



Was it all just
a **COP** out?

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COP26 was labelled as humanity's last chance to address the climate crisis, and this language of urgency inspired both hope and doom in the lead up to this year's conference. Now it's over, we're sharing our summary and reflections on what happened, from the commitments and the controversies to our own take on whether COP26 will truly deliver.



The story of COP26

Pledges, pledges, pledges – COP26 saw a lot of them. The word ‘transformation’ was used in abundance over the course of the two-week conference, with powerful people representing countries, institutions and brands vowing to make change that would be real and tangible in this age of climate emergency.

The pledges were of course no surprise – this is what these conferences are for: to come together and agree on collective actions that will make the world a better place and save the livelihoods of future generations. But pledges have been made in the past and proper actions have failed to follow.

Now that COP is over, the world will watch to see if the commitments to transform will be taken seriously, or whether it was just one big greenwashing fest. Many expect the latter to be true, and for good reasons. One of the memorable failings of this year's conference was the disproportionate voice given to

delegates from the fossil fuel industry, which had a larger delegation than any individual country, according to a study by Global Witness. On a more optimistic note, fossil fuels were explicitly mentioned as a major cause of climate change for the first time in the decision text, a fact that some are choosing to see as progress and a stepping stone in building momentum ahead of next year's COP.

Solving the climate crisis is not a straightforward task. It requires international collaboration between governments and corporations, and us, of course, the people. This is key to remember going forward: the importance of a united front and looking past self-interest. The question that remains is – will enough really be done to make the change we need? Only time will tell.

The commitments

The first part of COP saw world leaders take to the stage to address and debate the most pressing climate issues, while the latter half was time for the experts to negotiate and hash out the technical details. Here is a sample of the commitments and pledges that were made during the conference:

- Brazil increased its pledge to cut carbon emissions from 43% to 50% by 2030, although the baseline year is unclear. Amazon rainforest defenders were quick to label this move as “greenwashing”, urging COP delegates to look back to Brazil’s destructive policies in the recent past when considering its vague promises on the future.
- India pledged to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2070. Although the announcement was criticised as not being ambitious enough, President Modi defended the decision saying that India was sticking to its pledges “in spirit and letter”.
- The US rejoined the High Ambition Coalition, a group of global nations committed to limiting global warming to 1.5C.
- The EU and US launched the Global Methane pledge, followed by over 100 countries representing 70% of the global economy. The ultimate aim is to keep warming to below 1.5C by collectively reducing methane emissions by at least 30% from 2020 levels by 2030. Delivering on the Global Methane Pledge would reduce warming by at least 0.2C by 2050.
- 40 world leaders, including the US, India, EU, and China, signed up to the new Breakthrough Agenda. The plan was launched by the UK government with the objective of enabling countries and businesses to coordinate, scale, and speed up the development of clean technologies to drive down costs over the next decade. This would also help to support developing or transition economies to access the innovation and technology needed to move forward on the path to net zero.
- Over 100 countries containing 85 percent of the world’s forests promised to put an end to deforestation by 2030, described by Boris Johnson as “a landmark agreement to protect and restore the earth’s forests.” Among them: China and Brazil. But reversing the trend by 2030 might be too late for the world’s largest forests. U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres warned, “parts of the Amazon now emit more carbon than they absorb.” Indonesia came into the spotlight just days after signing the pledge when the country’s environment minister said that “forcing Indonesia to zero deforestation in 2030 is clearly inappropriate and unfair” and that Indonesia will not “promise what we can’t do”.
- The Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (Gfanz) - the Mark Carney-led coalition of international financial companies signed up to tackle climate change - committed up to \$130tn of private capital to hit net zero emissions targets by 2050. It is made up of more than 450 banks, insurers and asset managers across 45 countries, and has said it could deliver as much as \$100tn of financing to help economies transition to net zero over the next three decades.
- More than 20 countries and financial institutions (including the European Investment Bank) committed to halt all financing of fossil fuel development overseas and divert the spending to green energy instead from next year. Diverting funding from fossil fuels to low-carbon efforts will generate an estimated \$8bn a year around the world for clean energy.
- More than 40 countries committed to shift away from coal, including major coal-using countries like Poland, Vietnam and Chile. Yet some of the world’s most coal-dependent countries were not on board, notably China and the US. The commitment aims to end all investment in new coal power generation domestically and internationally, and to phase out coal power in the 2030s in high-income economies, and the 2040s for lower-income economies. The commitment notes that coal is the single biggest contributor to climate change.

