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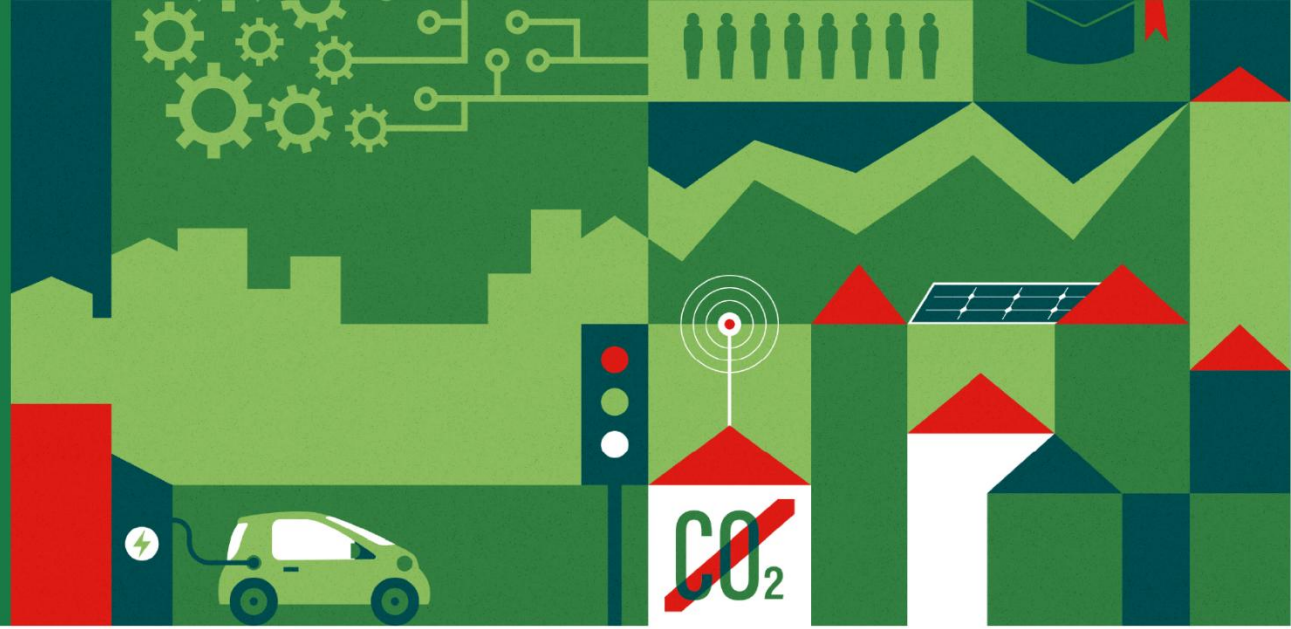


TRACK T4. SpSe5 - Intersecting the Multiple Scales of Climate Justice: Mapping Inclusive Adaptation and Just Fossil Fuel Transitions

# Data from the Margins: Intersectional Climate Justice and the Role of Personal Narratives


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SensJus

A SUD

le Rotte del Clima
Crisi climatica e migrazioni: diritti in azione.

ecsa European Citizen Science Association

CITIZEN SCIENCE ITALIA CSI

PASTIS Padova Science, Technology and Innovation Studies Research Unit

Università degli Studi di Padova

# Re-thinking evidence in climate litigation

- Scientific evidence is crucial in addressing climate issues and shaping climate action including in court
- Yet, its use raises key epistemological questions: *Who determines what constitutes valid evidence, and whose voices are heard or excluded?*

**The role of personal narratives—first-hand accounts of lived climate experiences—as potential game-changers in the production of climate justice data.**

# Technocratic approach to evidence in Western climate litigation

More than 2600 cases are reported by the Sabin Center's Climate Change Litigation Database (Setzer & Higham 2024); Peel & Lin (2019) pinpoint a 'technocratic' approach in climate litigation in the Global North

# The mobilisation of law through courts by civil society

*Civil society actors have turned to litigation* to challenge specific laws, policies and projects that governments or corporations have enacted (Sindico et al 2021); Vanhala (2022) studied *the mobilization of law* - which includes climate litigation - as a tactic deployed by social actors to address environmental problems

# The epistemic dimension of climate litigation

Litigation practices have been framed as “deeply institutionalized modes of achieving pragmatic closures around epistemic claims and controversies that science alone could not have settled” (Jasanoff 2011, 309)

# The poly-centric nature and uncertainties underpinning the climate challenge make it ‘legally disruptive’ (Fisher et al 2017, 173)

- The IPCC (2023, 52) recently stressed that *peoples-led movements and climate litigation* are playing a pivotal role in shaping the climate agenda.

