

THE COP TROIKA:

Fossil fuel champions or guardians of 1.5 °C?



BRIEFING

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Executive Summary

- At COP28 (2023), nations decided to transition away from fossil fuels in line with the 1.5 degrees Celsius (°C) threshold of the Paris Agreement. Science is clear: as a minimum benchmark for the implementation of this decision, countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) must include a commitment and a plan to immediately end the approval of new oil, gas, and coal projects.
- **Global North oil and gas producing countries, led by the United States, are the worst culprits for oil and gas expansion to 2050. These countries must not only end expansion, but also phase out existing production fastest and provide their fair share of climate finance.** Without immediate and fast actions from these countries, there will be no just and equitable phase-out of fossil fuels.
- The New Collective Quantified Goal on finance (NCQG) is essential for achieving a just energy transition. **To ensure a fair phase-out of fossil fuels, and the expansion of renewable energy and energy efficiency, COP29 must agree to at least \$1 trillion annually in grants and grant-equivalent finance from the Global North, including a mitigation subgoal of at least \$300 billion per year to unlock the delivery of the COP28 energy transition goals** in the Global South.
- **The three countries forming the COP Troika (UAE, Azerbaijan, Brazil) have assumed, through their presidency of COP28, COP29, and COP30, a key role in guiding international climate action.** While also major fossil fuel producers themselves, the COP Troika have committed to submit NDCs aligned with the 1.5°C temperature limit, which also gives them **a responsibility to end the expansion of fossil fuel production.**
- **Instead of leading by example, Troika countries are currently pursuing an oil and gas production trajectory that is incompatible with the 1.5°C limit:**
 - Under their current expansion plans, **the Troika countries are on track to increase their combined oil and gas production by 32 percent from 2023 levels by 2035.** By country, the projected increase in production to 2035 is 36 percent for Brazil, 34 percent for the UAE, and 14 percent for Azerbaijan.
 - **The UAE and Brazil rank first and third in the world in terms of oil and gas expansion approved since the COP28 decision to transition away from fossil fuels.**
 - **Together, the Troika countries account for nearly one third of the carbon pollution committed by new oil and gas fields approved so far in 2024.**
- The Troika countries were net exporters of up to 750 million tonnes of carbon pollution from oil and gas as of 2022. Their combined fossil fuel footprint doubles when counting the carbon pollution caused by their exported oil and gas production. **This is why NDCs that only cover fossil fuel use within their borders would fail to account for their full climate footprint.**
- The Troika countries have a clear choice to make. Not approving any new fossil fuel projects would put them closer to 1.5°C-aligned trajectories and signal their commitment to the energy transition and global climate goals. Enshrining or ignoring fossil fuel expansion in their NDCs would greenwash policies that are fundamentally incompatible with the 1.5°C limit.
- Brazil could cement a legacy as Global South climate champion through its COP30 presidency by not only announcing an end to new fossil fuel production, but also by convening a global conversation on how to make the phase-out of fossil fuels just and equitable. As such, it could enable conditions for the Global South to transition while ensuring prosperity and development.

Introduction

Nationally Determined Contributions: the “most important climate documents produced so far this century” (Simon Stiell)

We stand at a crucial time for global climate action. Almost 10 years after the signing of the Paris Agreement, greenhouse gas emissions are still increasing, fossil fuel production and use have never been higher, and deadly climate impacts devastate communities around the world. As such, the international climate policy architecture built by the Paris Agreement faces a serious, twofold credibility issue: is that architecture able to deliver on the 1.5°C temperature limit countries have committed? And is it able to tackle fossil fuels, the root cause of the climate crisis? In the coming months, countries will need to submit to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change the next round of their climate plans (Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs) – which, in the words of Simon Stiell, the head of UN Climate Change, will be “among the most important climate documents produced this century.”¹ A key test for the Paris Agreement will be whether the upcoming NDCs unlock the transformations needed to safeguard a livable future.

At COP28, in 2023, all countries committed for the first time to transition away from fossil fuels in a just, equitable, and orderly manner. In the same COP28 decision, countries reiterated their support for the 1.5°C limit. It is therefore clear that the next round of NDCs must align the consumption and production of fossil fuels with this limit. This implies, in particular, that fossil fuel producers must align their production with the downward global fossil fuel production trajectory that compliance with 1.5°C requires, which has not been the case until now.² The true legacy of this agreement will depend on how well parties integrate these commitments into their NDCs, turning the decision made at COP28 into concrete, ambitious steps toward a just and equitable phase-out of fossil fuels and the provision of adequate financial support to achieve these goals.

The Global North’s commitment to providing robust means of implementation and climate finance, particularly through a strong New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), is essential for supporting the Global South in phasing out fossil fuels. An NCQG goal of USD 1 trillion in grants and grant-equivalent finance will unlock NDCs that will enable the Global South to adopt ambitious climate action. Such finance will enable an equitable phase-out of fossil fuels in alignment with the energy outcome of the global stocktake at COP28. This should include a mitigation subgoal of at least USD 300 billion per year to unlock the delivery of the COP28 energy transition goals in the

Global South. This is a highly conservative estimate of Global North countries’ fair share of both climate spending needs and climate debts³, which is why the rights-based NGO constituencies of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change have called for \$5 trillion per year as annualized reparatory payments.⁴

A robust and fair finance agreement must go hand in hand with all countries putting an end to fossil fuel expansion.

