

DEGROWTH OF AVIATION

Briefing Paper / December 2019

REDUCING AIR TRAVEL IN A JUST WAY

Flying is the fastest way to fry the planet. While the aviation sector's climate impact is commonly underestimated, the technological greening potentials are overestimated. Since green growth of aviation is an illusion, degrowth of aviation is the only way forward. How can this be achieved in a just way?

In the last decades, emissions from air travel have increased more than those from other sectors of the economy.¹ If it was up to the industry, this trend would continue, resulting in more than 1,000 airport infrastructure projects around the world.² The industry fosters the dream for *green flying*³ with misleading information, proclaiming the goal of *carbon-neutral growth* and repeating the claim that civil aviation accounts for “only” 2% of global emissions. In fact:

1. Aviation's climate impact is **not just a matter of CO₂**. If other factors contributing to Earth's heating are taken into account—such as induced cloudiness, ozone, contrails, water vapour and soot—aviation's contribution to climate change doubles at the very least. A 2005 estimate stated that civil aviation's total climate impact amounted to around 5%.⁴ Since then, aviation's emissions have been growing.
2. The aviation sector's share of emissions is **increasing rapidly**. In a report to the European Parliament, the research organisation Öko-Institut warned that emissions from international aviation alone may reach a 22% share of global emissions by 2050.⁵
3. Only a **small number of people are responsible** for this share of Earth heating, since about 90% of the world's population has never set foot on an airplane.⁶ A few wealthy fly at the expense of others: residents exposed to noise and particle pollution from planes, local ecosystems, future generations and those in the Global South who are already bearing the brunt of the climate crisis.

Just measures to tackle the issue of aviation are ones that will:

1. **reduce traffic**, but enable mobility and cultural exchange
2. **eliminate the unfair privileges** and power of the aviation industry
3. **target the wealthy frequent flyers** more than those who rarely or never fly
4. **provide a just transition** for workers in the aviation sector
5. **not create new problems**, such as with offset projects, biofuels, or an increasing need for energy through high demand for synthetic fuels. Also, measures should not overemphasise efficiency, which can lead to a “rebound effect” that causes even more air travel. Therefore, there is little value in civil society demanding “environmentally friendly, decarbonized or carbon-neutral aviation”. Instead, “sufficiency” and degrowth of aviation are necessary.

¹ EEA (2019). *Data Viewer on Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Removals*. <http://tinyurl.com/ybewwyq7>

² <http://stay-grounded.org/planned-airport-projects>

³ <http://stay-grounded.org/green-flying>

⁴ Fahey and Lee (2016). *Aviation and Climate Change. A Scientific Perspective*. In: CCLR 2: 97–104

⁵ Öko-Institut (2015). *Emission Reduction Targets for International Aviation and Shipping*. <https://tinyurl.com/pyhhwsy>, p.28

⁶ <http://stay-grounded.org/position-paper>

ELIMINATING TAX EXEMPTIONS: KEROSENE & CARBON TAX, VAT, AND TICKET TAX



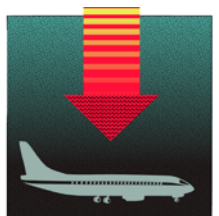
Flying is virtually tax free in comparison to other modes of transport. Introducing fiscal measures can counter the massive indirect subsidies of the aviation industry. This is a necessary step, but not enough to reduce aviation and to target the few wealthy people responsible for the biggest share of flights and climate impact.

MAKING EXCESSIVE FLYERS PAY: FREQUENT FLYER LEVY & AIR MILES LEVY



The frequent flyer levy (FFL) or the air miles levy (AML) attempt to address the social injustice of flying. In practice, the FFL could for example allow one levy-free first flight every four years, the second flight in this period would have a levy of e.g. 150 euro, and with each additional flight the levy doubles. The AML is similar, but rises according to the air miles travelled, since the longer the flight the more damaging it is. The revenues obtained from such levies can be used to make climate-friendly modes of mobility accessible for all, especially in the Global South, including a “just transition” fund.

SETTING LIMITS ON FLIGHTS



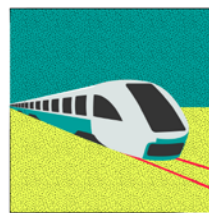
The most effective way to reduce aviation is to limit the amount of flights. This can be done by banning short-haul routes where alternative transport could easily be used or built, or by limiting the amount of departures per day on specific routes. Setting absolute limits and bans is fair, as nobody can buy themselves out of it. Bans are beginning to be publicly discussed and could become more popular if their justice dimension is pointed out more.

MORATORIA ON NEW INFRASTRUCTURE, AND SCALING DOWN OF AIRPORTS



A red line needs to be put on airport expansion, setting moratoria on new infrastructure projects. Along with a shift of short-haul flights to trains, regional airports (which are usually highly subsidised) will become obsolete and close.

FOSTERING ALTERNATIVES



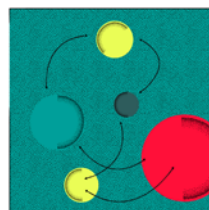
Boosting the use of alternatives to flying requires investment in the network of long-distance train and bus routes. This does not require high-speed train lines, which are also problematic, but larger numbers of more comfortable and affordable night trains and buses. Also, ecologically modernised ferries, ships, integrated and user-friendly international booking systems for multi-modal travel, improved transfers, as well as online conference systems are part of the future picture.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE OF TRAVEL POLICIES



While most of the above measures need implementation on a state level, institutions like schools, universities, municipalities, NGOs and businesses can already contribute to the reduction of flights (of their employees and partners), by changing their travel policies.

OTHER MEANS FOR REDUCING AVIATION



There are plenty of other measures that could lead to a reduction of air travel, including making explicit the overall climate impact of aviation (in accounting and communication); mandating that all marketing of flights show the climate impact; behaviour change campaigns; divestment from the aviation sector; banning frequent flyer programmes; and more.

THE STAY GROUNDED NETWORK

This fact sheet is a summary of the report “Degrowth of Aviation”. It combines different approaches to reduce aviation, many of them discussed at the Conference “Degrowth of Aviation” in July 2019, organised by the Stay Grounded Network. This network combines about 150 member organisations and groups around the world.

Download full report:

<http://stay-grounded.org/report-degrowth-of-aviation>

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