

ENGLISH SUMMARY OF THE GERMAN BACKGROUND PAPER¹

Inclusive, safe and ambitious? The Glasgow Climate Summit in times of the Corona Pandemic

Requirements and expectations for the COP26

Under the slogan “Uniting the world to tackle climate change”, the United Kingdom will host the 26th Conference of Parties (COP26) from 31 October to 12 November 2021 in Glasgow, Scotland. The context of this COP, often billed as the most important since the Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015, underlines the urgency. In the summer of 2021, people across the globe experienced extreme weather events and their consequences. Some of the many examples: Heavy rain and floods in Rhineland-Palatinate and North Rhine-Westphalia, China and India as well as London and New York, unimaginable heat in parts of the USA and Canada, massive forest fires in Greece and California and the drought in Madagascar that led to massive famine. Like these experiences, the first part of the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirms that climate action is becoming increasingly necessary to save the most affected people and countries from a scenario of a – increasingly likely – global temperature increase above 1.5°C. Global CO₂ emissions need to be roughly halved by 2030 compared to 2010 to keep the 1.5°C temperature limit agreed in Paris within reach. The Corona pandemic exacerbates the vulnerability of many affected by climate change.

COP26 and Corona

Thus, after the Corona-related one-year postponement of COP26, expectations are high for announcements by states as well as for decisions. At the same time, the still rampant Corona pandemic requires a safe yet inclusive conference concept.

The UK COP Presidency is planning COP26 as the first major UN Conference in presence since the start of the pandemic. Consequently, different stakeholder groups discussed criteria for and against holding COP26 – with strong and understandable arguments on both sides. How do health concerns, lack of or inadequate hygiene concepts, personal responsibility and solidarity in the pandemic weigh against the absolute urgency of climate policy decisions?

The Climate Action Network (CAN), of which Germanwatch is a member, positioned itself in favour of postponing COP26 until spring to allow time for vaccination and hygiene concepts that do not exclude many representatives of the affected countries. At the same time, Germanwatch called for a Leaders Summit on ambition and new international climate finance pledges to be held in November 2021. But the positions of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), for example, which is pushing for COP26 to be held in November 2021, are also understandable. Ultimately, the UK, the UNFCCC Secretariat and the UNFCCC Bureau decide on the feasibility of COP26 with about 25,000 participants. Germanwatch is preparing for participation.

¹ www.germanwatch.org/de/20964

COP26 and the response to the urgency of climate action

If COP26 takes place as planned, it will start with a two-day High Level Segment. This will allow COP26 to send a signal right from the start that it wants to live up to its central importance and prove that the innovative Theory of Change of the Paris Agreement functions. This theory relies on the fact that the initially insufficient nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and financial pledges are constantly increased – based on the scientifically based temperature targets –, as well as the resilience target, and the target of redirecting financial flows accordingly, in the internationally binding Paris Agreement until they finally guarantee the achievement of the Paris goals. The scientifically defined benchmarks anchored in international law should increasingly coordinate the expectations of politics, the financial market, the economy and civil society in order to trigger further pressure for action in the sense of subsequent improvements. This should lead to a constant dynamic of objectives (long-term goals, 2030 goals, and financial commitments) and implementation strategies. Political frameworks, pressure from the financial market, price decline and innovation push of necessary technologies, pressure from the courts – all driven by citizens who express a clear expectation of their politicians and their companies – should lead to a reciprocal dynamic.

Actually, the first round of ambition rising by countries should have been completed in 2020. Due to the postponement of COP26 in Glasgow, this has been adjourned to 2021. It is hoped that by COP26 most countries will have enhanced targets (long-term and short-term targets) and that the industrialised countries will have increased their financial pledges. As far as emission reduction targets are concerned, the G20 countries are particularly relevant, as they are responsible for about 80% of global emissions. The G20 summit taking place directly before the COP in Italy is therefore of particular importance for the COP momentum. If the 1.5°C limit is to remain within reach, the G20 countries in particular must quickly and significantly improve their targets and implementation strategies. Some G20 countries or groups of countries – such as the EU, the USA, New Zealand and the UK – have already updated their targets significantly, but still not sufficiently for a 1.5°C policy. Morally, the pressure is greatest on the countries with the highest per capita emissions. These are Saudi Arabia (18 tCO₂eq/capita), Australia (17.3 tCO₂eq/capita), Canada (15.7 tCO₂eq/capita) and the USA (15.5 tCO₂eq/capita). However, to limit global warming to 1.5°C, China in particular, as the emitter with almost one-third of absolute global emissions (30.3%), will have to enhance its target. The emerging countries with the largest growth in emissions – India being the first to mention here – must also reverse this trend if there is to remain a chance of reaching the 1.5°C goal. However, the richer countries have a duty to offer appropriate support here so that these goals can also be achieved sustainably in a social sense.

