Using OWID CO_2 Emissions Data to Build a Carbon Calculator

June 16, 2025

1. Overview of OWID CO_2 Emissions Data

Our World in Data provides high-quality, open-access datasets related to:

- Total CO_2 emissions (by country and year)
- Per-capita CO_2 emissions
- CO_2 emissions by sector and fuel type
- Consumption-based CO_2 emissions (adjusted for trade)
- Historical and cumulative emissions since the 18th century

These datasets can be downloaded in CSV format and are ideal for integrating into an emissions calculator.

2. Available Data Types

1. **Annual emissions:** Emissions (in tonnes) per country or region, based on fossil fuels, industry, and sometimes land use change.
2. **Per capita emissions:** Calculates average CO_2 emissions per person in a country/region.
3. **Consumption-based emissions:** Accounts for CO_2 embodied in trade: imports minus exports, giving a more holistic footprint.
4. **Emissions by source or sector:** Breakdown by fuel type (coal, oil, cement, etc.) or industry sector.
5. **Historical and cumulative data:** Long-term records back to 1750; cumulative totals by country also available.

3. How to Use These in Your CO_2 Calculator

A. Basic Country Calculator

Allow users to select a country and year to display:

- Total emissions
- Per capita emissions
- Consumption-based vs production-based data (if available)

Implement input fields:

- Country
- Year
- (Optionally) Population to compute per capita manually

B. Custom Footprint Estimation

- Users input personal activity data (e.g., annual kilometers driven, kWh of electricity used, flight hours).
- Use sector-specific emission factors to convert activities into CO_2 (e.g., kg CO_2 per kWh, per km driven).
- Sum emissions across activities to estimate personal footprint.

C. Historical Tracking

Users can analyze trends over time:

- Country's total or per capita CO_2 trend
- Comparison with consumption-based data to highlight trade impacts

D. Benchmarking and Comparisons

Compare a user's footprint to:

- Their country's per capita average
- Top emitters or lowest emitters
- Regional or global averages

E. Targets & Scenarios

- Use future scenario data from OWID (e.g., current policies vs net zero goals) to show required reductions per country.
- Help users set personal targets.

4. Types of Calculators You Can Build

A. Country-Level Emissions Explorer

Example: User selects a country (e.g., India) and year (e.g., 2022). The calculator shows:

- Total CO_2 emissions (in million tonnes, $MtCO_2$)
- Per-capita CO_2 emissions (tonnes per person)
- Emissions breakdown by fuel type: coal, oil, gas, cement, etc.

Equation:

$$\text{Per-Capita } CO_2 = \left(\frac{\text{Total } CO_2 \text{ Emissions (Mt)}}{\text{Population}}\right) \times 1{,}000{,}000$$

B. Personal CO_2 Footprint Calculator

Equations:

$$\text{Driving } CO_2 = \text{km/year} \times 0.12$$

$$\text{Electricity } CO_2 = \text{kWh/year} \times \text{country\_factor}$$

$$\text{Flights } CO_2 = \text{num\_flights} \times \text{average kg } CO_2 \text{ per flight}$$

Example Input:

- Drives 10,000 km/year
- Uses 3,000 kWh of electricity/year
- Takes 2 short-haul flights per year

Emission Factors:

- Driving: 0.12 kg CO_2 per km
- Electricity: 0.45 kg CO_2 per kWh
- Flights: 250 kg CO_2 per short-haul flight

Calculations:

$$\text{Driving} = 10{,}000 \times 0.12 = 1{,}200\,\text{kg } CO_2$$

$$\text{Electricity} = 3{,}000 \times 0.45 = 1{,}350\,\text{kg } CO_2$$

$$\text{Flights} = 2 \times 250 = 500\,\text{kg } CO_2$$

$$\text{Total } CO_2 = 1{,}200 + 1{,}350 + 500 = 3{,}050\,\text{kg } CO_2\text{/year}$$

C. Consumption vs Production Calculator

Purpose: Compare emissions produced within a country to emissions linked to what the country consumes (adjusted for imports/exports).

Equation:

$$\text{Consumption-based } CO_2 = \text{Production-based } CO_2 + CO_2 \text{ in imports} - CO_2 \text{ in exports}$$

D. Emission Benchmark Tool

Features:

- Compare personal footprint to national per-capita averages
- Compare to global average ($\sim$4.7 tCO_2/person in 2022)
- Compare to target footprints (e.g., 2 tCO_2/person by 2050 for climate goals)

E. Historical/Scenario Trend Viewer

Function: Displays:

- Historical country emissions (e.g., USA from 1850–2022)
- Projected emissions under different climate scenarios for 2030, 2050, etc.

Calculation Logic:

$$\text{Activity } CO_2 = \text{Quantity} \times \text{Emission Factor}$$