



Climate and environment

– main points on the global agenda 2021

A decisive year for the environment

THE ROAD TO GLASGOW – A CRUCIAL MEETING ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate negotiations will continue 1-12 November in Glasgow. Postponed from 2020 because of the pandemic, the Conference of the Parties to the Climate Convention (COP 26) will try to agree on “Paris left-overs”, including rules for carbon market mechanisms that would allow countries to purchase carbon credits (reductions) from another country to allow the purchasing country to continue to emit within its borders. Another important outstanding issue is the financing of responses when vulnerable countries experience negative effects of climate change (“loss and damage”). “Nature-based solutions” – that is how forest, agriculture and other ecosystems can absorb carbon and protect against negative effects of climate change – will also feature high on the agenda in Glasgow. And, significantly, there is the question on how earlier promises of financing to the Global South, the [100 billion dollar target](#), is going to be delivered, and ambitions for further resource transfers in the future.

In addition to the formal agenda, COP 26 will take place at a point in time when there is increased momentum for net-zero targets, with new commitments from Japan, Korea, China, and the President-Elect in the United States. The United Kingdom and Italy Joint Presidency of COP 26 has a key role in finding ways of expressing these higher ambitions in operative conclusions from Glasgow. Before the meeting, governments are supposed to present revisions to the national climate plans (NDCs). Increasing national efforts in a 2030 perspective is an important part of the global efforts to limit climate change.

CLIMATE ACTION IN MAJOR ECONOMIES

In addition to other preparations for COP26 in Glasgow, the G7 and G20 processes will be important during 2021.

The United Kingdom is, not only COP26 host, but also chair of the G7 in 2021. Climate is on the preliminary agenda for the Summit, probably to take place in June. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has invited Australia, India and South Korea to participate, in addition to the regular G7 members. The meeting will provide opportunities for follow-up to the [Climate Ambition Summit](#) held in London in December 2020.

Simultaneously, Italy holds the G20 Presidency during 2021. The government in Rome has [made](#) climate change a priority issue. The G20-summit will take place 30-31 October 2021 in Rome. As already mentioned, Italy shares the COP 26 Presidency with the UK, and the two governments have agreed to cooperate closely on the climate agenda.

In addition, there will be many bilateral summits. In Europe, much attention is directed toward a first EU-US meeting with President Biden and his administration, but there are also important developments in inter alia Asia, including [China's relations to Africa](#). The EU-Africa summit during the year will also be important.

PATHS FORWARD FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY- WHAT CAN KUNMING DELIVER?

According to [current plans](#), Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will meet 17-30 May 2021 in Kunming, China. However, the meeting might be delayed towards the end of 2021 because of both the pandemic and resistance from some



governments, in particular Brazil, during the preparations. There are also some doubts as to what issues China as host nation and chair will prioritise (or not prioritise) at the meeting.

Governments took important decisions at the meeting in Japan 2010, including [the Aichi targets](#). However, although there has been some progress, the loss of biodiversity continues. An important report in 2019 provided a scientific base for further negotiations. On the agenda of the meeting in Kunming is the adoption of a post-2020 biodiversity framework, including targets for 2030 and 2050. Means of implementation and rules on transparency and responsibilities are other important points.

In addition to the formal agenda, the link to pandemics is already in focus and will likely feature high on the political agenda in the run-up to Kunming.

The [One Planet Summit](#) in January and [World Congress of IUCN](#) in September might provide much needed impetus to further efforts for biodiversity protection.

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR REDUCING CHEMICAL RISKS

Negotiations are ongoing for a new global framework for chemicals management, to continue and strengthen work done in [SAICM](#). The fifth session of the International Conference for Chemicals Management (ICCM5 5-9 July 2021, Bonn) will also address other important issues, possibly including interlinkages between sound chemicals and waste management and combating climate change; and linkages with and the need for action in other sectors, including health, workers protection, and agriculture.

In addition, a back-to-back-meeting within the conventions addressing specific groups of chemicals, trade in dangerous substances and hazardous waste, will be held in July (Basel Convention COP15, Rotterdam Convention COP10 and Stockholm Convention COP10; 19-30 July 2021, Geneva). As environmental governance of complex supply chains is getting more attention, this is an important opportunity to move forward.

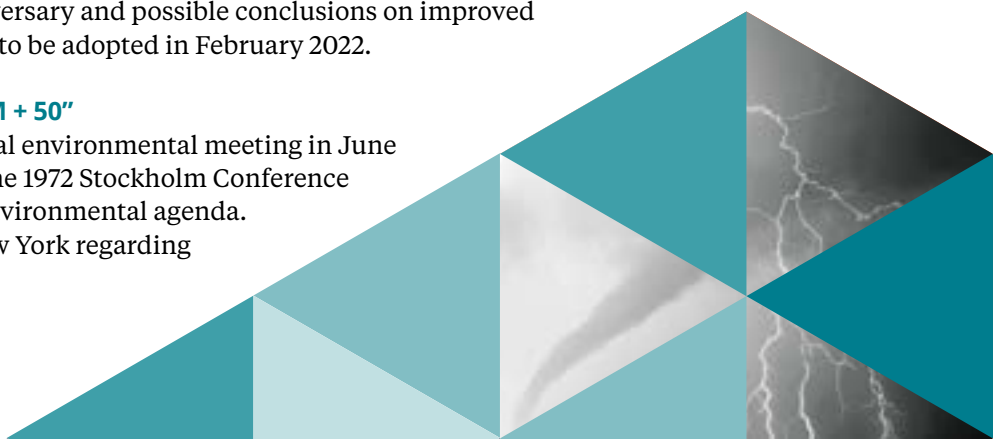
UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY

In February, the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) was scheduled to have its [fifth meeting](#) in Nairobi, Kenya (22-26 February 2021). According to latest planning, it will be reduced to a two-day virtual meeting on a limited number of issues, other items on the agenda being postponed to February 2022. Resolutions adopted at UNEA can be of significant importance for many environmental policy areas. The [theme](#) of the fifth meeting is “Strengthened action to protect and restore nature and the nature-based solutions to achieve the sustainable development goals in its three complementary dimensions (social, economic and environmental)”. The Norwegian UNEA Presidency is hoping for a political declaration on green recovery from Covid-19 at the virtual 2021 meeting, but this is far from certain.

