

Climate Action: decrease your footprint – increase your Hand Print



Staying below two degrees means ending the use of coal, oil and gas

The international community has agreed several times that climate change must be limited to below 2°C. Many of the most vulnerable countries demand that this upper limit be tightened to 1.5°C to avoid further negative impacts on their populations. These global temperature limits will likely be included in the Paris Agreement as well.

But temperature goals are very abstract. Paris will deliver an agreement – but emission reductions have to be realized on national, subnational, local and private levels. What do temperature goals mean for governments deciding on their national climate targets? For investors wondering whether an investment in a coal plant or a wind farm will be the smarter choice? For citizens making their own choices about transport and energy options and demanding better policies? To answer these questions, the global temperature goal needs to be “translated” into more concrete global long-term action.

At their summit in June 2015, the heads of state and governments of the G7 have suggested the following way of translating the 2°C limit:

*This [the Paris Agreement] should enable all countries to follow a low-carbon and resilient development pathway in line with the global goal to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2 °C. Mindful of this goal and considering the latest IPCC results, we emphasize that deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions are required with a **decarbonisation of the global economy over the course of this century.***

Decarbonisation means bringing the use of carbon-based fuels and many of process emissions (fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas, concrete, fertilizer) to zero. This goal was informed by the IPCC report, which shows what is required to stay below 2°C of warming with a probability of more than 66%: Most of the known reserves of fossil fuels must remain in the ground. Global emissions of all greenhouse gases must reach their peak by 2020 at the latest and then rapidly fall to zero or below by 2100 at the latest. Emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂), which is mainly produced during the combustion of fossil fuels,

must fall even faster. Global CO₂ emissions must be reduced to zero by 2070 the latest; the global economy must by then be completely “decarbonized”. In the electricity sector a substantial decarbonisation is already necessary at some point between 2040 and 2070, according to the IPCC.

The IPCC scenarios rely on “negative emissions” in the second half of the century, which means the removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. This would require technologies that have not yet been developed, tested or come with a variety of risks. If this risky bet is to be avoided, decarbonisation has to occur even faster. Likewise, if global warming is to be limited to below 2°C with a probability higher than 66% or to below 1.5°C, decarbonisation would have to occur even faster.

Others have suggested other formulations for this long-term goal, such as “**zero carbon emissions**”, “**phase-out of fossil fuel emissions**” or “**100% renewable energy**” by 2050. An agreement on these goals will also need to ensure that decarbonisation is organized in a fair way, with the richest countries taking the lead and with poorer countries and populations receiving the necessary support for a just transition. Whatever the exact choice of words, what matters is that Paris conference and citizens’ movements worldwide send a clear signal: **A worldwide phase-out of coal, oil and gas by mid-century means an earlier phase out in industrialized countries.**

What is my own role in this?

The urgent and huge task of decarbonisation can easily overburden individuals by creating a feeling of helplessness and pressure for change. At the same time we are asking ourselves: what is my role in this and do I even play any role in decarbonising the world we live in? The short answer is yes – if we choose to play an active role.

One first step is to decrease one’s own carbon footprint. **The next step is to effectively increase the scope of action.** The Hand Print stands for those activities that aim to change unsustainable structures in which individuals and groups are embedded.

Decrease your carbon footprint

Everyone can start to save the climate by decreasing the own carbon footprint which means to reduce individual greenhouse gas emissions. The following climate tips for everyday life can help to advance in this and can be used to inform others.

Electrical Devices

How many electrical devices do I really need?

- Use energy efficient devices
- Dispose electronic waste in environmentally-friendly ways
- Keep electric devices longer instead of purchasing new ones – especially mobile phones
- Completely switch off standby-devices

Nutrition/Diet

Do I need to eat meat every day?

- Buy regional and seasonal organic products, check the seasonal calendar for fruits and vegetables
- Eat less or no meat
- Drink tap water
- Value food, share it and reduce waste
- Buy fresh products and avoid purchasing frozen foods

Mobility

Do I really need a car?

- Avoid flights – if it is unavoidable then compensate with www.atmosfair.de/en
- Book your trip via sustainable travel operators
- Ride your bicycle more often or walk
- Use public transport and car-sharing
- If you use a car, try to choose fuel-efficient and environmentally-friendly options

Finance

What happens with my money?

- Invest in climate- and environmentally-friendly capital market products: www.forum-ng.de/en
- Choose sustainably managed banks
- Critically analyse offers concerning sustainability

Consumption

How much do I need for a good life?

- Use recycled products
- Upcycling: revalue things
- Buy less (tip for presents: “Zeit-statt-Zeug” – time instead of stuff)
- Opt to buy reusable products and second hand goods
- Hip: clothes-swapping events
- Share products instead of owning them

Habitation

How much living space do I need?

- Buy durable furniture and devices instead of disposable goods
- Procure certified green energy or invest in renewable energies yourself
- Use energy-efficient LED-lights
- Modernize your flat through energy optimization
- Use heating economically

Germanwatch Hand Print:**Increase your Hand Print and change long-lasting structures**

While some people try to change their individual behavior in some areas of everyday life for many years, they gave a lot of motivation and inspiring ideas to others, but the necessary change to keep global warming below 2°C obviously has not been reached yet. This is for reasons and conditions that make it necessary to take the next step and see where everyone can make a difference. First, the sustainable choice (e.g. consuming green electricity, moving with public transport ...) is often much more expensive, doesn't fit in socially accepted lifestyles and is also more complicated than its unsustainable counterpart.

Behaving in an unsustainable way in many areas is set as the socially accepted behavior and standard choice. Second, there is a behavioural phenomenon called the **rebound effect** that appears when individuals attempt to reduce their carbon footprint. According to that reduced emissions by one certain activity (e.g. using the train instead of car) are offset against unsustainable choices in other areas (e.g. flying more frequently) which in sum leads to no reductions or even an increasing footprint.

That's why footprint-activities must be complemented by actions that aim to change those underlying conditions, structures and patterns which make it hard for many people to behave climate friendly. Here the Germanwatch Hand Print comes into play. It focuses on those positive activities that lead to structural changes, for example

- by engagement in alliances and citizen initiatives for climate protection
- by critically following politics, by means of petitions, signature campaigns, and demonstrations for climate mitigation
- by requesting from politicians and businesses that sustainable consumption must be the easier and cheaper option
- by starting to change the social environments we live in

Everyone is embedded in certain surrounding structures: your street lane, neighbourhood, school or workplace, organisation, university, religious communities, sports clubs, the supermarket around the corner, the city you live in, your country, regional and global structures. Increasing one's Hand Print means **to play an active role in changing societal structures** at very different levels and increasing the sphere of action. The goal is to **make it easier for others to behave in a sustainable and climate friendly way.**

Examples: Schools conclude that flying is no longer possible for exchange visits; municipalities decide that all new electric supply contracts have to be with green electricity – the consumer can change later towards his preferred supplier etc.

The Centre for Environment Education (CEE) India developed the Hand Print as an open concept which can be used and further developed by everyone. The symbol of the Hand Print was created by ten-year-old Srija from India as a positive symbol. Meanwhile it is used to illustrate positive action towards sustainability. Germanwatch uses the Hand Print as an action tool for change makers with a strong focus on political engagement and structural change.

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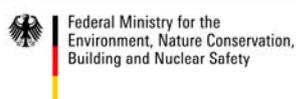
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