There is a clear scientific consensus that there is no room for new coal mines, or new oil and gas fields, if the world is going to stay within a 1.5°C limit.⁵

Analysis of energy pathways aligned with limiting warming to 1.5°C shows that we need to cut global fossil fuel production by six percent each year of this decade.⁶ To be 1.5°C-aligned, NDCs must include commitments to stop expansion of new fossil fuel production and related infrastructure:

- **Ending new fossil fuel development is a fundamental and urgent step toward the rapid declines in fossil fuels required to meet the 1.5°C limit.** According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), to stay within 1.5°C, global fossil fuel production must decline by 55 percent between 2023 and 2035 (45 percent for oil and gas; 72 percent for coal).⁷
- **Not only is there no room for new fields and mines, but too many are already developed.** Peer-reviewed research shows that existing oil and gas fields and coal mines – those already producing or under construction – contain far more fossil fuels than can be burned and still stay within the Paris Agreement limit.⁸ The majority of fossil fuels within these active fields and mines must stay in the ground to abide by a 1.5°C carbon budget.⁹ **In fact, the world’s remaining carbon budget is now so small that existing oil and gas fields alone could push the world beyond 1.5°C, even in a scenario in which coal production stopped today.**¹⁰

While all NDCs need to include an immediate end to fossil fuel expansion, the phase-out of fossil fuel production and use must be just and equitable. Past Oil Change International analysis shows that the majority of oil and gas expansion is planned in Global North countries, particularly in the United States. These are countries that have a responsibility to phase out their extraction fastest and provide quality finance on fair terms

to enable other countries to transition. Just five Global North countries – the United States, Canada, Australia, Norway, and the United Kingdom – are on track to be responsible for the majority of carbon pollution from new oil and gas fields and fracking wells between 2023 and 2050.¹¹ Unless these five countries, which hold historical responsibility for the climate crisis, urgently cancel their plans to continue expanding fossil fuel production, their claims to climate leadership will continue to ring hollow and deeply hypocritical.

While Global North oil- and gas-producing countries have a responsibility to lead the phase-out of fossil fuels, science is clear: the hard limits of the world's remaining carbon budget mean that fossil fuel expansion must stop everywhere¹², including in the countries forming the COP Troika.

The COP Troika can set a powerful example for the world

The COP Troika brings together the COP28 presidency of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), along with the upcoming COP presidencies of Azerbaijan and Brazil, to spearhead ambitious collective climate action under the “Roadmap to Mission 1.5°C.”¹³ On March 21, 2024, the COP28, COP29 and COP30 presidencies jointly issued a letter to all parties calling on countries to show ambition in the design of the next round of NDCs. **These three countries committed to lead by example by releasing 1.5°C-aligned NDCs** that will be guided by the COP28 decision, which includes transitioning away from fossil fuels.¹⁴

While their economic structures differ vastly, the countries of the COP Troika have significant, though varying, degrees of reliance on fossil fuel revenues. As the world phases out fossil fuels and demand for their products is drastically reduced, the Troika will need to implement strategies to prepare for a world where fossil fuel revenues are both reduced and more unpredictable.¹⁵ This also presents these countries with an opportunity for

genuine leadership: by adopting robust measures to phase out fossil fuels in their NDCs, they can signal that they are betting in favor of global energy transition by preparing for a world free of fossil fuels, while balancing economic development and energy security needs. **If the Troika countries use their national plans and NDCs to enshrine a decisive halt of fossil fuel expansion, they will manifest their roles as global leaders in climate action.**

Currently, as this briefing shows, all three countries are pursuing oil and gas expansion plans that are incompatible with the role they have assumed to guide global climate action toward 1.5°C alignment. But they have an opportunity to change course. By clearly stating that their NDCs will include an end to fossil fuel expansion, the Troika can foster a global conversation about how countries can implement, and be supported to implement, the commitments made at COP28. As the current and future guides of the international climate diplomacy process, **it is their responsibility to set a positive precedent by submitting NDCs that neither ignore nor reinforce fossil fuel expansion.**

Deciding to end fossil fuel expansion is both necessary and possible: Colombia's recent decision to halt new oil, gas, and coal exploration provides a powerful example for the Troika. Despite its significant economic dependency on fossil fuels – oil and gas account for roughly 10 percent of Colombia's GDP, 13 percent of foreign direct investment, and 20–40 percent of exports¹⁶ – Colombia has embraced a new path forward by committing to end new fossil fuel licenses and chart a just energy transition.¹⁷ As Latin America's fourth-largest oil producer,¹⁸ Colombia's move to keep fossil fuels in the ground highlights a profound commitment to aligning national interests with global climate targets. If Colombia, with its historical reliance on oil exports, can commit to this transition, the Troika can also pursue meaningful fossil fuel reductions to meet their 1.5°C commitments.

