



## 1. COP26 – What is it and why is it important?

The COP or the Council of the Parties is the annual summit of all states under the UN's main climate treaty, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is essentially a series of meetings where all state representatives come together and seek to reach agreement on common actions to reduce polluting emissions and deal with climate impacts.

This year the 26<sup>th</sup> COP meeting is taking from the 31<sup>st</sup> of October to the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 in Glasgow. It usually takes place every year but the 2020 meeting was delayed due to Covid-19. Thousands of government representatives, negotiators, civil society organisations, activists, journalists and businesses will be attending. The Taoiseach will attend the World Leader's Summit from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> of November. Several other Ministers, including Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan, as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Heritage are all expected to attend during the second week of COP.

This might sound like a standard Government process but there are huge challenges and opportunities. Firstly, COPs are complicated affairs as there are scores of interlinked negotiations happening at one time. Some of these are highly technical and others are hugely sensitive in terms of who should be required to do what and crucially by when. Despite the pressing need for urgent action, progress is often at a snail's pace and making sense of the different negotiating strands is far from easy. Many of the differences arising at COP relate to questions of equity, historic responsibility and capability to act. In essence, the climate crisis is deeply unjust: developing states in the global South who have done least to cause the climate crisis are being hit the hardest, while developed states are simply not doing their fair share to combat the crisis. However, for better or worse the annual COP meetings are the main international forum for collective action on the climate crisis.

The Paris Climate Agreement provided for new procedures for collective action, on how states must report on action, on how to hold each other accountable and on how to fund climate action particularly for vulnerable states. Since the Paris Agreement, the COP summits have focused on working out the details of these follow-up procedures and actions. Some of these have yet to be ironed out and Friends of the Earth has prepared recommendations to Government on some of the key gaps (see Section 3 below).

## 2. Is it all about governments?

These COP meetings are not only important because of the international negotiations. They are also a massive opportunity for mobilisation, activism and learning. In other words, even if there was no spotlight on what happens inside negotiating rooms, we would still care because this is an opportunity to highlight the importance of climate action and climate justice to the public and to push our politicians and decision-makers. Whether you are in Glasgow or at home in Ireland, now is

the time for collective action at every level – in your community, school, workplace and with your friends and family (see section 6 below).

Across the world, we are seeing a new wave of resistance, global solidarity and grassroots organising. Thousands of people from around the world, from civil society representatives, to youth groups and researchers, will be travelling to Glasgow to demand more from decision-makers, to collaborate, to protest and to learn. Friends of the Earth will be represented in Glasgow and engaging in the [Global Day of Action on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November](#) and the [People's Summit for Climate Justice](#) from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> of November (see more below).

Yet attendance at Glasgow is beyond reach for many. Friends of the Earth has been clear that climate justice demands that those hit hardest by the climate crisis must be represented in Glasgow or COP26 will not be legitimate. However, UK Government requirements and inequalities in the vaccine roll-out between rich and poor means that representatives from countries who are most impacted by the climate crisis will be excluded from the COP. Last month Friends of the Earth joined with 1500 other civil society organisations to support calls to postpone the COP until it's safe for people from all countries to participate. The inability for COP26 to be held in a safe, accessible manner is a result of the “vaccine apartheid” which the UK, US, EU, Norway and Switzerland have imposed by opposing a World Trade Organisation patent waiver (TRIPS waiver) on COVID-19 vaccines and refusing to support technology transfer or manufacturing programs that would enable access to vaccines in the Global South.

### 3. COP negotiations and Friends of the Earth Recommendations

We consider the COP to be a key moment to drive system change. Now is the time to put pressure on Governments and to join the fight for climate justice. Climate justice demands that states most responsible for climate crisis, including Ireland, must do their fair share to reduce emissions. Climate justice also demands that rich, high emitting countries must provide climate finance to support climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries and compensate for irreversible climate impacts (loss and damage) that these countries are already suffering from.

