

# The Individual Carbon Footprint



Why the individual carbon footprint is a band-aid solution, and what we should be focusing on instead

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The Empowering Youth through Environmental Storytelling is a collaboration between The Environment and Human Rights Academy (TEHRA), News Decoder and the Young Educators European Association (YEEA).

The purpose of these educational materials is to help young people understand the climate crisis on a systems level through engaging with the topics and foster agency through the skills and techniques of journalism.

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We cannot be held liable for how these materials are used in practice.

These educational resources have been developed to the best of our knowledge, using reliable and widely-recognized sources. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and clarity, we cannot guarantee that the materials are free from errors or omissions. Climate change is a field of knowledge that continues to evolve, and teachers and learners are encouraged to consult up-to-date scientific sources (e.g. IPCC, IPBES or national agencies) to complement and enrich these activities.

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## Learning objectives

1. Critically assess the solutions put forward by powerful players
2. Better understand one's own place in the climate crisis
3. Comprehend, explain, and communicate a complex topic to an audience

### ✓ GreenComp alignment:

- Systems thinking
- Exploratory thinking
- Supporting fairness
- Collective action

## Unit guide

This unit looks at how the individual carbon footprint as a concept came about, why it's a band-aid solution, who should really be held responsible for reducing emissions, and the role of lifestyle in systemic change.

We recommend that you start with the opening activity, to have students watch a short video and discuss how they see their role in the climate crisis. You can then read the storytelling project instructions, so that students know what their task will be following the lecture.



# OPENING ACTIVITY

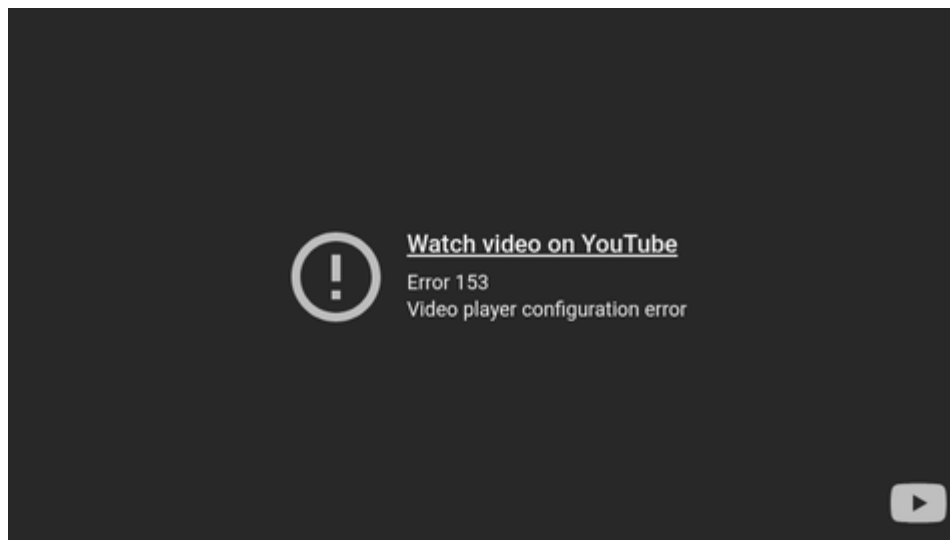
## Watch and discuss

(10 minute activity)

Watch [this video by DW Planet A](#), called *Why Big Oil loves to talk about your carbon footprint*, up until 3 minutes 20 seconds.

Discuss in pairs and then as a classroom:

1. Do you feel like you need to change your individual habits and lifestyle in order to “do your bit” for the climate?
2. Why would a big oil company like BP advertise the concept of a carbon footprint, while knowing how harmful their activities as a company were to the climate?





## Storytelling

### Produce an explainer

Start by writing down the who, what, when, where and why of the individual carbon footprint.

Who brought the idea about and who is targeted?

What does the individual carbon footprint say is a solution to the climate crisis? What is it missing?

When did it come about as a concept?

Why do BP, and other big fossil fuel corporations, want the responsibility to be on individuals? Why is this standing in the way of systemic solutions? Why is this an issue of injustice?

