

COP26 sharpened the talk, COP27 must measure the action

If the global journey to the 1.5-degree scenario were a mountain climb, various net-zero plans from across the world have left us with a very conscientiously considered, thoroughly researched, plan for how to climb it. COP26 commitments will not take us all the way to the top, but they mark a positive turning point.

COP26 has been hailed a failure by many. While the sum of all pledges could amount to us landing at 1.8 degrees within the next decade, a marked improvement to previous ambition levels, commitments to concrete action fell short. The 'phase-out' of coal ended at a 'phase-down', the elimination of fossil-fuel subsidies was softened, and climate financing pathways are nowhere near as ambitious as they need to be.

To begin their ascent, nations must now move beyond pledges, and move forward with an earnest attempt to accelerate the energy transition. And the first step must be an end to a long-standing addiction to fossil fuels. Subsidies must stop, and coal, oil and gas must be phased out, not phased down. Without this key first step in place, our global journey towards the summit will be not only be meandering and inefficient, we will be in danger of never reaching it.

Electrification is the backbone of many decarbonization strategies, but in many parts of the world, it's still not a climate winner. At present, the growth of electricity demand is set to outpace the scaling up of green energy infrastructure and renewable capacity, creating the danger of a shortfall that fossil fuels will have to fill. If governments pushed harder to decarbonize power, this balance could shift. Prioritizing the addition of more renewable projects, the expansion of grid infrastructure and the upscaling of flexibility solutions such as storage and demand side management is critical to drive this. 70 percent of global electricity generation is not powered by renewables, so the journey ahead here is long.

Simplified permitting and siting regulations are one of the biggest obstacles to the acceleration of renewable projects. Across the world, permitting rules are currently complex, compounded by a lack of administrative resources, and consequently inefficient. By addressing this, governments can help reduce the timelines of building new projects from up to ten years, to less than two in many cases.

Beyond power, governments and industry must work together to lay a strong foundation for net-zero societies. Nurturing electricity system flexibility is key to accelerate the global climate journey, and this can be kickstarted by technologies that already exist. Battery storage, electric vehicles and charging infrastructure, green dispatchable power plants and more digital network operations, should all evolve and build scale alongside an increasing penetration of renewables. Electric vehicles currently make up 5 percent of global car sales, this must grow to more than 60 percent by 2030 to align with global net-zero target.

Political action must also set clear signals to industry, and to the global community. Regions with the most ambitious climate pledges – such as Europe and the USA- can do more to bring the cost of capital down for international climate finance, and redirect investment away from fossil fuels. Clearer policy signals to industry, encouraging a more sustainable path forward can also accelerate decarbonization to the lengths necessary to stay aligned with the Paris Agreement.

Resting on the gains made at COP26 may be the most dangerous threat to the 1.5-degree scenario. To keep it within reach, we must begin climbing, and stop planning. This means implementing clear policies designed to accelerate green energy. Incremental steps, and a reluctance to phase out the past is no longer a viable option. In the words of [UN Secretary-General Guterres](#) "COP27 starts now".

[Read more about scaling up renewables.](#)