

# COP31: Convention on Climate change

Implications for environmental experts

September 2026



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The Institution  
of Environmental  
Sciences

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# Acknowledgements

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## About the Institution of Environmental Sciences

The Institution of Environmental Sciences (the IES) is at the forefront of uniting the environmental sciences around a shared goal: to work with speed, vision and expertise to solve the world's most pressing environmental challenges, together.

As the global professional membership body for environmental scientists, we support a diverse network of professionals all over the world – and at every stage of their education and careers – to connect, develop, progress and inspire.

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## About the Climate Action Community

The **Climate Action Community** is an IES Challenge-Led Community focused on championing the work of professionals in the environmental sciences in climate action, promoting the work of experts and evidence around climate change and driving change to ensure adaptation and mitigation measures are accurate, ambitious and achievable.

The Community champions interdisciplinary working and a systems approach to the interlinked crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

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# Background

COP31 will be the 31st Conference of the Parties of the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC), which will be held in Antalya, Türkiye.

Last year, all eyes turned to COP30 to deliver the world's urgent cry for an ambitious approach to climate action. It failed to achieve that goal, so COP31 must become a platform upon which hope can be rebuilt.

In a world of dire outcomes, inaction breeds only greater urgency with each passing year.

The more that COP31 fails to achieve, the greater burden is passed to the next set of negotiations, and ultimately to future generations.

This briefing sets out background information on COP31, the implications of the summit for environmental science, and how the work of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change fits into the wider context of climate action at an international and national level.

It has been written to support [IES Members](#) attending COP31, though the subject is likely to affect any professional working in the context of climate change or addressing environmental challenges.

If you want to support the work of the IES, you can [become an affiliate](#), or if you're a professional in the environmental sector working with science, consider [joining the IES](#).

For more information on environmental policy or the work of the IES to stand up for science, scientists, and the natural world, please contact Joseph Lewis, Head of Policy ([joseph@the-ies.org](mailto:joseph@the-ies.org)).

**“Last year, all eyes turned to COP30 to deliver the world’s urgent cry for an ambitious approach to climate action. It failed to achieve that goal, so COP31 must become a platform upon which hope can be rebuilt.”**



# Looking ahead: What to expect at COP31

The rhythm of global negotiations has become disconcertingly familiar, so experts will be hoping that COP31 can disrupt the trend and deliver real change.

It has yet to be seen whether the COP31 Presidency will rise to that challenge, though early indications of its priorities can already be seen from the provisional programme and Action Agenda for the summit.

For environmental experts wondering what to expect, the Presidency's priorities and Action Agenda show where the greatest effort will be placed on negotiations, while the programme itself will help anyone who is attending COP31, or seeking to link their own efforts to what's happening on the conference floor.

## Key themes

Following developments at recent climate summits, the top priority for many attendees will be ensuring the deliverability and implementation of commitments.

Adaptation and equity are also likely to be key themes in the negotiations, as increasingly extreme weather pushes the issues to the fore.

The COP31 Presidency has set out six **priority areas for negotiations**:

1. **Electrification:** Increase the global electrification rate to 35% by 2035.
2. **Zero Waste and Methane Reduction:** Reduce the increase in waste generation by 50% by 2035.
3. **Resilient Cities and Buildings:** Reduce energy intensity in the building sector by at least 25% by 2035.
4. **Green Industrialisation:** Increase the use of circular materials in the manufacturing and production sectors to at least 15% by 2035.
5. **Awareness Across All Areas:** Ensure that climate-resilient agricultural practices and climate change education are completed across all segments of society by 2035.
6. **Climate Implementation Bridge:** Expand the Climate Implementation Bridge Mechanism by 2035 to accelerate the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and support investable project portfolios.

One of the key outcomes of any COP is always its outcome declaration (or equivalent negotiated policy. Much of the world's media will be focused on the wording of that agreement and where it lands on the most controversial issues, such as whether it will seek to 'phase down' or 'phase out' fossil fuels.

The Presidency has also published an **Action Agenda** of issues, which includes:

1. **Zero Waste:** Unlocking the climate action potential of waste management through scalable circular economy solutions.
2. **Oceans and Seas:** Protecting marine ecosystems and unlocking blue carbon for climate resilience.
3. **Food Security:** Advancing the global transition toward sustainable and resilient food systems.
4. **Climate-Resilient Cities:** Climate-resilient cities to ensure liveable places for everyone.
5. **Climate Implementation Bridge (CIB):** From commitments to implementation, bridging priorities, investment and delivery.
6. **Youth and Education:** Young people as architects of climate solutions, not just inheritors of climate risks.
7. **Green Industrialisation:** Low-carbon industrial pathways that support development, competitiveness, and just transition.
8. **Clean Energy Transition:** Clean, secure, and affordable energy for all, accelerating access while ensuring reliability.

9. **Rio Synergy:** Integrated solutions where climate, biodiversity, and desertification converge.

10. **Dynamic and Resilient Health Systems:** Building climate-resilient, low-carbon and equity-focused health systems for the future.

Though the Action Agenda has a less specific set of actions and goals than the six priorities, it has played a key role in shaping the programme for COP31 and should give a clear insight into where the Presidency will be looking to reach outcomes.

## Provisional agenda

While the final details of what will be discussed at COP31 are not yet confirmed, the Presidency has published a provisional programme for negotiations, including themes for each day:

- **Monday 9th November: Food, Agriculture and Health** (Agriculture and Food Security · Irrigation and Water Efficiency · Food Systems · Climate Change and Health).
- **Tuesday 10th November: Energy and Transport** (Energy Security · Electrification · Grid Infrastructure · Energy Diversification and Efficiency · Sustainable Transport).
- **Wednesday 11th November: World Leaders' Summit / Zero Waste** (Zero Waste · Resource Efficiency · Methane · Circular Economy).
- **Thursday 12th November: World Leaders' Summit / Resilient Cities and Built Environment** (Climate-Friendly Buildings · Settlements and Urban Resilience · Disaster Risk Management · Local Governments · Smart Cities ·

Nature-Based Solutions · Smart Mobility  
· Built Environment and Infrastructure ·  
Sustainable Waste Systems).

