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COP28: the end of the beginning

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The 28th Conference of Parties saw the conclusion of the first Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement. It delivered an important signal on fossil fuels being the root cause of climate change and the need to transition away from them, though with loopholes, and little clarity for other areas of climate action (adaptation & finance). What matters now is implementation, at the domestic level in preparing a next round of commitments by 2025, by spurring international cooperation and rethinking the future of these conferences.

Global Stocktake: an imbalanced outcome?

COP28 was due to be a **moment of truth** for several reasons. First, it was a test of countries' capacity to deliver on the high expectations set at COP27 on Loss and Damage (L&D). On that front it delivered on day one, by establishing a new Fund with an initial capitalisation of over 700m\$, though that does not erase developing countries' defiance of the World Bank as its interim host, or the challenging conversations its board will have in defining

eligibility, among others. But it shows the importance that smaller settings with a clear mandate and a relatively tight timeline, like the [Transitional Committee](#), can play in crafting compromise, as well as the vital role of contributors' coordination.

Second, COP28 was an important milestone for the dynamic implementation of the Paris Agreement, and the conclusion of its first Global Stocktake. After a two-year long [technical phase](#) where countries had to look in the rearview mirror at progress and gaps across mitigation, adaptation and finance in order to inform future climate action, came its political translation in a COP decision. Closely linked to this milestone, a third [‘moment of truth’](#) related to the strength of the signal that could be sent on the need to phase out fossil fuels and the strengthening of the oil and gas industry's action (noting that the vast majority of O&G known reserves are [controlled](#) by national companies).

While the global stocktake was balanced by design, its outcome did not reach similar levels of clarity across the board. Mitigation in the energy sector focused a lot of the technical and political attention, both this year and at COP itself, in no small part because of the International Energy Agency's (IEA) role in clearly articulating [five success criteria](#). Beyond energy, the promise to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030 has become a formal outcome for the first time. But neither the adaptation section of the Global Stocktake, nor the definition of the Global Goal on Adaptation have managed to deliver strong signals, although that issue was [critical for the African Group of Negotiators](#), in particular. The question of finance looms large on the adaptation discussion, but even looking squarely at mitigation, developing countries are asked to take a leap of faith on collective goals for mitigation, without so much as an acknowledgment of the scale of the challenge (a tripling of investment this decade in developing countries, according to the [IEA and IFC](#)). This is partly due to a rigid calendar: COP29 will see countries agree on a [New Collective Quantified Goal](#) on climate finance from the current floor of USD100 billion per year. Most developed countries are unwilling to agree on any substance ahead of it. This is characteristic of COPs' thematic pendulum swinging back and forth from ambition to finance from one year to the next, with COP26 squarely focused on ‘coal, cash, cars and trees’ for mitigation, COP27 on finance for loss and damage (and implicitly, climate justice), and COP28 on our collective dependence on fossil fuels.

The effectiveness of the ‘signal’ on fossil fuels

While the technical report of the Global Stocktake said that “scaling up renewable energy and phasing out all *unabated fossil fuels* are indispensable elements of just energy transitions to net-zero emissions”, this conclusion was (perhaps inevitably) diluted in the [political decision](#) which only talks of “transition[ing] away from fossil fuels”.

More specifically, paragraphs 28 and 29 give eight ways forward for countries to accelerate their mitigation action:

- Two merely repeat COP26 text on coal and phase-out of fossil-fuel subsidies, with some new clues as to what might constitute ‘efficient’ subsidies (fighting against energy poverty and just transitions) harking back to language from the EU Council COP28 negotiating [conclusions](#).
- Three are new and directly related to the expectations set by IEA on [successful markers for ambition](#): tripling renewable capacity and doubling the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements (though without quantitative indicator or baseline year), accelerating action on methane emissions (though without any quantified target and no focus on energy), and transitioning away from fossil fuels (though with a focus on ‘energy systems’); crucially, they are all anchored in this critical decade for action, albeit in more or less loose terms. They are also supported by a voluntary pledge on [renewables and efficiency](#) signed by 130 countries.
- Two represent a good indication of where fossil interests might retreat next, in making space for “low-carbon fuels”, “low-emission vehicles”, “abatement and removal technologies such as carbon capture and utilization and

storage, particularly [but not only] in hard-to-abate sectors". Most worryingly, perhaps, the next paragraph gives a special role to "transitional fuels" (likely natural gas) as a way to balance energy security in the necessary energy transition ahead, in line with the [EU taxonomy of sustainable investment](#).

