EKŌ

JET SET JUSTICE

How Billionaires' Jets and Premium Flyers **Should Pay** Their Climate Bill

INTRODUCTION

Every day, ordinary people make efforts to reduce their environmental footprint - turning down thermostats, taking trains, sorting their waste. Yet, in the skies above us, the super-rich are flying in private jets and first-class cabins, pumping out carbon emissions, often paying barely a cent for the pollution they cause.

The likes of Donald Trump, Eric Schmidt and Elon Musk are paying close to zero tax on the fuel that powers their private jets, while ordinary families struggle to fill up their car with rising petrol prices. The aviation industry has so far successfully dodged paying the true cost of its climate impacts, but as emissions from the sector rocket, public pressure is growing for governments to address this shameless subsidy for billionaire jet-setters.

World leaders have gathered in Belem, Brazil for COP30 to agree on the next stage of collective action to address the climate crisis. Over the past year, the governments of France, Barbados, and Kenya have put together a plan to ensure the aviation industry pays for its pollution.

The 'solidarity levy' would include ensuring private jets and premium flights (business and first classes) pay their fair share. Expert analysis shows this could raise more than €78 billion annually to help climate-vulnerable communities.[1] This is a simple and fair way to make sure those who pollute most, pay most.

The public strongly supports a plan for an aviation levy on luxury flights. New polling in the UK and Brazil - two countries that are yet to back this initiative - shows that 76% of people in the UK agree their government should ask premium flyers to contribute fairly for higher emissions; in Brazil, 70% agree.

Momentum is building. Nine countries have already joined the Coalition for Solidarity Levies for Premium Flyers. Now is the moment to push for more. Ekō and other civil society organisations are demanding other countries, including the UK, Brazil, Denmark and Germany join and help get this off the ground.

[1] https://solidaritylevies.org/app/uploads/2025/06/Aviation-study-FINAL.pdf, P18, 41

THE MILE-HIGH DENIERS

Private jets are not just a rich person's toy — they are a climate catastrophe. Along with first class and business travel, luxury flights are pumping out millions of tonnes of climate-changing emissions, with the quantity of emissions growing rapidly year on year.

In 2023, private jets alone emitted 19.5 million tonnes of CO_2 -- that's a massive 46% increase since 2019, and is more than all flights from Heathrow Airport, Europe's busiest airport, combined. Private jets have an outsized climate impact compared to other modes of transport -they are up to 14 times more carbon intensive than commercial flights and 50 times more polluting than trains.

What's worse, CO_2 is only half the problem. When you add in the climate heating from other pollutants, such as contrails, this more than doubles the total heating impact of aviation.[2] The science shows that, just as premium flyers and private jets produce more CO_2 per passenger, they are more likely to cause heating contrails as well.[3]

This problem, entirely created by super-rich jetsetters, will only get worse unless action is taken. Private jet use has ballooned in the last two decades with the number of jets doubling between 2020 and 2022 - and carbon emissions from the sector will only grow as private jet users move towards bigger, more polluting aircraft.

THE TOP TEN BILLIONAIRE PRIVATE JET POLLUTERS

For the first time, Ekō researchers compiled publicly available data for the world's worst polluters in 2025 and the numbers are shocking.[4] Over just the first three months of 2025, top billionaire polluters Steve Wynn and Eric Schmidt each emitted close to—or over—900 tonnes of CO_2 from private flights. That's the equivalent of almost 1,300 years of emissions from the poorest half of humanity—in 90 days.[5]

Every time these tech moguls and billionaire businessmen fly to a board meeting or a weekend getaway, it's another punch to the planet.

[2] https://www.transportenvironment.org/topics/planes/contrails

[3] https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/255315/study-planet-warming-contrails-spanner-works-aviation/

[4] The data was compiled for the top billionaires' private jet use for each 2025 flight drawing on https://celebrityprivatejettracker.com. Data only available up to 5th April 2025.

[5] Data based on an annual budget of world's poorest 50% of 0.7 carbon tons according to Oxfam.

In newly-released data, *2025 top polluters (up to 5th April 2025)*

1. **Steve Wynn** (hotels and gaming) - *963 tons*
2. **Eric Schmidt** (ex-Google boss) - *874 tons*
3. **Michael Bloomberg** (Bloomberg owner and politician) - *663 tons*
4. **Steve Balmer** (former CEO of Microsoft) - *624 tons*
5. **Mark Cuban** (tech) - *516 tons*
6. **Oprah Winfrey** (entertainment) - *413 tons*
7. **Peter Thiel** (tech and ex-Pay Pal founder) - *408 tons*
8. **Jerry Jones** (businessman and Dallas Cowboys owner) - *317 tons*
9. **Rupert Murdoch** (media mogul) - 294 tons
10. **David Geffen** (entertainment) - 291 tons and for 2023-2025

Before publication, Ekō contacted the offices of several individuals listed in the draft findings to offer them an opportunity to comment.

