

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT: COP26 - THIS YEAR'S U.N. CLIMATE CONFERENCE

## Why is COP important?

Like most other international summits, such as the G7, the COP is a big deal for the global community. At each COP, virtually every country in the world gets the chance to come together to engage in climate negotiations with the overarching goal of limiting global warming to "well below" 2° Celsius (3.6° F), and ideally limiting warming to below **1.5° Celsius** (2.7° F), as was agreed upon in the Paris Agreement at COP21. The world currently stands at 1.1° Celsius (1.98° F) above pre-industrial temperatures, with more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere than any time in the past 4 million years (NOAA).

The COP is especially important for **developing countries and small island nations**, because they are at the most risk for the effects of climate change, and at COP, they get a chance to share their climate demands on equal standing with global superpowers. It is especially important that these countries have their voices heard because they have contributed the least to causing climate change but will suffer the most from it. Meanwhile, most global superpowers have contributed the most but will suffer the least.

Finally, climate change is, above all, a **human rights issue**. Climate change threatens human rights to "health, housing, food, and water" and disproportionately affects "women, children, older persons, indigenous peoples, minorities, migrants, rural workers, persons with disabilities, and the poor" (UN Human Rights Office). **Inaction is not a moral option.**

## IMPORTANT VOCABULARY

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**COP** = Conference of Parties, the decision-making body of 190+ countries who have signed the UNFCCC. Also the shorthand name for the annual U.N. climate conference (e.g. COP26).

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**UNFCCC** = United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change, which was signed at a summit in 1992 where the COP committed to non-specific climate action.

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**NDC** = Nationally Determined Contribution, or the specific commitments of each country to reach the goal of staying below 1.5 C of warming.

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**The Paris Agreement** = the most comprehensive international climate accord in history. Signed at COP21, virtually every country agreed to limit warming well below 2 C and as low as 1.5 C if possible.

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# What happened at the last COP?

The previous COP - COP25 - was held in Madrid in 2019. While the conferences are usually annual, COP26 was postponed due to the pandemic and will take place in 2021. COP26 will be important because COP25 was widely regarded as a disappointment. Negotiations between countries stretched into overtime, and world leaders still failed to agree on a universal "rulebook" for the Paris Agreement.

Additionally, many countries failed to increase the commitments outlined in their NDCs, and there was much unresolved debate over the use of weakly-enforced carbon markets as a tool to meet NDC goals. Countries' current NDCs still lead to a projected 3° C of warming - **double** the ideal goal of the Paris Agreement. With these failed negotiations, the fate of the Paris Agreement hangs in the balance.



## What to look for at COP26 this fall

After the unresolved ending to COP25 two years ago, all eyes will be on COP26 in Glasgow this November. COP26 marks the beginning of a new decade, a decade that is crucial to the future of our planet. In addition to the overarching significance of 2021, countries are also contractually obligated to update their NDCs in 2021 as part of the Paris Agreement they all signed 6 years ago. NDCs were originally supposed to be updated in 5-year intervals, but the pandemic has given countries an additional year to develop (hopefully) more ambitious climate commitments for 2021-2025.

The United Kingdom, the host country this year, has laid out a set of expectations that they hope the Parties will meet at COP26. The categories of improvements that the UK hopes to see are Mitigation, Adaptation, Finance, and Collaboration. Read more about the UK's goals for COP26 @cop26uk on Instagram or online at [ukcop26.org/cop26-goals/](https://ukcop26.org/cop26-goals/). Using the UK's goals as a guideline, it will be important to see if countries successfully rise to the challenge of keeping the 1.5° Celsius goal of the Paris Agreement within reach.

#### Sources:

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