



COP26: aims, goals and progress

Debate on 18 November 2021

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Date published: 11 November 2021

Date updated: 15 November 2021

On 18 November 2021, the House of Lords is due to debate a motion moved by Baroness Young of Old Scone (Labour) that “this House takes note of the outcome of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) and the challenges of implementing measures to tackle climate change”.

COP26 is an international climate change conference held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It stands for ‘conference of the parties’ and is the 26th meeting of the parties to the UNFCCC. COP26 is ongoing and runs from 31 October to 12 November 2021. It is being held in Glasgow under the UK’s presidency and in partnership with Italy.

Described by the UK Government as “an event many believe to be the world’s last best chance to get runaway climate change under control”, the conference will be attended by world leaders and many negotiators, government representatives, businesses, and citizens. The goals of the conference are to:

- secure global net-zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees within reach;
- adapt to protect communities and natural habitats;
- mobilise finance; and
- work together to deliver.

COP26 will continue work on implementing the 2015 Paris Agreement’s aim of limiting global temperature increase to “well below” 2.0 degrees celsius on pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit temperature increases to 1.5 degrees celsius.

Parties to the Paris Agreement set ‘nationally determined contributions’ (NDCs) that contain information on targets, policies and measures for reducing national emissions and on adapting to climate change impacts. The UN has said that the combined effect of the NDCs will determine whether the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement are met. However, an update on NDCs in October 2021 by UN Climate Change suggested that there was an “urgent need” to increase the level of ambition of NDCs to keep warming well below 2 degrees celsius or to limit it to 1.5 degrees (based on scenarios considered by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change).

The COP26 website describes Paris as setting the destination and has said that “Glasgow must make it a reality”.

Section 4 of this briefing was updated on 15 November 2021 with high-level outcomes of the conference.

I. What is COP26?

COP26 is the 26th ‘conference of the parties’ to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC is an international convention which entered into force on 21 March 1994. It was opened for signature at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992.¹ COP26 runs from 31 October to 12 November 2021.²

The UNFCCC has “near universal membership” with 197 countries having ratified it.³ The convention’s objective is to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous levels of climate change:

The ultimate objective of this convention and any related legal instruments that the conference of the parties may adopt is to achieve, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the convention, stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. Such a level should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.⁴

The COP meetings are the “largest annual conferences currently held under the auspices of the United Nations”.⁵

COP26 is being held in Glasgow under the UK’s presidency of the conference, in partnership with Italy. This year, both a pre-COP summit (running from 30 September to 2 October) and a youth event (from 28 to 30 September) were held in Milan, Italy.⁶

The COP26 website argues that Glasgow must make the Paris Agreement’s aim of limiting warming to well below 2.0 degrees celsius, and aiming for 1.5 degrees celsius, “a reality”.⁷

COP26 will involve negotiations between the parties to the UNFCCC. However, neither Russia’s President, Vladimir Putin, nor the President of China, Xi Jinping, are attending COP26 in person, although they have sent delegations to the conference.⁸ This has attracted criticism from US President Joe Biden, who said they had lost an ability to influence people around the world and at COP26.⁹

¹ Alongside the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification, the UN has described the three conventions as “intrinsically linked” (UN Climate Change, ‘[What is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change?](#)’, accessed 4 November 2021).

² UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, ‘[COP26, in partnership with Italy](#)’, accessed 9 November 2021.

³ UN Climate Change, ‘[What is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change?](#)’, accessed 4 November 2021.

⁴ [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), article 2.

⁵ UN Climate Change, ‘[What are United Nations Climate Change Conferences?](#)’, accessed 4 November 2021.

⁶ UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, ‘[Pre-COP Milan](#)’, accessed 9 November 2021; and ‘[Youth4Climate 2021: Driving ambition](#)’, accessed 9 November 2021.

⁷ UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, ‘[Negotiations](#)’, accessed 9 November 2021.

⁸ BBC News, ‘[COP26: Biden attacks China and Russia leaders for missing summit](#)’, 2 November 2021.

