

COP28 IEMA Policy Briefing

Introducing this year's
International Climate Conference

Nov 2023



This briefing note provides a short overview of what to expect at the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) in UAE. Once again we review the context, the agenda and set out what IEMA hopes to see as the outcomes. It also includes a lexicon of key terminology associated with the COP process and a reminder of some of the milestones reached in the past.

The background to COP28

Progress on negotiations so far

In 2015 at COP21, 195 countries adopted the legally binding treaty the Paris Agreement, with its goal of limiting global warming to well below 2°C, and ideally not more than 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels.

When last year's IEMA COP27 briefing note was written, it was already clear that the world was on track to fail the 1.5°C goal by the middle of this century and that modelling showed a potential warming of up to 4°C. Nonetheless global climate leaders were still saying that the 1.5 degrees ambition was 'alive but the pulse is weak'. Given the lack of real action between 2015 and 2022, IEMA took this analogy of a critically ill patient one step further and suggested that it may have been alive and with a weak pulse, but that it was also currently unresponsive.

What response then, came out of COP27 and the intervening year to COP28?

Is 1.5°C still within grasp?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)¹ Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) provides an overview of the state of knowledge on the science of climate change.

On the plus side, AR6 confirms that many low or zero emissions options are now available for energy, buildings, transport and industry, and that unit costs for these technologies are declining. On the other hand, the report observes that mitigation gains are likely to be reduced or counterbalanced by growth in demand for goods and services. It reports that climate finance for mitigation and adaptation is growing, but in a very limited way (especially in the case of adaptation) and overall that finance is not flowing fast enough.

Taken as a whole, AR6 is not a good news story. It clearly states that there are gaps between global ambitions and the sum of declared national ambitions. More on this in the section on the Global Stocktake (GST) further into this paper. These gaps are further compounded by gaps between declared national ambitions and current implementation for all aspects of climate action. It concludes that if the 'emissions gap' is not reduced, it is likely that warming will exceed 1.5°C during the 21st century and to limit warming to 2°C would take an unprecedented acceleration of mitigation efforts. Given the existing implementation gaps, a sudden and unprecedented acceleration seems almost impossible to imagine.

Is 1.5°C within grasp? Only if governments (a) improve on their promises and (b) deliver on their promises. So far we're not seeing enough of this. The 'emissions gap' urgently needs to be addressed at COP28 as part of the GST.

¹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change.

Framing the themes: Global Stocktake

This year the core themes are framed by the first ever Global Stocktake (GST) – an inventory of where the world stands on climate action, and an identification of the gaps. The final stocktake will be agreed at COP28, but it's not a secret that the gaps identified will be considerable.

The GST report published prior to the December meeting has a number of headline findings that set the scene for the key and cross-cutting themes.

The cross cutting overview found that:

- Action on climate change is happening but more is needed;
- Governments need to support transformations of the economy that mainstream climate resilience and low GHG emissions development; but that
- Economic transformation should not be at a pace which has a disproportionate or negative impact on specific groups in society

Key theme: Mitigation

All Parties to the Paris Agreement have put forward Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) that include mitigation targets and policies or measures to achieve them.

Emissions gaps are the difference between the emission levels implied by the NDCs and the average emission levels of global modelled mitigation pathways which would limit warming to 1.5 °C or 2 °C. Implementation gaps refer to how far currently enacted policies and actions fall short of reaching the NDC.

According to the IPCC AR6, global GHG emissions need to peak between 2020 and 2025 to limit warming to the Paris Agreement temperature goal of 1.5°C. Taking a purely country-by-country measurement approach, it could be noted that emissions have peaked in developed and some developing countries, but that global emissions have not yet peaked – with only two years left to achieve this. After achieving peak emissions, countries need to continue achieving deep cuts in emissions. However the emissions gaps and the implementation gaps remain considerable, and these both need to be addressed.

