

# Natural gas leading source of EU's power emissions

16 April 2021, by Patrick Galey



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Gas power plants overtook lignite coal plants in 2020 to become the European Union's largest single source of emissions from electricity, an analysis of the bloc's Emissions Trading Scheme showed Friday.

Gas plants produced 231 million tons of carbon dioxide across the continent in 2020 according to the analysis conducted by energy think tank Ember.

Emissions from [coal plants](#) meanwhile plunged, with lignite emissions falling 23 percent in 2020 compared with 2019.

Charles Moore, Ember's European program lead, said gas was now the biggest emitter thanks to cheaper renewables and carbon pricing squeezing coal out of the market.

But he warned that nations investing heavily in gas infrastructure risked losing out as the price of renewables such as wind and solar continues to fall over time.

"Nations making short-term decisions to switch coal for gas have ignored the mega-trend from [fossil fuels](#) to renewables," Moore told AFP.

"Investments in new large gas plants now, with normal lifetimes of 25 years, will already become stranded assets in the 2030s."

If emissions from hard coal power plants are factored in, total coal power emissions in the EU are now 58 percent below levels registered in 2013.

The analysis showed that overall emissions from the power sector were responsible for just over 50 percent of the total emissions covered by the Emissions Trading Scheme, down one percent from 2019.

In absolute terms, power sector emissions fell 140 million tons, or 17 percent, year-on-year in 2020.

## 'Pace of change'

Natural gas produces roughly half the carbon pollution as lignite coal per unit of energy produced.

While emissions from lignite and hard coal combined were higher than natural gas, they were considered as separate fuels in the analysis given the divergence on cost and emissions intensity.

Low gas prices last year and robust carbon pricing meant that gas was cheaper even than the historically inexpensive lignite last year.

In 2020 gas [plants](#) accounted for 33 percent of power sector emissions in the ETS, up from 16 percent in 2013.

Gas in 2020 was the largest emitting fuel used in 11 EU countries, the analysis found, including in Britain, France, Spain, Belgium, Austria, the Netherlands, Italy, Malta, Latvia and Ireland for the first time.

The EU is expected next week to finalize its criteria for what constitutes sustainable investments, with some states, particularly from the east of the bloc, pushing for [natural gas](#) to be included.

Moore said these countries had "not yet understood the pace of change" in renewable energy prices.

"As the deployment of renewables accelerates to deliver Europe's climate targets, gas will follow [coal](#) into Europe's history," he said.

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