- **Friday 13th November: Finance and Trade** (Green Transformation · Climate-Based Investment · Green Finance · Value Chains · Carbon Markets).
- **Saturday 14th November: Children, Youth, Education and Skills** (Climate Literacy and Education · Green Skills and Workforce · Academia · Curriculum Development · Lifelong Learning).
- **Sunday 15th November: “A breath in Antalya”** (Social and Cultural Programmes / Rest day).
- **Monday 16th November: Science, Industry and Technology** (Science · Green Industrialisation · Technology and Innovation · SMEs · Digitalisation · Artificial Intelligence · Low-Carbon Manufacturing).
- **Tuesday 17th November: Ocean, Seas, Nature and Land Use / Rio Synergy** (Ocean and Marine Ecosystems · Inland Water Ecosystems · Coastal Resilience · Blue Economy · Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services · Forest and Ecosystem Restoration).
- **Wednesday 18th November: Human and Social Development** (Tourism · Cultural Heritage · Employment and Livelihoods · Traditional and Local Knowledge · Vulnerable Groups · Persons with Disabilities · Women’s Empowerment · Just Transition).
- **Thursday 19th November: İmece: Enhancing Implementation** (Institutional and Technical Capacity Building ·

Investment-Ready Projects · Access to Finance).

- **Friday 20th November: Final Negotiations**

“İmece” is a Turkish word roughly translating as “Collective community effort”, continuing the thematic thread started at COP30, which emphasised the concept of Global Mutirão.

It is also noteworthy that the World Leaders’ Summit has not been organised for the first two days of the conference, allowing time for negotiation to begin before speeches from world leaders, and placing greater emphasis on the topics that will be discussed on those two days: waste and the role of cities and the built environment.

The absence of world leaders during the first two days cannot become an excuse to begin with a slow start, especially with some of the biggest systemic drivers of climate change on the negotiating agenda.

For the latest documents on COP31 and news on the programme, see the [Action Agenda](#), [Presidency priorities](#), and [provisional programme](#).

# Our priorities for COP31

Five years ago, COP26 was held in Glasgow, which many hoped would usher in the onset of a new era for climate action.

In some ways, it delivered; in others, it failed. The years since have seen diminishing returns from the global COP process, as more focus turns to implementation and the issues where negotiations remain vital become more controversial and difficult to navigate.

Looking back to where we were five years ago, lots has changed, but most of the challenges are the same.

We wrote in 2021 that “it is often the quality of implementation, and not the quality of negotiations, that determines the success of major environmental commitments”. We are still fighting that battle for effective implementation, which undoubtedly remains the biggest priority for COP31

## Our key messages for COP31

Last year, the IES held a series of discussion events with environmental scientists and other experts, identifying the most pressing priorities for climate action.

The result was our position statement on COP30: **Delivering change in a complex world**.

As we remain in a similar position to where we were at the start of COP30, our key messages for systemic change remain the same:

1. Fight for a better future, not just to survive
2. Facing complexity now makes the future simpler
3. Focus on better services to create more value
4. Do it the right way, don't do it twice
5. Doing more costs less
6. Work together, share successes
7. Make it fair, make it just
8. Plans need to add up, to deliver our ambitions
9. Embrace an era of local climate leadership
10. Don't stop until it's done

Our overarching message is that it is possible to deliver change in a complex world, yet we need an approach that recognises the systems driving climate change and works within them, seeking ambitious transformative change.

Not only is it possible, it is cheaper than inaction, and it will be essential to delivering on the enduring public consensus for stronger environmental outcomes.

## **Our Manifesto for Transformative Change**

At COP26, we launched a report with 54 recommendations for global climate action, bringing the expertise of environmental scientists across disciplines to bear on the challenges facing the world.

That report, our **Manifesto for Transformative Change**, set out the case for urgent and ambitious action, as well as how a transformative approach could be taken in practice.

Of our 54 recommendations, only a handful have been achieved and we estimate that fewer than 20% have seen sufficient progress in the last five years.

When the recommendations were published, we said that “the decisions we make now will be historic ones, and they will decide the stories we tell to generations to come about the fight against climate change”.

As we begin to reach a consensus that the world will overshoot the crucial 1.5 degree threshold, it seems clear that the decisions made so far have not been enough. While there has been progress, the dominant trend in climate action has been inertia.

Five years on, the IES is renewing its call for ambitious climate action. We said in our Manifesto for Transformative Change that “the stories told by our actions must be about ambition and the commitment to seeing our aspirations materialise through transformative change.”

As we look ahead to COP31, we still have time to tell those stories. The prospect of a more ambitious and effective approach to climate action is not yet lost, so we cannot forego the opportunity of the next five years in the same way that we have allowed the last five to pass with so little progress.

## **Five years on: Have we seen transformative change?**

As scientists, we have always acknowledged that there are many valid pathways to reach our climate commitments.

However, not all pathways are effective ways to mitigate climate change or adapt to its effects. Even acknowledging substantial progress in several areas over the last five years, it is clear that the path we are on will not be an effective route to achieving our climate commitments or protecting society from the consequences of climate change.

To get the world back on track, we must commit to a transformative change approach. It is increasingly clear that doing so will be the only way to ensuring that we meet global climate targets.

We predicted as much in our Manifesto for Transformative Change, which outlined two possible futures:

- “Transformative change, ... a future which is sustainable, resilient, and which

meets the needs of global communities that share in the benefits of the natural world.”

- “Climate change, where our inaction leads us on the road to overwhelmed human resilience, degraded natural environments, and an existential threat to our planet.”

At least for now, we are still on the second of those paths, with bigger challenges and worse threats ahead of us.

Yet even as the scale of the challenge grows greater, the hope that we can beat it never goes away.

