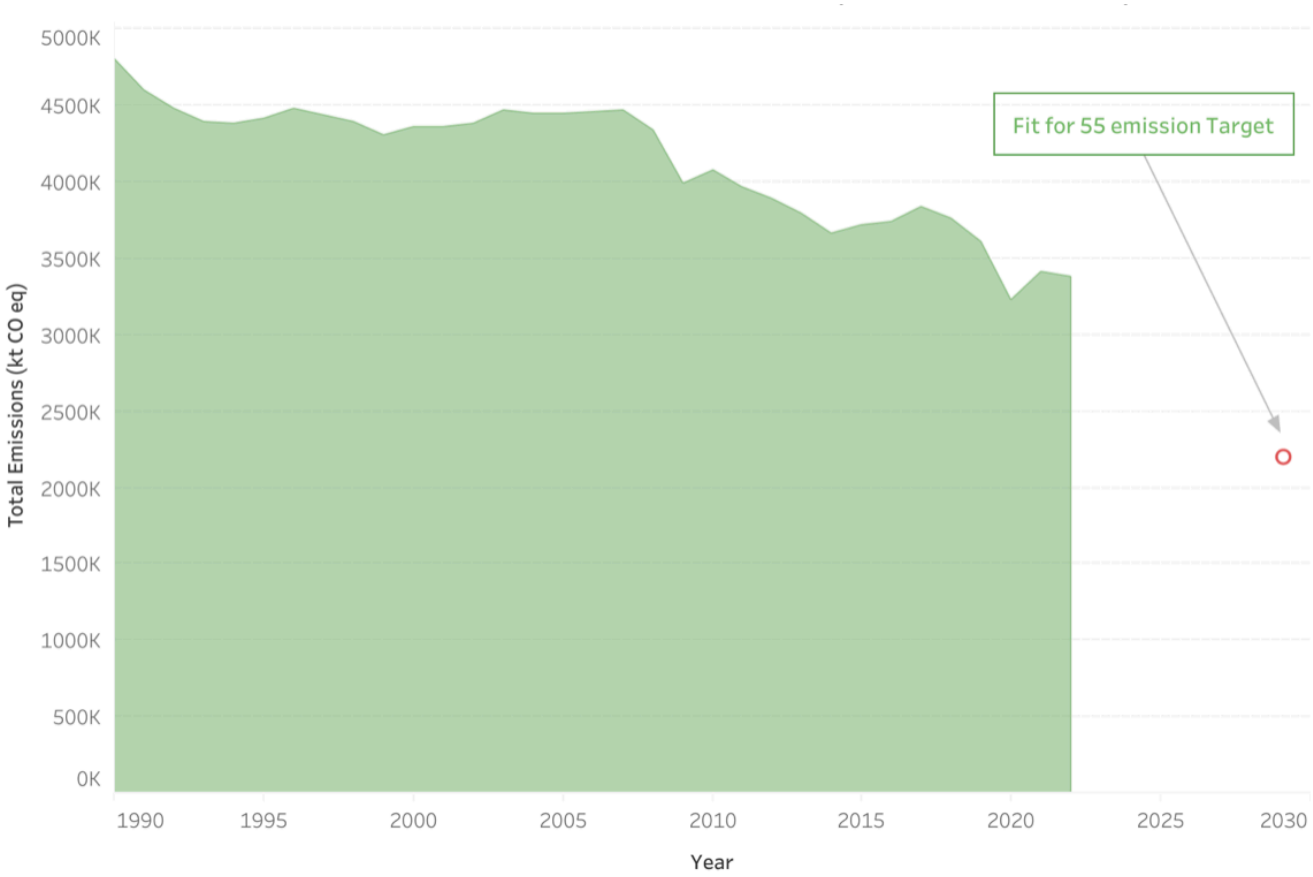
FROM "FIT TO 55" TO "FIT TO EVERYONE"

By *Luca Albertini*

If you are European and you care about the environment, you've surely heard about the EU's "Fit for 55" package. Would you believe that it entails the vast majority of us reducing our yearly carbon footprint by 20-30%?

The "Fit for 55" is a set of proposals to revise the EU's policies to reduce net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 55% (from 1990 levels) by 2030. This means going from 4,806,578 Kt to 2,643,617 Kt CO2 equivalent.

EU Total Emissions Including International Transport from 1990 to 2022 (Kt CO2 equivalent)



Data Source. European Environment Agency - EEA greenhouse gases (https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/data-viewers/greenhouse-gases-viewer)

It is easy to feel insignificant when numbers are so huge. That’s why we usually blame businesses and/or institutions for emissions. This could be right to a certain extent. However, we too often forget that businesses produce goods because we are asking for them. As such, reducing our demand will (in theory) reduce emissions too.

Two concepts come in handy in this case. The first is the carbon footprint, i.e., the amount of GHGs that an entity/human being generates in a given period. This means that your carbon footprint accounts for those GHGs coming from the pair of shoes you bought, the flight you caught, or the plastic bottle you threw away. The second one is that everyone has a carbon footprint. That’s good news since it implies that anyone can work to reduce their carbon footprint. Maybe, if we do really well, we could reduce it to the point of reaching the “Fit for 55” target.

