

North America



Although we often think of North America being the United States and Canada it also includes Central America and the Caribbean. This means it contains a wide range of habits, environments and people who are all affected by climate change in different ways.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
education

Image credit: National Geographic

We will highlight here some of the main impacts of climate change on these countries, but the effects are far more wide ranging than just these ones!

The USA

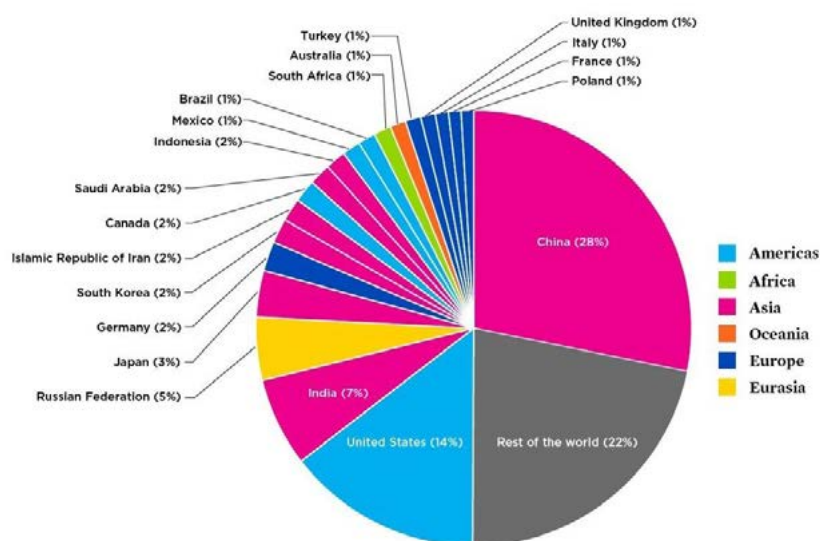
With a population of 328 million, the USA is dominant in both its contribution to climate change and its power in global politics to change climate policy.

Working out which country produces the most greenhouse gases can be pretty tricky because it depends how you measure it. Is it...

- The total amount ever produced?
- The amount of greenhouse gases produced in a given year?
- The amount produced per person?
- Does it include the greenhouse gases used to make products in other countries which are bought and used in another?

Let's look at a couple of the more straightforward measures as an example.

This pie chart shows the total greenhouse gas emissions of each country in 2017 (which is the most recent data). As you can see, China, followed by the USA and then India, are the biggest producers of greenhouse gases.

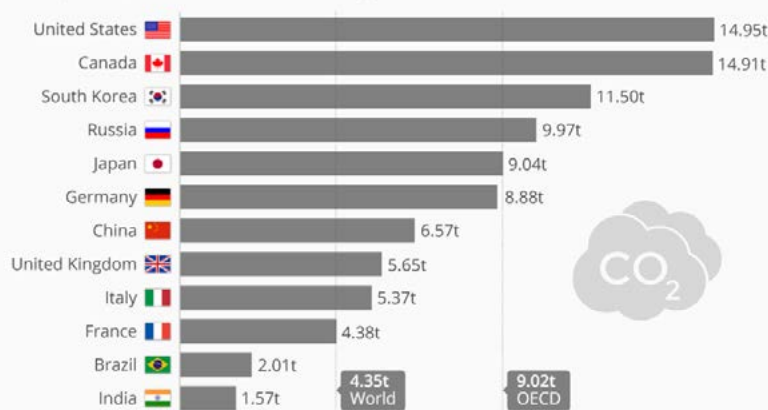


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Data: IEA Fuel Combustion 2019 Highlight

Image credit: National Geographic

The Global Disparity in Carbon Footprints

Per capita CO₂ emissions in the world's largest economies in 2016* (in metric tons)



* countries chosen based on 2017 nominal GDP
Sources: International Energy Agency, International Monetary Fund

statista

However, when you look at it from a slightly different perspective, you get slightly different results.

This bar chart uses the same data to show how much greenhouse gas each country is producing per person (per capita). In this way of looking at emissions the USA produced the highest amount per person, followed closely by Canada and then South Korea. China has dropped all the way to 7th place.

The data used to make these graphs does not include the greenhouse gases made in one country and made in another. For example, if you live in the UK but buy a computer made in China, the greenhouse gases produced in making that computer and flying it to the UK are recorded as being produced in China. Do you think that is fair?

Lots and lots of the things we use every day in the UK are made in countries like China, India and Indonesia. Have a look at these countries on the graphs. What do you think might happen to their ranking if these emissions were attributed to the country who bought that product?

