

A new ranking shows how European countries stack up on climate protection. How does your country compare?

The Paris Agreement to limit climate change signed in 2015 had countries committing to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions in order to keep global temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) — anything beyond could cause catastrophic effects, scientists warn.

And although countries have had two and a half years to put in place policies on the ground to help get them to their targets, few have done so. A ranking published Monday by the environmental group Climate Action Network shows this is the case even in Europe, the world's supposed leader in fighting climate change.

"While all European Union countries signed up to the Paris Agreement, most are failing to work towards delivering on its objectives," says CAN director Wendel Trio.

The ranking, which finds that no country is performing well enough if you look at both ambition and progress, comes at a decisive moment: The EU is preparing its long-term strategy for the next United Nations climate change summit, to be held in Poland in November.

Through Tuesday, Berlin is hosting 35 ministers from around the world for its yearly Petersberg Climate Dialogue, while later this week, Brussels will host a ministerial with Canada and China to discuss ambition around emissions reduction.

But even as these summits take place, Belgium and Germany have been ranked as "bad" by the report. "It's becoming very clear these days that Germany has gone from being world champion in climate action to a third division team," says Hermann Ott from the German League for Nature.

Opening the Petersberg forum in Berlin this morning, German environment minister Svenja Schulze acknowledged the problems. "It is bitter for me to admit that Germany will fail to meet the target we set for ourselves for 2020," she said. "Germany's goal has always been to be a pioneer in international climate policy."

Schulze went on promise that she would "work very hard to attain this goal."

Where does your country stand? CAN grouped countries into three groups: "the good, the bad and the ugly." Countries are ranked against a theoretical "number one" country with a 100 percent rating — a spot currently occupied by no country.

- The Good -

Sweden - 77 percent

Sweden came in first place among EU countries, both because of its domestic climate action and its diplomatic action pushing for more ambitious climate policy at EU level. Sweden is

on track to meet its domestic climate and energy targets for 2020, and it has a high share of renewable energy in its energy mix. It has set domestic emission reduction targets beyond EU requirements.

Portugal - 65 percent

Portugal is on track to meet its 2020 climate and energy targets, and is making good progress in reducing emissions and energy consumption per capita. It has also adopted a plan to reduce emissions to net zero by 2050, and called for the same target to be introduced at the EU level. CAN says Portugal has been playing a positive role in the negotiations of the EU 2030 climate and energy policies, particularly by calling for a higher renewable energy target. It would have scored higher if not for its relatively high coal consumption per capita.

France - 60 percent

France scores high for its diplomatic efforts on advancing the objectives of the Paris Agreement, and also for being a lead advocate for more ambition in EU targets, including by advocating for a net zero emissions target by 2050. However, France is likely to miss its 2020 renewable energy target, due to lack of investment in renewables and heavy dependence on nuclear energy.

- The Bad -

United Kingdom - 55 percent

CAN notes that while at the domestic level, the UK has committed to a number of ambitious climate targets that go beyond what is required by the EU — including a plan to phase out coal by 2025, and fossil fuel cars by 2040 — at the EU level, it has played a blocking role preventing ambitious climate legislation. It has routinely sided with the least-ambitious Eastern European countries on EU climate legislation, including in current negotiations on energy efficiency rules. “The uncertainties surrounding the continuation and nature of the UK’s relation with the EU environmental acquis after Brexit are also detrimental to the UK’s credibility as a climate leader,” CAN adds.

Belgium - 45 percent

Belgium has a mixed record of pushing for more ambition at EU level, but it is in favor of allocating more money for climate action in the future EU budget. Belgium is likely going to miss its own emission reduction target for 2020. Emissions have been rising since 2014, mainly in the transport and buildings sectors. Belgium is also likely to have difficulty reaching its 2020 renewable energy target, with Belgium’s byzantine federal governance structure also preventing progress. “With four governments responsible for climate policy, it does not have a coherent strategy for reducing emissions,” CAN says.

Germany - 35 percent

At the EU level, Germany has made public calls for higher climate ambition while reining back ambition in negotiations behind the scenes, CAN notes. Germany recently admitted it would miss its 2020 climate targets, notably those for emission reductions and energy efficiency. And while Angela Merkel has assembled a committee to look into how Germany can phase out coal, progress on that front has been slow.

- The Ugly -

Bulgaria - 26 percent

Bulgaria has held the rotating presidency of the EU since the beginning of this year, and climate campaigners have accused it of holding back on ambition in negotiations of key energy proposals this year. The country's development challenges frequently have it — along with Romania — at the back of the pack for EU climate and environment rankings.

Ireland - 21 percent

Ireland is set to miss its 2020 climate and renewable energy targets, and is also off-course for what CAN says is an already unambitious 2030 emissions target. Emissions from the transport and agriculture sectors are increasing significantly. "Ireland has failed to prepare effective policies to align near-term climate action with EU and Paris Agreement commitments," CAN wrote. At the EU level, Ireland failed to join the group of progressive EU Member States calling for increased EU climate ambition, and played a negative role in the negotiations of the EU 2030 climate and energy legislation, pushing for loopholes to dilute the laws.

Poland - 16 percent

Most central and eastern European countries come in low on the CAN ranking, but Poland ranks the lowest of any country. Coal-reliant Poland is routinely the villain in the EU climate story, and it is usually the country leading opposition to ambitious climate legislation. It wields particular power as the largest member of the "V4" group, along with Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Those combined votes in Brussels can kill off climate and environment legislation. Domestically, Poland's current Law & Justice regime has dismantled a number of climate and environment laws and has opened historic forests to deforestation.

Source: dw