

## WIDENING GAP: ON UN'S EMISSIONS GAP REPORT

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

The UN's Emissions Gap Report comes as a sharp warning to countries preparing to meet in Madrid in December, under the aegis of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, that every year of inaction is jeopardising the main goal of the Paris Agreement: to keep the rise in global temperature over pre-industrial times well below 2°C, and ideally at 1.5°C. Emissions gap represents the difference between current actions to reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs) and what is needed to meet the target. In quantitative terms, the UN report estimates that there would have to be a 2.7% average annual cut in emissions from 2020 to 2030 for temperature rise to be contained at 2°C, while the more ambitious 1.5° C target would require a 7.6% reduction. But countries with large emissions, such as the U.S., China, the European Union (EU) nations and India, will face more challenging demands if corrective measures to decarbonise are not implemented now. Climate warnings issued over the years have failed to impress most politicians, but the EU is considering an emergency declaration, and the British Parliament adopted a resolution earlier this year. What the emissions gap findings make clear, however, is that symbolism can do little to mitigate the effects of dangerous climate change. Hundreds of millions of people could face the extreme impacts.

In the U.S., the Trump administration has initiated the process of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, but there is considerable sub-national support for climate action. The EU, where public pressure to act on climate change is high, is working on legislation to bring about net zero emissions. The U.K., responsible for a large share of historical emissions, has turned its net zero 2050 goal into a legal requirement. For these rich nations, the road to lower emissions is mainly through innovation and higher efficiencies in energy use. China and India, on the other hand, have to reconcile growing emissions with development needs. Their best options are a scaling up of investments in renewable energy, leapfrogging to clean technologies in buildings and transport, and greater carbon sequestration. Here, as the UN report points out, India could do much more. It needs to provide more consistent support for renewable energy, have a long-term plan to retire coal power plants, enhance ambition on air quality, adopt an economy-wide green industrialisation strategy, and expand mass transport. In the key area of buildings, the energy conservation code of 2018 needs to be implemented under close scrutiny. With a clear vision, India could use green technologies to galvanise its faltering economy, create new jobs and become a climate leader.

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