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RNI NO. MAHENG/2013/48866 ■ VOLUME 13 ■ ISSUE 05 ■ DECEMBER 2025 ■ PRICE ₹100 ■ TOTAL PAGES: 52

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Fossil fuel CO2 emissions hit record high in 2025

Rajesh Tiwari
Publisher
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Efforts to tackle climate change are visible, with 35 countries succeeding in reducing their emissions while growing their economies, twice as much as a decade ago, and important progress in reducing reliance on fossil fuels elsewhere.

Global carbon emissions from fossil fuels are projected to rise by 1.1% in 2025 – reaching a record high, according to new research by the Global Carbon Project.

The 2025 Global Carbon Budget projects 38.1 billion tonnes of fossil carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions this year.

Decarbonisation of energy systems is progressing in many countries – but this is not enough to offset the growth in global energy demand. With projected emissions from land-use change (such as deforestation) down to 4.1 billion tonnes in 2025, total CO2 emissions are projected to be slightly lower than last year.

With the end of the 2023-24 El Niño weather pattern – which causes heat and drought in many regions – the land "sink" (absorption of CO2 by natural ecosystems) recovered this year to the pre-El Niño level, according to a press statement.

This year's report – published alongside a new paper in the journal Nature – examines the impact of climate change on the land and ocean carbon sinks. It finds that 8% of the rise in atmospheric CO2 concentration since 1960 is due to climate change weakening the land and ocean sinks.

The report says the remaining carbon budget to limit global warming to 1.5°C is "virtually exhausted".

With no sign of the urgently needed decline of global emissions, the level of CO2 in the atmosphere – and the dangerous impacts of global warming – continue to increase.

The research team included the University of Exeter, the University of East Anglia (UEA), CICERO Center for International Climate Research, Ludwig-Maximilian-University Munich (LMU), Alfred-Wegener-Institut and more than 90 other institutions around the world.

"With CO2 emissions still increasing, keeping global warming below 1.5°C is no longer plausible," said Professor Pierre Friedlingstein, of Exeter's Global Systems Institute, who led the study.

"The remaining carbon budget for 1.5°C, 170 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide, will be gone before 2030 at current emission rate. We estimate that climate change is now reducing the combined land and ocean sinks - a clear signal from Planet Earth that we need to dramatically reduce emissions."

Professor Corinne Le Quéré, Royal Society Research Professor at UEA's School of Environmental Sciences, said: "Efforts to tackle climate change are visible, with 35 countries succeeding in reducing their emissions while growing their economies, twice as much as a decade ago, and important progress in reducing reliance on fossil fuels elsewhere. Progress is still much too fragile to translate into the sustained decreases in global emissions needed to tackle climate change. The emerging impacts of climate change on the carbon sinks is worrying and stresses further the need for urgent action."

Glen Peters, Senior Researcher at the CICERO Center for International ClimateResearch, said:

"It is 10 years since the Paris Agreement was negotiated, and despite progress on many fronts, fossil CO2 emissions continue their relentless rise. Climate change and variability are also having a discernible effect on our natural climate sinks. It is clear countries need to lift their game. We now have strong evidence that clean technologies help reduce emissions while being cost effective compared to fossil alternatives."

Professor Julia Pongratz, at LMU's Department of Geography, said: "The reduction in land-use emissions demonstrates the success that environmental policies can achieve. Deforestation rates in the Amazon have declined and are at their lowest level this season since 2014. Yet the sweeping fires in 2024 revealed how sensitive the ecosystem remains if we don't also limit global warming."

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DECEMBER 2025 | VOL. 13 | ISSUE 05

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Editor: Rajesh Tiwari

NIT Rourkela Patents Green Technology to Revive India's Black Terracotta Craft

Researchers from the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Rourkela have developed an eco-friendly method to produce black terracotta wares. This unique process merges traditional artisan knowledge with modern technology to produce black terracotta sustainably.

The research team, led by Prof. Swadesh Kumar Pratihar, Professor of Ceramic Engineering, along with Mr. Shiv Kumar Verma, Senior Technical Assistant, and Dr. Rupesh Mandal, a Research Graduate from NIT Rourkela, has secured a patent (Patent No. 572754, Application No. 202531008090) for the developed process.

NIT Rourkela Research Team

The word, Terracotta, is derived from the Italian language, which means "baked earth", and has been extensively used in India for kitchenware (utensils), temple sculptures, and roofing tiles. Red terracotta is commonly seen, which is made by firing common clay in the presence of air. The presence of iron in the clay, when exposed to fire, leads to oxidation, resulting in its characteristic red color. In chemical terms, ferric oxide produces the red colour in the process. On the other hand, Black terracotta wares are known for their contrasting shine and mirror finish.

Black pottery is made in India and its neighbouring regions using techniques that are generations old. One such example is the Nizamabad Black Pottery of Uttar Pradesh, where semi-finished wares are coated with a glaze made of clay and organic vegetable matter native to the area, referred to as "kabiz." Polishing with mustard oil gives the surface a mirror finish. It is then fired in a sealed iron vessel along with cow dung, straw, and wood chips. Crafting beautiful black ware requires time, effort, constant monitoring, specialized clay, skilled hands, and organic fuel in solid form. In Tibet's Nixi village, artisans use coarse red clay mixed with white sand and powdered black baked quartz. The wares are covered with wood logs during firing, and once the desired temperature is reached, the fire is extinguished using sawdust. The smoke produced in this final step turns the pottery black.

The existing production method typically requires 2 days to complete the open-pit firing process, which releases smoke containing many toxic

The sustainable production process reduces the total firing process from 2 days to less than 7 hours without any adverse impact over the health of working associates and climate

NIT Rourkela Patents Green Technology to Revive India's Black Terracotta Craft

Prof. Swadesh Kumar Pratihar,
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gases, such as carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, sulfur oxides, and nitrogen oxides, that adversely affect the health of associated workers, including breathing difficulties.

With the aim of eliminating the major drawbacks of these generation-old processes and focusing on sustainable development, the patented method developed by Prof. Swadesh Kumar Pratihar and his team reduces the total firing process to less than 7 hours without any adverse impact over the health of working associates and climate.

Speaking about the patented process, Prof. Swadesh Kumar Pratihar, Professor, Ceramic Engineering, NIT Rourkela, said, "The sustainable production process merges traditional artisan knowledge with modern technology. The Key to this process is the indirect heating of as-fabricated bodies in an enclosed vacuum (air-depleted) chamber. During this heating pyrolysis of the carbonaceous oil produces Carbon monoxide and carbon soot which helps in producing the reducing atmosphere required for the development of back colour wares."

Black Terracotta Pottery developed at NIT Rourkela

This method produces a uniform black finish and does not require open fires, skilled worker, or specialised clay. The process significantly shortens the firing cycle and eliminates environmental pollution associated with burning large quantities of organic materials. Unlike older methods, this approach can be a key technology to produce black terracotta wares, anywhere.

The process developed by NIT Rourkela researchers makes a significant contribution to environmental conservation and heritage preservation.

10 Lakes, 100,000 Lives, Nexus Select Trust's 'Lakes of Happyness' Makes Ripples Across India

Nexus Select Trust, India's largest retail real estate platform, announced the successful rejuvenation and handover of its 10th lake under its flagship ESG program "Lakes of Happyness.".

The initiative, which aims to adopt and revive 15 lakes by FY2026, focuses on restoring India's vanishing urban and rural water bodies through sustainable, community-driven methods.

Launched in 2022, Lakes of Happyness has already revived 10 lakes across four states, Karnataka,

Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana benefiting over 100,000 people across 100+ villages and local communities. The Hyderabad phase marks a major milestone, with the Gurunath Cheruvu lake spread over 21 acres in Miyapur, now fully restored and handed over to the local society for their recreational activities.

Dalip Sehgal, CEO, Nexus Select Trust, said: "Water scarcity is not just an environmental issue, it's a human one. When a lake revives, life revives. Through Lakes of Happyness, we're bringing back not just water, but wellbeing for people, for nature, for generations to come."

What makes Lakes of Happyness stand out is its reach beyond the company's immediate business

Unvieling of the Foundation stone

footprint. Many of the rejuvenated lakes lie far from Nexus malls, in regions where local livelihoods depend critically on water from drought-prone farmlands in Chalisgaon to temple-linked ecosystems in Chennai and wildlife corridors in Bengaluru.

Working alongside celebrated water conservationists such as Anand Malligavad ("Lake Man of India") and Gunwant Sonawane, Nexus has employed traditional, nature-based restoration methods — avoiding cement and steel, focusing instead on de-silting, deepening basins, planting native species, and rebuilding natural catchment areas.

The initiative has already resulted in measurable outcomes:

- Groundwater levels increased by up to 1.5x in drought-hit belts like Jalgaon and Chalisgaon.
- 20 dry wells refilled and hundreds of acres of farmland restored post-monsoon.
- Flourishing biodiversity observed in rejuvenated lakes, with return of migratory birds and native flora.
- Community migration reduced, with families now accessing drinking water locally year-round.

Jayen Naik, President – Operations, Nexus Select Trust, added "Every lake we've restored has become the heart of its community again recharging groundwater, attracting birds, improving crops, and reconnecting people to nature. These lakes don't just hold water; they hold the promise of a better tomorrow."

Since inception, Nexus has through Lakes of Happyness, has reinforced its commitment to sustainable development, community resilience, and environmental stewardship. The 10th lake which was rejuvenated and handed over in Hyderabad marks the halfway milestone in the Trust's vision to rejuvenate 15 lakes by FY2026. A goal that underlines how corporate purpose can create ripples of change well beyond the balance sheet.

Nexus Select Malls Team, Anand Malligavad - the lakeman of India and Shri Gandhi at the launch of the 10th Lake of Happyness in Miyapur

Shri Gandhi with Anand Malligavad and the Nexus Select Malls team at the inaguration of the 10th lake of Happyness in Miyapur

Commemorating 42 Years of Purpose and Impact: Habitat for Humanity India Marks the Milestone with a Volunteer Build alongside Global and Indian Leaders

Habitat for Humanity India commemorated 42 years of purposeful impact with a special Volunteer Build, in partnership with global business leaders and local families in Morewadi village in Pathraji Gram Panchayat, Karjat block, Raigad district, Maharashtra.

This hands-on build brought together distinguished global and Indian dignitaries, including Harlan Stone, Executive Chairman, HMTX Industries; Israel Cooper, Director and Founder, Home Development Group; Elizabeth Satow, Area Vice President (Asia-Pacific), Habitat for Humanity International; Anand Kumar Bolimera, National Director, Habitat for Humanity India and members of Habitat India's Board of Trustees – Sheila Kripalani (Chair), Rajni Basumatary, Air Vice Marshal Samuel M. Nicodemus (Retd.) and Dr. Belinda Bennet.

Together with local families and community members, the group worked side by side to construct two homes for tribal families — an inspiring demonstration of solidarity and shared purpose that has defined Habitat's journey in India for over four decades. The commemorative build reaffirmed Habitat's enduring belief that everyone deserves a decent place to live, reflecting its mission of building homes, communities and hope.

This build is part of Habitat India's housing programme for select tribal families in Karjat, aimed at strengthening community resilience through safe and sustainable housing. Beyond constructing durable homes, the project integrates sustainable and climate-resilient practices including the

use of eco-friendly, locally sourced fly ash bricks; improved sanitation systems; access to renewable solar energy; rainwater-harvesting and greywater reuse systems. These interventions aim to reduce environmental impact while creating lasting value for the community.

Habitat India began working in Karjat in 2006 and has since supported more than 2,000 families through new home construction and home repair initiatives that have significantly improved living conditions across the region.

Speaking about the milestone event, Anand Kumar Bolimera, National Director, Habitat for Humanity India said: "As Habitat for Humanity India marks 42 years of its mission, we remain deeply committed to ensuring that every family has access to a safe and decent home. This build reflects our belief that housing is the foundation for dignity, health and opportunity. Our work complements the Government of India's Housing for All vision and continues to promote sustainable, climate-resilient solutions that strengthen communities across the country."

Hausa Ganpat, one of the two homeowners, shared "I am very excited about my new home because I will finally have a safe and comfortable place to live. I have been helping the masons with the construction but seeing so many people work with the same enthusiasm to help me build my home truly moved me. I feel happy and grateful to have met them."

In support of UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities and in complement to the national housing priorities, Habitat for Humanity India continues to promote inclusive, climate-resilient and sustainable housing solutions that empower individuals, uplift families and strengthen communities across both urban and rural India.

Aayom Welfare Society gets Global Sustainability Award 2025 - No Poverty Category; Recognised for Impacting Over 80 Crore Lives

India's leading non-profit organisation committed to social empowerment and sustainability, Aayom Welfare Society, has been recognised with the Global Sustainability Award 2025 under the 'No Poverty' category for its incredible work in empowering communities through skill training, sustainability programs, policy advocacy, and social welfare initiatives for the last two decades.

The award is a testimony towards Aayom's continuous efforts to uplift vulnerable and marginalized communities through a series of initiatives designed for livelihood generation, environmental conservation, and social inclusion. Aayom's believe in women empowerment was reflected in the team that collected the award at Miranda House.

Poonam Mansingh, Founder & President and Nitika Dhiman-Member, Rashtriya Pramukh Mahila Morcha and Chief - Communication & Engagement, Aayom Welfare Society received the award.

To witness the win, all the key members of Aayom were present at the ceremony - Sharat Mansingh- Founder, Prerrit Mansingh-Secretary, Prerna Saxena-Joint Secretary and Antila Mansingh-Vice President, Aayom Welfare Society.

Aayom Welfare Society also exhibited its handmade products from packaged snacks, to incense sticks, jute baskets, dresses made by sustainable products, etc. all made by the beneficiaries of Aayom. The proceeds from the sale would go towards the beneficiaries for their financial independence.

Started in 2006, with key focus on improving dignity of life and social conditions, Aayom Welfare Society

has benefited over 80 crore Indian citizens through its policy advocacy for the Universalisation of the Public Distribution System.

During the outbreak of COVID, Aayom Welfare Society supported 4.5 lakh individuals with dry ration, medical aid, and hygiene essentials.

Aayom made a history by reaching out to more than 2,80,522 women all across India to spread awareness on menstrual hygiene in a single day, empowered 3,000 individuals in Denkanikottai, Tamil Nadu through renewable and sustainable energy initiatives, and improved livelihoods of farmers and artisans through innovative use of agricultural waste and fibers.

Speaking about the recognition, Prerrit Mansingh, Secretary, Aayom Welfare Society, said, "Receiving the Global Sustainability Award 2025 under the 'No Poverty' category is a deeply humbling recognition of Aayom Welfare Society's commitment to building a fair and compassionate India. This honour reflects our continuous work towards uplifting vulnerable communities through education, livelihood generation, food security, environmental conservation, and social inclusion. It strengthens our belief that ending poverty is not only about meeting basic needs, but about enabling dignity, opportunity, and hope for every individual. Together with our dedicated volunteers, partners, and supporters, we remain committed to building a future where no one is left behind."

With a bid to uplift the social condition of lives, Aayom has implemented a range of inclusive, skill-based programs. These programs like training in tailoring, driving, sustainable product making, green enterprise development to name a few, have created pathways to income generation and self-reliance. Its flagship initiatives have empowered women, rehabilitated jail inmates and marginalized youth.

TCS and SINTEF Forge Partnership to Deploy Artificial Intelligence for Improving Elderly Care

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), a global leader in IT services, consulting, and business solutions, announced a partnership with Norwegian research and development company SINTEF—one of Europe's largest, independent research foundations. Drawing on TCS's extensive experience in deploying Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital solutions for clients in industries such as healthcare, energy, and smart cities, and SINTEF's strong research capabilities, the partnership aims to create scalable, real-world innovations.

Together, they will focus on using Social AI to improve elderly care, building on SINTEF's successful eHealth initiative, SMILE (Smart Inclusive Living Environments). SMILE is a platform designed to help senior citizens live independently and safely in their own homes. It acts as both a communication tool and a support system, connecting seniors with family members, caregivers, and even peers in their community. By enabling easy communication, reminders and access to health services, SMILE fosters active living and social engagement. With multidisciplinary expertise within technology, natural sciences and social sciences, SINTEF works to create innovation through development and research assignments for business and the public sector in Norway and abroad.