This seems overly ambitious to me too, yet let’s try asking ourselves:

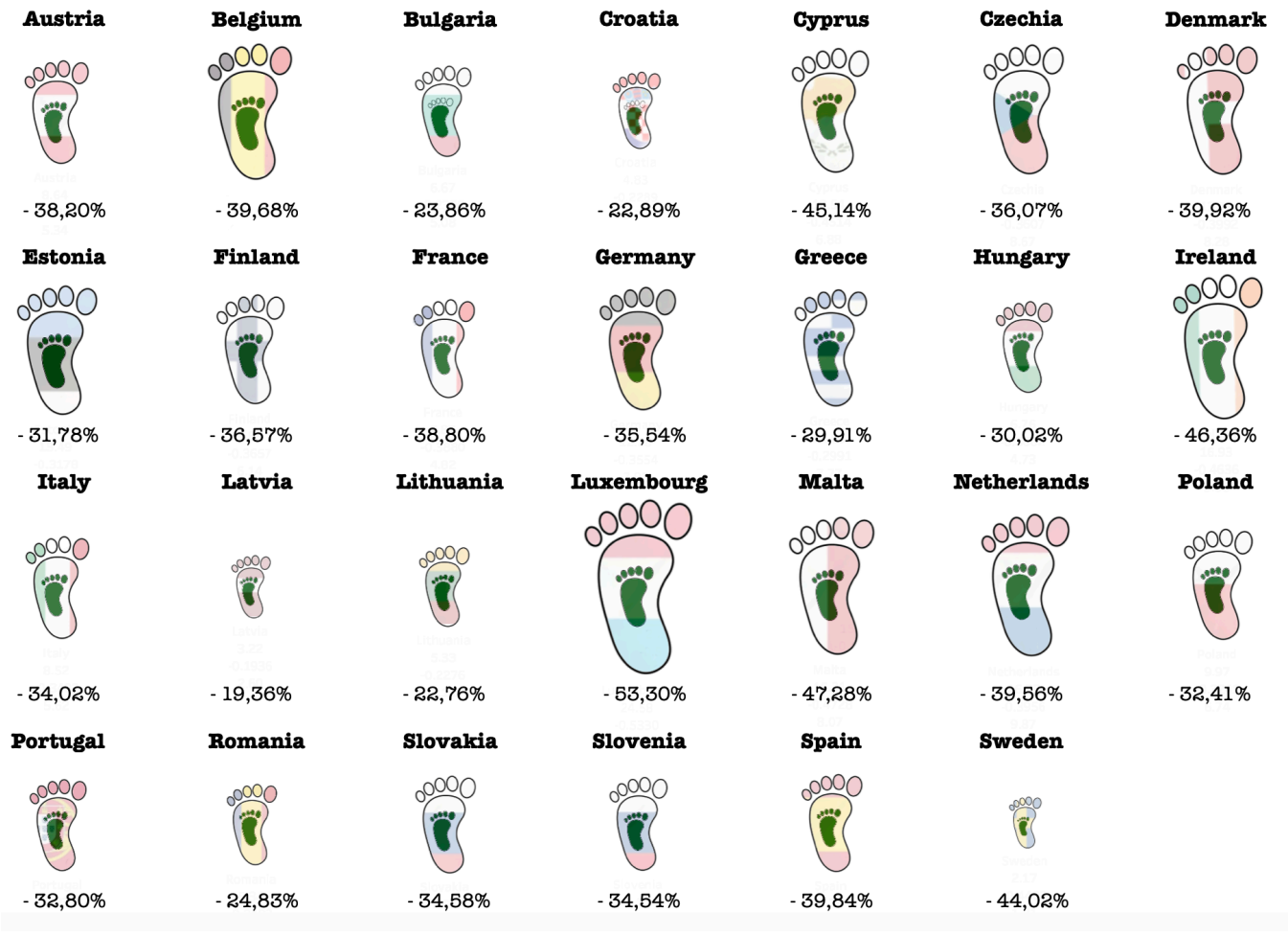
How much should the average citizen (like me, you, or whoever lives in one of the EU27 States) decrease their yearly carbon footprint from 2022[1] with respect to the period 1990-2022 to achieve the “Fit for 55” target based on the State they reside in?

That’s the million-dollar question, and I understand the excitement that comes from answering it. Surprisingly, the average citizen in most of the EU27 States should decrease their annual carbon footprint by only a percentage between 20 and 30%. And, in the worst case, a little bit more than 50%. What if you could achieve that carbon footprint reduction just by changing your diet?[2] Does it still seem like an unattainable goal?

[1] That’s the last year with available data.

[2] Studies showed how by changing diet individual can reduce by the 25% their food-related carbon footprint.

How much should the average citizen reduce his/her yearly carbon footprint respect to the 1990-2022 period?



Data Source. Green footprint: average yearly emissions from 2022 to 2030; Flag colored footprint: average yearly emissions from 1990 to 2022. European Environment Agency - EEA greenhouse gases (https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/data-viewers/greenhouse-gases-viewer). Chart by the author.

Here there is a little thing to consider: assumptions.

The fact that emissions are going to decrease from 2022 to 2030 and that EU policy will stick to the “EU Fit for 55” are the most reasonable ones. Related to the former, is the idea that absolute emissions will decrease linearly. This will likely not be true, but it allows splitting the emissions decrease evenly into the remaining years. Note that this excludes the possibility of game-changing innovations.

Two considerations about EU27 states are made too. Primarily, it is assumed that for the period 2022-2030 each state will contribute to total emissions as it has contributed on average over the period 1990-2022. This is the weakest assumption. States evolve

and change policies. As such, contributions continuously change. Secondly, it is assumed that each state’s population forecasts[3] are right.

Being honest, some of these may prove wrong. No one knows what will happen in the future. Yet, the results give us an insightful tip: it is not necessary to engage in life-changing efforts, we just need to be more cautious in our day-to-day choices. Buying fewer clothes, avoiding wasting food, sharing car rides, using public transportation, and shutting down the lights when you leave a room are small actions that could really leave a mark in the fight against climate change.

Now is the time to join forces and transform the “Fit for 55%” into the “Fit for Everyone” package. Every effort counts—let’s make a big impact, one footprint at a time.

[3] Data coming from the Eurostat (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/explore/all/t_popul?lang=en&display=list&sort=category).