

Our Guide to COP26

The eyes of the whole world will be on Glasgow in 2021 when the city plays host to COP26, the UN climate change conference. The event will take place between 31st October and 12th November, and it's shaping up to be one of the biggest and most important international summits ever held to tackle climate change.

As President of COP26, the UK writes the conference agenda, sets the tone for the talks, and lays down the expectations for the level of ambition expected. That makes the UK the country with the single biggest influence on the outcome of the negotiations. By mobilising our faith communities here in Scotland and lifting up the voices of our partners around the world, we can put pressure on our politicians to deliver real action on climate justice at COP26.

What is COP26?

The term COP26 refers to the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). At these talks, governments negotiate rules for addressing and tracking their progress on climate change. There are also platforms outside the negotiations for others to share information, build capacity and discuss policy solutions to climate change.

The summit was delayed by 12 months as a result of the pandemic. Given that the pandemic is still not under control in many parts of the world, there is still some uncertainty about the timing and format. The current format of COP26 is for representatives to attend in-person. However, there is still the potential for a delayed COP26, for the format to be online, or the Conference to be a combination of

online and in-person. Whatever decision is reached, it is vital that those most affected by the crisis are able to take part. Should there be a delay, or COP26 takes on a digital dimension, then the UK Government must ensure that there is equal access for participants from the Global South. Representatives from countries on the frontline of this crisis must be able to fully participate.

Why Glasgow?

The location and presidency of COP changes for each meeting. The last two summits were held in Katowice, Poland in 2018; the venue was changed to Madrid in 2019 at the last minute due to civil unrest in Chile.

COP26 was originally scheduled to be hosted by Brazil until President Jair Bolsonaro, controversial for his anti-environmental policies, withdrew his support. The UK offered to host the talks instead, and the UK Government Minister Alok Sharma has been appointed as President.

Glasgow is one of the few cities in the UK with large enough conference facilities to host an event on such a global scale. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for people in Scotland to come together to demand justice for those most affected by climate change – the global poor and future generations.

Why is this year's COP so important?

The science tells us that time is running out to save the planet. In 2018, the official body which provides scientific evidence to the UNFCCC published a landmark report

warning that failure to take drastic action in this decade would result in irreversible climate breakdown for the world's poorest regions. This includes many countries where SCIAF works which are already hardest hit by events like droughts, floods and severe heatwaves.

The Paris Agreement drawn up at the climate talks in 2015 was historic because it brought all countries together, for the first time, in common cause to combat climate change and keep global temperature rises this century to well below 2°C – with the aim of not exceeding 1.5°C.

The Paris Agreement also required every country to put forward a detailed plan showing how they will cut their “nationally determined contributions” (NDCs) to global emissions. The COP26 summit in Glasgow will be the first time since 2015 when all countries are invited to update their plans with tougher action designed to meet the 1.5°C target. To put it bluntly, COP26 could be our last chance to protect the poorest



Mary Jackson, Malawi

around the world, and our children and grandchildren from climate catastrophe.

What happens at COP?

The main event will be split into a Blue Zone at the SEC, for official badge-holders only, and a Green Zone at Glasgow Science Centre, which is open to the public to visit. In the Green Zone you will be able to interact with various organisations, from businesses and universities, to NGOs and international organisations. Within the Blue Zone at the SEC there are UN officials, representatives from governments, negotiators, advisors, a lot of press and media, and organisations with ‘Observer’ status.

At the start of the summit, world leaders will arrive. At COP26 we expect 196 to be present, including the US President Joe Biden who has formally re-joined the process after President Trump withdrew from the treaty.

In addition to the official COP26 spaces there will be a Civil Society Hub that will act as a base for activists from around the world to meet and socialise. This will be open to everyone – those badged delegates of COP26 from global civil society and activists, both local, and those who have travelled to Glasgow, to add their voices to calls for global action.

What do we want to see from this COP?

With the UK holding the Presidency of COP26, we have a crucial role to play in ensuring that countries set out bold and ambitious national pledges for action, or NDCs, which must be aligned with the goal to limit temperature rises to 1.5°C.

The richest countries of the world were the first to industrialise, have the greatest capacity to tackle the climate crisis, and are currently responsible for the vast majority of global emissions. However,

most climate impacts are being felt now in the poorest countries which have done little or nothing to cause this crisis.