Alexandra Bech Gjørv, President and CEO of SINTEF, said, "Rooted in the heritage of the world-renowned Tata Group, we recognize TCS' ambition in creating long term value for its clients, employees, and the community at large. SINTEF shares similar values, and I believe that together, we can improve the quality of life and help the elderly in Norway to be able to stay healthy, in the comfort of their homes much longer. We are looking forward to collaborating with TCS." What makes this initiative innovative is the use of Social AI to understand the unique needs of each individual and personalize their care. By combining advanced research and with digital technology, the platform not only improves elderly care but also sets the stage for smarter more inclusive healthcare solutions in the future.

Sapthagiri Chapalapalli, Head of Europe at Tata Consultancy Services, said, "The most impactful ideas are often generated in collaboration with external partners, startups, and academia. We are excited to begin our collaboration with SINTEF. Combining the academia research, TCS' deep domain expertise and experience of implementing AI strategies will be turning ideas into action. Together with SINTEF, the identification of specific, practical AI use cases that address real business challenges focusing into usability and human-centric approach will become to full circle. Our digital technologies will add scale and speed to SINTEF's research and innovation activities, enabling these projects to have an even greater reach and impact for society.".

TCS has been operating in the Nordic region since 1991. A total of around 20,000 experts serve the company's Norwegian, Finnish, Swedish, and Danish customers. For the past 15 years, TCS has been consistently ranked as one of the best IT consulting service providers in the Nordic region by its customers. TCS has also received the Top Employer recognition in Norway for eleven consecutive years.

Toyota Kirloskar Motor Sends 100 Skilled Youth for Global Training to Japan

Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) has announced that 100 members will travel to Japan to participate in the Global Skill-Up Training (GST) program at Toyota Motor Corporation. The initiative reflects TKM's deep commitment to nurturing globally competitive talent and aligns with the Government of India's Skill India Mission and the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) — a collaborative framework between the Governments of India and Japan for international skill development and talent exchange.

The Global Skill-Up Training Program at Toyota Motor Corporation, Japan, spans 11 months, combining classroom sessions with intensive on-the-job training. It emphasizes Toyota's core principles while nurturing teamwork, adaptability, and cross-cultural understanding. Trainees are also oriented towards Japanese language, culture, and civic responsibility to prepare for global integration.

The event was graced by the presence of Hon'ble Minister Dr. Sharanaprakash Rudrappa Patil, Minister for Skill Development, Government of Karnataka and Ms. Sonal Mishra, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Government of India along-with Toyota Kirloskar India Team. Speaking on the initiative, G. Shankara, Executive Vice President, Finance and Administration, Toyota Kirloskar Motor said, "We at Toyota Kirloskar Motor are deeply committed to nurturing globally competitive talent from India. The Global Skill Up Training Program is more than just a learning opportunity; it is a journey to experience excellence, discipline, innovation, and respect on a global stage. Through this initiative, we aim to empower our youth with world class technical expertise and the values that define Toyota's culture, while contributing to the Government of India's Skill India vision. Together, we aspire to make India a global hub for people, solutions, and automobiles, and together we will make that vision a reality."

Appreciating TKM's training program, Dr. Sharanaprakash Rudrappa Patil, Minister for Skill Development, Government of Karnataka, "We are proud to see our youth getting access to this global opportunity with Toyota. This program aligns strongly with our vision to position Karnataka as a hub for advanced skills while empowering rural talent to access world-class career opportunities."

Sonal Mishra, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Government of India, "The collaboration between MSDE and

Toyota under the TITP framework represents India's growing role as a trusted global source of highly skilled professionals. This international apprenticeship opportunity will accelerate India's contribution to global value chains and enable our youth to build future-ready careers."

As an National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)-approved Sending Organization, Toyota Kirloskar Motor has facilitated the overseas training of over 1000 youth in countries including Japan, Jordan, Qatar, and Slovakia, reinforcing its commitment to advancing global mobility and cross-cultural learning. The TITP framework provides Indian youth with an opportunity to acquire international technical experience, contribute to Japan's workforce, and return as globally skilled professionals ready to support India's industrial growth.

Guided by the vision "Grow India and Grow with India" and the mission "Producing Happiness for All," TKM believes that industrial progress and social progress must advance together. Since its establishment in 1997, the company has focused on developing people and creating shared value for the community through holistic learning and skilling initiatives.

NIIT Foundation and Cisco Unveil 'Cyber Suraksha Plus' to Train 27 Lakh Citizens in AI and Cloud-Driven Cybersecurity by 2028

NIIT Foundation, a non-profit organisation in partnership with CISCO since 2022 has trained over 10 lakh learners across 27 states and 5 union territories, with nearly 40% of participants being females.

This initiative has enabled over 7,000 youth to embark on careers in cybersecurity. The program has also reached vulnerable groups such as senior citizens, persons with disabilities, frontline workers, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community, helping them navigate digital spaces more securely.

Cyber Suraksha Plus, a new phase that expands from cyber awareness to offer structured career pathways in system protection, ransomware defense, AI-driven security, and cloud protection. Designed to be multilingual and inclusive, the initiative aims to train 27 lakh learners by 2028, helping to bridge the talent gap in India's cybersecurity ecosystem.

Harish Krishnan, Managing Director and Chief Policy Officer, Cisco Systems, India & ASEAN, said: "Cybersecurity is the cornerstone of digital trust, and safeguarding it is shared global responsibility. As nations across the Global South increasingly digitize, collaborative capacity-building initiatives like Cyber Suraksha Plus will be key. They'll help build the skills and capacity needed to meet the ambitions outlined in global forums such as the G20 Digital Economy Working Group and the upcoming AI Impact Summit 2026. Through this partnership, we aim to empower India's young workforce with globally relevant skills and contribute to a safer, more resilient digital future."

Sapna Moudgil, CEO, NIIT Foundation, added: "Our effort through Cyber Suraksha Plus is to make digital safety a social equalizer. While the program builds employability among youth, it also addresses those who are often left behind in the digital transformation: senior citizens, women, rural youth, and low-literacy groups. For many, especially older adults who are most vulnerable to online scams, these courses can become a turning point, restoring confidence and agency in the digital world. Our mission remains to ensure that the benefits of cybersecurity awareness reach every community that needs it most."

According to the India Cyber Threat Report 2025 by DSCI, cybercrime cases in India surged to 22.68 lakh in 2024, up from 15.96 lakh in 2023 and 10.29 lakh in 2022. The healthcare sector faced the most attacks (21.8%), followed by hospitality (19.6%) and banking (17.4%), underscoring the risks to organizations managing personal and financial data. Senior citizens, students, and small business owners were among the worst hit, losing savings or data to phishing and online frauds. With India's internet user base crossing 1 billion in June 2025, the report calls for stronger cyber awareness and resilience nationwide.

With Cyber Suraksha Plus, NIIT Foundation and Cisco reaffirm their joint commitment to advancing digital inclusion, expanding India's cybersecurity workforce, and enabling the vision of a Viksit evam Cyber Surakshit Bharat.

PwC India Foundation and Yuva Unstoppable support housing infrastructure and livelihood restoration initiative in Jammu and Kashmir

The PwC India Foundation launched an initiative in Naushera, Rajouri District, Jammu and Kashmir, aimed at uplifting communities by rebuilding essential housing infrastructure and restoring livelihoods, in collaboration with Yuva Unstoppable. Yuva Unstoppable, is a youth driven NGO empowering marginalised communities – a cause that deeply resonates with the PwC India Foundation's mission. This collaboration is helping more than 50 families in the villages of Rajouri District. They are not only receiving vital resources for home repairs, but also livestock, which is essential for restoring financial stability and securing long-term livelihood opportunities for these families.

Jaivir Singh, Vice Chairman, the PwC India Foundation and Amitabh Shah, Founder and Chief Inspiration Officer, Yuva Unstoppable recently paid a visit to the location, marking a significant milestone in the programme's progress.

"Our initiative in Jammu and Kashmir with Yuva Unstoppable aims to bring immediate and sustainable relief, aligning with our broader vision to serve marginalised communities, and where private sector CSR funding has had limited reach," said Jaivir Singh, Vice Chairman, the PwC India Foundation. He added, "By focusing on structurally damaged homes and lost livelihoods, we are committed to delivering essential aid to those who need it the most."

"Collaborating with the PwC India Foundation allows us to extend our reach and deliver support to communities in need," said Amitabh Shah, Founder and Chief Inspiration Officer, Yuva Unstoppable. "Our efforts address key housing needs and revive crucial income streams by replacing livestock, helping families move towards economic self-sufficiency and stability."

The collaboration brings together complementary strengths—the PwC India Foundation's focus on high-quality social impact and Yuva Unstoppable's on-ground implementation expertise. Over the next few months, the programme will follow a phased plan that includes household assessments, timely delivery of repair materials and livestock replacement, coordination with local stakeholders and vendors in border regions which are hard to access.

The PwC India Foundation is dedicated to fostering resilience and contributing positively to communities in need. The Foundation does this by consistently transforming intent into impact through interventions which focus on communities that are most vulnerable. This project underscores our commitment to impacting change and delivering hope through vital infrastructure and livelihood restoration efforts.

Downtown Hong Kong, one of Asia's major finance centres. Finance leaders are shaping how companies interpret climate risk as financial risk – affecting valuations, cost of capital, and even debt pricing, writes Kaushik Sridhar.
Image: Robin Hicks / Eco-Business

WHY CFOS WILL DRIVE THE CLIMATE TRANSITION

The real drivers of the climate transition are no longer sitting in the sustainability department – they're in finance, as sustainability shifts from the realm of storytelling to accountability, writes **Kaushik Sridhar**

For years, chief sustainability officers (CSOs) were seen as the architects of corporate climate action. But as sustainability becomes regulated, assured, and financially material, the centre of gravity is shifting – fast. The real drivers of the climate transition are no longer sitting in the sustainability department. They're in finance.

Across Australia and globally, chief financial officers (CFOs) are now being tasked with owning climate disclosure, validating emissions data, and determining which decarbonisation projects make financial sense.

As the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) and Australian Sustainability Reporting Standard (AASB) S2 embed climate reporting within financial statements in Australia, sustainability has moved from the realm of storytelling to that of accountability. The result: climate performance is now a

finance issue, not just a moral one – and CFOs hold the pen.

Why CFOs are rising to the fore

The reason for this is simple: the climate transition is now a financial transition. Under new regulatory regimes, sustainability information must meet the same rigour as audited financials. Australia's AASB S2 will require climate-related disclosures that are "reasonable assurance ready," pushing reporting into the CFO's domain. The ISSB framework explicitly demands consistency between climate disclosures and financial statements - making the CFO responsible for the integrity of both.

This shift is happening globally. In Europe, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) makes sustainability data subject to audit. In Singapore, the SGX has announced phased assurance of climate data beginning in 2025. Each of these developments reinforces one reality: sustainability is now a compliance and capital allocation issue – and CFOs, not sustainability teams, are best equipped to manage it.

Finance leaders have long managed materiality, assurance, and investor engagement – precisely the disciplines environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting now demands. As one big-four report notes, CFOs are becoming "the new stewards of sustainability data," responsible for ensuring that carbon metrics stand up to audit scrutiny in the same way as financial KPIs. That responsibility will only grow as markets penalise unreliable or exaggerated claims.

Signals of the shift - Australia and beyond

In Australia, the pattern is already clear. At BHP, the integration of climate considerations into financial planning and capital allocation is now embedded. The mining and metals company's 2024 reports show that Scope 1 and 2 emissions are directly linked to operating and capital expenditure decisions, with CFOs and finance teams deeply involved in evaluating decarbonisation investments.

Wesfarmers, the retail-to-fertiliser conglomerate, has taken a similar route. Its finance division co-leads the group's climate risk reporting process alongside sustainability, ensuring alignment with financial materiality thresholds and investor disclosures.

The trend extends across sectors. Qantas has embedded climate risk into the airline's financial scenario planning under CFO Rob Marcolina, while AGL Energy has shifted climate risk oversight into its finance and strategy functions. These moves reflect a growing view that credible emissions reduction cannot be managed apart from capital expenditure and investor expectations.

Financial institutions are moving fastest. At NAB, the bank's CFO Gary Lennon had previously emphasised that credible climate strategy depends on integrating climate metrics into financial management and risk models. NAB's approach – embedding financed emissions and green lending targets into its core financial reporting – mirrors what we'll soon see across the Australian Securities Exchange as AASB S2 takes hold.

The ISSB framework explicitly demands consistency between climate disclosures and financial statements – making the CFO responsible for the integrity of both.

Globally, the same realignment is under way. Chanel's CFO Philippe Blondiaux has become a leading voice for finance-driven sustainability, arguing that "sustainability is not a cost centre but a strategic investment." Despite economic pressures, Chanel maintained its decarbonisation funding through 2023 - a decision led and defended by its finance office.

Technology giants are following suit. Microsoft's finance team now oversees sustainability reporting, integrating emissions data into enterprise financial systems to prepare for third-party assurance. Apple has tied executive compensation, including CFO Luca Maestri's, to carbon and environmental performance metrics - embedding climate into financial governance.

These examples reflect a clear inflection point: climate strategy has moved from the communications department to the balance sheet.

The expanding role of the finance function

The CFO's expanding role goes beyond compliance. Finance leaders are shaping how companies interpret climate risk as financial risk – affecting valuations, cost of capital, and even debt pricing. Banks and investors are increasingly demanding that companies disclose emissions data with "financial-grade accuracy." That means CFOs are now central to how organisations quantify transition risk, model carbon pricing, and determine the financial viability of renewable projects.

A Deloitte survey of Australian CFOs found that 73 per cent now view climate risk as material to financial performance, up from just 35 per cent two years ago. More than half expect to increase spending

on sustainability-related reporting systems and internal controls in the next 12 months. These aren't marginal adjustments; they represent a structural shift in the DNA of corporate finance.

CFOs are also uniquely positioned to drive collaboration. They sit at the nexus of investor relations, audit, and governance – the very functions that need to align for credible climate disclosure. When finance leads the sustainability agenda, the discussion moves from aspiration to execution: how climate goals are funded, monitored, and delivered.

What it means for professionals

For sustainability professionals, this shift redefines the career landscape. The CFO's growing influence doesn't diminish the sustainability function – it elevates its expectations.

Future sustainability leaders will need to speak the language of finance: assurance, materiality, internal controls, and capital expenditure. The soft skills of stakeholder engagement will remain essential, but credibility will increasingly depend on data fluency and audit readiness.

Finance professionals, meanwhile, are being upskilled in sustainability literacy. A new generation of CFOs is learning how to translate carbon and climate metrics into financial risk, cost of capital, and valuation. The result is a hybrid professional class – finance leaders who understand climate science, and sustainability specialists who understand balance sheets.

That convergence is already reshaping graduate programs, job descriptions, and executive training. Universities and business schools are responding too. Courses on "sustainable finance," "climate accounting," and "ESG assurance" are now among the fastest-growing postgraduate offerings. As the sustainability function integrates with finance, the future belongs to professionals who can move fluently between both worlds.

What it means for companies

For companies, the rise of the CFO in climate governance is both an opportunity and a challenge. On one hand, it strengthens the integrity of sustainability data and aligns it with investor expectations. On the other, it exposes a gap: many organisations still treat ESG as a communication exercise, while finance teams lack the capability to interpret climate science or scenario modelling.

Bridging that gap requires collaboration. Boards should empower sustainability and finance leaders to work side by side, ensuring climate disclosure isn't just compliant but decision-useful. Upskilling finance teams in sustainability assurance – and sustainability teams in financial materiality – will be essential.

There's also a strategic dimension. When CFOs lead on climate, decarbonisation becomes a capital allocation priority, not an afterthought. It embeds climate action in the business model itself – turning sustainability from a cost into a driver of long-term resilience. The companies that master this integration will not only meet disclosure obligations but also outperform peers by anticipating regulation, reducing transition risk, and winning investor confidence.

Australia as a test case

Australia is poised to become a global test bed for this shift. With AASB S2 on the horizon, ASX-listed companies will soon need to produce "financial-grade" climate data - assured, investor-ready, and audit-aligned. That will force finance functions to take ownership of sustainability for the first time.

This is not just a compliance exercise; it's a cultural inflection point. When CFOs start to own emissions, the tone of climate conversations will change – from ambition to accountability, from pledges to performance. And that may be exactly what the next phase of the climate transition requires.

For global markets watching Australia's rapid regulatory rollout, the country offers a live demonstration of how finance-led sustainability could look in practice. If done well, it could redefine what credible climate action means in the corporate world - one spreadsheet, audit trail, and balance sheet at a time.

The message is clear: the climate transition won't just be engineered by scientists or advocated by sustainability teams. It will be modelled, costed, audited, and financed – by CFOs.

