



EU commissioner for climate action Wopke Hoekstra at The Hague in January 2022.

Photograph: BSR Agency/Getty Images

## **The Observer**

### **Cop28**

# EU climate chief: China must help fund rescue of poorer nations hit by disaster

## Gulf petrostates must also pay for relief, warns EU commissioner Wopke Hoekstra in the run-up to the Cop28 summit

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China and other big developing nations must pay into a fund to rescue poor countries stricken by the climate disaster, the EU's climate chief has said as world leaders prepare to gather in Dubai for a crucial climate summit.

Wopke Hoekstra, EU commissioner for climate action, said there was no longer any reason to exclude big emerging economies with high greenhouse gas emissions such as China and petrostates in the Gulf from the obligation to provide aid to the poorest and most vulnerable countries.

“We need so much more money that we need basically everyone with the ability to pay to chip in,” Hoekstra said to a small group of journalists, including the *Observer*. “Climate financing, climate action, will take significantly more money. I’m not talking about 20% or 30% more – incremental amounts – but factors more in the years to come. We need private sector money and we need a lot more public sector money.”

The question of finance for poor countries will take centre stage at Cop28, a fortnight-long summit of world leaders and high-level ministers and officials from 198 countries that begins in Dubai on Thursday.

The UK’s prime minister, Rishi Sunak; the EU Commission’s president, Ursula von der Leyen; the pope and the UN’s secretary general, António Guterres, are expected to attend, with King Charles giving the opening speech.

Xi Jinping and Joe Biden, the presidents of the world’s two largest emitters of carbon dioxide, China and the US, are not expected to be there, but will send high-level representatives.

More than 70,000 delegates are expected, and the talks have already caused controversy: host country the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a large oil producer whose government has appointed Sultan Al Jaber, the chief of UAE’s national oil company Adnoc, as president of the summit.

Governments are expected to set up a new fund at Cop28 for “loss and damage”, which refers to the rescue and rehabilitation of poor and vulnerable communities stricken by the climate disaster.



## World facing 'hellish' 3C of climate heating, UN warns before Cop28

Hundreds of billions of pounds are likely to be needed from a variety of sources, including the private sector and governments, but few countries have yet stepped up with pledges.

For decades, no financial contributions were expected from China and other nations that were classed as developing when the UN framework convention on climate change, parent treaty to the Paris agreement, was signed in 1992.

Now, the EU and rich countries including the UK and the US are asking for China, high-emitting large economies classed as developing such as South Korea and Russia, and petrostates such as UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to be donors.

“I’m saying [to China] and others that have experienced significant economic growth and truly higher wealth than 30 years ago, that with this comes responsibility,” said Hoekstra. “Simply because it is fair, and because the problem is so large, so we truly need everyone.”

He said he was urging poor nations in Africa and Latin America to also put pressure on newly rich and high-emitting countries to pay into the fund. “I am more optimistic about loss and damage than I was a number of weeks ago,” he said. The *Observer* understands that the UAE is considering a contribution.

However, most donor countries are insisting that any contributions should be voluntary, not based on their wealth or their greenhouse gas emissions.

Other sources of finance for the loss and damage fund include potential levies on frequent flyers and on international shipping, as well as windfall taxes on the bonanzas made by fossil fuel companies.

Gordon Brown, the former UK prime minister, has suggested a small tax on the revenues of petrostates could raise a substantial proportion of the funds needed.

Hoekstra, a former Shell employee who previously served as foreign minister for the Netherlands, was appointed EU commissioner for climate action in October after Frans Timmermans, the European Commission's vice-president, resigned in August to contest the Dutch general election. His leftwing party ended in second place, way behind the far-right Geert Wilders, whose party is now biggest in the Netherlands parliament.

Timmermans was a massively influential figure at previous Cops, frequently invoking the likely future plight of his grandchildren to browbeat governments into action.

Hoekstra will face a more difficult job than his predecessor, with rightwing parties pushing anti-environmental agendas on the rise across the EU and many member states cooling on the EU green deal amid the cost of living crisis, as well as growing global tensions over the Israel-Gaza conflict and the war in Ukraine.

“[This is] an absolutely pivotal moment for the world in terms of coming together at Cop28 with geopolitics potentially more difficult than ever,” Hoekstra said.

As well as Ukraine and the Middle East, he cited “tensions in the Indo-Pacific and great power rivalry between a number of the world's largest players. And it is more broadly the worries, at least in the EU but also abroad, about the backlash we face against international institutions, the rule of law, human rights, democracy itself, where I feel we need to push back on the pushback. That simply makes for a very difficult context.”