There is fair cause for optimism that we can reach a world beyond climate chaos, where we build global resilience and mitigate the threat of future climate change.

That optimism is rooted in the rich evidence available to us: we know how we can make progress and we have the tools needed to deliver fair, sensible, and effective solutions.

Now, all we need is to inspire courage in our leaders to deliver the transformative change needed to bring about a world with thriving people, a healthy economy, and a flourishing environment.

For more information about COP26 and its implications for environmental science, read our 2021 [Manifesto for Transformative Change](#).

## Our work on climate change

The IES is an observer to the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) and the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#). We send observers to relevant summits and meetings, and will be represented at COP31.

In addition to our involvement in international meetings on climate change, we engage in policy work at a national and local level to support the delivery of commitments like the UK's Nationally-Determined Contribution in practice.

Our [Climate Action Community](#) champions the work of environmental professionals in climate action, promoting the work of experts and evidence and driving change to ensure adaptation and mitigation measures are accurate, ambitious and achievable.

The Community takes an interdisciplinary and systems approach to the interlinked crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Meanwhile, EPIC, our [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#), connects nearly 1000 local authority officers focused on solving the challenges that make delivery difficult. They share solutions and work to improve the local delivery of environmental outcomes, including action on climate change.

**“The decisions we make now  
will be historic ones, and they  
will decide the stories we tell to  
generations to come about the  
fight against climate change.”**

Ethny Childs & Joseph Lewis,  
A Manifesto for Transformative Change



# What happened at COP30 last year?

COP30 was the 30th Conference of the Parties of the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC), which was held in Belém, Brazil in November 2025.

The summit should have been a crucial platform for negotiations between governments, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations, to increase global action on climate change.

Ultimately, the [final agreement at COP30](#) has been widely seen as failing to make sufficient progress towards that objective, with no mention of phasing out fossil fuels and limited new commitments to collective action.

Ahead of the summit, COP30 was seen as especially important, even compared to previous COPs. The increasing urgency of action has compounded the need for effective negotiations and COP30 also fell at a key stage in the process set out under the [Paris Agreement](#).

Countries were due to set out new or updated Nationally-Determined Contributions (NDCs), effectively ‘ratcheting-up’ their commitments on climate change. However, this did not happen at the scale needed to significantly improve global progress.

In the context of shifting politics, COP30 also had the opportunity to keep the world agreed on tackling climate change, avoiding regression on existing commitments. That goal was somewhat met, as although the outcome of negotiations did not sufficiently increase global aspirations, it also did not lead to meaningful regression.

Key priorities set out by [the COP30 presidency](#) included:

- protecting multilateralism and the role of science;
- linking negotiations to tangible change for communities; and
- accelerating implementation through structural mechanisms and delivery levers, particularly finance.

## Global Mutirão

The final outcome of the negotiations was ‘[Global Mutirão](#)’. The text was agreed by COP30’s attendees, focusing on the need for implementation. Crucially, it failed to include plans to [phase out fossil fuels](#), not acknowledging the extent of their role in causing climate change.

This has been seen as a step backwards, as the goal of increasing implementation will be meaningless without addressing the carbon emissions from global energy systems.

Ultimately, despite the weakness of the final declaration, COP30 still achieved an important task: it maintained a consensus on action amongst the countries who attended and sets the scene for ongoing action over the next year.

For many recent climate COPs, the more important developments have emerged around formal negotiations. The same is true for COP30, where progress was made on several issues.

## Finance

Finance has remained one of the most important issues for global climate summits since COP26 in Glasgow. COP30 saw considerable discussions around mobilising finance, with key highlights including:

- A commitment to triple adaptation finance by 2035 through a new finance workplan, ‘the Belém Package’ (though this was a smaller increase than experts called for, and delivery against finance objectives has been challenging in practice).
- The Independent High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance published a new report setting out a **pathway to mobilising \$1.3 trillion USD** of climate investments in developing countries per year by 2035.

- The **Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage** rapidly opened a call for funds, but only a handful of commitments were made during COP30.
- **Principles for Taxonomy Interoperability** were published to support joined-up action.
- The Network for Greening the Financial System made a Declaration on the **Economic Cost of Climate Inaction**.

## Adaptation

As the effects of climate change become more stark, with a greater effect on people today, adaptation is urgently needed.

One of the main goals of COP30 was to agree indicators for the **Global Goal on Adaptation**. These would make it easier to support delivery, finance projects, and ensure accountability for commitments.

Indicators were agreed at COP30, but **concerns were raised** that they did not fully align with climate science. The challenge now will be to ensure the indicators remain a useful tool in supporting delivery.

To learn more about environmental indicators and how they can support (or get in the way of) effective policy, read our 2025 environmental SCIENTIST journal, ‘**Are we measuring what matters?**’

Other news on adaptation included:

- Accelerated adaptation measures and a **new framework for nature finance** were announced by the Multilateral development banks.

- A **Joint Statement on Water and Climate Action** was adopted, highlighting resilience challenges.
- One key discussion spotlighted the role of Indigenous Adaptation, though this has not led to wider adoption of the discussion's outcomes.
- The **Fostering Investible National Planning and Implementation initiative** was launched to help transform National Adaptation Plans into investable, finance-ready projects.

## Innovation

COP30 was used as a platform to make several announcements about innovation, or to demonstrate novel approaches to climate change, including:

- The launch of the **Green Digital Action Hub** and AI Climate Institute, the world's first open-source AI model for agriculture, and **Oxford's Nature's Intelligence Studio**.
- The Buildings Breakthrough put out new standards for **sustainable and resilient buildings**.
- A new **Global Initiative on Jobs & Skills** for the New Economy was launched to accelerate workforce development and social inclusion.
- The **Country Platforms Hub** was set up to provide information, finance, and technical assistance.
- A draft **framework on climate literacy** was published.

- The Future Fuels Action Plan was proposed, which sets out several actions to support the shift towards sustainable fuels in line with the proposed **Belém 4X Pledge on Sustainable Fuels**.

