

COP26: What outcomes?

The 2021 Glasgow Climate Change Conference or COP26^[1], organized by the United Nations, took place from November 1 to 13, 2021 in Glasgow (United Kingdom) as it had to be postponed for one year due to the COVID-19 health crisis.

The COP26 resulted, on November 13, in the adoption of the “Glasgow Climate Pact”, which notably allows to finalize the rules of application of the Paris Agreement but falls short of the ambitions that had been initially set.

The wide-ranging set of decisions, resolutions and statements that constitute the outcome of COP26 is, according to the press release of the United Nations (UN), *“a global compromise that reflects a delicate balance between the interests and aspirations of nearly the 200 Parties to the core instruments on the international regime that governs global efforts against climate change”*.^[2]

Among these decisions is the Glasgow climate pact, which decides to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C and invites Parties to consider further measures to reduce emissions of non-carbon dioxide greenhouse gases (GHGs), including methane, by 2030.

Let's look back at some of the key decisions or commitments.

Finalization of the Paris Agreement

It should be recalled that, on December 12, 2015, COP21 resulted in the adoption by 196 nations of a climate agreement in Paris, known as the “Paris Agreement”^[3]. The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It entered into force on November 4, 2016. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.

By entrusting each country with the task of establishing themselves, and *à la carte*, the height of their commitments - via “Nationally Determined Contributions” (NDCs) -, the Paris Agreement had revolutionized the modus operandi of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). With the NDCs, it is no longer a question of a treaty that fixes commitments and constraints from above, and that only

applies to certain countries (top-down approach), but rather of letting the States decide on their commitments (bottom-up approach).

At COP26, the States agreed on the rules for implementing Article 6, one of the last points of the Paris Agreement that remained to be negotiated, and in particular regarding:

- rules, modalities and procedures for the so-called Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) established by Article 6(4),
- guidance on cooperative approaches under Article 6(2),
- the work program for non-market approaches under Article 6(8).

It should be noted that the new framework in Article 6.2 addresses the critical issue of accounting for internationally transferred mitigation outcomes (ITMOs) to avoid double-counting those emissions credits, both by the country obtaining them and the country supplying them.

Common timeframes have been defined for NDCs under Article 4§10.

Article 13 adopts an enhanced transparency framework through implementation guidelines. Parties will now have to report their greenhouse gas emissions in as much detail as possible and in a comparable manner.

Mitigation and adaptation measures

In response to climate change, a distinction is generally made between adaptation and mitigation measures.

Mitigation refers to technological change and substitution that reduce resource inputs and emissions per unit of output. Mitigation measures include the use of renewable energy sources, carbon capture and storage, shifting from road to rail and public transportation, reforestation, etc.

Adaptation refers to initiatives and measures to reduce the vulnerability of natural and human systems to the effects of actual or expected climate change. These include measures such as building dikes and storm surge protection, diversifying tourism attractions and revenues, heat wave health watch plans, etc.

Mitigation

The Glasgow Climate Pact requires Parties to raise their ambition from 2022 if their NDCs is not in line with the Paris Agreement.

All national contributions will now be transmitted to the UN Secretariat, and will be the subject of an annual synthesis report.

The process will be combined with an annual political roundtable to review a global progress report and a leader's summit in 2023.

Adaptation

The Parties established a work program to define the global goal on adaptation, which will identify collective needs and solutions to the climate crisis already affecting many countries.

The Santiago Network was further strengthened by elaborating its functions in support of countries to address and manage loss and damage.

Finally, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA) approved the two registries for NDCs and adaptation communications, which serve as channels for information flowing towards the global stocktake that is to take place every five years starting in 2023.

Biodiversity

The preamble of the Glasgow Pact underlines the importance of ensuring *“the integrity of all ecosystems, including in forests, the ocean and the cryosphere, and the protection of biodiversity”*.

Paragraph 21 of the Pact stresses the importance of *“protecting, conserving and restoring nature and ecosystems to achieve the Paris Agreement temperature goal, including through forests and other terrestrial and marine ecosystems acting as sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases and by protecting biodiversity, while ensuring social and environmental safeguard.”*

Nature, through biodiversity but especially the contribution of ecosystems as sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases and the importance of protecting them to achieve the 1.5° target, thus appears symbolically for the first time.

Fossil fuels and methane

For the first time in a document of the Convention on Climate, the reduction of fossil fuels is mentioned in the final declaration. However, the term coal “phase out” was replaced at the last minute by coal “phase down”.

France joined the agreement to end financing of fossil fuel projects carried out abroad without carbon capture and storage technology by the end of 2022. This declaration concerns both French bilateral official development aid and export financing.

Regarding methane, the Global Methane Pledge, an initiative led by the United States and the European Union, was originally announced on September 18, 2021. The European Union and 8 countries (Argentina, Ghana, Indonesia, Iraq, Italy, Mexico, United Kingdom, United States) had already indicated their support for this commitment. Officially launched at the leaders’ level on November 2, 2021 during the COP26, the initiative was endorsed by more than 100 countries.

Under this framework, signatory parties commit to taking voluntary action at the national level to help reduce global methane emissions (the 2nd largest greenhouse gas, after CO₂) by at least 30% by 2030, compared to

2020 levels. According to scientists, this could allow warming to be reduced by 0.2 degrees Celsius by 2050.

What's next?

The Glasgow Pact indicates that countries will have to raise their ambitions again next year. This is a step forward from the Paris Agreement which provided for a five-year mechanism.

But, given the targets to be achieved, the question is whether the countries will actually take action.

"We can now say with credibility that we have kept 1.5 degrees alive. But, its pulse is weak and it will only survive if we keep our promises and translate commitments into rapid action" said Alok Sharma, UK President of COP26, with a trembling voice and tears in his eyes.

COP27 will take place in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, from 7 to 18 November 2022.

[1] Since 1995, world leaders have met almost every year to determine how to collectively address climate change. COP26 is the 26th Conference Of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). During this conference, negotiators are invited but also NGOs, scientists, business leaders, diplomats and journalists.

[2] <https://unfccc.int/news/cop26-reaches-consensus-on-key-actions-to-address-climate-change>

[3] <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

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