- Scientists are calling for the need to *tackle climate data gaps* (The Platform on Disaster Displacement 2018).

- Authors argued for the opportunity of *combining site-specific qualitative data and big data to grasp climate impacts* (Boas et al. 2020), also referring specifically to evidence in climate litigation (Lloyd & Shepherd 2021).

- Climate litigation can be regarded as an *arena for 'co-producing' a shared understanding* of climate change (Fisher et al 2017, 198) for action.

***Quantitative climate data does not necessarily reflect the lived experiences of people daily exposed to the effects of climate change and may miss important knowledge that is crucial to take action.***

- Progresses in climate science are key for climate litigation, but there are *other types of compelling evidence* that could help ground otherwise abstract claims of present and future climate impacts (Berti Suman & Burnette 2024).

- As climate change is a potentially widespread threat (Wewerinke-Singh 2019), courts may struggle to find localized and individual harms in light of existing human rights systems.

- Personal accounts of climate impacts could serve to courts **I) to decide upon matters related to standing** (i.e., the ability of a party to show an injury to their own legal interests); **II) to adjudicate harms**, which is particularly challenging especially in human rights-based litigation (Keller & Heri 2022); **III) to define *adaptation strategies*** based on civic knowledge shared.

Individual experiences of climate impacts - currently not included in official climate science - could *enter the litigation under the form of 'personal narratives',* contributing to evidence formation.

Existing research in relation to environmental pollution has demonstrated that civic evidence can prove harms in court, filling evidentiary gaps (Berti Suman 2024; Sensing for Justice 2025).

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**A place for people's knowledge in climate evidence: Exploring civic evidence in climate litigation**

Anna Berti Suman, Amelia Burnette

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*Herrera Carrion et al. v. Ministry of the Environment et al.*