Despite new and novel solutions being proposed, far more needs to be done to deliver the solutions we already know about.

The promise of innovation cannot become a barrier to taking ambitious climate action now.

## The future of climate action

Given the challenges faced by recent climate COPs, the future of negotiations has been an inevitable topic of discussion.

The protests during COP30 and broadly critical commentary following its outcome have made clear that a new approach is needed.

At COP30, discussions were framed around the idea of **Global Mutirão**, a collective approach to mobilising for climate action.

This is somewhat reflected in the final outcome of COP30, but much more will need to happen to realise that aspiration in practice.

Key delivery plans are still missing, especially the **fossil fuel transition roadmap** that many experts called for at COP30, which was removed from the final outcome.

Other developments included:

- The proposal for a Global Climate Council, linked to the UN General

Assembly, to improve coordination and accountability.

- Brazil's **Multilevel Governance Solutions Acceleration Plan** to support alignment between national ambition and local delivery, in line with the **Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships** (CHAMP).
- An agreement to include trade in future climate talks, starting before COP31, to better integrate trade policy with climate action.
- A new **just transition mechanism** was agreed to enhance international cooperation, technical assistance, capacity building, and knowledge sharing for inclusive and fair just transitions.

Ultimately, one clear message of COP30 was that the future of climate action cannot rely on COPs alone.

Ahead of the summit, the IES launched a report, '**Delivering change in a complex world**', which highlighted the importance of delivering climate action every day of the year.

The report has ten key messages, laying out a better way to deliver effective action in the context of a complex world.

It's ambitious, it's challenging, but this is what it takes, and we need to choose to make it happen.

## Since COP30: Santa Marta

In keeping with the increased recognition that COPs alone are insufficient to drive delivery on climate targets, Colombia hosted

a **conference in Santa Marta** at the end of April 2026, uniting a coalition of countries willing to take more action to support the transition away from fossil fuels.

The Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels was the first in a new series of international conferences intended to accelerate action on the transition away from fossil fuels.

The focus was on delivery, aimed at countries already committed to taking action as 'first-movers'.

Nearly 60 countries took part, along with subnational governments and other key stakeholders, aiming to establish a tangible process to enable action and planning to support the transition in practice.

From the beginning, Santa Marta embodied two clear principles: starting with science and focusing on clear, evidence-led delivery.

During the conference, three workstreams were set out:

1. **National and regional roadmaps:** Working to support the development of national and regional roadmaps away from fossil fuels.
2. **Finance reform:** Aiming to change the financial system and better facilitate the transition.
3. **Trade reform:** Advancing progress towards a system of trade that is free of fossil fuels.

Ahead of the conference, a synthesis report was circulated to leaders with 12 "Action Insights", placing science at the centre of these negotiations.

To find out more about the Santa Marta Climate Conference, read our [analysis for Essential Environment](#).

## Find out more about COP30

You can also learn more about what happened at COP30 and the last year of action on climate change with these related resources:

- IES briefing on [COP30 for climate change](#)
- [Global Mutirão](#) (COP30 final outcome)
- [The Belém Package](#) (finance workplan)
- [Delivering change in a complex world](#)
- [Carbon Brief's analysis on key outcomes from COP30](#)
- IES briefing on [COP17 of the Convention on Biological Diversity](#)
- [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#)
- [UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2025](#)
- [Transforming the planet: Our vision for the future of environmental science](#)
- Our [recommendations to the UK Government](#) for transformative action on climate change

# Recap: Climate summits from 2021 to 2024

## COP26 Glasgow

Ahead of **COP26 in Glasgow** in 2021, there was a substantial drive to increase national commitments through the ‘ratcheting-up’ mechanism of the Paris Agreement.

Each signatory country makes such commitments through its **Nationally-Determined Contribution** (NDC), which sets out the ambition and commitment of each country to mitigate climate change and reduce its own contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

The result of the COP26 rise in NDC ambitions was significant:

- The projected temperature rise above pre-industrial levels shifted from more than 3 degrees to +2.4 degrees (in Celsius) through policies due to be set in place by 2030.
- Targets beyond 2030 were predicted to lower the projected rise in temperatures to +2.1 degrees.
- Including ambitions which had been stated without plans for delivery decreased that projection even further,

potentially lowering expected temperature rises to +1.8 degrees.

However, note that subsequent analysis has shown **less positive progress**. For any of those targets to be met, the NDCs and associated pledges would need to be implemented in full.

That implementation has not yet taken place, so considerable doubt remains about the world’s ability to limit the rise in temperatures to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

**Subsequent research** indicates that it will be necessary to reach net zero by 2034 to prevent global temperatures crossing that threshold.

COP26 also saw a range of multilateral agreements, such as the **Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests and Land Use**, the **Global Forest Finance Pledge**, and the **Methane Pledge** to cut emissions by 30% by 2030.

The summit also launched the **Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero**, which was designed to align more than 100 trillion USD towards investments in climate action.

Ultimately, the alliance has faced a number of challenges linked to the definitions and taxonomy underpinning those investments, which has somewhat undermined its capacity to achieve its stated impacts.

For more information:

- [IES COP26 Wrap-up](#)
- [International Energy Agency: Net Zero Roadmap](#)
- Research: [Size and uncertainty of remaining carbon budgets](#)
- [IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C](#)
- [UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2023](#)

## COP27 Sharm El-Sheikh

While COP26 raised the possibility of annual increases to NDC commitments, [COP27](#) ultimately failed to continue the momentum of COP26.

There was only a limited push by countries to increase NDC ambitions, leading to minimal progress on climate mitigation.

However, there were important developments on two significant issues:

1. **Loss and damage:** where meaningful conversations began to take place, with countries agreeing to establish a loss and damage fund. An adequate response to loss and damage is likely to be a prerequisite for future agreements about sustainable development and mitigation, so was an important step towards setting the stage for future negotiations.

