

# World faces disastrous 2.7C temperature rise on current climate plans, UN warns

**Report says countries must strengthen climate ambitions after wasting chance to build back better after Covid**



A power plant and traffic in New York, US. The report says countries' current pledges would reduce carbon by only about 7.5% by 2030. Photograph: Justin Lane/EPA

**Fiona Harvey** *Environment correspondent*

Tue 26 Oct 2021 19.06 BST

The world is squandering the opportunity to “build back better” from the Covid-19 pandemic, and faces disastrous temperature rises of at least 2.7C if countries fail to strengthen their climate pledges, according to a **report from the UN**.

Tuesday's publication warns that countries' current pledges would reduce carbon by only about 7.5% by 2030, far less than the **45% cut scientists say is needed to limit global temperature rises to 1.5C**, the aim of the **Cop26 summit** that opens in Glasgow this Sunday.

António Guterres, the UN secretary-general, described the findings as a “thundering wake up call” to world leaders, while experts called for drastic action against fossil fuel companies.

Although more than 100 countries have promised to reach net zero emissions around mid-century, this would not be enough to stave off climate disaster, according to the UN emissions report, which examines the shortfall between countries’ intentions and actions needed on the climate. Many of the net zero pledges were found to be vague, and unless accompanied by stringent cuts in emissions this decade would allow global heating of a potentially catastrophic extent.

Guterres said: “The heat is on, and as the contents of this report show, the leadership we need is off. Far off. Countries are squandering a **massive opportunity** to invest Covid-19 fiscal and recovery resources in sustainable, cost-saving, planet-saving ways. As world leaders prepare for Cop26, this report is another thundering wake-up call. How many do we need?”

Inger Andersen, the executive director of the UN Environment Programme (Unep), which produced the report, said: “Climate change is no longer a future problem. It is a now problem. To stand a chance of limiting global warming to 1.5C, we have eight years to almost halve greenhouse gas emissions: eight years to make the plans, put in place the policies, implement them and ultimately deliver the cuts. The clock is ticking loudly.”

Emissions fell by about 5.4% last year **during Covid lockdowns**, the report found, but **only about a fifth of the spending** on economic recovery was geared to efforts that would cut carbon. This failure to “**build back better**” despite promises by governments around the world cast doubt on the world’s willingness to make the economic shift necessary to tackle the climate crisis, the UN said.

In the run-up to **Cop26**, countries were supposed to submit national plans on emissions cuts – called **nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** – for the next decade, a requirement under the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

But the Unep report found only half of countries had submitted new NDCs, with big emitters including China and India still to publish their plans, and several

other governments – including Russia, Brazil, Australia and Mexico – had presented weak plans that were no improvement on their 2015 Paris pledges.

Joanna Depledge, of the Cambridge Centre for Environment, Energy and Natural Resource Governance, said: “The picture painted by the report is grim: less than half of the NDCs are genuinely more ambitious than the first round submitted in 2015 or 2016.

“There is an ambition gap between country pledges and the cuts needed to limit temperature rise ... and even more troubling is an implementation gap – many large emitters are not even on track to meet their existing pledges.”

**Longer-term net zero pledges** for mid-century have now been adopted by 49 countries and the EU, putting about half of global emissions, half of GDCP and about a third of the global population under net zero pledges, according to the report, which took into account pledges made before the end of September.

But Andersen said net zero promises from governments were often vague or ambiguous. If these could be “made robust and implemented fully”, the world could shave 0.5C off the projected warming of 2.7C that Unep predicted, she said.

Joeri Rogelj, the director of research at the Grantham Institute, Imperial College London, said: “If implemented, current net zero targets would lower temperature projections for the next century by about half a degree – bringing central estimates close to 2C – yet still not in line with holding global warming well below 2C, let alone 1.5C.

“On the other hand, the report also highlights that in many cases countries’ near-term targets are not yet putting emissions a clear track towards achieving their net zero goals. This casts doubt on whether these targets will ever be achieved.”

Ed Miliband, the shadow business secretary, said: “It’s time for the government to start telling the truth about how far away we are from where we need to be in this decisive decade. This report makes clear there can be no shifting of the goalposts from action this decade to targets in the middle of this century. If we follow this course, we will fail to keep global warming to 1.5C and betray future generations.

