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Climate Change



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COP26: THE NEGOTIATIONS EXPLAINED



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COP26 Overview

What is a COP?

COP26 is the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference. For nearly three decades the UN has been bringing together almost every country for global climate summits – called COPs – which stands for ‘Conference of the Parties’. In that time climate change has gone from being a fringe issue to a global priority.

This year saw the 26th annual summit – giving it the name COP26. With the UK as President, COP26 took place in Glasgow from 31 October-13 November 2021.

In the run up to COP26 the UK worked with every nation to reach agreement on how to tackle climate change. As the Presidents of COP26, the UK’s role has been to act as an impartial chair in bringing all Parties (individual countries and the EU, which operates as a group) to an agreement by consensus.

World leaders arrived in Scotland, alongside tens of thousands of negotiators, government representatives, businesses and civil society groups for fourteen days of talks.

Why was COP26 the “most important COP since Paris”?

Back in 2015, at COP21, for the first time ever, something momentous happened: every country agreed to work together to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees and aim for 1.5 degrees, to adapt to the impacts of a changing climate and to make money available to deliver on these aims. The Paris Agreement was born.

The commitment to aim for 1.5 degrees is important because every fraction of a degree of warming will result in the loss of many more lives lost and livelihoods damaged.

The Paris Agreement set out that every 5 years countries must set out increasingly ambitious climate action. This meant that, by 2020, countries needed to submit or update their plans for reducing emissions, known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

This made the run up to this year’s summit in Glasgow (due to take place in 2020, but delayed by a year due to the pandemic) a critical moment in the

world's mission to keep the hope of limiting global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees alive.

What happened at COP26?

On 13 November 2021, COP26 concluded in Glasgow with all countries agreeing the Glasgow Climate Pact to keep 1.5C alive and finalise the outstanding elements of the Paris Agreement.

Climate negotiators ended two weeks of intense talks with consensus on urgently accelerating climate action.

The Glasgow Climate Pact, combined with increased ambition and action from countries, means that 1.5C remains in sight and scales up action on dealing with climate impacts, but it will only be delivered with concerted and immediate global efforts.

Reflecting on the task ahead, COP26 President Alok Sharma said:

“We can now say with credibility that we have kept 1.5 degrees alive. But, its pulse is weak and it will only survive if we keep our promises and translate commitments into rapid action. I am grateful to the UNFCCC for working with us to deliver a successful COP26.

“From here, we must now move forward together and deliver on the expectations set out in the Glasgow Climate Pact, and close the vast gap which remains. Because as Prime Minister Mia Mottley told us at the start of this conference, for Barbados and other small island states, ‘two degrees is a death sentence’.

“It is up to all of us to sustain our lodestar of keeping 1.5 degrees within reach and to continue our efforts to get finance flowing and boost adaptation. After the collective dedication which has delivered the Glasgow Climate Pact, our work here cannot be wasted.”

Decisions

Decisions in Glasgow fall under the three UN climate treaties: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (the COP), the Kyoto Protocol (the CMP), and the Paris Agreement (the CMA). The Glasgow Climate Pact is manifested across all three.

Preamble

What is the preamble?

The Glasgow Climate Pact preamble sets out overarching principles that flow through the rest of the document. The preamble gives a balanced reflection of the principles that Parties said were important to them.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

The preamble confirms the centrality of a sustainable recovery from Covid-19 and solidarity with vulnerable parties to global efforts to tackle climate change. It highlights the importance of the World Leaders Summit, which saw 120 Heads of State and Government set the tone for a successful COP26 and make a series of significant commitments to take national action and collaborate to tackle climate change.

It also reaffirmed the continuation of key principles from the Paris Agreement and previous COPs, including multilateralism, and the importance of nature and biodiversity to climate action, as well as human rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations, gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.

Science and urgency

What is this issue?