2. **Adaptation:** which is still significantly under-resourced and under-appreciated, both compared to the overall adaptation needs, as well as compared to mitigation. COP27 saw an increase in funding and action on adaptation through agreements such as the [Sharm El-Sheikh Adaptation Agenda](#) and the [Global Shield Against Climate Risks](#).

2022 also saw the end of the [IPCC's Sixth Assessment cycle](#), with reports published by the science-policy panel's three working groups, and a final [Synthesis Report](#) published in 2023.

The reports cover the physical science basis for climate change, adaptation to the effects of climate change and the need for resilience, and mitigation of climate change, as well as analysis of what works, what doesn't, and how much different options are likely to cost.

For more information:

- [IES COP27 Wrap-up](#)
- [Sharm El-Sheikh Adaptation Agenda](#)
- [Analysis on IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report](#)

## COP28 Dubai

Negotiations at [COP28](#) faced a significant degree of criticism, partly owing to the UAE's role as host, but they were ultimately able to [reach a consensus](#) on a global transition away from fossil fuels.

This final agreement has been viewed by many as an important step towards meeting obligations under the Paris Agreement.

Despite this positive progress, further action is still needed to get the world back on track to address climate change.

In particular, the consensus does not amount to a commitment to phase out the use of fossil fuels completely.

As **highlighted by the COP28 President**, the true test of the consensus will be whether it is implemented in practice by national governments, prompting a just and urgent transition.

Some of the other outcomes of discussions at COP28 included:

- The conclusion of the **first Global Stocktake** to assess the world's progress towards addressing climate change
- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s **Roadmap to 1.5**
- The **Buildings Breakthrough** (as part of the Breakthrough Agenda) to link business, governments, and civil society to support the transition to climate resilient and near-zero emissions buildings as a global norm by 2030
- The **Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge** to triple the world's renewable energy generation capacity by 2030
- Negotiations towards an 'Adaptation Playbook' to support the financing and roll-out of the **Global Goal on Adaptation**
- Delivery of an agreement on the **Loss and Damage Fund** to provide supporting finance for the developing countries most vulnerable to historic climate change, with 700million USD of funding committed at COP28

- Initial steps towards a work programme on delivering a just transition

Discussions around climate adaptation at COP28 managed to secure a modest increase in finance, though high expectations were placed on COP29 to include a wider set of considerations, such as food security, energy security, and other risks.

For more information:

- **IES briefing on COP28**
- **COP28's summary** of global climate action during the summit (pdf)
- **Transforming the planet: Our vision for the future of environmental science**

## COP29 Baku

COP29 took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, characterising itself from an early stage as a '**finance COP**'. Unsurprisingly, there was a substantial ambition to use the summit to leverage a substantial increase in climate finance.

The main outcome of COP29 was the **New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance** (NCQG). COP29 did not produce a separate outcome declaration. The NCQG included:

- An increase in the goal for finance to developing countries from developed countries, from 100billion USD each year to 300billion USD, to be achieved by 2035.
- A further ambition to scale up finance to developing countries from public and private sources to 1.3trillion USD per year by 2035.

The NCQG was controversial, prompting the [Alliance of Small Island States](#) to walk out of negotiations, citing both the limited scale of the finance being discussed and the failure to achieve past finance goals.

[Research](#) published at the time suggested the need for far greater amounts of finance by emerging markets and developing countries, with 1trillion USD a year needed by 2025 and as much as 2.4trillion by 2030.

Other developments linked to COP29 included:

- The full [operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund](#), completing the work of previous climate summits.
- Further financial initiatives, including the [Climate Finance Action Fund](#) and the [Baku Initiative for Climate Finance, Investment and Trade](#).
- The finalisation of technical rules relating to carbon markets under [Article 6 of the Paris Agreement](#), laying the foundations for international coordination to reach national emissions reduction targets.
- A new [Global Energy Storage and Grids Pledge](#), aimed at agreeing a collective goal of deploying 1,500 GW of energy storage globally by 2030.
- More high-level pledges in energy mitigation, including the [COP29 Hydrogen Declaration](#) and the Pledge on [Green Energy Zones and Corridors](#), albeit with limited delivery commitments.
- Developments in adaptation, including the [Baku Initiative on Human Development for Climate Resilience](#), [Multisectoral Actions Pathways](#) (MAP) for Resilient and

Healthy Cities, [Water for Climate Action](#), [UNEP's Adaptation Gap Report 2024](#), and a [High-Level Dialogue on National Adaptation Plans](#).

- The completion of the [Enhanced Transparency Framework](#) (ETF) reporting tools, the inaugural report of the [Forum for Insurance Transition to Net Zero](#), and the first target setting protocol for the [Net Zero Export Credit Agencies Alliance](#).
- Early updates to Nationally-Determined Contributions from countries including the UK and Brazil, which were ultimately not followed by a significant rise in ambitions ahead of COP30.

For more information:

- [IES briefing on COP29](#)
- [New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance](#)
- [COP29 Presidential Action Letter](#)
- [UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2024](#)

# In the UK: The latest climate developments

In the UK, a steady stream of policy around the country's climate commitments has been announced since the 2024 General Election.

## Carbon Budget (and Growth) Delivery Plan

The [Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan](#) is the Government's primary policy mechanism for coordinating the delivery of its climate commitments.

While the plan's history is complex and linked to a series of legal challenges, its purpose is simple: creating a clear plan for delivering the UK's [Carbon Budget](#) commitments.

The original Carbon Budget Delivery Plan was updated in 2025, in the process becoming a 'Carbon Budget **and Growth** Delivery Plan'. Some of the updates to the plan included:

- [Legally-required commentary](#) on decision making and risk, providing greater clarity on how the Government views the uncertainty associated with policy delivery.
- Several additional documents, including a technical annex, a response to the (at the time) latest [report from the Climate Change Committee](#), and a [Methane Action Plan](#), which brings together existing policy commitments and their expected contributions.
- A clear focus on growth and sustainable investments, supported by a [prospectus for investors](#) setting out the case for increased private investment that aligns with the delivery plan.
- Revisions to many of the [projected contributions to reducing emissions](#) at a technical level.
  - In some cases, particularly in power generation and energy efficiency, a greater contribution is now expected based on the successes of implementation so far.
  - In other cases, such as for electric vehicle uptake and ambitions around peatland restoration and woodland creation, the projections are lower, indicating that policy has been less successful than expected at realising change or that focus has shifted.