“The window for action is closing, and it is critical that in the budget and the days ahead, the prime minister and the government step up to make **Cop26** the summit of climate delivery, not climate delay.”

The emissions gap report also highlighted **methane**, a powerful greenhouse gas that arises from animal husbandry, natural gas extraction and waste. The US, the EU and more than 20 other countries have **signed a pledge to reduce methane** globally by 30% this decade.

Unep said methane was the second biggest contributor to temperature rises, after carbon, and that about 20% of annual methane emissions could be **cut at little or no cost**, for instance through better management of natural gas drilling, stopping flaring and capping old wells.

Myles Allen, a professor of geosystem science at the University of Oxford, has championed the idea of forcing fossil fuel companies and other big emitters to pay for the permanent storage of the carbon they emit, through a **“carbon takeback obligation”**, using carbon capture and storage technology.

He said: “On current progress, we’ll close the 2030 emissions gap some time in the 2080s. There is no appetite for reducing fossil fuel consumption globally at the rate required. The only remaining option is to scale up safe and permanent disposal of carbon dioxide, such as storing it back underground, instead of fly-tipping it into the atmosphere.”

## Climate change: UN emissions gap report a 'thundering wake-up call'

By Matt McGrath  
Environment correspondent  
Published  
6 hours ago

**National plans to cut carbon fall far short of what's needed to avert dangerous climate change, according to the UN Environment Programme.**



Current plans to cut carbon emissions don't work quickly enough, says the UN

Their **Emissions Gap report** says country pledges will fail to keep the global temperature under 1.5C this century.

The Unep analysis suggests the world is on course to warm around 2.7C with hugely destructive impacts.

But there is hope that, if long term net-zero goals are met, temperatures can be significantly reined in.

- **Attenborough in 'act now' warning over climate**
- **Make people fly less, climate change advisers say**
- **Australia's 2050 net zero pledge draws criticism**

Just a few days before **COP26** opens in Glasgow and another scientific report on climate change is "another thundering wake-up call", according to the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres



Street art in Glasgow where COP26 begins in a few days time

This week, we've already had a study from the WMO showing that **warming gases were at a new high last year**, despite the pandemic.

Now in its 12th year, this Emissions Gap report looks at the nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) or carbon-cutting plans that countries have submitted to the UN ahead of COP. These pledges run up to 2030 and have been submitted by 120 countries. Unep has also taken account of other commitments to cut warming gases not yet formally submitted in an NDC. The report finds that when added together, the plans cut greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 by around 7.5% compared to the previous pledges made five years ago. This is nowhere near enough to keep the 1.5C temperature threshold within sight, say the scientists who compiled the study.

To keep 1.5C alive would require 55% cuts by the same 2030 date. That means the current plans would need to have seven times the level of ambition to remain under that limit.



"To stand a chance of limiting global warming to 1.5C, we have eight years to almost halve greenhouse gas emissions: eight years to make the plans, put in place the policies, implement them and ultimately deliver the cuts," said Inger Andersen, executive director of Unep.

"The clock is ticking loudly."

According to the authors, the current pledges would see the world warm by 2.7C this century, a scenario that Antonio Guterres calls a "climate catastrophe".

He believes the report highlights the failures of political leaders. "The emissions gap is the result of a leadership gap," he said at the launch of the study.

"But leaders can still make this a turning point to a greener future instead of a tipping point to climate catastrophe."

As Mr Guterres suggests, there are some hopeful signs in the report.



Fires in California are continuing to burn, made worse by a changing climate

Around 50 countries plus the EU have pledged a net zero target for the middle of this century.

These strategies cover over half of greenhouse gas emissions. The Unep analysis finds that if these plans were implemented fully, this could shave 0.5C off the temperature rise by 2100. This would bring the global temperature level down to 2.2C, which would see dramatic and deadly impacts from warming but would be a step in the right direction from where the world is currently headed.

The problem, though, is that many of these net zero goals are ambiguous, say the authors - particularly among the world's 20 richest nations, where a dozen long-term plans are said to be quite vague.

Many delay significant cuts until after 2030, raising serious doubts about whether they can really deliver net zero just 20 years later.