How can one boil down this complexity? First, by recognising that in symbolic terms, this outcome represents a major tipping point, with collective objectives for the energy transition in the next 7 years around three pillars (deployment of renewables, energy efficiency and a transition away from fossil fuels). This shows countries recognise the exponential growth trend of renewables in particular—an annual growth rate of 17% is [exactly what the average growth rate has been for the past seven years](#). Second, by recognising that in legal terms, it still gives cover for, say, fossil capacity expansion, or the deployment of low-performance 'abatement'. Somehow counter-intuitively, a clearer focus to phase-out the [oft-criticised](#) 'fossil fuel emissions' may have delivered a clearer legal basis (but a much murkier signal to the rest of the world). As a response, some call for a high-standard definition of what counts as 'unabated' ([Bataille et al., 2023](#)), while others [highlight](#) that the term has a positive track-record on regulatory approaches in relation to curbing coal use.

Countries or individuals will inevitably project different meaning onto the same words, in line with their expectations and interests. Scientists are [devastated](#), the group of Small Islands and Developing States ([AOSIS](#)) laid out how this deal fell short of what's needed, and puzzled observers will no doubt wonder why it took 28 COPs to name the root cause of the bulk of the problem (75% of all global warming to date and 90% of CO₂ emissions). The head of OPEC privately warned of '[irreversible consequences](#)' should fossils appear in the text, and after it was adopted praised "[the consensual and positive outcome](#)". But what matters now is understanding, and to some extent deciding to weigh in on how this outcome will influence today's expectations and decisions. The [executive Secretary of the UNFCCC](#) or the [Climate Vulnerable Forum](#) both called it the 'beginning of the end' of the fossil fuel era, mindful that its potential ripple effect lies in seeding doubts in investors that fossil fuels may not be a safe bet after all. As OPEC chief says, "without adequate levels of investment, the future of our industry is in jeopardy."

What next: preparing domestic plans and building international cooperation

The UAE Consensus is fragile—the 39 countries of AOSIS were not in the room when the Global Stocktake decision was adopted, and Least Developed Countries called it "the bare minimum". What matters now, in the words of Indian scholar Navroz Dubash, is to "[rebalance attention from global target setting toward national climate politics and policy](#)". Clean energy investment has already [overtaken](#) fossil investment globally, but this needs to accelerate, in particular towards developing economies who see fossils as a way to meet their energy needs and generate a much-needed rent to industrialise. One thing is certain: developed countries must take the lead on showing the way out of fossil fuels (as per their mandate under the Paris Agreement), and this should be the first focus of 2024. Their anachronistic expansion of fossil capacity (US, UK, Canada, Norway, Australia particularly), and need to heed a 2009 G20 decision on phasing out fossil subsidies should be among the first tough conversations to have to bring about a 'just and orderly' transition. Their legislation (as well as their long-term strategies) ought to be assessed in light of this commitment to transition away. As all countries will start preparing their next round of nationally-determined commitments (NDCs) expected for 2025 through to 2035, what will matter is the detail of their plans, beyond the encouragement to have economy-wide emission reduction targets. How countries will reflect the collective goals on energy in their own NDCs will ultimately matter more than its precise wording. In addition, about 150 of them pledged to include the role of agriculture and food going forward, for instance.

The Global Stocktake was also due to enhance international cooperation on climate action, and on that front it fell short—probably reflective of low levels of trust, but also that this cooperation is usually delivered in sectoral agreements in smaller groups, rather than in a multilateral decision. Countries also project different things, once

again, and international cooperation could be a synonym for capacity building, financial support, agreeing common standards, or a way to criticise climate policies perceived as ‘unilateral trade measures’. To overcome the very difficult geopolitical context, with fault lines with respect to the Ukraine or the Middle East strongly felt in the negotiating rooms and in the coalitions being built outside of them, countries need to keep on **innovating**. The “Road map to Mission 1.5” centred on cooperation and enabling conditions, creates an important mechanism from Dubai to Belem (COP30). The IEA’s successful crystallisation of 1.5°C-aligned benchmarks for energy shows that what matters for delivery is political ownership (e.g. Ministerial Dialogues); in that respect the “Mission 1.5” model seems promising.