COP Troika: Doubling down on oil and gas expansion

As of 2023, all three Troika countries were globally significant oil and gas producers. The UAE is the world's seventh largest oil and gas producer, Brazil the 11th largest, and Azerbaijan the 28th largest. **If the three COP hosts' production were counted as a single country, it would rank as the fourth largest oil and gas producer in the world, behind the United States, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.**¹⁹

Troika fossil fuel production plans to 2035 are incompatible with 1.5°C emissions trajectories

Our analysis of industry data shows that, under their current expansion plans, the Troika countries are on track to increase their combined oil and gas production by 32 percent by 2035, compared to 2023 levels (Table 1). The projected increase in production to 2035 is 36 percent for Brazil, 34 percent for the UAE, and 14 percent for Azerbaijan.²⁰ These projections reflect government policies and targets to boost oil and gas over the coming decade:

- In the **UAE**, state-owned oil company ADNOC is pursuing an aggressive expansion strategy to increase its oil production capacity to 5 million barrels per day by 2027²¹ and to more than double its liquefied natural gas (LNG) production capacity by 2028.²²
- **Brazil** aims to become the world's fourth largest oil producer.²³ Brazil's latest government projections are for oil production to peak at 5.3 million barrels per day in 2030, growing almost 50 percent above

projected 2024 levels.²⁴ The government forecasts an even higher peak for oil production than Rystad Energy, the source of data in Table 1.

- In **Azerbaijan**, oil production is declining from mature, existing fields, but the country's gas production is increasing sharply: it grew from 914 billion cubic feet in 2020 to 1,261 billion cubic feet in 2023, a jump of 38 percent.²⁵ The country is aiming to double its gas exports to Europe by 2027²⁶ and to increase its fossil gas production by more than 30 percent over the coming decade.²⁷

These countries' oil and gas expansion plans will lead to levels of production at complete odds with the immediate and rapid declines in oil and gas required to meet a 1.5°C commitment. The next round of NDCs will cover countries' climate plans to 2035. Over that time period, **the IEA's 1.5°C-aligned scenario shows global oil and gas production needs to decline by 45 percent** (relative to 2023 levels).²⁸ However, this should be considered a minimum global benchmark for phasing out oil and gas, as the scenario includes reliance on technologies like carbon capture and storage and novel forms of engineered carbon removal that are unproven to work at scale and also bring significant health and safety risks.²⁹ As such, **oil and gas production will need to decline by around 60 percent globally by 2035**³⁰ to avoid gambling on these technologies with a long track record of false promises and failure. As a bottom line, the science implies that there is no atmospheric room for any fossil fuel producers, anywhere in the world, to greenlight new fossil fuel production.

Equitable phase-out trajectories

In this briefing, we do not attempt to suggest what each Troika country's target should be for reducing production. Doing so would require a more detailed equity analysis, and such targets should be informed by input from civil society organizations and experts within each country. But as a bottom line, national climate plans must include a pathway for production to decrease significantly, not increase, by 2035, as well as an immediate end to new fossil fuel extraction projects. Suggested fossil fuel production phase-out dates on the basis of a country's dependence on fossil fuels and its capacity to manage the transition can be found in the 2023 Civil Society Equity Review report.³¹ Using this framework, Global North producing countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Norway, and the United Kingdom, should completely phase out their production by 2031.

If these countries took the collective step – in line with 1.5°C scenarios – to stop licensing or permitting new oil and gas fields, their combined production would fall by three percent by 2035, moving their production closer to 1.5°C-aligned trajectories (Table 1). By ceasing new field development, Azerbaijan’s production would fall by 33 percent by 2035.

In the case of the UAE and Brazil, much stronger action would be required to align with a 1.5°C trajectory because of the large volumes of new production recently approved for construction and set to come online by 2030 in each. In the UAE, additional action to stop construction of already approved fields would be required to ensure its production declines rather than grows by 2035.

Table 1: Troika countries’ projected change in oil and gas production with and without new fields, from 2023 to 2035

	Projected change in 2035 production (%), by scenario			
	2023 oil and gas production, kboe/d ³²	Producing fields only (new field construction stops)	Producing and under construction fields only (new field approval stops)	Approval of new fields and licenses continues
UAE	4889	-5%	16%	34%
Brazil	3797	-64%	-18%	36%
Azerbaijan	1196	-40%	-33%	14%
Troika countries combined	9882	-32%	-3%	32%

Source: Oil Change International calculations using data from Rystad Energy (October 2024)

Since the start of 2024, the UAE and Brazil have been amongst the largest oil and gas expanders in the world

In Dubai at COP28 in 2023, all countries committed to contributing to the global objective of transitioning away from fossil fuels. Past Oil Change International analysis has shown that, over the medium- to long-term, the U.S. and Canada rank first and second, respectively, for the amount of carbon pollution that could be unleashed by oil and gas expansion through 2050, based on their rapid, unchecked expansion of fracking. ³³ These countries, alongside other Global North producers, are the most egregious culprits for both historical emissions and future pollution from new oil and gas drilling, and must end fossil fuel production first and fastest. For instance, the United States Fair Shares NDC, a civil society proposal for the U.S.’s new NDC, calls for an immediate end to fossil fuel expansion and a complete phase-out of existing production by 2031. ³⁴