Previous COPs have previously been criticised for not 'listening to the science' i.e. not taking enough action, or taking it too slowly, compared to that which the scientific community has concluded is necessary to avoid dangerous climate change. In recent years, negotiations have struggled even to welcome the publication of reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) the world's foremost authority on the science of climate change. Given the stark warning issued by the IPCC earlier this year, it was important to

adequately recognise the science, and to set the decisions at the COP in that context.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

The Glasgow Climate Pact captures many Parties' wishes to fully embed science in the decision-making process. It recognises the enormous importance of the IPCC's latest report. Both here and in later sections, the Pact frames action in terms of the science, demonstrating that COP26 is responding to what scientists say needs to happen to keep 1.5C in reach.

Science is used to illustrate the situation the world is facing, the need to urgently scale up ambition in all areas of climate action to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, while acknowledging that some parties have a greater responsibility than others to tackle the problem.

Adaptation

What is this issue?

In the Paris Agreement, a Global Goal on Adaptation to tackle the impacts of climate change was agreed as one of the three core goals (alongside Mitigation and Finance). Since Paris, Parties have not been given the opportunity to discuss how this goal should be delivered. Developing countries have become frustrated that this has not been progressed, which has been made more urgent with rapidly increasing changes to the climate, and the impacts already being acutely felt.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

In recognition of the need to strengthen action on adaptation, parties have agreed to launch the 2 year Glasgow-Sharm el Sheikh Work Programme on the Global Goal on Adaptation (The GlaSS). This is a significant step forward which will deliver action to reduce vulnerability, strengthen resilience and increase the capacity of people and the planet to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Specifically the objectives of the GlaSS Work Programme are to:

- A. Enable the full and sustained implementation of the Paris Agreement with a view to enhancing adaptation action and support;
- B. Enhance the understanding of the global goal on adaptation;
- C. Contribute to reviewing the overall progress made in achieving the global goal on adaptation;

- D. Enhance national planning and implementation of adaptation actions;
- E. Enable Parties to better communicate their adaptation priorities, needs, plans and actions;
- F. Facilitate the establishment of robust, nationally appropriate systems for monitoring and evaluating adaptation actions;
- G. Strengthen implementation of adaptation actions in vulnerable developing countries.

Adaptation finance

What is this issue?

Agreed in 2009 and extended through to 2025 at Paris (2015), a goal was set to mobilise \$100bn of climate finance a year by 2020 for developing countries from a range of sources. Delivering this \$100bn goal is a totemic issue of international climate action and negotiations.

Adaptation finance lags behind finance for mitigation, representing roughly 25% of total climate finance in 2019. Securing finance for adaptation is a critical issue for parties most vulnerable to climate change, especially the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The Paris Agreement states that increased financial resources should aim to achieve a balance between adaptation and mitigation.

The Climate Finance Delivery Plan, published in October 2021 by the UK COP26 Presidency, provided clarity on when and how developed countries will meet the \$100 billion climate finance goal. This gave some confidence to developing countries that the \$100bn goal will be met in 2023 - however, donors were not able to produce clear data on how adaptation finance would be scaled up, and concerns regarding adaptation finance remained clear in the lead up to COP26.

Sending a positive signal on adaptation finance at COP26 was important in addressing the growing impacts of climate change and enabling parties to reach a balanced, comprehensive agreement across all areas of the Paris Agreement.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

A notable outcome of COP26, as recorded in the Pact, is the call for “developed country Parties to at least double their collective provision of climate finance for adaptation to developing country Parties from 2019 levels by 2025.” It also encourages further commitments beyond those made in the lead up to COP26.

COP26 also saw a record finance raising effort for the Adaptation Fund of over \$350m, around three times the previous highest level. Contributions to the Least Developed Country Fund reached \$600m.

Mitigation

What is this issue?