CFOs are also uniquely positioned to drive collaboration. They sit at the nexus of investor relations, audit, and governance – the very functions that need to align for credible climate disclosure.

Dr Kaushik Sridhar is the founder of Orka Advisory, a sustainability consultancy. He previously worked in sustainability roles at Evolution Mining, Regis Healthcare, KPMG, EY and Unisys.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/why-cfos-will-drive-the-climate-transition/)

CSR INDIA UNITED

Vedanta's Nand Ghar Crosses 10,000 Mark Across 16 States

The Anil Agarwal Foundation (AAF), the social impact arm of the Vedanta Group, India's leading energy transition metals, oil & gas, critical minerals, power, and technology conglomerate announced a landmark moment in India's social impact journey. Nand Ghar, Vedanta's flagship social impact initiative, has surpassed the 10,000 centers milestone across 16 states, transforming the lives of over four lakh children and three lakh women every day, nationwide.

Nand Ghar is redefining India's Anganwadi ecosystem by modernising rural centres and empowering women and children through improved nutrition, early education, healthcare, and skill development. Aligned with the Government of India's Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), which marks 50 years this year, the initiative represents a significant leap in transforming traditional Anganwadis into modern, technology-enabled hubs delivering measurable impact at the grassroots.

Each Nand Ghar is a model of transformation equipped with smart classrooms, digital learning tools, BaLA (Building as Learning Aid) designs, reliable electricity, safe drinking water, hygienic sanitation, and child-friendly furniture, creating safe, inclusive and inspiring spaces for children aged 3–6 years. Beyond early learning, Nand Ghars serve as vibrant community hubs where nutrition programs for children, health check-ups, immunisation drives, and women's skilling initiatives converge to foster healthier and more resilient villages.

Launched under the vision of Vedanta's Chairman, Anil Agarwal, Nand Ghar initiative has evolved into a nationwide movement. Speaking on this milestone, Anil Agarwal, Chairman, Vedanta Group, said, "When we started the Nand Ghar journey, the dream was simple - to ensure every child gets the right nutrition and early education and every woman has the opportunity to stand on her own feet. As we cross the10,000 Nand Ghars milestone across 16 states, that dream is being translated to reality. Each Nand Ghar is a symbol of empowerment, education, and aspiration. This milestone has been possible only because of the unwavering partnership and support of the Government of India, state governments and local communities. My heartfelt gratitude to everyone who believes in this vision. We are fully committed to transforming the lives of 8 crore children and 2 crore women across India. I would like more and more people from all walks of life to join us on this mission."

From the deserts of Rajasthan to the coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Nand Ghar has transformed traditional Anganwadis into vital nodes of local development. Children receive hot-cooked meals and nutrition supplements, with over 80 lakh supplements distributed, along with digital learning modules in regional languages that ensure strong preschool foundations. Regular health screenings and awareness drives have strengthened maternal and child health, impacting more than 90 lakh community members. Vocational training across priority trades is enabling thousands of women to earn up to 10,000 per month, fostering lasting economic independence and social dignity.

To deepen impact at scale, Nand Ghar has carried out large-scale

infrastructure upgrades so that every centre is digitally enabled and sustainably powered. These upgrades have helped Nand Ghar emerge as a replicable model for integrated community development, bridging last-mile gaps and amplifying government efforts in child welfare and women's empowerment.

Sunita Devi, a Nand Ghar Didi from Rajasthan, shared, "Before Nand Ghar, our Anganwadi was just a small room. Today, it is the pride of our village! Children love coming here, and mothers trust us more than ever. With smart TVs, clean facilities and nutritious meals, our Nand Ghar has become a place of learning and joy."

Rekha, a mother from Odisha, added, "Nand Ghar has changed how our village looks at women. I learned new skills, started earning, and now teach others too. When women grow, the whole community grows and that's what Nand Ghar has brought to our lives."

Children's Day celebrations were even more special this year as they marked the completion of 10,000 Nand Ghars. Across multiple states, centres came alive with art, storytelling, and community activities that united children, mothers, and local leaders in a joyful celebration.

With a growing presence in Rajasthan, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and other states, Nand Ghar is expanding its footprint across India's rural heartland. The next ambitious goal is to establish 25,000 Nand Ghars in Rajasthan over the next two years, touching two million lives and setting a new benchmark for public–private collaboration in community transformation.

SOS Children's Villages India acts as ray of hope for 40,000+ vulnerable children over the course of a year

SOS Children's Villages India believes that every child deserves the love of a family, the security of a home, and the promise of a future filled with hope. For over six decades, the organisation has worked tirelessly to ensure that no child grows up alone. As a stepping stone to make this vision come true, the NGO has extended support to 42,653 children through their varied programmes, over the past year.

From strengthening vulnerable families to providing nurturing alternative care, SOS India stands beside children and young people at every step of their journey through their comprehensive Basket of Care Solutions. Their work is closely aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The aim is to not only protect vulnerable children today but also to strengthen the systems that safeguard future generations. The vision is a world where every child belongs, the organisation continues to create safe spaces where dreams are nurtured, potentials are unlocked, and futures are rebuilt.

Sumanta Kar, CEO, SOS Children's Villages India, said, "Every child deserves a safe childhood, meaningful opportunities, and the confidence to dream. Our focus this year has been to strengthen family-based care, expand reintegration efforts, and deepen our support systems across vulnerable communities. Reaching 40,000+ children and youth is both an honour and a reminder of our responsibility. We remain committed to ensuring that every child under our care grows up with love, stability, and a clear pathway to a self-reliant future. Our efforts will continue to align with national child protection priorities while strengthening partnerships with government bodies, communities, and supporters."

Through its flagship Family-Like Care programme, 5,221 children found a loving home environment in various SOS Children's Villages across the country and a further 33,033 children through its Family Strengthening Programme.

SOS India also addressed urgent and evolving child protection needs across the country. 343 children received immediate safety and psychosocial support in Short Stay Homes located across SOS Children's Villages, offering temporary shelter until permanent care plans were finalised by Child Welfare Committees. Under Kinship Care, 834 children continued to live safely within their extended families, maintaining emotional continuity and cultural roots while receiving dedicated mentoring, capacity-building support, and access to government sponsorship schemes. The Foster Care programme enabled 51 children to grow up in nurturing community-based family settings, backed by structured parent training, regular monitoring, and reintegration planning.

To support young adults preparing for economic independence, the Youth Skilling Programme enrolled 2,976 youth, equipping them with employability skills, life skills, vocational guidance, and career-readiness training. Children with disabilities received specialised support through the Special Needs Childcare initiative, where 195 children were provided individual care plans, therapy support, inclusive education pathways, and family-strengthening interventions to ensure equal opportunity and dignity.

With a blend of emergency response, preventive family-strengthening, alternative care, and youth empowerment, SOS Children's Villages India continues to play a decisive role in shaping brighter futures for children with no or at-risk parental care.

Vedanta Empowers 12 Lakh Learners through Quality Education

Vedanta Limited , India's leading energy transition metals, oil & gas, critical minerals, power, and technology conglomerate, reaffirmed its vision of building a future-ready India by empowering over 12 lakh children and youth through education in FY25, guided by its purpose of "Transforming Communities, Transforming India".

Across India's rural and tribal districts, where many children are first-generation learners and often at risk of dropping out to support family incomes, Vedanta is ensuring that quality education becomes a right and not a privilege. Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2030 goals of universal access and future-ready learning and UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of Quality Education, Vedanta's multi-tiered education model spans the entire learning lifecycle, from early learning and school readiness to remedial and school support, and career and job readiness.

Vedanta is driving large-scale, technology-led learning interventions that are shaping the nation's next generation of thinkers, innovators, and leaders, through early learning, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) based digital literacy, inclusive schooling, and higher education pathways.

At the foundation of Vedanta's education mission are 9,800 Nand Ghars, modernized anganwadis operating across 16 states that nurture over 3.2 lakh children through digital early education, nutrition, and healthcare services. These centres form the first layer of Vedanta's education model, strengthening early learning and school readiness by integrating digital learning tools such as smart TVs. The content is customized in regional languages with holistic child development at its heart.

Building upon this foundation, Vedanta's remedial and school support initiatives address learning continuity, quality, and retention across government schools. The company is enabling future-ready learning through focused investments in STEM, digital literacy, and

inclusive education. In Odisha, Mini Science Centres and outreach sessions have engaged students in hands-on learning, while STEM labs in Rajasthan and Uttarakhand are bringing AI, AR/VR tools, and innovation hubs to government schools. The company's E-Kaksha initiative has built one of India's largest digital learning ecosystems with over 1.5 million subscribers and 12,000 educational videos.

This future-ready learning model combines curiosity with capability, preparing young people not only to learn but to lead in the innovation economy. Vedanta's focus on school

support and retention addresses the challenges of access, quality, and continuity in education. In Rayagada, Odisha, the Gyanjyoti programme has reduced dropout rates for hundreds of tribal students by introducing digital projectors and engaging local youth as facilitators. In Jharsuguda, Project Vidya has improved infrastructure and teacher support for 14,000 children.

"With Vedanta's support in providing additional teachers, our students are finally getting the individual attention they deserve. Attendance has improved, and dropout rates have gone down. The change is visible in their confidence, learning, and overall growth. Vedanta has truly made a difference in our classrooms," said Anjali Sa, Additional Teacher, Government Upper Primary School, Mundherkhet Village, Odisha.

Ensuring inclusivity and dignity, the company's Jeevan Tarang initiative has enabled over 2,600 children with disabilities to pursue tailored education and livelihood pathways; one of the few large-scale efforts of its kind in India. Localized initiatives such as the Utkarsh Scholarships and Gyanshree Awards further bridge the digital divide and celebrate academic excellence among first-generation learners.

Extending its focus from learning to livelihood, Vedanta's career and job readiness programmes are creating tangible pathways to employment and entrepreneurship. Through its Vedanta Foundation Colleges and schools, offering high-quality, subsidized education to students from underserved communities. With three colleges and four schools across Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and West Bengal, Vedanta Shiksha and its 50+ vocational training institutes have already enabled 20,000 job placements, equipping young people with industry-relevant skills and improving livelihoods.

"Vedanta's education initiative changed my life. Coming from a small government school, I never imagined I'd one day be a gold medalist and start my career here. The support I received gave me the right guidance, structure, and confidence to aim higher and achieve more.", said Rohit Maheshwari, Gold Medalist, MBM University & Vedanta Employee.

Furthering this continuum, Vedanta is progressing towards the establishment of Vedanta University, envisioned as a world-class education city, integrating global best practices in education, innovation, and research. It will be an integrated ecosystem, featuring a multidisciplinary university, world-class R&D and innovation hubs, a premier medical school with a cutting-edge hospital, advanced pharma drug research facilities, and a state-of-the-art sports complex with a modern stadium.

Through these community-centric approach, Vedanta is shaping a continuum of learning, from early childhood to employability, that strengthens India's social and economic fabric. Vedanta is integrating access, digital empowerment, and skill development to build an India where every learner has the opportunity to grow, thrive, and contribute meaningfully to the nation's progress.

←Mr. Praveen Kakulte, CEO of POWERCON Training CORE Academy Students.

POWERCON's CORE Academy Introduces 7 Specialized Renewable Energy Courses at YCM Open University, Aiming to Train 20,000 Students by 2026

As India works toward achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel Electric Power capacity by 2030, the Renewable Energy (RE) sector is projected to create over 1.8 million new jobs. In response to this growing demand for skilled professionals, Centre of Renewable Energy (CORE) Academy of The POWERCON Group has launched seven specialized RE courses at Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU), the world's fifth-largest open university. Through this collaboration, CORE Academy aims to train and upskill 20,000 students by 2026, expanding India's green energy talent pool and addressing the critical skill gap in the RE ecosystem.

CORE Academy focuses on building a future-ready workforce in key domains such as Wind Energy, Solar PV Systems, Energy Storage, Pumped Hydro Storage, and Electrical Safety, all pivotal to India's clean energy transition. The launch of Certificate, Diploma, and Advanced Diploma programs in Wind, Solar, and Safety in RE at YCMOU marks a significant step in making specialized skilling programs accessible to a wider and more diverse learner base. These programs blend academic depth with hands-on industry experience, ensuring learners gain both theoretical knowledge and practical exposure preparing "RE Commandos" who are immediately employable and industry-ready.

The curriculum aligns with the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE). Each course has been developed in-house by industry experts at POWERCON, combining the company's extensive operational experience with globally benchmarked training practices. The programs cater to students, working professionals, and individuals seeking skill certification in RE technologies, with flexible course durations ranging from three months to one year.

Commenting on the launch, Praveen Kakulte, CEO of The POWERCON Group, said, "We experienced a critical gap between what the RE industry needed and what training institutions delivered. So, CORE Academy was born to create programs designed by practicing engineers, not just educators. Today, we are proud to see our approach shaping professionals who are technically skilled, adaptable, and ready to thrive in a fast-evolving global RE industry."

CORE Academy has trained 6000+ students and facilitated placements across 25 leading RE companies. The partnership with YCMOU further strengthens the Academy's reach and impact, enabling large-scale access to RE education and empowering the next generation of green energy professionals for India.

Under25 expands Summit at Campus to 200 colleges - proves that Gen Z is hungry for authentic experience

What if India's largest youth festival didn't live in one city but travelled to every college across the country? That was the idea behind Under25's Summit at Campus (SAC). What started as an experiment has turned into a national youth movement. After completing 100 Summits in 2025, Under25 now sets its sights on 200 Summits across 30 cities by March 2026.

Unlike typical college fests, SACs are licensed, student-run experiences powered by Under25's nationwide fellowship network. It is an on-ground culture experience that brings workshops, conversations, performances, and real-world exposure straight to college campuses. It's where students meet creators, brands, and mentors who actually give them the knowledge and experience they need to become leaders in their fields. Through Under25, the students have the opportunity to learn leadership in a way that pushes them to bring out their best potential. It's where classrooms turn into launchpads for creativity, community, and career.

UNEP warns that current climate plans will have only a limited effect on curbing global warming – with emissions still rising and the 1.5°C goal slipping out of reach. *Image: UNclimatechange, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.*

UNEP:

NEW COUNTRY CLIMATE PLANS 'BARELY MOVE NEEDLE' ON EXPECTED WARMING

The latest round of country climate plans 'barely move the needle' on future warming, the head of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has warned, writes **Ayesha Tandon** and **Cecilia Keating** of Carbon Brief

Executive director Inger Anderson made the comments as UNEP published its 16th annual assessment of the global "emissions gap". The report sets out the gap between where global emissions are headed – based on announced national policies and pledges – and what is needed to meet international temperature targets.

It finds that the latest round of national climate plans – which were due to the UN this year under Paris Agreement rules – will have a "limited effect" on narrowing this emissions gap.

Currently, the world is on track for 2.3-2.5°C of warming this century if all national emissions-cutting plans out to 2035 are implemented in full, according to the report.

In a statement, Anderson said: "While national climate plans have delivered some progress, it is nowhere near fast enough."

A decade on from the Paris Agreement, the UN agency credits the climate treaty for its "pivotal" role in lowering global temperature projections and driving a rise of renewable energy technologies, policies and targets.

Nevertheless, it warns that countries' failure to cut emissions quickly enough means the world is "very likely" to breach the Paris Agreement's aspirational 1.5°C temperature limit "this decade".

It urges countries to make any "overshoot" of the 1.5°C warming target "temporary and minimal", so as to reduce damages to people and ecosystems, as well as future reliance on "risky and costly" carbon removal methods.