Another hopeful sign relates to methane. The report also says there is great potential to make progress on these emissions, which are the second largest source of warming.

Up to 20% of these emissions from fossil fuels, from waste and from agriculture could be curbed at low or no cost.



Boats on a lake where the water level has fallen significantly due to drought

However, the opportunity to develop a far greener world as the world recovers from Covid is in danger of being lost, say the authors.

They find that around 20% of recovery investments will support renewables and the green economy.

"The huge sums spent to recover economies from Covid-19 are a once-in-a-generation opportunity to boost low-carbon technologies and industries. In most cases, this opportunity is not being taken," said Brian O'Callaghan, project manager of the Oxford University Economic Recovery Project, and an author on the Unep report.

"This is a particular slap in the face for vulnerable nations who are suffering the worst consequences of climate change...we remain without a commitment from the highest emitters to cover the loss and damage that they have brought on the world."



Steam rises from a coal-fired power plant in Adamsville, Alabama.

# The world promised to cut greenhouse gas emissions. These countries aren't meeting their targets.

By John Keefe and [Rachel Ramirez](#), CNN

Updated 1350 GMT (2150 HKT) October 26, 2021

**(CNN)** Nearly 200 countries have pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions to prevent the worst consequences of the climate crisis, but there is still a huge gap between what's been promised and what scientists say is needed, according to a report by the UN Environment Programme.

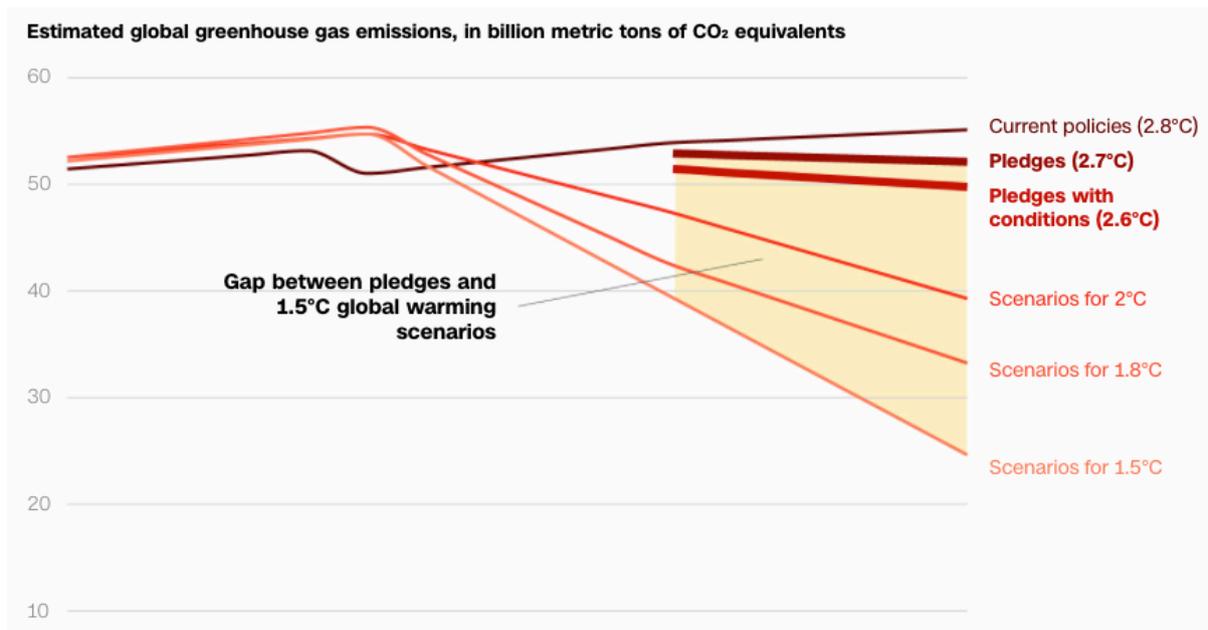
With just five days left until leaders meet at the UN's COP26 climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland, dozens of nations have not yet officially updated their pledges to reduce emissions, as they are supposed to do under the rules of the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Of the G20 countries, which account for 80% of the world's emissions, only six nations have formally increased their targets. The report also found that six G20 nations, including the United States, never met their old targets. The others were Canada, Australia, Brazil, South Korea and Mexico.