Turn your notes into an explainer. Do you think your parents, your friends, your siblings, know that the individual carbon footprint was brought about by a big oil company? How could you explain that the carbon footprint is just a band-aid solution?

In your explanation, try to keep your opinion out. It should be possible to get the meaning across by focusing on the facts.

Next, think about how you can visualise your explanation. Are there metaphors or example (like a cyclist patching up a flat tire instead of the municipality building safe roads for cycling on) that could help explain it?

Is there data you can find from this unit or from the Oxfam reports called Climate Inequality: A planet for the 99% or Carbon Inequality Kills: Why curbing the excessive emissions of an elite few can create a sustainable planet for all that can help you explain the individual carbon footprint with a critical lens?

You can make your own visuals (using an online tool like *DataWrapper* or *Canva* or pen and paper) from the data you find, as long as you fully reference your source and ensure you put it in context.

From your explainer, produce a complete report with your words and visuals. You can make a short video for social media, a written explainer with infographics in the format of a web page, or an audio story with rich explanations of any data you find.

Remember – your audience (young people like you, or people unknowing of this topic) should be able to clearly understand your report AND stay engaged.

**If you want to find free-to-use images and videos visit [Pixabay.com](https://pixabay.com) and [Pexels.com](https://pexels.com). But can you be creative with taking your own videos!**



# LEARN: THE INDIVIDUAL CARBON FOOTPRINT

You may have already heard about the individual carbon footprint on the news, in adverts or online.

The carbon footprint as a concept was introduced by the British oil and gas company BP (formerly the British Petroleum Company) in the early 2000s.

According to BP, a carbon footprint is "the amount of carbon dioxide emitted due to our daily activities – from washing a load of laundry to driving a car load of kids to school" (see image below).

BP is a multinational oil and gas company, among the largest companies in the world.

When hearing about research, a concept, or an idea, it is important to look who is behind it, either as an author, or as a funder of the project.

You will notice that in their definition of the carbon footprint, BP doesn't mention the CO<sub>2</sub> emitted whilst burning fossil fuels, flying for city trips on a monthly basis or owning a yacht, but instead stresses daily activities we all do.

In 2004, BP launched a "carbon footprint calculator" on their website. Through only a few clicks, any person could see the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that their daily activities were releasing into the atmosphere – and therefore, how much they were contributing to climate change.

The concept of individual carbon footprint has become a widely used term and has even been adopted by environmental organisations. This was the result of a big marketing campaign, which cost BP more than \$100 million a year between 2004 and 2006.<sup>1</sup>

While making changes in our lifestyles is a core part of the change we need, it is also important to ask ourselves if "sustainable" lifestyle changes are accessible to all. Not all individuals have the time, money, or choices and alternatives to make greener decisions, such as buying organic food and using public transport.

Focusing too much on personal responsibility can shift attention away from the structural changes that are truly needed – like a renewable energy system, or subsidised public transport.

**What on  
earth is a  
carbon  
footprint?**



**Reduce your  
carbon footprint.  
But first, find  
out what it is.**

Call it your mark on the world. It's the amount of carbon dioxide emitted due to your daily activities - from mowing your lawn to vacuuming your home. Find out the size of your household's carbon footprint, learn how you can reduce it, and see how we're reducing ours at bp.com/carbonfootprint. It's a start.



Figure 1: Ads about the individual carbon footprint, published by BP from 2004 to 2006. Ads from Supran, G. and Oreskes, N.<sup>2</sup>



individual  
**carbon  
footprint**

vegetarian

cycling to  
school

saving energy  
at home

**system**  
CHANGE

meat-free  
school canteen

protected  
cycling lanes

building codes based  
on renewable energy

There is also the danger of greenwashing, where certain products are labelled as green and sustainable, but when you dig deeper, it is just a marketing trick.

As with everything we have explored so far, the individual carbon footprint is complex and has many aspects to consider.

## 1. Why the individual carbon footprint is a band-aid solution

*1.1. The 'individual carbon footprint' concept does not tackle the root causes of the climate crisis.*

By putting the responsibility for climate change on the shoulders of individuals, the 'individual carbon footprint' concept does not tackle the root causes of the climate crisis – the fact that our electricity, showers, stoves, food systems, transportation networks, and buildings are most often connected to the burning of fossil fuels.