Find out more by reading our analysis on the Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan for Essential Environment:

- Our insights on [what the plan needed to deliver](#).
- Our [commentary on the plan](#) in the context of COP30.

## Clean Energy Superpower

A large amount of the Government's policy agenda around the environment has focused on energy system decarbonisation, through its '[Mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower](#)', though the focus on cross-government Missions has waned in recent months.

The five key actions attached to the mission were:

- 'Set up Great British Energy to cut bills for good'
- 'Energy independence from dictators like Putin'
- '650,000 new high-quality jobs'
- 'Warmer homes to slash fuel poverty'
- 'Water companies forced to clean up our rivers'

In December 2024, then Prime Minister Keir Starmer [set out 'milestones'](#) for each of the missions, which are functionally non-binding targets.

For the clean energy mission, the milestone was to 'put the country on track for at least 95% clean power by 2030'.

The primary institution for delivering the Government's energy decarbonisation objectives is [Great British Energy](#), a publicly-owned energy company, primarily working with the [Department for Energy Security and Net Zero](#).

## England's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)

Most of the Government's broader approach to environmental policy is set out in its [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) (EIP), though the scope of most policies in the EIP is contained to England.

In December 2025, the new Government published [revisions to the EIP](#), providing new commitments and an overview of the current state of environmental policy and government plans over the coming years.

Key developments for climate in the EIP included:

- An updated [Goal 7 on climate change](#) which brings the commitments in the Carbon Budget (and Growth) Delivery Plan into the wider context of other systemic environmental changes sought by government policy.
- Additional commitments to report on carbon emissions from farming and agricultural practices, restore English peatland, and integrate climate resilience into decision making across the EIP's delivery.
- Commitments around the delivery of the Clean Power Mission, particularly on the deployment of energy infrastructure and offshore wind; efforts to promote behavioural change and business action;

and actions to integrate energy and biodiversity measures.

- Reiterating the commitment to a [Land Use Framework](#) to manage trade-offs for land use, including nature, with a specific role in informing spatial planning for LNRS and Spatial Development Strategies.
- Many other commitments and policies with implications for climate, energy, food systems, and land use.

Find out more by reading the [revised Environmental Improvement Plan for England](#) and our [briefing on land and nature policy](#).

## Across the devolved nations

While these developments are ongoing in England, policy has continued across the other three countries of the UK. Northern Ireland published its own [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) (EIP) in 2024, as a strategic document setting out Northern Ireland's approach to the environment.

It draws together existing strategies and policies and grounds the actions it contains in the context of sustainable development and natural capital.

DAERA's EIP also sets six Strategic Environmental Outcomes, which are the primary objectives of the plan.

One of these is 'Net Zero GHG Emissions & Improved Climate Resilience & Adaptability' and several of the others relate to climate change, such as 'Zero Waste & Highly Developed Circular Economy' and 'Sustainable Production & Consumption on Land & at Sea'.

Commitments highlighted by the EIP include:

- Legislation to ensure greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets for the years 2030 and 2040 are in line with the Climate Change Act's net zero by 2050 target.
- Completing the development of the [third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme](#) (NICCAP3) setting out actions for climate change adaptation.
- A [Just Transition Commission](#) to oversee the implementation of the just transition elements of the [Climate Change Act \(NI\) 2022](#) and to advise departments on just transition matters, to help ensure that Northern Ireland's pathway to net zero is fair for everyone.
- A Nature-based Solutions Plan to enhance ecological and climate resilience.
- Publication of the [Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy](#) to 2040.
- Achieving sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources including soils and water.

To find out more about Northern Ireland's environmental commitments, read the [Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland](#) and our [analysis for Essential Environment](#).

Since the start of 2024, Wales has been working to develop a framework for environmental governance following the UK's exit from the European Union. The primary policy instrument for these changes has been the [Environment \(Principles](#)

Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act, along with several consultations.

Broadly, these changes will deliver a governance framework that contains many of the classical elements of environmental governance, including targets, principles for decision making, and a governance body.

In the medium term, the Act will also lead to new biodiversity targets for Wales, with a sound foundation in the legislation.

## Land Use Framework for England

The **Land Use Framework** is a strategic policy intended to support multiple objectives for the use of land in England, including for energy production and several other forms of land use with implications for the UK's climate commitments.

The framework sets out a strategic-level approach to land use in England across three chapters, which broadly consider:

1. The Framework's goals;
2. The ways it can support better land use decisions; and
3. The ways it will be implemented.

Across those chapters, the substantive content of the framework includes:

- **Seven visions** for specific functions of land use in 2030 and 2050, including:
  - Housing;
  - Energy infrastructure and clean power;
  - Food production;

- Nature recovery;
- Resilient landscapes;
- Landscapes for water; and
- Communities.
- **Three insights** from the land use evidence base that inform the framework's approach:
  1. 'There is enough land to deliver our objectives';
  2. 'Changes should play to the strengths of the land'; and
  3. 'Cross-sector opportunities are key to efficiency and growth'.
- **Four principles** to drive land use decisions:
  - 'Multifunctionality';
  - 'Right use for the right place';
  - 'Future-ready decisions'; and
  - 'Adaptive by design'.
- **Five actions** intended to drive the implementation of the framework:
  - Consistent spatial plans to join-up decisions on land use;
  - Support for multifunctional and efficient land use (including through funding for farming, alignment across spatial priorities, and the diversification of land use finance);
  - Better use of technology and data to inform land use decisions; and

- Sharing responsibility for the stewardship of land (with specific reference to mayors and local authorities, the government estate, major landowners, landscape partnerships, and local communities)

While the framework is limited in how widely it will influence decisions about climate-related land use, much of its success will come down to its delivery, which will be crucial to determining if the framework actually leads to multifunctional solutions in practice.