The planet has already warmed 1.2 degrees, [scientists say](#). The latest set of global climate pledges, according to the report released Tuesday, fall far short of what's necessary to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels — a critical threshold that scientists say the world should remain below.

## Nations have pledged to cut emissions, but UN says it's not enough

Current promises to reduce greenhouse gas emissions put the planet on track to warm 2.7°C over pre-industrial levels, according to a United Nations report. That's much hotter than the 1.5°C target scientists say we should stay below.



The report found that new and updated pledges on emissions will only cut an additional 7.5% by 2030, but a 55% cut is needed to meet the goal of containing warming to 1.5 degrees.

Under countries' current targets, the world will continue to warm to 2.7 degrees, according to UNEP.

"Countries have stretched, but they've not stretched enough," Inger Andersen, executive director of the UNEP, told CNN. "Many of them sort of kick the can down the road, and we need to see not pledges anymore we actually need to see real action."

The annual "emissions gap" report outlines the difference between what countries have pledged and what more needs to be done. To limit warming to 1.5 degrees, UNEP reports the world needs to slash current emissions in half in the next eight years.

"We're not nearly where we want to be," Andersen said. "We want to be optimistic and say the window is still open, we can still make it — but it's closing very fast. The reality is we must make this happen in this current decade."

Under the [2015 Paris Agreement](#), countries submit "Nationally Determined Contributions," or NDCs, a term that will come up often as world leaders and climate negotiators gather in [Glasgow for COP26](#) — a UN-brokered climate summit — beginning October 31. The NDCs lay out each country's planned cuts in emissions in order to reach the Paris Agreement goal, which was to limit warming to at least 2 degrees, but ideally 1.5 degrees.

The UN's [interim NDC registry](#) shows there are currently 192 parties to the Paris Agreement, all of which have submitted their first NDCs. Eritrea and Iraq are the only countries that have not yet signed on to the Paris Agreement, but have submitted initial NDCs.

All eyes will be on wealthy G20 countries at COP26, particularly the world's largest fossil fuel emitters. The G20 countries are responsible for around 80% of the world's emissions, according to Andersen.

Three of the top emitters — the United States, India, and the European Union — have pledged to reduce their emissions by 2030. But [China has no plan](#) to reduce emissions before 2030, instead committing to reaching peak emissions by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2060.

## Emissions promises aren't enough to curb warming

As top greenhouse gas emitters, China, the United States, India and the European Union will be key to curtailing emissions.

Their current pledges — known as nationally determined contributions — aren't enough to keep the planet from warming to dangerous levels, according to the UN Environment Programme.

The emissions gap report comes on the heels of a summer packed with climate change-fueled disasters around the world: While the US has been battered by wildfires, worsened by [unrelenting drought](#), flooding events and [hurricanes](#), [China](#) and [Germany](#) experienced deadly flooding events as Southern Europe battled [wildfires of its own](#).