All of these commitments, pledges and coalitions beg the question, who will be keeping score? The International Energy Agency (IEA) has taken on the role of tracking adherence of countries’ commitments announced during the conference, but does this mean they will walk the talk?

COP Controversies

Despite the pledges coming out of the summit, there was no shortage of criticism both in terms of the announcements made, and the event itself. These are the controversies that made headlines over the two weeks of COP:





Coal investment

- While more than 40 countries agreed to phase out their use of coal-fired power, controversy about the world's “dirtiest fuel source” continued to dominate conversations.
- Speaking at the summit, Boris Johnson said he was “not in favour of more coal” and does not want a planned new Cumbrian coal mine to go ahead, despite others being in favour of the project due to its promise of hundreds of well-paid jobs.
- Meanwhile, researchers also argued that South Asian nations needed to create more effective plans to be able to utilise new funding to help developing countries speed up their shift from polluting coal to greener energy.

Concerns from developing countries

- The developing world called on richer nations to “deliver on promises” during the first days of this year’s climate talks. From Honduras to India, from Libya to the Seychelles, leaders from developing countries imparted this same message to those from wealthier nations.
- In an emotional speech, Honduras President Juan Hernandez said that in the last half century, 67 of the 82 natural disasters his country has experienced were induced by climate change, resulting in billions of dollars in economic losses, and people suffering from displacements and pollution.
- Malawi President Lazarus Chakwera said that developing nations will continue to exert as much pressure as possible on big emitters to up their commitments. He added that poorer countries face an uphill battle to adopt clean energy solutions without financial support from industrialised nations.

Greenwashing allegations

- As delegates inside the conference hall heard promises of new private-sector funding for climate change, protesters marched in the city in opposition to “greenwashing”. Several hundred protesters, holding signs that read “Act now!” and “Stop Funding Fossil Fuels,” gathered outside a shopping mall to demand that companies take more substantial steps.
- Greenwashing by companies eager to massage their environmental credentials and increase their appeal to ethical investors also came under scrutiny with the launch of The International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) - a standards body that aims to weed out unjustified climate claims. The ISSB will be based in Frankfurt and will publish its first batch of global norms for climate-related company disclosures next year.
- Greta Thunberg meanwhile doubled down on her criticism of COP26, accusing it of “greenwashing” and “business as usual”.



3 Key takeaways from COP26 for the private sector

After two weeks of promises, pledges and protests, what does COP26 mean for the business community? Here are three key takeaways:

1.

The drive to net zero is a business imperative.

While there was criticism over some of the wording in the Glasgow Climate Pact – notably around coal – COP26 stood out for producing the very first climate deal that explicitly stated fossil fuel consumption as a primary driver of climate change. The evidence is clear, and every business should be prioritizing a net-zero strategy that is tied to science-based targets and focused on GHG reductions across the entire value chain.

2.

Action is meaningless without urgency.

Many climate activists, media, and delegates expressed anger and frustration with the lack of urgency detailed in the final commitments of COP26. For them, winning slowly was still losing. This year's COP has taught us that pledges made 20, 30, or 40 years into the future are not enough. The climate emergency is not the next generation's problem to fix and stakeholders want to know what companies are doing today. So, what can organizations do to better express their understanding of the urgency and how they're working to address it? Telling stakeholders what you have done or are already doing is far more powerful than talking about what you will do – building trust relies on a regular drumbeat of open and honest communications rather than choosing a single moment in time to garner support for long-term commitments.

3.

Make it mainstream.

Solving the climate crisis requires collaboration between governments, corporations and, of course, us – the world's citizens. Many of us are questioning what the world will look like in 10, 20, 30 years' time, and what our place will be in it. Yet the organizers of this year's COP were criticised for failing to educate the wider public on why the issues discussed at the conference mattered to them. For climate action to work, it must go mainstream. For business leaders and communicators, that means breaking out of our 'green' echo chambers to make climate action accessible, inclusive – and above all else – the easy choice.

A vertical garden system with multiple levels. The top level is filled with large, vibrant green leafy vegetables, possibly chard or spinach. Below this, there is a layer of fresh, bright red radishes with their green tops. The bottom section is densely packed with various green herbs, including what appears to be basil and other leafy greens. A dark blue metal frame supports the garden, and a roll of brown mesh is visible in the middle section.

Sector round-up:
Food and farming



Agriculture, deforestation and other changes in land use account for about a quarter of humanity's planet-heating greenhouse gas emissions – so, it's no surprise that reforming the sector was a crucial focus of this year's summit.