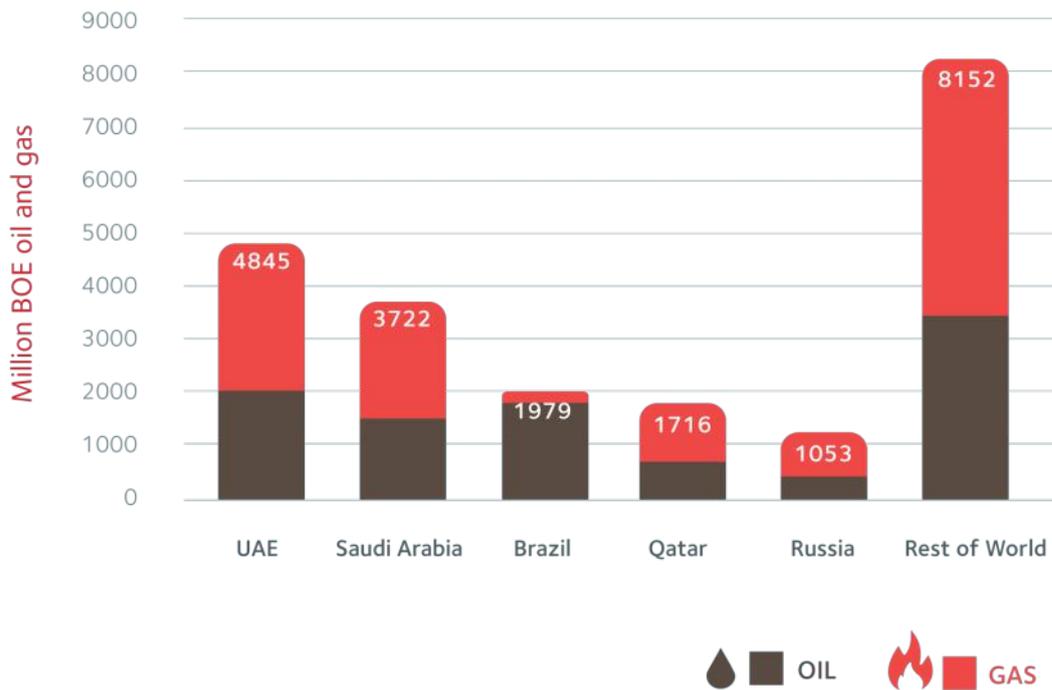
However, in the short-term, the UAE and Brazil are host to some of the most significant oil and gas

expansion approved in the immediate aftermath of the COP28 decision to transition away from fossil fuels.

Since the start of 2024, the UAE and Brazil rank first and third, respectively, among all countries in new oil and gas fields approved for construction, by volume of their reserves (Figure 1). Specifically, this data represents company final investment decisions ³⁵ to construct new fields, which depend on government approval to license and permit new extraction in the first place.

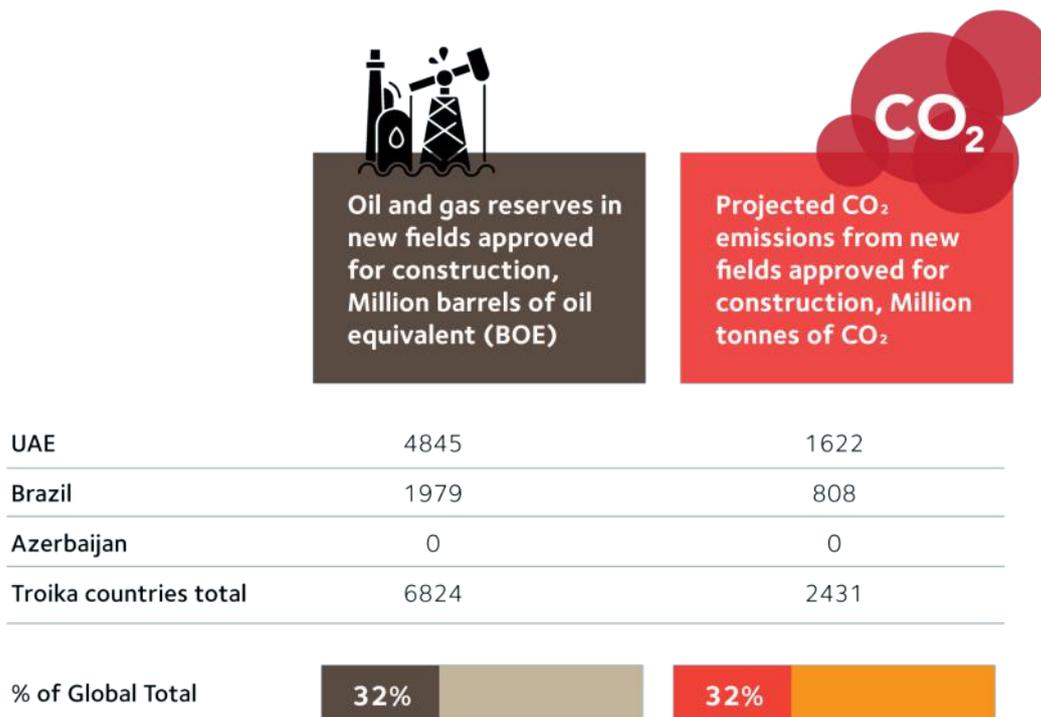
Together, the UAE and Brazil account for nearly one third (32 percent) of the carbon pollution committed by new oil and gas fields approved by final investment decisions in the first three quarters of 2024. The oil and gas fields approved for construction in these countries so far in 2024 could cause 2.4 billion tonnes (Gt) of carbon pollution, if their reserves are fully extracted and burned (Table 2). Pollution on that scale is equivalent to the annual emissions of 625 coal-fired power plants, or nearly 580 million gasoline-powered cars. ³⁶