The mitigation outcome sets out the steps and commitments that Parties will take to accelerate efforts to reduce emissions 'to keep 1.5 degrees in reach'. Recognising that collective progress to date to reduce emissions has not been sufficient, there was a clear expectation for COP26 to address the 'mitigation gap'.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

The outcome includes a series of actions that all Parties are expected to take to accelerate their efforts. This includes:

- A stronger commitment to limit global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees, and greater acknowledgement of the latest science which reflects the urgent need to take action during this critical decade.
- The text includes 'phase-down of unabated coal power' and 'inefficient fossil fuel subsidies', as well as 'mid-century net zero'. This language has never been included in UN text before.
- Parties are expected to revisit their 2030 emission reduction targets in 2022 and, where necessary, strengthen them to bring them in line with the Paris Agreement temperature goal. This will be based on a Party's national circumstances, recognising that it will be for each Party to decide how best to do this.
- Parties that did not submit new nationally determined contributions (NDCs) are requested before COP27, as well as long-term strategies (LTS) that set out plans to reach net zero by mid-century.
- The invitation from the Paris Agreement for Parties to submit long-term strategies, which expired in 2020, has been extended and the text says that these should be regularly updated in line with the best available science.
- The outcome launches a work programme on mitigation ambition and implementation and there will be an annual high-level Ministerial meeting on pre-2030 ambition. Both of these steps are focused on accelerating action on mitigation during the 2020s.
- There will also be annual Synthesis Reports which will provide the latest information on progress on NDCs and LTS.
- The important role of nature in achieving the Paris Agreement temperature goal is emphasised.

- In addition, there will be a Leader Level Summit hosted by the UN Secretary General in 2023 on ambition to 2030.

Finance, technology transfer and capacity-building for mitigation and adaptation

What is this issue?

Finance is essential to delivering the goals of the Paris Agreement. COP26 had a very large number of finance issues to consider. This included the \$100bn goal (as outlined above), agreeing the approach to setting a new goal from 2025, considering a report on the needs of developing countries and a report on aligning financial flows with the Paris goals.

Building the capacity of developing countries for practical action and policy making, is critical to support the implementation of the goals agreed at Paris. Parties were considering technical reports to continue to make progress in capacity-building.

Also critical is the work on technology transfer and technical assistance. At COP26 this included a need to extend the memorandum of understanding between the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as its host agency.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

Parties agreed to continue discussions on long-term finance through to 2027 and have asked the Standing Committee on Finance to prepare a report on progress towards achieving the \$100bn goal.

Parties also agreed to begin the process of setting a new collective quantified post-2025 goal and that this process would be open, inclusive and transparent, seeking a broad spectrum of views and inputs.

An ad hoc work programme was established to undertake the technical work and a series of high-level ministerial dialogues mandated to provide political engagement.

Parties also agreed that this process will take into account the needs and priorities of developing countries and will include a consideration of quantity, quality, scope and access. Alongside these critical decisions on the overall finance architecture, this COP also agreed a huge amount of technical work,

including guidance to the climate funds demonstrating that Paris implementation is underway.

Parties agreed technical work on capacity-building, including annual technical progress reports for the Paris Committee on Capacity Building. They also agreed to reviews of the Capacity-building Frameworks for developing countries and economies in transition. In the Pact, Parties noted the importance of continuing to enhance international coherence and coordination of capacity-building. Parties recognised the need to continue to support developing countries to identify capacity-building gaps and find solutions to resolve these.

Parties also welcomed the outcomes of the “COP26 Catalyst for Climate Action” and Parties’ strong commitments to take forward action on capacity-building. The COP26 Catalyst is a UK Presidency convened framework to bring together key stakeholders to discuss capacity-building challenges and to catalyse action through four Action Groups on key areas requiring capacity-building, namely: Adaptation Action, Access to Finance, Carbon Markets Participation, and Transparency and Reporting.

Each Action Group includes key voices on the issue from donor and developing Parties and a range of relevant experts. The Action Groups met regularly, and conducted wider consultations at the UN Regional Climate Weeks. The COP26 Catalyst for Climate Action’s Recommendations and Call to Action have now been published, with Parties and non-state actors encouraged to add their endorsements.

