

‘Crunch time for real’: UN says time for climate delays has run out

Means to stop catastrophic global heating exist, says UN chief, but political courage is needed to end world’s fossil fuel addiction

Damian Carrington *Environment editor*

Thu 24 Oct 2024 15.00 BST

Share



People walk along the dry bed of the Solimões Tiver in the Manacapuru region of Amazonas in Brazil. The water level continues to drop every day owing to a drought affecting the region. Photograph: Raphael Alves/EPA

The huge cuts in carbon emissions now needed to end the climate crisis mean it is “crunch time for real”, according to the UN’s environment chief.

An unprecedented global mobilisation of renewable energy, forest protection and other measures is needed to steer the world off the current path towards a catastrophic temperature rise of 3.1C, a report from the UN environment programme (Unep) has found. Extreme heatwaves, storms, droughts and floods are already ravaging communities with less than 1.5C of global heating to date.

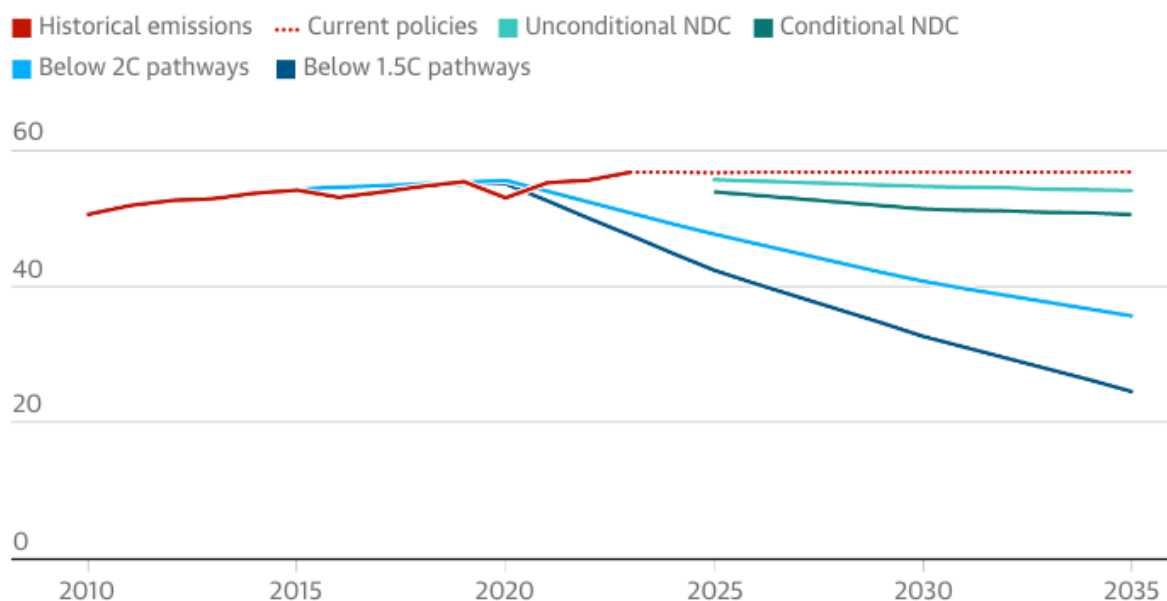
Current carbon-cutting promises by countries for 2030 are not being met, according to the report, and even if they were met, the temperature rise would only be limited to a still-disastrous 2.6C to 2.8C. There is no more time for “hot air”, the report said, urging nations to act at the Cop29 summit in November.

Keeping the international goal of 1.5C within reach was technically possible, said the report, but it required emissions to fall by 7.5% annually until 2035. That means halting emissions equivalent to those of the EU every year for a decade. Delaying emissions cuts only means steeper reductions would be needed in future.

Unep said countries must collectively commit to cut 42% off annual greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and 57% by 2035 in their next UN pledges, called nationally determined contributions and due in February. Without these pledges, and rapid action to back them up, the 1.5C goal would be gone, the UN said.

Drastic emissions cuts needed to limit temperature rise to 1.5C or 2C

Emissions, gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year



Source: UN Environment Programme. Note: forecasts show median estimates. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are action plans developed by countries to combat climate change, as part of the Paris agreement. Conditional NDCs are dependent on provision of funding

However, the head of Unep, Inger Andersen, said it was misguided to fixate only on whether the 1.5C target was kept or not, because every fraction of a degree of global heating avoided would save lives, damage and costs: “Don’t over-focus on

a magic number. Keeping temperature as low as possible is where we need to be.”

The finance and technology to slash emissions exists, Andersen said, but “political courage” was needed, particularly from the G20 nations (excluding the African Union) that cause 77% of global emissions.

Andersen said the world’s nations made strong climate promises at the Paris summit in 2015. “Now is the time to live up to that – it’s climate crunch time for real. We need global mobilisation on a scale and pace never seen before, starting right now, or the 1.5C goal will soon be dead and the ‘well below 2C’ target will take its place in the intensive care unit.”