During the event's 'Nature and Land-Use Day', 45 governments, led by the UK, pledged investment to protect nature and shift to more sustainable ways of farming. As part of the Prime Minister's commitment to spend at least £3 billion of International Climate Finance on nature and biodiversity, the UK will launch a new £500 million package to help protect rainforests from deforestation. The funding promises to create thousands of green jobs throughout rainforest regions and generate £1 billion of green private sector investment to tackle climate change around the world.

Yet many industry representatives and campaigners felt that not enough attention was paid to food and farming at COP26, despite it being one of the key ways to cut emissions over the next few decades. Food served at the canteen was criticised, with nearly 60% of dishes containing meat or dairy. Campaign group Animal Rebellion described it as the equivalent of "serving cigarettes at a lung cancer conference".

A woman with long, wavy brown hair and orange lipstick stands in the center of a city street. She is wearing a long-sleeved, floor-length orange lace dress that is blowing in the wind. The street is lined with brick buildings, and a tall skyscraper is visible in the background. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. The text 'Sector round-up: Fashion' is overlaid on the image.

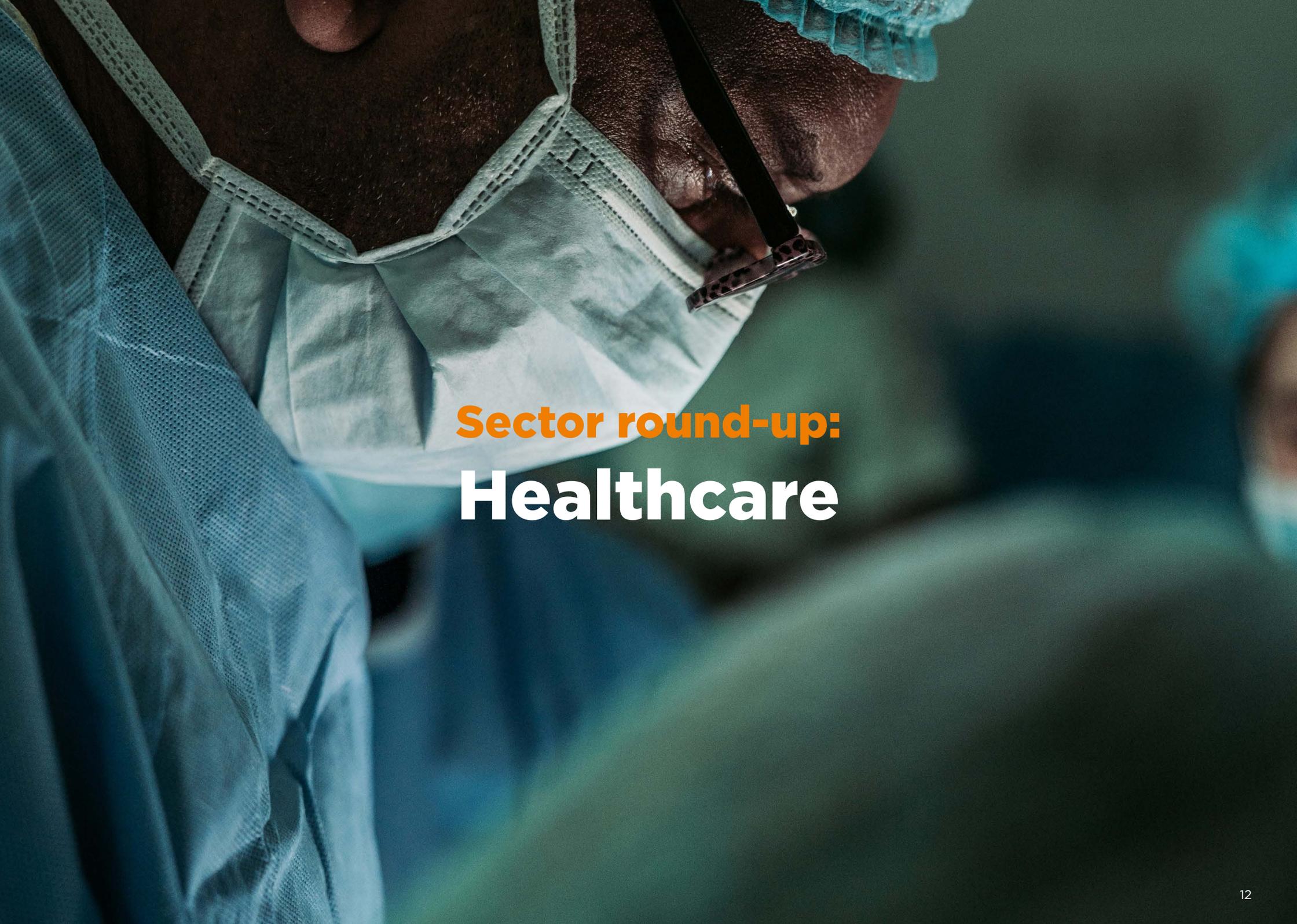
Sector round-up:
Fashion

Fashion brands such as Burberry and H&M were among 130 companies that have pledged to halve their greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. During the second week of COP, these prominent brands lifted their target from a previous goal of cutting emissions by one-third that was set in 2018.