On technology transfer, the outcomes were that:

- The TEC and CTCN were invited to explore the preparation of a joint programme, with Parties wishing to see greater collaboration between the two arms of the Technology Mechanism;
- Parties agreed to renew the memorandum of understanding with UNEP to host the CTCN for a further five-year period;
- Parties agreed to allocate additional seats on the CTCN’s Advisory Board to ensure that SIDS, LDCs and Eastern Europe (Non-Annex I) are permanently represented;
- Parties also agreed to extend membership to three additional observer constituencies; Women and Gender constituency, Youth NGOs and Indigenous Peoples Organizations;
- Parties noted the challenges faced by the CTCN including limited financial resources, and encouraged the CTCN to diversify its sources of funding and enhance engagement with the private sector.

Loss and Damage

What is this issue?

Loss and damage refers to the impacts of climate change which occur beyond the limits of societies' and ecosystems' ability to adapt. It was widely expected that COP26 would have a significant focus on how we respond to these growing impacts that cause loss and damage to millions, including the loss of lives, livelihoods and ecosystems.

This has been a controversial issue in recent years, not least given strongly held different views on liability and compensation for climate change impacts. Support and action to avert, minimise and address loss and damage is part of international assistance under adaptation, disaster prevention, disaster preparedness disaster response and rehabilitation budgets.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

This COP made clear statements that the changing climate has already and will increasingly cause loss and damage. It endorsed the need for more money to be provided to tackle loss and damage through existing sources. It agreed the functions and funding arrangements for the Santiago Network that will arrange and fund technical assistance to Parties to help avert, minimise and address loss and damage.

COP26 also founded the Glasgow Dialogue, where Parties, civil society and technicians will come together to discuss how to increase the funds applied to loss and damage and how Parties in need can access these funds. COP26 did not reach consensus on a proposal from developing countries to set up a financing facility dedicated to loss and damage.

COP26 also elevated the political focus on loss and damage through ministerial discussions in London in July and at PreCOP in Milan. The COP President also asked ministerial facilitators to drive forward work on loss and damage at the COP, and it has a dedicated section in the Pact to emphasise its status as a critical pillar of climate action.

Implementation

What is this issue?

COP26 included discussions on how to fully implement all provisions of the Paris Agreement to ensure it is effective to reach its objectives across adaptation, mitigation and support.

In order to fully operationalise the Paris Agreement, a top priority for the UK Presidency was closing outstanding items from the 'Paris Rulebook' agreed three years ago. The Paris Rulebook sets out the detailed rules and systems to underpin delivery of the Paris Agreement. However, there were several issues where Parties held such strongly held different views that they had been unable to agree on these at previous COPs. The clock was ticking so that they could move forward with implementation.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

COP26 signalled the start of an important stock taking process to assess Parties' progress against the Paris goals on implementation over the next two years. This will culminate in 2023 at the Global Stocktake.

COP26 finalised the Paris 'rulebook', resolving the key outstanding political decisions needed for Parties to begin implementing the Paris Agreement. More detail on the Paris 'rulebook' can be found below.

At COP26, Parties also agreed a number of important practical and institutional arrangements, such as on Response Measures (responding to the impacts of climate policies) and the Consultative Group of Experts (to help fulfil reporting requirements) and many more. These will help the UN climate process and its constituted bodies take forward their work.

Collaboration

What is this issue?

COP26 sought to be both open and inclusive, with a greater variety of voices heard and helping to shape outcomes.. This included responding to calls for further youth inclusion, recognition of the role of indigenous people and calls for a new direction on the ocean within the UNFCCC.

In the run up to and during COP26, UK High Level Champion Nigel Topping and his Chilean counterpart Gonzalo Munoz led work on non-Party stakeholder action, building collaboration between them and Parties in order to ensure a greater range of voices are heard to help shape and increase climate action.