Friends of the Earth is calling for the principle of climate justice to be respected in the following areas:

#### 1) Climate Pledges - go beyond the rhetoric of striving for 1.5°C

It is now abundantly clear that governments must lead urgent action to stop catastrophic heating of the planet. Global temperature rise must be limited to 1.5°C– anything above this means that the climate crisis is no longer just disastrous, but catastrophic. Developed states must now go beyond the rhetoric of striving for 1.5°C. This means putting in place clear plans and actions to do their fair share and reduce their emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement while respecting the principles of climate justice and a just transition.

Under the Paris Agreement, every country must contribute to emissions reductions and set out targets (or pledges) for doing so and increase these every 5 years. All countries were supposed to submit updated and enhanced pledges for action by the end of 2020. However, many of the world's largest emitters missed the deadline or just repeated old targets. UN [analysis](#) has shown that the pledges submitted so far would lead to catastrophic global heating of close to 3°C. Globally we are now at 1.2°C Celsius of dangerous warming which is already having devastating impacts around the world.

The US, Canada, the EU and the UK have formally submitted improved plans to the UN. Ireland forms part of the EU's pledge which is for "at least 55% net emission reductions by 2030". This is a more ambitious target but it is not a sufficient or a fair approach to a 1.5°C pathway.

Several states (including Ireland) have also put forward national 'net zero' targets. However, the 'net' (as opposed to 'real') zero can be used obscure and delay climate action through loopholes and false solutions, like carbon offsetting, as shown by [Friends of the Earth International](#). The long term nature of net zero targets can also push action, and accountability for action, down the road, if these long term targets are not accompanied by short term targets. Thus, there is an urgent need for short term targets focused on real emission reductions.

To make matters even more complicated, in order to reach agreement certain elements of obligations of the Paris Agreement were left deliberately vague. The result is that the pledges submitted by states [do not have the same format](#), are not clear on how they will phase out fossil fuels and often have differing scope and metrics.

Ireland's new [Climate Action and Low Carbon Development \(Amendment\) Act](#) includes a commitment to net-zero emissions no later than 2050 and to a 51% reduction in emissions by the end of this decade. It also provides for two new carbon budgets (to be reviewed and agreed by Government very soon) and a new Climate Action Plan, which will be published by Government in early November. These new targets are not in line with Ireland's 1.5°C commitment under the Paris Agreement and fall short of Ireland's global fair share of emission reductions. And at present, Ireland remains the second highest emitters per capita in the EU. However, Ireland's new Climate Act is a significant improvement from Ireland's previous Climate Act in terms of climate ambition and provides strong accountability mechanisms. It is now essential that Ireland prioritises immediate substantive measures which supports a phase out of polluting emissions across all sectors, while supporting the most vulnerable and rejecting any reliance on offsets or negative emissions technologies. Climate action must focus on meeting the basic needs of the most vulnerable and improve their quality life. For example, in terms of our buildings that means prioritising funding for retrofitting and having the best electric heating systems for those most vulnerable to fuel poverty.

## 2) Fossil Fuel Phase Out – Ireland must be leader at international level

Friends of the Earth is clear that the fossil fuel era must be brought to an end. We need to keep fossil fuels in the ground. That means no new fossil fuel investments and infrastructure at home or abroad. We need a just transition for workers, which includes a shift away from polluting industries and investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency to create unionised green jobs and services. At the very least half of all existing gas reserves need to stay in the ground unburned to keep global heating to less than 2C, more if we are serious about the Paris goal of 1.5C. The International Energy Agency in their recent analysis of achieving net zero emissions globally by 2050 concluded that "beyond projects already committed as of 2021, there are no new oil and gas fields approved for development...Net zero means a huge decline in the use of fossil fuel".

In recent years Ireland has taken some positive steps with laws to ban fracking and to make the state investment fund pull its money out of fossil fuels. And we are phasing out the burning of coal and peat to make electricity. Now we need to make sure we don't get hooked on gas instead. A year ago Leo Varadkar and Micheál Martin produced a letter to their Green Party counterparts which noted "Both of our parties accept that as we move towards carbon neutrality, it does not make sense to build new large scale fossil fuel infrastructure such as liquefied natural gas import terminals". The Government introduced legislation to prevent new licences for oil and gas exploration in Irish waters in July this year. There is already a legislative ban on fracked gas in Ireland since 2017. There is also legislation in place to make the state investment fund pull its money out of fossil fuels.

