

Your Guide to This Year's COP

International climate summits are complex. Here's a guide to help you



? What is COP26?

For nearly three decades the UN has been bringing together almost every country on earth for global climate summits – called COPs – which stands for ‘Conference of the Parties’. The conferences are climate negotiations held under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) established in the early 90s to reduce carbon emissions that would keep the world's temperature from increasing. This year will be the 26th annual summit – giving it the name COP26. With the UK as President, COP26 is taking place in Glasgow this year from October 31- November 12. Simply explained, it's the biggest, most important climate conference on the planet.

Activity at a COP takes place in two different zones - the Blue Zone and the Green Zone. The blue zone is for people registered with the UN body or related organizations, delegates from countries, and members of the media or non-profit observer organization. The Green Zone is for the general public where a wide range of events happen and everyone can attend.

What exactly is the "Paris Agreement" and why is it important for COP26?

The Paris Agreement, if simply put, is the most critical climate change treaty today, which will inform much of the conversation at COP26. The 21st COP in Paris saw 196 nations sign the Paris Climate Accords, or "Paris Agreement," a legally binding treaty with the aim of limiting global warming to "well below 2 degrees Celsius" by 2100, compared to preindustrial levels (levels commonly defined as the global average temperature between 1850 and 1900). To achieve that goal, the agreement sets countries on a course to reach a peak in their greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible and to shoot for "net-zero" emissions in the second half of this century.

How are countries meeting the Paris Agreement Goals?

Under the Paris Agreement, countries committed to bringing forward national targets/ pledges setting out how much they would reduce their emissions - known as Nationally Determined Contributions, or 'NDCs'. These targets/ pledges are not set by the UNFCCC or IPCC but by the countries themselves, and so they are "negotiated," as such, at the COP. Every 5 years the countries are expected to update their NDCs and make them more ambitious. 2020 marked the first of these five-year cycles. Climate Action Tracker shows 89 countries have updated their NDCs and 71 have not. [CAT Climate Target Update Tracker](#)

Why does limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees matter?

A few years after the Paris agreement, a group of the world's top climate scientists published an explosive report (IPCC Special Report, 2018) suggesting that the Paris agreement didn't go far enough. The reports suggested that if humans want a chance at a habitable future, global temperatures must not rise above 1.5 degrees. In this case, even half a degree would make all the difference. At 1.5 degrees, 80% of the world's coral reefs would disappear. But, half a degree more, and there'd be none at all. At 1.5 degrees, the Arctic would experience an ice-free summer, a devastating phenomenon every 100 years. But if the thermostat is turned up by half a degree, it would happen every 10 years. A shift from 1.5 to 2 degrees would drag 50% more people into climate-related poverty, significantly worsening the risk of drought, floods, extreme heat, and food scarcity for hundreds of millions of people.

? Are the pledges/targets put forward in COPs legally binding?

Under the Paris Agreement, countries must have an NDC as a legally binding requirement but reaching the targets an NDC might set out is not legally required. However, the conference provides the limelight and the international pressure that could see nations announce more ambitious targets.

? Has pledging worked?

By one standard, pledging has worked because it helped unlock agreement on important issues. By the other much tougher standard of whether it leads to positive change for the environment, it is too early to tell. The new pledges/ NDCs represent a 12% decrease in emissions (for those that submitted pledges). But this puts the earth on track for a 2.7°C warmer world by the end of the century.

? What are the goals of COP26?

There are four goals to be discussed during the annual summit:

1. Secure global net-zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees within reach	2. Adapt to protect communities and natural habitats
To deliver on this target, countries will need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accelerate the phase-out of coal• Curtail deforestation• Speed up the switch to electric vehicles• Encourage investment in renewables.	At COP26 nations must work together to enable and encourage countries affected by climate change to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protect and restore ecosystems• Build defenses, warning systems, and resilient infrastructure and agriculture to avoid loss of homes, livelihoods, and even lives
3. Mobilise finance	4. Work together to deliver
To deliver on the first two goals, developed countries must make good on their promise to mobilize at least \$100bn in climate finance per year by 2020.	At COP26 nations must: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalize the Paris Rulebook (the detailed rules that make the Paris Agreement operational)• Accelerate action to tackle the climate crisis through collaboration between governments, businesses, and civil society.

? What does a successful COP look like?

In practical terms it's one that kicks starts decarbonization on the timescale set out by science and the Paris Agreement, and where promises made to the poorest, most vulnerable nations are delivered in full. In Paris, COP21 was a success because the nations with most at stake said it was a success.

? What are the outcomes of COP26 so far?

Read the key takeaways from COP26: [COP26 Outcomes \(So far\)](#)

! Information sources to keep yourself updated on the daily developments in COP26:

- Find the outcomes of high-level segments: [COP26 Outcomes](#)
- Get everyday updates from: [Latest News - UN Climate Change Conference](#)
- Watch the live events from: [Green Zone Programme of Events](#)
- As the world leaders' summit came to an end in COP 26, the tough negotiations regarding Climate Finance began from day 3. Read the Climate Finance Delivery Plan from here: [Climate Finance Delivery Plan](#)
- Don't know how Climate Finance works? We have you covered. Read our guide on Climate Finance from here: [The Landscape of Climate Finance](#)
- Learn what your country has pledged to tackle Climate Change: [All Nationally Determined Contributions](#)
- Find the concept note for this year's COP: [COP 26 Concept Note](#)

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Youth Policy Forum (<https://ypfbd.org>) | November 2021