Among other areas of work, the Champions launched three campaigns over the past two years (Race to Zero, Race to Resilience, and the Glasgow Finance Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ)). They also launched the [2030 Breakthroughs](#) in order to help increase action on reaching net zero across 30 sectors in the economy.

Further information on the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action is available [here](#).

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

Action for Climate Empowerment and youth:

- Agreed a new 10 year Glasgow work programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE), focused on advancing climate education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information and international cooperation. This is a new flexible framework which improves policy coherence, coordination, support and monitoring of ACE elements. The most notable outcome is its recognition of youth as critical agents of change. It encourages governments to include youth as part of national delegations. The Cover Decision also creates a permanent youth forum, following the Youth4climate event held by Italy at Pre-COP.

Gender:

- Parties agreed building blocks for a review of the Gender Action Plan scheduled for next year. This review of progress will strengthen the implementation of the Gender Action Plan going forwards.
- The Pact also encourages Parties to increase the full, meaningful and equal participation of women in climate action and to ensure gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation.

Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform:

- Following the success of the initial two year Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples' Platform (LCIPP) work plan, the LCIPP Facilitative Working Group agreed to a further three year workplan.
- The new workplan will have a continued focus on capacity for engagement, knowledge sharing and climate policy, but will incorporate new activities, such as youth meetings. It will also include activities from the previous work plan, such as regional gatherings (which had been postponed due to pandemic).

Ocean and Land:

- Parties agreed to a new action on the ocean in the UN climate process, including asking UN climate institutions to integrate the ocean in their work, and to start an annual dialogue on the ocean to strengthen action.
- Parties agreed to new steps to bring more coherence to discussion and action on land and climate change in the UN climate process.

Institutional issues:

- The budget for the UNFCCC for the next two years was agreed, as was agreement to the start of the Paris Agreement's Compliance Committee.
- Egypt was confirmed as host of COP27 and the United Arab Emirates as host of COP28.

Marrakech Partnership and High Level Champions:

- At COP26 the High Level Champions launched their five-year plan for the Improved Marrakech Partnership for Enhancing Ambition. This will deepen engagement with national governments, see more activities by stakeholders at a regional level and continue to foster action on resilience and finance, especially for emerging markets and developing countries.
- Parties welcomed the leadership of the High Level Champions and their improvements to the Marrakech Partnership. The Marrakech Partnership is the space within the UN Climate Change body for collaboration between Parties and businesses, local governments, investors and civil society.

Nature

- The final texts have taken a significant step forward in recognising the importance of nature and ecosystems, and the connection between the climate and biodiversity challenges we face. There are 11 references to nature themes in total across the COP and CMA decisions, including further action on ocean and land. This builds on language used at COP25 and aims to increase global awareness of the critical role of protecting, conserving and restoring nature and ecosystems for climate change adaptation and mitigation, including forests and biodiversity.
- The text emphasizes nature's critical role in achieving the Paris Agreement temperature goal. As the science makes clear, there is no viable route to limiting global warming to 1.5C without nature. The text encourages Parties to incorporate the protection, conservation and restoration of nature and ecosystems in their national and local climate action plans, to support sustainable livelihoods and indigenous peoples and local communities.

Paris Rulebook

Article 6

What is this issue?

Article 6 acknowledges that Parties may choose to cooperate internationally to meet part of their NDCs using emission reductions achieved in other countries. This could be, for instance, by purchasing international 'carbon credits' or 'offsets', or by creating a link between carbon markets, such as linking the new UK Emissions Trading System to another international system. It also includes non-market approaches. Having failed to reach agreement since Paris, it was also important to the credibility of the multilateral process that a deal was reached.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

The three constituent parts of Article 6 were agreed, covering voluntary cooperation, a new carbon crediting mechanism, and non-market approaches. Within those parts, consensus was finally found on the major political issues that had divided Parties for many years: how to avoid double counting of emissions reductions; use of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) credits; and adaptation finance. That consensus will see host Parties clarifying the intended use of credits generated by the new mechanism, a limited carryover of CDM credits for use against NDCs, and voluntary contributions to adaptation finance where cooperation takes place between Parties. This paves the way for an operational Article 6, initiating transition from the old Kyoto Protocol regime to the instruments of the Paris Agreement.