Figure 1: Top five countries, oil and gas reserves in new fields approved for construction in 2024 (January–September 2024)



Source: Oil Change International calculations using data from Rystad Energy (October 2024)

Table 2: Projected CO₂ emissions from new oil and gas extraction projects approved in Troika countries in 2024 (January–September 2024)



Source: Oil Change International calculations using data from Rystad Energy (October 2024) ³⁷

While publicly portraying themselves as guardians of the 1.5 °C target, the UAE and Brazil have been explicitly betting against the COP28 decision on fossil fuels and the 1.5 °C limit:

- **UAE:** the vast majority of new oil and gas expansion approved in 2024 comes from a single project – ADNOC’s massive Ruwais LNG export project. **By reserves and embedded carbon pollution, Ruwais is the largest new oil and gas extraction project approved in the world in 2024.**³⁸ The company greenlighted the Ruwais project in June 2024 with the support of COP28 president Sultan Al-Jaber, who is CEO of ADNOC, and Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE’s president, who chairs ADNOC’s board of directors.³⁹ This comes despite the COP28 president repeatedly committing to use the 1.5 °C limit as his North Star.⁴⁰

- **Brazil:** almost all of the new oil and gas approved in 2024 comes from major expansions of the offshore Atapu and Sépia fields. State-controlled Petrobras, the operator and majority owner of both fields, approved the field expansions in May 2024 with its partners led by Shell and TotalEnergies.⁴¹

The Ruwais, Atapu, and Sépia expansions are all projected to continue pumping oil and gas for decades into the future – beyond 2050, when nearly all fossil fuel production must be phased out globally to meet climate goals. The Ruwais project has enough reserves to continue operating through 2100, while the new Brazilian fields could continue pumping oil into the mid-2050s.⁴²

While companies have not yet approved new extraction projects in Azerbaijan to date in 2024, Rystad Energy tracks that Socar, Azerbaijan’s state-owned oil company, has as many as 11 new fields or field expansion projects in its pipeline for approval before the end of the decade.⁴³

Addressing fossil fuel production and exports through NDCs: a key step toward climate leadership

The case for NDCs to include measures to phase out fossil fuel production and exports

In the last round of NDCs, almost all of the world’s largest fossil fuel producers either omitted consideration of their fossil fuel production entirely, or included explicit plans to maintain or increase it.⁴⁴ This approach has moved the world closer to climate failure, contributing to the ongoing rise in global fossil fuel emissions, the approval of new long-lived fossil fuel infrastructure incompatible with 1.5°C, and a dangerous “production gap.”⁴⁵

Under the UN Climate Change regime accounting system, countries are only required to report on the greenhouse gas emissions happening within their territory and have no obligation to report on their fossil fuel production plans, whether for domestic use or for exports. Many major fossil fuel producers use this as an excuse for not addressing production in their national climate plans. Some governments try to justify this omission by claiming that if they do not produce a given barrel of oil, then others will produce the same amount elsewhere.

This logic has three fundamental flaws:

- **The amount of fossil fuels consumed – and hence global greenhouse gas emissions – are shaped by factors of both supply and demand, both of which are directly influenced by government policy.**

Government decisions to license and permit new oil and gas fields commonly trigger multibillion-dollar investments by companies. While governments set demand-side policies in their NDCs, such policies and goals are incomplete in the absence of measures to address supply. An oversupply of fossil fuels will lower fossil fuel prices, creating stranded value and assets or causing a rebound in fossil fuel consumption. In the absence of supply-side policies, fossil fuel companies, which are continuing to lock in new long-lived infrastructure and investments, might still prefer to sell their fossil fuels at a discounted price rather than not at all, thus slowing down the renewable energy transition. New extraction or export projects are often approved and designed to operate for several decades, creating incentives for companies to lobby to sustain demand for them and legal barriers to shutting their supply off.⁴⁶

- **Reducing the supply of fossil fuels has a direct effect on the amount of CO₂ ultimately emitted into the atmosphere.** A recent study found that policies limiting fossil fuel production lead to substantial global emissions reductions. Even in the absence of broader climate policy, for each barrel of oil not produced in one place, around half of the life cycle CO₂ emissions from that barrel is avoided globally.⁴⁷ A growing number of court decisions affirm that

governments must account for the global pollution that would result from burning the fossil fuels contained in new fields and mines. ⁴⁸ **The same logic should apply to NDCs:** countries should assess and report on the global climate footprint of the fossil fuels they export and take adequate measures to lower that footprint.