⁹ *ibid.*

Speaking in the House of Commons on 3 November 2021, the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, said he had spoken to both Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin. He said their non-attendance was related to the pandemic and that senior negotiators were present at COP26:

I talked to both President Xi and President Putin and it was clear: they said that the pandemic precluded them from coming. I understand the situation that they are in. They have very senior negotiators in Glasgow as we speak—Xie [China’s special climate envoy] is a very senior operative in the Chinese system—and we have to hope for results.¹⁰

1.1 COP26: targets for progress

The UK has set out four targets that need to be met at COP26:¹¹

- **Mitigation:** “Secure global net zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees within reach”.
- **Adaptation:** “Adapt to protect communities and natural habitats”.
- **Finance:** “Mobilise finance”.
- **Collaboration:** “Work together to deliver”.

Mitigation

The UK Government’s *COP26 Explained* report states that targets set at Paris would lead to temperature rises “well above” 3 degrees celsius by 2100 compared with pre-industrial levels.¹² The UK Government has said that progress has been made “in recent months” to keep the world closer to a 2 degrees celsius rise in temperature, “but the science shows that much more must be done to keep 1.5 degrees in reach”¹³:

The world needs to halve emissions over the next decade and reach net zero carbon emissions by the middle of the century if we are to limit global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees.¹⁴

COP26 Explained argues that a range of measures are required:

- Developed countries must quickly phase out their use of coal, and all countries should not open or finance new coal-fired power stations.
- Forests must be protected. Countries should work together to reward sustainable agricultural production to help farmers make a better living whilst still protecting forests.
- Air quality should be improved, and carbon emissions reduced, by moving to zero emission vehicles.

¹⁰ [HC Hansard, 3 November 2021, col 929.](#)

¹¹ HM Government, [COP26 Explained](#), July 2021, p 13.

¹² *ibid*, p 15.

¹³ *ibid*.

¹⁴ *ibid*.

Adaptation

The *COP26 Explained* report also says that action is needed to address the fact that “we know that the most vulnerable are at the greatest risk from climate change, and that they have done the least to cause it”.¹⁵ It states that improvements to early warning systems and flood defences, and more resilient infrastructure and agriculture, are needed in order “to avoid further loss of life, livelihoods and natural habitats”.¹⁶

COP26 Explained called on countries to produce ‘adaptation communications’ that set out “what they are doing, and planning to do, to adapt to the impacts of the changing climate, challenges they face and where they need help”.¹⁷ It cited the Adaptation Action Coalition (AAC). This was co-developed by the UK with Egypt, Bangladesh, Malawi, the Netherlands, Saint Lucia and the United Nations Development Programme.¹⁸ The AAC was formed in January 2021 and aims to “build momentum and support action to adapt and build resilience to the impacts of climate change”. In August 2021, it had 38 member countries.

Finance

COP26 Explained identifies finance as a key part of responding to climate change. It says “countries need to manage the increasing impacts of climate change on their citizens’ lives and they need the funding to do it”.¹⁹

Financial support was particularly important for developing countries, and the UK has said that developed countries must raise at least \$100 billion each year “in climate finance”. It has cited Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that this figure stood at \$78.9 billion in 2018.²⁰

The UK has argued that both public and private sector investment is needed, but that “we must work to unleash the trillions in private finance” needed to reach net zero by 2050. This would require every financial decision to take climate change into account. It has also said that financial systems needed to be resilient to the impact of climate change:

Central banks and regulators need to make sure that our financial systems can withstand the impacts of climate change and support the transition to net zero. It also means banks, insurers, investors and other financial firms committing to ensuring their investments and lending is aligned with net zero.²¹

¹⁵ HM Government, [COP26 Explained](#), July 2021, p 19.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, ‘[Adaptation Action Coalition: an overview](#)’, 26 March 2021.

¹⁹ HM Government, [COP26 Explained](#), July 2021, p 22.

²⁰ For further information see: House of Commons Library, ‘[COP26: Delivering on \\$100 billion climate finance](#)’, 3 November 2021.

²¹ HM Government, [COP26 Explained](#), July 2021, p 22.