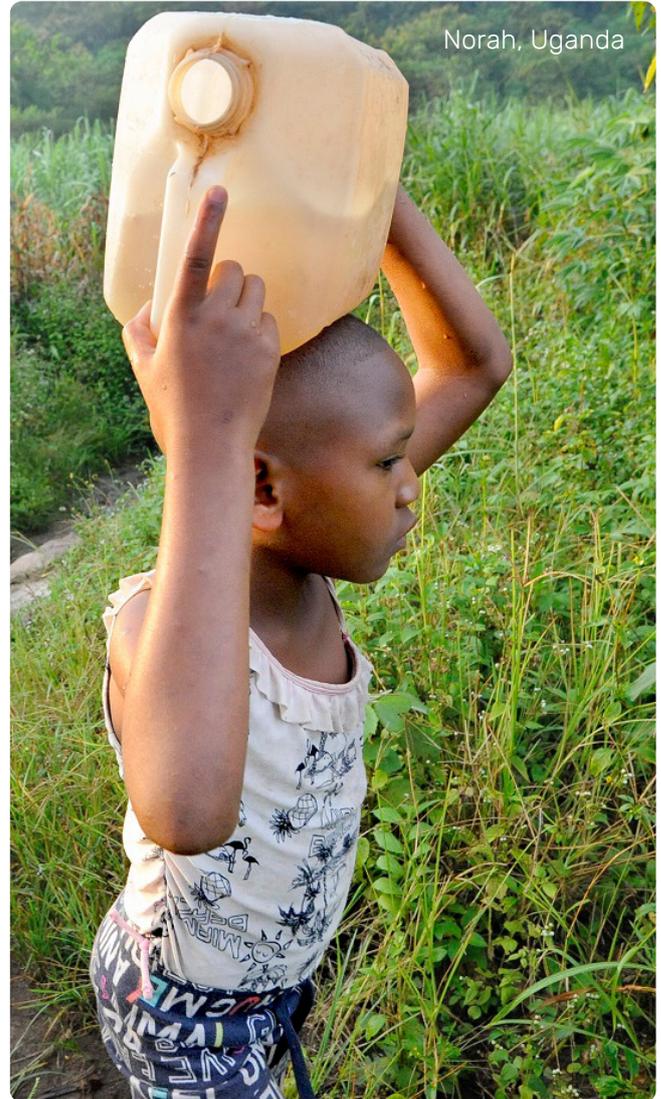
At previous COPs, it has been easy for richer countries to actively ignore this climate injustice, to brush it under the carpet, in favour of ensuring “business as usual” in their own countries. This time it is essential that richer countries rapidly increase their financial support to developing countries to help them grow post-carbon economies, and to help the poorest adapt to the changing climate. We also need action to address the issue of “loss and damage”. This is a term used by the UN to refer to the permanent loss or repairable damage caused by the changing climate. This could be severe weather events like floods and droughts, or slow-onset events, such as sea-level rise. It can also refer to economic losses, or the loss of life, livelihoods, ecosystems and cultural heritage.

It is crucial that the voices of people worst affected by the climate crisis are heard at COP26, so that the full extent of the change needed is understood and acted on.

Why do faith voices matter at COP26?

Too many times summits have stalled because country negotiation teams have been locked in soulless conference rooms arguing over the specific wording of technical agreements. It’s easy to understand why, viewed from the outside, so many people believe that the bureaucratic negotiations take place inside a bubble at COP which is far removed from the everyday lives of people affected by climate change.

We also know that the science alone is not enough to persuade the world to take action. When Pope Francis published [*Laudato Si’*](#) (his 2015 letter to the world on our Common Home) he reminded us that climate change is about so much more



than facts and figures – more, even, than Polar Bears and melting ice caps! It’s about people. Caring for our Common Home is an act of love for all of God’s Creation and Pope Francis’s hopeful words have inspired Catholics around the world to take action.

The impact of *Laudato Si’* in setting the scene in 2015 for 195 countries to unanimously agree to a plan to halt global warming cannot be underestimated. The Pope’s rallying call for each and every one of us to “hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” brought the environment movement into the mainstream. The effect on the summit was clear with numerous world leaders quoting his words in their speeches in Paris.



How do I get involved?

