

What is the Paris Agreement?

The Paris Agreement, or Accord de Paris, is an agreement between the world's 197 countries to act together to tackle Climate Change.

It was agreed in principle by 195 of the world's leaders in Paris in December 2015 and later signed by all 197 countries. In order for the Paris Agreement to come into force it then had to be 'ratified' (formally agreed in their domestic law) by at least 55 countries, and the countries had together to account for at least 55% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Significant signing: The threshold was reached after President Xi Jinping of China and President Obama of The US ratified the Agreement. This joint action by the world's two largest emitters saw the Paris Agreement officially come into force on 4 November 2016.

What does the Agreement say?

Countries agreed to aim to keep the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to attempt to limit the rise to 1.5°C. The three broad areas of action are:

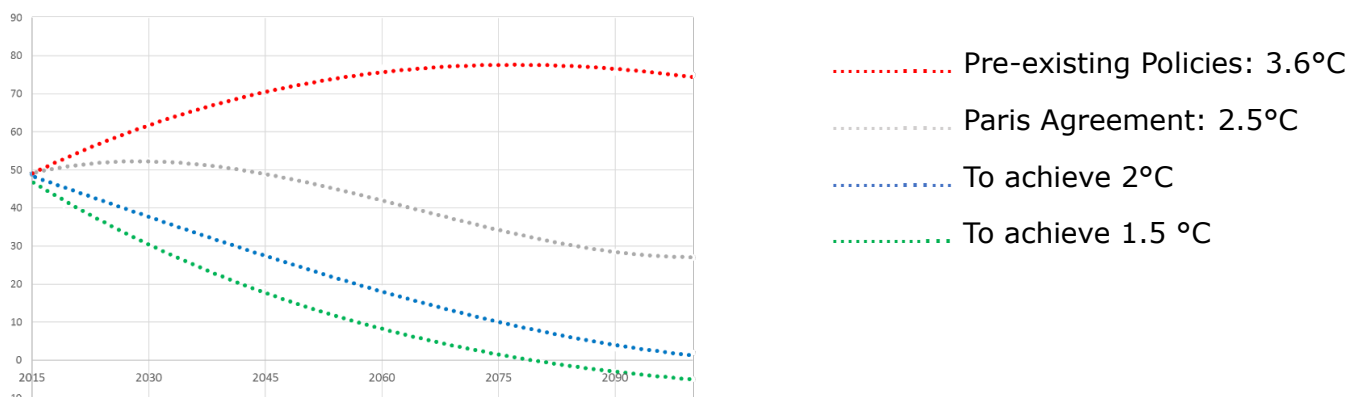
- * **Mitigation:** actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, intending to limit, stop or reverse the extent and/or rate of climate change long-term
- * **Adaptation:** ways to reduce how vulnerable we are to the effects of the many negative changes brought about by climate change.
- * **Finance:** richer countries to provide money to help poorer countries with both mitigation and adaptation using the global Green Climate Fund.



Are the promised reductions enough?

No! A very important part of the Paris Agreement calls for countries to improve their reduction 'offers' in future. The reduction offers made at Paris will limit the temperature rise only to about 2.5°C above pre-industrial levels, even if countries implement all the policies that they promised.

Fig. 1 One Estimate of Global Emissions (Gtonnes CO₂/ annum) for various scenarios



Crucially, the Paris Agreement isn't a static deal. It says countries must meet every 5 years to take stock and each must 'ratchet up' their commitments to **set more ambitious targets**. COP26 will be held in UK in 2020 and is a critical point for the world: countries must now agree the processes for reviewing their targets. 2020 is also a 'global climate turning point' when the world needs to begin the descent towards **net zero emissions** in the second half of the century.

Who is in charge of the Agreement process?

The Paris Agreement was agreed at the so-called 'COP21' meeting. This was the 21st 'Conference of the Parties', a meeting of all the world's countries organised under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international treaty which came into force in 1994. The UNFCCC set out how countries would negotiate and progress action on climate change and Parties to the treaty have met annually since then to discuss progress.



Each COP lasts for 2 weeks and huge numbers of interested organisations from city governments, charities, businesses and consultancies come to take part in the many workshops and events that run alongside meetings for country delegations and High-Level talks for the world's leaders.

Why did they agree at Paris and not before?

After years of failing to agree on setting targets, why did countries manage to agree at COP21?

The key was to allow different **countries to set targets** that were very different in nature, depending on their history and circumstances – ie whether they are still industrialising, whether they are affected particularly badly by climate change, how wealthy they are, whether they are a significant or very small emitter of GHG. This has been termed a '**bottom-up approach**' and helped to get around the problems of an earlier, top-down Agreement, the Kyoto Protocol, under which countries had to agree to a flat % reduction in their absolute emissions. Many countries couldn't agree to this given their particular circumstances.

The Paris Agreement allows different sorts of emission reduction targets, so called 'Nationally Determined Contributions', which are at the heart of the agreement. Examples are:

- * the EU pledges to reduce GHG emissions by 40% compared with 1990 levels by 2030
- * Fiji pledges to reduce emissions unconditionally by 10% *compared with 'Business as Usual'*, and by a total of 30% if it receives \$500million of external aid for action on adaptation
- * China pledges that its emissions will peak by 2030, and also to provide 20% of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2030.

What will make it happen?

There are no sanctions if countries fail to meet their targets but there is a significant amount of international pressure - **countries must report to each other and the public at each COP** on progress they are making. Detailed rules are being worked out for this 'Progress Tracker', setting out how countries should accurately measure and report on their emissions, and on actions they are taking for both mitigation and adaptation. There is international momentum to keep the Paris Agreement on track even if one or two countries, or their Presidents, say they want to opt out.

Questions to explore

1. Why did Nicaragua initially refuse to sign the Paris Agreement?
2. Why were countries allowed to make different targets (eg for developed and developing)?
3. Why has the Paris Agreement chosen 1.5°C as the global temperature rise to aim for?
4. What will the global emissions be in 2030 relative to 2015, if all the promises at Paris are kept?
5. What emissions reduction might be needed to actually achieve the long-term target of only a 1.5°C temperature rise?
6. What are some new initiatives that would have to be taken to put emissions on that trajectory?
7. Why did some countries who signed the Agreement not ratify it back home (Russia and others)?

Further research

UNFCCC Paris Agreement	http://unfccc.int/2860.php https://profilesoparis.com/
UNFCCC Nationally Determined Contributions	http://unfccc.int/focus/items/10240.php
Different targets for developed and developing countries	https://www.carbonbrief.org/explainer-why-differentiation-is-key-to-unlocking-paris-climate-deal
UN International Panel on Climate Change: Special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels	http://ipcc.ch/report/sr15/
Mission 2020	http://www.mission2020.global/
Capturing Carbon	https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/may/05/negative-emissions-tech-can-more-trees-carbon-capture-or-biochar-solve-our-co2-problem
Global Climate Action Summit	https://www.globalclimateactions summit.org/
President Trump and the Paris Agreement	http://mailchi.mp/d69d954db505/interclimate-newsletter
Ratification of the Paris Agreement	http://www.climatechangenews.com/2018/07/12/count-ries-yet-ratify-paris-agreement/

Inspiring action on climate change