EU and the Paris agreement: towards climate neutrality

Ahead of the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference, the EU has made its long term climate goals, including the climate neutrality by 2050 legally binding.

On 28 November 2019, MEPs adopted a resolution calling for the EU to set climate neutrality by 2050 as its long-term climate goal under the Paris agreement and to increase the emission reduction target to 55% by 2030. In a separate resolution, members declared a climate emergency in Europe. In December 2019, the European Commission presented the roadmap for a climate-neutral Europe - the Green Deal.
The Paris agreement aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C in order to avoid the catastrophic consequences of climate change. It has been signed by 194 countries as well as the European Union. All EU countries are signatories on their own, but they coordinate their positions together and set common emission reduction goals at the EU level.

National emission reduction goals

In order to reach the goal of the Paris agreement, countries are required to set goals for their climate efforts every five years, increasing their level of ambition over time. These goals are known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

The EU’s climate goals

The EU was the first major economy to submit its emissions reduction goal under the Paris agreement, promising to reduce its CO2 emissions 40% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

In June 2021, the Parliament adopted the EU Climat Law, making the political commitment of climate neutrality by 2050 under the Green Deal into a binding obligation. The EU is expected to promote the climate law as an ambitious accomplishment during the COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021.

Why is COP26 important?

The first update of the national emission reduction goals will happen at the COP26. The meeting was postponed by a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, some countries still haven’t updated their national determined contributions, while analysis of the submitted contributions shows that action to reach the agreed targets remain insufficient.

According to a Eurobarometer survey from August 2021, 43% of Europeans say that action against climate change should be the main priority for the European Parliament.

In a resolution approved on 21 October 2021, the European Parliament expressed concern that the targets announced in Paris in 2015 would result in warming well above 3°Cs by 2100, compared to pre-industrial levels. MEPs called on all G20 nations to show global leadership and to commit to achieving climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest.
Key terms

• UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change): entered into force in 1994 and under which Paris Agreement and Kyoto protocol have been agreed

• COP (Conference of the parties to the UNFCCC): participants come together every year to discuss how to achieve the convention's targets

• NDC (nationally determined contribution): the climate change mitigation goal each signatory of Paris agreement is required to set every five years

Find out more on international climate change negotiations with our infographic.

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At a glance: adopting the climate law
At a glance: COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow