# Wealthiest 10% responsible for two-thirds of global heating since 1990, study finds



# The Wealthy Few: A Driving Force Behind Climate Change

A stark new study reveals that the wealthiest 10% of the global population are responsible for two-thirds of the rise in global temperatures since 1990. This alarming statistic, highlighted in the latest research, illustrates the profound disparity between those who contribute disproportionately to greenhouse gas emissions and the individuals in poorer regions who suffer the most from climate-related disasters.

Historically, analyses have underscored how higher-income groups emit substantially more greenhouse gases. However, this recent study marks a crucial step in quantitatively linking those emissions to climate breakdown. According to Sarah Schöngart, the lead author and a climate modelling analyst, “Our study shows that extreme climate impacts are not just the result of abstract global emissions; instead, we can directly link them to our lifestyle and investment choices, which in turn are linked to wealth.” This connection is pivotal for arguing for climate finance and equitable wealth taxes, as it provides concrete data showing how significant portions of the developed world's population, including over half of full-time employees in the UK, bear a heightened responsibility for climate disasters affecting the most vulnerable.

The research methodology involved integrating wealth-based greenhouse gas emissions assessments into sophisticated climate modelling frameworks to systematically determine how changes in global temperatures and the frequency of extreme weather events since 1990 correlate to the emissions of the wealthiest. By examining the hypothetical climate impacts minus the emissions from the wealthiest groups, the researchers unveiled a staggering truth: about 65% of the increase in global mean temperature since 1990 can be attributed to emissions from the richest 10%. This group, defined as individuals earning more than €42,980 (£36,472) annually, includes those on the median salary in the UK, which stands at £37,430.

More alarming still, the richest 1%—those with incomes over €147,200—contributed 20% to global heating, while the top 0.1%, comprising about 800,000 individuals earning over €537,770, are responsible for a striking 8%. The implications are clear; the wealthiest emit 6.5 times more carbon dioxide than the average person. If global emissions were distributed equally—like those of the bottom 50%—the research suggests that minimal additional warming would have occurred since 1990. Conversely, if emissions mirrored those of the top 10%, 1%, or 0.1%, we would be facing a catastrophic temperature increase of 2.9C, 6.7C, or an uninhabitable 12.2C, respectively.

These findings are corroborated by Oxfam's recent reports, which maintain that the richest 1% were responsible for 16% of global CO₂ emissions in 2019—equivalent to the emissions of the poorest two-thirds of the worldwide population. This underscores the urgent need for progressive climate policies aimed at curbing emissions from the wealthiest individuals. The wealth inequality is mirrored in their investment behaviours; research shows that billionaires are twice as likely to invest in polluting industries compared to average investors.

The new research arrives at a time of increasing resistance from wealthier nations, including the US and parts of Europe, against financing efforts for poorer countries to combat climate change and its detrimental effects. Co-author Carl-Friedrich Schleussner warns, “This is not an academic discussion; it’s about the real impacts of the climate crisis today. Climate action that doesn’t address the outsize responsibilities of the wealthiest members of society risks missing one of the most powerful levers we have to reduce future harm.”

This intricate web of wealth, emissions, and climate impact calls for policy interventions that acknowledge the disproportionate contributions to climate change by the richest among us. As governments worldwide grapple with how best to enact meaningful climate action, recognising and addressing these stark inequalities could be a crucial step towards a sustainable and equitable future for all.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/two-thirds-of-global-heating-caused-by-richest-study-suggests), [[2]](https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-emit-much-planet-heating-pollution-two-thirds-humanity)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/two-thirds-of-global-heating-caused-by-richest-study-suggests)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/two-thirds-of-global-heating-caused-by-richest-study-suggests), [[3]](https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231120-world-richest-1-emit-as-much-carbon-as-bottom-two-thirds-report), [[4]](https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/03/22/millionaires-will-burn-through-two-thirds-of-the-worlds-carbon-budget-by-2050-scientists-w)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-emit-much-planet-heating-pollution-two-thirds-humanity), [[7]](https://www.oxfamapps.org/scotland/2023/11/20/richest-1-globally-emit-as-much-planet-heating-pollution-as-two-thirds-of-humanity-put-together/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/two-thirds-of-global-heating-caused-by-richest-study-suggests), [[3]](https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231120-world-richest-1-emit-as-much-carbon-as-bottom-two-thirds-report)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/two-thirds-of-global-heating-caused-by-richest-study-suggests), [[2]](https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-emit-much-planet-heating-pollution-two-thirds-humanity), [[6]](https://www.oxfam.org.nz/news-media/richest-1-emit-as-much-planet-heating-pollution-as-two-thirds-of-humanity__trashed/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/07/two-thirds-of-global-heating-caused-by-richest-study-suggests> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-emit-much-planet-heating-pollution-two-thirds-humanity> - Oxfam's 2023 report reveals that the richest 1% of the global population were responsible for 16% of global CO₂ emissions in 2019, equating to the emissions of the poorest two-thirds of humanity. This disproportionate contribution is linked to increased climate-related deaths and highlights the need for progressive climate policies targeting the wealthiest individuals. The report also suggests that taxing the super-rich could help curb both climate change and inequality.
3. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231120-world-richest-1-emit-as-much-carbon-as-bottom-two-thirds-report> - A 2023 study indicates that the wealthiest 1% of the global population were responsible for 16% of global emissions in 2019, matching the emissions of the bottom two-thirds. The report emphasizes the need for progressive climate policies, such as taxing frequent flyers and non-green investments, to address this inequality. It also highlights that billionaires are twice as likely to invest in polluting industries compared to the average investor.
4. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/03/22/millionaires-will-burn-through-two-thirds-of-the-worlds-carbon-budget-by-2050-scientists-w> - Research published in 2023 warns that millionaires' emissions will consume over two-thirds of the world's carbon budget by 2050, making it less likely to achieve a low-carbon transition. The study underscores the disproportionate impact of the wealthy on global emissions and calls for urgent action to curb their carbon footprint to meet climate goals.
5. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2024/09/11/two-thirds-of-global-methane-emissions-now-come-from-human-activity-researchers-say> - A 2024 study reveals that human activities are now responsible for at least two-thirds of global methane emissions, with a 20% increase in human-produced methane sources over the last two decades. This trend poses a significant risk to climate goals, as atmospheric concentrations of methane have reached levels 2.6 times higher than in pre-industrial times, the highest in at least 800,000 years.
6. <https://www.oxfam.org.nz/news-media/richest-1-emit-as-much-planet-heating-pollution-as-two-thirds-of-humanity__trashed/> - Oxfam's 2023 report highlights that the richest 1% of the global population were responsible for 16% of global consumption emissions in 2019, surpassing all car and road transport emissions. The report emphasizes the stark gap between the carbon footprints of the super-rich and the rest of the world, calling for progressive climate policies targeting the wealthiest individuals to address this inequality.
7. <https://www.oxfamapps.org/scotland/2023/11/20/richest-1-globally-emit-as-much-planet-heating-pollution-as-two-thirds-of-humanity-put-together/> - Oxfam's 2023 report reveals that the richest 1% of the global population were responsible for 16% of global consumption emissions in 2019, equating to the emissions of the bottom two-thirds. The report emphasizes the need for progressive climate policies targeting the wealthiest individuals to address this inequality and highlights the disproportionate impact of the wealthy on global emissions.