*Sagoonick et al. v. State of Alaska*

*Kanuk et al. v. State of Alaska*

*KlimaSeniorinnen et al. v. Switzerland*

*Duarte et al. v. Portugal et al.*

*Armando Carvalho et al. v EU*

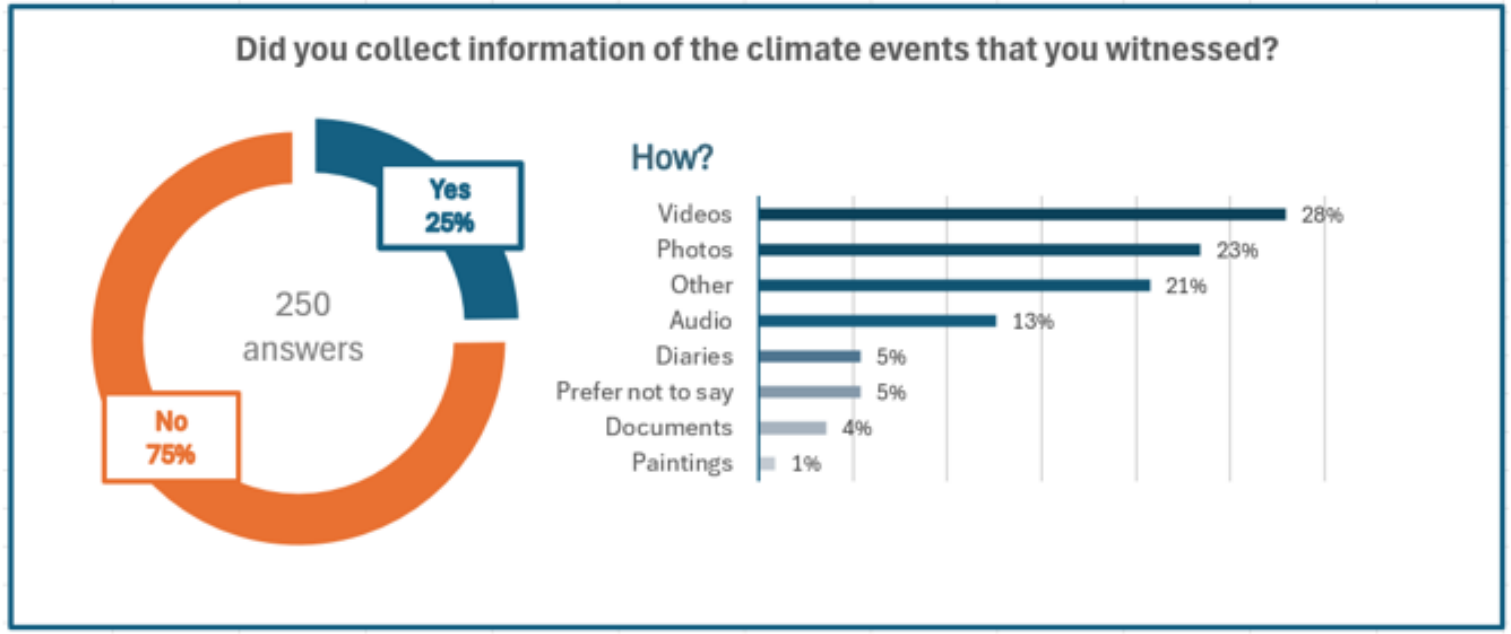
*Sacchi, et al. v. Argentina, et al.*

***Teitiota v New Zealand***

***Daniel Billy et al. v Australia ('Torres Strait')***

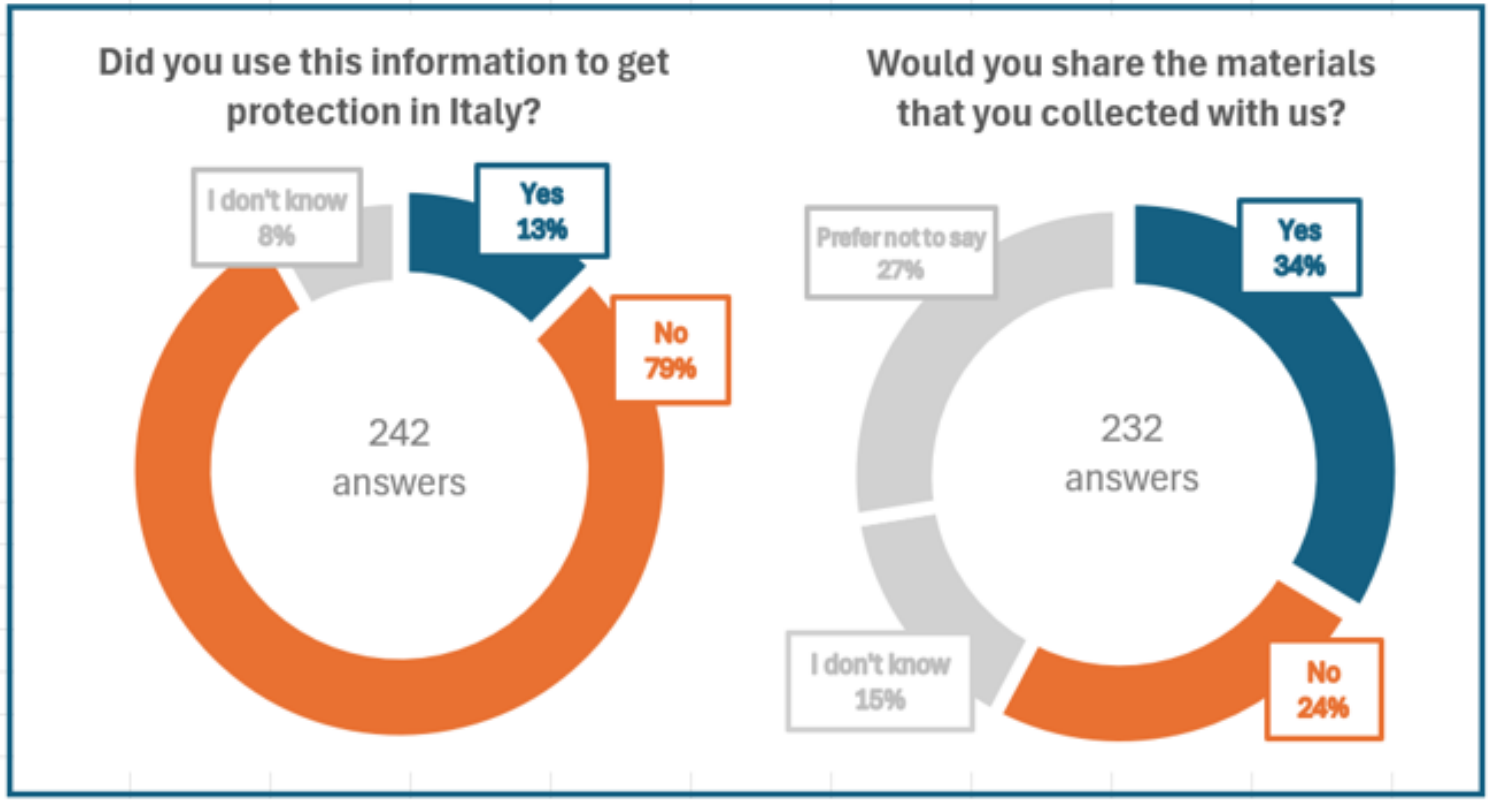
Contribution to ‘Le Rotte del Clima’ Project which researched the understanding that migrants arriving in Italy have of climatic determinants that may have influenced their decision to migrate: *migration as adaptation*

