

COP 30 in Brazil: a call for more ambition, better integrated



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"Society is a contract, ... a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are yet unborn" (Edmund BURKE).

Climate policy, like policy in many other areas, is increasingly at risk from populism and identity politics. This trend is systemically corrosive of the rational basis of all and any policy, in whatever field. It thus becomes a threat to constitutional norms. The reason is that the quest for votes proceeds by weaponizing the subject of every incomprehension, every ignorance, every court decision, every complaint or fear as a threat to the individual persona, typically as part of an 'international' or 'European' or 'elitist' conspiracy. Thereby the other is portrayed as the fundamental threat to the self. Yet climate science has not changed. Tragically, the consequence of the failure to invest adequately in the switch to clean energy is to place future generations with the others. This paper proceeds on the principle, practical as well as ethical, that policy must be timely, and must have a rational and intergenerational basis.



Current levels of emissions

Global greenhouse gas emissions reached 57.1 Gt CO₂eq in 2023, a record high. The biggest emitters being China (16 Gt), the US (6 Gt), India (4.1 Gt), the EU (3.2 Gt), Russia (2.7 Gt) and Brazil (1.3 Gt). Seven G20 members, including China and India, have not yet peaked emissions. Despite the Methane Pledge, significant reductions have only been made by Australia and Turkmenistan.

Current national pledges (NDCs) fall short: unconditional pledges would reduce 2030 emissions by just 10%, whereas 42% is needed for a 1.5°C trajectory. On current policies, the world faces a 97% chance of exceeding 2°C and a likely warming of 3.1°C.

The Production Gap underscores the problem: fossil fuel production plans exceed levels compatible with 1.5°C by 120% by 2030. Several countries, notably India, are still expanding coal.

Climate science in 2025: a dangerous threshold

Atmospheric carbon reached a level of **430 parts per million in May 2025**, compared with 400 ppm in May 2013, and the pre-industrial level of 280 ppm. This is the highest level for 14 million years. On 2 February, the temperature at the North Pole was 20 degrees above average.

It is estimated that the world's net forest carbon sink, which was -10 Gt CO₂/a. in 2001 and approximately -8 Gt CO₂/s. in 2023 is now approximately -5 Gt CO₂/a (World Resources Institute). This is due to forest clearance and wildfires: in particular, the Canadian forest has flipped from sink to source (an area of forest larger than Austria burned this summer), but it

has been the worst year on record for fires in Spain.

Before climate change, such events would have been expected every 500 years but, on warming of +1.3 degrees so far, can now be expected every 15 years. Warming of +3 degrees would be catastrophic here. (Centre of Environmental Policy, Imperial College, London).

International Court of Justice

The recent ICJ opinion notes that not only under the Climate Change Convention but also under customary international law, states have a duty to prevent activities from causing significant harm to the climate system, and that breach may potentially entail full reparation.

The contribution of land management: AFOLU

One way to analyse the potential for land use is to look at Agriculture, Forestry and Land-Use Change as a single sector. The EU has an AFOLU emissions gap, being the difference between agricultural emissions and carbon sequestration. In 2015, this was 386-319=67 MtCO₂eq; in 2019: 429-234 = 195 MtCO₂eq; in 2020: 384-194=190 MtCO₂eq; in 2023: 365-198=167 Mt CO₂eq. While agricultural emissions have slightly declined from 386 Mt CO₂eq in 2020 to 365 Mt-CO₂eq in 2023, the carbon sink has declined from an average of -335 Mt CO₂eq in the period 1991-2013 to -198 Mt CO₂eq in 2023, the principal causes being the maturation (and therefore slower growth) of forest stands, increase in harvest, loss of stored carbon through forest fires and disease, and a reduced rate of afforestation.

Forestry

It is estimated that EU consumption leading to the production of cattle, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, soya and wood has the potential to drive deforestation rising to 248,000 ha annually by 2030.

Afforestation remains an important measure, especially for countries with significant areas of marginal land and/or less than 25 per cent forest cover.

Much peatland is degraded and restoration has the potential to reduce long-term carbon emissions and significantly in-

crease long-term sequestration by re-wetting, although there will be initial increases in methane emissions.

Trading in sequestered carbon should be based on land-use change (including afforestation) or a well-maintained forest inventory, with five-yearly verification, the buyer having the responsibility to renew or replace. The methodologies available are currently inadequate

to encompass shorter-term generic management practices, although these could be supported outside a trading system.