Among the other key findings of the report are that China's emissions could peak in 2025, while the impact of recent climate policy reversals in the US are likely to be outweighed by lower emissions in other countries in the coming years.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS CONTINUE TO GROW

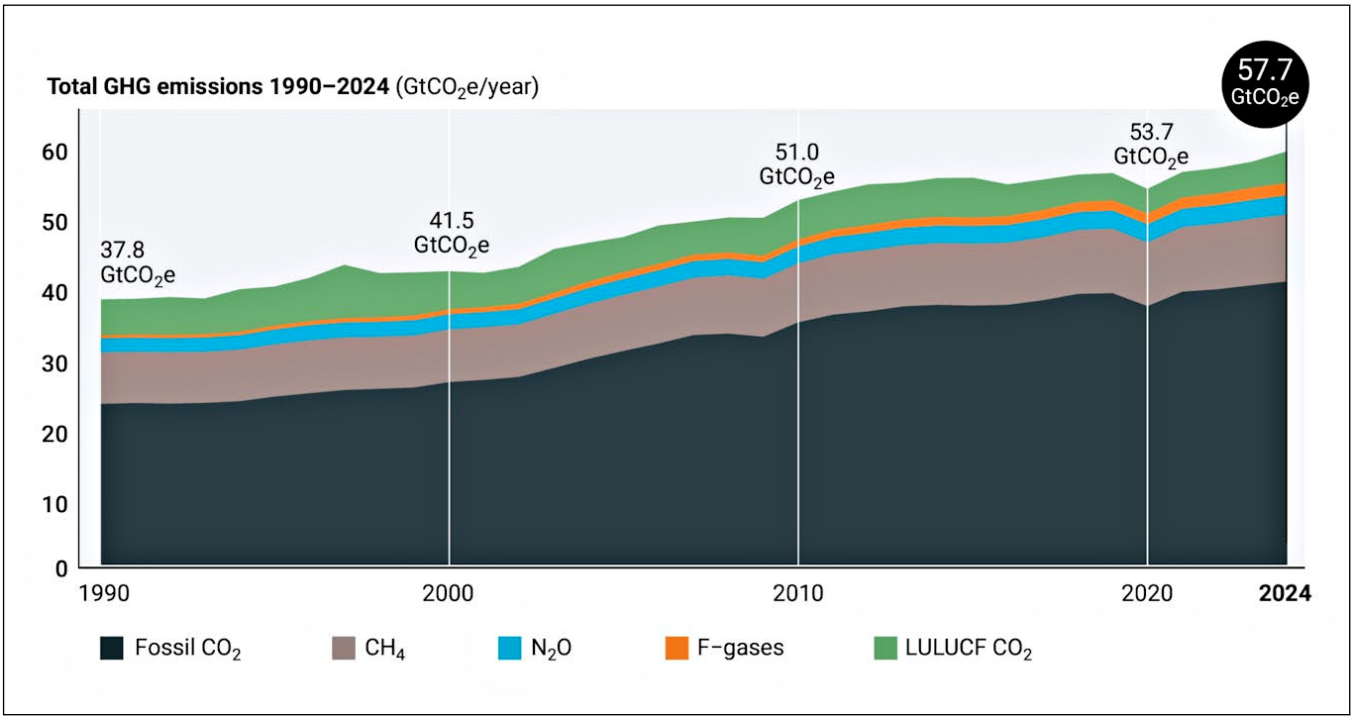
The UNEP report finds that global emissions of greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide (CO2), methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases (F-gases) – reached a record 57.7bn tonnes of CO2 equivalent (GtCO2e) in 2024. This marks a 2.3 per cent increase compared to 2023 emissions. This increase is "high" compared to the rise of 1.6 per cent recorded between 2022 and 2023, the report says.

This rate of increase is more than four times higher than the average annual emissions growth rate throughout the 2010s, the report notes, and is comparable with the 2.2 per cent-per-year rate seen in the 2000s.

The chart below shows total greenhouse gas emissions between 1990 and 2024.

It illustrates that "fossil CO2" (black), driven by the combustion of coal, oil and gas, is the largest contributor to annual emissions and the main driver of the increase in recent decades, accounting for around 69 per cent of current emissions.

Methane (grey) plays the second largest role. Meanwhile, emissions from nitrous oxide (blue) fluoride gases (orange) and land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF, in



Global annual emissions of greenhouse gases (in GtCO2e using 100-year global warming potentials). *Source: UNEP (2025)*

green) make up 24 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions.

The report notes that all "all major sectors and categories" of greenhouse gas emissions saw an increase in 2024. For example, fossil CO2 emissions increased by 1.1 per cent between 2023 and 2024.

However, it highlights that deforestation and land-use emissions played a "decisive" role in the overall increase last year. According to the report, net LULUCF CO2 emissions rose by a fifth – some 21 per cent – between 2023 and 2024.

This spike is in contrast to the past decade, the report notes, where emissions from land-use change have "trended downwards".

It says one of the reasons for the increase in LULUCF emissions over 2023-24 is the rise in emissions from tropical deforestation and degradation in South America, which were among the highest recorded since 1997.

The authors also break down changes in greenhouse gases by country or country group. They note that the six largest emitters in the world are China, the US, India, the EU, Russia and Indonesia.

The report finds that, when emissions from land use are excluded, emissions from the G20 countries accounted for 77 per cent of the overall increase in emissions over 2023-24. Meanwhile, the "least developed countries" group contributed only 3 per cent of the increase.

The graph below shows contributions to the change in greenhouse gas emissions between 2023 and 2024 for the five highest-emitting countries and groups, as well as for the rest of the G20 countries (purple), the rest of the world (grey), LULUCF globally (green) and international transport (dark blue).

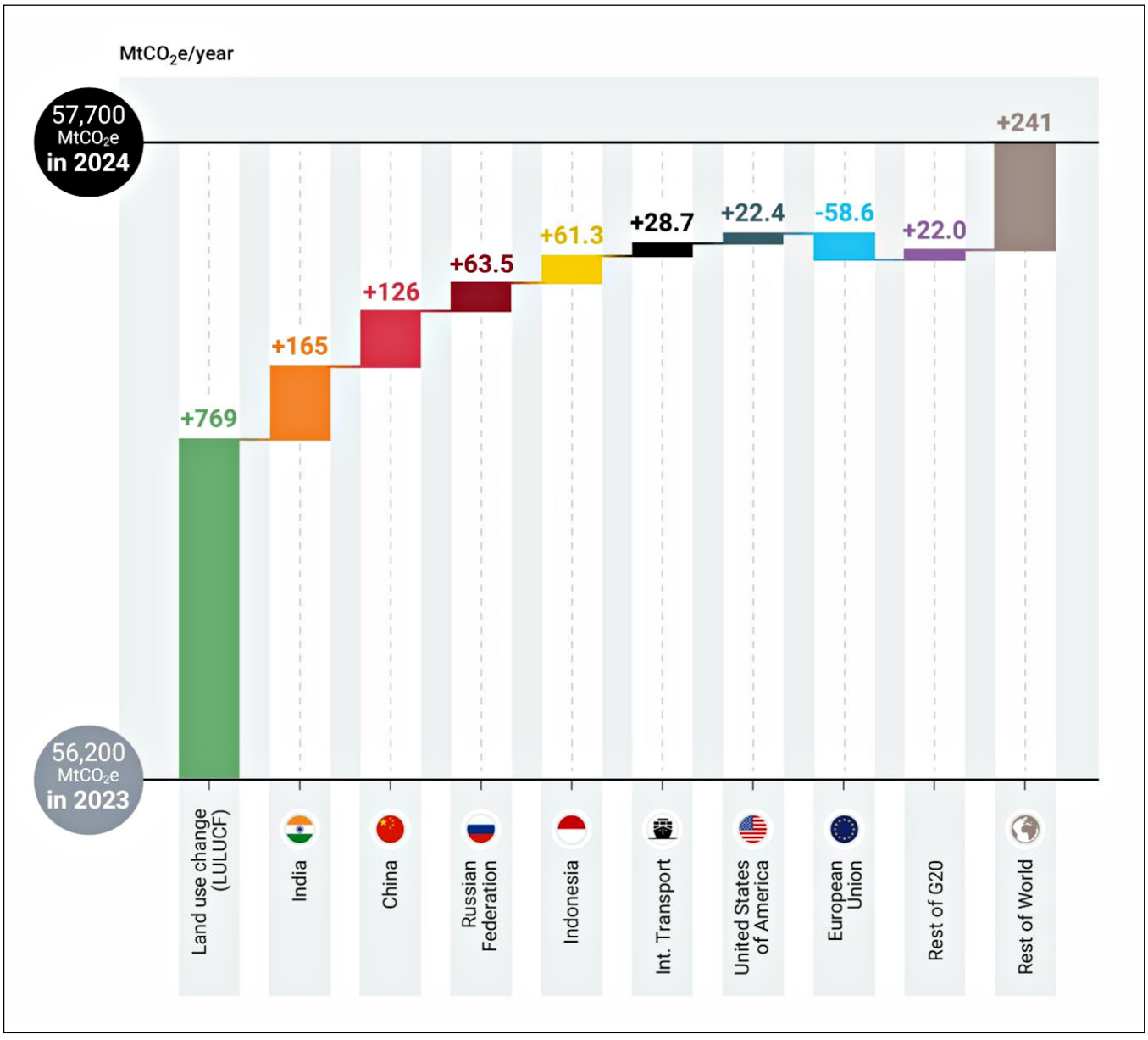
The bottom horizontal black line shows the 56.2GtCO2e emitted in 2023. The size of each bar indicates the change in emissions between 2023 and 2024. The top horizontal black line shows the 57.7GtCO2e emitted in 2024.

The chart illustrates how India and China are the countries that recorded the largest individual increase in emissions between 2023 and 2024, while the EU is the only grouping where emissions decreased. India and China recorded the largest absolute increase in emissions beyond the land sector. However, Indonesia saw the highest percentage increase of 4.6 per cent (compared to 3.6 per cent for India and 0.5 per cent for China). In contrast, emissions from the EU decreased by 2.1 per cent.

NEW NATIONAL CLIMATE PLANS FALL SHORT

Under the terms of the Paris Agreement, countries are required to submit national climate plans, known as "nationally determined contributions" (NDCs), to the UN every five years. These documents describe each country's plans to cut emissions and adapt to climate change. The deadline for countries to submit NDCs for 2035 was February 2025.

(Carbon Brief reported earlier this year that 95 per cent of countries had missed the February deadline and, more recently, that just one-third of new plans submitted by the end of September expressed



Contributions to the change in greenhouse gas emissions between 2023 and 2024 for key countries and groups of countries, as well as for land-use change (green) and international transport (dark blue). *Source: UNEP (2025)*

support for "transitioning away" from fossil fuels.)

By September 2025, 64 parties had submitted or announced their new NDCs. UNEP says that 60 of these countries accounted for 63 per cent of global emissions. Meanwhile, only 13 countries, accounting for less than 1 per cent of global emissions, had updated their emissions reduction targets for 2030.

Writing in the foreword to the report, UNEP's Inger Andersen says that "many hoped [the pledges] would demonstrate a step change in ambition and action to lower greenhouse gas emissions and avoid an intensification of the climate crisis that is hammering people and economies". However, she adds that "this ambition and action did not materialise".

The report emphasises that "immediate and stringent emissions reductions" are the "fundamental ingredient" for meeting the Paris temperature goal of keeping warming this century to well-below 2°C and making efforts to keep it to 1.5°C. However, it adds that the new NDCs and "current geopolitical situation" do not provide "promising signs" that these emissions cuts will happen.

The report presents a "deep dive" into the emissions reduction targets of G20 countries – the world's largest economies, which are collectively responsible for more than three-quarters of global emissions.

The analysis investigates NDCs and policy updates as of November 2024.

None of the G20 countries have strengthened their targets for 2030, according to the report. However, it finds that seven G20 countries have submitted NDCs with emissions reduction targets for 2035. The EU, China and Turkey have announced targets, but had not yet submitted 2035 climate plans to the UN by the time the report was finalised.

According to the report, the new NDCs and policy updates of G20 countries lead to a reduction in projected emissions by 2035. However, these reductions are "relatively small and surrounded by significant uncertainty", it cautions.

Nevertheless, UNEP says there are a number of G20 countries whose emissions projections have seen "significant changes" in this year's report, including the US and China.

For the first time, the projections in the gap report suggest that China will see its emissions peak in 2025, followed by a reduction in emissions of 0.3-1.4GtCO2e by 2030. According to the report, this is due to the growth of renewable electricity generation in the country "outpacing" overall power demand growth.

In contrast, the authors warn that projections for US emissions in 2030 have increased by 1GtCO2e compared to last year's assessment, mainly due to "policy reversals".

(Since taking office in January 2025, Donald Trump has triggered the process of withdrawing the US from the Paris Agreement for the second time and dismantled US climate policies implemented under Joe Biden. The UNEP report does not specifically mention Trump or his administration.) However, it finds that lower greenhouse gas projections for China and several other countries outweigh the higher projections in the US by 2030.

Overall, the report projects that, under current climate policies, annual emissions from G20 countries will drop to 35GtCO2 by 2030 and 33Gt by 2035.

China is the largest contributor to this projected reduction, followed by the EU then the US, according to the report. (Emissions from the US are still projected to decline, albeit much more slowly than previously expected.)

It adds that other G20 members are on "clear downward emission trends", noting that "several more" might see emissions "peak or plateau between 2030 and 2035" under current policies.

The graph below shows the historical emissions (light blue) and projected emissions (dark blue) of the G20 members, along with their NDCs for 2030 and 2035 (shown by the diamonds) and net-zero targets (circles).

The graph shows that some countries, such as Turkey and Russia, are projected to cut emissions more rapidly than they have pledged under their NDCs. In contrast, other nations, such as the UK and Canada, are anticipated to fall short of the emissions-reduction goals set out in their national climate plans.

NEW NDCS AND POLICY UPDATES LOWER EXPECTED EMISSIONS IN 2035

The report conducts an "emissions gap" analysis that compares the emissions that would be released if countries follow their climate policies or pledges, with the levels that would be needed in order to hold warming below 2°C, 1.8°C and 1.5°C with limited or no overshoot.

The "gap" between these two values shows how much further emissions would need to be reduced in order to limit warming below global temperature thresholds.

To explore potential rises in global temperature over the coming years and decades, the report authors use a simple climate model, or "emulator", called FaIR. They assess a range of potential futures:

- A "current policy" scenario, which assumes that countries follow policies adopted as of November 2024. This scenario also assumes the full implementation of announced policy rollbacks in the US as of September 2025.
- An "unconditional NDCs" scenario, which assumes the implementation of NDCs that do not depend on external support. This scenario includes the US NDC, as withdrawal from the Paris Agreement will not be complete until January 2026.
- A "conditional NDCs" scenario that further assumes the implementation of NDCs that depend on external support, such as climate finance from wealthier countries.

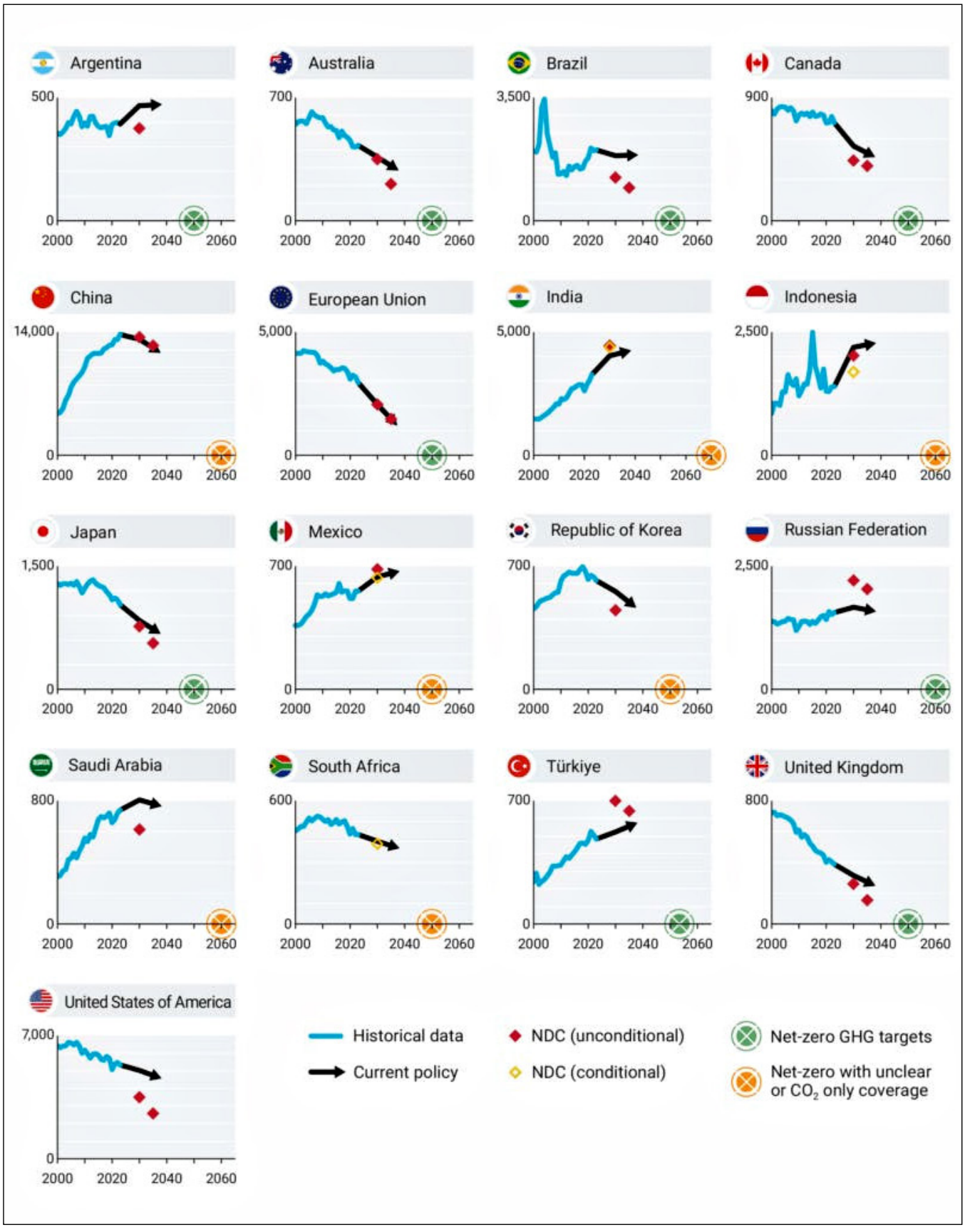
The report also analyses two "scenario extensions", which explore the post-2035 implications of current policies, NDCs and net-zero pledges:

- A "current policies continuing" scenario, which "follows current policies to 2035 and assumes a continuation of similar efforts thereafter".
- A "conditional NDCs plus all net-zero pledges" scenario, which is "the most optimistic scenario included". This scenario assumes the "conditional NDC" scenario is achieved until 2035 and then all net-zero or other long-term low emissions developments strategies are followed thereafter, excluding that of the US.