Common Time Frames

What is this issue?

Common Time Frames for nationally determined contributions (NDCs) was one of the elements from the Rulebook for the implementation of the Paris Agreement that could not be agreed three years ago. This meant that whilst the Paris Agreement had been agreed, there was no agreement on the length of the implementation period of Parties' national commitments (NDCs). The lack of consistency across the time periods covered by national climate commitments

meant it was challenging to track, aggregate and compare their targets and implementation.

Since 2020, there have been growing calls to resolve this issue at COP26 to give Parties clarity for the next round of NDCs in 2025 and support efforts to raise the ambition needed to keep 1.5c alive.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

By recommending a common time frame, we have provided guidance to Parties to ensure future NDCs cover the same period of time. This means that all commitments set forward by Parties in 2025 should show us what 2035 climate commitments add up to, allowing the world to understand better whether Parties are on track to keep 1.5c alive.

Enhanced Transparency Framework

What is this issue?

By finalising the Enhanced Transparency Framework, agreement was reached on how to track and communicate progress in tackling climate change as we implement the Paris Agreement. Under the Paris Agreement, each Party will report on the progress made towards achieving its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), on support provided to, needed and received by developing countries, in addition to an annual Greenhouse Gas emissions report. Previously, developed and developing country Parties had reported using different systems to different levels of detail. From December 2024 onwards, all Parties have common reporting requirements.

This will help us to understand our collective progress towards achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, help us to understand where more could be done, and encourage further action and ambition.

What was the outcome at COP26 on this issue?

Parties agreed to adopt a package that will implement the Enhanced Transparency Framework under the Paris Agreement. This included a series of common reporting tables that will track Parties' emissions, support, and progress towards their nationally determined contributions.

Process

Ministerial Co-Facilitators

1. In line with long-standing UNFCCC tradition, the COP President appointed sets of ministers to take forward informal consultations on more political issues. Each of these issues was allocated a pair of ministers to co-facilitate discussions (one from a developed country and one developing). These were:
 - Article 6 - Minister Fu of **Singapore** and Minister Eide of **Norway**. Focussing in particular on adaptation finance in Article 6.2, accounting for units generated outside the scope of NDCs, and the use of pre-2020 units to meet NDCs.
 - Common Time Frames for NDCs - Minister Mujawamariya of **Rwanda** and Minister Sommaruga of **Switzerland**: whether there will be a single time frame for Nationally Determined Contributions.
 - Enhanced Transparency Framework - Minister Joseph of **Antigua and Barbuda** and Minister Shaw of **New Zealand**: elements in the overarching transparency decision text.
 - Adaptation - Minister Shauna of the **Maldives** and Minister Ribera of **Spain**: operationalising the Global Goal on Adaptation.
 - Mitigation and keeping 1.5 within reach - Minister Stiell of **Grenada** and Minister Jorgensen of **Denmark**: actions required from Parties, individually and collectively.
 - Loss & damage - Minister Dieschbourg of **Luxembourg** and Minister Charles Jr of **Jamaica**: relevant aspects of the agenda which transcend technical discussions under the SBI and SBSTA.
 - Finance: Minister Fouad of **Egypt** and Minister Bolund of **Sweden**: progress on substantive issues, in particular concerning Long-Term Finance and the New Collective Quantified Goal.
 - Coherence: Minister Meza of **Costa Rica** worked with the COP President to address the ways in which these issues are linked.

For reference please see: [UN Glossary of Climate Change](#).