On the 348 potential climate migrants, respondents showed familiarity with using digital means and channels to record and share information, including on climate and environmental stressors (Berti Suman 2025)




Narratives of lived climate impacts emerged in the survey's free fields, for example the following quote: "To ask for protection in Italy I told about the event that destroyed my house during a flood. They accepted my request to stay in Italy in order to raise money for my family in Bangladesh".

However, rarely this information has been used for obtaining protection in the country of arrival, both as the person *did not consider it relevant* and due to *encountered obstacles*, such as the loss of the device on which the information was recorded. Half of the respondents to the specific survey question would be *willing to share* the gathered information with the interviewers.



## The inclusion of personal narratives:

- can address the limitations of an overly technocratic approach to climate litigation, which risks detaching ordinary people from courts;

- can promote the agency and participation in climate litigation of those people most affected by climate change;

- can be a way to emotionally relate to climate change (Berti Suman & Petersmann 2021, 229), improving public understanding of the problem (Dillon & Craig 2023) and turning this awareness into action (Nosek 2018).

# Conclusions: An STS reflection

- Through the lens of **epistemic justice and intersectionality** of climate impacts, we argue that incorporating diverse knowledge systems—via citizen science, storytelling, and participatory approaches—is vital for planning a just transition.
- We argue that **methodological pluralism**, combining qualitative and quantitative data, offers a pathway towards more inclusive and legitimate climate action.
- By centring **data from the margins**, climate litigation becomes not only a forum for legal redress but a contested space where knowledge, authority, and justice are actively renegotiated.

# The project PersoNa: Persona

Fund: FIS-2023-01203 (1.3m €, Fondo Italiano per la Scienza – Starting Grant)

Duration: 1° February 2026-31 January 2029

Title: “PersoNa – Personal Narratives in Climate Litigation”

*What can judges learn about climate change from climate-affected people? How is this knowledge entering court cases? Which effects does the narration of lived climate impacts have in such cases?*

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# The project PersoNa:

- will study systematically, from a sociological perspective, **the emerging use of personal narratives in climate litigation and their impacts** on the actors involved in these cases but also on broader societal engagement with climate litigation;

- will explore **under which conditions personal narratives of climate-affected people are being given credibility of evidence** to ground standing and/or demonstrate harms in climate cases, and to identify the procedural and substantive barriers and the possible adverse effects.

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