The authors note that emissions projections for 2030 under the "current policy" scenario in this year's report are slightly larger than they were in last year's assessment. The authors say this is "mainly" due to policy rollbacks in the US.

In contrast, this report projects slightly lower emissions for 2035 than last year's report, as policy changes in the US are offset by "improved 2035 policy estimates" in other countries.

The authors find that the new NDCs have "no effect" on the 2030 gap when compared to last year's assessment.



Historical emissions (light blue) and projected emissions (dark blue) of the G20 members, along with their NDCs (shown by the diamonds) and net-zero targets (circles). *Source: UNEP (2025)*

According to the report, implementing unconditional NDCs would result in emissions in 2030 being 12GtCO2e above the level required to limit warming to 2°C. This number rises to 20GtCO2e for a 1.5°C scenario. Also implementing conditional NDCs would shrink these gaps by around 2GtCO2e, the report says.

(The authors note that these numbers are slightly smaller than in last year's report, but say this is not a reflection of "strengthening of 2030 NDC targets", but instead from "updated emission trends by modelling groups and methodological updates".)

The report adds that the formal withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement for a second time will mean that emissions laid out in the US NDC are not counted. This will increase the emissions gap by 2GtCO2e, the report says.

According to the report, the new NDCs do narrow the 2035 emissions gap compared to last year's assessment. The report says:

"The unconditional and conditional NDC gaps with respect to 2°C and 1.5°C pathways are 6bn and 4bn tonnes of CO2e lower than last year, respectively."

This means that the "emissions gap" between a world that follows conditional NDCs and one that limits warming to 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures is 6GtCO2e smaller in this year's report than last year's. Similarly, the gap between the "conditional ND°Cs" scenario and the 1.5°C scenario is now 4GtCO2e smaller.

Despite the improvement, the report warns that the emissions gap "remains large".

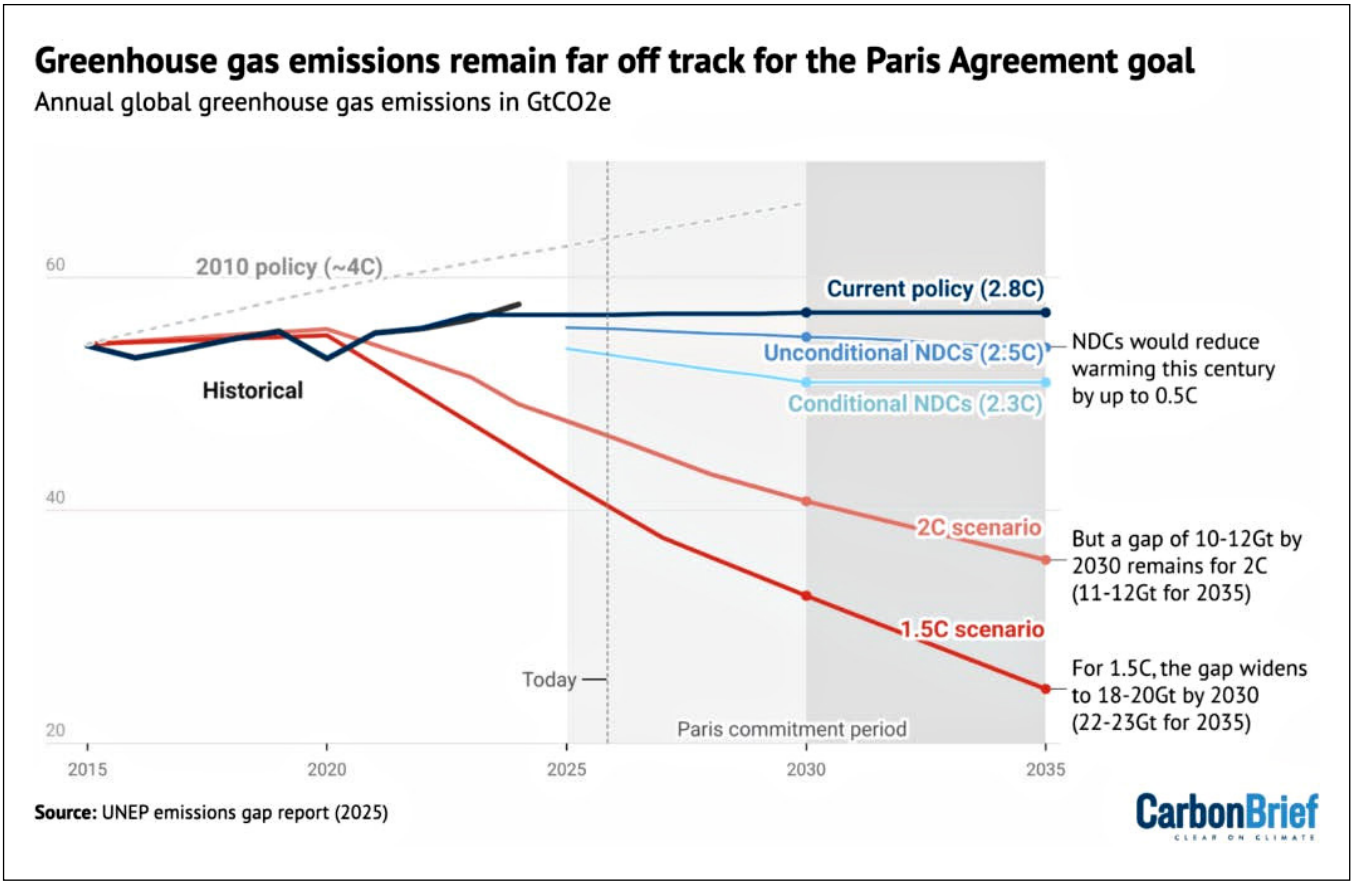
The graph below shows historical and projected global emissions over 2015-35 under the current policy (dark blue), unconditional NDCs (mid blue), conditional NDCs (light blue), 2°C (pink) and 1.5°C (red) scenarios.

The report also warns that there is an "implementation gap", as countries are currently not on track to achieve their NDC targets.

The authors say the implementation gap is currently 5GtCO2e for unconditional NDCs by 2030 and 7GtCO2e for conditional NDCs, or around 2GtCO2e lower once the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement is complete next year.

'LIMITED' PROGRESS ON REDUCING FUTURE WARMING

UNEP calculates that the full implementation of both conditional and unconditional NDCs would reduce emissions in 2035 by 12 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, on 2019



Historical and projected global emissions over 2015-35 under the current policy (dark blue), unconditional NDCs (mid blue), conditional NDCs (light blue), 2°C (pink) and 1.5°C (red) scenarios. There is a 66 per cent chance that warming this century will remain below the levels shown on each of the pathways. *Chart by Carbon Brief.*

levels. However, these percentages shrink to 9 per cent and 11 per cent if the US NDC is discounted.

The projections suggest there will be a "peak and decline" in global emissions. However, the report says the large range of estimates that remain around global emissions reductions means there is "continued uncertainty" around when peaking could happen.

Projected emissions cuts by 2035 are "far smaller" than the 35 per cent reduction required to align with a 2°C pathway and the even steeper cut of 55 per cent required for a 1.5°C pathway, the report says.

The authors say that temperature projections set out in this year's report are only "slightly lower" – at 0.3°C – than last year's assessment.

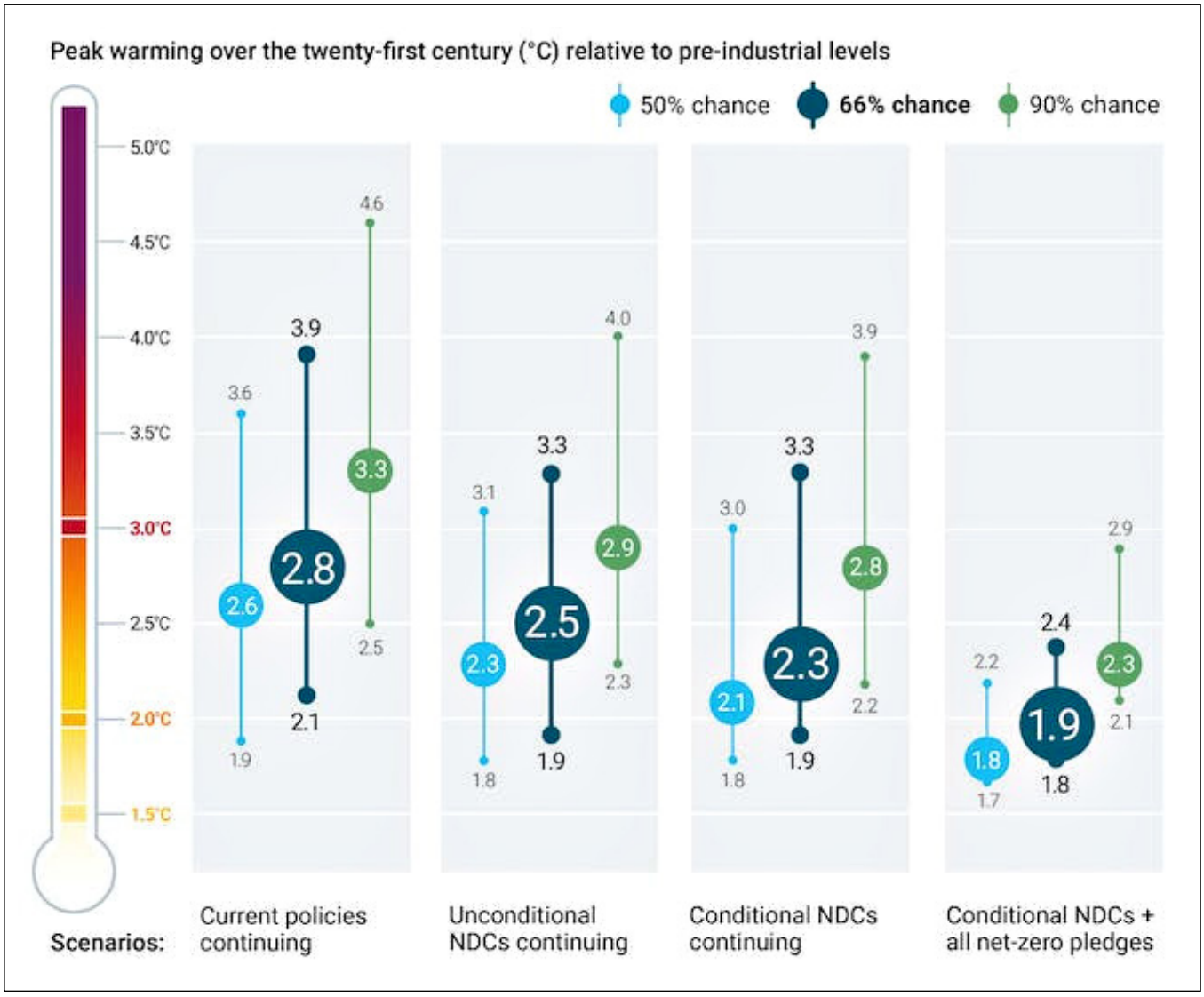
It notes that new policy projections and NDC targets announced since the last assessment have lowered warming projections by 0.2°C. "Methodological updates" are responsible for the remaining 0.1°C.

Furthermore, the forthcoming withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement would reverse 0.1°C of this "limited progress", the report notes. Responding to these figures in the report's foreword, UNEP's Anderson says the new pledges have "barely moved the needle" on temperature projections.

The chart below shows the different warming projections under four of the scenarios explored in the report.

It shows how, under the current policies pathway, there is a 66 per cent chance of warming being limited to 2.8°C. In a scenario where efforts are made to meet conditional NDCs in full, there is the same probability that warming could be capped at 2.3°C.

In the most optimistic scenario – where all NDCs and net-zero targets are implemented – there is a 66 per



Peak warming over the 21st century under four scenarios: current policies continuing, unconditional NDCs continuing, conditional NDCs continuing and conditional NDCs and all net-zero pledges. Three different probability thresholds are shown: 50 per cent (light blue), 66 per cent (dark blue) and 90 per cent (green). The report authors define a likelihood greater than 66 per cent as a "likely chance". *Source: UNEP (2025)*

cent chance that warming could be constrained to 1.9°C. (This projection remains unchanged since last year's report.)

The report warns that, across all scenarios, the central warming projections would see global warming surpass 1.5°C "by several tenths of a degree" by mid-century. And it calculates there is a 21-33 per cent likelihood that warming could exceed 2°C by 2050.

Nevertheless, it stresses that the Paris Agreement has been "pivotal" in reducing temperature projections. Policies at the time of the treaty's adoption would have put the world on track for warming "just below 4°C".

1.5°C LIMIT COULD BE EXCEEDED WITHIN A DECADE

UNEP notes that its updated temperature projections underscore an "uncomfortable truth" that surpassing the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C warming limit is "increasingly near".

The limit – which refers to long-term warming over a pre-industrial baseline and not average warming in any particular year – could be exceeded "within the next decade", it says. However, the report emphasises that it remains "technically possible" to return to 1.5°C by 2100.

Global inaction on emissions in the 2020s means that 1.5°C pathways explored in previous emission gap reports and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's sixth assessment cycle are "no longer fully achievable", according to UNEP.

Moreover, a lack of "stringent emissions cuts" in recent years means climate pathways with "limited" overshoot of 1.5°C are also "slipping out of reach", the authors say.

A future of "higher and potentially longer" overshoot of 1.5°C is "increasingly likely", they warn.

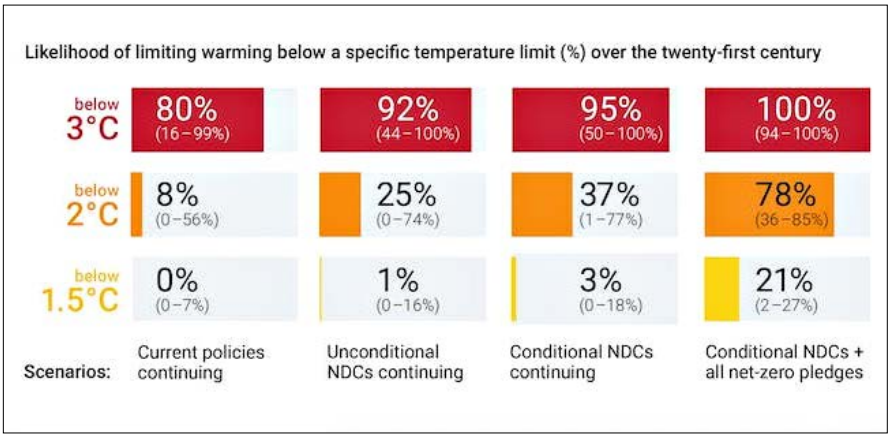
Climate "overshoot" pathways are those where temperatures exceed 1.5°C temporarily, before being brought back below the threshold using techniques that remove carbon from the atmosphere.

(For more on climate overshoot, read Carbon Brief's detailed write-up of a recent conference dedicated to the concept.)

