



Greenwashing Fact Sheet Series

“Greenwashing” is misinformation intended to mislead others about the environmental impact of activities. Globally, the aviation sector plans to triple in size by 2050 which would see aviation fuel consumption and therefore greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, double. Governments, lobbied by the sector, use unrealistic and

distracting promises of technological solutions and offsets to greenwash this growth. They also use economic growth and job arguments to justify subsidies and tax breaks for airports, airlines, manufacturers and fossil fuel companies. In our [series of Fact Sheets](#), we examine these claims and debunk common myths and misconceptions.

Aviation Greenwash vs. Reality

WHAT THEY SAY

Small climate impact. Aviation’s responsible for only about 2% of total CO₂ emissions.

Objective: Net zero emissions in 2050. In spite of an expected doubling of traffic, CO₂ emissions will be reduced by 81% in 2050 and the rest will be offset or removed from the atmosphere.

It can be achieved through technology. New technologies and fossil fuel substitutes will be able to effectively reduce emissions in the required time and scale. E.g.:

- Efficiency improvements;
- “Sustainable” aviation fuels (SAF);
- Electric and hydrogen flight;
- Carbon removal from the atmosphere (NETs) for remaining emissions.

Subsidies are needed to cover the cost of “green solutions”. As aviation is so important to society, flights must remain cheap, and so governments should subsidise any “green” technology / fuel and minimise aviation taxes.

Air traffic can keep growing. Its growth should not be hampered by restrictive policies.

WHAT WE SAY

Large and increasing climate impact. When we include non-CO₂ emissions, aviation’s contribution to climate heating is about 6% and is increasing. In wealthy countries, aviation is responsible for a much larger share (15-20%). Its climate impact is disproportionate to the small number of people who fly and more difficult to justify than that of essential and universal needs like food or heating.

Massive emission reductions required by 2035. 2050 is much too late: rapid and massive reductions in emissions are required! We need to ensure we remain below a safe level of global heating.

It can only be achieved by flying less. Technological solutions will come too late, if ever, to prevent the unacceptable risk of climate collapse, whilst grabbing essential resources and renewable energy. The only fair way to reduce emissions in time is to reduce air traffic, now.

Polluters should pay the cost of decarbonising any remaining flights, rather than all taxpayers (through government subsidies), since most of them have never flown or rarely fly. Those most responsible, e.g. the aviation sector itself, energy companies, private jet users and frequent flyers, should pay the most.

We urgently need policies that reduce air traffic. Among the most obvious and the most needed: stopping airport expansion, capping CO₂ and non-CO₂ emissions, stopping private jets and other luxury flights, banning flight advertising, ending tax privileges and raising fair taxes.

SUMMARY GREENWASHING FACT SHEETS 1-8

1. EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENTS

- Efficiency gains don't lead to an absolute decline of emissions because they are constantly being outpaced by air traffic growth and more carbon-intensive flying (longer distances and larger, premium seats).
- They make flying cheaper, which contributes to increasing traffic (this is known as the "rebound effect").

2. ELECTRIC FLIGHT

- Electric aircraft will not be "zero emissions" until electricity grids are fully decarbonised.
- The considerable weight of batteries will only allow for short flights with few passengers. These flights can most easily be replaced by ground travel.

3. HYDROGEN FLIGHT

- Hydrogen aircraft will, if at all, come much too late. There won't be any medium and long-haul flights before 2050, which are responsible for most aviation emissions.
- Hydrogen would still have significant non-CO₂ impacts.
- Producing green hydrogen requires massive amounts of renewable electricity and water, diverting them from more essential and efficient uses.

4. BIOFUELS

- Biofuels are a false response to the climate emergency. It diverts biomass - a scarce resource - from more essential uses and sectors. Plans to scale them up are slow and unrealistic.
- They still produce significant and sometimes more CO₂ than fossil fuels due to land use changes.
- Biofuels from food crops are widely used despite major issues.
- Biofuels from so-called "waste", generated by food, farming or forestry, are very limited in supply.

5. SYNTHETIC ELECTRO-FUELS (E-FUELS)

- E-fuels won't tackle the climate emergency. The technology is still at the pilot stage and would need decades of heavy investment to scale up production.
- E-fuels would still have significant non-CO₂ impacts.
- Due to the low energy efficiency of its production, e-fuels would require huge quantities of renewable electricity, even more than hydrogen flight, depriving other more essential sectors needing to decarbonise.

6. NET-ZERO & CARBON NEUTRALITY

- Net-Zero in 2050 is far too late. Meeting the 1.5°C target to prevent climate collapse means aviation has to cut its emissions very sharply now, like other sectors.
- Current aviation Net-zero roadmaps only include CO₂ but no non-CO₂ impacts.
- Net-zero is not Real Zero. The sector says it will need to remove massive amounts of CO₂ from the atmosphere by technological means. Today, these means are unproven and would entail massive resource use and risks ([see Fact sheet #8](#)).

7. CARBON OFFSETS

- Offsetting is fundamentally flawed. It does not reduce emissions, postpones action and serves as a licence to pollute.
- A majority of carbon offsets are ineffective or fraudulent.
- Carbon credits are so cheap that offsetting schemes will not reduce demand nor emissions.

8. NEGATIVE EMISSIONS TECHNOLOGIES (NETS)

NETs are industrial processes which remove CO₂ from the atmosphere by capturing and storing it, supposedly permanently. They are:

- unproved at scale and present severe technical, economic, humanitarian and environmental risks.
- inefficient and therefore expensive, requiring massive amounts of energy and resources that are crucially needed to efficiently decarbonise other sectors.
- undermining demands for real, deep emission cuts and are used to justify new oil and gas infrastructure.

While the development of new technologies and fuels may be helpful, it cannot be an excuse to delay regulation to reduce air traffic NOW to prevent further climate collapse.

On our [Policies to Degrow Aviation](#) webpage and in our [Just Transition](#) paper, we outline different reduction measures and how the conversion of the sector can guarantee the livelihood of workers.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Policies to Degrow Aviation: stay-grounded.org/policies-to-degrow-aviation

Just Transition Paper: stay-grounded.org/just-transition



Full factsheets on each topic can be found here:

stay-grounded.org/greenwashing

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