However, the signatories to the updated UN fashion charter represent just a fraction of the sprawling apparel and footwear industry. Brands have 12 months to submit plans on how they will reach the updated target.

Over 50 brands, suppliers, retailers, NGOs and industry associations also supported a request to governments for trade policy to incentivise the use of environmentally-preferred materials. Presented by Textile Exchange, the request called for preferential tariffs on materials like organic cotton and recycled fibres.





Sector round-up:
Healthcare



A group of 50 countries committed to develop climate-resilient and low-carbon health systems in response to growing evidence of the impact of climate change on people's health. 45 of these countries also committed to transform their health systems to be low-carbon and more sustainable. Fourteen have set a target date to reach net zero carbon emissions on or before 2050.

For the NHS this will mean:

- Working with stakeholders to establish how to embed issues like net zero, biodiversity and climate resilience in the NHS Constitution for England
- A zero-emission fleet, with the world's first zero-emission ambulance unveiled at COP26
- Requirement for NHS suppliers to publish a carbon reduction plan
- £330 million investment in climate-smart healthcare and low-carbon hospitals
- A new net zero healthcare building standard applied to the existing commitment to build 48 new hospitals before 2030.

Sector round-up: Transport



The summit's transport day saw the transition to zero emissions vehicles gathering pace, with some of the largest car manufacturers working together to make all new car sales zero emission by 2040 and by 2035 in leading markets.

The world's three largest car markets, the US, Germany and China, did not sign the declaration, but businesses, cities and regions in these geographies did. However, a report warned that weak EU vehicle emissions targets could allow Europe's biggest carmakers to produce millions more petrol and diesel cars than necessary up to 2030 in a "wasted decade" for cutting carbon pollution.

From the roads to the skies, 18 nations including the UK, US, Canada and France signed a new declaration in support of the development of emissions targets for aviation that align with the Paris Agreement's 1.5C temperature pathway. These nations are collectively responsible for more than 40% of global annual emissions from aviation.



A photograph of a wind farm in a field at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow. Several wind turbines are visible, silhouetted against the sky. The foreground is a field of tall grasses.