Elsewhere, the report notes the remaining "carbon budget" for limiting warming to 1.5°C without any overshoot of the goal will "likely be exhausted" before 2030.

(The carbon budget is the total amount of CO2 that scientists estimate can be emitted if warming is to be kept below a particular temperature threshold. Earlier this year, the Indicators of Global Climate Change report estimated the remaining carbon budget had declined by three-quarters between the start of 2020 and the start of 2025.)

The graphic below illustrates the percentage likelihood of limiting warming under 1.5°C, 2°C and 3°C under the four scenarios set out in the report.



Likelihood of limiting warming below 3°C (red), 2°C (orange) and 1.5°C (yellow) under four scenarios: current policies continuing, unconditional NDCs continuing, conditional NDCs continuing and conditional NDCs and all net-zero pledges. *Source: UNEP (2025)*

It shows how the chances of limiting warming to below 1.5°C throughout the 21st century is close to zero in all but the most optimistic scenario. In the scenario where conditional NDCs and net-zero pledges are met, the chances of limiting temperatures below the goal is just 21 per cent.

The report stresses that it is critical to limit "magnitude and duration" of overshoot to avoid "greater losses for people and ecosystems", higher adaptation costs and a heavier reliance on "costly and uncertain carbon dioxide removal".

Roughly 220GtCO2 of carbon removals will be required to reverse every 0.1°C of overshoot, according to the report. This is equivalent to five years of global annual CO2 emissions.

The report also warns that it is "highly unlikely" that all risks and hazards will "reverse proportionately" after a period of temperature overshoot.

UNEP states that pursuing the 1.5°C temperature goal is nevertheless a "legal, moral and political obligation" for governments regardless of whether warming exceeds the target.

The UN agency emphasises that the 2015 Paris Agreement establishes "no target date or expiration" for its temperature goal – and points to the International Court of Justice's recent advisory opinion that 1.5°C remains the "primary target" of the climate treaty.

This story was published with permission from Carbon Brief.

Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/unep-new-country-climate-plans-barely-move-needle-on-expected-warming/

Hydrogen tanks in Germany.
Image: DLR/Fabian Walker (CC-BY 3.0).

AS COP30 APPROACHES, US POLICY REVERSALS ARE SLOWING GLOBAL CLIMATE MOMENTUM

Following a Trump-led assault on climate policy in the US, Australia and India have seen steep climate policy decelerations over the last three months, a new report finds. Confidence in hydrogen as a decarbonisation solution is waning fast as projects are cancelled, write **Robin Hicks**

The United States' retreat from climate commitments is driving a record global slowdown in climate policy momentum, dampening sentiment and casting doubt on whether the world can stay on course for critical decarbonisation goals, a new report warns.

The latest quarterly update from climate forecasting consortium Inevitable Policy Response (IPR), commissioned by the United Nations-supported Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI), found that global climate policy progress has slowed dramatically in 2025, despite a 30 per cent rise in total policy announcements compared to 2024.

According to the report, supportive climate policies dropped by 7.5 per cent, while decelerating or regressive policies surged by 575 per cent, even as the number of total policies stayed roughly constant with 2024 levels.

The US, under climate-denying President Donald Trump, accounted for 70 per cent of these reversals, following a series of decisions that included slashing over US$16 billion in climate grants and dismantling legal frameworks that underpin major climate regulations.

Jakob Thomä, IPR project director, said that much of the pessimism surrounding climate progress stems from comparisons to the 1.5°C and 2050 net zero goals – ambitions that policy trends were never fully aligned with to begin with.

> **The accountability and credibility of the Paris Agreement is at risk, and it will be interesting to see whether emerging nations align with higher or lower climate ambition [at COP30].**
>
> **–KAROLINE HALLMEYER**
> Senior Manager for Climate and Biodiversity Strategy, Deloitte

"What we really should have been seeing is policy momentum accelerating against our forecast. Instead, the ratchet – the mechanism through which policies tighten over time – is not yet visible," he said on a webinar on Tuesday to discuss the report. This means that countries are not achieving their earlier climate goals and then setting more ambitious ones.

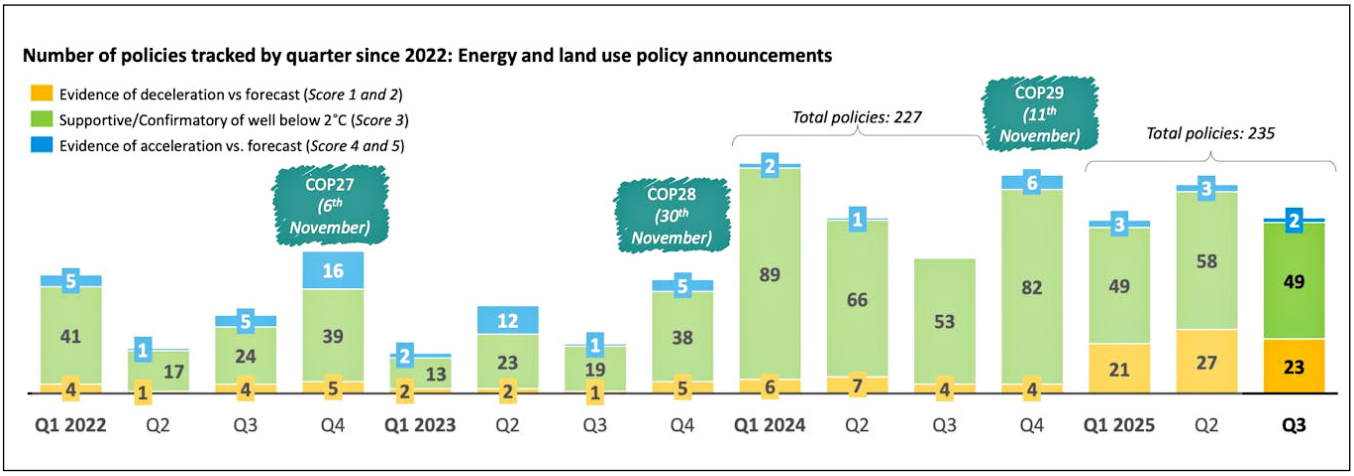
However, Thomä added that some backsliding may reflect market maturity rather than retreat. "In Germany, [government] support for rooftop solar has been reduced not because of waning ambition, but because it's no longer needed – solar has become incredibly cheap, and people don't need subsidies to adopt it," he said.

The next phase of the transition will partly depend on how vulnerable low-carbon technologies are to geopolitics, he said. "There is strong motivation to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, but also concern around dependence on Chinese technologies. That dynamic will shape how governments design future policies."

The hydrogen hype bubble has burst

The report highlighted a global retreat in hydrogen's role in decarbonising heavy industry, with numerous projects shelved as investors question the technology's economics and governments failed to provide stable policy signals.

Karoline Hallmeyer, senior manager for climate and biodiversity strategy at Deloitte, noted on the



Despite an 30 per cent rise in total policy announcements compared to Q3 2024, climate action reversed as decelerating policies soared by 575 per cent, IPR's study finds. *Source: IPR*

webinar that even in countries with strong policy environments, such as Germany, large-scale hydrogen ventures are faltering.

"We are also seeing projects being canceled in Germany, where you would expect stability," she said. Two major steel plants stopped their commercial hydrogen conversion projects in June despite receiving €1 billion (US$1.2 billion) in funding from the German government. "It really shows that the business case for hydrogen is struggling," said Hallmeyer.

The collapse of Australia's largest green hydrogen project in Queensland in June echoed those concerns. "The technology costs for hydrogen are still very high, particularly for green hydrogen," she said. "Governments are acting too slowly, and companies are getting impatient because of that lack of policy security. It's a chicken-and-egg problem."

Mixed signals in India, bright spots in China, Japan and Indonesia

In India, the world's third-largest emitter, climate policy signals are mixed. The country has achieved its 50 per cent non-fossil electricity capacity milestone five years ahead of schedule, proving its capability to deliver large-scale renewable power.

Yet, India has simultaneously softened emissions standards for coal power plants, cancelled 4,500 megawatts of offshore wind tenders, and repealed its northeastern Indian state of Assam's renewable energy policy with no replacement timeline.

Assam has also paused its green hydrogen policy, citing inadequate subsidies for renewable generation and grid infrastructure – both crucial for scaling hydrogen production. The pause has rattled investor confidence in what was seen as one of India's cornerstone clean technology bets.

Despite the overall climate policy slowdown, there have been some positive policy signals in Asia. Lily Burge, policy manager at Climate Bonds Initiative, noted that Hong Kong released the second phase of its green taxonomy in September, expanding its scope to include transition and adaptation measures.

"It's an example of an interoperable national taxonomy, showing how these frameworks can be used to mobilise international climate finance," she said.

Burge also pointed to progress in Japan, where the Tokyo Metropolitan government is looking to certify the world's first bond using a resilience taxonomy.

In China, an updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) has strengthened climate targets by capping national emissions in line with a 1.5°C pathway. "An important part, which hasn't received as much attention, is that the update now includes methane reduction – and China is the world's largest methane emitter," Burge noted.

Policy signals for COP

While the global climate policy narrative is downbeat overall, much rides on COP30, said Hallmeyer, noting that the talks in Belém, Brazil hold particular significance as countries will be updating their national climate plans under the Paris Agreement.

"The accountability and credibility of the Paris Agreement is at risk, and it will be interesting to see whether emerging nations align with higher or lower climate ambition," she said.

Dubbed the "nature COP", forests will be a central discussion point at the talks. A Brazil-led proposal to create the Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF) aims to compensate countries for preserving tropical forests. TFFF will provide direct payments to governments to conserve their forests, which could mean "hundreds of times more funding" than what the voluntary carbon market currently delivers, said Hallmeyer.

She added that COP30 could highlight the role of forests not only as carbon sinks, "but as an essential asset class," adding that she expected announcements related to Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, which enables the trade in carbon credits between countries.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/as-cop30-approaches-us-policy-reversals-are-slowing-global-climate-momentum/)

Two major steel plants stopped their commercial hydrogen conversion projects in June despite receiving €1 billion (US$1.2 billion) in funding from the German government. "It really shows that the business case for hydrogen is struggling.

In 2024, coal plants accounted for over 80 per cent of the 1.9 gigawatts (GW) new capacity additions in Indonesia. The country has also began construction on 1.1 GW of captive coal capacity last year. *Image: AP*

WHY ASEAN'S COAL PROMISES KEEP COLLIDING WITH REALITY

Southeast Asian countries have struggled to stick to their promises to reduce coal use in their energy mix. High-level commitments must be translated into enforceable roadmaps, and private demand unlocked to accelerate clean energy investments, writes **Lintang Ambar Pramesti** and **Suwanto**

The year 2024 marked a record high of coal use with an interesting pattern of "triple +1": a 1 per cent increase in global coal demand, 1 per cent increase in global coal power capacity, and 1 per cent increase in energy-related CO2 emissions. Despite years of climate summits and international commitments, these coal statistics strongly remind us how the world still relies on it. Asia, including Southeast Asia, holds the heart of coal's resilience.

Coal currently powers 37 per cent of Asean's total energy generation. A recent reportfrom the Asean Centre for Energy shows that among the most coal-dependent economies – Indonesia (67 per cent), the Philippines (63 per cent), Viet Nam (49 per cent) and Malaysia (43 per cent) – a clear pattern has emerged over recent years: the coal transition is underway, but the path forward remains complex and uneven.

All those countries, except Philippines, have pledged to phase out coal around 2040-2050 and net zero or carbon-neutral goals around 2050–2060. Philippines, while not having any set target around net zero nor carbon neutrality, plans to start decommissioning their coal plants based on market performance from 2024. However, the details diverge significantly.

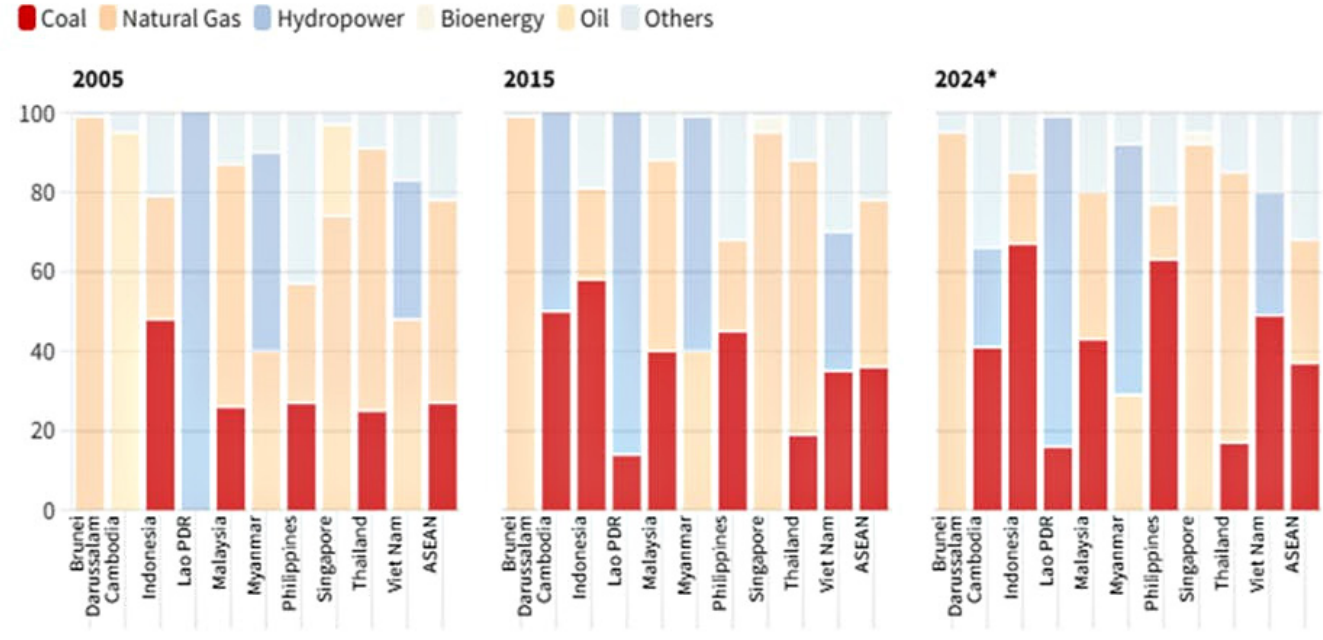
Malaysia has taken the clearest and most consistent path toward phasing out coal. Since announcing its 2050 carbon neutrality target in 2021, the government has halted approvals for new coal plants, aligned utility strategy through Tenaga Nasional Berhad's plan to halve coal capacityby 2035, and embedded coal retirement into the National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR), now aiming for a full exit by 2044.

Indonesia and the Philippines exemplify how bold coal transition announcements are often followed by clarifications that soften their impact.

Indonesia pledged no new coal plants beyond those already committed, embedding this in its 2021–2030 Electricity Supply Business Plan (RUPTL), and even signalled a full phase-out within 15 years (by 2040). Yet by December 2024, the government clarified it was not pursuing a phase-out but rather a "phase-down," arguing that a rapid coal exit would harm economic performance and energy affordability. In practice, Indonesia has also allowed exceptions for captive coal, with its 2024–2060National Electricity Master Plan (RUKN) projecting new capacity to support mineral industries.

The Philippines likewise declared a moratorium on greenfield coal in 2020, reinforcedby a Department of Energy advisory, but clarified in 2024 that the policy was not an outright ban, permitting projects meeting certain criteria to move forward. Both countries have showcased early retirement pilots, Cirebon-1 power plant in Indonesia and 246 MW South Luzon Thermal Energy Corp (SLTEC) power plant in the Philippines, yet these sit alongside policies enabling new capacity.

Viet Nam, on the other hand, strongly expressed its call for fairness and justice at COP26, stressing that as a developing country that began industrializing only three



Coal's share in Asean's power generation mix has risen through decades.
Image: Asean Centre for Energy, Shun Culture, Low Carbon Power, VOI, Energy Tracker, ANGEA, and Global Climate Scope

decades ago, it cannot be expected to move at the same pace as advanced economies without significant international support. This framing shaped the launch of its US$15.5 billion Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) and the National Power Development Plan (PDP) 8, which caps coal at 30–31 GW by 2030 before phasing it out entirely by 2050. Significant cancellations, 9.6 GW in early 2023 alone, underline the seriousness of this shift. Yet contradictions remain as legacy projects such as Quang Trach I continue.

Four common challenges

The journey reflects four common challenges that cut across Asean Member States.