However, there is a long way to go. Research [has shown](#) that Governments still plan to produce more than twice the amount of fossil fuels in 2030 than would be consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C. In Ireland fossil fuels accounted for 87% of all the energy used in Ireland in 2019, [Ireland's fossil fuel subsidies](#) were estimated at €2.4billion in 2019, the mandates of relevant public bodies [are not aligned with climate commitments](#), and the risk of fossil fuel lock-in, particularly due to proposed new data centres, remains very real. Governments should [require](#) state-owned energy companies to disclose their spending, project plans, emissions, and climate-related financial risks.

Although the Paris Agreement does not directly address the phase out of fossil fuels, at COP 26 several states will be coming forward with new commitments and collective actions related to ending reliance on fossil fuels and ending fossil fuel subsidies.

One such initiative is the [Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance](#) (BOGA) which has been established by the Governments of Denmark and Costa Rica and will be officially launched at COP26. BOGA is a diplomatic initiative to bring together states that have ended licensing for new oil and gas exploration and production. It is the first such initiative to recognise the need for governments to manage the phase out of fossil fuel production in order to respond to the climate emergency and align with Paris Agreement commitments. It is understood that BOGA will seek to address a clear process to phase out oil and gas production for both developed and developing countries. It will provide a forum for shared dialogue in order to support countries in their energy transition, particularly those most reliant on fossil fuels.

**Friends of the Earth believes that it is strategic, appropriate and opportune for Ireland to join the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance in the run up to COP26.** Ireland has a clear opportunity to demonstrate international climate leadership through membership of the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance. We are asking that the Irish Government builds on previous successes and takes this opportunity to now join the alliance.

### 3) Women's Empowerment – real climate action means women at the centre of decision-making

As shown by [Friends of the Earth](#) and most recently by other leading NGOs such as Trócaire, the climate crisis is impacting women disproportionately while women's empowerment is key to ensuring strong climate action at every level. [Research has shown](#) that disasters resulting from the climate emergency fall greatest on women. And, while women face greater barriers to participation, women are often leading the way in responding to the climate crisis and corporate human rights abuses. Organisations like the Mary Robinson Foundation has [shown](#) that empowering women at any and all levels leads to better climate outcomes. That is why Friends of the Earth at the COP is calling for women to be put at centre of decision-making on climate action from national to local level.

### 4) Climate Finance – prioritise funding for adaptation and Loss & Damage

#### (i) Climate finance for adaptation and mitigation

The other big issue at COP26 is financing climate action and adaptation. Without finance from rich countries, who are responsible for the vast majority of climate change, it will not be possible for poorer countries to implement action to both reduce emissions and adapt to climate change impacts.

In 2009 rich countries agreed to deliver \$100 billion per year by 2020 in climate finance to fund climate mitigation and adaptation for developing countries. Every COP since 2009 has reiterated the \$100 billion/year goal, but over time the language has been watered down and this \$100 billion

per year goal has not been delivered. (This figure may sound big but it pales in comparison to global military expenditure which in 2020 was estimated at just under \$2 trillion or \$2,000 billion). It is also important to point out that this figure of \$100 billion per year by 2020 was politically derived, it was not based on real needs, which are much greater. In fact the UNFCCC has recently estimated that developing countries would require [almost \\$6 trillion by 2030](#) in order to be able to deliver just 40% of their conditionally pledged climate action plans under the Paris Agreement.

Although Ireland stands out for the quality and impact of its funding for international development and humanitarian assistance, Ireland's climate finance remains inadequate and below comparable EU states. Ireland's global fair share of climate finance should be around \$475 million a year but we are falling well short of this. In 2019 Ireland contributed just over [\\$93 million to international climate action, which equates to roughly one fifth of our fair share](#). By failing to contribute to our fair share of climate finance, the Irish Government is undermining the Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney's stated ambition for Ireland to take a leadership role on climate mitigation and adaptation. Ireland is also letting down small island nations in the Caribbean and Pacific who voted for Ireland to be given a temporary UN security council seat, believing that Ireland would support climate resilience.