The pre-COP GST report reminds readers that under the Paris Agreement, developed countries are committed to undertake absolute and economy-wide emission reduction targets while developing countries should continue enhancing their mitigation efforts and are encouraged to move over time towards economy-wide emission reduction or limitation targets in the light of different national circumstances.



A just transition requires collective and participatory decision-making processes and systems transformation should include both supply and demand-side measures. The co-benefits of mitigation efforts – such as poverty eradication and the achievement of other sustainable development goals should be promoted.

The GST highlights the need for COP28 to face the emissions and implementation gaps and will challenge negotiators to address them, within the context of the just transition.

Key theme: Adaptation and Loss and Damage

The key findings from the GST report are that progress on adaptation needs a huge step change, as it goes nowhere near far enough to protect increasingly climate-vulnerable communities. Climate change is already setting back previous gains, and undermining fresh efforts, and as targets on mitigation are missed, the requirements for adaptation can only grow. An important risk factor is that what global warming will be, or how fast it will occur is not known and tipping points cannot be predicted with certainty. This makes planning for adaptation an iterative process.

In the good news on adaptation, more countries are taking steps to understand their needs, and knowledge on the subject is growing rapidly. Mechanisms for sharing skills and understanding for resilience-building capacity are improving. However delivery of adaptation programmes is fragmented, incremental, sector-specific and unequally distributed across regions. The key stumbling block remains finance. Climate finance is increasing, but it remains far below what is needed.

The establishment of a Loss and Damage fund, a headline outcome from COP27, has not progressed smoothly during 2023. Disagreements about where it should be based as an institution, who should fund it, or who the recipients should be have continued. The latest draft has been controversial and it will continue to be a focus at COP28.

Key theme: Finance

If ambitions set out in the Paris Agreement are to be met, the international financial system for mobilising climate finance needs transformation. Public funds are critical, but will not be sufficient to meet the significant challenges, and private-sector finance and capital markets need to help finance adaptation and climate-resilient development. In combination, public funds can help to establish pipelines of projects and de-risk private investment. As key technologies become more widespread, the cost of capital should reduce and trigger further investment in infrastructure and capacity-building.

An enormous amount of work, innovation and goodwill will be required to achieve all of this, and perhaps one barrier is that because it requires the engagement of private capital, it goes beyond what individual countries can promise in negotiations.

Key theme: Capacity-building

Capacity development and building is linked to the Sustainable Development Goal 17: Revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. Overall it is about developing the skills and abilities and resources needed to survive, adapt and thrive within the context of climate change. International cooperation and coordination must include consideration and appreciation of indigenous skills rather than being an imposition of processes developed elsewhere. The COP process and the United Nations system is ideally placed to facilitate this international transfer of the tools needed to take effective action on mitigation and adaptation. This includes, as per Article 11 of the Paris Agreement, technology development, dissemination and deployment, access to climate finance, relevant aspects of education, training and public awareness, and the transparent, timely and accurate communication of information.

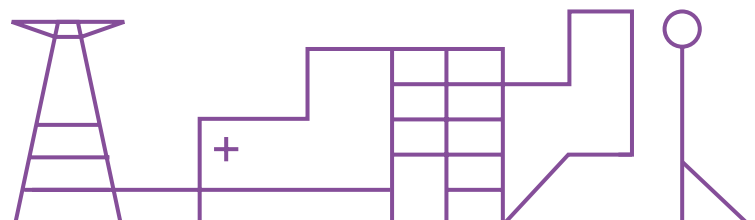
What does IEMA want to see COP28 achieve?

IEMA has always called for governments to step up and create environments in which policy is internationally ambitious and consistent, to ensure steep emissions reductions are seen internationally. Ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions, combined with the policies needed to implement them absolutely can't be allowed to slide further into the deficit against what is needed to reduce global warming.

