



ITUC Summary report of the Glasgow Climate Negotiations COP26

15 November 2021



In the midst of a pandemic with COVID infections rising everywhere, including in the UK, the UNFCCC climate conference brought 35.000 people together at the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow. After two weeks of negotiations, the final COP outcomes acknowledge the science, recognise the gaps to realise the 1.5° target and embed the call for Just Transition. But there is also a huge feeling of disappointment, especially with countries and communities of the Global South. The compromises in the Glasgow Climate Pact fall short on ambition, finance, responsibility and inclusion.

The multilateral approach of the Paris Agreement is still on track, all countries are at the table. While there is progress, it is by far not enough. COP27 must see 1.5° in reach through raised ambition and an agreed Loss and Damage mechanisms must be central to any outcome. For workers and their communities, the social dialogue vital for Just Transition plans with jobs at the centre must begin now. Nothing less than national jobs plans and company jobs plans can be accepted. These plans are crucial to effectively reduce emissions at the national level, in the economic sectors and at the company level. Unions must step up their engagement, and make that they are at the table to deliver the policies and measures to keep the temperature rise to 1.5°C.

The global trade union movement went to the UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow with four clear demands:

1. Raise climate ambition with Just Transition policies and measures in enhanced NDCs.

2. Implement inclusive climate policies that respect and promote human and labour rights.
3. Provide climate finance to change the global development model and decarbonise the Global South.
4. Implement strong industrial policies and investment plans underpinning the transition to zero-emission economies.

Raise climate ambition with Just Transition

The Glasgow Climate Pact (GCP) confirms the 1.5°C target and recognises that this requires rapid, deep and sustained reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions, including reducing global CO₂ emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 relative to the 2010 level and to net zero around mid-century. The Pact recognises that the current NDCs will lead to emissions that are 13.7% above the 2010 level in 2030. Countries are requested to revisit and strengthen the 2030 targets in their NDCs as necessary to align with the Paris Agreement temperature goal by the end of 2022.

The GCP calls on the countries to *"the phasedown of unabated coal power and phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies"* and explicitly recognises *"the need for support towards a just transition"* in this crucial paragraph. This is a major win for the global trade union movement. Our language on Just Transition has been broadly picked up at COP26 in several parts of the texts, also in the important decisions on Article 6 (see further). Answering to one of our explicit demands, countries are urged to present by the next COP *"long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies (...) towards just transitions to net zero emissions by or around mid-century"*.

There are now 49 countries that have explicitly included 'just transition' in their NDCs. This provides the global trade union movement an important base to work with governments, social partners and other stakeholders to implement Just Transition plans, policies and measures. It is a major call to action at the national level where unions must demand their place at the negotiation table (at the national level, in economic sectors and at the company level) to set up national jobs plans and company jobs plans.

In a declaration presented at COP26, governments declared support for Just Transition through green growth, decent work and economic prosperity as economies move towards net-zero emissions.¹ The declaration, signed by fourteen donor countries and the European Commission, pledged to support the conditions for Just Transition in their development cooperation. A concrete example of such cooperation was decided in

¹ <https://ukcop26.org/supporting-the-conditions-for-a-just-transition-internationally/>

a cooperation agreement with South Africa.² South Africa embodies a model for other governments to follow, with national jobs plan negotiated through social dialogue, a work and community impact study from electricity company Eskom and now negotiations with unions for an aligned plan for jobs – and for communities affected by the transition.

One of the places inside the UNFCCC structures where Just Transition is being discussed is in the workstream on Response Measures. We recognise that important work has been done by the Katowice Committee on the Implementation of Response Measures (KCI) that contributes to a better understanding of Just Transition. Nevertheless, the work of the KCI and the Forum on Response Measures does not reflect the urgency to make progress on the integration in climate policies of the social dimension and the impact of climate policies on workers and their families. Also, there is no place where observers, especially from the workers organisations, can contribute in a structural way to the discussions. This remains a challenge that we need to deal with in the future.

Under the agenda item on 'Gender and climate change' the decision also focused on procedural aspects instead of enhancing action on gender-responsive climate action. The decision does not define a clear pathway towards gender-responsive policies, including adaptation and mitigation.³ A positive point is the request to the ILO to prepare a technical paper exploring linkages between gender-responsive climate action and Just Transition for promoting inclusive opportunities for all in a low-carbon economy.

Major challenges remain however, as governments, companies and organisations are giving their own interpretations to the concept of Just Transition, sometimes leaving out the focus on workers and jobs. The union movement must insist on the double reference to the Paris Agreement, that clearly states in paragraph 10 *"the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs"* and the ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) that stress the tripartite social dialogue approach.