The build-up to COP26 is a great opportunity for raising awareness and getting new people involved in the climate conversation.

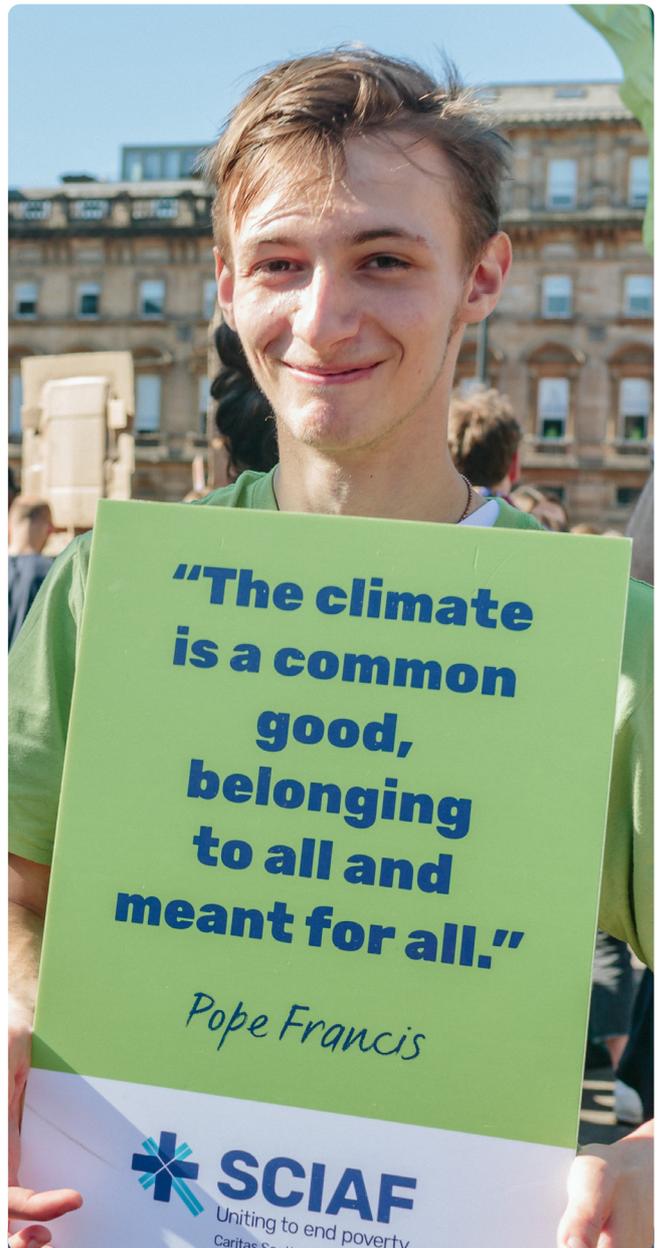
Give your support by visiting sciaf.org.uk/cop26 to find out about our Climate Chorus and sign our petition calling on the UK Government to lead the way at COP26 to ensure that those who are most affected by climate change get support.

You can get involved simply by participating in the myriad of projects, events, and other (currently online) activities planned on the road to COP26. Visit the Climate Fringe website for more information: climatefringe.org

We have also launched a guide to help people think about how we can all live in a more environmentally friendly way. Read [Caring for our Common Home](#) to get tips and ideas to bring *Laudato Si'* to life, including information on setting up an eco-group in your parish.

During COP26 there will be a range of opportunities to get involved: from joining the people's summit and mass mobilisations, to volunteering from home and across the city. More information on this will become available as the date draws near.

In what will no doubt be a cold Scottish winter, the people of Glasgow and the surrounding areas can also help to provide a warm welcome to people coming from all over the world if international travel is permitted in November. Whether this is through providing a home for pilgrims and global activists, welcoming them into our communities, praying together, or just chatting about their experiences over coffee, together we can ensure that people feel at home in Scotland.



**Stop Climate Chaos Scotland
have produced an excellent
resource with answers to
many more of the frequently
asked questions about
COP26**

[stopclimatechaos.scot/
cop26-faq/](https://stopclimatechaos.scot/cop26-faq/)

SCIAF (Scottish International Aid Fund) is the official overseas aid and development charity of the Catholic Church in Scotland and is a proud member of the Caritas family.

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