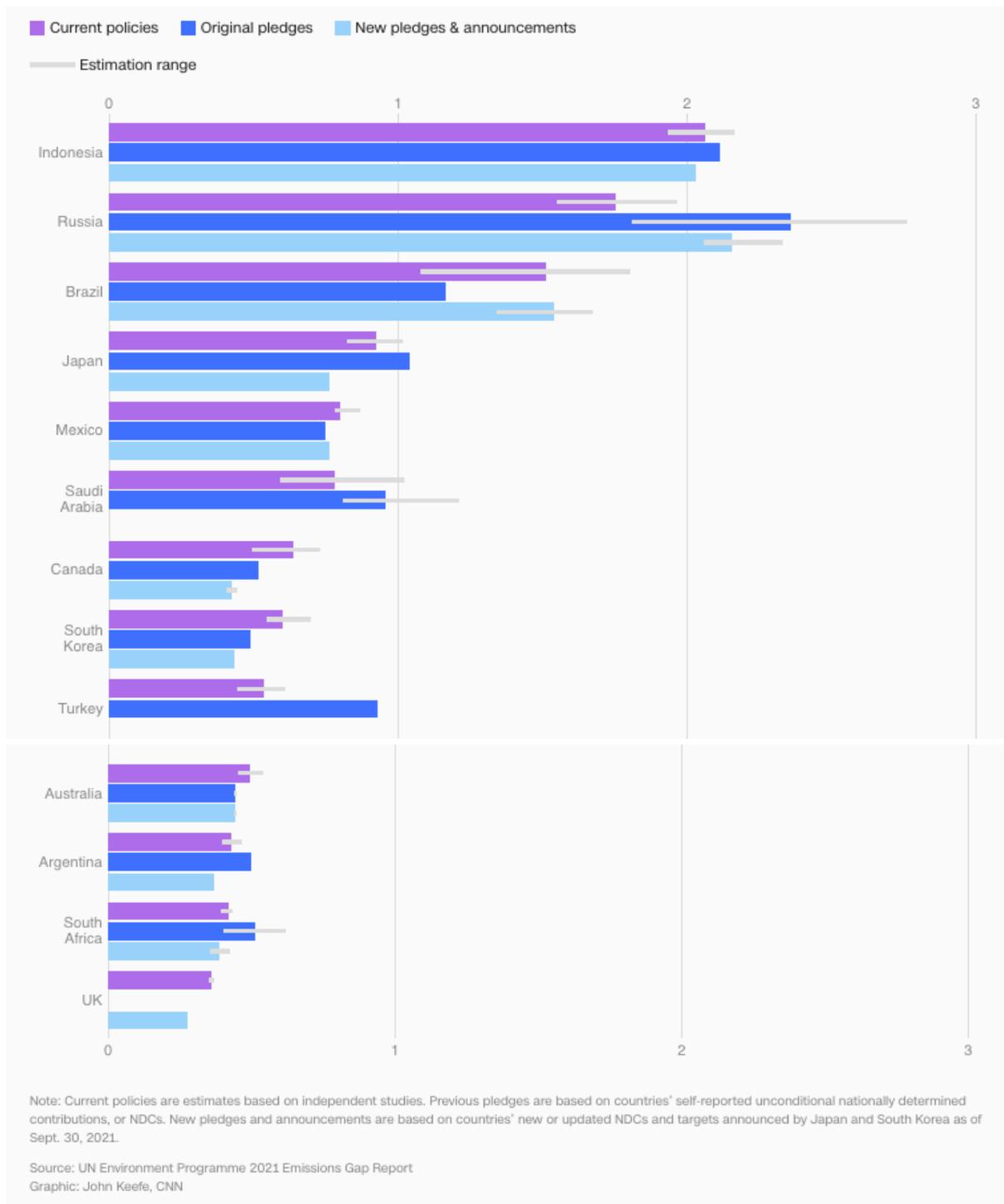
At the Major Economies Forum in September, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that the upcoming climate summit, during which world leaders will meet to discuss emissions targets, has a "[high risk of failure](#)."

"It is clear that everyone must assume their responsibilities," Guterres said.

Even UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose country is hosting COP26, said Monday that success at the talks will be "touch and go."

## **Smaller emitters also play a role**

The effort to slow global warming "will stand or fall" with the G20 group of nations, including those emitting less than the three largest and the EU, according to Inger Andersen, executive director of the UN Environment Programme, which published the latest report on nations' greenhouse-gas promises.



Some countries have announced other goals, including net-zero dates, but those targets are ambiguous and outside the official NDCs.

