



The BMJ

zhussain@bmj.com

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2022;379:o2391<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.o2391>

Published: 13 October 2022

CLIMATE EMERGENCY

COP27: What can we expect from this year's climate change conference?

As the biggest climate conference in the world begins once more, *The BMJ* explains the outcome of last year's and whether this one will bring any new action for health

Zainab Hussain, Elisabeth Mahase

What, and when, is COP27?

The 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) will take place in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from 6 to 18 November 2022. It will be attended by government representatives and observer organisations, such as charities, from around the world.

What happened at COP26?

In Glasgow, Scotland, between 31 October and 12 November 2021, COP26 saw 50 countries commit to creating climate resilient, low carbon, and sustainable health systems, with 14 (including the UK) setting a target of net zero emissions by 2050.¹

At the summit 100 countries, which together account for about 85% of the world's forests, promised to stop deforestation by 2030, and a plan to cut methane emissions by 30% by 2030 was agreed by more than 100 countries.

However, there was frustration at the end of the summit over a watered-down climate deal. In a first for a COP, a plan to reduce coal fired power generation had been agreed, but objections from India and China led to the text being weakened from an agreement to "phase out" coal to a commitment to a "phasedown of unabated coal." Unabated coal is a phrase used to describe the burning of coal without some form of carbon capture to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.²

Writing in *The BMJ* after the conference, the writer and ethicist Julian Sheather said, "COP26 has made it clear that polluters still hold the whip hand, both in government and industry. But it has also made it clear that the fury of the environmentalists is growing louder by the day. Time for us all to reach for our megaphones."³

What is expected from COP27?

Egypt's minister for international cooperation, Rania Al-Mashat, has said she wants COP27 to be about practicalities. "What we want this COP to be about is moving from pledges to implementation . . . What is it that we need to do to operationalise the pledges into implementation?" she said in the *Guardian* earlier this year.⁴ As part of this, one of the issues Egypt seems to want to focus on is finance, and in particular financial assistance for developing countries.

COP27 will also see the new Forests and Climate Leaders' Partnership (FCLP) established—building on that commitment from COP26—with each country expected to commit to leading by example in at least one action area, such as ensuring that forest economies contribute to a net zero world or sustainably managing high integrity forests.

The COP26 president, Alok Sharma, former UK secretary of state for business, energy, and industrial strategy, said, "At COP26 we saw incredible ambition, with more than 140 countries committing to halt and reverse forest loss by 2030. This partnership is a critical next step to collectively deliver on this promise and help keep the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C alive."⁵

However, a big part of keeping that 1.5°C target alive relates to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions. Specifically, global emissions must halve by 2030 and reach 'net zero' by 2050. Despite this, emissions are still increasing, with the UN reporting that current national climate plans are expected to see a 14% increase in emissions by 2030, when compared with 2010 levels.⁶ It is not yet clear whether COP27 could change this course.

Will the war in Ukraine and energy crisis affect COP27?

Zambia's Mwepya Shitima, the chair of the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) on climate change, told the United Nations that the energy crisis is likely to set back progress on the climate agenda while more countries search for alternative energy resources. He said, "But as we go back to the negotiations, our hope is that it shouldn't affect the outcome, as the multilateral process is guided by its rules and guidelines, irrespective of the geopolitical situation, and should not make us lower our expectations."⁷

Will COP27 tackle "climate injustice"?

Climate injustice is a term used to describe the situation in which countries that contribute the least to the climate crisis nevertheless pay the highest price.

Africa contributes less than 4% of global emissions. President Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon reports that 22 million people on the continent are facing starvation and that climate change is responsible for droughts, extreme famines, and the displacement of families.⁸

African countries hope that COP27 will tackle climate injustice. During Africa climate week at the end of August the COP27 president, Sameh Shoukry, Egypt's minister of foreign affairs, said, "Africa is obliged, with its already limited financial means and scant level of support, to spend around 2-3% of its GDP per annum to adapt to these impacts, a disproportionate responsibility that cannot be described as anything other than 'climate injustice.'"

"We will spare no effort to assist parties in engaging in a frank, constructive, and dynamic dialogue that addresses loss and damage, including the central issue of new and additional finance dedicated thereto."⁹

Competing interests: None declared.

Provenance and peer reviewed: Commissioned; not externally peer reviewed.

- 1 Wise J. COP26: Fifty countries commit to climate resilient and low carbon health systems. *BMJ* 2021;375: doi: 10.1136/bmj.n2734 pmid: 34753788
- 2 Wise J. COP26 summit: leaders frustrated at watered down climate deal. *BMJ* 2021;375: doi: 10.1136/bmj.n2803 pmid: 34785525
- 3 Sheather J. The conflicts that killed COP26. *BMJ* 2021;375: doi: 10.1136/bmj.n2798 pmid: 34782376
- 4 Harvey F. Egypt says climate finance must be top of agenda at Cop27 talks. *Guardian*. May 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/25/egypt-climate-finance-top-of-agenda-cop27-talks>.
- 5 Cabinet Office. Leaders will build on Glasgow legacy to establish Forests & Climate Leaders' Partnership at COP27. Gov.UK. Sep 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/leaders-will-build-on-glasgow-legacy-to-establish-forests-climate-leaders-partnership-at-cop27>.
- 6 UN. For a livable climate: Net-zero commitments must be backed by credible action. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/net-zero-coalition>.
- 7 Towards UN. COP27: Views from Africa's chief climate negotiator. <https://www.un.org/os-aa/news/towards-cop27-views-africa%E2%80%99s-chief-climate-negotiator>.
- 8 Africa News. African nations call out climate injustice ahead of COP27. <https://www.africanews.com/2022/08/29/african-nations-call-out-climate-injustice-ahead-of-cop27>.
- 9 COP27 Egypt. Egypt's COP27 president designate calls for urgent action against climate injustice at Africa climate week 2022. Aug 2022. <https://cop27.eg/#/news/53/Egypt%E2%80%99s%20COP27%20President%20Design>.