



MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Contents:

1. **What We Do**
2. **Terms Defined**
3. **Key Facts**
4. **How Nations Compare**
5. **The Climate Connection**
6. **Contact Global Footprint Network**

1. What We Do

Global Footprint Network is an international think tank working to advance sustainability through the use of the Ecological Footprint, a resource accounting tool that measures how much nature we use, how much we have and who uses what. By developing transparent, scientifically robust measures to help decision-makers monitor and protect ecological assets, Global Footprint Network is committed to fostering a world where all people can live well within the means of one planet.

2. Terms Defined

- The Ecological Footprint measures how much productive area it takes to produce what a population (an individual, a city, a country, or the world) consumes and absorb its waste, using prevailing technology.
- Ecological overshoot occurs when a population demands resources and produces waste (such as CO₂ emissions) faster than the earth can renew these resources and absorb the waste. Humanity has been in overshoot since the 1980s. Its pressure on resources today now exceeds what the planet can renewably provide by 31 percent.
- Ecological Creditors are countries that have more biocapacity within their borders than they consume.
- Ecological Debtors are countries that use more biocapacity than is available within their borders. These countries maintain their ecological deficits by importing resources from abroad, depleting their own stocks and/or filling waste sinks, such as the atmosphere and ocean with CO₂.

3. Key Facts

- According to Global Footprint Network calculations, in 2005, humanity's Ecological Footprint was 31 percent larger than the planet's capacity to produce these resources. In other words, it now takes a year and four months to regenerate what humanity uses within one year.
- Humanity has gone from using slightly more than half of planet Earth's biocapacity in 1961 to the equivalent of 1.4 planet Earths in 2008.
- At the current rate humanity is using natural resources and producing waste, we will require the resources of **two planets** to meet our demands by the early 2030s – around the time children born today are entering the work force. Reaching this level of ecological deficit spending may be physically impossible, and is likely to cause major ecosystem collapses.

- The carbon Footprint, which accounts for the use of fossil fuels, is almost half of humanity's total Ecological Footprint and is its fastest growing component, having increased more than 700 percent from 1961 to today.
- The average Ecological Footprint for a U.S. resident (as of 2005 data) is 9.4 global hectares (23.5 acres), or about the size of 17 U.S. football fields. If everyone in the world lived like an American, it would take almost five planets to support humanity.
- Today, 80 of the world's population live in countries that are ecological debtors – they use more biocapacity than they have within their own borders. These countries depend upon the resource surpluses concentrated in those few countries with excess biocapacity, so-called ecological creditors.

4. How Various Nations Compare

Globally, we are using 1.4 Earths' worth of biocapacity every year. Some nations, however, use a lot less than this, and some use a lot more. Here is how many Earths we would need if everyone lived like a resident of the following countries, according to Global Footprint Network's 2008 National Accounts.

- | | |
|------------------|------------|
| • United States | 4.5 Earths |
| • United Kingdom | 3.1 Earths |
| • Germany | 2.5 Earths |
| • Argentina | 1.2 Earths |
| • Costa Rica | 1.1 Earths |
| • South Africa | 1.0 Earth |
| • India | 0.4 Earths |

Global Footprint Network calculates the Ecological Footprint and biocapacity of more than 200 nations and looks at how these nations compare. For more information, go to www.footprintnetwork.org/atlas.

5. The Climate Connection

Carbon is the primary culprit of our ecological overspending. Humanity is emitting carbon faster than the planet can reabsorb it. Our carbon Footprint (the amount of land and sea it would take to absorb all the carbon we emit) has increased 700% since 1961. Now over 50% of our Ecological Footprint comes from carbon emissions. We are now emitting so much carbon, the planet can't absorb it all, so it is building up in the atmosphere, contributing to climate change.

While climate change may represent the most alarming symptom of overshoot, it also offers the greatest opportunity for change; virtually every action we take to reduce climate change also reduces overshoot, and vice versa. If we conquer climate change without depleting other natural assets, we can rebalance our Earth budget. However, some strategies for addressing climate change, like certain biofuels, simply shift the pressure to agricultural land and therefore don't contribute to ending overshoot overall.

6. Contact Global Footprint Network

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Visit www.footprintnetwork.org for more information about overshoot, Global Footprint Network, the Ecological Footprint, and to get specific country and world Footprint data.