



What is the Paris Agreement?

The Paris Agreement, or Accord de Paris, is an agreement between the vast majority of the world's 197 countries to act together to tackle Climate Change.

It was agreed in principle in Paris in December 2015, and later signed by 195 countries*. In order for the Agreement to come into force it then had to be 'ratified' (formally agreed in law) by at least 55 countries, and the countries had together to account for at least 55% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

* The two exceptions are Syria and Nicaragua

Significant signing: The threshold was reached after President Xi Jinping of China and President Obama of The US ratified the Agreement. This joint action by the world's two largest emitters saw the Paris Agreement officially come into force on 4 November 2016.

What does the Agreement say?

Countries agreed to aim to keep the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to attempt to limit the rise to 1.5°C.

More generally, countries agreed to act together in three broad areas:

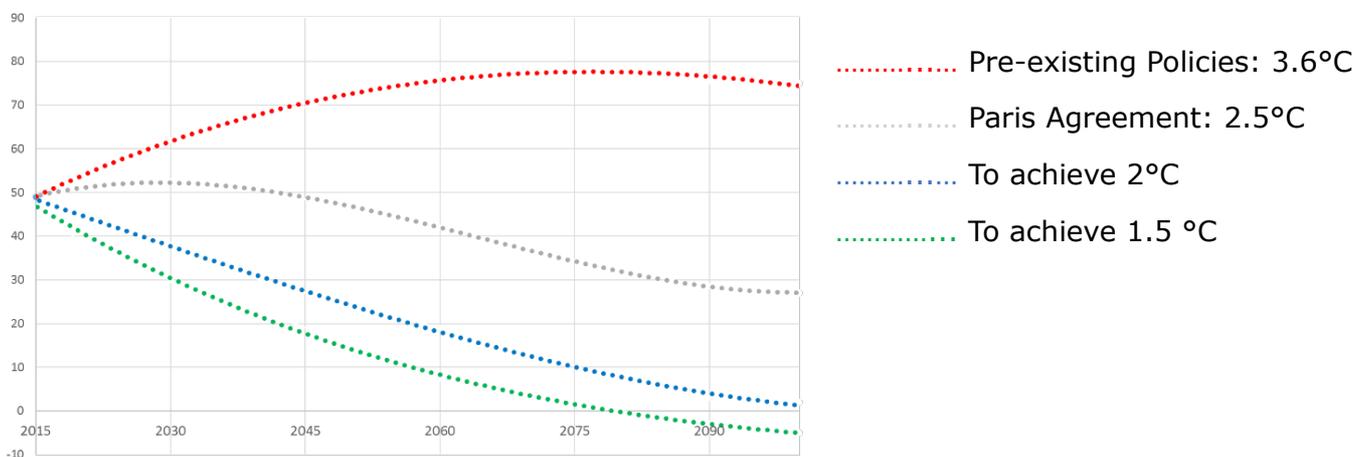
- * **Mitigation:** actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, intending to limit, stop or reverse the extent and/or rate of climate change long-term
- * **Adaptation:** ways to reduce how vulnerable we are to the effects of the many negative changes brought about by climate change.
- * **Finance:** richer countries to provide money to help poorer countries with both mitigation and adaptation.



Are the promised reductions enough?

No! A very important part of the Paris Agreement calls for countries to improve their reduction 'offers' in future. The reduction offers made at Paris will limit the temperature rise only to about 2.5°C above pre-industrial levels, even if countries implement all the policies that they promised.

Fig. 1 One Estimate of Global Emissions (Gtonnes CO2/ annum) for various scenarios



Crucially, the Agreement says countries must meet every 5 years to take stock (in 2018 for the first time) and each must 'ratchet up' their commitments to **set more ambitious targets**.

Who is in charge of the Agreement process?

The Paris Agreement was agreed at the so-called 'COP21' meeting. This was the 21st 'Conference of the Parties', a meeting of countries organised under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC is an international treaty which came into force in 1994, and which set out how countries would negotiate and progress action on climate change.

The Parties to the treaty have met annually since then to discuss progress. They met in Paris for the crucial COP21, in Marrakesh last year for COP 22, and will meet this year in Bonn for COP23. Fiji currently holds the COP Presidency, but the meeting is in Bonn for logistical reasons.



Why did they agree at Paris and not before?

After years of failing to agree on setting targets, why did countries manage to agree at COP21?

The key was to allow different **countries to set targets** that were very different in nature, depending on their history and circumstances – ie whether they are still industrialising, whether they are affected particularly badly by climate change, how wealthy they are, whether they are a significant or very small emitter of GHG. This has been termed a '**bottom-up approach**' and helped to get around the problems of an earlier, top-down Agreement, the Kyoto Protocol, under which countries had to agree to a flat % reduction in their absolute emissions. Many countries couldn't agree to this given their particular circumstances.

The Paris Agreement allows different sorts of emission reduction targets, so called 'Nationally Determined Contributions', which are at the heart of the agreement. Examples are:

- * the EU pledges to reduce GHG emissions by 40% compared with 1990 levels by 2030
- * Fiji pledges to reduce emissions unconditionally by 10% *compared with 'Business as Usual'*, and by a total of 30% if it receives \$500million of external aid for action on adaptation
- * China pledges that its emissions will peak by 2030, and also to provide 20% of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2030.

What will make it happen?

There are no sanctions if countries fail to meet their targets but there is a significant amount of international pressure - **countries must report to each other and the public at each COP** on progress they are making. Detailed rules are being worked out for this 'Progress Tracker', setting out how countries should accurately measure and report on their emissions, and on actions they are taking for both mitigation and adaptation. There is international momentum to keep the Paris Agreement on track even if one or two countries, or their Presidents, say they want to opt out.

Questions to explore

1. Why didn't Nicaragua sign the Paris Agreement?
2. Why are some countries who signed the Agreement yet to ratify it back home eg Russia?
3. Why has the Paris Agreement chosen 1.5°C as the temperature rise to aim for?
4. What will the global emissions be in 2030 relative to 2015, if all the promises at Paris are kept?
5. What emissions reduction might be needed to actually achieve the long-term target of only a 1.5°C temperature rise?
6. What are some new initiatives that would have to be taken to put emissions on that trajectory?
7. Why were there different types of country promise? You could select a variety of different types of countries (developed, developing), find out what type of offer they made and consider why.

Further research

UNFCCC Paris Agreement: <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>

UNFCCC Nationally Determined Contributions: <http://unfccc.int/focus/items/10240.php>

Why 1.5 Degrees matters: <https://www.cleantechloops.com/1-5-degrees/>

Why half a degree matters: <https://www.egu.eu/news/230/15c-vs-2c-global-warming-new-study-shows-why-half-a-degree-matters/>

President Trump and the Paris Agreement: <http://mailchi.mp/d69d954db505/interclimate-newsletter>

Inspiring action on climate change

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