

Climate Justice

A demand whose time has come

As more and more people start to demand practical steps to reduce greenhouse gases and a zero carbon future, calls for Climate Justice are also getting louder and louder.

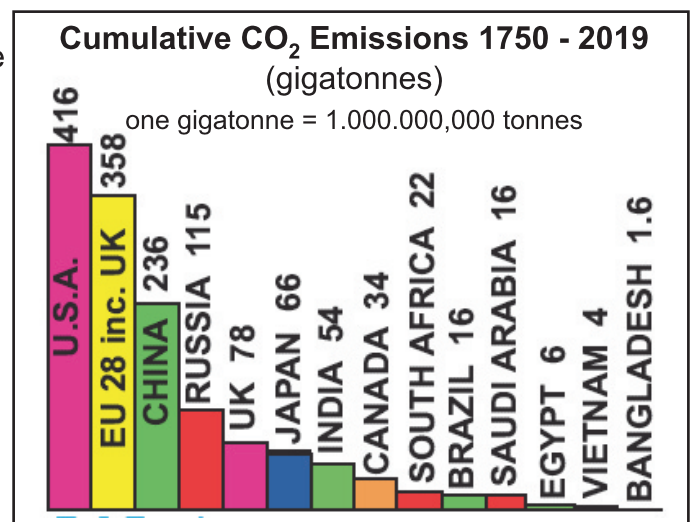
Climate Justice demands that those countries and corporations who have contributed the most emissions – while enriching themselves and being extravagant consumers – should support the lower-income countries who often bear the greatest burden of the climate change they did little to bring about.



Which countries are most responsible for emissions over time?

The industrial revolution started in Britain towards the end of the 18th century. With the development of the steam engine, this industrialisation was increasingly driven by coal, and spread from Britain to other European countries, North America and beyond. In the mid-20th century, oil took over from coal as the dominant fossil fuel.

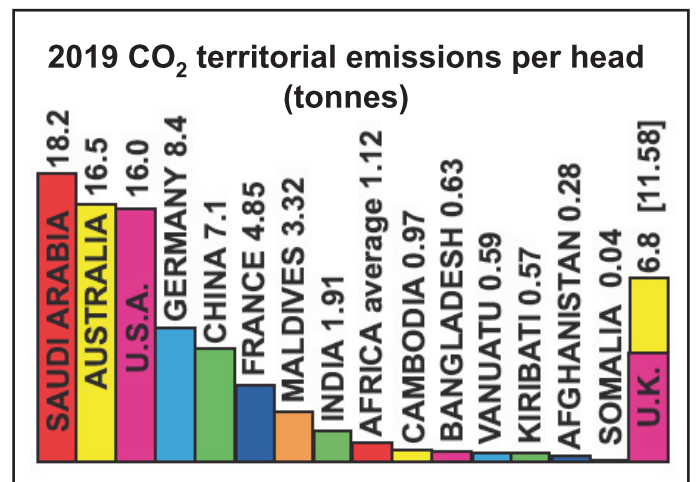
Looking at cumulative emissions since the industrial revolution, the USA is the worst offender with the EU 28 (incl the UK) behind it, followed by China.



Who is emitting most per head?

50% of all emissions since 1750 have happened in the past 30 years, and the USA and China are the countries which now emit the most.

Possibly the fairest way to compare countries is by their emissions per head of population. China and the USA have similar total emissions, but China's emissions per head are much lower. Saudi Arabia, the other Gulf states and Australia all have smaller populations than the USA, but emit more per head.



The territorial emission figures opposite include CO₂ from production of goods for export. People in China consume less than those in France or the UK, but they manufacture goods sold to the West, so China's actual consumption is lower than it appears here.

For comparison, the UK territorial emissions (far right) are shown in pink, together with those due to imported goods, shown in yellow. The total figure is shown in brackets.

The poorest countries and people bear the greatest burdens of climate change

The consequences of the climate emergency are now being felt world-wide.



Even the most developed countries, like Western Europe and the U.S.A., have been hit by repeated freak weather events including droughts and heatwaves resulting in huge uncontrollable forest fires. Farmers have seen crop yields go down, and food prices have gone up for consumers. Violent storms and floods which used to be "once in 100 years" events are now commonplace.

But we are still the lucky ones. Some in Britain may still shrug off the bad effects and lie back on the beach, mistakenly thinking that global warming just means better summer holidays.

Elsewhere in the world the effects have been more extreme, and there is no room for complacency.

Pakistan and Bangladesh have suffered from both droughts and huge floods, leaving millions homeless and hungry.

Ferocious hurricanes and typhoons have destroyed whole communities from the Caribbean to the Philippines, and low-lying island nations in the Pacific and Indian Ocean see their whole existence threatened by rising sea levels.



Droughts have destroyed crops and livestock across large parts of Africa, leaving millions on the brink of starvation. Some areas have not seen any rainfall for several years, whilst other parts have suffered floods.

None of these countries is responsible for creating the climate emergency. Their contributions to rising CO₂ levels have been tiny or non-existent. None of their starving or homeless people caused the problems they now have to cope with.

Successive COP climate summits since 2016 have recognised that the big CO₂ emitters have a moral debt to the less developed countries who are bearing the costs of climate change.

Climate Justice requires that that debt should now be paid in full.