Representatives for Bill Gates and Sergey Brin both challenged the accuracy of the flight data attributed to them by the Celebrity Private Jet Tracker, the public source used for this analysis.

• Mr. Gates's office stated that he owns one Gulfstream jet, not two as shown in the tracker, and that the second aircraft was wrongly linked to him. They also noted that he uses sustainable aviation fuel (SAF).

• Mr. Brin's office stated that the aircraft listed on the site does not belong to him, and therefore the emission figures are incorrect.

Given these representations, and pending further independent verification of the data, Ekō has decided to remove Bill Gates and Sergey Brin from the Top 10 list of billionaire private jet polluters prior to publication.

The imbalance between the super rich and the 99% is staggering. Twenty-three of the world's **top billionaires average 184 private jet flights a year**, producing around 2,074 tonnes of CO_2 -- equal to what an average person would emit in 300 years.

These aircraft are often not used for necessity but for convenience: to skip airport queues, to land closer to vacation villas, to arrive at Davos in style while talking about climate action. High-speed train connections exist on 70-80% of the top 10 most popular private jet routes in the EU and Switzerland.

Ekō also compiled the top billionaire private jet polluters for the period 2023-2025.

Although he now uses Air Force One, which is classified as a military aircraft (and doesn't appear on the 2025 leaderboard), Donald Trump has been by far the world's biggest private jet polluter, in recent years with three times the private jet emissions than anyone else. Since 2023, his private jet has pumped out **32,344 tons of carbon**, the equivalent of the annual emissions from **over 7000 US cars**[6] **or 50,592 European roundtrip (Helsinki to Munich) flights**[7].

2023-2025 top billionaire polluters (up to 5th April 2025)

1. **Donald Trump** (real estate and politician) - *32,344 tons of CO_2*
2. **Eric Schmidt** (ex-Google head) - *8239 tons*
3. **Elon Musk** (tech mogul) - *7440 tons*
4. **Michael Bloomberg** (Bloomberg owner and politician) - *7017 tons*
5. **Kim Kardashian** (media personality and fashion mogul) - *4800 tons*
6. **Jay Z** (pop star) - *4594 tons*
7. **Steve Wynn** (hotels and casinos) - *4,395 tons*
8. **Mark Zuckerberg** (Meta founder) - *4,390 tons*
9. **Steve Balmer** (former CEO of Microsoft) - *3,830 tons*
10. **Marc Benioff** (Salesforce CEO) - *2,868 tons*

When we talk about the climate crisis, we often hear the refrain: "We're all in this together." But the truth is, we're not.

Kerosene — the lifeblood of private jets — enjoys a unique privilege: it's taxed hardly anywhere in the world. Whilst ordinary families pay through the roof to fill up their cars to take their kids to school and get the weekly groceries - in the first half of 2024, the EU's average tax rate for petrol was 50% (excise and VAT) - the jet fuel propelling the super rich is largely untaxed.

Private jet users in the EU pay zero tax on jet fuel whilst UK and US polluters pay a pittance - at the start of 2025 the US rate was just 22 cents per gallon, barely 1/10th of the rate of other polluting fuels. People are finally waking up to this absurdity. In the US, a Congressional bill has been submitted to raise the tax to $2 per gallon, to try and bring it into line with other polluting fuels.

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[6] 32,344 tons is the equivalent of 7,031 cars' annual carbon emissions based on the US Environmental Protection Agency's estimate that a typical passenger vehicle emits about 4.6 metric tons of CO_2 per year.

[7] 32,344 metric tons is the equivalent of 50,592 roundtrip flights from Helsinki to Munich according to OpenCO2.

EMISSION EVADERS

For years, watchdogs and journalists could expose the excesses of private aviation because flight data and ownership records were accessible. That visibility allowed the public to see billionaires taking 17-minute hops or logging hundreds of flights a year—spotlighting emissions on a scale ordinary people could barely imagine.

Now, that transparency is disappearing. In the US, new rules introduced on 28 March 2025 let private jet owners hide their identity with moves to make the withholding of this information the default in the future. This matters, as the US private jet market is by far the world's biggest. In 2023, US private jet flights accounted for more than half of global emissions from private jets, with Florida and Texas together generating more emissions than the entire European Union.

We might be seeing the impact of the new secrecy law as 2025 data on top polluters only goes as far as early April, just a few days after it came into place. Furthermore, other countries are following suit: Ireland, a key hub for jet registration, by default now removes the identity of all owners.

Billionaires are adapting in ways that make accountability even harder. Instead of purchasing aircraft, **some now rent or charter jets**, leaving no clear paper trail. They enjoy the same high-carbon lifestyles while evading headlines and public pressure. Bernard Arnault, CEO of LVMH and one of the world's richest men, sold his private jet to avoid being tracked. He summed it up perfectly, 'the result now is that no one can see where I go because I rent planes when I use private planes'. This lack of accountability makes it even more urgent to ensure the emission evaders are paying their fair share.