Going forward, the focus of COP29 in Baku (Azerbaijan) is clear. It will include the delivery of the New Collective Quantified Goal, and more calls to a reform of international financial institutions, and other initiatives including a new task force on international taxation led by France and Kenya. Brazil will be a central player in the multilateral arena, with a G20 presidency in 2024 and the hosting of the Clean Energy Ministerial, ahead of COP30 in Belem, where new are NDCs due. In the words of Winston Churchill, ‘now is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end, but it is perhaps **the end of the beginning**’. We now ought to herald innovative ways to bring about rapid implementation of these collective goals.

Future of COPs

Perhaps more so than other Presidencies in recent years, the UAE yearned for a positive outcome. In trying to deliver it, it crossed an important line: that several countries traditionally considered as developing do have the capacity to contribute to multilateral climate finance. That could encourage China, the 7th contributor globally according to **ODI**, and **others** to provide more transparency on their contributions.

Despite the cognitive dissonance of having a COP in the UAE, what is undisputable is how much the COP presidency invested in this process—never again will another COP presidency be able to register close to 100,000 delegates. Both because COPs will inevitably need to downsize going forward (Belem is planning to attract 3 to 4 times less), and because we need to shape the UNFCCC towards implementation, we need to be creative. A potentially important way to ensure COPs deliver in the face of very different priorities, starting points and responsibilities is to open a space for connecting regional discussions, connected to nationally-driven processes and multilateral arena (e.g. regional climate weeks to be harnessed).

Factsheet

First Global Stocktake

Mitigation

- Countries are called on to contribute to the global efforts to [28]:

? triple renewables capacity and double the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030;
 ? "transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade"

? phase down unabated coal power and phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies as soon as possible (repeating **COP26 decision text**), with an added focus on subsidies “that do not address energy poverty or just transitions”

? accelerate, among others, zero- and low-emission technologies (renewables, nuclear, hydrogen, abatement & removal technologies)

? substantially reducing non-CO₂ emissions globally, including in particular methane by 2030

? accelerate the reduction of emissions from road transport, “including through development of infrastructure and rapid deployment of zero and low-emission vehicles”

- Recognizes that “transitional fuels” (likely: natural gas) can play a role in facilitating the energy transition while ensuring energy security [29]
- Emphasises the importance of halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030 [...] in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework [33]

Adaptation

- Calls on countries that do not have them yet to set up national adaptation plans, policies and planning processes by 2025 and to have progressed in implementing them by 2030 [59]
- Sets 7 qualitative objectives (not time-bound) on water, food and agriculture, health, ecosystems, infrastructure, poverty eradication and livelihoods [63]
- Countries should all have an early-warning system by 2027, and i) climate hazard assessment, ii) designed and iii) implemented adaptation plans as well as, iv) operationalized a system for monitoring, evaluation and learning by 2030 [64]

Means of implementation & support

- Highlights overall needs of USD 5.8–5.9 trillion for the pre-2030 period according to the Standing Committee on Finance on both adaptation and mitigation [67], and the importance of fiscal space [68]
- Notes the likelihood of meeting the USD 100 billion goal in 2022 [76] and welcomes pledges towards the Green Climate Fund replenishment [78]
- Notes progress made towards doubling adaptation finance [77] but that more needs to be done [86], sets up a high-level ministerial dialogue at COP29 on the urgent need to scale up adaptation finance [99], urges for dedicated report on progress towards doubling by COP29 [100]
- Emphasises the role of governments, central banks, commercial banks, institutional investors and other financial actors to enhance access to climate finance and accelerate the ongoing establishment of “new and innovative sources of finance, including taxation” [96]

International Cooperation, guidance and way forward

- Establishes a dialogue on implementing the global stocktake outcomes [97] starting from June 2024 until COP32 in 2028 [98]
- Launches “Road map to mission 1.5°C” under guidance of COP28, COP29 and COP30 Presidencies “to significantly enhance international cooperation” and “stimulate ambition in the next round” of NDCs” [191]
- Calls for new NDCs to be submitted between Nov. 2024 and Feb. 2025 [173] at a special event hosted the UN Secretary General [190], taking into account “the good practices and opportunities identified during the technical dialogue of the first global stocktake” [177]
- Invite “relevant work programmes” to integrate relevant outcomes of the first global stocktake in planning their future work, “in line with their mandates” [186]

