

Green electricity baku

An ocean of 570,000 solar panels stretches out as far as the eye can see across an arid landscape an hour's drive from Azerbaijan's capital Baku. In the sun-baked hills of Garadagh, a country built on oil and gas is taking its first steps towards what it bills as a "green" future.

This is Azerbaijan's first large-scale solar power plant. It opened last October and the Emirati company developing it, Masdar, says it can power 110,000 homes.

Climate Home visited the solar park as part of a media tour organised and sponsored by the Azerbaijan COP29 Presidency, which is arranging the UN climate summit in Baku this November.

At the park's opening ceremony, in front of Sultan Al-Jaber – Masdar's CEO who led the COP28 climate summit in Dubai – Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev boasted about his country's determination in "moving towards a green agenda".

"This is our contribution not only to the future development of Azerbaijan but to the issues related to climate change," he told the assembled dignitaries.

But despite this rhetoric, climate scientists have questioned Azerbaijan's climate credentials as it prepares to host the COP29 summit.

An increase in renewable energy production does not mean Azerbaijan is planning to leave its vast oil and gas reserves in the ground. Aliyev said last month that Azerbaijan will try to sell abroad the gas it saves by not using it in power stations at home. Europe is the main target customer, as it shifts away from Russian gas supplies.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan's net zero vision clashes with legacy of war

On top of selling its surplus, Azerbaijan is planning to extract more gas thanks, in part, to fresh investments from foreign fossil fuel giants like Britain's BP, France's TotalEnergies and Emirati oil giant ADNOC, which Al-Jaber also heads.

Bill Hare, CEO of climate science non-profit group Climate Analytics, called Azerbaijan's plans "a fantasy". "Ramping up renewables won't make a dent in emissions unless they displace fossil fuels in the system," he told Climate Home. "You can't tackle climate change without getting rid of fossil fuels."

A spokesperson for COP29 said gas is "an ideal transition fuel in the production of electricity". In emailed comments, they added that gas exported to Europe can replace coal power; which



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currently provides around 15% of the EU's electricity – in the short to medium-term, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Azerbaijan is not alone in pursuing both renewable energy and fossil fuel production. Most fossil fuel producers – including wealthy nations like the US, UK and Canada – have no plans to stop producing oil and gas. That's despite the International Energy Agency (IEA) warning that new fossil fuel extraction projects are not compatible with limiting global warming to 1.5C.

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