

## Voluntary Offsetting

**International climate protection is one of the greatest challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In order to keep climate change manageable, efforts should be made to limit the rise in temperature to 1.5° Celsius. This is the only way to keep the risk for humans and the environment at an acceptable level. In other words, the world-wide increase in greenhouse gas emissions must be stopped, which can only be achieved if all of us work towards that goal.**



There are many ways to keep individual greenhouse gas emissions as low as possible. Even small changes such as buying regional products, cycling more often or switching to green electricity can improve our climate balance. Of course, sufficiency is also part of ambitious climate protection. When planning a holiday, environmentally friendly mobility can also avoid and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Providers can be project developers themselves or purchase credits on the market for voluntary offsetting. Those who cannot or do not want to avoid air travel should make a voluntary contribution and offset their emissions.



**Emissions: 1. Avoid, 2. Reduce and 3. Offset!**

## How are Emissions Offset?

Greenhouse gas emissions can be offset by cancelling emission credits (also called certificates). Thus, for example, a car's carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions can be 'neutralised' by certificates from climate protection projects.

It is crucial to accurately calculate the emissions to be offset. Various institutions provide emissions calculators which may differ greatly. The more criteria the calculations are based on (e. g. car model, fuel consumption or distance driven) and the more detailed the information, the better.

The UBA CO<sub>2</sub> calculator at [uba.co2-rechner.de/en\\_GB](http://uba.co2-rechner.de/en_GB) can help determine your greenhouse gas emissions.

After the emissions have been calculated, certificates can be purchased from various compensation providers to offset the remaining unavoidable emissions.

## Climate Projects

Building a wind farm is an example of a climate protection project. Most countries obtain their electricity from coal or other fossil fuels. Electricity generated from wind, by contrast, does not cause any carbon dioxide emissions, making it easy to calculate the emissions saved.

These emissions reductions can be used to offset other – unavoidable – emissions. Good climate protection projects not only protect the climate, but also foster sustainable development at the project location.

They can encourage the transfer of environmentally friendly technology to developing countries. They create jobs for the local population and protect the local environment e. g. by improving air quality. This added value is called co-benefit.

Guide "Voluntary CO<sub>2</sub> offsetting through climate protection projects"



► [www.umweltbundesamt.de/publikationen/voluntary-co2-offsetting-through-climate-protection](http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/publikationen/voluntary-co2-offsetting-through-climate-protection)

## Quality of Climate Projects

In order to ensure a high quality of the climate protection projects and thus ultimately a high-quality compensation, there are certain criteria, so-called project standards. These ensure that the projects are carried out and checked reliably. The aim is that at the end of the day the amount of reduced emissions has been reliably determined.

### Important Criteria

- ▶ The project must be **additional**. This means for example that the project could not have been realised without the sale of certificates and the resulting proceeds. There should also be no legal obligation to do so.
- ▶ **Permanent** reduction or saving of emissions that may not be reemitted elsewhere as a result of the project.
- ▶ **No double counting** of mitigated emissions, which happens, for instance, when a certificate is sold twice or when this mitigation is claimed multiple times by different parties.

## Emissions Above the Clouds

Careful calculation of the climate impact is particularly important when offsetting air travel. The climate impact of air travel is not limited to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Nitrogen oxides, soot particles and water vapour additionally contribute to the warming of the atmosphere. According to estimates by the German Environment Agency, the total climate impact of aviation is about three times greater than the impact of emitted CO<sub>2</sub> alone.



### OFFSETTING FROM 2021

Most climate protection projects are located in the southern hemisphere, and the reason for this is the former Kyoto Protocol – an agreement on climate protection under international law. Transition from the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement has since changed the offsetting culture. This is because developing and emerging countries are now also submitting climate protection targets, which are to be improved after a certain specified time. Only ambitious climate protection projects that are free of double counting are additional and also suitable for voluntary offsetting with the aim and claim of climate neutrality.

**A paradigm shift can be expected here:** Instead of making yourself climate-neutral by offsetting, the contribution is used collectively and strengthens the host nations' achievement of their goal. If the contribution is to be used individually, the host country should release the project for such purposes and then no longer use it for its own purposes (contribution claim).



## How to Assess Offers for Voluntary Offsetting

Hint  
1

Reliable providers always prioritise **avoidance and reduction** of emissions to offsetting. Offers to offset avoidable high emissions such as those from high performance vehicles are unreliable.

Hint  
2

Reliable providers always ask for **actual and individual data** before calculating emissions.

When offsetting air travel, the climate impact of aviation is also given special consideration beyond pure CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, e. g. the German Environment Agency uses a factor of three for its compensation.

Hint  
3

In the best case, **independent third parties verify the climate protection project**. These verifications ensure that the project has really saved emissions.

Further checks can prove the project's overall sustainability with regard to other environmental and social aspects.

Hint  
4

The **offer is transparent** when providers give basic information about offsetting and the project's features. This may include detailed descriptions of the project (location, size, project type, duration etc.) and the standards applied.

In addition to location and measures, the number of certificates generated by the project should also be transparent.

Cancellation of certificates from projects should take place immediately and verifiably.

*We promote  
climate protection  
together!*