Other negotiation items

- The [Sharm el-Sheikh mitigation ambition and implementation work programme](#) notes the synthesis report published on the global dialogues covering power and transport in 2023, under the topic of accelerating the just energy transition.
- The [just transition work programme](#) is established until 2026, to organise at least two dialogues a year [4] regarding enhancing just transition pathways, adaptation and resilience, just transition of the workforce [2].
- The [global goal on adaptation](#) establishes a two-year 'UAE-Belém' work programme to determine “indicators” for measuring adaptation progress in line with the objectives set out under the “UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience” (see adaptation section of the Global Stocktake above).
- The draft decision on [operationalisation of new funding arrangements for loss & damage](#) proposed by the Transitional Committee is adopted as is, with over USD [770 million USD](#) pledged for the initial capitalisation of the Fund. The [Santiago Network](#) will be hosted by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS).
- Article 6: No decision was reached to operationalize [Art. 6.2](#) ('cooperative approaches') and [Art. 6.4](#) (centralized carbon market) but a [decision](#) was reached on [Art. 6.8](#) ('non-market approaches'), Parties and observers are invited to submit ideas for such approaches.

Voluntary coalitions

Energy

- 10 new countries joined [Powering Past Coal Alliance](#) (60 in total) to phase-out coal by 2030 (developed) or 2040 (developing countries), 3 joined the [Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance](#) (24 in total) committed to end oil and gas extraction and exploration, Australia and Norway joined the [Clean Energy Transition Partnership](#) (41 in total) to end direct international public finance for fossil fuel projects, Palau, Colombia and Samoa joined the [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#) (11 in total) for launching a treaty to phase-out fossil fuels.
- [Oil & Gas Decarbonization Charter launched to accelerate climate action](#): 50 companies committed to eliminating methane emissions and end routine flaring of gas by 2030, and achieve net-zero from production operations by 2050
- 118 signatories committed to the voluntary [Global Renewable and Energy Efficiency Pledge](#)

Industry

- India and Sweden launched a [Leaders for Industry Transition partnership](#), alongside a separate Climate Club led by Germany and Chile with 36 members, aiming to set-up inclusive match-making platforms to decarbonise industries.

Food & Nature

- The 159 signatories of the [COP28 UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action](#) commit to include agriculture and food systems in their next NDCs, NBSAPs, and NAP (mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity plans).
- The first part (global) of [FAO's 1.5°C roadmap](#) is to be followed by regional (COP29) and national (COP30) roadmaps.

- ["Tropical Forests Forever" Fund](#): Proposed by Brazil, it envisions paying for hectares of standing forests via contributions from sovereign funds among others, with the aim to value forests beyond their carbon sequestration capabilities.

Non-CO2

- 3 new countries joined the [Global Methane Pledge](#) (155 in total), committing to reduce global methane emissions at least 30 percent from 2020 levels by 2030; the US launched a [Methane Finance Sprint](#) and, together with Canada, jointly [committed](#) to methane reductions by 2030 in their O&G sector.
- [Global Cooling Pledge](#): 66 countries signed a new pledge to cut emissions from fridges and air conditioning by 68% by 2050 (on 2012 levels)

Finance

- [Expert Review of Debt, Nature and Climate](#) launched by Colombia, Kenya and France to examine how to make sovereign debt more sustainable, both environmentally and fiscally, to report back at COP29.
- [Task Force on International Taxation](#) launched by Barbados, Kenya, France and others, to look into a variety of possibilities of raising new revenues for climate finance from taxation.
- [International coalition aimed at phasing out fossil fuel subsidies](#) launched by Netherlands with 11 countries, focusing on i) transparency, ii) addressing international barriers and iii) facilitating national strategies for subsidy reduction and carbon leakage prevention through international dialogue.

CLIMATE

NÉGOCIATIONS INTERNATIONALES

COP28

CLIMATE INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS

GLOBAL STOCKTAKE

FOSSIL FUELS