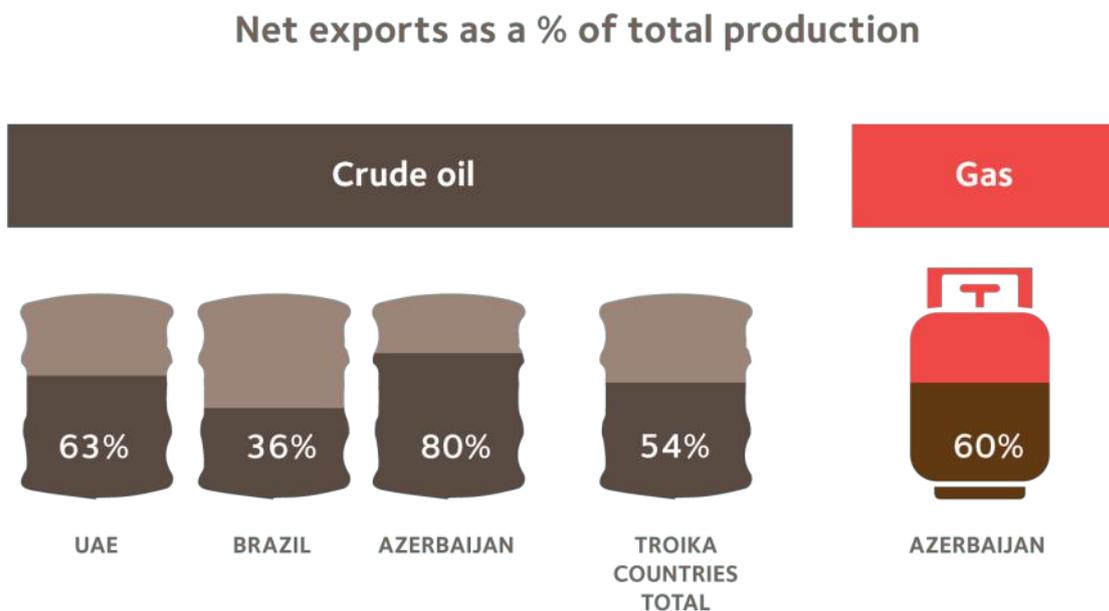
- **Governments are betting against a world in which the Paris goals are achieved when they argue that fossil fuels they do not produce will simply be produced elsewhere.** As the science described previously makes clear, not only is there no room in the 1.5°C carbon budget for new fields and mines, but a majority of the fossil fuels in already developed extraction sites must stay in the ground. In this context, the core challenge of 1.5°C-aligned supply-side policy is how to phase out existing production as rapidly and as equitably as possible. ⁴⁹ If the world is to cut fossil fuel production by more than half in a decade, a barrel of oil kept in the ground in one country cannot be produced anywhere else – it must be matched by more barrels of oil kept in the ground.

The COP Troika countries, as significant exporters of fossil fuels, cannot ignore fossil fuel production and exports in their NDCs

In order to make a genuine commitment to aligning their NDCs with the 1.5°C global limit, the COP Troika countries must include measures to address fossil fuel production and exports, or they will omit a significant and growing part of their contribution to the global climate crisis.

Both the UAE and Brazil are already among the world's 10 largest exporters of crude oil, ranking sixth and ninth, respectively, as of 2022. ⁵⁰ Azerbaijan is the world's 11th largest exporter of fossil gas. ⁵¹ In Brazil, net exports of crude oil production have more than doubled since 2015. ⁵² Over that same time period, Azerbaijan has doubled its net gas exports. ⁵³ The Troika countries exported over half of their combined crude oil production as of 2022 (Figure 2). **In other words, around half of the carbon pollution caused by burning the oil produced by Troika countries occurs beyond those countries' borders.**

Figure 2: Net exports of oil and gas production by Troika country, 2022



Source: IEA, Oil Change International analysis ⁵⁴

The Troika countries' combined fossil fuel footprint doubles when counting the carbon pollution caused by their exported oil and gas production. We estimate that the combustion of the Troika countries' 2022 fossil fuel production, almost entirely of oil and gas, caused up to 1,375 million tonnes of CO₂ pollution globally.⁵⁵ That total includes production burned within the three countries, as well as exported production. This compares to 626 million tonnes of CO₂-equivalent pollution from fossil fuels burned within the Troika countries in 2022.⁵⁶ Thus, **the Troika countries' fossil fuel production caused up to 750 million tonnes of**

exported carbon pollution as of 2022.⁵⁷ **For the UAE and Azerbaijan, the fossil fuels they produce that are burned outside of their borders are their largest contribution to the climate crisis.**⁵⁸

If the Troika countries pursue current oil and gas expansion plans, their total contribution to global fossil fuel pollution could continue to rise, even if they reduce domestic fossil fuel use – more emissions will simply be exported. This is demonstrated by Azerbaijan's plans to increase renewable energy deployment within its own borders to free up more fossil gas for exports.⁵⁹

Country snapshots

United Arab Emirates: betting against its own COP legacy?