Sector round-up: Energy



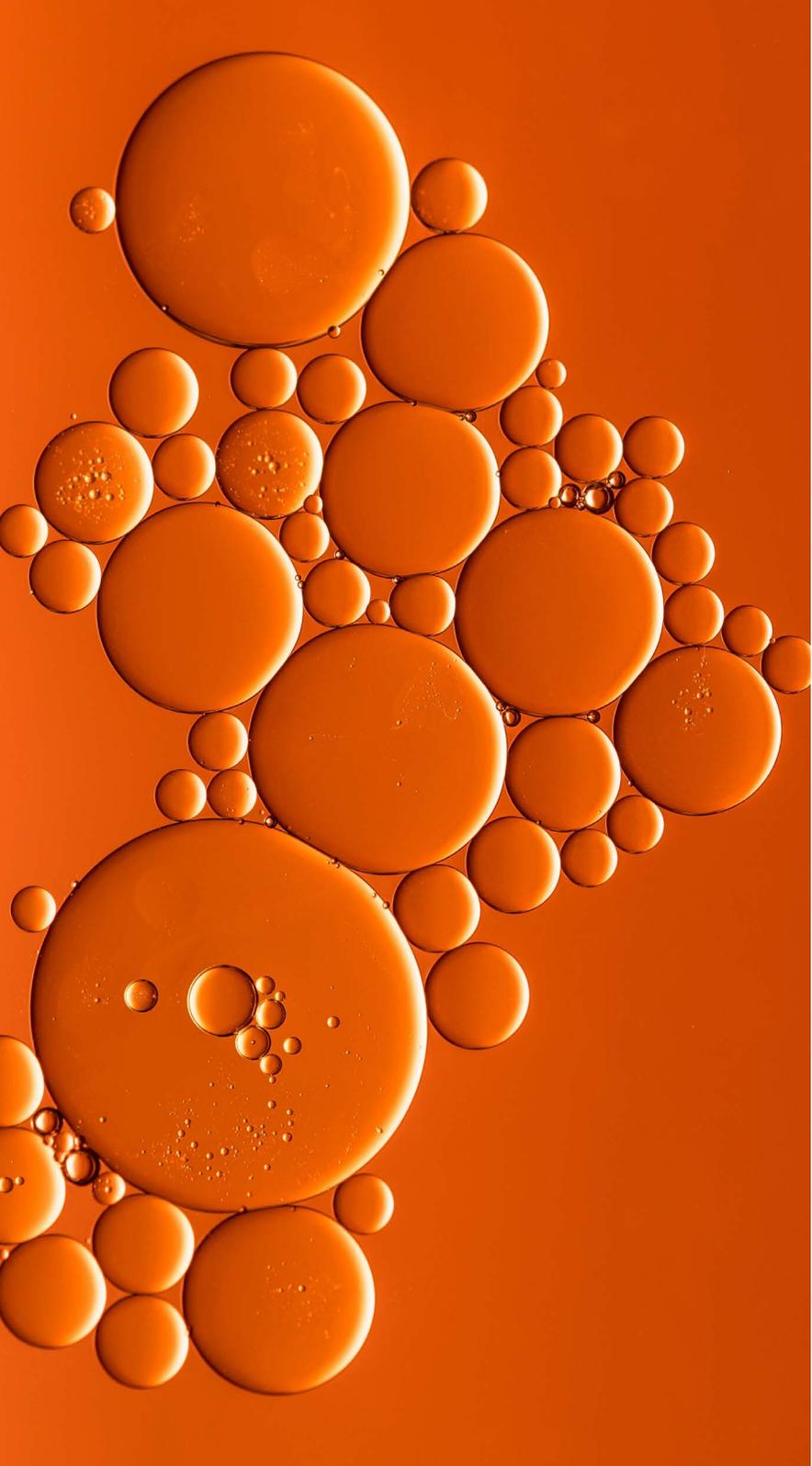
While Boris Johnson claimed this year's summit had "sounded the death knell for coal power", many were furious with the late decision to "phase down" rather than "phase out" coal in the final Glasgow Climate Pact. The wording change was made after a late intervention by China and India.

Spokesman Asad Rehman, who gave a blistering speech in the conference centre as part of the closing plenary, said: "This agreement is an utter betrayal of the people. It is hollow words on the climate emergency from the richest countries, with an utter disregard of science and justice. The UK government greenwash and PR have spun us off course." But it remains the first time plans to reduce coal have been mentioned in such a climate deal.

Meanwhile, 'Fusion energy' promises a step change in the way the world's future energy demands are met in a low-carbon, safe and sustainable way. This was the message from scientists and engineers from the fusion energy community to world leaders on the final day of COP26. Fusion - the process that powers the sun and stars - promises a near-limitless low carbon energy source for the long term. It has the capability of meeting the global surge in electricity demand expected in the coming decades.

The image features a group of approximately ten business professionals in silhouette, standing in a modern office space. They are positioned in front of large floor-to-ceiling windows that offer a view of a bright sunset or sunrise. The warm, golden light from the sun creates a strong backlighting effect, casting long, dark shadows of the individuals onto the highly reflective, polished floor. The overall atmosphere is professional and contemplative.

**What else was
discussed at COP?**



Science & Innovation

Tackling climate change relies on the acceleration of science and innovation. During the last week of COP over twenty governments and the European Commission committed to four additional “Missions” as part of Mission Innovation, a platform for governments and the private sector to collaborate on cleaner technologies. These additions included accelerating technologies to facilitate urban transitions, eliminating emissions from industry, enabling CO2 removal, and producing renewable fuels, chemicals, and materials.

These commitments were consistent with the Glasgow Breakthroughs, which aim to make clean technologies more affordable and accessible across four heavily polluting sectors: power generation, road transport, steel, and agriculture. Driving this is a commitment to make clean hydrogen affordable and globally available by 2030.