On 25 October 2021, before the start of COP26, the UK COP26 presidency published a climate finance delivery plan.²² The plan would provide “clarity” on how and when developed countries would meet the \$100 billion climate finance goal. The press release accompanying the plan states that it would “provide confidence” that the \$100 billion goal would be met by 2023 and “significant progress” would be made towards it in 2022.²³

Collaboration

COP26 has a focus on finalising the rules required to implement the Paris Agreement, described as the ‘Paris rulebook’. The UK has said that there are several things that need to be achieved:

- Solutions must be found to allow carbon markets to enable “greater ambition in mitigation and adaptation actions”.²⁴
- Issues around transparent reporting must be resolved to “build confidence in the system and support all countries to meet their commitments”.²⁵
- An agreement must be reached “that drives ambition from governments over the coming years to keep 1.5 degrees alive”.²⁶

COP26 Explained states that the UN negotiations were consensus-based and therefore the UK was trying to remove barriers to participation and to ensure that the voices of those particularly at risk of climate change (such as indigenous groups) were heard.²⁷

However, the UK has argued that finalising the Paris rulebook alone would not be enough to deliver net zero:

Governments, business and civil society (sometimes called ‘non-state actors’) need to work together to transform the ways we power our homes and businesses, grow our food, develop infrastructure and move ourselves and goods around. Which is why we are working hand in glove with the UN High Level Champions on Climate Action to catalyse transformation in the global economy.²⁸

2. Paris Agreement 2015

The Paris Agreement was adopted by 196 parties on 12 December 2015 at COP21 in Paris.²⁹

Article 2(1) of the Paris Agreement sets the aim to limit the global temperature increase to “well

²² Cabinet Office, [‘UK COP26 Presidency publishes Climate Finance Delivery Plan led by German State Secretary Flasbarth and Canada’s Minister Wilkinson ahead of COP26’](#), 25 October 2021.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ HM Government, [COP26 Explained](#), July 2021, p 26.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.* There have been press reports of visa restrictions due to covid making it harder for people from some regions to attend COP26. For example: BBC News, [‘COP26: Has the Glasgow climate summit been poorly organised?’](#), 5 November 2021.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ UN Climate Change, [‘The Paris Agreement’](#), accessed 5 November 2021.

below” 2.0 degrees celsius on pre-industrial levels, and to “pursue efforts” to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels. It also highlights the need to improve the ability to adapt to climate change and to use finance that is consistent with lowering greenhouse gas emissions:

This Agreement, in enhancing the implementation of the convention [UNFCCC], including its objective, aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty, including by:

- (a) Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change;
- (b) Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production;
- (c) Making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilient development.³⁰

The United Nations Climate Change Secretariat has described the 1.5 degrees target as “a significantly safer defence line against the worst impacts of a changing climate”.³¹

To achieve these long-term temperature goals, the Paris Agreement calls on countries to limit their greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible:

In order to achieve the long-term temperature goal set out in article 2, parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that peaking will take longer for developing country parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century, on the basis of equity, and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.³²

2.1 Nationally determined contributions

Nationally determined contributions (NDCs) are a key part of delivering the aspirations of the Paris agreement.

Article 4(2) of the Paris Agreement requires parties to “prepare, communicate and maintain” successive NDCs. These set out what the country intends to achieve. They contain information on targets, and policies and measures for reducing national emissions and on adapting to climate change impacts.³³

³⁰ [Paris Agreement](#), article 2.

³¹ United Nations Climate Change Secretariat, [Press Release: Historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change 195 Nations Set Path to Keep Temperature Rise Well Below 2 Degrees Celsius](#), 12 December 2015.

³² [Paris Agreement](#), article 4.

³³ UN Climate Change, [‘NDC Synthesis Report’](#), accessed 5 November 2021.

Parties should pursue domestic mitigation measures with the aim of achieving the objectives of the NDCs. The UN has said that it is the combined impact of the NDCs that will govern whether the long-term aims of the Paris Agreement are achieved:

Together, these climate actions determine whether the world achieves the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement and to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century. It is understood that the peaking of emissions will take longer for developing country parties, and that emission reductions are undertaken on the basis of equity, and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty, which are critical development priorities for many developing countries.³⁴

Parties communicate new or updated NDCs every five years. A synthesis report was due to be published in 2020. Owing to the postponement of COP26 from 2020 to 2021, the NDC synthesis report was instead published on 17 September 2021.³⁵

Under article 4(3) of the Paris Agreement successive NDCs are expected to “represent a progression beyond the party’s then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible ambition”.³⁶ A revised note on the report’s key findings was published on 25 October 2021, so that COP26 had access to the most up-to-date information.³⁷

On 4 November 2021, UN Climate Change said that the available NDCs of 193 parties would lead to a combined increase of approximately 13.7% in global greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 compared with 2010.³⁸ It contrasted this with an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report³⁹ that estimated that limiting global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees celsius “requires a reduction of CO₂ emissions of 45% in 2030 or a 25% reduction by 2030 to limit warming to 2 [degrees celsius]”.⁴⁰

