

WILL WORLD LEADERS TAKE ACTION TO PREVENT THE CLIMATE CRISIS?



THE DILEMMA



A giant sand artwork in Merseyside, England, asks world leaders to commit to net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050

OPINIONS

“Build back better. Blah, blah, blah. Green economy. Blah, blah, blah. Net zero by 2050. Blah, blah, blah. This is all we hear from our so-called leaders. Words that sound great but so far have not led to action. Our hopes and ambitions drown in their empty promises.”

– Greta Thunberg, climate activist

The COP26 climate summit starts in Glasgow, Scotland, on 31 October and runs until 12 November. World leaders will gather to discuss the climate crisis and, it is hoped, agree on some urgent actions to prevent a rise in global temperatures.

But not everybody is convinced the event will lead to significant change. Campaigners and others point out that so far action has been very slow, and that we are running out of time for our leaders to make the changes the planet urgently needs.

The UK Government is organising and hosting COP26. The hosts say: “The COP26 summit will

bring parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The UK is committed to working with all countries and joining forces with civil society, companies and people on the frontline of climate change to inspire climate action ahead of COP26.”

This year has seen lots of signs of climate change’s effects on Earth: severe floods, wildfires, storms and record-breaking temperatures all across the planet. Leaders have talked a lot about the urgent need to stop the rise in global warming, but what are they actually doing about it? And will COP26 result in more warm words but no solid action?



World leaders, including Joe Biden (centre, front) and Boris Johnson (right) will be expected to agree on urgent actions



This is what climate change looks like. Devastating floods in Germany earlier this year destroyed buildings and killed more than 220 people

WHAT IS A COP?

COP stands for Conference of the Parties. It was set up by the United Nations (UN). COP1 took place in 1995, and this will be the 26th edition, which is why it's called COP26.

This year's event, postponed from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will see world leaders and tens of thousands of negotiators, government representatives, businesses and citizens go to Glasgow for 12 days of talks.

all fossil fuels, are burned to produce energy which powers everything from an apartment to a factory.

The emissions that are causing global warming include carbon dioxide and methane. They enter our atmosphere and absorb then re-emit heat being radiated from the Earth. This traps the warmth and causes the average temperature of the Earth's surface to rise.

deaths in vulnerable people. Wild weather has also been increasing with dangerous floods, wildfires and storms affecting many countries.

The biggest step to tackle climate change is for countries around the world to end their dependence on fossil fuels. That means phasing out oil, gas and coal and turning to wind, the sun and the seas for our energy.

WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?



Climate change is a global emergency. The world is warming up because of harmful emissions caused by human behaviour. Oil, gas and coal, which are

Climate change is already having an effect on Earth. People living in small islands and developing countries are feeling the most impact, particularly from extreme weather causing floods and droughts, and melting ice causing a rise in sea levels. Some communities have had to relocate. But every part of the planet has been affected in recent years by rising temperatures, which have led to droughts and even

But other things have to be tackled too. For example, meat is a big part of most of our diets but the production of meat is a big driver of climate change, as a result of methane emissions produced by cattle and the forests cleared to make space for farms. Reducing meat consumption would help reduce harmful emissions. Some campaigners are calling on governments to invest more in lab-grown meat.

WHAT IS THE PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT?



At the COP21 conference in 2015, 190 countries plus the European Union signed an agreement in which they each promised to take tough action to stop the threat of climate change. The main goal is to make sure a global temperature rise is well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels (before the 19th century, when industry became widespread). They have promised to try and limit the increase to 1.5°C.

The wealthier countries also promised to provide support to developing countries to help them with the effects of climate change, and to help them reduce their emissions, too.