Gender

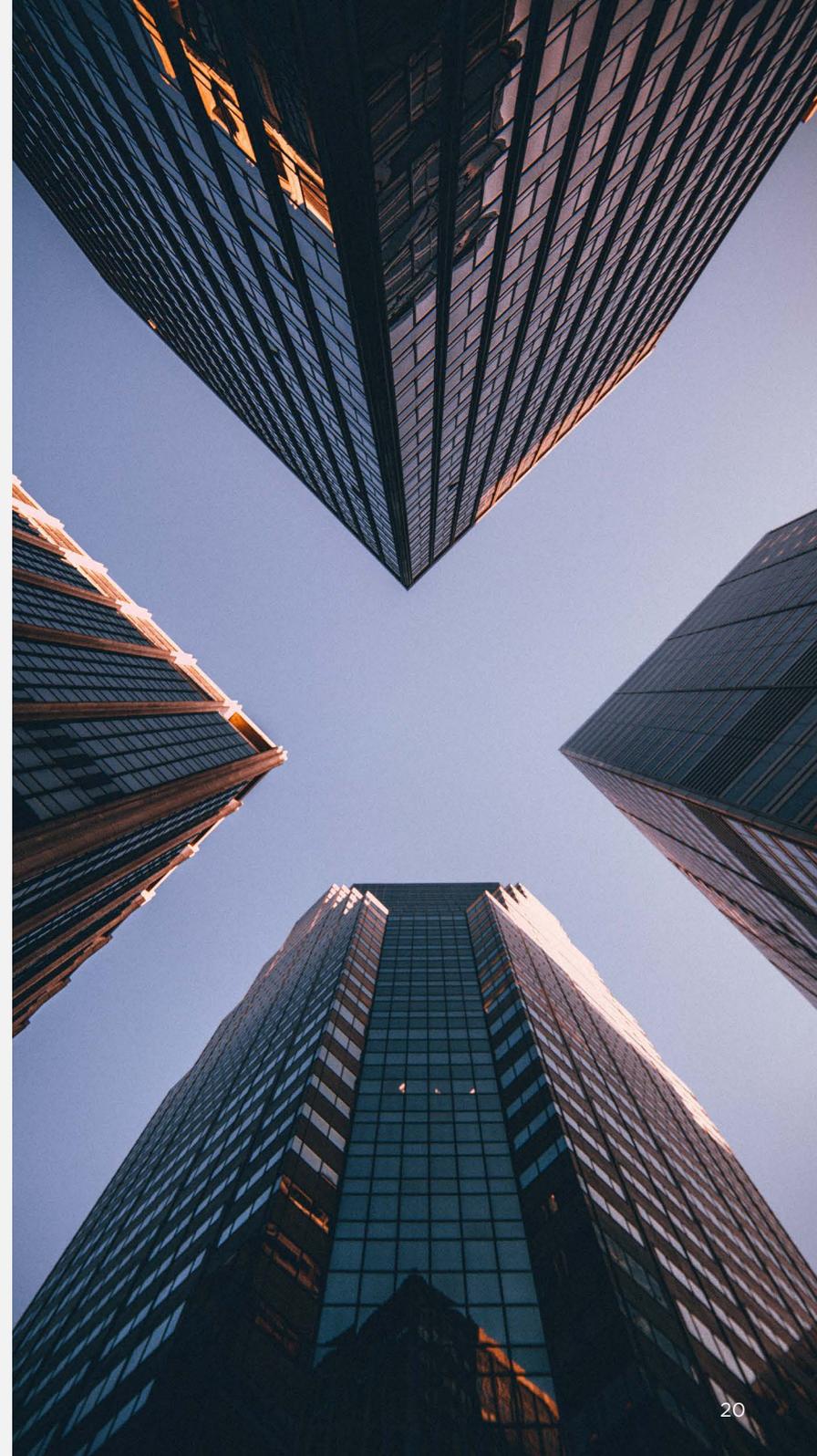
Gender Day at COP26 was opened by a puppet named Little Amal, the Arabic word for hope. Little Amal, representing a Syrian refugee girl, drew attention to those living on the front lines of climate change. The impacts of the climate crisis are far from gender neutral. Devastating floods, extreme heat, and drought will disproportionately affect women and girls who are on average poorer, less educated and more dependent on subsistence farming. Those with the fewest resources will be hardest hit, and pre-existing vulnerabilities linked to poverty will be multiplied.

Although women are most impacted by the climate crisis, they were underrepresented in the decision-making processes at COP26. This is unlikely to change any time soon - gender parity in global climate leadership is expected to only be achieved by 2068.

Finance

Funding from higher income countries to lower income countries to help finance their response to climate change was a major sticking point at COP26. One major consideration in the drafting of the Glasgow Climate Pact was how to address the debate over who is responsible for footing the bill of the climate crisis, particularly when it comes to lower income and rapidly developing economies. Highlighting the disconnect between funding needs and expectations, India requested \$1tn in international funding as part of its pledge to reach net zero by 2070.

As the discussions on funding were finalised, several financial pledges materialised. Thirteen governments committed to a \$232 million collective pledge, the Adaptation Fund, including first-time donors the US and Canada, which according to the UNFCCC was the highest-ever single mobilisation to the fund.