UN Climate Change said if emissions were not reduced by 2030 they would need to be “substantially” reduced after this to “compensate for the slow start on the path to net zero emissions, but likely at a higher cost”.⁴¹ However, global emissions could be brought to a peak before 2030 if developing countries were supported in achieving their conditional commitments:

Many NDCs from developing countries contain more ambitious conditional commitments to reduce emissions, which can only be implemented with access to enhanced financial resources and other support. The report suggests that the full implementation of these components could allow for global emissions to peak before 2030.⁴²

³⁴ UN Climate Change, ‘[Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDCs\)](#)’, accessed 8 November 2021.

³⁵ UN Climate Change, ‘[NDC Synthesis Report](#)’, accessed 5 November 2021.

³⁶ [Paris Agreement](#), article 4(3).

³⁷ UN Climate Change, [Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement. Revised Note by the Secretariat](#), 25 October 2021.

³⁸ UN Climate Change, ‘[COP26: Update to the NDC Synthesis Report](#)’, 4 November 2021.

³⁹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, [Global Warming of 1.5 °C—An IPCC Special Report](#), 2018. Also referred to as SRI.5.

⁴⁰ United Nations Climate Change, ‘[COP26: Update to the NDC Synthesis Report](#)’, 4 November 2021.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

The 25 October 2021 revised note on NDCs stated that there was an “urgent need” to increase the ambition of NDCs to keep warming well below 2 degrees celsius:

The information in paragraphs 10, 13 and 14 [of the revised note] implies an urgent need for either a significant increase in the level of ambition of NDCs between now and 2030 or a significant overachievement of the latest NDCs, or a combination of both, in order to attain cost-optimal emission levels suggested in many of the scenarios considered by the IPCC for keeping warming well below 2°C or limiting it to 1.5°C. If emissions are not reduced by 2030, they will need to be substantially reduced thereafter to compensate for the slow start on the path to net zero emissions. The SRI.5⁴³ identifies net zero CO₂ emissions as a prerequisite for halting warming at any level.⁴⁴

Article 4(19) of the Paris Agreement states that parties should “strive” to formulate and communicate long-term strategies on low greenhouse gas emissions. These strategies are published on the UN Climate Change website and are available for 44 countries.⁴⁵

3. UK Government policy: net zero by 2050

In June 2019, the Government said it was the first major economy in the world to pass laws to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.⁴⁶ It said that net zero meant greenhouse gas emissions could be offset or captured:

Net zero means any emissions would be balanced by schemes to offset an equivalent amount of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, such as planting trees or using technology like carbon capture and storage.⁴⁷

On 20 April 2021, the Government announced that it would “set the world’s most ambitious climate change target” to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035, compared to 1990 levels, as part of its sixth carbon budget.⁴⁸ This would bring the UK “three-quarters of the way to net zero by 2050”. The UK’s carbon budgets place a restriction on the total amount of greenhouse gases the UK can emit over a five-year period.⁴⁹

The target was informed by Climate Change Committee advice.⁵⁰ The committee is a statutory body, set up under the Climate Change Act 2008.⁵¹ It advises the UK and devolved governments on the UK’s progress in tackling climate change.

⁴³ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, [Global Warming of 1.5 °C—An IPCC Special Report](#), 2018.

⁴⁴ UN Climate Change, [Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement. Revised Note by the Secretariat](#), 25 October 2021, para 15.

⁴⁵ UN Climate Change, [‘Communication of long-term strategies’](#), accessed 9 November 2021.

⁴⁶ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, [‘UK becomes first major economy to pass net zero emissions law’](#), 27 June 2019.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, [‘UK enshrines new target in law to slash emissions by 78% by 2035’](#), 20 April 2021.

⁴⁹ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, [‘Carbon Budgets’](#), 13 July 2021.

⁵⁰ Climate Change Committee, [The Sixth Carbon Budget: The UK’s Path to Net Zero](#), December 2020.

⁵¹ Climate Change Committee, [‘About the Climate Change Committee’](#), accessed 9 November 2021.

The target set in this carbon budget will include the UK's share of international aviation and shipping emissions, which were excluded from the UK's earlier carbon budgets. The Government must set carbon budgets under the Climate Change Act 2008.⁵² They are legally binding and are intended to act as stepping stones towards the net zero target in 2050.