For the full details of what the Land Use Framework includes, read our [briefing on the Land Use Framework](#) and our [analysis for Essential Environment](#).

If you are interested in how Scotland handles the same questions of strategic land strategy, read about [Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy](#). Throughout 2025, Scotland consulted on [proposals for land reform](#), culminating in the [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#).

While these proposals primarily affect rights around how land is used, they have some implications for community decision making around land use, which may have implications for biodiversity on land.

## The UK at COP30

After initially indicating he would not attend, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer went to COP30 and [spoke at the World Leaders' Summit](#) ahead of the formal negotiations.

In both the speech and an [article by the Secretary of State for Net Zero](#), the Government reiterated its commitment to

clean energy, climate action, and [giving a voice to nature](#), though formal commitments were limited.

This comes as a step back from the approach taken at COP29, where the UK was relatively active during the summit, including another [speech by the Prime Minister](#).

During his 2024 speech, the UK announced its new Nationally-Determined Contribution (NDC): to cut UK emissions 81% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2035.

The previous UK NDC was to reduce emissions by 68% by 2030, so the revised target represented a longer-term continuation of that goal, rather than a replacement of the previous objective. The UK brought the same NDC into COP30.

With a new UK Prime Minister, it is yet to be seen how the country will take the opportunity of COP31. Andy Burnham has indicated that [he will attend the summit](#), though specific UK commitments have not yet emerged.

Based on the Prime Minister's experience and stated goals, it is likely that he will emphasise a regional or city-led approach to climate, and that he will seek to embed economic considerations in any approach to climate action.

## UK climate resilience

Adaptation and resilience also require a significant degree of action to bring the UK back on track. As [recent extreme weather](#) has made the consequences of climate change more immediate than ever, the need to improve UK resilience is imperative.

The Climate Change Committee (CCC)'s 2026 [report on adaptation](#) concluded that “the UK was built for a climate that no longer exists today ... We need increased ambition from government, captured in clear objectives ... measurable targets ... delivery plans and sufficient resources.”

The [Third National Adaptation Programme](#) began in 2023 and will run until 2028, informed by the 2023 [National Risk Register](#).

The period covered by the programme will be critical for increasing UK resilience, which will require adequate funding and extensive support for implementation.

It must also inform the development of the Fourth National Adaptation Programme, which will need to take the threat of climate change far more seriously.

The UN Environment Programme's [Adaptation Gap Report 2025](#) provides a global perspective on the current state of adaptation to climate change.

For an overview of the current state of the UK's policy on climate change, as well as the key actions needed to keep the UK on track, you can [read our priorities for the UK Government](#) published by the IES ahead of the 2024 general election.

## Is the UK on track?

The UK has historically succeeded in meeting its climate targets, and although much more needs to be done, the UK still has an important role as a leading nation on climate change.

The [Climate Change Committee reported](#) in June 2026 that the UK “remains among a

leading group of countries demonstrating sustained emissions reduction”.

However, it also recognised that the UK “is not moving fast enough to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and to protect households and businesses” and that “17% of the required emissions reductions are not covered by ... policies and plans [in the [Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan](#)].”

If the Government can set out a robust delivery plan for meeting its 2030 NDC, it could bring the UK back on track.

The revised [Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan](#) was published in October 2025, with more details of how policies will ‘add up’ and further analysis of the risks associated with delivering policies.

As noted by the CCC, there are still significant gaps between ambitions and delivery, and the plan does not sufficiently deliver on linked objectives like climate adaptation and nature restoration.

Find out more in our September 2025 article on the [Carbon Budget Delivery Plan](#).

## How can we get back on track?

Since 2024, the IES has published [recommendations for the UK Government](#), including priorities for climate action. Some of our top [recommendations on climate change](#) include:

1. Committing to a ‘transformative change’ approach to reshaping unsustainable systems, addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution together.

2. Taking an integrated approach to climate adaptation alongside climate mitigation, bringing resilience funding and support in line with the scale of the UK's adaptation challenge.
3. Delivering ambitious action to mitigate UK emissions, closing the gap between current commitments and a plan aligned with 1.5°C, with explicit implementation plans.
4. Working with communities and NGOs on a 'just transition' away from fossil fuels which fairly distributes costs and benefits so that no communities are left behind.
5. Working with businesses to unlock private finance and drive corporate sustainability that supports a nature-positive future.

The **full report** sets out how those recommendations can deliver the Government's missions and how they could be delivered in practice, with additional advice on implementing each policy.

As policy implementation remains a key challenge, the role of environmental professionals in securing delivery will be vital.

The **Environmental Policy Implementation Community** (EPIC) is a key network for professionals to share their experiences and speak with a single voice calling for ambitious and deliverable policy.

If you require further information about these recommendations, or about the state of UK climate policy, please contact Joseph Lewis, IES Head of Policy, at [joseph@the-ies.org](mailto:joseph@the-ies.org).

**“A new UK Prime Minister is an opportunity for a new, locally-led era of climate policy ... It’s sorely needed: there are still significant gaps between ambitions and delivery.”**

Joseph Lewis, IES Head of Policy



# Frequently asked questions and key concepts

## How certain is the science behind climate change?

The [IPCC Working Group I Report](#) outlines the physical science underpinning climate change (and includes a [Summary for Policymakers](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions](#)). The IPCC reports directly comment on the certainty behind each scientific claim.

A more general environmental perspective which addresses the need for transformative change is provided in the UN Environment Programme's [7th Global Environment Outlook](#).

The role of human-induced climate change in increased vulnerability and risk is covered in [IPCC Working Group II's Report](#), and the extent of our efforts to address climate change is covered in [IPCC Working Group III's Report](#), both of which express the confidence behind each scientific claim.