The Paris Agreement requires specific action on adaptation to climate impacts, including financial support for global South countries, but action to date has been unsatisfactory. COP26 needs to secure progress towards a new Global Goal for Adaptation, including ensuring that 50% of climate finance goes towards adaptation. We need a clear Global Goal for Adaptation, with proper transparency and monitoring and this funding must be new and additional, i.e. not just repackaging existing commitments.

## (ii) Finance for Loss and Damage

The failure of rich countries to cut their emissions to date means that some climate impacts have got to the point where they cannot be adapted to. Examples include loss of lives, livelihoods, homes, territory, culture and identity, ecosystem services and biodiversity which are permanent and cannot be reversed. Policy-makers and experts refer to these climate impacts as "Loss and Damage".

Climate justice movements are calling for a COP26 decision to provide sufficient and needs-based Loss and Damage finance, on the basis of equity, historical responsibility and the polluters pays principle. A process to identify the scale of funding needed to address Loss and Damage as well as suitable mechanisms to deliver the finance to developing countries must be developed. A key COP26 test will be whether it ensures the rapid and effective operationalisation of the Santiago Network, the purpose of which is to catalyse technical assistance on loss and damage, in line with the needs of countries who are most impacted by the climate crisis.

Trócaire has published a [new report](#), which deals with Loss and Damage, among other issues, and is calling for the establishment of a Loss and Damage finance facility with new and additional Loss and Damage finance.

## 4. Carbon Markets - carbon markets have no role to play in responding to the climate emergency

As noted by [Friends of the Earth Scotland](#), one of the main issues at COP 26 will be the Paris Agreement's Article 6 which deals with voluntary cooperation between parties to help achieve emissions reductions. While this might sound positive, it opens the door to global markets that would let polluters keep emitting for a price, either through trading or offsetting. The fact that fossil fuel companies, such as Shell, are strongly in favour of carbon markets, should by itself raise alarm bells.

Article 6 is the last part of the Paris Agreement on which more detailed rules need to be finalised and there will be huge pressure on COP26 to secure an outcome. Indeed, the success or failure of the UK Presidency could be assessed on it. This pressure increases the danger of bad rules getting through.

[Friends of the Earth International](#) has undertaken detailed analysis regarding the dangers of allowing companies to choose cheap trading and offsetting options, while continuing to use fossil fuels and increase polluting emissions. Sadhbh O'Neill from DCU has recently [highlighted](#) that 'so far there is little evidence that international emissions trading mechanisms have delivered meaningful reductions in greenhouse gas emissions' and also outlined the major risks of companies essentially looking to pay 'for the moral right to pollute'.

Friends of the Earth is clear that carbon markets have no role to play in responding to the climate emergency. Several NGOs and experts are increasingly concerned that negotiations on Article 6 will further open up the use of carbon credits. These are intended to allow companies to trade permits for carbon emissions which in theory should provide for actual mitigation measures elsewhere. However, the risk of convoluted credit systems is that for all the trading, real emission reductions are either unclear or kicked to touch. Offsetting and trading schemes have also been associated with serious human rights abuses and land grabs, particularly impacting Indigenous peoples. Opposing carbon markets will be a major focus of climate justice movements at COP26.

## 5. Transparency – ensure clear reporting on emissions and pledges and support developing countries

In addition to the above issues, there are still other technical aspects of implementing the Paris Agreement that must be negotiated (sometimes referred to as the 'Paris rulebook'). The Enhanced Transparency Framework is one such issue. This is a set of reporting requirements that obliges countries to report on their emissions and pledges, and the support they have given or received. While the ETF will apply to all states, developing countries point out that the differentiated nature of their commitments and capacities mean that there should be both flexibility and enhanced support to help them meet these new requirements.