Whatever way you look at it, the USA is producing a huge amount of greenhouse gases, so the actions of its leaders and its people have a big effect on the climate crisis.

Climate Impacts



*California wildfire in 2018
Image credit: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 Keven Key- flickr*

The USA covers a huge area with a huge number of biomes, so the impacts of climate change will be felt differently in different places. For much of the southern and central parts of the country rising temperatures will bring increased risks of drought, especially in regions which are already deserts. This will also increase the risk of wildfires and increase the likelihood of water shortages.

Throughout the whole country there is an increased chance of extreme weather events such as floods, storms and, particularly in the south west, hurricanes. A hurricane is a huge tropical storm which consists of very fast winds. These usually build up into huge swirling storms over the sea with lots of rain. If they get blown onto land then they can damage houses and roads as well as risk people's lives and cause flooding. These hurricanes are becoming both more frequent and more powerful; September 2020 was the most active month of hurricanes in the Pacific Ocean ever recorded.



*Satellite image of hurricane Isabel
reaching the west coast of the USA in
2003*



Hurricane in Florida



*Flooding in New Orleans after Hurricane
Katrina*

Canada

Canada has a bigger land mass than the USA but far fewer people. Unfortunately, it is still one of the world's biggest contributors to climate change, coming just behind the USA in world rankings when looking at the amount of greenhouse gases emitted per person. Because Canada is so huge with people living so far apart, much of this comes from travel and the movement of food and goods to different areas.

The other way in which Canada contributes to climate change is through the exploitation of its expansive range of natural resources. Much of Canada's income comes from the extraction of oil and gas and the mining of materials like gold and diamonds. As well as causing immediate damage in places where the resources are being extracted it also causes pollution and disruption to water supplies. This has a huge impact on the natural environment of the country.



Image credit: The National Observer, Canada

The impact of climate change will be felt particularly badly in the northern parts of Canada where many of the First Nations People live. This is because many parts of northern Canada are Arctic tundra, lying within the Arctic Circle - an ecosystem particularly sensitive to climate change. Rising temperatures are rapidly changing the environments in polar regions with the melting of sea ice, glaciers and permafrost all having disastrous effects on wildlife and people.

For example, melting ice sheets mean that polar bears lose their hunting grounds and end up moving further inland, encountering cities where they endanger themselves and people. Many of the roads and buildings in the Arctic north are built on ground which is only stable when frozen; land which has permafrost. This is frozen soil which never melts. However, because of rising temperatures, this permanently frozen ground is melting and becoming mud. This is causing buildings and roads to collapse in catastrophic landslides. All this melting ice also adds more water into our oceans which causes sea levels to rise.



The town of Resolute in Canada is one of many northern communities where all the roads and buildings are constructed on permafrost.

Image credit: Northern Pix, CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Isra Hirsi

Born
2003

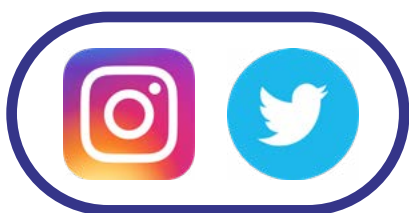


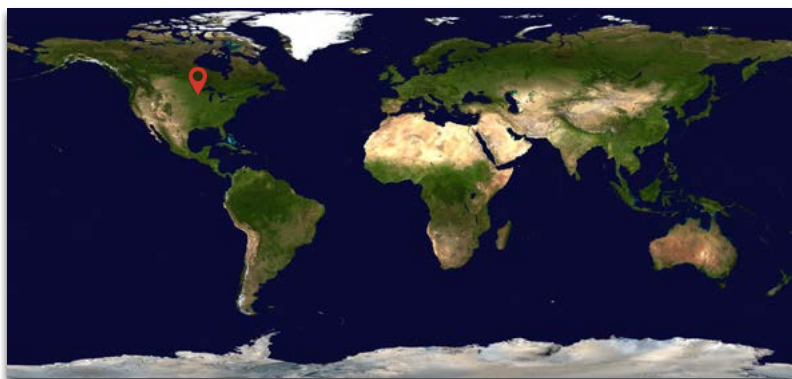
Image credit: Climate Change Resource

Isra Hirsi is a climate and social justice activist from Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is co-founder of US Youth Climate Strike, through which she has helped to organise hundreds of school strikes across the US. In 2019 She won a Brower Youth Award for her climate activism. She is the daughter of US Congresswoman Ilhan Omar.