The **Say-do** Barometer



Keep the 1.5C goal alive. That was the ambition coming into COP26. John Kerry, America's Climate Envoy, described the summit as "the last, best hope" to keep global warming within this target and Sir David Attenborough urged delegates to "turn tragedy into triumph".

So, now that the negotiations are over and the Glasgow Climate Pact has been agreed, have the intentions of this year's COP been matched by action? Can we call it a success or failure?

The reality is somewhere in between, and as a result, we're scoring the conference a slightly optimistic 6/10 on PN's Say-Do Barometer.

It's easy to be cynical, even fatalistic, about the purpose of COP. This was perhaps best summed up by The Times' Science Editor, Tom Whipple, who wrote: "In 30 years of COPs, of so many initiatives and agreements, of so many business-class flights to conference centres in attractive locations, there is a graph you can see of carbon concentration in the atmosphere. Each year it increments by the same amount. It is as if nothing has happened."

Was this year's COP a turning point? Understandably, many climate activists, media and delegates expressed anger and frustration with the lack of urgency detailed in the final commitments – winning slowly is still losing in their eyes. In fact, a sobering report from the Climate Action Tracker found that temperatures would still rise by 2.4C by the end of the century based on countries' short-term targets for the next decade. There was also disappointment over the lack of a clear financial plan to compensate the world's most vulnerable nations from the effects of climate change. And while actions speak louder than words, the watered-down language in the final Pact, particularly around coal, quite rightly raised more than a few eyebrows.

Perhaps one of the most disappointing parts of COP was the sense of elitism and division it created.



Hearing from those on the ground, PN's Phil Honour, who was in Glasgow, said "The lack of representation, both from next-gen voices and the Global South as a whole has led to a high level of scepticism around the pledges. People just don't trust governments to deliver. And when it comes to business, we shouldn't underestimate how frosty some members of the climate movement are to the business community. It goes far beyond "big oil" and extends to the fact that the private sector is largely misunderstood by the campaigning community. Outside of the main event, it felt like campaigning groups wanted to 'bash' business rather than bring them along for the ride and collaborate.

So why the optimism? There was a renewed vigour and single-mindedness to this year's conference. The science is unequivocal, and despite the criticism over some of the wording in the final agreement, this is the first time that a global climate deal has explicitly stated that fossil fuel consumption is a major driver of climate change and set out a plan to reduce it.

About time too some might say. In fact, the science is the easy part. Now it's about making sure that progress isn't hampered by politics or self-interest, although things are beginning to shift here too. As Paul Polman wrote: "What gives me hope? Above all, it is seeing the tone beginning to harden against the foot-dragging, self-interested minority."

And let's not forget that progress is being made. Three years ago, only 30 percent of countries had net zero targets. Now 90 percent do.

Ten years ago, electric vehicles were a pipedream. Now they're becoming the norm. Renewable energy and green technologies are becoming cheaper and more accessible. 80 percent of FTSE100 companies now have net zero goals in place.

Perhaps it's naïve to think that the climate crisis could be solved in two weeks. The hard work lies ahead and what happens next is up to all of us. The pandemic has shown us what can be achieved when a crisis hits. When the need is there, we're willing and able to invest in solutions, and modify our behaviour, for the greater good.

According to Porter Novelli's latest research, 73 percent of Americans are more concerned than ever before about the impacts of the climate crisis, and 80 percent believe companies have a responsibility to solve it. Thirty years of COP conferences have shown that political negotiations can only take us so far, and in this era of high expectations and even higher stakes, closing the say-do gap on climate action has never been more important.

As citizens and consultants, we need to keep holding our politicians, our clients and each other to account. With our clients in particular, we should not be afraid to nudge, to challenge, and to guide. For those who are 'doing' but not 'saying', we need to encourage them to use their voice to influence others. And for those who are 'saying' but not 'doing', we need to actively push them to do more. Only then can we edge closer to a 10/10 on the say-do gap barometer.

