



## What did COP26 Achieve?

This month's Green Tip article focused on the November COP26 conference held in Glasgow. Now that the conference is over, we explore some of the comments on what positive outcomes were achieved, and what still needs to be done.

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The COP26 conference held the first two weeks of November, 2021 brought together diplomats from nearly 200 nations to:

1. refine the details of the Paris Agreement
2. to keep alive the hope of limiting human-caused global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius
3. set more ambitious goals to cut emissions adapt to climate change
4. provide aid to developing countries suffering the worst climate impacts.

## How successful were the COP26 negotiations?

"I would say it is a real mixed bag," said John Furlow, director of the Climate School's International Research Institute for Climate and Society. The overall consensus is that countries signed onto a variety of pledges and agreements that, while promising much-needed progress, do not go far enough in cutting emissions and lack the details required to ensure the words are transformed into action.

## The Glasgow Climate Pact

### The Good:

- Negotiators from nearly 200 countries unanimously signed the Glasgow Climate Pact
- The agreement established a clear consensus that all nations need to do much more, immediately, to prevent a catastrophic rise in global temperatures. It calls on nations to strengthen their pledges to reduce emissions by the end of 2022, three years earlier than previously laid out in the Paris Agreement
- Wealthy countries were called upon to double their funding to protect poorer nations who have contributed the least to climate change, yet suffer the deadliest consequences.
- Fossil fuels were mentioned in the text for the first time in the history of COPs, which could be considered a small win

### The Not so Good:

- It is still unclear on how much and how quickly each nation would cut its emissions

- There is no clear plan to limit warming to 1.5 degrees (or even 2 degrees)
- Not enough is to be done to help vulnerable countries.
- The language on fossil fuels was watered down by India and the US and went from 'phase out coal and phase out fossil fuel subsidies' to 'phase down unabated coal power and phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.'<sup>1</sup> Developing countries are still waiting for the \$100 billion per year that was promised under the 2015 agreement

### **Promises and Pledges**

Before COP26, the world was on track to heat up by 2.7 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. New commitments announced at COP26 could limit warming to 2.4 degrees, if countries follow through on their plans (Still too much).

### **The Good:**

- More than 40 countries [pledged to quit coal](#), the dirtiest fossil fuel and the world's largest source of carbon dioxide emissions, in the 2030s. Quitting coal is essential for limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees C. The Biden administration joined an agreement ... to end financing for "unabated" oil, gas and coal in other countries by the end of next year. (Unabated refers to power plants that burn fossil fuels and discharge the pollution directly into the air, without any attempt to capture the emissions).
- More than 140 countries vowed to [end deforestation](#). The deal includes the U.S., Brazil, Russia, and China, and other countries that together comprise over 90% of the world's forest cover. The deal includes \$19 billion in financing, some of which will go to developing countries to restore damaged land, tackle wildfires and support indigenous communities.
- More than 100 countries have signed on to the Global Methane Pledge, an initiative that aims to cut methane emissions by 30% by 2030, compared to 2020 levels. Led by the US and the EU, the list of signatories are responsible for nearly half of the world's methane emissions.
- At least six major automakers and 30 national governments have pledged to phase out gasoline- and diesel-powered cars and vans by 2040. The deal includes automakers Ford, Mercedes-Benz, General Motors and Volvo and countries such as Britain, Canada and India. The US, China, and Japan did not sign on.
- China and the US—the world's two biggest polluters—announced an agreement to work together to cut emissions in the coming decades. The agreement is short on

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<sup>1</sup> Méloody Braun, a senior staff associate at the International Research Institute for Climate and Society,

details, but considering the rivalry between the two countries, seems to be a promising result.

### **The Not so Good**

- The new pledge "set vague timelines—in the 2030s or thereafter for major economies, and in the 2040s for everyone else—so more concrete deadlines will likely be needed to make the commitment effective."
- Notably, some of the world's largest coal consumers—including China, India, the U.S. and Australia—did not sign on to the pact, which will also limit its impact
- In 2014, leaders made a similar deforestation pledge in the New York Declaration on Forests, but since then, tropical primary forest loss has increased and tree cover gains have been insufficient. Significant effort will be needed to ensure a better outcome with this new agreement.
- China, Russia, and India—key methane-emitters—have not signed onto the Global Methane Pledge. "Significant work remains to be done to expand the number of countries involved, detail the ways countries will meet the commitment, and verify that cuts have actually occurred.
- The US, China, and Japan did not sign on to the pledge to phase out gasoline and diesel-powered cars/vans.

### **Net-zero pledges**

COP26 President Alok Sharma noted that a few months ago, only about 30% of the global economy had net-zero emissions pledges for the coming decades. Now that number is close to 90 percent, the Washington Post reports. "By any measure, that is progress," said Sharma.

Now those pledges need to transform from mere promises to detailed plans, with real emission reduction pathways and sufficient resources in order to be relevant.

### **Was COP26 a Success?**

There were many announcements that came out of the conference in Glasgow but in terms of judging its success, the devil really is in the detail.

There have been highs and lows: some hail it as a success, others as a failure. It is perhaps best summarized by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres: "The approved texts are a compromise. They reflect the interests, the conditions, the contradictions and the state of political will in the world today. They take important steps, but unfortunately the collective political will was not enough to overcome some deep contradictions."

COP26 laid bare the huge spread in national interests. As negotiations came to a close, pressure mounted to water down commitments on fossil fuels, and coal in particular, while the small island states made clear that anything above 1.5 degrees temperature spelt catastrophe for them.

## **What comes next**

Overall, the negotiations that led to the new Glasgow pact are actually a small but necessary part of COP, said Braun—a lot of the climate action happens at the local, regional, and national level. "We are running out of time, and out of trust in what can realistically be achieved by a negotiation text that has to be approved by every country."

To her, the most important part of COP is what happens in the corridors, streets, and side events, rather than in the negotiation rooms. "COP is an incredible and unique incubator for bottom-up action through the gathering of activists, experts, civil society, Indigenous communities, and various stakeholders from all around the world, who bring and share their expertise and experience to strategize together on how to develop, support and fund new partnerships, projects, technologies, capacity building programs, climate education and climate empowerment efforts, at local, regional, national, international levels.<sup>2</sup>

## **Sources:**

1. What did COP26 Achieve? Phys Org by Sarah Fecht, Earth Institute at Columbia University, November 16, 2021 [What did COP26 achieve? \(phys.org\)](https://phys.org/news/2021/11/16/cop26-achievement.html)
2. Giki Zero
3. 6 Takeaways from COP26, the UN Climate Summit- The New York Times, November 13, 2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/13/climate/cop26-climate-summit-takeaways.html>

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<sup>2</sup> Méloody Braun, a senior staff associate at the International Research Institute for Climate and Society,