On 19 October 2021, the UK published its strategy for meeting its target of net zero by 2050.⁵³ The strategy has been submitted by the UK to the UNFCCC as its second long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategy under the Paris Agreement.⁵⁴

Reaction

In June 2021, the Climate Change Committee made a progress report to Parliament across two documents: *Progress in Reducing Emissions* and *Progress in Adapting to Climate Change*, with a joint recommendations document.⁵⁵ The committee argued that whilst the Government has made “historic climate promises” in the past year, it had been “too slow to follow these with delivery”.⁵⁶ The committee said the UK's climate credentials had “been marred by uncertainty and delay to a host of new climate strategies”.⁵⁷ In the report on reducing emissions the committee said that underlying progress outside of electricity generation had been “insufficient”.⁵⁸ The committee made a large number of recommendations to the Government including “ensuring all departmental policy decisions, and procurement decisions, are consistent with the net zero goal and reflect the latest understanding of climate risks”.⁵⁹

In a House of Commons Westminster Hall debate on the report, Alan Whitehead, Shadow Minister for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, described the report as “a pretty coruscating condemnation of progress”.⁶⁰ Responding to the debate, Greg Hands, Minister of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, said that the Government welcomed the committee's report.⁶¹ He said the point of such a committee was to challenge the Government and “to ensure that the Government are straining every possible muscle to get to that [net zero] target and get there in good time”. The Government published a formal response to the Climate Change Committee on 19 October 2021, alongside its net zero strategy.⁶²

⁵² Climate Change Committee, ‘[Advice on reducing the UK's emissions](#)’, accessed 9 November 2021.

⁵³ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), 19 October 2021. The net zero strategy was announced alongside a heat and buildings strategy: [Heat and Buildings Strategy](#), 19 October 2021.

⁵⁴ UN Climate Change, ‘[Communication of long-term strategies](#)’, accessed 9 November 2021.

⁵⁵ Climate Change Committee, ‘[2021 Progress Report to Parliament](#)’ 24 June 2021.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Climate Change Committee, [Progress in Reducing Emissions: 2021 Report to Parliament](#), June 2021, pp 19–20.

⁵⁹ Climate Change Committee, [Joint Recommendations: 2021 Report to Parliament](#), June 2021, p 3.

⁶⁰ [HC Hansard, 21 October 2021, col 409WH](#).

⁶¹ *ibid.*, col 413WH.

⁶² Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, ‘[Committee on Climate Change's 2021 progress report: government response](#)’, 19 October 2021. The adaptation-specific recommendations from the Climate Change Committee are addressed in: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, ‘[Government response to the Climate Change Committee report on progress in adapting to climate change](#)’, 19 October 2021.

4. COP26: outcomes and progress

Section 4.1 was added on 15 November 2021 to include high-level outcomes and reaction to the conference.

Developments from the conference so far have included:

- **Action on forests and land use.** 133 countries issued a declaration committing to “working collectively to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030 while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural transformation”.⁶³
- **Statement on the breakthrough agenda.** 42 countries endorsed the ‘breakthrough agenda’, which was “a commitment to work together internationally this decade to accelerate the development and deployment of the clean technologies and sustainable solutions needed to meet our Paris Agreement goals, ensuring they are affordable and accessible for all”.⁶⁴ Including in the areas of clean power, road transport, steel production, and hydrogen.
- **Zero emission cars and vans.** A declaration was signed by governments, cities, automotive manufactures and fleet operators to “commit to rapidly accelerating the transition to zero emission vehicles to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement”.⁶⁵ The declaration said that the signatories would work towards sales of new cars and vans being zero emission globally by 2040 and “by no later than 2035 in leading markets”.
- **India announces net zero by 2070.** India’s prime minister Narendra Modi said that India would reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2070, the first time India has announced a net zero target.⁶⁶
- **China and the US issue a joint statement.** China and the US issued a joint statement saying that “the two sides are intent on seizing this critical moment to engage in expanded individual and combined efforts to accelerate the transition to a global net zero economy”.⁶⁷

Daily media summaries of the conference have been published on the news page of the COP26 website.⁶⁸ High-level outcomes from the World Leaders Summit and the presidency theme days are also being published to the website.⁶⁹

⁶³ UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, ‘[Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests and Land Use](#)’, 2 November 2021. See also: Cabinet Office, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and Prime Minister’s Office, ‘[Policy paper: World leaders summit on ‘Action on forests and land use](#)’, 9 November 2021.