The first is policy cohesion and consistency. Bold international commitments often clash with domestic realities, prompting governments to issue clarifications or exemptions that dilute earlier pledges. Public expectations of rapid coal phase-out frequently outpace what regulators see as feasible without risking energy security and affordability. Countries often express that the energy transition should not compromise the affordability of electricity, which could hinder economic competitiveness and social welfare.

Second, the "growth first, transition later" mindset reflects how fast-growing economies such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam still link coal to industrial expansion – from Indonesia's captive plants for nickel smelting to Viet Nam's allocation of coal in PDP8 to support their industrialisation and the boom of data centres.

Third, the weight of the pipeline shows how "no new coal" policies rarely apply retroactively, allowing already-approved projects to proceed and add capacity despite long-term phase-out goals. Governments often find themselves adding "special requirements" to exclude coal plants that protect certain economic sectors, such as mineral processing industries, from decommissioning or permit cancellation.

Finally, transitions on borrowed capital highlights the high costs of early retirement and reliance on external support. JETPs in Indonesia and Viet Nam, as well as the Philippines' ETM, illustrate how accelerated exits depend on international funding. Indonesia's Power Sector Energy Transition Roadmap through MEMR Regulation No. 10/2025, which set out criteria for choosing which coal-fired power plant's (CFPP's) phase out to accelerate, ranked financing support availability as the most important criteria to consider, while the age and capacity of the CFPP ranked last.

The way forward

Asean's coal transition will be judged not by new pledges, but by whether governments can break free from the cycle of policy ambiguity, economic dependence, and financial inertia. First, high-level commitments must be translated into enforceable roadmaps that reassess pipeline projects, set binding retirement schedules, and close loopholes that allow captive coal to persist under the guise of industrial necessity.

Second, Asean must turn its fastest-growing sectors such as data centres, smelters, and industrial parks, into engines of clean energy demand rather than drivers of new coal. Vietnam's Direct Power Purchase Agreement (DPPA) and Malaysia's Corporate Renewable Energy Supply Scheme (CRESS) show how industrial consumers can directly procure renewables.

Third, coal plants will remain in pipeline operation because sunk costs, long-term contracts, and cheap financing keep them viable. Therefore, the economics of coal also need to be fundamentally reshaped through smarter financing. Reformed JETP and ETM models that offer more grants, concessional loans, and blended finance can make early retirement economically feasible by buying out or refinancing projects. Coal Retirement Mechanisms (CRMs), which restructure debt and compensate asset owners for foregone value, can further accelerate closures for developing economies like Asean.

While international finance remains vital, especially given the climate debt owed by developed nations, Asean must also develop innovative domestic financing strategies to support coal transition. The region can explore emerging mechanismssuch as concessional loans, transition credits, and managed transition vehicles. These approaches offer new ways to reduce the cost of capital, generate alternative revenue streams, and align investor incentives with climate goals. Therefore, Asean can demonstrate that its coal transition is not an externally imposed burden, but a strategic, locally driven effort that balances equity, economic resilience, and long-term energy security.

Suwanto is manager of the Fossil Fuels, Hydrocarbon and Minerals Department at the Asean Centre for Energy (ACE) with over 10 years of professional working experience and currently supports regional fossil fuels-related works towards energy transition and sustainable development goals. Lintang Ambar Pramesti is a junior research analyst in the Fossil Fuels, Hydrocarbon, and Minerals (FOM) Department at ACE with a particular focus on carbon capture, utilisation and storage technologies, clean coal technologies, and the integration of these technologies with policy and regulation.

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors, and do not reflect the opinions and beliefs of the Asean Centre for Energy.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/why-aseans-coal-promises-keep-colliding-with-reality/)

Joojin Kim left a legal career in 2016 to set up Solutions for Our Climate. He was recognised by the Sustainability Leadership A-List 2025 for his advocacy work and leadership. *Image: Solutions for Our Climate*

TURNING UP THE HEAT

JOOJIN KIM ON TAKING SOLUTIONS FOR OUR CLIMATE'S APPROACH OF HOLDING POLLUTERS TO ACCOUNT REGIONAL

The Seoul-based advocacy group has seen its profile grown over the years after securing some climate wins – including getting the government to halt coal financing and backing the country's first youth-led climate lawsuit. It now wants to replicate its working model in Japan and Taiwan, Kim says in an interview to **Ng Wai Mun**

Liquefied natural gas (LNG) remains deeply embedded in the energy strategies of South Korea and broader East Asia. It has been marketed as a cleaner bridge fuel, but climate advocates warn that growing LNG investments risk locking the region into decades of carbon emissions.

Joojin Kim, founder and CEO of Solutions for Our Climate (SFOC), believes the approach that the climate advocacy group takes can help shift that trajectory.

"We are building new teams in Japan and Taiwan," Kim told Eco-Business. The Seoul-based non-profit has had a clear mission, to rely on science-based research and knowledge to change the energy narrative and reduce the region's dependence on fossil fuels by making it riskier for those with interests in polluting sectors.

Earlier this year, SFOC opened an office in Taiwan, with Kim meeting with central and local government officials to lay the groundwork for long-term climate work in cities across Taiwan. It has also been recruiting and expanding its team that researches on decarbonisation in Japan, while hiring for its Japan office.

A former corporate lawyer, Kim left his legal career in 2016 to start SFOC. Under his leadership, the group said it has helped cancel over 4,000 megawatts (MW) of coal projects across Asia and pushed for the retirement of 8,000 MW of domestic coal in South Korea.

SFOC also played a key role in the country's first youth-led climate lawsuit, which culminated in a landmark ruling by South Korea's Constitutional Court that declared parts of the national climate law unconstitutional for failing to protect future generations.

SFOC combines legal pressure and policy advocacy. A recent study by the grouplinked ten major polluters, including steelmaker POSCO and state power utility KEPCO, to US$119.6 billion in heatwave losses. It is now backing farmers who are suing both companies for their role in worsening climate risks.

This year, Kim was named a winner of the Sustainability Leadership A-List awards, recognising his impact in shaping climate action in South Korea and beyond.

As SFOC grows beyond its home base, Kim is thinking about how to keep momentum through political shifts – and how to build teams and retain talent to deliver long-term impact, in a field that demands both moral clarity and resilience.

Now one of the largest courts in the country has made a climate-friendly decision, so I think a lot of people working in the lower courts will have more courage and be more empowered to set bolder precedents.

In the following Q&A, he shares more on SFOC's expansion, lessons from South Korea, and what it means to hold influential companies accountable in a changing region.

Q One of the missions of SFOC is very clearly-worded: to make it riskier for the financial industry to support fossil fuels. Was this something you had set out to do or did the mission evolve over the years?

A I saw a problem in [the presence] of coal-powered assets across Asia, particularly in South Korea and in Southeast Asia. A key reason for these developments was that a lot of money was flowing to the coal plants. The governments were financing them. We knew that to slow down fossil fuel asset development, the money flow first had to be slowed down.

For new greenfield fossil fuel assets, we also found that questioning the project finance package, the public financing supporting them, or even export credits and government insurance, was important. For current operating assets, we need to know whether bond holders are making fair decisions when they invest in them, and whether the government is supporting the rating of bonds issued by fossil fuel companies. All these are important from our perspective.

For renewables, then we look at removing the policy barriers that make them difficult to develop.

Q Was there a successful case study that led to SFOC or you discovering that finance was a strong lever you could use?

A An important example is the impact of the ending of public financing into coal power plants by the South Korean government, and after that, the Japanese and Chinese governments. We had been advocating for a long time for this to happen since we started SFOC and South Korea finally announced the end to that in April 2021. Within six months, Japan and China fol-

In August 2024, citizens gathered outside South Korea's Constitutional Court in Seoul to hear the long-anticipated outcome of Asia's first climate court case targeting a country's carbon neutrality commitments. SFOC supported the youths in bringing the case to the court and said the government's implementation of the ruling will be critical for correcting the greenhouse gas emissions reduction pathway in the country.
Image: Solutions for Our Climate

lowed suit. What this did was that a lot of financing going into the newly planned coal power plants in Southeast Asia also stopped. There was no public finance going into that suddenly and the stream of private finance also slowed. Many of these coal projects were paused. And the emissions [reduction] impact of this suspension was huge.

It shows how important finance-related decisions are in ending or reducing greenhouse gas emissions. If the coal plants, say in Indonesia, had then been developed, that would be [equivalent to] the size of coal power fleets of many countries combined.

Q SFOC supported the youth-led litigation that led to the landmark 2024 ruling which declared South Korea's climate law unconstitutional for failing to protect basic rights. It marked Asia's first court decision linking climate inaction to human rights violation. How do you see the law and courts playing a role in SFOC's work?

A As much as we reach out to policymakers, legislators and journalists to share our understanding on climate change, in recent years, engaging the legal community has become more important too.

Over the past year, this lawsuit has meant expanded coverage of the work we do and stronger engagement with our legal stakeholders. We already saw this before the ruling, that there has been strong growth of climate-focused organisations working to share about climate science with judges and lawyers in the country. The ruling shows that the legal fraternity is are becoming more aware about the impacts of climate change.

Now one of the largest courts in the country has made a climate-friendly decision, so I think a lot of people working in the lower courts will have more courage and be more empowered to set bolder precedents. Many lawyers would probably be motivated by the ruling and consider filing similar cases in the courts.

Q Globally, we are seeing a climate action retreat and there has been a lot of uncertainty on how geopolitics intersect with climate, particularly after US President Donald Trump's election. Have these affected SFOC's work?

A Not very much. Our work is focused on spreading climate science to the key stakeholders and decision makers. We are asking people to think about the impact, that if you invest US$10 in a [coal] facility, it will lead to emissions, and therefore you shouldn't invest. We tell them how much a certain investment decision will add to global emissions. And I think that can be done regardless of the geopolitical environment or whether you have a conservative or progressive government.

Take South Korea for example. We recently had a President impeached and removed from office, but climate progress still happened. In February this year, when the constitutional court was still in deliberation and then-President Yoon Suk-yeol's impeachment had not yet been confirmed, there was another noteworthy development that some might have missed. South Korea's National Assembly had passed the bipartisan Offshore Wind Special Act to fast-track renewable energy [by streamlining permits, designating zones and targeting 14.3 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity by 2030]. I think it is a good example of how a government regime change does not hold back climate progress.

Of course, the US is a significant player but there are other important global stakeholders. People have a better understanding of how climate change impacts the world now and I am confident they will respond accordingly, in spite of the political climate.

Q South Korea has been going through a period of political change. Now we see a new administration led by President Lee Jae-myung and observers are trying to interpret what this means – if it will lead to the government taking a more progressive stance towards renewables. How does SFOC see this development?

A The current administration does have climate-positive policies. One of the commitments made by the President during his election campaign was to phase out coal-fired power plants by 2040. He also committed to prioritise renewables and improving policies that have been making clean energy development difficult, as well as pledged more support for green steel.

There might be difficulties in implementation, but we are supportive of helping to accelerate the transition. But like the previous President, the current President will also be bound by his constituents or the people who had elected him. Their demands are not necessarily going to be pro-climate. There will be all kinds of voices that will emerge especially if he pushes for an energy transition.

For example, if he wants to reform the power sector, people who run the coal plants, gas plants or nuclear plants will be affected. Hence, there will be limitations to his power.

Our job as a non-profit organisation is to make the climate-friendly promises of any leader easier to implement.

Q In December, SFOC also put out a statement expressing your strong condemnation of the former President Yoon Suk-Yeol's sudden declaration of emergency martial law, stating that this is unconstitutional. Why did SFOC decide to comment on the political situation?

A SFOC is a non-partisan organisation, but martial law goes against the principles of democracy and democracy is the lifeblood for organisations like us. It will narrow civil society space and impact climate advocacy.

Q What are the biggest climate policy challenges for South Korea right now?

A Renewables such as solar and wind have a lot of potential. In South Korea, offshore wind is especially promising. But policies that can support these developments are not in place.

We have a very old energy development regime that is not designed for supporting offshore wind assets and that is causing delay and discouraging investors. Expediting renewable energy projects is still not in the spirit of how the government operates, nor does the regulations we have support it. It is important to change that.

Our power sector is also not operated in the most fair and transparent way. There are structural biases in the electricity market. If you compare how fossil fuel-generated electrons compete with renewables-generated electrons within the transmission grid, you will find that the fossil fuel-generated ones get more compensation and more opportunities to get into the network, [because of guaranteed access to the grid]. The "unfairness" needs to be fixed.

South Korea also still plays a very big role in the global gas supply chain. It will have to reduce its exposure to liquefied natural gas (LNG), and LNG must be seen as a fossil fuel [not a clean energy source].

Q Some of the corporates that SFOC has continuously called out include steelmaker POSCO and state-owned power utility Korea Electric Power Corporatation (KEPCO). How do you handle the challenge of coming up against these big and influential organisations?

A Many of the companies that emit a lot of fossil fuels are much bigger than us. They have several thousand times more employees, and we cannot compete on scale.

But I think our theory of change is simple. We produce good content revealing the reality of climate change, especially how economic activity can affect the climate. And we put it in front of the people who need to know it. That is how we work.

The biggest difficulty is, like I said, that we are tiny. We have slightly more than 100 people on the team. Becoming visible is challenging. Finding smart and effective people who are willing to work on a non-mainstream agenda is also very difficult.

But I have faith. SFOC is now a lot stronger than the organisation I started years ago.

In South Korea's first corporate climate lawsuit last month, six farmers took state-owned utility KEPCO to court for US$72.9 billion in estimated damages from extreme heat and floods. *Image: Solutions for Our Climate*

Q Has it been easier attracting people to the cause?

A Yes, certainly. There is now a broader understanding of the science associated with climate change. Although we are still constantly in search of talent, we see that a lot of people now approach us with the willingness to contribute and they are passionate. There has been a lot of improvement on this front in South Korea, as well as in Japan and Taiwan.

Q Do you have any advice for sustainability leaders who are coming up against large and powerful forces?

A I would say have a clear mission statement. Know in your mind what you want to achieve, and remember to prioritise that at all times.

It's not very different from how leaders in the business world operate. Be smart and diligent. Be good team players. Abide by strong standards of integrity.

Q What work would SFOC be focusing on for the next five to 10 years?

A A big change we are going through now is the building of new teams in Japan and Taiwan, similar to what we have in South Korea. We are trying to replicate the working model and culture to places where we feel impact can be delivered, just like how it has been done in Korea.

In Japan and Taiwan, there are also a lot of investments in LNG, and that has to be reduced. A lot more work also has to be done to ensure that the unfairness favouring fossil fuels over renewables is fixed so that clean energy is properly valued and can be developed faster. We will need to work towards decarbonising the petrochemical and steel sectors in the region. Companies will have to stop investing in blast furnaces. C

Joojin Kim was one of 10 sustainability leaders selected for the Eco-Business A-List 2025. Read our stories with the other winners here.

(Source - https://www.eco-business.com/news/turning-up-the-heat-joojin-kim-on-taking-solutions-for-our-climates-approach-of-holding-polluters-to-account-regional/)

Renewable energy expansion has cut fossil fuel import dependence in over 100 countries since 2010 – saving importers more than US$1.3 trillion and strengthening their energy security, the IEA said.
Image: Lino, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Flickr.

IEA: RENEWABLES HAVE CUT FOSSIL FUEL IMPORTS FOR MORE THAN 100 COUNTRIES

More than 100 countries have cut their dependence on fossil-fuel imports and saved hundreds of billions of dollars by continuing to invest in renewables, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), writes **Josh Gabbatiss**

It says nations such as the UK, Germany and Chile have reduced their need for imported coal and gas by around a third since 2010, mainly by building wind and solar power.

Denmark has cut its reliance on fossil-fuel imports by nearly half over the same period.

Renewable expansion allowed these nations to collectively avoid importing 700 million tonnes of coal and 400 billion cubic metres of gas in 2023, equivalent to around 10 per cent of global consumption.

In doing so, the fuel-importing countries saved more than US$1.3 trillion between 2010 and 2023 that would otherwise have been spent on fossil fuels from overseas.

Reduced reliance

The IEA's Renewables 2025 report quantifies the benefits of renewable-energy deployment for electricity systems in fossil fuel-importing nations. It compares recent trends in renewable expansion to an alternative "low renewable-energy source" scenario, in which this growth did not take place.

