

To what extent will the COP26 agreements and policies be successful in fulfilling the conference goals and solving the climate emergency?

Ever since 1995, the Conference of Parties (COP) has met every year to discuss the future implication of every nation's actions concerning climate change, attempting to solve the problem by putting in place different policies and protocols for limiting the effect that countries have on the Planet's heating. Throughout this essay, I will be discussing the 26th Conference of Parties (COP26), assessing the policies and decisions made during the meeting, and evaluating their potential to help reach the conference goals.

I will start by stating the conference set goals before the fortnight of discussions and negotiations between the attending nations. The four fundamental goals of the COP are: Securing global net-zero by mid-century and keeping 1.5 degrees within reach, adapting to protect communities and natural habitats, mobilising finance, and promoting cooperation between all parties towards a single, common goal. For reaching these targets, every country must take specific actions. The only way of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 is to phase out the use of coal and other fossil fuels, that are the dominant cause of CO₂ emissions (approximately 89% of CO₂ emissions), and replace them with other sources of renewable, 'green' energy, while preserving the existing carbon sinks, like forests or peatlands. Adapting to protect communities and mobilising finance would imply that the more developed countries should provide support, both technically and financially to the developing world, or the nations that face the biggest threat from global warming, allocating the promised 100\$bn every year to make it possible for nations to develop without the use of fossil fuels. All these goals that we've seen so far are only achievable with a lot of cooperation between all the countries of the world, however, some of them might require more time than we have.

Now that we know what the COP26 has aimed to accomplish, it's time to look at the actual policies and decisions made and decide how close are these objectives to our current reality. The Glasgow Climate Pact, which was agreed during the meetings, firms up the global commitment to accelerate action on climate change, while also finalising the Paris Agreement that was decided during the meeting that took place in 2015. The phasing-down of coal was implemented, governments pledging to commit to this decision by cutting fossil fuel subsidies that artificially lower the price of coal, oil, or natural gas, making a big step towards lowering the use of fuels, by increasing the cost of selling and using them. Another key decision was made towards the deforestation activities that take place in countries. World leaders from more than 100 countries that cover approximately 85% of the world's forests promised to end deforestation by 2030, allocating almost \$20 billion to tackle this problem. Furthermore, more than 30 financial companies made assurances regarding the investment in activities linked to deforestation, therefore both the public and private sectors acted towards ending deforestation. Efforts have also been made towards promoting ecosystem-based adaptation solutions for reducing vulnerability and building resilience of human communities to climate change. These efforts suggest the need to conserve, sustain and restore ecosystems, such as forests, grasslands, wetlands, mangroves, or coral reefs to reduce the destructive effects of climate hazards. A roadmap for updating the contribution that every nation brings to the table (Nationally Determined Contributions - NDC) has also been produced, as the previous plan's analysis showed to fall short on meeting the goal of meeting the 1.5C targets. A quarter of the current climate warming is attributed to methane – a powerful greenhouse gas that had the attention of the parties, that agreed to cut the emissions by 30% by the year 2030 by creating the Global Methane Pledge, led by the United States and the European Union. Six of the

Top 15 (accounting for 20% of the world's methane emissions) methane emitters have already indicated their support to the pledge.

Now that we know what was decided during the COP26, we can evaluate the situation and assess whether the solutions will be effective or not. The short answer is – we can not be sure of anything yet. While all the decisions made look promising, they are simply not enough to solve the problem of global warming. Let's start with the initial proposition towards coal, which was about phasing it out, but after an intervention from India and China, the commitment was watered down from 'phasing out' to 'phasing down'. Now, a new question comes to our mind: why did they decide to do that? We can answer that by looking at the statistics regarding coal use in both India and China. Their combined coal consumption adds up to 62% of the world's total, with China having more than half of the world's share. Coal has become essential for sustaining their economies; therefore, a collapse in the economy would follow the phasing out of coal in both countries. While the cubic feet per capita might not be the highest in China or India, the very high number of citizens drives the consumption numbers higher and higher. These are just two examples, but there are a lot of other countries, like Australia, Bulgaria, or Serbia that have a very high per capita consumption, but a smaller population. These statistics indicate the necessity of replacing coal and other fossil fuels as a resource in developing countries, a feat that is only possible with the financial and technical support from richer nations.

Furthermore, by analysing the emissions that each country outputs today, we can see a drop in the EU and US, however, the global emissions are still growing each day, month, and year. How is that possible? Most of the countries that go through a development stage need those fossil fuels to maintain their growth, as more and more energy (that is obtained by burning fossil fuels) is required. Rich nations asking the developing world to reduce their emissions output might seem very hypocritical since those nations themselves used incredible amounts of fossil fuels over the years to reach their current economic, social, and technological level. That is why the idea that rich nations bear a very important responsibility of dragging the developing world along with them arises. Investing more and more and providing financial support for projects that promote economic growth without emitting the same amount of greenhouse gases that prevent us from reaching net-zero can be one of the decisive factors in keeping the objective alive. The only way for the COP to effectively deliver the result we wish to achieve is by providing the necessary financial support for developing nations, besides setting ambitious NDCs. The current amount promised by developed countries is almost \$100bn by the year 2023, but experts estimate that the figures need to move into trillions for efficient adaptation to climate change, figures that we are nowhere near currently. While the US has said that they would take a leading role in the effort towards net-zero ('leading by example'), one very controversial action can make us question whether the richest, most developed nation on the planet is reliable for saving the planet. Just 4 days after the COP, the US held the largest ever auction for gas drilling leases in the Gulf of Mexico, territory that amounts to over 80 million acres, all being leased for the sole purpose of oil and gas production, therefore promoting the fossil fuel industry.

In conclusion, looking over at the goals set by the COP26 before the event, we can say that it has been a very important and productive meeting, producing a lot of policies that put us on track to complete our mission, but it is still not enough. The fossil fuel industry and emissions are still growing, and experts estimate that we still have a lot of work to do to reach the 1.5C mission, as we are currently on course for a temperature rise in the range of 1.8C to 2.4C. We still have to rely on nations to keep their promises and truly take action by collaborating as a whole. The next COP

meetings will be decisive moments in our history, as the time window for action rapidly closes. It is time for all the countries to be united towards one single goal, as everyone will lose otherwise.