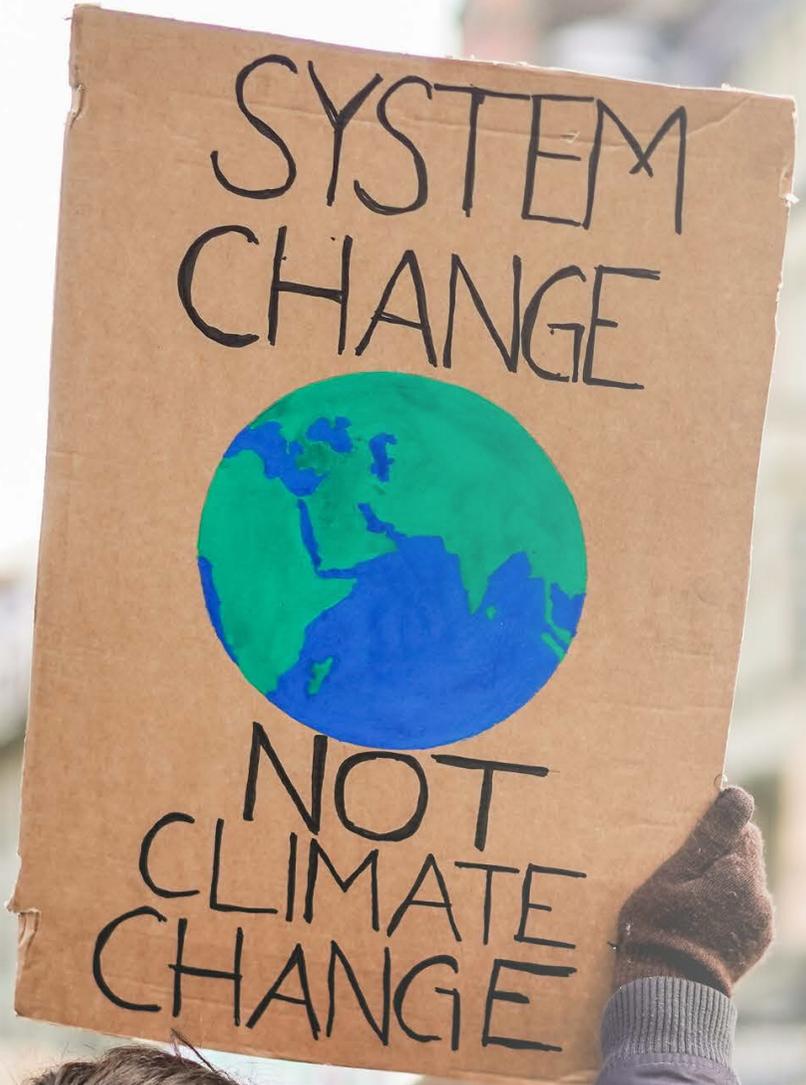
Interesting perspectives

Keen to hear more? Here are some of our favourite speeches and articles relating to COP26:



- **Climate Activist Elizabeth Wathuti powerful speech at COP26**
Hear from Elizabeth Wathuti, a 26-year-old from Kenya who founded the Green Generation Initiative, a group that helps young people become environmentally conscious through growing trees. Wathuti delivered a powerful speech in front of leaders at COP26 and said two million of her fellow Kenyans are suffering from climate-related starvation due to drought.
- **COP26: ‘You might as well bomb us,’ says president of Palau**
The president of the Pacific island state of Palau told the COP26 summit that parallels could be drawn between the climate crisis and the traditional Palau story of a boy who grew into a giant and ‘wouldn’t stop growing ... depleting all the natural resources’.
- **Two degrees is a death sentence for island nations**
Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley delivers a stark warning on the effects of a rise in global temperature on small island nations like hers.
- **Climate depression is real. And it is spreading fast among our youth**
Opinion piece by climate scientist Peter Kalmus that delves into the growing epidemic of climate depression among young people.
- **COP26’s worst outcome would be giving the green light to carbon offsetting**
Opinion piece by Greenpeace executive director Jennifer Morgan that explores the problems with carbon offsetting over direct emissions reductions.
- **Cop26 is doomed, and the hollow promise of ‘net zero’ is to blame**
Opinion piece by Yanis Varoufakis, co-founder of DiEM25 (Democracy in Europe Movement) and former finance minister of Greece who argues net zero commitments are a cover for not restricting emissions.
- **Spotlight on gender at COP26: 8 inspiring women tackling the climate crisis**
edie’s list of women whose voices have been integral to the summit so far, including activists from the global south and UN representatives.





COP
campaigns
we like

COP Campaigns we like

- **Co-op 26**

The play on words made it a no-brainer but this campaign from the ethical retailer did a nice job of educating people on how they can positively impact climate change at a community level.

- **The [Uncertain] Four Seasons**

This striking campaign from AKQA uses climate data and weather AI to recompose Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons' to reflect the environmental changes in a post-climate change world.

- **People Just Do Nothing - About Climate Change**

People Just Do Nothing's Allan 'Seapa' Mustafa and Hugo Chegwin collaborated with Virgin Media O2 to create a special climate-focused episode of their hit Kurupt FM podcast, Chattin' S**t, to encourage young people to get involved in the debate.





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