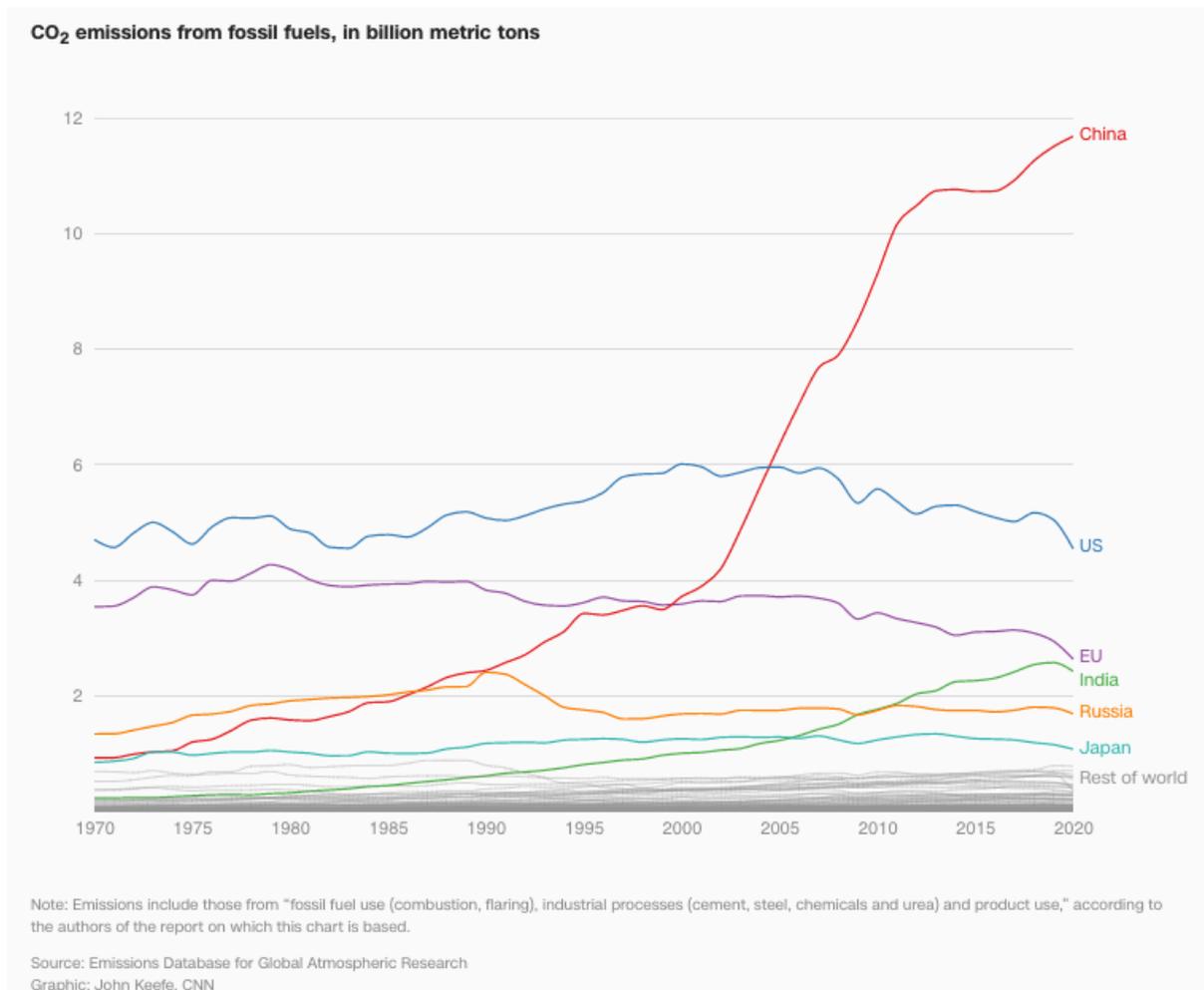
Achieving net-zero emissions, where the amount of greenhouse gas removed from the atmosphere equals what is emitted, is critical to global climate commitments. UNEP reports that these actions, if implemented, could potentially shave off a half a degree of warming.

Though tension between the two countries has been [running high](#), the US and China agreed in the spring to [cooperate on the climate crisis](#). Without accounting for population, China is the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, followed by the United States, the EU, India, Russia and Japan.

But smaller countries can also make an impact: Emissions from the rest of the world combined exceeds China's total output of carbon dioxide.

## China and the US have highest fossil fuel CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

The biggest emitters of greenhouse gases — of which carbon dioxide is the most prevalent — will likely be the focus of discussions at COP26.

