



The 2026 World Cup could turn into a global climate crisis

## Description

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### World Cup

A few days before [the kickoff of the 2026](#) World Cup, environmental warnings are escalating around the tournament, which is supposed to be the biggest in football history, but is now poised to become the "most climate-destructive" since the tournament began.

[The Guardian](#) revealed that the edition, which will be held in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, does not appear to be just an exceptional sporting event, but a massive project that could leave an unprecedented carbon footprint. This is due to the enormous expansion in the number of teams, matches, and host cities, alongside the almost complete reliance on air travel across an entire continent.

## Record emissions! A World Cup the size of a continent

According to the report, the 2026 World Cup could cause the emission of nearly 9 million tons of carbon dioxide, a figure approaching double the average emissions recorded by previous editions of the tournament.

The newspaper believes the main reason for this increase is the unprecedented geographical nature of the World Cup, as matches will be spread across dozens of cities spanning three countries. This entails thousands of air travel miles for teams, fans, media, and sponsors.

For the first time in World Cup history, the tournament will transform into something resembling a "giant air transport network," at a time when climate issues and emissions reduction are a growing global priority.

The biggest change in the 2026 edition is the increase in the number of participating teams from 32 to 48 and the increase in the number of matches to 104, which *The Guardian* report considers the key turning point in the inflation of the tournament's environmental impact.

Every extra match means more travel, more energy consumption, and more logistical pressure, while criticism of FIFA's commercial expansion policies is mounting.

Environmental voices believe that football has entered a new phase where economic and marketing interests take precedence over climate considerations, especially with FIFA's endeavor to turn the World Cup into the biggest event ever in terms of revenues, sponsorships, and spectators.

## The issue of 'sustainability' haunts FIFA

The report directed direct criticism at the 'sustainability' discourse promoted by the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), arguing that talking about an environmentally friendly tournament appears contradictory given the expected emissions figures.

It also recalled the controversy surrounding the Qatar 2022 World Cup, after FIFA faced criticism for declaring the tournament 'carbon-neutral' some time when Swiss regulatory bodies deemed the evidence provided insufficient to prove those claims.

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The intensity of the criticism grows with the continued presence of oil and energy companies among the international federation's most prominent commercial partners, which raises questions about the seriousness of the environmental rhetoric adopted by the world's largest football institution.

The concerns were not limited to emissions only, as the report pointed to climate warnings related to high temperatures during the tournament, especially in some US cities expected to host matches in the peak of summer.

According to studies relied upon by the newspaper, a quarter of the tournament's matches may be played in heat conditions dangerous to players and fans. This could impose unprecedented health and sporting challenges, and perhaps lead to a reconsideration of match times or even future hosting policies.

## Football vs. climate

What the latest reports reveal is that the World Cup is no longer merely a global sporting event; it has become part of the international debate on climate and sustainability.

As FIFA prepares to organize the largest edition in history, questions are mounting about the true environmental cost of this expansion, and whether football can truly reconcile commercial growth with climate preservation, or whether the 2026 World Cup will be the moment the world's most popular game turned into one of the most environmentally controversial sporting events.

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1. News

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