

# COP26: limiting global temperature rises to 1.5°C

General debate, 21 October 2021



## Background

In November, the UK will host the [UN climate summit](#) in Glasgow (COP26). This is a vital opportunity for concerted global action on limiting global temperature rises to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, in line with the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#), to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of climate change, as outlined by the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#).

As hosts, the UK can lead the way both domestically and globally to meet this moment. [Climate diplomacy](#) must therefore be a top priority for the government, both in the run up to COP to ensure a successful outcome, and after COP to ensure momentum is kept up and climate pledges are fulfilled.

## Driving action at the global level

A key benchmark of a successful COP is delivering meaningful progress on limiting global warming to 1.5°C at the end of the century, compared to pre-industrial levels. According to the UN, the world is currently on track to [2.7 degrees of warming](#) this century. Achieving progress at COP26 should include:

- As many governments as possible submitting ambitious updated [Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDCs\)](#) which, combined, can put the world on track to 1.5°C.
- Wealthier, developed countries honouring the promise made in 2009 to mobilise \$100 billion per year by 2020 to support climate action in countries most at risk from the impacts of climate change.
- Restoring natural ecosystems, one of the cheapest and immediately implementable climate mitigation measures, which also provides ecosystem services to people and increases resilience to the effects of climate change.
- Ensuring join-up between national climate policy and nature policy as each of the four UK nations develops its National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) following [COP15](#) talks in 2022.

It is important to note that wealthier countries are responsible for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions that have occurred since the industrial revolution, even though other countries are now becoming high polluters. When looking at total emissions since 1850, the UK is the [eighth largest contributor of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions](#) globally, behind the US, China, Russia, Brazil, Indonesia, Germany and India (in that order).

## Delivering domestically

The UK has a strong track record of climate ambition: it has reduced emissions by [41 per cent since 1990](#), including international aviation and shipping, but there is still a long way to go and major areas of the economy where the government is not making enough progress. Green Alliance's [Net zero policy tracker](#) has highlighted that existing government plans only add up to just 24 per cent of emissions cuts needed over the fifth carbon budget (the period between 2028-32).<sup>1</sup>

There are practical and affordable policies that can close this gap. The heat and buildings strategy and net zero strategy, expected imminently, are key opportunities to put the UK on track to net zero. However, the government must review progress and update policy throughout the remainder of this parliament.

- The government must set out concrete and ambitious policies to cut emissions from buildings, transport, power and industry, and in which nature plays a central role as a cost effective climate mitigation tool.
- The upcoming net zero strategy should outline expected emission savings for each sector of the economy against which progress can be tracked; government should commit to reviewing progress frequently to ensure the right policies are in place and that each sector is on track.
- The government should have a plan for financing the transition that unites public and private finance.
- The government should end subsidies for oil and gas production, redirecting investment towards ensuring a strong renewables sector in affected areas, and into retraining programmes to ensure that oil and gas workers are able to transition into these new industries.
- Following the Climate Change Committee's (CCC's) recommendations in the [sixth carbon budget](#) and unlocking [new nature jobs](#) by fulling restoring peat and increasing afforestation rates.

The 2021 spending review is a crucial opportunity for the Treasury to take decisive action on green spending. In addition to meeting climate targets, a spending review that invests in the green recovery is critical to meeting government objectives such as driving job creation, skills development and levelling up.

To support industry, innovation and consumers, the spending review should:

- Provide the initial capital investment that stimulates green markets and jobs.
- At minimum commit to doubling public investment levels on net zero across the board, a level commensurate with the CCC's assessment of UK investment's investment needs, which is frontloaded to lower the fiscal burden and maximise the co-benefits of the transition.
- Set regulation that ensures industry adapts, innovates, and provides value for public money in decarbonisation.
- Reform government policy making to prevent waste in the system (such as the financing of assets likely to be stranded in future as a result of environmental imperatives)

The costs of inaction on addressing the climate crisis are far greater than the costs of action. Acting now will lower costs in the long run, with the Office of Budget Responsibility highlighting the benefits of early action and investment, stating that

the fiscal cost of achieving net zero by 2050 will be twice as high to the UK if the government delays acting until 2030.

The transition to net zero will bring a better quality of life to UK residents and co-benefits like improved health and wellbeing. Investment in a net zero future could support up to [1.7 million jobs by 2030](#), half of which are likely to be located in the North, Midlands and Scotland.

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<sup>i</sup> Note that Green Alliance's [Net zero policy tracker](#) is based on assessment of the fifth carbon budget aligned with the CCC's balanced net zero pathway, which is more ambitious than the government's currently legislated carbon budget for that same period.