-identification of oneself as a nature protector and a lack of action in nature protection.

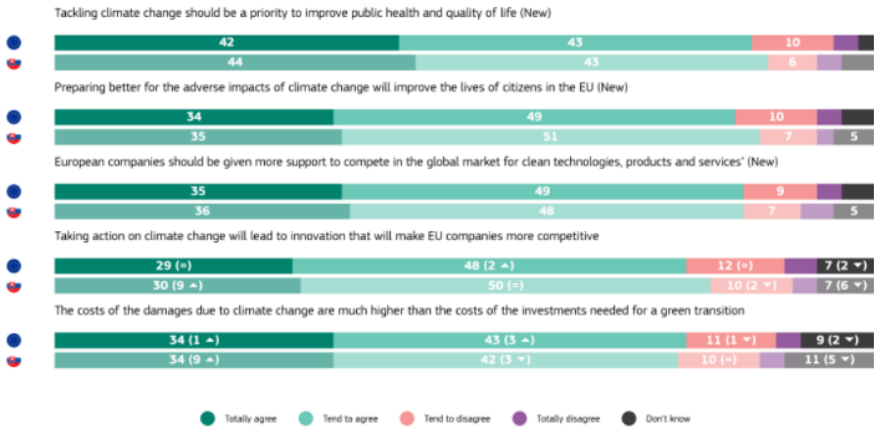
This is further supported by the Eurobarometer on Climate Change in 2025 - only 39% of Slovaks consider climate change to be one of the most serious problems facing the world, a contrast from the 47% in the EU (European Commission 2025). Nonetheless, when asked about what they think of climate change specifically, a staggering 84 % of Slovaks believe climate change is a serious problem, similar to 85% in the EU (European Commission 2025). The European Investment Bank even says 93% of Slovaks believe it is important to adapt to climate, but nonetheless only place it in the 8th spot in terms of challenges that the country is facing (European Investment Bank 2024). This shows that while people consider it an important issue, they would identify other problems as more grave.

Interestingly, other numbers show that by a few percentage points, Slovak citizens are almost always more concerned about climate than the EU average when asked

about specific attitudes to fighting climate change, as seen in Graph 2 below (European Commission 2025). When asked whether people in Slovakia support the EU becoming climate neutral by 2050, 81% of EU support, while only 75 % of Slovaks support this (European Commission 2025). Furthermore, two in three Slovaks have personally taken action to fight climate change in the past six months, compared to three in five people in the EU (European Commission 2025). In Slovakia, people are more likely to separate waste and recycle, to reduce the use of disposable items, or to insulate their home to cut down energy consumption (European Commission 2025). Therefore, there are many eco-friendly practises across the population.

ATTITUDES TO FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

QD4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (%)



Graph 2 (European Commission 2025)

Despite this, the EU Green Deal does not have significant support in Slovakia (Institut 2050 2023) and the country does not rank well in climate policies either (CCPI 2026). Only one in 10 Slovaks are familiar with the EU Green Deal, and only 1 in 100 are completely familiar – 89% either do not know anything, or very little (Institut 2050 2023, 20). There are more positive opinions on it than negative, but the biggest portion of the population cannot judge either way (Institut 2050 2025, 14). Furthermore, according to both 2023 and 2025 data from Institut 2050, there is a lack of information and understanding among Slovaks about climate in general (Institut 2050 2023, 13; Institut 2050 2025, 31).

Possible explanations and solutions

Based on the findings shown above, the self-identification of a nature protector does not fully align with support of climate policies and nature connectedness. There also seems to be a discrepancy between the protection of 'nature' and the protection of 'climate'. One of the reasons could be the politization of certain topics or policies, such as the Green Deal. Another is the lack of knowledge and understanding of climate change, of climate policies, and of the effects of certain phenomena which degrade our climate (Institut 2050 2025, 31). Policy communication should frame climate action in terms of nature protection, speaking to what Slovaks already align with deeply. People that perceive themselves as protectors of nature should be natural allies for climate action, which means that the two identities should be connected.

This blog recommends change in communication strategies regarding climate in Slovakia, as well as in countries with similar patterns. While there is a high level of self-identifying as protectors of nature, high nature connectedness is missing. Despite Slovak nature playing a strong part of the country's national identity and culture, nature is for many no longer a part of their day-to-day life and therefore they do not perceive themselves as necessarily being a part of nature themselves. Rather, nature is something to go to during the weekend, something to protect, not something to live in and to be a part of. As a result, nature connectedness remains relatively low while the importance of nature protection remains high.

This could be different for people living in areas with more physical connections to nature, especially in rural areas, for farmers, foresters and similar, as nature plays a part in their daily life. Nonetheless, as protection of nature seems to be perceived as a different issue to climate protection, due to a lack of knowledge and politization. The surveys themselves show conflicting data, highlighting the need to increase understanding of the connection between nature, climate and policies

which protect both. Additionally, fear of high costs or certain policies and perceptions of a lack of affordability of certain decisions decrease support of such actions, as a large portion of citizens in Slovakia struggle to make ends meet (Institut 2050 2025, 49-50). This is supported by the European Investment bank, according to which two thirds of Slovak citizens think that a climate neutral economy is possible only if social and economic inequalities are resolved first (European Investment Bank 2023).

Another suggestion is to establish superordinate identity groups and find common ground regarding climate policy (Fielding and Hornsey 2016) e.g. focusing on nature protection and its presence in climate policy communication. This can help bridge the gap between distant groups regarding climate policy. Additionally, there should be aims to connect identity with pro-environmental outcomes, for example by reminding people of their previous pro-environmental actions, with which they can realise they are themselves pro-environment (Fielding and Hornsey 2016). In the context of this blog, this can be highlighting gardening, farming or even mushrooming, which could highlight the connection with soil and seasonal eating habits. As already indicated, many pro-environmental actions are already well developed in Slovakia, such as recycling, reducing the use of disposable items, and home insulating (European Commission 2025).

Overall, climate policy in Slovakia should be communicated as an extension of Slovaks identification with nature, bridging the gap between the understanding of the two. Connecting the language of climate action to that of nature protection can be a fruitful mechanism to incite higher climate policy support.

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