FACTS & FIGURES



The Earth is now about **1.1°C** warmer than it was in the late **1800s**

Most of the warming has occurred in the past **40 years**, with the **seven** most recent years being the warmest

The last decade (**2011-2020**) was the warmest on record

Scientists think limiting the global temperature rise to no more than **1.5°C** would help us avoid the worst climate impacts

Half of emissions cuts must be in place by **2030** to keep warming below **1.5°C**

Fossil fuel production must fall by roughly **6%** per year between **2020** and **2030**

If carbon dioxide emissions keep increasing as they are now, global temperatures could rise by as much as **4.4°C** by the end of the century

The **ten countries** with the largest emissions contribute **68%** of the total

The **100** least-emitting countries generate just **3%** of total emissions

Globally, **2020** and **2016** were the joint hottest years ever



Greenland lost an average of **253 billion** tonnes of ice per year between **1993** and **2019**, while Antarctica lost about **134 billion** tonnes of ice per year

THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change isn't some far-off event predicted to happen in the future. It's happening now. While the worst damage can still be avoided by limiting the global temperature rise, scientists say we are already living with the effects of the 1.1°C increase in Earth's temperature since the late 19th century.



WARMING OCEANS

Oceans, which cover more than 70% of the surface of our planet, are absorbing much of the planet's increased heat. The top 100 metres of oceans worldwide have warmed by 0.33°C since 1969. In addition, both the amount and the thickness of Arctic sea ice has declined fast over the last several decades.

EXTREME WEATHER

Extreme weather is happening more and more. Since 1950, the number of occasions of record high temperatures in the USA, UK and elsewhere has

been increasing, while the number of occasions of record low temperatures has been decreasing. There are more extreme storms with more rainfall, too, and there are more severe droughts. In July 2021, more than 200 people died in floods in Germany. Those floods were made between 1.2 and 9 times more likely by human-caused climate change, according to one study.



MELTING GLACIERS

Glaciers, which are large, thick ice masses made up of compressed snow over hundreds or thousands of years, are melting fast. They occupy about 10% of the world's surface. According to data from NASA satellites, 46 gigatons of ice from Alaskan glaciers was lost on average each year from 2003 to 2010. A gigaton is equivalent to 908 million tonnes.



COP ACTIONS

The world's leaders and their teams will have to agree on some big, bold steps to help combat climate change. These are some of the goals of COP26:



A coal-fired power station, giving off harmful emissions

1. REACH GLOBAL NET ZERO BY 2050 AND KEEP 1.5 DEGREES "WITHIN REACH"

Net zero means a balance between emissions produced and emissions taken out of the atmosphere. So you end up contributing zero emissions, because you've cancelled out whatever emissions you've produced.

To achieve it by the middle of this century, countries are being asked to present targets to reduce emissions by 2030. COP organisers say that countries will have to commit to:

- Speeding up the phasing out of coal
- Reducing deforestation
- Speeding up the switch to electric vehicles
- Encouraging investment in renewable energy, such as solar and wind

2. ADAPT TO PROTECT COMMUNITIES AND NATURAL HABITATS

This goal aims to protect people and countries from the effects of climate change. According to the COP26 plan, the way to do this is to:

- Protect and restore ecosystems
- Build defences, warning systems and infrastructure and agriculture to avoid loss of homes, livelihoods and even lives

3. MOBILISE FINANCE

To achieve the first two goals, the COP26 team say that wealthier countries must deliver their promise to invest \$100 billion (£73 billion) into efforts to combat climate change by 2020 (last year!). This money could help developing nations buy solar panels for solar energy, for example. But last year, the UN said the target was likely to be missed, so richer countries are being asked to commit more money urgently. In 2018, countries had provided \$79 billion. It's hoped the \$100 billion goal will be announced at the end of COP26.

4. WORK TOGETHER TO DELIVER

This goal calls on all countries to:

- Agree on the Paris Rulebook (the detailed rules that make the Paris Agreement work)
- Speed up action to tackle the climate crisis through collaboration between governments, businesses and civil society

Do you think all of these goals will be achieved?

DID YOU KNOW?