⁶⁴ UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, ‘[COP26 World Leaders Summit—Statement on the Breakthrough Agenda](#)’, 2 November 2021.

⁶⁵ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and Department for Transport, ‘[Policy paper: COP26 declaration on accelerating the transition to 100% zero emission cars and vans](#)’, 10 November 2021.

⁶⁶ BBC News, ‘[COP26: India PM Narendra Modi pledges net zero by 2070](#)’, 2 November 2021.

⁶⁷ US Department of State, ‘[US-China Joint Glasgow Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s](#)’, 10 November 2021. See also: BBC News, ‘[COP26: China and US agree to boost climate cooperation](#)’, 11 November 2021.

⁶⁸ UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, ‘[Latest news](#)’, accessed 9 November 2021.

⁶⁹ UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, ‘[COP26 outcomes](#)’, accessed 9 November 2021.

On 10 November 2021, a draft agreement document was reported on in the press.⁷⁰ This reaffirmed the Paris Agreement’s temperature control goal of holding temperature increases well below 2 degrees celsius and pursuing efforts to limit increases to 1.5 degrees. However, the COP26 draft agreement included text that the parties would “resolve” to pursue efforts to limit temperature increases to 1.5 degrees celsius.⁷¹

4.1 Update: COP26 high-level outcomes

On 13 November 2021, COP26 agreed the ‘Glasgow climate pact’.⁷²

The press release on the COP26 website stated that the Glasgow climate pact, “combined with increased ambition and action from countries”, would mean that limiting temperature rises to 1.5 degrees celsius remained “in sight”.⁷³ However, it would only be delivered “with concerted and immediate global efforts”.

The Glasgow climate pact also called upon parties to accelerate the transition to low-emission energy systems. This included deployment of clean power generation but also efforts to reduce the use of coal and fossil fuels. This included:

[...] accelerating efforts towards the phasedown of unabated coal power and phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, while providing targeted support to the poorest and most vulnerable in line with national circumstances and recognizing the need for support towards a just transition.⁷⁴

This was the first time that the COP had agreed action on phasing down unabated coal power.⁷⁵

COP26 also finalised the Paris Rulebook, including rules for the exchange of carbon credits:

The Paris Rulebook, the guidelines for how the Paris Agreement is delivered, was also completed today after six years of discussions. This will allow for the full delivery of the landmark accord, after agreement on a transparency process which will hold countries to account as they deliver on their targets. This includes article 6, which establishes a robust framework for countries to exchange carbon credits through the UNFCCC.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ BBC News, [‘Live: Strengthen emissions targets, urges draft agreement’](#), 10 November 2021; and [‘COP26: Draft deal calls for stronger carbon cutting targets by end of 2022’](#), 10 November 2021.

⁷¹ United Nations Climate Change, [Draft CMA Decision Proposed by the President: Version 10/11/2021 05:51](#), 10 November 2021, para 23.

⁷² UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, [‘COP26 keeps 1.5C alive and finalises Paris Agreement’](#), 13 November 2021. An ‘advance unedited version’ of the Glasgow climate pact has been published on the UNFCCC website: [‘Outcomes of the Glasgow Climate Change Conference - Advance Unedited Versions \(AUVs\)’](#), accessed 15 November 2021.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ [Glasgow Climate Pact](#), (13 November 2021, ‘advance unedited version’).

⁷⁵ UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, [‘COP26 keeps 1.5C alive and finalises Paris Agreement’](#), 13 November 2021.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

Countries also agreed to “revisit and strengthen” their current NDCs in 2022.⁷⁷ This would be combined with a yearly political ‘roundtable’ to examine progress worldwide. There would also be a leaders’ summit in 2023. In addition, commitments were made to “significantly increase financial support through the Adaptation Fund as developed countries were urged to double their support to developing countries by 2025”.