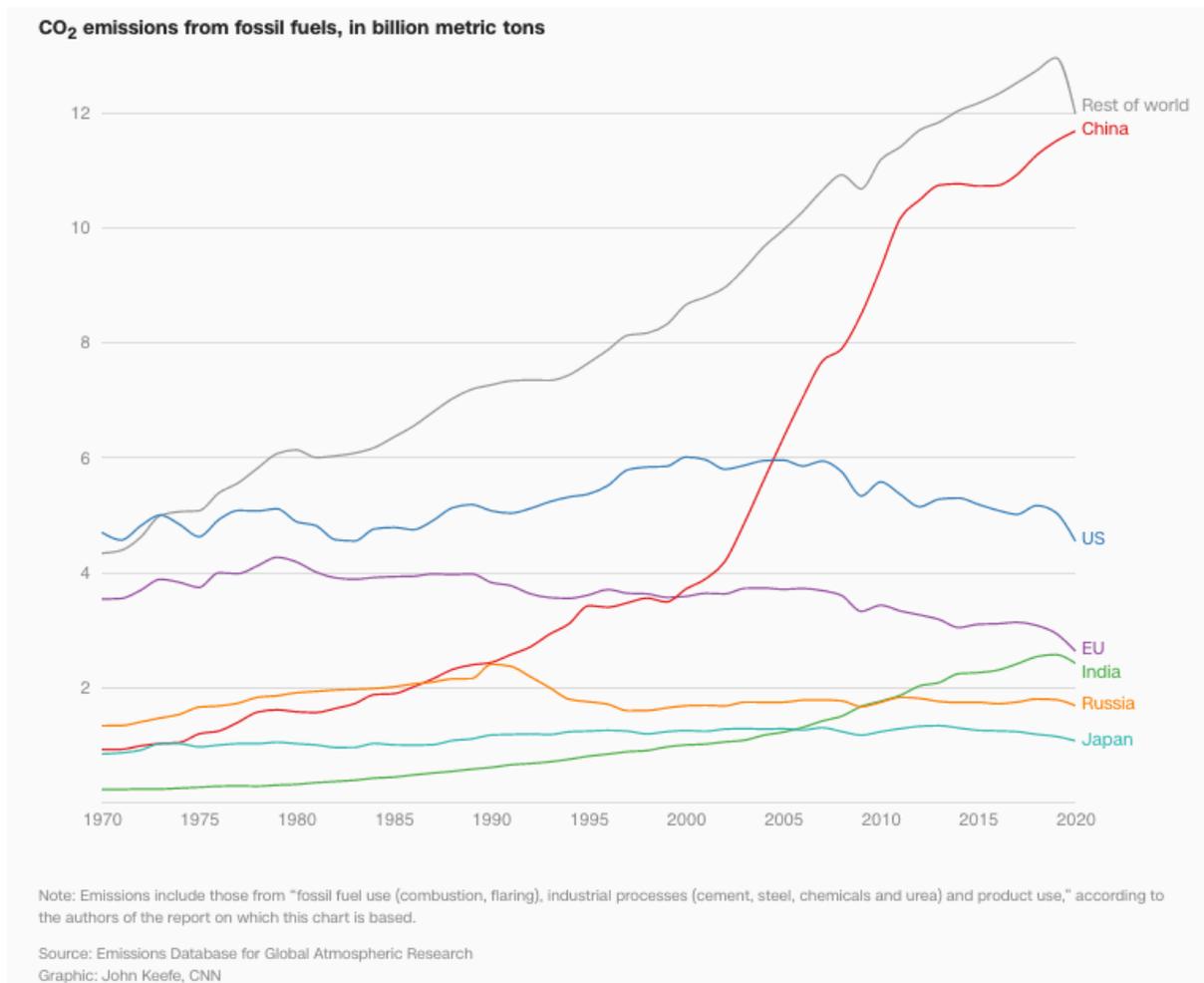


Developing nations are those most likely to endure the worse effects of the climate crisis, despite the small amount they contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions. Andersen said this is why [climate finance](#) — funding for developing nations to fight the climate crisis — is vital.

"Those in poorer countries are going to suffer the very most, so ensuring that there's a degree of equity and a degree of global solidarity for adaptation finance is also critical," she said.

## Combined, smaller countries emit the most fossil fuel CO<sub>2</sub>

Excluding from the European Union and other major emitters of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), the rest of the world emits more CO<sub>2</sub> combined than China.