## 6. How can I get involved in the Irish Climate Movement?

"Screwing in a new system is more important than screwing in a lightbulb". As Professor Katherine Hayhoe and Bill McKibben have said, the most important thing individuals can do is ORGANIZE, i.e. come together as a family, as friends, as a team in work, as a residence group, as a community, as a village or town, and directly demand climate action.

This is not about decision-makers putting responsibility on you, this is an opportunity for you to place demand on decision makers for systemic change. We need collective action, campaigning and activism to demand the right changes from Government

Activists and organisations have come together under the umbrella of the [COP26 Coalition](#) to organise around COP26. There are public events not only in Glasgow but also in Ireland. Friends of the Earth will be attending the Dublin march for the Global Day of Action on November 6<sup>th</sup> along with several other climate and environmental organisations. See more information on how you can get [involved in action in Dublin, Cork or in your local area here](#). You can also participate in the

[Peoples' Summit](#), a global gathering for climate justice that is being organised by the COP26 Coalition from 7-10 November 2021. It includes online events that you can join from home – check out the programme and [register for individual events here](#).

Joining a local climate campaign group is a great way to get involved in the climate movement. One Future is the network of local climate campaign groups supported by Friends of the Earth and Stop Climate Chaos which set up before the General Election last year. It is the network to join if you want to take the next step in your climate campaigning after emailing your TDs. It connects you to other people in your area concerned about climate change and gives you the chance to work together to do something about it. Join the [One Future mailing list here](#) to be connected with your local group and to receive emails about opportunities to take climate action. The Friends of the Earth website also has a map of grassroots environmental groups in areas all over the country which you can follow or join.

Follow the likes of [Friends of the Earth](#), [Stop Climate Chaos](#) (and its member organisations) and the [COP26 Coalition](#) on Twitter and other social media platforms or sign up to their mailing lists to get the latest information. To join live updates from Irish people attending COP26, join [Stop Climate Chaos's special COP26 email update list here](#).

## 7. Resources

Several organisations have produced detailed briefings and further information on the issues raised above. See a selection of these below:

<https://cop26coalition.org/>

<https://climatenetwork.org/cop26/>

<https://foe.scot/cop26-resources/>

<https://foe.scot/campaign/climate-action/un-climate-summit-glasgow-2020-cop26/>

<https://www.foei.org/resources/publications/chasing-carbon-unicorns-carbon-markets-net-zero-report>

<https://www.foei.org/resources/carbon-markets-briefing-cop25>

<https://www.foei.org/resources/publications/publications-by-subject/climate-justice-energy-publications/briefing-notes-for-cop26-carbon-markets-article-6-and-net-zero>

[https://www.foei.org/press\\_releases/friends-of-the-earth-international-at-the-glasgow-cop26](https://www.foei.org/press_releases/friends-of-the-earth-international-at-the-glasgow-cop26)

[https://www.foei.org/press\\_releases/ahead-of-un-climate-summit-friends-of-the-earth-international-spotlights-how-nature-based-solutions-is-being-used-to-disguise-climate-trashing-business-as-usual](https://www.foei.org/press_releases/ahead-of-un-climate-summit-friends-of-the-earth-international-spotlights-how-nature-based-solutions-is-being-used-to-disguise-climate-trashing-business-as-usual)

[https://www.foei.org/press\\_releases/friends-of-the-earth-international-at-the-glasgow-cop26](https://www.foei.org/press_releases/friends-of-the-earth-international-at-the-glasgow-cop26)

<https://www.foe.ie/blog/2021/09/17/cop-on-why-should-young-people-care-about-our-planet-and-cop26/>

<https://demandclimatejustice.org/2021/10/21/cop26-background/>

<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/glasgow-climate-change-conference>

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/un-climate-talks-key-outcomes-from-the-june-2021-virtual-conference>

<https://www.cidse.org/2021/10/13/climate-justice-in-the-context-of-covid-19/>

<https://www.cidse.org/2021/10/26/cop26-urgency-transformation-and-action/>

<https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2021/10/28/1256349-cop26-summit-climate-change-explainer/?s=03>

<https://productiongap.org/2021report/>