During the negotiations of the first Global Stocktake, which led to the COP28 decision to transition away from fossil fuels, Dr. Sultan Al Jaber, then COP28 president and CEO of the UAE's national oil and gas company ADNOC, emphasized his commitment to a science-driven approach, stating that "1.5°C is our North Star."⁶⁰

However, there is a fundamental incompatibility between this commitment to science-driven climate action and the UAE's current policies. The UAE is on track for a substantial increase in fossil fuel production – 34 percent by 2035 (Table 1) – and has approved massive new fossil fuel projects since the landmark agreement it helped negotiate. This discrepancy demands questions about whether the UAE is actually betting against the 1.5°C limit it says its work around COP28 was guided by.

The Climate Action Tracker has rated the UAE's climate policies as "Critically Insufficient," signaling that current and planned expansions in the oil and gas sector are incompatible with its ambition to reach carbon neutrality by 2050.⁶¹ This position underscores the need for the UAE to realign its NDC with climate science. The country's ongoing dependence on fossil fuels not only threatens the effectiveness and credibility of COP28's outcomes, but

also presents a long-term economic risk and threat to international positioning of the UAE. As the global economy moves away from and stigmatizes fossil fuels, nations that continue to rely heavily on fossil fuels face the potential for financial instability and stranded assets.⁶²

The UAE has the potential to lead fossil fuels-dependent economies like Saudi Arabia toward a future centered on sustainable development and economic diversification. By setting an example, the UAE could guide these major oil-producing nations in reducing reliance on fossil fuels, embracing cleaner energy sources, and investing in diversified, fossil-free industries. This transition could mitigate significant economic risks as global demand for fossil fuels declines, as well as support their populations' long-term prosperity and reduce climate change impacts that affect billions of people worldwide.

The NDC process provides the UAE with an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to the energy transition decision it helped negotiate. Doing so would align the country's domestic decisions with its international climate diplomacy and deliver a real legacy of leadership beyond a COP decision.

Brazil: Mission 1.5°C or Mission oil and gas?

During the recent UN General Assembly, in a bid to project climate leadership, President Lula da Silva of Brazil declared that "it is time to address the debate on the slow pace of the planet's decarbonization and work towards an economy that is less dependent on fossil fuels," reiterating Brazil's commitment to submitting an NDC aligned with the 1.5°C temperature limit.⁶³ At the same time, Brazil's energy authorities expect that new oil production will make the country the fourth largest producer in the

world.⁶⁴ Brazil's energy minister declared after a G20 meeting in October 2024 that "anything that points to the word 'end' in a transition is preposterous."⁶⁵

This contradiction between Brazil's climate aspirations and its fossil fuel plans highlight a tension in the country's approach to climate policy. According to an analysis by Brazilian think tank Instituto de Energia e Meio Ambiente, the climate consequences of the planned increase in oil

and gas exploration in just one of the new offshore frontiers, the Equatorial Margin, surpass by a factor of three the gains from Lula's policies to reduce deforestation in the Amazon.⁶⁶

In order to be the climate leader it aspires to be, Brazil needs to chart a way forward to meet its population's aspirations for prosperity while ending fossil fuel expansion, which is a key driver of climate impact there and elsewhere. While we applaud Lula's success in reducing deforestation rates in 2023 and 2024, these accomplishments cannot be used to justify continuing to extract more fossil fuels, in direct contradiction with science and global climate goals. The record-breaking 2024 fire season is a dire reminder that Brazil's forests may be lost to fossil fueled climate change even if zero deforestation is reached by 2030.

Brazilian civil society organizations and climate experts in the Observatório do Clima have proposed an NDC that charts a pathway to achieve these goals. Their proposed national climate plan would slash greenhouse gas emissions by 92 percent by 2035. This would involve beginning a phase-out of fossil fuels – a 42 percent reduction in their use by 2035 – that would eliminate any need for new licensing of oil and gas production.⁶⁷