Changing your lifestyle – or the way in which you go about your life – cannot in itself address the climate crisis and its inequality dimensions.

It doesn't lean on any of the powerful leverage points we talked about in the Systemic Change unit – the goals, rules, or mindset.

If you lead a low-carbon lifestyle, continue, as this is of course helpful and indicative of how one could live in a low-carbon world. Also, once you learn about the threats of climate change, and how overconsumption impacts the environment and other people, it is likely you will want to change some of your behaviors.

Recycling, choosing to travel by train or bicycle, eating seasonally, avoiding fast fashion are all very important aspects of a low-carbon world.

But, it's important to underline that CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions arising from individual lifestyle change are just a fraction compared to the scale of decarbonisation that is needed to stay within safe temperature limits.



# INDIVIDUAL CARBON FOOTPRINT

It's impossible for you, your classmates or parents, even your school to address climate change simply by making lifestyle changes. We need much more.

For example, when thinking how our lives would look in a low carbon world, we need carbon-neutral products to be the norm required by law, not a choice made by a company.

We need less 'choices' (how important is it really to choose between 50 variations of soap?), and more products that are environmentally friendly and accessible to all. We need low-carbon infrastructure to be accessible, good quality and easy to use, and probably the main, if not only, option we have.



## *1.2. The 'individual carbon footprint' keeps the status quo in place.*

By focusing on individual responsibility to address climate change, the individual carbon footprint diverts our attention away from the real culprits of climate change. Companies such as fossil fuel companies, high-income countries and wealthy individuals are the high-emitters and culprits of climate change, who need to drastically reduce CO2 emissions.

Big carbon emitters like BP have worked to make us feel like we, individuals, are all responsible for climate change and that we are also responsible to address it.

Individuals can try to reduce their individual carbon footprint, but many high-emitting countries, companies, and wealthy individuals are continuing their carbon-intensive activities.

These groups are the biggest emitters. Doesn't it make more sense for us, individuals, to encourage and push them to reduce their emissions, rather than use our energy and money trying to reduce ours, whilst also feeling guilty that we can't do enough?





## 1.3. When low-carbon options remain inaccessible

Because the systems organising our lives are not designed to be low-carbon and to meet everyone's needs, low-carbon alternatives tend to be more expensive. Therefore, switching to a low-carbon lifestyle is mostly available to wealthy people, whilst those people who are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change have limited access to it.

For example, an electric vehicle is more expensive than a vehicle running on fossil fuels.

Taking the train tends to be more expensive than taking the plane when traveling internationally.

Sustainable and organic food products can often be more expensive.

In Europe, high-income countries or cities often have good cycling infrastructure, while middle- or low-income countries or cities often don't have cycling lanes or pro-cycling cultural attitudes, which can make using a bicycle instead of a car dangerous.

This means that people with lower incomes will struggle to switch to a low-carbon lifestyle. Moreover, people with the lowest incomes often need to increase their energy consumption to meet their basic human needs.





## 2. Who are the climate change culprits?

Whilst the individual carbon footprint is not helpful when it comes to ordinary people and people living in poverty and exclusion, certain entities and individuals should rapidly and drastically reduce their carbon footprint.

In their latest report, the IPCC has shown that major polluting companies, high-emitting countries and wealthy individuals are largely responsible for climate change.<sup>3</sup>

Global North countries and major companies, in particular fossil fuel ones, have played a significant role in emitting CO<sub>2</sub> since the Industrial Revolution through pursuing economic growth at all costs.<sup>4</sup>

Wealthy individuals have disproportionately contributed to the climate crisis:

- through their carbon-intensive lifestyles (which are way above the average lifestyle, as you will see below)
- through investing their money in high-emitting companies such as fossil fuel companies
- through their influence over politics (from directly funding parties to indirect lobbying), the economy, and social norms (what is 'cool' or not).<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, those who are most impacted by climate change are those who have contributed the least to climate change: people living in poverty and exclusion, marginalized groups (such as women and girls, Indigenous People and other people experiencing discrimination), and Global South countries.<sup>6</sup>

This is unfair, and shows how the climate crisis is at its core a crisis of inequality.