Isra is particularly concerned with the intersection of climate and social justice issues and has been involved with anti-racist and gun violence protests since the age of twelve. She works to diversify the people involved in climate action and climate discussions because she recognises that this is an issue which affects everyone, and as such needs solutions which involve everyone.

“When we talk about the climate crisis and we don’t talk about these communities that are being affected, we create this circle of it becoming a white issue, or an issue that doesn’t care about black and brown bodies. And that allows for solutions that don’t care about black and brown bodies.”

She has a brilliant [TED talk](#) on being a black woman in traditionally white spaces.



More info:

- [International Congress of Youth Voices](#)
- [Article in The Grist](#)

Jerome Foster II



Image credit: OneMillionOfUs

Jerome is the Founder & Executive Director of OneMillionOfUs, an international youth voting organization that is building a uniting youth coalition between the 5 major youth social movements:

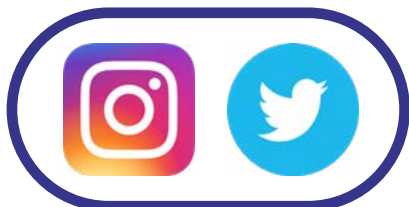
- Gun violence
- Climate change
- Immigration reform
- Gender equality
- Racial equality

The coalition combines these movements with the goal to educate, energize, and mobilize one million young people to vote in their national elections. He believes strongly in the power of children and young people to make a difference.

“Young people need to keep marching. We can’t be complacent. It’s up to us to save our future.”

He began his activism as a climate striker and protested outside the White House, sometimes by himself, for 58 consecutive Fridays. He has now led some of the biggest climate strikes in the US and has a role on the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council for the current US government. This board advises the government on issues surrounding climate change and its intersection with other social justice issues.

“No one wants to be fighting for clean air in 2030. When you aren’t able to plan for your future, you aren’t able to feel secure. When everything is destabilizing and you don’t have a fallback plan, that’s incredibly devastating.”



Born
2002

More info:

- [Wikipedia](#)
- [OneMillionOfUs](#)
- [Instagram](#)



Nadia Nazar

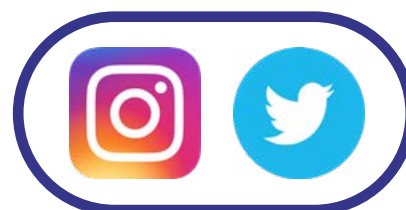
Nadia is an artist and youth climate activist from Baltimore. She uses her artwork to capture the urgency of the climate crisis. She has organized multiple community art builds for climate demonstrations. By using art to help spread climate messages, empower youth protesters and to mobilise communities Nadia shows how you can use any of your skills and talents to help fight the climate crisis.

Born
2002/3



Image credit: Stuart Holton

Nadia is also the Co-Executive Director and Co-Founder of Zero Hour, the youth led climate justice organization. She is currently the Art Director as well organizing with other young creative people to provide beautiful and powerful art for demonstrations.



More info:

- [Zero Hour](#)
- [Zero Hour instagram](#)
- [Zero Hour Twitter](#)

“Together, the youth are shaking the systems that have supported the climate crisis, including racism, patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism.”

To see some of her artwork go to her [website](#)

Makasa Looking Horse

Makaśa Looking Horse was born on Six Nations territory in Ontario and is Mohawk and Lakota. She has completed Lakota and Mohawk rites of passage ceremonies known as Ishnati and Ohero:kon. She has been a Sundance leader for the women for 11 years and is most known for her activism with Six Nations on water security.



Image credit: Makasa Looking Horse



Her activism is focused on clean water and the rights of First Nation people to control their ancestral lands. She was driven to become a climate activist because only 9% of the people living in her community have access to clean drinking water and climate change will only make this worse.

“We should be at the forefront and they (the federal government) should know how to be a good ally and support us 100 per cent.”

She has held many protests fighting for clean water for her community and has worked alongside traditional governments to fight big corporations, including handing Nestle a Cease and Desist Letter on behalf of the Confederacy to stop them from removing billions of litres of water from her communities’ water supply.

“I can’t sit back and watch all these terrible things happening. I have to take action and fight for our water and our land.”

More info:

- [Makasa took on Nestle](#)
- [Ohneganos Instagram](#)
- [Indigenous Ecological Knowledge](#)

Born

1996/7



United Kingdom and the UKSCN

What is the UK government doing to combat climate change?

In May 2019, the UK parliament declared a climate emergency.