As the home of professionals in the climate sector, naturally IEMA has always promoted education and skills. IEMA firmly believes that professionals need to be encouraged into the sector and that their ongoing development is critical for progress. Furthermore, non-climate professionals need at least an overview understanding of why they're doing what they're doing when it comes to their organisation's mitigation and adaptation programmes.

This year, IEMA has formally written to the Minister of State for Energy Security and Net Zero to request that the UK works with its international counterparts to ensure that the cover decisions reached at the UAE negotiations adequately reflect the need to invest in and develop a global workforce that can tackle climate change head on.

Specifically, IEMA would like to see a cover decision that mandates a requirement for Paris Agreement signatories to include a detailed education and skills investment and development roadmap as part of their Nationally Determined Contribution to the UNFCCC.



Lexicon

The United Nations climate negotiations take place throughout the year, with the headline COP event being the culmination of the year's conversation and the beginning of the following Presidency. The meetings and committees and papers have complex numbering systems and the UN cautions against the use of AI to look up information, as apparently there have been instances of AI generating plausible-looking but fake document references. In addition, the terminology used in and around the negotiations is almost a language of its own (there's even a Non-Paper Paper!). Even full-time insiders say it takes a few years to become 'fluent'.

For everyone else, here is a short guide to the agreements and abbreviations that pop up most often in the headline publications:

AFOLU Agriculture, forestry and other land use

AR Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

CDM Clean Development Mechanism allows a country with an emission-reduction or emission-limitation commitment to implement an emission-reduction project in developing countries. Such projects can earn saleable CER credits, each equivalent to one tonne of CO₂, which can be counted towards meeting Kyoto targets.

CER Certified emission reduction (credits)

CMA Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement

COP Conference of the Parties

GGA Global goal on adaptation

GST Global stocktake

INDC Intended nationally determined contribution

IPCC Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

LT-LEDS Long-term low-emission development strategy(ies)

NAP National adaptation plan

NDC Nationally determined contribution

REDD+ Reducing emissions from deforestation; reducing emissions from forest degradation; conservation of forest carbon stocks; sustainable management of forests; and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (decision 1/CP.16, para. 70)

SB Sessions of the subsidiary bodies

TD Technical dialogue

Milestones

Each COP ushers in a higher level of ambition than the one before with headline developments on progress. Here are a handful of the key milestones.

1984 The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) entered into force in 1984. Ratified by 198 Parties (countries). It includes Annex I countries – industrialised and ‘in-transition’ countries expected to make the greatest contributions to Mitigation, report regularly on their policies and greenhouse gas emissions inventories. Non-Annex I countries – developing countries including Least Developed Countries report less regularly and receive financial support for reporting.

1997 The Kyoto Protocol was adopted on 11 December 1997 and entered into force on 16 February 2005. Currently, there are 192 Parties to the Kyoto Protocol. It operationalises the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by committing industrialized countries and economies in transition to limit and reduce greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions in accordance with agreed individual targets. Extended in ambition in **2012** by the Doha Amendment.

2015 The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015. It entered into force on 4 November 2016. Its overarching goal is to hold “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.”

2019 The **Santiago Network** was established by COP25 to connect vulnerable developing countries with providers of technical assistance, knowledge, resources they need to address climate risks comprehensively in the context of averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage.

2021 The Paris Agreement established a global goal on adaptation, to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change. COP26 in 2021 established the two-year **Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh work programme** (on adaptation).



Further Information

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About IEMA

We are the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA). We are the global professional body for over 20,000 individuals and 300 organisations working, studying or interested in the environment and sustainability. We are the professional organisation at the centre of the sustainability agenda, connecting business and individuals across industries, sectors and borders. We also help and support public and private sector organisations, governments and regulators to do the right thing when it comes to environment and sustainability related initiatives, challenges and opportunities. We work to influence public policy on environment and sustainability matters. We do this by drawing on the insights and experience of our members to ensure that what happens in practice influences the development of government policy, legislation, regulations and standards

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