Tackling injustice is essential for addressing the climate crisis because the roots of both problems are deeply connected. By addressing inequality, we can shift the focus from profits to people and the planet, support fairer access to clean basic services, and ensure that everyone has a voice in shaping the future.

In other words, climate justice isn't just about cutting emissions, it's about creating a more equal, caring, and resilient world for all.





## 2.1 Certain companies

Research has found that only 100 companies are responsible for more than 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions between 1988 and 2015<sup>7</sup>. Fossil fuel companies such as ExxonMobil, Shell, BP and Chevron have been identified among the highest carbon-emitting private companies since 1988<sup>8</sup>.

Maybe fossil fuel companies don't know about the accumulation of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions leading to climate change? They do. And they've known for a long time.

You may wonder why systemic change is so important to address the climate crisis. Imagine you're riding a bicycle on a road filled with potholes. Each time you hit a pothole, your bike gets a flat tire. You could keep stopping to patch up the tire each time it punctures, but that's only a temporary fix.

If we stay with the metaphor of the bicycle, systemic change for the climate crisis is like changing the entire road infrastructure to make it adequate for cycling and pothole-free. We need to change the systems which are the root cause of the climate crisis to address the climate crisis and not just 'patch up' its effects.

Yet, despite knowing about climate change, fossil fuel companies continued to burn fossil fuels and make profits whilst spreading and funding misinformation about climate change to stop any significant attempts at phasing out fossil fuel.

To stay within 1.5°C of temperature increase, we need to phase out fossil fuels<sup>9</sup>.

When fossil fuel companies are making record-high profits, why would they voluntarily choose to stop extracting fossil fuel, if no one requests them to?





In 2022, the five largest Western fossil fuel companies' combined profits (Exxon, Chevron, Shell, BP and TotalEnergies) amounted to \$200 billion! Each of these companies revealed that they made their highest profits ever in 2022<sup>10</sup>.

BP or the "cash machine", as it was described by its CEO based on its 2022 record annual profits (in the context of increased oil and gas prices due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine), scaled back its emissions reduction target for 2030 from 35-40% to 20-30%<sup>11</sup>. BP went back to discovering, developing and buying new oil and gas resources<sup>12</sup>, whilst being among the 25 companies responsible for emitting 51% of the global greenhouse gas emissions between 1988 and 2015<sup>13</sup>.

## 2.2. Global North countries

There are huge inequalities among countries in terms of their current contribution to global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In 2019, high-income countries (home to 16% of the global population) emitted 40% of global consumption-based CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Low-income countries emitted 0.4% of global consumption-based CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

For example, African countries (home to 17% of the global population) currently emit less than 4% of global consumption-based emissions, which is 10 times less than high-income countries' emissions in 2019 despite having almost the same population<sup>14</sup>.

There are also huge inequalities in terms of historic emissions and therefore responsibility for climate change. High-income countries have historically benefited from economic growth fueled by fossil fuels, whilst low-income countries still need to grow their economies to meet their populations' needs.



A photo from Mumbai, India, documenting a wealthy neighbourhood next to a poor neighbourhood.  
Source: Oxfam International, 2023. © Johnny Miller / Unequal Scenes



Whilst bearing much less responsibility for the climate crisis compared to Global North countries in terms of current and historic emissions, Global South countries are on the frontline of the climate crisis. At the same time, they have less resources to deal with the effects of climate change compared to Global North countries. As an example, in the below chart, you can see that Global South countries are among the most impacted in terms of climate change affecting their agricultural production:

