PRESS RELEASE
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S. Korea trails behind G20 on climate action, new study shows

As Korea prepares to enhance its 2030 emissions target by COP26, a new study reveals the country struggles to keep up with G20 peers on climate response. Korea's total emissions are projected to rebound by nearly 5% in 2021, as its renewable share amounts to only a quarter of the G20 average, and less than a third of its COVID-19 recovery spending is deemed green.

October 14, 2021 – While the Korean government has recently proposed a provisional 2030 emissions reduction target, South Korea needs far more ambitious climate actions based on findings from the *Climate Transparency Report 2021* – a comprehensive review of G20's climate performance and opportunities in 2021 by 16 research institutes and NGOs.

The report found that emissions are projected to rebound across the G20 by 4% in 2021 after a brief decline of 6% due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the share of renewable energy in total energy supply is projected to grow to 12% in 2021, the G20 has subsidized the fossil fuel industry with a total of USD 298bn from January 2020 to August 2021.

Korea scores poorly compared to G20 countries
Gahee Han, researcher at Seoul-based NGO Solutions for Our Climate and one of the lead authors of the report, said: "We've seen a rebound of emissions across the G20, but South Korea in particular has not made meaningful improvements in climate action despite its pursuit of carbon neutrality since last year's study. The country remains a laggard relative to G20 countries."

Some of the key findings related to South Korea are as follows:

- **Korea's overall climate action remains "highly insufficient," meaning Korea's climate policies and commitments are not compatible with a 1.5°C pathway:** The report states that Korea's 2030 emissions would need to be around 278 $MtCO_2e$ to meet the 1.5°C goal. This means Korea must significantly increase its domestic emissions reduction target. Even with the provisional Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) target enhanced to 40% reduction compared to 2018 levels, Korea is still projected to have a significant ambition gap.

- **Korea's energy-related CO_2 emissions fell in 2020 but are projected to rebound by 4.7% in 2021 relative to 2020, while the G20 average rebound by 4.1%:** Without an official coal phase-out year, and with new coal power plants still under construction, Korea would remain reliant on coal power as a major energy source. Moreover, the Korean government plans to replace most of the retired coal plant capacity with LNG,

leading to a further growth of Korea's gas consumption which has already increased by 17% from 2015 to 2020 while that of the G20 has increased by 12%.

- **Korea's renewables' share in power generation of 7.2% (incl. hydro, biomass and waste) experienced among the highest increases in the G20 between 2015 and 2020, but still makes up only one fourth the G20 average of 28.7%**: While solar energy in Korea has increased by more than four times, it still makes up only 0.6% of total primary energy due to complicated renewable power plant permitting schemes and grid access challenges.

- **Korea has been rated as 'missing opportunities' for a green recovery from COVID-19:** Korea had among the highest recovery spending relative to GDP since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, but less than 30% of it was directed toward a green recovery. Other spending supported fossil fuels, such as Doosan Heavy, the country's flagship coal plant manufacturer.

- **Korea was the third largest provider of public finance for fossil fuels internationally, providing an average of USD 495m per year for the coal sector, an average of USD 7.5bn per year for oil and gas during 2018-2019.** The highest providers of public finance were Japan (USD 10.3 billion/year), China (just over USD 8 billion/year), and South Korea (just under USD 8 billion/year).

To improve on its climate performance, the report recommends that Korea halt the construction of new coal plants and phase out coal power by 2030, streamline renewable permitting procedures and improve grid access, reduce its reliance on LNG aiming for a net-zero power sector by 2035, and rapidly phase out its massive fossil fuel financing.

Calls for South Korea to demonstrate stronger climate leadership
The Korean government's interim target announced earlier this month received backlash for relying too heavily on overseas offsets and carbon sinks over domestic emissions reductions. The country announced its bid to host COP28 in May and is expected to announce an official enhancement of its NDC at COP26 in Glasgow next month.

Dr. Gerd Leipold, program director of Climate Transparency, said: "Korea can strengthen its case for hosting COP28 by becoming a leader among the G20 countries. A 2030 coal phase out and ramping up of renewables would be signs that the country wants to increase its ambition and climate performance and keep up with its OECD peers."

ENDS.

Please refer to the following link for relevant reports and key graphs before the embargo lifts: https://forourclimate.sharepoint.com/:f:/s/share/Ept-7giv1wdIgqVdShm7aQEBAyVFEdEiwOTI7M-BvwAd2A?e=BT4Nwc

Link to report after embargo lifts: www.climate-transparency.org/g20-climate-performance/g20report2021

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Notes

1. Other notable findings from South Korea's profile in the 2021 Climate Transparency report:

- **Korea's per capita greenhouse gas emissions (13.8 tCO_2e/capita) are still almost twice the G20 average (7.5 tCO_2e/capita):** The report found that Korea's per capita greenhouse gas emissions grew with a 5-year trend of 3% between 2013 and 2018 while the G20 average fell by 0.7%.
- **Energy use per capita in South Korea is nearly 2.5 times the G20 average:** The study found Korea's energy use per capita to be **230.9 GJ/capita in 2020, well above the G20 average of 92.6 GJ/capita.**
- **South Korea's transport emissions (excluding aviation) per capita are still twice the G20 average:** Transport emissions have increased by 0.06% in Korea between 2015 and 2020, whereas the G20 average decreased by 4.3%.
- **South Korea's aviation emissions per capita are also twice the G20 average:** South Korea's aviation emissions at 0.4 tCO2/capita are more than double the G20 average of 0.2 tCO2/capita. South Korea's aviation emissions per capita grew with a 5-year trend of 29.5% between 2013 and 2018 while the G20 average grew by 21.3%.
- **South Korea's building-related emissions per capita (2.9 tCO_2/capita) are more than double the G20 average (1.4 tCO_2/capita):** Korea's higher building-related emissions are due to a high share of electricity from fossil fuel and natural gas for heating, with a lack of building energy efficiency standards.

2. About the Climate Transparency
Climate Transparency is a global partnership of 16 think tanks and NGOs that brings together experts from the majority of G20 countries. Our mission is to encourage ambitious climate action in the G20 countries: we inform policymakers and stimulate national debate.

3. About Solutions for Our Climate
Solutions for Our Climate, a partner of the Climate Transparency network, is a South Korea-based group that advocates for stronger climate change policies and transition towards a fossil-free society. SFOC is led by legal, economic, financial, and environmental experts with experience in energy and climate policy and works closely with policymakers.

4. About the Climate Transparency Report
The Climate Transparency Report (previously known as "Brown to Green Report") is the world's most comprehensive annual review of G20 countries' climate action and their transition to a net-zero emissions economy. The independent, in-depth assessment draws on the latest analysis of international renowned data sets such as the OECD, World Bank, CAT, and IEA, as well as qualitative data from leading global experts in the field.

The review is based on 100 indicators for adaptation, mitigation, and finance compared against 1.5°C global benchmarks and aims to make good practices and gaps transparent. The summary report and 20 country profiles allow the report to be a clear reference tool for decision-makers. This year's report consists of two parts: the annual policy assessment based on data of the previous year(s) is complemented by an analysis of the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and recovery efforts on countries' climate ambition.