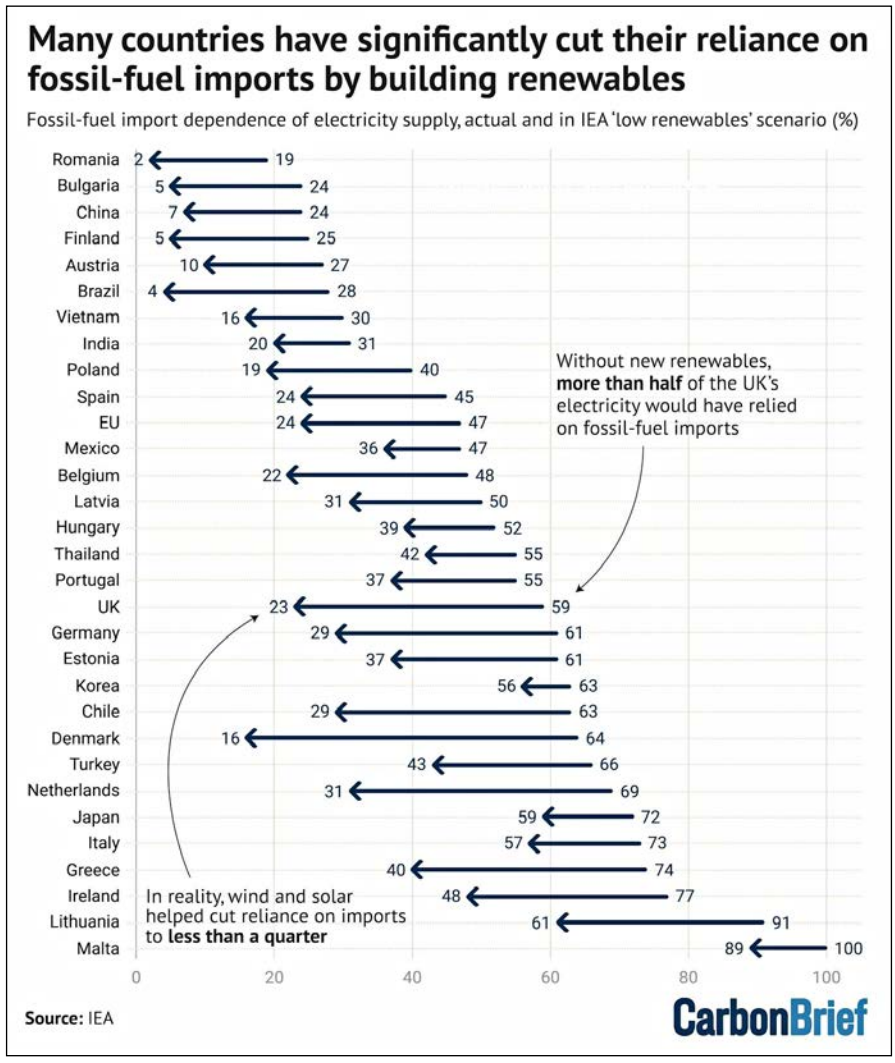
In this counterfactual, fuel-importing countries stopped building wind, solar and other non-hydropower renewable-energy projects after 2010.

In reality, the world added around 2,500 gigawatts (GW) of such projects between 2010 and 2023, according to the IEA, more than the combined electricity generating capacity of the EU and US in 2023, from all sources. Roughly 80 per cent of this new renewable capacity was built in nations that rely on coal and gas imports to generate electricity.

The chart below shows how 31 of these countries have substantially cut their dependence on imported fossil fuels over the 13-year period, as a result of expanding their wind, solar and other renewable energy supplies. All of these countries are net importers of coal and gas.

In total, the IEA identified 107 countries that had reduced their dependence on fossil fuel imports for electricity generation, to some extent due to the deployment of renewables other than hydropower.

Of these, 38 had cut their reliance on electricity from imported coal and gas by more than 10 percentage points and eight had seen that share drop by more than 30 percentage points.



Share of national electricity supplies that depend on imported fossil fuels in 2023, actual (left) and in the IEA's "low renewable-energy source" scenario (right), in 31 countries that are net importers of coal and gas. *Source: IEA.*

Security and resilience

The IEA stresses that renewables "inherently strengthen energy supply security", because they generate electricity domestically, while also "improving economic resilience" in fossil-fuel importer countries. This is particularly true for countries with low or dwindling domestic energy resources.

The agency cites the energy crisis exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which exposed EU importers to spiralling fossil-fuel prices.

Bulgaria, Romania and Finland – which have historically depended on Russian gas for electricity generation – have all brought their import reliance close to zero in recent years by building renewables.

In the UK, where there has been mounting opposition to renewables from right-wing political parties, the IEA says reliance on electricity generated with imported fossil fuels has dropped from 45 per cent to under 25 per cent in a decade, thanks primarily to the growth of wind and solar power.

Without these technologies, the UK would now be needing to import fossil fuels to supply nearly 60 per cent of its electricity, the IEA says.

Other major economies, notably China and the EU, would also have had to rely on a growing share of coal and gas from overseas, if they had not expanded renewables.

As well as increasing the need for fossil-fuel imports from other countries, switching renewables for fossil fuels would require significantly higher energy usage "due to [fossil fuels'] lower conversion efficiencies", the IEA notes. Each gigawatt-hour (GWh) of renewable power produced has avoided the need for 2-3GWh of fossil fuels, it explains.

Finally, the IEA points out that spending on renewables rather than imported fossil fuels keeps more investment in domestic economies and supports local jobs.

This story was published with permission from Carbon Brief.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/news/iea-renewables-have-cut-fossil-fuel-imports-for-more-than-100-countries/)

Although attitudes towards environmental, social and governance (ESG) matters vary across global corporate leaders, many are committed to their climate goals, found a 2025 report by global advisory firm KPMG. Image: Samson via Unsplash.
Image: I Viewfinder/Shutterstock

MORE CEOS CONFIDENT OF ACHIEVING NET-ZERO TARGETS BY USING AI, FINDS KPMG

Corporate leaders anticipate that the strategic use of artificial intelligence can help accelerate sustainability efforts, including the use of AI to improve data quality and reporting.

A growing number of chief executive officers are confident in their firms' ability to achieve corporate net zero goals, supported by artificial intelligence (AI), according to a new report by global advisory and accounting firm KPMG. From a survey of more than 1,300 CEOs worldwide, 61 per cent of CEOs said they are on track to hit their net zero targets by 2030, KPMG revealed in a report published on Tuesday. This marks a 10 percentage point increase

from the 51 per cent of CEOs which expressed confidence in achieving their climate targets last year.

"While attitudes toward environmental, social and governance (ESG) vary across regions, the KPMG 2025 CEO Outlook indicates that most corporate leaders remain strongly committed to their sustainability goals and are increasingly confident of meeting them," the report said.

The increased confidence was attributed to businesses reviewing and reassessing their interim climate goals to be more realistic and aligned with core business strategy, said KPMG.

CEOs were also more bullish on achieving their net zero targets using the strategic application of AI. The top use cases include improving sustainability-related data quality and reporting (79 per cent), identifying opportunities for resource efficiency (78 per cent), and directly reducing emissions and improving energy efficiency (78 per cent), the survey found.

The report did not mention whether CEOs had considered the energy and water resources needed for data centres to power AI, which has been a subject of concernfor environmental experts. "I am encouraged that, despite the challenging macro conditions, leaders remain strongly committed to ESG issues," said John McCalla-Leacy, global head of ESG at KPMG International. "The leap in confidence around net-zero sends out a positive signal and could help build momentum toward achieving collective decarbonisation goals."

However, the path to decarbonisation is not without its hurdles. CEOs identified the top challenges as being the complexity of decarbonising supply chains (25 per cent) and a lack of skills and expertise to successfully implement solutions (21 per cent).

Comparatively, cost was seen as a lesser barrier to climate action, cited by only 11 per cent of leaders.

The survey also found that two-thirds (65 per cent) claim to have fully embedded sustainability into their business, viewing it as critical to long-term success. However, the integration of sustainability into capital expenditure decisions remains a work in progress, with only 29 per cent saying it is comprehensively done.

Business leaders also continued to prioritise community engagement, but in a more nuanced manner, said McCalla-Leacy. The report found that 83 per cent of CEOs believe there is an increasing need to balance between centralised and localised approaches when addressing the impacts of conflict, politics, and near- and long-term climate change.

More broadly, AI remained a top investment priority, with 69 per cent of CEOs planning to allocate 10-20 per cent of their budgets to the new technology over the next 12 months, KPMG said, despite confidence in the global economy dropping to its lowest level since 2001.

"Despite ongoing economic pressures, 92 per cent of leaders are planning to increase headcount over the next 12 months," the firm said.

The top concerns related to AI use were ethical challenges (59 per cent), data readiness (52 per cent) and a lack of regulation (50 per cent).

Bill Thomas, KPMG's global chairman and CEO said, "With what we are seeing, there's a careful balance required between innovation and responsibility. CEO responses on AI exemplify this, with leaders recognising the need to embrace innovation while managing concerns over ethics, regulation, upskilling and access to talent."

(SOURCE: https://www.eco-business.com/news/more-ceos-confident-of-achieving-net-zero-targets-by-using-ai-finds-kpmg/)

Sustainability professionals gather at Ecosperity, a sustainability event in Singapore. For companies, the ESG jobs crunch is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, integration reduces function duplication. On the other, there are risks to hollowing out dedicated expertise. Image: Robin Hicks / Eco-Business. *Image: Solutions for Our Climate*

THE ESG JOBS CRUNCH IS COMING

Dedicated sustainability roles are being folded into other functions. But this integration is not necessarily a dilution of influence – it is an expansion of relevance for corporate sustainability, says **Kaushik Sridhar**

For the past decade, environmental, social and governance (ESG) has been one of the fastest-growing parts of the corporate world. Companies raced to set up sustainability teams, hire specialists, and create new job titles that barely existed 10 years ago.

But that wave of expansion is slowing.

The era of unconstrained ESG headcount is giving way to a new reality: consolidation, integration, and in some cases, contraction. This shift isn't hypothetical - the signals are already here.

In Australia, new climate disclosure requirements under Australian Sustainability Reporting Standards Pillar 2 (AASB S2) will move reporting squarely into the hands of chief financial officers (CFOs) and auditors.

Globally, we've seen companies like Unilever restructure their leadership, folding sustainability into broader external affairs portfolios, while Nike's recent layoffs disproportionately affected staff in its sustainability unit.

These moves point to the same conclusion: ESG is becoming too important to be siloed.

Instead of standing apart, sustainability is being pulled into finance, risk, and operations – a trend likely to play out first in progressive markets like Australia, before spreading across the region.

Why the crunch is happening

The ESG jobs crunch isn't about waning interest in sustainability – if anything, demand for credible climate action is rising. The real driver is where responsibility now sits.

As regulations harden, disclosure is no longer a matter of glossy sustainability reports or stakeholder communications. It is becoming a financial and legal obligation.

Australia's AASB S2 standards will require climate disclosures that are assured to the same standard as financial statements. In Europe, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) already demand granular, auditable reporting. In the United States, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has finalised rules that link climate risk to investor protection.

Each of these regimes shifts ESG out of "nice-to-have" territory and into the core accountability of chief financial officers, auditors, and boards. Layer onto that the economic climate. Companies facing inflationary pressures and tighter capital markets are scrutinising headcount. Dedicated ESG roles, once seen as an expansionary investment, are now being folded into existing functions.

The sustainability professionals of the future will not sit in isolation - they will sit in boardrooms, finance teams, supply chains, and strategy units.

This makes sense in a compliance-driven world: finance and risk teams already have the skills to manage reporting, while procurement and operations are natural homes for supply chain sustainability. The stand-alone ESG department is giving way to a more distributed model - leaner in numbers, but broader in reach.

Signals of the shift, from Australia to the US

The crunch is already visible in corporate decisions across Australia and overseas: some companies are folding sustainability responsibilities into other functions, trimming specialist teams, or reassigning roles to asset and finance owners.

In Australia, mining and energy firms have been explicit about moving environmental and planning duties away from central teams and into operational lines. Mining and minerals firm BHP's 2024 global restructure transferred planning, environment and heritage responsibilities to asset-level management as part of a wider cost and efficiency push. Oil and gas company Woodside has also pared back standalone leadership roles for low-carbon projects and reoriented priorities as it tightens its investment focus - a signal that standalone "new energy" or sustainability units can be vulnerable in a cost-constrained environment.

Globally, the pattern is similar. Consumer-goods giant Unilever recently merged its chief sustainability responsibilities into a broader external affairs remit - a senior-level consolidation that shifts sustainability closer to communications, strategy and execution.

And retail and apparel provide a stark cautionary tale: Nike lost roughly 20-30 per cent of employees who worked primarily on sustainability initiatives through layoffs, transfers and departures – a concrete example of how budget pressure can hollow out specialist teams.

Meanwhile, consultancy and policy research is explicit about

the organisational consequences of tougher disclosure regimes: sustainability reporting is being designed to feed into finance, audit and investor-facing processes, which naturally pulls responsibility toward CFOs and reporting teams.

Taken together, these Australian and international signals point to the same trajectory: fewer big, standalone ESG departments and more distributed responsibility – often sitting with finance, operations and asset owners. That's the practical change driving the "ESG jobs crunch."

What it means for professionals

For professionals working in sustainability, the implications are immediate and personal.

The ESG boom created a generation of analysts, officers, and advisors whose roles were defined by their sustainability title alone. That model is under pressure. For junior professionals in particular, the entry-level "ESG officer" or "sustainability analyst" role is likely to become scarcer as teams consolidate and responsibilities are absorbed by finance, risk, or operations.

This doesn't mean the pathway disappears – it means the on-ramps change.

Future entrants will need to be comfortable bringing sustainability skills into hybrid roles: as a financial analyst fluent in carbon accounting, a supply chain manager with an eye on modern slavery, or a risk officer adept at climate scenario analysis.

For mid-career specialists, the challenge is different. Those who have built their identity purely around ESG reporting or stakeholder engagement may need to broaden their remit, adding skills in financial literacy, governance, and change management. This integration is not a dilution of influence but an expansion of relevance. As sustainability becomes embedded in mainstream business functions, the most valuable professionals will be those who can act as translators – making the complex science and policy of climate change intelligible to CFOs, boards, and regulators.

Students and graduates entering the workforce face a similar recalibration. The advice of "get into ESG" is being replaced by something more nuanced: embed sustainability in whatever function you choose. Whether in law, engineering, marketing, or finance, the professionals who will thrive are those who carry sustainability literacy into their core discipline, rather than trying to remain in a silo.

What it means for companies

For companies, the ESG jobs crunch is a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, integration makes sense: moving sustainability responsibilities into finance and operations reduces duplication and positions disclosure where it belongs – alongside other material risks. It also encourages the embedding of sustainability into decision-making processes, rather than treating it as a parallel function.

On the other hand, there are risks to hollowing out dedicated expertise. If companies simply cut ESG teams without ensuring sustainability literacy across the business, they risk compliance-only responses that miss the broader strategic opportunity. Investors, regulators, and customers can spot when a business is ticking boxes instead of delivering transformation.

This means upskilling becomes crucial.

Companies must invest in building sustainability capability among non-ESG professionals: training procurement teams on ethical sourcing, finance teams on climate disclosure, and boards on climate governance.

There is also a cultural challenge.

A shrinking central ESG team can create the perception that sustainability has become less important. Leaders must counteract this by framing the shift as maturation, not retreat. The message should be clear: sustainability is no longer a side-team project - it is now everybody's job.

The future of ESG careers

The crunch does not spell the end of ESG careers. Instead, it signals a transition to a more embedded, more demanding phase for the profession.

We are moving from growth to integration, from expansion to consolidation. That can be unsettling for those who joined the field during its boom years, but it also presents new opportunities for influence.

The sustainability professionals of the future will not sit in isolation - they will sit in boardrooms, finance teams, supply chains, and strategy units.

Their success will depend less on the size of their departments and more on their ability to make sustainability inseparable from the organisation's core value proposition.

In that sense, the crunch is not a closing down but a levelling up.

It requires adaptability, broader skillsets, and a willingness to move beyond the comfort of dedicated ESG teams.

But for those who are ready, the opportunities are significant: shaping corporate decisions at the centre, not the margins. The ESG jobs crunch is coming. But those who prepare for integration, and those organisations that invest in upskilling, may find that sustainability's influence grows, not shrinks.

Dr Kaushik Sridhar is the founder of Orka Advisory, a sustainability consultancy. He previously worked in sustainability roles at Evolution Mining, Regis Healthcare, KPMG, EY and Unisys.

(Source: https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/the-esg-jobs-crunch-is-coming/)

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