

Super-rich's carbon investment emissions 'equivalent to whole of France'

Analysis examining carbon impact of billionaires' investments published as Cop27 talks get under way



Some of the super-rich analysed did attempt to make positive impacts to tackle the climate crisis. Photograph: scphoto/Alamy

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The super-rich emit greenhouse gases at a level equivalent to the whole of France from their investments in carbon intensive businesses, according to analysis published on the opening of the Cop27 UN climate talks **in Egypt**.

Examining the carbon impact of the investments of 125 billionaires, the research found they had a collective \$2.4tn stake in 183 companies. On average each billionaire's investment emissions produced 3m tonnes of CO₂ a year; a million times more than the average emissions of 2.76 tonnes of CO₂ for those living in the bottom 90% of earners. In total the 125 members of the super-rich

emitted 393m tonnes of CO₂ a year – equivalent to the emissions of France, which has a population of 67 million.

The **report by Oxfam** called for the investments of the very rich to be regulated and for a wealth tax with a steep rate of top up on investments in polluting industries.

Danny Sriskandarajah, Oxfam GB's chief executive, said: "We need **Cop27** to expose and change the role that big corporates and their rich investors are playing in profiting from the pollution that is driving the global climate crisis. It is people in low income countries who've done the least to cause it who are suffering the most – as we are seeing with the devastating drought in east Africa and catastrophic floods in Pakistan."

The investments were held in the consumer industry, energy and materials, with an average of 14% of their investments in polluting industries, such as fossil fuels and cement. There was only one renewable energy company in the sample. Studies show that 50-70% of emissions from the super rich **come from their investments**.

Researchers made the calculations by starting with a list of the 220 richest people in the world, according to the Bloomberg billionaire list from August 2022. They worked with a data provider to identify what percentage of each company was held by the billionaires and **the scope 1 and 2 emissions** of these corporations. The researchers used analysis by Bloomberg for detailed breakdowns of the sources of billionaire wealth to calculate what percentage of each company was owned by the billionaires. They excluded billionaires with less than a 10% share in a business. The research was limited because it was reliant on data that companies publish themselves, which is often not externally verified.

"Each of these billionaires would each have to circumnavigate the world almost 16m times in a private jet to create the same emissions," the report said – adding that almost four million people would have to go vegan to offset the emissions of each of the billionaires.

Some of the super-rich analysed did attempt to make positive impacts to tackle the climate crisis. They highlighted Yvon Chouinard, the billionaire owner of the sportswear brand Patagonia, who put the company's ownership **into a trust** for the benefit of environmental efforts and declared that "Earth is our only shareholder".

The tech billionaire Mike Cannon-Brookes took up a significant holding in the Australian energy company AGL to prevent it from continuing to operate coal power plants for another two decades, the report said.

But Oxfam researchers said these efforts of activism were very limited in the sample of the super-rich.

The charity has estimated that imposing a wealth tax on the world's super-rich could raise \$1.4tn a year, which could help developing countries who are worst-hit by the climate crisis to adapt, address loss and damage and carry out a just transition to renewable energy.

It is also recommending steeply higher tax rates for investments in polluting industries; and is calling for governments to act to ensure that investments in new fossil fuel extraction and use and in highly polluting industries are strictly regulated and banned in many instances.

"We need governments to tackle this urgently by publishing emission figures for the richest people, regulating investors and corporates to slash carbon emissions and taxing wealth and polluting investments. They can't be allowed to hide or greenwash," said Sriskandarajah.

"The role of the super-rich in super-charging climate change is rarely discussed. This has to change. These billionaire investors at the top of the corporate pyramid have huge responsibility for driving climate breakdown. They have escaped accountability for too long."