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**Policy Brief 4**  
The 26th Conference of Parties to  
the UNFCCC (COP26) 2021

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## Executive Summary

This is the Fourth Brief in a series of Briefs that discusses the Global Climate Change response starting from the 1992 UNFCCC, highlighting key UN Climate Conferences (COPs) and developments over the years.

We previously discussed the Kyoto Protocol's first implementation period (2008-2012) and aspects of the second period (2013-2020). The 2015 Paris Agreement signalled a new global response to climate change which encompasses a bottom-up approach and all parties making progressive mitigation, adaptation and financial commitments every five years. Parties are now preparing for the first commitment period under the Paris Agreement, and COP26 is vital in this process as outstanding aspects of the Paris Rulebook will be concluded. Countries will review their emissions reduction commitments (NDCs) in preparation for the 2023 Global Stocktake and the first implementation period.

In this Brief, we discuss the 26th Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (COP26), the process leading up to the conference and expected outcomes.

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# The Presidency and Process of COP26

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In 2019, the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of Italy successfully bid for the Presidency of the 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP26) of the UNFCCC. Italy will host the Pre-COP Summit in September 2021, and the UK will host COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021.

Both Governments work with their national ministries, the UNFCCC secretariat and different stakeholders to plan and deliver the conference. While COP26 is seen as the main event, the Presidency oversees negotiations and agenda setting leading up to the conference. The UK and Italian

Governments have worked on COP26 since January 2020 and will hand it over to the next COP President in 2022 once a new country is conferred the Presidency role.

## How the COP Process Works

UN Climate Conferences are organised annually and are a forum for multilateral discussions on climate change involving governments, businesses and civil society organisations. If a party does not bid for Presidency, the conferences are held in Bonn, Germany, where the UNFCCC secretariat seats. Depending on the Agenda, some years have up to three COP meetings, with the final conference usually in November or December acting as the main conference where heads of states convene and make final decisions.

*It is important to note that the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (COP) is a supreme body under the UNFCCC composed of all 197 parties to the Convention. What is usually referred to as a COP in the media is an annual meeting of the COP (the supreme body). For ease of reference, we shall refer to these meetings as COPs, but the reader must be aware that the Conference of Parties is a permanent supreme body that holds the annual meetings, including COP26.*

## What are UN Climate Conferences?

UN Climate Conferences serve as the formal meetings of the UNFCCC 3 Supreme Bodies the Conference of the Parties (COP) (to the UNFCCC), the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) and the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (the CMA). Additionally, the two subsidiary bodies, Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), hold sessions during these conferences.

COPs serve two main purposes; first, they are an opportunity for parties to review the implementation of the Convention, The Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. Secondly, they are an opportunity for parties to adopt further decisions that aid the implementation of the three instruments.

At these meetings, every UNFCCC part has one vote and parties are encouraged to reach a consensus when negotiating as this is the only way to ensure implementation of agreements. The Convention, however, allows for amendments when a three-fourths majority is reached.

## Coordination of COPS

The UNFCCC Secretariat, The Presidency and the Cop Bureau coordinate UN Climate Change Conferences (COPs) as elaborated.

### UNFCCC Secretariat

- The secretariat was formed in 1992 to ensure implementation of the UNFCCC and provide technical support to Parties.
- The UNFCCC facilitates intergovernmental climate negotiations, reviews and analyses implementation and maintains the register of NDCs.
- The UNFCCC hosts the Climate Conferences in the event that no party bids for Presidency. The secretariat ensures coordination of all actors in responding to the climate emergency.

### The Presidency

- UNFCCC Parties vie for Presidency, and the practice is that the Presidency rotates between the five world regions.
- As President, the country hosts the negotiations and works with the Bureau and Secretariat to plan and coordinate the conference.
- There is also a political leadership role as the Presidency convenes parties to negotiate on different issues before the meeting in order to build consensus and ensure a successful conference.

### The COP Bureau

- The Bureau advises and provides guidance on ongoing work under the Convention to the COP, CMP and CMA, but is not a forum for political negotiations.
- It is responsible for process management and assists the President in various tasks, including consultation and negotiations.
- It consists of members elected from the five regional groups and frequently consults with regional parties to ensure a smooth conference.

## Consensus Building



In ensuring a successful COP, the Presidency must identify its priorities that influence the negotiations before and during the conference. Pre-conference negotiations are vital in ensuring that during the COP, parties reach a consensus on issues, which goes a long way in ensuring national voluntary compliance with decisions. For COP26, the UK Government has set out four main priorities. These priorities align with the UNFCCC secretariat's vision and influence the engagements leading up to the conference. The UK Government's priorities are as follows:

- i. *Emission reduction*: The UK is working with parties to ensure that more countries pledge and work towards a carbon net-zero world by 2050 to keep global warming at a maximum of 1.5 degrees Celsius (1.5°C) of pre-industrialisation levels;
- ii. *Adaptation*: Countries will be encouraged to continue building adaptation resilience, to build early warning systems and build climate defences around the world;
- iii. *Climate Finance*: The UK will work with Countries to make good on the 100 billion US-Dollar annual climate finance goal;
- iv. *Finalising the Paris Rulebook*: During COP26, parties will finalise negotiations on the Paris Rule Book's outstanding issues.