Alok Sharma, COP President, said that the Glasgow climate pact was a “fragile win”. It had kept 1.5 degrees alive, which was the UK’s overarching objective when it took on COP presidency-designate.⁷⁸ However, Mr Sharma said that the “pulse of 1.5 is weak”. He said that whilst it was an historic agreement, it would be judged not just on the fact that countries had signed up to it “but on whether they meet and deliver on the commitments”.⁷⁹

Reaction

A lot of initial reaction to the Glasgow climate pact has focused on a change in wording on coal from a previous draft to the agreed text. Text was changed from phasing “out” coal, to phasing “down” coal.⁸⁰ It was reported that this change was agreed following opposition from China and India.⁸¹

At a press conference held following the conclusion of COP26, UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, argued that the Glasgow climate pact marked a “decisive shift” in the world’s approach to addressing carbon emissions and that it set “a clear roadmap to limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees and marking the beginning of the end for coal power”.⁸² However, he said that progress was “tinged with disappointment”. Mr Johnson said that those who were already being affected by climate change had demanded a high level of ambition for COP26 and, whilst some countries had been “willing to go there, that wasn’t true of everyone”. He said that was “sadly the nature of diplomacy”. Mr Johnson said that after Paris “we were heading for three degrees” but Glasgow had “turned that dial down to around two degrees”. He argued that was “still far too high” but the world was heading in the right direction despite disagreements and that 1.5 was still alive.

Keir Starmer, Leader of the Labour Party, said that the agreement was welcome but “we’ve seen too many promises for tomorrow, not the action that’s needed today”.⁸³ He argued that “we must use the final year of the UK’s presidency to rescue what COP26 hasn’t achieved”.

The following is a selection of media articles covering the conclusion of COP26:

- Fiona Harvey, [‘Ratchets, phase-downs and a fragile agreement: how COP26 played out’](#), *Guardian*, 15 November 2021

⁷⁷ UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, [‘COP26 keeps 1.5C alive and finalises Paris Agreement’](#), 13 November 2021.

⁷⁸ UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, [‘COP President concluding media statement’](#), 13 November 2021.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Paul Rincon, [‘COP26: New global climate deal struck in Glasgow’](#), BBC News, 14 November 2021.

⁸¹ Hannah Ellis-Petersen, [‘India criticised over coal at Cop26—but real villain was climate injustice’](#), *Guardian*, 14 November 2021.

⁸² Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, [‘PM opening statement at COP26 press conference: 14 November 2021’](#), 14 November 2021.

⁸³ Keir Starmer, [‘Personal Twitter account’](#), 13 November 2021.

- Steven Swinford and Kaya Burgess, '[COP26: 'We won. Now China and India will have to explain themselves'](#)', *Times* (£), 15 November 2021
- Paul Rincon, '[COP26: New global climate deal struck in Glasgow](#)', BBC News, 14 November 2021
- Georgina Rannard, '[COP26 climate deal: 'It won't save us from drowning'](#)', BBC News, 14 November 2021
- Leslie Hook, '[Climate deal offers relief for wealthy nations but vulnerable fear 'death sentence'](#)', *Financial Times* (£), 14 November 2021

A number of climate groups and other organisations have also issued reactions to the outcomes of COP26, including:

- Climate Action Network International, '[COP26: Rich nations betray vulnerable people of the world](#)', 13 November 2021 (includes reactions from a number of organisations, including ActionAid International, Amnesty International, and Christian Aid)
- Friends of the Earth, '[COP26: Road to 1.5 just got harder with Glasgow get-out clause](#)', 13 November 2021
- Greenpeace, '[COP26 ends in Glasgow](#)', 13 November 2021
- Royal Society, '[Royal Society response to the COP26 agreement](#)', 13 November 2021
- Confederation of British Industry, '[Our response to Glasgow climate pact: COP26 outcome](#)', 13 November 2021

5. Read more

The Lords Library has published a special page on its website for COP26.⁸⁴ This presents a range of briefings on the conference and on climate change in general, including challenges in implementation:

- House of Lords Library, '[COP26: "Code red for humanity"](#)', 1 November 2021
- House of Lords Library, '[Behaviour change and reaching net zero](#)', 18 August 2021
- House of Lords Library, '[Net zero and integrated policymaking](#)', 16 April 2021
- House of Lords Library, '[Home insulation and the net zero target](#)', 17 June 2020
- House of Lords Library, '[Net Zero Carbon Emissions Target and Climate Change: Role of Technological and Lifestyle Efforts](#)', 30 January 2020

⁸⁴ House of Lords Library, '[COP26](#)', accessed 9 November 2021.

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