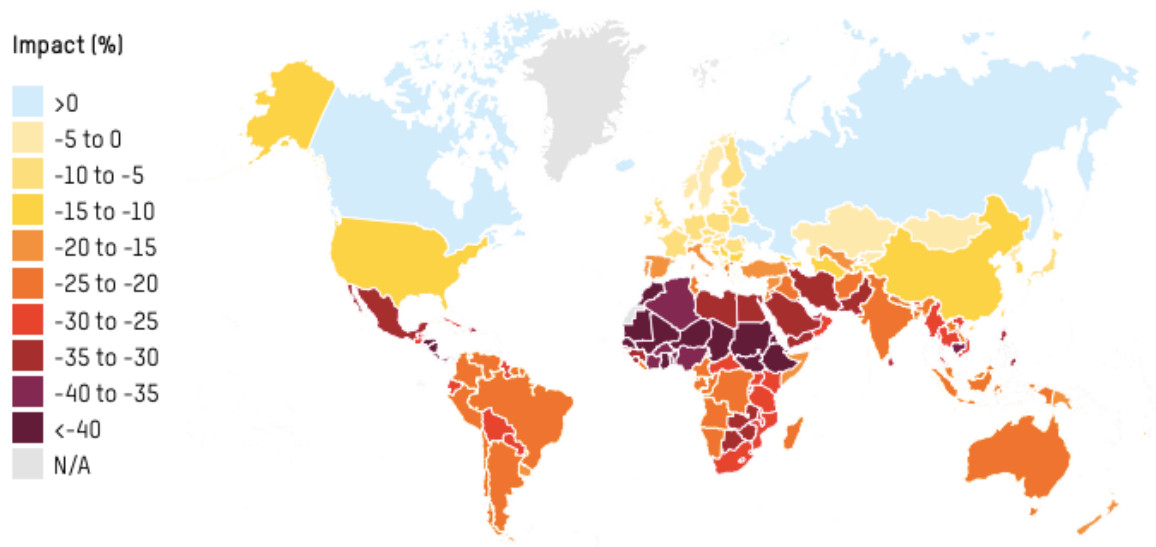


Figure 2: Chart showing the effects of climate change on agricultural productivity across the world, from 1961 to 2015. Chart from Oxfam International<sup>15</sup>.

Yet, at the international level, Global South countries are sidelined in climate negotiations such as Conferences Of the Parties (COPs).

COPs are spaces where crucial decisions about climate action, funding, and accountability are made. However, power imbalances continue to shape whose voices are heard and whose interests dominate.

Global North countries which have benefitted from fossil fuel-powered economic growth - such as the US, Western European Union countries, Japan, Australia and Canada - do not

assume their responsibility for climate change. After years of negotiations, the loss and damage fund, a pot of money that would go to those that feel climate change the most but have contributed to it the least, was finally adopted at COP27 in 2022 and operationalised during COP28 in 2023<sup>16</sup>.

However, the agreed amount of \$700 million covers less than 0.2% of losses Global South countries face every year due to climate change<sup>17</sup>. It is also unclear if this money will be provided as grants, or as loans with unjust interest.



Another big issue is that high-emitting companies exert pressure on climate negotiations: at COP26 in Dubai (2023), over 500 fossil fuel lobbyists were given access to the negotiations. For comparison, this was more than the combined delegations of 8 countries having already been hugely impacted by climate change: Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Mozambique, Myanmar, Haiti, Puerto Rico and the Bahamas<sup>18</sup>.

This is of real concern, because negotiation meetings on different topics take place simultaneously at the COP, and Global South countries with small delegations cannot participate in each of these meetings with high stakes for them.

Global South countries are therefore often excluded from the decision-making process, although they are the ones most impacted by climate change.

## 2.3. *Wealthy individuals*

An analysis by Oxfam International released in 2023 shows that some individuals contribute far more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to climate change than others:

### BOX ES.1. CLIMATE INEQUALITY IN NUMBERS

Oxfam's analysis has revealed the following.<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ In 2019, the super-rich 1% were responsible for 16% of global carbon emissions, which is the same as the emissions of the poorest 66% of humanity (5 billion people).
- ▶ Since the 1990s, the super-rich 1% burned through twice as much of the carbon budget as the poorest half of humanity combined.
- ▶ The emissions of the 1% are set to be over 22 times more than the safe limit (the emissions allowed if we are to stay below 1.5°C global warming) in 2030.
- ▶ Annual global emissions by the super-rich 1% cancel out carbon savings for almost a million onshore wind turbines.
- ▶ The emissions of the super-rich 1% in 2019 are enough to cause 1.3 million deaths due to heat.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ A tax of 60% on the incomes of the super-rich 1% of earners globally would cut the carbon equivalent of more than the total emissions of the UK and raise US\$6.4 trillion to fund renewable energy and a transition away from fossil fuels.

