

COP (Conference of the Parties)

[COP](#) is the main decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It includes representatives of all the countries that are signatories (or 'Parties') to the UNFCCC. COP assesses the effects of measures introduced by the Parties to limit climate change against the overall goal of the UNFCCC.

UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change)

The [UNFCCC](#) is an agreement between 197 countries of the United Nations. The agreement is to “stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system.”

How often does COP take place?

COP happens every year, unless otherwise agreed by the parties. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 COP was postponed until 2021.

[COP26](#) was hosted by the UK in Glasgow, from 1 to 12 November 2021, while Italy organised a range of [pre-COP sessions and events in Milan](#). The UK continues to hold the COP26 presidency until COP27. [COP27](#) takes place from 7-18 November 2022 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

What happens at COP?

COP meetings primarily revolve around negotiations and debates. The aim is to review progress towards the overall goal of the UNFCCC: to limit climate change.

Sometimes, COP will result in new agreements and treaties, often with the goal of refining targets, agreeing rules or forming binding treaties, like the Kyoto Protocol.

A key part of COP meetings is to review the contributions of each of the Parties, detailing how they are tackling climate change. Members who are also party to the Paris Agreement will submit [Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDCs\)](#). These are plans by each country to reduce their emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Taken together, these actions will determine whether we meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Who goes to COP?

The attendees at COP are representatives of governments or 'observer' organisations, like charities. The United Nations manages all attendees at COP.

The 197 Parties to the UNFCCC are broadly organised in [five regional groups](#):

- Africa
- Asia
- Eastern Europe
- Latin America and the Caribbean
- Western Europe and Other States (including Australia, Canada and the USA)

The COP presidency and host of the next COP meeting usually rotate between these groups. These regional groups are also represented on the [UNFCCC Bureau](#), which acts in an advisory role to the current COP President.

Various other groupings of parties, such as ones representing Arab States, the European Union and Small Island states, also exist within the UNFCCC. These groups may meet to agree on their negotiating positions and common interests.

What is the Paris Agreement?

The Paris Agreement is the first legally-binding global treaty on climate change agreed in COP21 in Paris in 2015. Since 2015, under the Paris Agreement, almost all countries in the world have committed to:

- Keep the rise in global average temperature to ‘well below’ 2°C, and ideally 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels.
- Strengthen the ability to adapt to climate change and build resilience.
- Align finance flows with ‘a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development’.

The Paris Agreement has a ‘bottom-up’ approach where countries individually decide by how much they will reduce their national emissions each year.

They communicate these targets to the UNFCCC secretariat in the form of ‘nationally determined contributions’, or ‘NDCs’, which they have agreed to revise every five years. This five-year cycle of increasing ambition is known as the ‘ratchet mechanism’. Read CISL’s briefing on the implications of the [Paris Agreement for business](#).