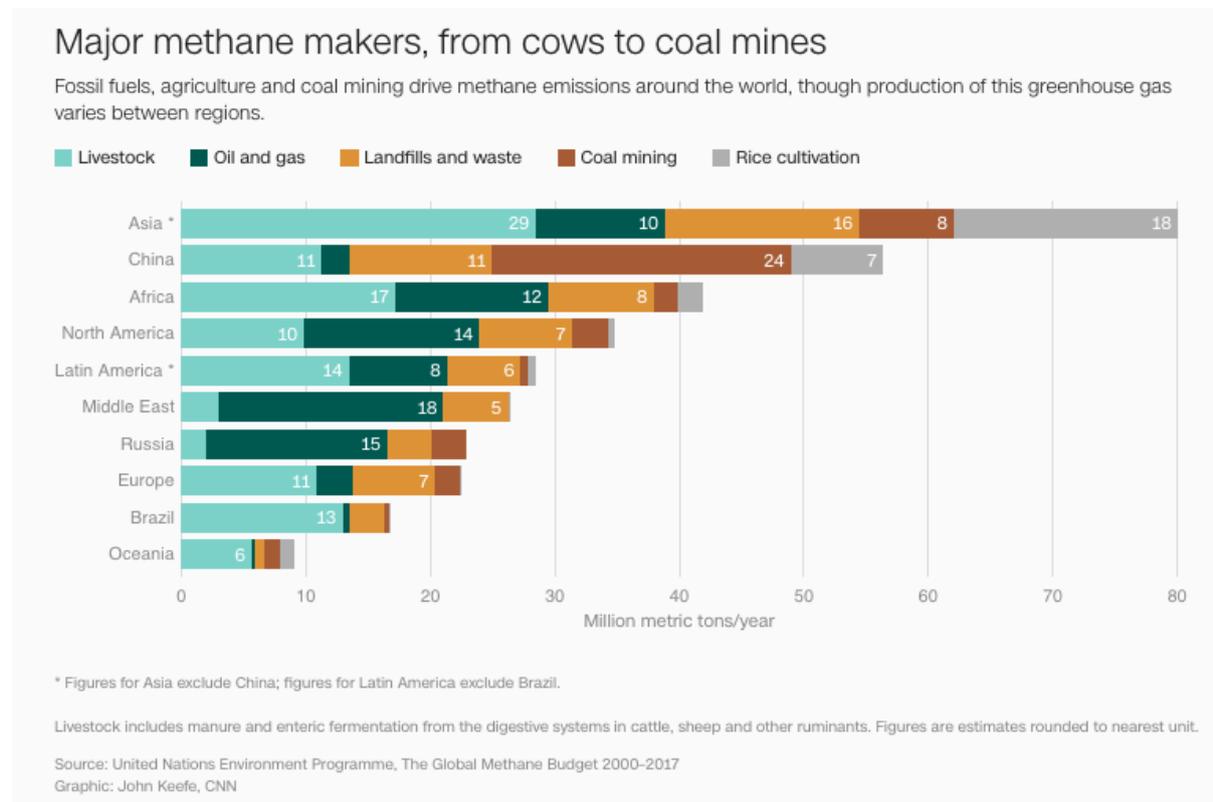
While slashing carbon dioxide emissions is critical, the emissions gap report also emphasized the need to control a more insidious culprit: methane.

Methane, an invisible, odorless gas that's more than 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide, is the main component of the natural gas people now use to fuel stoves and heat homes. It's also pumped into the atmosphere in large amounts by landfills, livestock and the oil and gas industry.

However, it has a shorter life span in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide — only 12 years compared to roughly hundreds for carbon dioxide. [Scientists say](#) that because of its short-term life, immediate and strict cuts to methane would limit warming faster than curbing carbon emissions.

# Major methane makers, from cows to coal mines

Fossil fuels, agriculture and coal mining drive methane emissions around the world, though production of this greenhouse gas varies between regions.



Andersen said in order to close the emissions gap, the world needs to reimagine and reinvent all energy and transportation sectors.

"It means a fundamental overhaul of the sectors," she said. "The good news is that there are solutions right there, at our fingertips. We just need a few nudges and policy guardrails that sets the tone."

And while there's still room to change the course of the climate crisis, Andersen added action is needed by 2030. Unless fossil fuel emissions are slashed quickly, extreme weather will increasingly be in Earth's future.

"This is possible. We can do this, but it won't happen without real leadership," Andersen said. "And that's where multilateral agreements matter. It will take the leadership of everyone, including the smallest of countries, but it will particularly take steady, firm, and supportive leadership by the G20 and other wealthy economies."