PREMIUM SEATS: SHIRKING THEIR FARE SHARE

Private jets aren't the only climate injustice. On commercial airlines too, the wealthy pollute far more than the rest, widening the emissions gap. 1% of the world's population emits 50% of CO_2 from global aviation.

A study from 2013 estimated that a business-class passenger produces up to 3 times more CO_2 than someone in economy, while first class can be **9 times worse**. The reason? Space and weight.

Premium seats take up more space than economy. Add in heavier fittings—beds, bars, private partitions—and fuel burn climbs. The heavier a plane is, the more emissions it produces. In addition, business or first class seats are less occupied than economy seats, making them even more carbon intensive.

Airlines, too, profit handsomely from these tickets. Business passengers represent 12% of travellers, but are typically twice as lucrative, accounting for as much as 75% of airlines' profits. A first-class flyer is paying more money to the airline, but the true cost of luxury flight pollution isn't being captured under the current arrangements.

EXPOSING GREENWASHING

The aviation industry knows it has a problem. Public concern about flying's climate impact is growing. The global airline fleet is on track to more than double over the next two decades, driving up air travel — and emissions. To protect profits, airlines have deployed a familiar strategy: **greenwashing**.

Their glossy reports are filled with promises of "net zero by 2050" and "sustainable aviation fuels." But dig beneath the slogans, and the reality crumbles.

- **Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)**: It makes up less than 0.1% of global jet fuel today. The cost is 3-5 times more than regular jet fuel and even if production scaled up massively, some SAFs need vast tracts of land for biomass, potentially causing deforestation and replacing food with energy production, whilst other SAFs need huge amounts of electricity to create liquid fuel.

- **Carbon Offsets:** Airlines sell passengers the option to "fly guilt-free" by paying a few extra dollars to fund tree planting or renewable projects. Yet countless investigations show these schemes are at best unreliable, and are often just downright fraud, as they over-count carbon savings or fund projects that would have happened anyway.

- **Efficiency Gains:** Yes, engines are improving, but the industry's growth outpaces these gains. More luxury cabins and more flights means more emissions.

This is not a pathway to climate safety. It is a delay tactic, designed to stall regulation and taxes while airlines expand their most profitable business lines.

SOLIDARITY LEVIES

The problem is clear, and so is the solution. The Global Solidarity Levies Task Force, an intergovernmental body seeking ways to fund climate action, has outlined a fair, simple way to bring justice to aviation emissions: aviation levies.

These could raise more than €78 billion annually to help combat climate change impacts - including up to €41 billion from taxing private jet fuel and €37 billion from a ticket levy on commercial airlines.

Three measures stand at the heart of the proposal:

1. **Luxury Ticket Levy** – A purchase tax on business and first-class tickets, reflecting their higher emissions. The more polluting the seat, the higher the tax.

2. **Private Jet Kerosene Tax** – Ending the untaxed fuel privilege of the world's most carbon-intensive transport mode.

3. **Money for climate justice** – Revenues (raised from domestic and international flights) would flow directly into adaptation, mitigation, and loss-and-damage programs for the world's most climate-vulnerable communities.

These are not radical ideas. They follow the basic principle of fairness: those who pollute most should pay most. Economists call it the polluter pays principle—and it has worked in many other industries.

Imagine what €78 billion could fund: flood defences in South Asia, solar power in Africa, food security in Latin America. Luxury pollution turned into lifelines for those at risk.

Critics will say this is unrealistic. But let's be clear: governments already tax car fuel, tobacco, and alcohol because they are harmful. Aviation levies will ensure that the richest do not fly free while the planet and vulnerable communities pay the price.

THE ROAD TO COP30

This year's COP30 in Brazil is more than just another climate summit. It is a turning point. The world is running out of time to close the climate finance gap, and aviation levies could play a decisive role.

Already, nine countries have launched a Premium Flyers Solidarity Coalition. These member states - France, Spain, Kenya, Barbados, Somalia, Benin, Sierra Leone, Djibouti and Antigua & Barbuda - have committed to a ticket levy on premium flyers and for a significant tax on private jets. But that is just the start. To truly change course, more nations must step up.

We call on:

- **Brazil** – As COP host, Brazil has the chance to make history by championing aviation levies on the global stage.

- **The United Kingdom** – Home to one of the largest aviation industries and a powerful seat at ICAO (the International Civil Aviation Organization), the UK is uniquely positioned to lead.

- **Other nations** – including Brazil, Denmark and Germany must face their responsibility.

Aviation levies are not a fringe idea. They are gaining traction among governments, NGOs, and economists. At COP30, they could become a flagship initiative that shows the world is finally willing to hold the world's top polluters accountable.