To ensure a successful conference and an impactful climate response, the UK Government has set up and works with the following negotiating groups. The negotiating groups bring together governments, businesses, civil society and other non-state actors to allow for consultation, innovation and inform COP26. Below are the groups working on adaptation issues and finalising negotiations on the Paris Agreement:

#### Adaptation Negotiations

- **Adaptation Action Coalition** (established January 25 2021): This Coalition works to deliver sector-specific and actionable workstreams initially focusing on health, infrastructure and water. This Coalition will eventually work across all 12 of the Adaptation Action Agenda sectors.
- **Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade (FACT) dialogue** (established February 2 2021): This was launched in partnership with the Tropical Forests Alliance and works to hasten the transition to sustainable land use.

#### Paris Rulebook Negotiations

- **Energy Transition Council:** This is set up in partnership with the International Energy Agency (IEA) and International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) to accelerate the transition from coal to clean power.
- **Zero Emissions Vehicles Transition Council:** The Council consist of heads of European Governments and works to overcome the strategic, political, technical and economic barriers that hamper the fast development and production of electric vehicles.
- **Powering Past Coal Alliance:** This is an alliance of national and sub-national governments, businesses and organisations working towards the energy transition away from coal. It was formed in 2017 by the UK and Canadian Governments and is vital in the response to climate change.
- **Multilateral Sessions on the Paris Rule Book:** In partnership with Chile, the UK Government facilitates these monthly sessions to allow for pre-negotiation and consultation by parties.

### Expected Outcomes

COP26 is predicted to be a major event in the climate change discourse as it comes at a time when the world is seeking urgent action to climate change and will pave the way for the first implementation period under the Paris Agreement. During COP26, parties will negotiate on the following key significant issues:



## Success at COP26

COP26 is seen as a vital conference that will determine global climate policy and action. Reviewing the evolution of the UNFCCC from 1992, including the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, it is clear that all countries, both developed and developing countries, are expected to take up climate leadership. Developed countries are still expected to make significant mitigation and finance commitments, but least developed countries must also innovate to sustainably develop.

Given the six key decisions to be taken at COP26, it is vital that all UNFCCC parties reach a consensus, make progressive commitments and take decisive action. Climate Change negotiations are no longer a prescriptive process led by developed countries but are now conducted through a bottom-up process that relies on all governments, businesses and other actors.

In line with this, the UK Government, the UNFCCC secretariat and other actors have embraced the pre-negotiation approach, which includes Pre-Conference meetings, thematic negotiating groups and multilateral talks. In addition to these efforts, other governments, including the USA, are holding multilateral negotiations to ensure a successful global response, be it through the UNFCCC or national development priorities.

Ultimately COP26's success depends just as much on pre-conference multistakeholder consensus as it does on the actual deliberations and agreements at the November conference.

## Summary and conclusion

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In this Brief, we reviewed the COP26 process in detail, provided information on UN Climate Conferences generally and explaining the plans put in place for COP26. The UK Government's role has been highlighted, and we emphasise that COP26's success is pegged on all actors reaching a global consensus. The role of businesses and non-state actors has been highlighted, and the UK Government is working with multiple stakeholders to ensure success.

In this series of Briefs, we reviewed the UNFCCC process and traced the development of the global climate response architecture starting in 1992 up to the present day. Below is a summary of each of the Briefs:

- **Policy Brief 1: An Introduction to Climate Change and the International Community's Response:** In this Brief, we discuss the development of the UNFCCC from 1990-1992 and review its main provisions, and briefly discuss the factors driving the evolution of the Global Climate Response, including the scientific consensus, developments in advanced economies and the role of global politics.
- **Policy Brief 2: Global Evolution of The Climate Change Regime: The Kyoto Protocol (1994-2010):** This Brief discusses the [Kyoto Protocol](#), its key provisions, preparations for its implementation and the developments during its first commitment period (2008-2012). The Brief outlines the key decisions, including the [Bali Roadmap](#) (2007), [Copenhagen Accords](#) (2009) and the Ambition Gap that arose in the 2010 COP. The Brief concludes by discussing how these developments ultimately shaped the negotiations that led to the 2015 Paris Agreement.
- **Policy Brief 3: Global Evolution of the Climate Change Regime: The Paris Agreement and the Road to COP26 (2011-2019):** This Brief covers the [Paris Agreement](#), the Paris Rule Book's development, and ultimately the importance of COP26 in paving the way for the implementation period. Additionally, the Brief highlights Global Developments that will inform the decisions at COP26: these include the Covid-19 pandemic, the requirement to reach net zero by 2050 and the impact of world politics, including the USA leaving and re-entering the Paris Agreement.
- **Policy Brief 4: The 26th Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (COP26) 2021:** Our final Brief discusses the process leading up to COP26, the importance and interventions made by the UK Government, which holds the COP26 Presidency, as well as expected outcomes of the Glasgow summit.



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