

What is the Paris Agreement?

The Paris Agreement, or Accord de Paris, is an historic agreement made at the United Nations ([COP21](#)) between the world's 196 countries to act together to tackle Climate Change.

It was agreed in principle by the world's leaders in Paris in December 2015 and later signed by all 196 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?

The agreement forms part of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international treaty which came into force in 1994 saying how countries would negotiate and progress action on climate change. In Paris in 2015, all countries finally agreed a joint aim to keep the **global average temperature to well below 2°C** rise above pre-industrial levels, and to attempt to limit this rise to 1.5°C. All countries submitted their own targets and committed to:

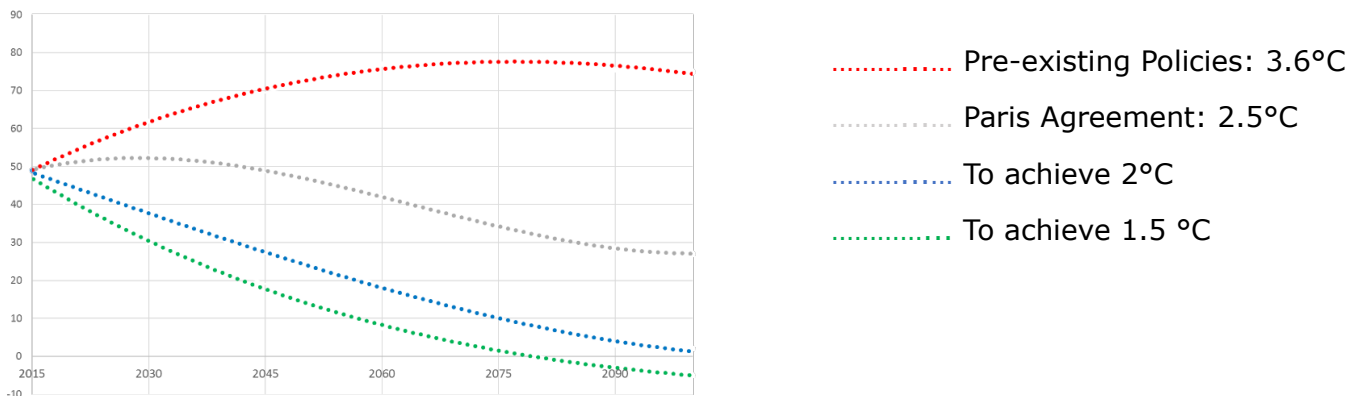
- * **Mitigation:** actions to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions**, intending to limit, stop or reverse the extent and/or rate of climate change long-term.
- * **Adaptation:** ways to **reduce how vulnerable we are to the effects** of the many negative changes brought about by climate change.
- * **Finance:**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



Were the promised reductions sufficient?

No! A very important part of the Paris Agreement calls for countries to improve their reduction targets 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



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' or COP for short - an annual top level decision-making meeting of the UN. 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.



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'Parties to the treaty' are mainly individual countries although the European Union (EU) acts together as one 'party'. The United Kingdom is now a separate party to the treaty. Hundreds of scientists from around the world contribute to the independent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and their work is highly significant (see: [Cooperation IPCC and UNFCCC](#)).

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 – i.e. 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 pledged to reduce GHG emissions by 40% compared with 1990 levels by 2030.
- * Fiji pledged 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's emissions will peak and is to provide 20% of energy from renewable sources by 2030.

What will make it happen?

A crucial part of the Paris Agreement is that countries must meet every five years to take stock and each must 'ratchet up' their commitments to **set more ambitious targets**. [COP26](#) is the first of these important five-year reviews and is co-hosted by UK with a [Pre-COP](#) in Italy to:

- * **Report on progress:** Detailed rules have been set out in a '[Paris Rulebook](#)' to agree how countries should accurately measure and report on emissions. There are no sanctions for failing to meet targets but there is a significant amount of international pressure to make progress. Many nations are responding with [Climate Ambition](#), whilst others have been slower to respond (see [Climate Action Tracker](#)).
- * **Accelerate action to 2030:** Countries are being encouraged to say what they will do, and how they will accelerate action this decade so the world can reach net zero emissions as quickly as possible. Delayed because of COVID, it is essential for all decision-makers to meet face to face so that many views are heard at COP26, especially the world's most '[Climate Vulnerable](#)' nations and young people around the globe (see this [Youth4 Climate](#) Pre-COP meeting in Italy).

Questions to explore

1. Why were countries allowed to make different targets (e.g. for developed and developing)?
2. Why has the Paris Agreement chosen 1.5°C as the global temperature rise to aim for?
3. What will global emissions be in 2030 relative to 2015, if all the promises at Paris are kept?
4. What emissions reduction might be needed to actually achieve the long-term target of only a 1.5°C temperature rise?
5. What are some new initiatives that would have to be taken to put emissions on that trajectory?
6. What strong messages are young people sending to decision-makers at COP26?

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