A month later - in June 2019 - the UK parliament passed legislation saying it will be a 'net zero' emitter of greenhouse gases by 2050. This means it will balance the amount of greenhouse gases it produces with the amount removed from the atmosphere.

As of summer 2021, the UK is not yet on track to achieve net zero by 2050 - it is a tough target so more needs to be done to achieve it. Some examples of ways the UK are currently attempting to reduce emissions are:

- Closing coal-fired power stations - only three remain in the UK and are all planned to be closed by 2024;
- Stopping sales of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030;
- No new homes built from 2025 onwards will have gas boilers.

However, even though these actions have been put in place to reduce greenhouse gases, there are other related projects that will create high levels of emissions:

- Although there is a plan to close coal-fired power stations, there is a new coal mine called Woodhouse Colliery being proposed in Cumbria;
- There has been a controversial decision to allow further exploration of undersea oil resources in Cambo oil field, near the coast of Shetland;
- There is a plan to stop sales of cars that create high levels of pollution, but the UK government plans to build 4000 miles of new roads by 2025.

In **December 2020**, Prime Minister Boris Johnson declared a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 68% by 2030 (compared to levels in 1990). There are a lot of ongoing discussions about whether the UK is doing enough to meet this target, or whether these targets are even good enough - some argue they are too late. These discussions will continue at COP26 as countries talk about their climate change policies and actions.



Image credit: @10DowningStreet Twitter

What is the Scottish government doing to combat climate change?

In September 2019, the Scottish government passed legislation committing to becoming **net zero by 2045** - five years earlier than the rest of the UK. They also adopted a target of **reducing emissions by 75% by 2030** - 7% more of a reduction than the rest of the country in that time period.

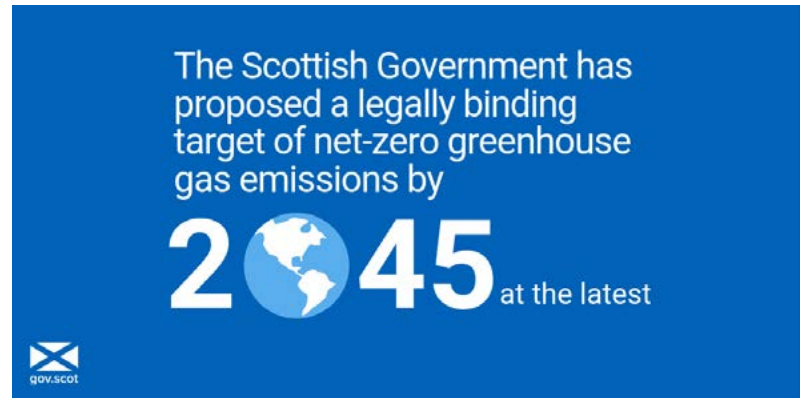
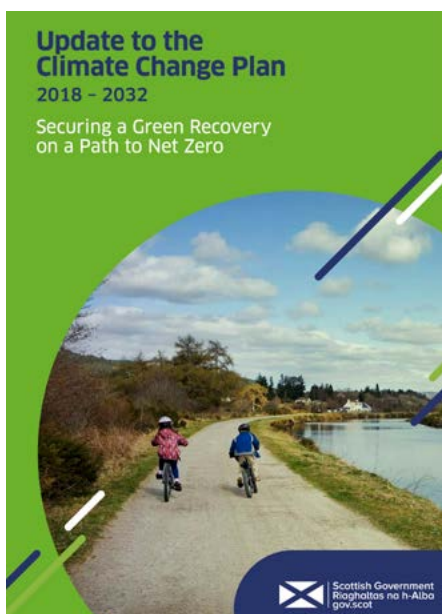


Image credit: Scottish Government Blogs

The UK has ambitious climate targets; Scotland even more so. To achieve these goals, there are a lot of challenges that the Scottish government has to find solutions for and create policies and laws for too. Some of the actions the Scottish government are planning include:

- Introducing 'Low Emission Zones' in cities in 2022, where vehicles that create a lot of pollution will not be allowed access;
- Stopping biodegradable waste going straight to landfill by 2025;
- Restoring at least 250,000 hectares of peatland by 2030, which can absorb carbon dioxide and support wildlife;
- Making trains carbon-neutral by 2035;
- Upgrading heating and cooling systems in buildings to make them energy efficient by 2035.



These sit alongside other commitments in Scotland's "Climate Change Plan", with the hope that Scotland can stick to the promise made in the Paris Agreement to minimise greenhouse gas emissions. Click the image to read the plan.