Figure 3: Box summarizing key insights into climate inequality in terms of carbon footprint. Box from Oxfam International<sup>19</sup>.



# INDIVIDUAL CARBON FOOTPRINT

Wealthy individuals – living on every continent – play a key role in the climate crisis.

Looking at consumption-based CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2019, Oxfam International found that the wealthiest 10% were responsible for 50% of emissions, while the poorest 50% in terms of income were responsible for only 8% of emissions.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst being the least responsible for climate change, people experiencing poverty and exclusion – such as women, people of color and the poorest people in Global South countries – are most impacted by the effects of climate change. How come?

A few explanations for this:<sup>21</sup>

- These groups tend to live in areas which are more prone to extreme weather events such as flooding, storms, heat stress;
- They tend to live in temporary or low-quality housing which is vulnerable to extreme weather events;
- They tend to lack savings or access to social protection or insurance schemes to cope with an emergency;
- They tend to depend more directly on natural resources;
- They tend to live in areas with less green spaces which help decrease temperature.

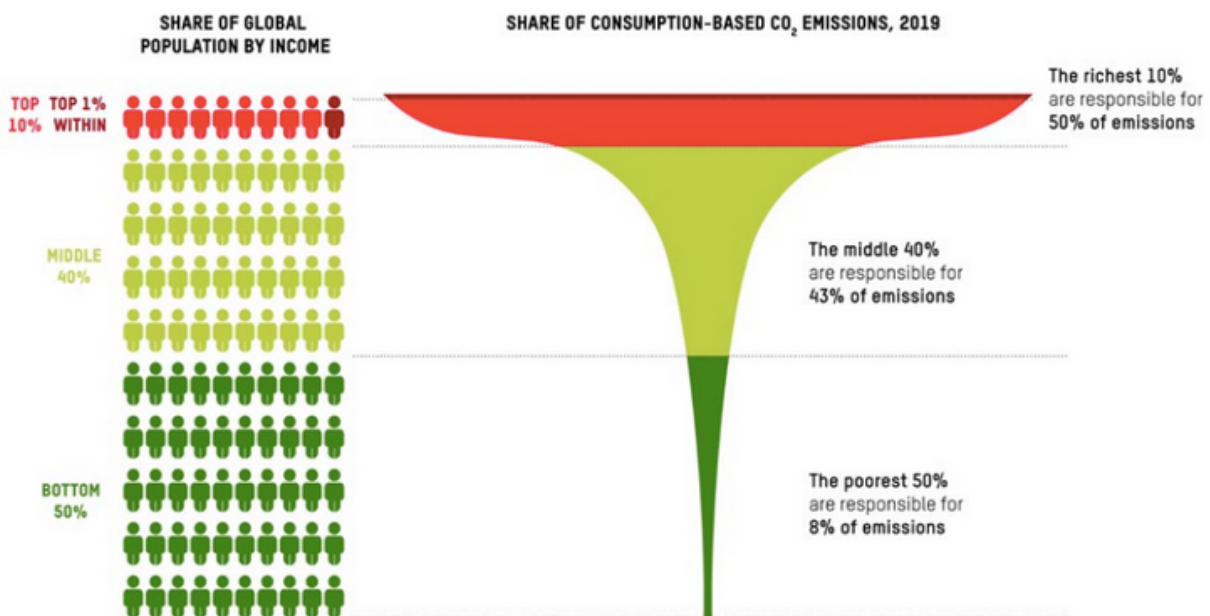


Figure 4: Chart representing the share of consumption-based CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2019 by income groups globally. Chart from Oxfam International<sup>22</sup>.