For a complete overview of the latest climate science, see the full [Synthesis Report from the IPCC](#), and its [Summary for Policymakers](#).

## What could the future look like?

Presenting a [positive vision of the future](#) is essential to addressing the concerns of those who are worried about climate change.

The IPPR think tank has created a [summary of case studies](#) on 'just transition' and an [analysis of the opportunities](#) for communities.

More information on the risks if we do not act to address climate change is available in the Climate Change Committee's [2026 Climate Change Risk Report](#) and the UK Government's [2023 National Risk Register](#).

The IES has set out an evidence-informed [vision for the future of environmental science](#), supporting the transformation towards a sustainable society.

## Where do we need further action?

The report from [IPCC Working Group III](#) evaluates mitigation efforts so far. The 2026

CCC Progress Report also identifies gaps in current UK climate plans.

In 2024, the IES set out priorities for the UK Government between 2024 and 2029, including for climate action in the UK.

On the global level, the IES position statement on COP30 sets out clear messages for action, and our report ‘Transforming the Planet’ sets out a vision for what still needs to happen to achieve a sustainable future for humanity.

## Is there a trade-off between the economy and climate action?

It is possible to address climate change while securing sustainable development and multiple social and economic benefits.

The UK Government’s Independent Review of Net Zero described net zero as ‘the economic opportunity of the 21st Century’.

Both the Imperial Grantham Institute’s analysis on climate change and the economy, and New Climate Economy’s report on ‘accelerating climate action for inclusive economic growth’ provide further evidence to support that perspective.

The World Bank’s Climate Change Action Plan acknowledges that “trade-offs ... including transition costs ... can be reduced” but that “The cost of not addressing climate change is already immense and will only get more expensive.”

By comparison, Swiss Re reports on the costs to the global economy of inaction on climate change. The World Economic

Forum CEO guide on ‘the cost of inaction’ is clear: “inaction comes at a cost ... early movers are already realising tangible benefits.”

The 2006 Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change also provides useful context, though note that the situation and our understanding has significantly developed over the past 20 years.

Research from the Green Finance Institute indicates that the UK could also be 12% poorer in the 2030s due to biodiversity loss and degradation, a bigger hit than either the 2008 financial crisis or COVID-19.

Ultimately, the message is simple: doing more costs less.

In our 2024 message to the new UK Government, the IES set out priority recommendations to deliver an approach to environmental crises which will lead to thriving people, a healthy economy, and a flourishing environment.

## Key concepts

### Mitigation

Action to slow, reduce, stop, prevent, or reverse climate change. Typically mitigation involves addressing the sources of climate change, including by reducing carbon emissions.

Find out more about climate mitigation.

### Adaptation

Action to prepare for the effects of climate change, such as increased resilience against consequences of climate change including flood risk, food security, energy security,

and the potential effects of other climate vulnerabilities.

**Find out more** about climate adaptation.

### **Vulnerability**

The extent of exposure to the risks created by climate change. For example, a community is likely to be vulnerable to water stress created by climate change if it has limited access to water, or if it has poor resilience against the consequences of water stress.

### **Loss and damage**

‘Loss and damage’ is a phrase used to refer to the harms caused by human-caused climate change, many of which have already taken place or can no longer be prevented.

These can include loss of lives, livelihoods, territory, ecosystem services, social and cultural identity, or any other financial or non-financial losses caused by the impacts of climate change.

Further action is still needed to properly address loss and damage, including the extent to which the historically most-polluting nations are responsible for reparations or financial restitution.

### **UNFCCC**

The **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change** (UNFCCC) is an international agreement which commits signatory governments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to address climate change (and is also the body of the United Nations responsible for enacting the Convention).

With the support of the COP presidency host governments, the UNFCCC is responsible for organising COP31 and similar summits.

### **COP**

Conferences of the Parties (COPs) are annual meetings of the UNFCCC held to support negotiations between parties to the Convention and coordinate ongoing international action on climate change.

### **IPCC**

The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** (IPCC) is a body of the United Nations which brings together expertise from around the world to provide objective and comprehensive information about climate change.

The **IPCC’s sixth assessment report**, published in 2023, comprises reports from three working groups on:

1. **The science behind the current state of the climate**
2. **Adaptation and vulnerability** (What are we doing to address the consequences of climate change?)
3. **Mitigation** (What are we doing to reduce emissions?)

### **CCC**

The **Climate Change Committee** (CCC) is the UK’s independent body responsible for advising the UK on climate change and emissions reduction targets.

It was established by the **Climate Change Act** and reports to Parliament on climate mitigation and adaptation.

# Other relevant links and resources

## How to engage with policy

Policy is increasingly relevant to the work of environmental professionals and having engaged scientists will be vital to creating a [future where people and nature thrive](#).

The IES publishes primers to help member develop their skills around engaging with environmental policy:

- [Policy analysis and awareness](#)
- [Evidence-informed policy making](#)
- [Cost-benefit analysis for policy](#)
- [Influencing the UK Parliament](#)
- [Cross-departmental policy](#)

Specific case studies for engaging with environmental policy are also provided in '[Speaking up for science](#)' which provides examples of how professionals can engage with environmental policy effectively.

The IES also [offers training](#) to help professionals learn more about policy and how they can engage with policy decisions. On-demand training sessions are available for sign-ups [on the IES website](#).

## Other links and resources

Find out more about this topic:

- [COP31 Provisional Programme](#)
- [UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2025](#)
- [Global Mutirão](#) (COP30 final outcome)

Read other relevant briefings and resources from the IES:

- Position statement: [Delivering change in a complex world](#)
- Our 2021 [Manifesto for Transformative Change](#)
- [Recommendations for government](#)
- Our briefing on [COP17 on biodiversity](#)
- [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#) (EPIC)

To support our work, consider [joining the IES](#) or [becoming an Affiliate](#).

Get in touch with Joseph Lewis, Head of Policy ([joseph@the-ies.org](mailto:joseph@the-ies.org)) to let us know your thoughts for future briefings, or with your suggestions for content.

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