Unep’s last two annual reports highlighted “the closing window” for action and the “broken record” of failed promises. “Now we’re saying, this is it,” she said.

“The irritating thing is technology is there for the grasping, as are the job and economic development opportunities,” Andersen said. “It just takes political courage and some strong leadership.”

The UN secretary general, António Guterres, said: “We’re playing with fire; but there can be no more playing for time. We’re out of time.” He said global heating was supercharging monster hurricanes, bringing biblical floods, turning forests into tinder boxes and cities into saunas.

“Governments must wean us off our fossil fuel addiction: showing how they will phase them out – fast and fairly,” he said, adding that levies on fossil fuels could help pay for climate action.

The Unep report found that faster rollout of solar and wind energy could provide 27% of the emissions cuts needed. “That’s massive and this is a cheap, proven technology – it’s not a gamble to invest in,” Andersen said.

Stopping the destruction of forests could bring another 20% cut, the report said. Much of the rest could come from energy efficiency and the electrification of buildings, transport and industry, as well as cutting methane emissions from fossil fuel facilities, which Andersen described as “not hard”.

The estimated investment needed to cut emissions to net zero is \$1-2tn a year, according to the report, about 1% of the value of the global economy and financial markets. “We’re talking a couple of percentage points that would be incremental in terms of renewal of ageing infrastructure” in developed countries, said Andersen. But developing countries would need finance from rich nations, a topic at the top of the Cop29 agenda.

The global geopolitical situation was difficult, acknowledged Andersen, with conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, and tensions between western nations and Russia and China. But she said: “If there is a space where the world has been able to meet, it is really the environment space.”

She cited a recent G20 meeting of environment and climate ministers. “These are not the best friends, all of them, and yet they managed to have a [good] communique.” She said there had been significant green policy shifts in the US, China, Germany, India and Brazil, but a much greater effort was required.

“The sooner we strike out hard for a low-carbon, sustainable and prosperous future, the sooner we will get there – which will save lives, save money and protect the planetary systems upon which we all depend,” she said.

“World leaders continue to drag their feet, protecting the interests of the fossil fuel industry, while people are suffering right now. At Cop29, leaders must respond and act on their fair share of responsibility – especially wealthier nations who have fuelled this crisis for decades,” said Harjeet Singh, at the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative.

Climate change: UN report says planet to warm by 3.1 C without greater action

By Gloria Dickie

October 25, 2024 5:27 AM GMT+13 Updated 3 hours ago



Item 2 of 3 A drone view shows the dry banks of Rio Amazonas during a drought in Santarem, Para state, Brazil October 8, 2024. REUTERS/Amanda Perobelli/File Photo [2/3]A drone view shows the dry banks of Rio Amazonas during a drought in Santarem, Para state, Brazil October 8, 2024. REUTERS/Amanda Perobelli/File Photo [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)

- Summary
- Current policies could lead to 3.1 C warming by 2100 Nations to discuss updated emissions strategies at COP29 in Azerbaijan 1.5 C target likely out of reach without climate overshoot

TORONTO, Oct 24 (Reuters) - Current climate policies will result in global warming of more than 3 degrees Celsius (5.4 degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the century, according to a United Nations report on Thursday, more than twice the rise agreed to nearly a decade ago.

The annual Emissions Gap report, which takes stock of countries' promises to tackle climate change compared with what is needed, finds the world faces as much as 3.1 C (5.6 F) of warming above pre-

industrial levels by 2100 if governments do not take greater action on slashing planet-warming emissions.

Governments in 2015 signed up to the Paris Agreement and a cap of 1.5 C (2.7 F) warming to prevent a cascade of dangerous impacts.

"We're teetering on a planetary tight rope," U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in a speech on Thursday. "Either leaders bridge the emissions gap, or we plunge headlong into climate disaster".

Global greenhouse gas emissions rose by 1.3% between 2022 and 2023, to a new high of 57.1 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, the report said.

Under current pledges to take future action, temperatures would still rise between 2.6 C (4.7 F) and 2.8 C (5 F) by 2100, the report found. That is in line with findings from the past three years.

"If we look at the progress towards 2030 targets, especially of the G20 member states ... they have not made a lot of progress towards their current climate targets for 2030," said Anne Olhoff, chief scientific editor of the report.

The world has currently warmed by about 1.3 C (2.3 F).

Nations will gather next month at the annual United Nations climate summit (COP29) in [Azerbaijan](#), where they will work to build on an agreement made last year to transition away from fossil fuels.

Negotiations in Baku will help to inform each country's updated emissions-cutting strategy, known as a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), which are due in February 2025.

The report suggests that nations must collectively commit to and implement a cut of 42% on yearly greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and reach 57% by 2035 for any hope of preventing warming beyond 1.5 C — a target now seen as likely out of reach.

Inger Andersen, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, urged countries to use the Baku talks to increase action in their NDCs. "Every fraction of a degree avoided counts," she said.