## 2.4. The wealthiest 1% influence over society

### *Influence over social norms (leverage point: mindset)*

Unfortunately, the overconsumption of luxurious goods and activities by the wealthiest makes these carbon-intensive products desirable or aspirational to wider society. Think about all the movies and series which glorify luxurious lifestyles, impacting the kind of lifestyle people want. This increases excessive consumption by the wealthiest 10%, but also by the middle 40%<sup>23</sup>.

It also disincentivises and demotivates the general population from changing their lifestyles - which could actually have a positive impact if done at scale, rather than at an individual level<sup>24</sup>.

### *Influence over politics (leverage point: the rules)*

There are many examples of wealthy individuals trying to influence government decision-making on curbing carbon emissions or actively lobbying against renewable energy regulations<sup>25</sup>.

Importantly, wealthy individuals and the companies that they control can exert influence over politicians and voters through owning media companies or funding political advertising. One of the famous examples of this is Rupert Murdoch who, together with his family controls international media outlets such as Fox News, the Wall Street Journal, the Sun and the Times. These outlets have been denying the reality of climate

change and spreading misinformation about it for decades<sup>26</sup>.

Why would the wealthiest 1% seek to influence political decision-making against bold climate action? Not only do the wealthiest 1% lead lavish, carbon-intensive lifestyles, but they also invest in highly carbon-intensive companies. In fact, between 50% and 70% of the wealthiest 1%'s carbon footprint comes from their investments<sup>27</sup>.

Because they own shares in high-emitting companies, the wealthiest 1% have a direct interest in those high-emitting companies continuing to make profits. The five fossil fuel majors confirmed that most of the profits they made in 2022 – \$200 billion – would go to paying dividends to their shareholders<sup>28</sup>.

The wealthiest 1% therefore have a direct interest in keeping the economy locked in fossil fuel energy, so that their companies continue to make ever-increasing profits.





*Investing in companies (leverage point: goals)*

Behind a company there are the people who invested their money in it. By investing money in a company, you buy parts of that company, or 'shares', becoming a shareholder of the company. When a company makes a profit at the end of the year, after having covered their expenses and paid tax, they distribute the profit or a large part of it to their shareholders by paying them dividends. The larger the profit that a company makes, the larger the dividends that the shareholders will receive.

This means that most shareholders, if their main motivation is to increase their wealth, would require the companies that they invest in to focus on growing and maximising profits, rather than switch focus to meeting people's needs and reducing their pressure on the environment. This prevents companies from drastically decarbonising their practices.

### **3. The need for systemic and just alternatives to the 'individual carbon footprint'**

To achieve the scale of CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction that is needed to stay within the temperature limits of the Paris Agreement and to address inequalities, we need systemic and just solutions.

The individual carbon footprint concept is limited in relation to the average citizen who has little time to think about climate change and their footprint. It also does not apply to for

people living in poverty and exclusion who are in energy poverty and have to increase their energy consumption to meet basic needs.

According to the IPCC, "wealthy individuals contribute disproportionately to higher emissions and have a high potential for emissions reductions"<sup>29</sup>.

Therefore, it is time for wealthy individuals – the top 1% or 10% of the global population – to drastically reduce their 'wealthy individual carbon footprint' because it is the richest 10% that are responsible for 50% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.





# INDIVIDUAL CARBON FOOTPRINT

Research suggests with high confidence that such changes would not even impact wealthy individuals' quality of life<sup>30</sup>. At the end of the day, beyond meeting your basic needs, money can't buy you happiness.

For low-income groups in low-income countries, a large share of their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions come from meeting basic needs, such as housing, energy and staple foods<sup>31</sup>.

For high-income groups, the largest share of their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions comes from transport: car journeys, flights, even private jets and yachts<sup>32</sup>.

If low-income individuals tried to reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, this would impact their quality of life given their emissions stem from covering basic needs such as housing, electricity, and food. Some people even need to increase their energy use to meet their needs.

Even for middle-income individuals who may rely on their car to go to work or use fossil fuel-generated electricity, it may not always be possible or affordable to turn to a less carbon-intensive alternative.

For instance, if a person were only able to find a job in a different town and there is no affordable and reliable public transport connecting their home to their workplace, they don't have any other option than to drive to work to make a living.

