

COP26 – the UN Climate Change Conference

The COP26 UN Climate Change Conference will take place 1–12 November 2021, in Glasgow, Scotland. The event will bring together country leaders, experts and environmental campaigners to take urgent action against climate change.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. a natural historian
2. CO₂ emissions
3. a host
4. an advocate
5. a summit
6. to be due to
7. a campaigner
8. adaptation

Definition

- a. a person who participates in activities that are designed to change something in society
- b. a formal meeting between leaders from two or more countries
- c. to be expected or planned to happen at a particular time
- d. a place or organisation that provides the space for a special event
- e. someone who studies plants, animals, rocks, etc.
- f. someone who publicly supports something and speaks in favour of it
- g. quantities of carbon dioxide that are sent out into the air and that are harmful for the environment
- h. the process of changing to suit different conditions

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Introduction

The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres recently said, '2021 is a make or break year to confront the global climate emergency.' This means that action taken now will decide whether we succeed or fail completely. 'If this task was urgent before, it's crucial now,' said Patricia Espinosa, a UN climate change leader. The COP26 summit is seen as a last opportunity to limit climate change to 1.5°C and meet the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement.

What is COP26?

This year will see the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference. These events are also known as ‘COPs’, which stands for ‘Conference of the Parties’. The conference was due to take place in 2020, but it was postponed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The meeting of world leaders will now be held from 1 to 12 November 2021, in Glasgow, Scotland. The United Kingdom and Italy are the hosts and share the presidency this year. Sir David Attenborough, the British natural historian and much-loved TV personality, has been named the COP26 People’s Advocate for climate change as part of the preparations.

The 2015 Paris Agreement

COP26 is an opportunity to get the world on track to meet the objectives of the 2015 Paris Agreement, which was signed at COP21. The Paris Agreement represented an important moment in the climate change process because it was the first time there was a legal agreement bringing countries together to act. Since then, 190 countries have joined the Paris Agreement. The goal is to keep global warming to well below 2°C, ideally 1.5°C. To do this, countries need to reduce CO₂ emissions as much and as fast as possible. However, time is running out. Despite the Paris Agreement, not enough has been done to limit climate change or to manage its impact on people and the planet.

What’s the plan now?

The aim of the COP26 conference is to bring international leaders together to make faster progress towards the goals of the Paris Agreement. The UN is asking the biggest CO₂-emitting countries to come to COP26 with ambitious plans to cut their emissions. The 2021 event has four goals, set by its hosts, the UK and Italy:

- agreeing to more ambitious action to reduce carbon emissions
- strengthening adaptation to the effects of climate change
- making money available for climate action
- improving the way countries work together on energy change, clean road transport and nature.

COP26 brings together country leaders, experts and environmental campaigners to work on the biggest challenge the world faces today. It is time for people to come together to take ambitious and fast action against the climate crisis.

Find out how you can get involved by visiting the British Council’s Climate Connection site: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection>

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
	True	False
1. The UN wants people to understand that COP26 is just one step in a long and slow process.	True	False
2. The COP26 conference was supposed to happen last year.	True	False
3. Sir David Attenborough has criticised the goals of COP26.	True	False
4. The 190 countries that have signed the Paris Agreement are aiming to limit global warming to below 1.5°C.	True	False
5. Countries need to reduce carbon emissions dramatically to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.	True	False
6. The four objectives for COP26 were proposed by the UK and Italy.	True	False

Task 2

Complete the sentences.

warming	leaders	challenge	change
goals	campaigners	emissions	plans

- The conference tackles the issue of climate
- Environmental were unhappy when the conference was postponed.
- COP26 is a last opportunity for countries to meet the of the Paris Agreement.
- The aim is to limit global to below 2°C.
- Countries need to present their plans to cut CO₂
- International will come together at the summit to discuss the action needed.
- The UN is asking for ambitious for change from the countries with the highest carbon emissions.
- Climate change is the greatest the world faces today.

Discussion

What do you think is the most important action to be taken to confront the climate emergency?