

COP26 in a Nutshell - a Primer

COP stands for Conference of the Parties, and the summit will be attended by almost 200 countries that signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – a treaty that came into force in 1994. COP26 is the 26th climate change COP and will be hosted in Glasgow by the UK in partnership with Italy.

The Paris Agreement : an international treaty

- signed by almost all countries in the world at COP21 in Paris in 2015.

Its aims are:

- to keep the rise in the global average temperature to ‘well below’ 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels, ideally 1.5 degrees;
- strengthen the ability to adapt to climate change and build resilience; and
- align all finance flows with ‘a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development’.

The Paris Agreement has a ‘bottom-up’ approach where countries themselves decide by how much they will reduce their emissions by a certain year. They communicate these targets to the UNFCCC in the form of ‘nationally determined contributions’, or ‘NDCs’. The signatories of the Paris Agreement are, however, expected to submit new – and more ambitious – NDCs every five years, known as the ‘ratchet mechanism’.

COP26 is our last chance to avoid the worst effects of climate change

COP26 is the first test of this ambition-raising function. One of the main ‘benchmarks for success’ in Glasgow is that as many governments as possible submit new NDCs and, when put together, these are ambitious enough to put the world on track for ‘well below’ 2 degrees, preferably 1.5.

Science shows that to avoid the worst effects of climate change, we must limit the rise in average global temperature to 1.5 degrees centigrade. If global temperatures rise higher, the risk of species extinction and catastrophic impacts on human lives increases dramatically. And we risk kickstarting feedback loops with the consequences of climate change, like melting permafrost, release even more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, making it even harder to wrestle the crisis under control.

To keep 1.5-degree limits alive, we've got to halve global emissions by 2030. Will countries around the world commit to this ambitious goal and get on the right side of history?

The difference between 1.5 and 2 degrees is substantial: every increment of a degree translates into increased risks for people, communities, and ecosystems.

A successful outcome in Glasgow also requires developed countries to honour a promise they made back in 2009 of mobilizing \$100 billion per year by 2020 to support climate action in developing countries.

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/09/what-cop26-and-why-it-important>