Two young activists from Scotland who are pushing for climate policy reform and meaningful action are Dylan Hamilton and Holly Gillibrand.

Dylan Hamilton

Dylan is a 16-year-old activist from West Lothian in Scotland. He has been selected to attend The Youth Summit, a meeting being held in September 2021 to devise proposals for representatives in the run-up to COP26, as well as COP26 itself. In an [interview with Sky News](#), Dylan said:

“Hopefully we get even more radical action than we saw (in Paris). And this time countries actually follow it.”

Regarding the potential discussions taking place at COP26 this year, he is concerned about seeing fossil fuel companies influencing negotiations about climate action, as their needs and priorities are not comparable to those experiencing the damaging effects of climate change in their daily lives.



Image credit: Scottish Youth Parliament

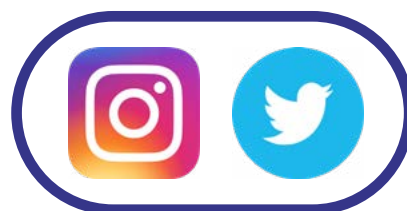


Scotland has already faced extreme weather as a result of changing climate conditions and without cutting back on greenhouse gas emissions this is set to continue. Dylan will be 41 years old in 2045 - the year that the Scottish government has pledged to reach net-zero - and so is very aware that he will see the continued impacts of climate change over his lifetime if people do not address it with the urgency it requires.

More info:

- [Scottish Youth Parliament](#)
- [Dylan's blog](#)

Born
2004



Holly Gillibrand

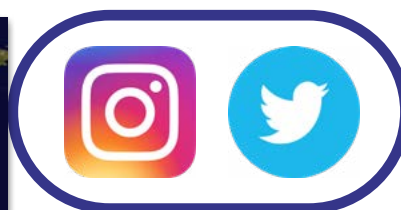


Holly is an activist from the west coast of Scotland. In late 2018, at the age of 13, she started striking outside her school on Fridays, frustrated by the lack of action being taken by world leaders in the fight against climate change.

From a young age she has tried to be environmentally conscious herself, but recognised the importance of pushing for change by people in positions of authority. In an [interview with the Guardian](#) in 2019, she stated:

“I feel very angry, very scared and I see that they (political leaders) are not taking climate change seriously. It is an urgent crisis that needs to be addressed.”

Later that year, she was awarded the title of Young Scotswoman of the Year following a public vote by the Glasgow Times. This was following her participation in a flurry of different events and activities, such as supporting TV presenter Chris Packham in a TV campaign about stopping wildlife crime, taking part in a Q&A with COP President Alok Sharma, and being a Youth Ambassador for the rewilding charity [Scotland: The Big Picture](#).



Born
2005

More info:

- [Scottish Youth Parliament](#)
- [Holly's Wikipedia](#)



Image credit: @hollywildchild on Twitter

Speaking to [Scottish Rural Action](#), Holly's advice to young people who want to create change is to find something you're good at and turn that into activism - whether that's speaking, writing, designing, planning... Everyone has a niche they can capitalise on to help create change. Think about what you enjoy and how you can put it to use.

UK Student Climate Network (UKSCN)



Image credit: UKSCN

South of the border is the UKSCN (<https://ukscn.org/>), a network of activists who organise climate campaigns across England and Wales. They are passionate about ensuring the UK government is taking sufficient action to combat the climate crisis and end our reliance on fossil fuels. The UKSCN was set up in December 2018, inspired by Greta Thunberg and the emerging #FridaysForFuture movement. It is made up mostly of young people who are under 18 years old.

We reached out to Anita Okunde, a member of the UKSCN, to find out what inspired her to join and what issues are particularly important to her.

Anita Okunde



Anita is the president of the Manchester branch of Girl Up, an initiative founded by the UN to develop girls' leadership skills and push for gender equality. As part of the UKSCN, she also volunteers for Youth Strike Manchester.

Dynamic Earth: Hi Anita - thanks for taking the time to answer a couple of questions for us. We want to highlight some of the young people who are taking action in the fight against climate change. Can you introduce yourself and explain why climate change is such an important issue to you?

Anita: Hi! Thank you so much for having me. I'm Anita Okunde, I'm 17, I use she/her pronouns and I'm a youth activist. I'm more known for my work on climate change but I look at other things such as feminism and mental health. My work on climate focuses on intersectional climate justice in regards to race and gender and I work internationally and nationally to achieve goals surrounding that.

DE: You're also active in the UKSCN. Can you tell us a bit about how you got involved and some of the things you've done as a member?