

Making action the norm

Climate change action is moving forward, with the outcomes from COP26 setting the agenda for governments to commit to. Actors in the private sector are also setting out commitments, and climate action looks to be gaining momentum across society and around the globe.

COP26 was a highly anticipated event, seen as a great opportunity for the world to re-focus on the fight against climate change given that the pandemic had been absorbing political bandwidth since early 2020. Yet, on reflection, the outcomes of COP26 seem to have drawn a mix of hopefulness and disappointment. One outcome of the November 2021 event was the adoption of the Glasgow Climate Pact — this agreement commits to the reduction of coal usage and re-affirms the ambition to restrict warming to 1.5 °C, as long as rapid action is taken in line with countries' enhanced commitments.

This commitment to reduce coal use is a step forward, but it is not as ambitious as many had hoped for, nor what is required. “Phasing out” was the wording put forward and preferred by a number of nations, but the final document reads “phasing down”. International negotiations rely on reaching a consensus for agreement, and to have achieved a commitment on coal is still an achievement to celebrate and push forward on.

Away from the government negotiations, announcements from businesses on their climate pledges were coming out daily during the event. Net-zero pledges do need to be solidified into net-zero plans, but pledges are a necessary first step to make climate action part of the collective consciousness. Many of these pledges are being made as part of the UN Race to Zero (<https://unfccc.int/climate-action/race-to-zero-campaign>), a campaign requiring a commitment to reduce emissions to zero by 2050 at the latest and to cut them in half by 2030. This has spread across various industries, for example with major music labels, alongside independent labels, signing the Music Climate Pact, and they have further committed to educate music fans on the climate impact of their industry.

Fashion is another industry stepping up, creating the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action. Fast fashion has a large climate impact (*Nat. Clim. Change* 8, 1; 2018), but businesses are working to reduce



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this through changes to their supply chains and production. Clothing rental is also becoming more common — Carrie Johnson, wife of the British prime minister, wore hired clothes for the 2021 G7 summit events, and also hired her wedding dress. The footprint of clothes hiring does need to be considered, as a study found a high footprint for a specific Finnish example (J. Levänen et al. *Environ. Res. Lett.* 16, 054069; 2021), and clothing rental should sit alongside other behaviour changes reducing personal consumption.

Another member of the UN Race to Zero is the Glasgow Finance Alliance for Net Zero, which currently includes over 450 financial companies from 45 countries. These companies control US\$130 trillion in global assets; a significant sum if some of this money can be directed to climate transition. Sustainable investing has seen rapid growth in recent years, and throughout 2020, environmental, social and governance (ESG) investing has outperformed non-ESG investments. ESG investing is now an attractive option for consumers.

As more companies make claims about their climate action, it is important for consumers to take responsibility to make themselves aware of the validity of such claims and to avoid potential greenwashing — claims of environmental responsibility

that are not supported by the actions of the company. Greenwashing is increasing, but legislation is following, and action can be taken against companies for this behaviour. In January 2021, the European Commission released a report on the outcome of their annual screening of websites to identify breaches of EU consumer law in online markets, which focused for the first time on greenwashing (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_269). Of the 344 questionable claims investigated, the authorities believe that 42% may be false or deceptive and could therefore potentially amount to unfair commercial practice under the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive.

Momentum is important in climate action, but it is easy for ambition to be derailed or sidelined. The greater the number of groups committing to the cause during and after COP26, the greater the swell of action that will surge forward to become true action to address climate change — which has been seen around the world with previous pledges. We hope that this will be seen in the coming months and that commitment to a sustainable future will become the new way of life. □

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