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Emissions from cattle in the EU are declining in most countries, driven principally by a decrease in numbers (between 2022 and 2023, -480 Kt CO₂eq in France, - 301 Kt CO₂eq in Ireland, -298 Kt CO₂eq in Spain, -149 Kt CO₂eq in Germany, with significant increases only in Poland, 218 Kt CO₂eq and The Netherlands, 103 Kt CO₂eq (Annual European Union Greenhouse Gas Inventory 1990-2023 and inventory document 2025). Policy measures, however, risk being caught between a desire to reduce emissions at the margins, implying intensification, and achieving reductions through lower numbers of cattle integrated with extensive grazing and land-use management.

Denmark will introduce a marginal tax on agricultural emissions at Danish kroner 120 (€16) /tCO₂eq from 2030, rising to DKK 300 (€39)/tCO₂eq from 2035, with a 60 per cent discount applied to farms meeting a given reduction target. This will be combined with investment in afforestation and peatland restoration, including from arable land. This would include restoring natural hydrology over 60,500 ha of agricultural land with extensification of a further 38,000 ha, out of a total of 171,000 ha of cultivated peatlands. Livestock measures include measures affecting digestion and better manure management, and there will be encouragement of plant-based foods. The intention is to achieve a reduction in emissions from the AFOLU sector of between 55 and 65 per cent on 1990 levels by 2030, or 6 to 8 Mt CO₂eq.

Mitigation: COP 30 and nationally determined contributions

Although the Paris target of limiting warming to +1.5 degrees has not been abandoned, it is now likely that the world is headed for over +2 degrees of warming. Projected production



Press conference on the Pre-COP30, marking 30 days until COP30.

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levels of fossil fuels and certain infrastructure investments (new airports, runways) are not compatible with the +1.5 degrees target. The last-minute watering down of the Glasgow pledge from 'phase out' to 'phase down' coal in 2021 has been part of this.

It should be remembered that because of the atmospheric lifetimes of Greenhouse Gases, atmospheric stabilisation will not be achieved until 50 years after Net Zero is achieved in terms of emissions.

At COP 30, to be held at Belém, Brazil, in November, the stocktake at which parties to the Paris Agreement revise their Nationally Determined Contributions should be completed. Logically this should include, as a matter of urgency, plans for the phase-down (phase-out) of coal.

The EU still expects to reduce emissions by 55 per cent by 2030, with a reduction of between 66 and 72 per cent by 2035 and is working on a 90 per cent reduction by 2040. (The revised NDC details are awaited as at early October.)

China has pledged a 7 to 10 per cent reduction on its 2020 levels of emissions by 2035, and an expansion of wind and solar energy by six times its 2020 levels during the same period, increasing the level of non-fossil fuels in domestic energy consumption to over 30 per cent. It also plans to increase forest stocks by 6 billion cubic metres above 2005 levels to 24 billion cubic metres of timber. Together, this is expected to deliver an annual reduction of -1.4 billion tonnes CO₂. This is too little to save the +1.5 degrees target, but the good news would be that Chinese emissions would have peaked.

Canada, which in 2021 committed to reduce emissions by 40 to 45 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, had achieved only a reduction of 8.5 per cent in 2024, and trends indicate that the reduction will only be 20 to 25 per cent by 2030. This arises

partly from increases in emissions from oil and gas cancelling out progress in electricity generation and in the climate-proofing of buildings, and partly from the increase in wildfires.

Meanwhile the new government has abolished the carbon tax on consumers.

Australia, which has offered to hold COP 31 in 2026, intends to reduce emissions by between 62 and 70 per cent on 2005 levels by 2035. Brazil, the host nation, has committed to a reduction of between 59 and 67 per cent by 2035.

Japan's offer is currently awaited.

It remains the case that these commitments will still be inadequate to keep temperature rise to +2 degrees, unless greater efforts can successfully be made to reach Net Zero in the years 2035-2050.

Concluding recommendation

The EU remains a forum where rational, intergenerational and transboundary policies can be developed and implemented. This is a critical moment in which it needs to strengthen its broad objectives, while continuing the internal dialogue on the detailed design of some of the more ambitious measures that will be needed to achieve them. If climate change mitigation falls significantly short in the next ten years, adaptation costs are likely to become unmanageable, and to fall overwhelmingly on local and private actors without the necessary resources to meet them.

Read the full article on ELO website
www.elo.org/publications/cop-30/