At the February meeting, UNEA is expected to launch a year of celebrating the start of UNEP in 1972. Negotiations are taking place in Nairobi regarding the content of this “UNEP at 50”-anniversary and possible conclusions on improved global environmental governance, to be adopted in February 2022.

PREPARATIONS FOR “STOCKHOLM + 50”

Sweden has offered to host a global environmental meeting in June 2022, to celebrate the memory of the 1972 Stockholm Conference and to move forward on today’s environmental agenda. Discussions are taking place in New York regarding



a UN mandate for such a conference, with a proposal for a resolution expected to be tabled at the UN General Assembly soon. Whereas the EU is supportive of Sweden's offer, there are question marks from the G77 group regarding the purpose and scope of such a meeting.

UNEA-6 is scheduled for February 2023, coinciding with Sweden's Presidency of the European Union. This might create opportunities for follow-up of both UNEP+50 and a possible Stockholm+50 meeting.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

The election of Joe Biden as US President and new net-zero commitments have created a window of opportunity for climate change negotiations. COP-26 in Glasgow is an occasion to solve remaining issues from Paris and to move forward on the net-zero path. However, this may require a broader approach than only the cumbersome and path-dependent negotiation process on the articles in the present draft texts. A high-level political commitment on for example low-carbon transitions of industry could be one such step.

On other environmental issues, progress might be more difficult. Brazil is creating obstacles in negotiations on biodiversity, and the commitment of China as COP15 President is unclear. Management of chemical risks is still to a large extent an unregulated area, compared to progress made since the Rio conference 1992 on for example climate change. Much depends on the ability of leading countries and institutions such as UNEP to formulate a coherent agenda for strengthened global environmental governance. In this area as well, high-level political commitment and creativity is needed, to avoid getting stuck in detailed text negotiations in the usual Nairobi/New York institutional settings.

Environmental negotiations do not take place in isolation from international relations in other areas. The pandemic is both a global health crisis and an economic crisis, with increasing existing inequalities.

The uneven access to vaccines is creating new conflict lines between the rich countries and the Global South. By autumn 2021, many citizens in Europe and the US will have been vaccinated and life might be well on the way to normality. In contrast, it will take years before most of the population in developing countries are immune to the new coronavirus. India and South Africa have [tabled a proposal](#) in WTO on wavering intellectual property rights to facilitate production, but the EU and the US (among others) have rejected such an option. The EU is providing financing to the COVAX-initiative but needs to consider further measures. China has an active vaccine diplomacy, increasing its geopolitical leverage.

Regarding the economic fallout of pandemic. The IMF has [warned](#) about increasing debt, in particular in the Global South. However, so far the US has resisted the issuing of [special drawing rights](#) as a way of facilitating the situation for developing countries, and negotiations on debt relief are progressing slowly.

Even if the United Kingdom and Italy might try to keep climate change negotiations separate from the wider global agenda, the debt issue and conflicts over access to vaccines might complicate the dialogue up to the Glasgow meeting in November.

There is also a risk that measures taken by the EU and the US to avoid "carbon leakage", such as the introduction of border carbon adjustment mechanisms, might create negative reactions in other parts of the world, if not [framed in a constructive and multilateral way](#).



Key scheduled events

- **11 January:** [One Planet Summit](#)
- **25-26 January:** [Climate Adaptation Summit](#)
- **22-23 February:** First part of the fifth session of the [United Nations Environment Assembly \(UNEA\)](#)
- **9-11 April:** [Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group](#)
- **17-30 May:** [UN Convention on Biodiversity \(COP 15\)](#) (Kunming, preliminary dates, might be moved to autumn)
- **24 May–1 June:** World Health Assembly
- **Summer (date to be decided):** G7 Summit, UK Presidency
- **5-9 July:** [Fifth meeting of the International Conference on Chemicals Management](#)
- **July:** [UN Ocean Conference](#), Lisbon
- **19-30 July:** [Triple COPs: meetings of the Conferences of Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam & Stockholm Conventions under the Theme of “Global Agreements for a Healthy Planet – Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste.”](#)
- **14-30 September:** [76th Session of the UN General Assembly](#)
- **3-11 September:** [World Conservation Congress](#) hosted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- **September/October:** [The Food Systems Summit](#)
- **October:** [Second UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference](#), Beijing
- **15-17 October:** IMF and World Bank Group Annual Meetings, Washington
- **24-26 October:** World Health Summit (including sessions on climate change and health)
- **30-31 October:** G20 Summit (Rome)
- **1-12 November:** [United Nations Climate Change Conference \(COP26\)](#)
- **1-5 November:** [Minamata Convention COP4](#)
- **6-7 November:** 2021 Global Conference on Health and Climate Change (Glasgow)
- **7-10 December:** [Barcelona Convention COP 22](#)

Sources: UNEP, WHO, IMF, and others