Internationally, beyond submitting an ambitious and science-aligned NDC that includes the end of fossil fuel expansion, **Brazil has an opportunity to use its “Roadmap to Mission 1.5”⁶⁸ COP30 agenda to facilitate a global conversation on how to implement a just and equitable phase-out of fossil fuels.** The agenda calls upon rich countries to take the lead and to pay their fair share of global climate finance, enabling Global South countries to be able to transition. Brazil could lead the development of a North-South bloc of countries committed to facilitating conditions for an accelerated phase-out of fossil fuels. Brazil has a true opportunity to display leadership by leveraging its dual role as a Global South country and as a producer of oil and gas to increase pressure on Global North producers, such as the U.S., to end fossil fuel expansion, while engaging other Global South producers in planning and managing the economic, social, and energy consequences of a 1.5°C-aligned fossil fuel phase-out. **One of Brazil's most impactful legacies could be the adoption of a global calendar for fossil fuel phase-out, with rich countries scheduled first. Furthermore, Brazil could catalyze a deep reform of the global financial architecture to unlock the financial resources for the transition in oil-, gas-, and coal-dependent economies of the Global South, as promoted by President Lula.**⁶⁹

Azerbaijan: the urgent need to prepare for the end of the fossil fuel era

Azerbaijan will host COP29 in November 2024 in Baku at a time of escalating climate impacts and deep questions about the direction of international climate action. A major point of uncertainty centers on how countries will implement the COP28 decision on energy; Azerbaijan, as the host, has the potential to set that course.

So far, Azerbaijan has sent consistently negative signals about its willingness to implement this decision in an ambitious and science-led manner. The country's president called fossil gas a “gift from the Gods,” before adding that, “as a head of the country, which is rich with fossil fuels, of course, we will defend the right of these countries to continue investments and to continue production.”⁷⁰ This commitment to fossil fuel expansion has resulted in the COP29 presidency deprioritizing the implementation of the COP28 decision on fossil fuels in its diplomatic outreach to countries.

However, ignoring the accelerating energy transition will not protect Azerbaijan from its impacts. Fossil fuels “account for 90% of all exports and 60% of government revenue,” according to E3G.⁷¹ As such, a report by Carbon Tracker has shown that a decline in fossil fuel

consumption, triggered by the energy transition, will impact Azerbaijan more than many other countries. Azerbaijan's climate plans have been judged “critically insufficient” by Climate Action Tracker, because of the country's rapidly rising emissions, weakened climate targets, and weak renewable energy target.⁷²

Azerbaijan exports the vast majority of its fossil gas to the European Union, and has committed to doubling exports by 2027. However, the European Union has clearly signaled that its gas consumption will decline significantly, by at least 80 percent by 2050, as the continent phases out fossil fuels. This leaves Azerbaijan in a heightened state of vulnerability as its main export market dries up.⁷³

Hosting COP29 offers Azerbaijan a real opportunity to submit an NDC that prepares its economy for the end of the fossil fuel era and that implements a robust energy transition plan, which the country currently lacks.⁷⁴ Moreover, COP29 offers Azerbaijan to cement its legacy by leading efforts to shape an NCQG that secures substantial funding from Global North countries to enable ambitious NDCs from countries in the Global South.

Conclusion

The next round of NDCs represent countries' best, and probably last, opportunity to adopt the policies and plans that are needed to unlock the deep and rapid emissions cuts required to limit warming to 1.5°C. While NDCs are complex, science is clear that there is no such thing as a 1.5°C-aligned NDC that does not put an immediate end to the approval of new oil, gas, and coal production.

The phase-out of fossil fuels, which all countries agreed to at COP28 in Dubai, requires justice and equity. This means that Global North oil and gas producing countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Norway, and the United Kingdom should not only follow science by ending fossil fuel expansion, but must also be the first ones to end their fossil fuel production. They must also provide financial support to countries that are still dependent on fossil fuels, and thus vulnerable to the consequences of the energy transition. The absence of decisive and immediate action from these countries is a powerful political impediment to the energy transition and a strong incentive for other countries to hold off from initiating their own transitions.

While inaction by rich countries is unacceptable, climate arithmetics and the inevitable end of the fossil fuel era mean that all oil and gas producing nations need to accelerate their exit from fossil fuels. A just and orderly transition away from fossil fuels requires immediate action and deep collaboration and support, not delay tactics. In this context, the COP Troika countries, as major oil and gas producers tasked with shepherding the global climate process for the next

few years, should lead by example and demonstrate how the transition can be managed. This requires submitting NDCs aligned with limiting warming to 1.5°C, starting with refusing new fossil fuel production. Continuing to expand fossil fuels while calling their own plans "1.5°C-aligned" would deal a serious blow to the credibility of the Troika itself and serve to greenwash plans that are in direct opposition to the scientific consensus.

Beyond their domestic plans, the COP Troika could use their influence over international climate policy to foster the enabling environment needed to unlock the transition away from fossil fuels.

First, by working to secure adequate finance on fair terms through a strong NCQG at COP29, which would encourage the reflection of the COP28 energy outcomes in NDCs, driving a unified, ambitious, and science-aligned path toward comprehensive climate action.

Second, COP30 in Brazil, with its "Roadmap to Mission 1.5°C" agenda item, could host a conversation on just and equitable phase-out timelines between countries and the necessary financial support to enable fossil fuel-dependent countries to transition, including through a reform of the global financial architecture, thus cementing President Lula's climate legacy. At a time of turmoil for multilateralism, leadership from the COP Troika could help turn the lofty goals of the COP28 decision into reality. The ball is in their court.



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