For the top 1% or 10% wealthiest of the global population, we can likely agree that SUVs, yachts and private jets are not necessary to meet human needs, especially when thinking that this may impact the needs and lives of either people living in a less privileged situation or futures generations.





## 4. What role can lifestyle change play in all this?

You may wonder if switching to a low carbon lifestyle can have any contribution to addressing climate change. Of course, it does, but with certain nuances!

On the one hand, the IPCC tells us that lifestyle changes have the potential to bring about large reductions of greenhouse gas emissions, whilst also increasing well-being in relation to food, mobility and housing – as long as these changes are systemically enabled through policies (rules), infrastructure and technologies, as well as cultural change (mindset)<sup>33</sup>.

On the other hand, lifestyle change can also contribute to bring about systemic change. Let's look into it in more detail!

### *4.1. Systemic lifestyle change has the potential for large greenhouse gas emissions reductions*

According to IPCC's calculations, the most promising lifestyle changes, if systemically enabled, are the following<sup>34</sup>:

- Reducing long-distance flight and providing low-carbon transportation urban infrastructure
- Switching to a plant-based diet
- Increasing the energy efficiency of the building sector

The IPCC highlights that such lifestyle changes must be systemically enabled – or made easy and affordable to adopt by everyone, through adequate policies, infrastructure, cultural change and technologies, to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by a meaningful amount.

Without good and affordable public transport, one can't do without a personal vehicle if their office is far away from their home.

Cultural change also plays an important role. If you live in a society where it's considered "uncool" to use public transport, most people will seek to buy and use a car. Keep in mind, the vast majority of people must adopt a low-carbon lifestyle to make a difference.

For example, by cycling to school or work, you reduce the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that are emitted. Depending where you live, cycling can be more or less difficult or close to impossible.

If you live in the Netherlands, the cycling infrastructure will likely be there (policy and infrastructure change), and the car drivers will be used to cyclists and so know how to drive on roads with cyclists (cultural change).



However, if you live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are so few cycling lanes – the infrastructure doesn't accommodate cyclists. The drivers are not used to them either, making an accident more likely. To be able to use low-carbon transport, we need to change our awareness, but we also need the tools available to change our behaviours - and this requires the system – such as road infrastructure and the culture – to change as well.



*4.2. Lifestyle change has the potential to contribute to systemic change, which is its main strength*

Lifestyle change can play a role to achieve systemic change and make low carbon lifestyles easy and cheap, under certain conditions.

**1. If you lead a low carbon lifestyle, don't stop there.**

Buying organic cotton t-shirts, organic fruits and vegetables and riding your bike are only one aspect of being kind to our environment.

Get involved with other people to intervene at leverage points in the systems that have led to the climate crisis.

In other words, don't limit yourself to being a 'responsible consumer', but be an active citizen. The IPCC is highly confident that transition pathways and changes of social norms are often triggered by experiments implemented by dedicated individuals<sup>35</sup>.



**2. If you lead a low-carbon lifestyle, don't guilt trip others around you who may not afford to lead a low-carbon lifestyle. Show them how it could benefit them instead!**

This attitude only drives people away from your cause. Rather, talk to them, understand their concerns and show them how low-carbon alternatives could benefit them as well.

**3. People leading a low-carbon lifestyle can demonstrate people's support for such changes, when we ask the government to change the rules in favour of low-carbon alternatives.**

The IPCC explains that when taken collectively, lifestyle changes initiatives can prompt governments to make legal and policy changes which in turn, further encourage other people to join in those lifestyle changes<sup>36</sup>.

**4. By leading a low-carbon lifestyle and encouraging others to do so by gently and respectfully bringing them in, we are already creating a different world.**

We are demonstrating to ourselves and to each other that a different world, where we can all live well together, in harmony with nature, is possible.

This unit does not aim to discourage you from trying to lead a low-carbon lifestyle. It aims to allow you to critically view the individual carbon footprint, knowing where it came from and uncover the need to shift narratives from individual blame to systemic change.

Lifestyle change is not a solution to the climate crisis. Its power lies, however, in how it can catalyse systemic change.



## Endnotes

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