One of the most crucial points before COP26 is therefore whether and how important emerging countries will present more ambitious NDCs in the coming weeks. At COP26, an ambition decision for all countries on further enhancing NDCs and submitting long-term strategies (LTS) should be adopted. This is essential if the 1.5°C limit is still to be within reach in two or three years' time – which means halving global emissions by 2030 compared to 2010 (IPCC). Richer emerging countries such as Saudi Arabia or China would essentially have to shoulder the financial burden of this transformation themselves. But many of the others are dependent not only on the political will of their own governments, but also on offers of cooperation from industrialised countries or other emerging economies.

For a positive climate ambition dynamic, it is essential that the industrialised countries – due to their historical responsibility and their wealth – “go ahead” as promised in the Paris Agreement. And that they at the same time provide sufficient support to developing countries.

The “opportunity” to use the corona recovery packages also for climate protection and adaptation has so far been used too little in the G20. Overall, 30% of the corona recovery packages of the G20 countries support sectors that are very problematic for climate protection. The European G20 countries and Canada still performed best here. In contrast, there was positive momentum with regard to accelerated coal phase-out. This year, Japan, South Korea and now China, the last major financiers of coal, announced the end of this

financing in other countries. There are also indications that by COP26 almost all G20 countries will have accepted a target to be greenhouse gas neutral by 2050. This accelerates the international “Race to Zero”.

The developed countries' pledge to provide 100 billion a year in international climate finance by 2020 will be a test of trust at COP26. How the financing gap is dealt with and how the negotiations on a new post-2025 financing target are set up will be crucial for the success of COP26. Moreover, industrialised countries – including Germany – should significantly increase their funding pledges to the Adaptation Fund at COP26 and make multi-year commitments.

If climate protection and resilience targets are to be achieved, future corresponding financial support for poorer countries should be needs-based – not independent financial pledges by the richer countries. The richer emerging countries should also make their contribution from 2025 onwards.

In addition to financial support, rich countries can also assist partner countries through cooperation. In this sense, it is very gratifying that the German government, together with some partners such as South Africa, India and Indonesia, is talking about such cooperation on the phase-out of coal and further climate protection strategies. It will be very interesting to see how far such bi- and plurilateral partnerships, including Paris Partnerships² – also with the poorest and most vulnerable countries in the world – will be built up to COP26 and beyond in the coming years.

It is very encouraging that the US, EU and China are supposedly trying to keep the climate issue out of the rapidly growing geopolitical tensions between these countries or groups of countries as an area of common interest. Despite an increasingly gratifying climate protection dynamic in the G20 since the USA re-entered the Paris Agreement, it is also quite clear that even in these countries this dynamic is still nowhere near enough to bring the world onto a path well below 2°C, let alone a path below 1.5°C. Here, unfortunately, 1.7°C is becoming more and more the norm. In view of the increasing urgency, many activists, social movements and NGOs around the world are pointing this out with ever greater vehemence.

Moreover, the international community has not even shown the willingness to negotiate in order to develop appropriate instruments to deal with the massively growing damage and losses, especially in the poorest parts of the world. COP26 must at least pave the way for more comprehensive decisions at COP27 in this area with operational results on the Santiago Network on Loss and Damage, a way forward on loss and damage funding and a standing agenda item for loss and damage.

For the actual negotiations – after the states have presented their new targets and financial pledges at the Leaders Summit at the start of COP26 – the UK Presidency is focusing on the following four priorities: Climate action for 1.5°C, adaptation, finance and cooperation. At COP26, parties must take a stand on their financing pledges, pursue more ambitious implementation strategies for their climate targets and accelerate the environmentally sound, socially just transformation.

On the official negotiation agenda is the issue of how the outstanding decisions from previous COPs on finalising the rulebook for implementing the Paris Agreement can finally be taken. A central question will be whether regulations on the design of international emissions trading (Art. 6 of the Paris Climate Agreement) can be adopted that do not torpedo the integrity of the Paris Agreement but deliver additional benefits for climate action and sustainable development. Also on the COP26 agenda is a decision that all countries should participate in a round of target revision every five years and not be allowed to choose between five and ten years (“common timeframes”). This is very relevant in order to create sufficient momentum so that the goals of the Paris Agreement remain within reach. The rules on transparency reporting on countries' activities and support also play an important role. They must be adopted at COP26. Further, the global

² „Paris-Partnerschaften – Ein Beitrag zur Neuausrichtung der deutschen Klimaaußenpolitik an den Zielen des Pariser Klima-Abkommens“, www.germanwatch.org/de/19693

stocktake must be prepared with decisions on non-state actors' participation and guiding questions in order to kick-start after COP26.

COP26 also offers space for issue-based decisions or declarations such as the acceleration of the global coal phase-out or the restructuring of the financial system ("sustainable finance").

The climate summit in Glasgow – in conjunction with the G20 summit shortly before – can significantly accelerate climate protection efforts worldwide. But it is by no means certain that this will succeed. The success of COP26 will have to be measured by which results were politically achievable and which the physics of climate change require.

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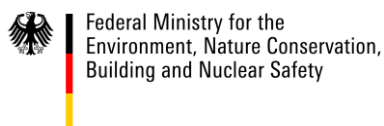
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