One electric car can save an average of 1.5 million grams of carbon dioxide. That's the equivalent emissions of four return flights from London to Barcelona in Spain!

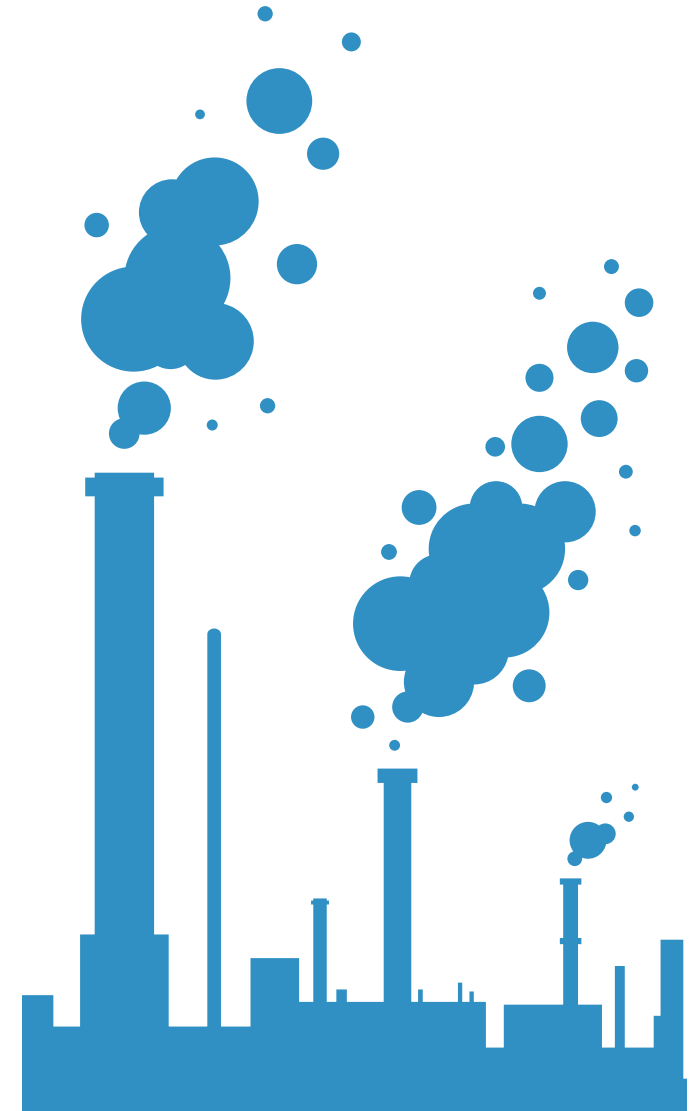
WHY MIGHT COP26 BE TRICKY?

Getting nearly 200 different groups to agree on things is always going to be hard. Different countries have different priorities and budgets to spend. There will likely be disagreements and a lot of discussions to reach compromises.

A lot of attention will be on China, the world's biggest polluter. They have recently announced they will stop building coal-fired power stations abroad. That's a big step because they had been under a lot of pressure from many countries to stop spending money on these power stations that let off harmful emissions. China is the biggest spender on coal power plants in the world and they have invested in stations in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America.

All eyes will also be on the USA at COP26. President Joe Biden recently announced he would double spending on helping developing nations deal with climate change to \$11.4 billion (£8.4 billion) by 2024. Mr Biden has also appointed the USA's first ever Special Envoy for Climate Change, John Kerry. Mr


Kerry is in charge of the country's energy and climate policy and has spent much of this year meeting world leaders to prepare for COP26.





DISCUSS 


How is climate change affecting us already?

DISCUSS 


Why is climate change such an emergency?

DISCUSS 

What actions need to be taken by governments to reduce global warming?

DISCUSS 

How can ordinary people influence governments to take action?

DISCUSS 

Do you think COP26 will lead to positive action against climate change?