Pointing to the end of coal and to fossil fuels, while difficult for our members in transition, is a major step forward for the planet with the elimination of these harmful emissions. However, the ambiguous language demanded at the last minute by China and India watered down the reality that we must transition from Coal. The text remains vague and *'unabated'* coal leaves the door open for Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) which is a false hope for workers in coal production and an excuse to delay vital Just

² <https://ukcop26.org/political-declaration-on-the-just-energy-transition-in-south-africa/>

³ <https://womensgenderclimate.org/press-release-the-power-is-with-us-cop26-fails-people-planet/>

Transition measures to protect them. And there is only reference to phase-out '*inefficient*' fossil fuel subsidies. Without definition and a commitment to redistribution this leaves the poorest communities at the risk of energy poverty. The negative impact of this compromise is much stronger on the developing countries who risk stranded assets and people compared with the industrialised that have or are rapidly replacing coal by fossil fuels like natural gas and who have greater access to the resources to CCS where it is possible. COP 27 will have to return to this question with greater certainty and global solidarity.

Inclusive climate policies that respect and promote human and labour rights

COP26 saw major challenges to organise the negotiations in an inclusive manner. The UK COP26 presidency insisted on full physical participation without providing clarity and assurances that Global South delegates and observers could participate. Confusing COVID rules on quarantine and vaccination requirements added to this situation. Especially at the start of the negotiations, the observers were often blocked physical access to the negotiations while the digital platform was not functioning appropriately. Guaranteeing the protection of human rights in the implementation of climate policies is critical to build trust and broad support for the policies that are needed. It is a priority for the labour movement. In the negotiations on the work programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE), reference to human rights was dropped which led to a strong outcry by many countries led by Mexico. All CSOs were shocked. In the cover decision this is somehow remedied, but it indicates the unacceptable views that some countries have with the respect of human rights.

Demands for human right protections in the cooperative mechanisms of Article 6 (market and non-market mechanisms) were only picked up partially. The labour movement also noticed a worrying trend to pick and choose human rights where labour rights (as referenced under paragraph 10 of the Paris Agreement with language on Just Transition) were often left out. Both 'rights paragraphs' of the Paris Agreement (§§ 10 and 11 of the preamble) should be mentioned together.⁴

⁴ §10 Taking into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities,

§11 Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity,

Climate finance and Loss and Damage

The rich countries have failed their commitments to provide the \$100 billion a year for climate finance, a pledge made in 2009. After spending some \$17.2 trillion on COVID recovery the failure of rich nations to commit to a mere \$100 billion a year in climate financing for vulnerable nations is just bad faith. A high-level ministerial roundtable on pre-2030 ambition will discuss climate finance, but there is no commitment to extra money. Neither are their concrete measures to prevent further indebtedness of the vulnerable countries by debt-based climate finance. One positive point is the commitment to double adaptation finance (from 2019 levels) by 2024 to achieve a balance between adaptation and mitigation finance, a long-standing demand of the developing countries.

Most importantly, and the biggest failure of COP26, is the lack of an agreement on Loss and Damage. Developed countries are asked to provide money to the operationalisation of the Santiago Network on Loss and Damage but there is no mechanism for Loss and Damage finance for the vulnerable countries themselves. No fund that the poorest countries could draw on for crisis response which is so important to small islands and many climate vulnerable nations. Countries did not even agree to create a permanent place to discuss Loss and Damage inside the negotiations (a Loss and Damage facility) but only decided on organising some workshops.

Paris Rule book is finalised

The tasks of COP26 were to finalise the Paris Rule book, containing the practical rules to execute the Paris Agreement. The last open chapters on transparency, common time frames and cooperative mechanisms were negotiated in Glasgow. There is now no excuse anymore for the full implementation of the Paris Agreement.

This means that by 2024 all countries must report details on their emissions, which sets the baseline to measure future reductions and governments to provide 2-yearly transparency reports so we can all judge what progress is being made. The important demand to have a 5-year cycle for all countries (instead of giving some countries the possibility to have a 10-year cycle) is only a recommendation and not an obligation. Also, the rules governing the 'Global Stocktake' (the official evaluation of all NDCs) should have been more concrete, including reporting on Just Transition. This is only partially dealt with through reporting from the Forum on Response Measures.

Finally on Article 6 of the Paris Agreement that enables countries to cooperate in implementing their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) towards emission

reduction. Among other things, this means that emission reductions can be transferred between countries (6.2) and companies can engage in carbon trading (6.4), while there is also a system for 'non-market mechanisms' (6.8). A positive aspect of the agreement is that credits from REDD+ projects (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) will not be permitted as these are notoriously difficult to prove their environmental benefit. Also, a proposal from industrialised countries that would lead to 'double counting' of emission reductions was kept out of the text. Nevertheless, major loopholes remained in the text that risk undermining real climate action with offsets that do nothing to enhance ambition to keep temperature rise below 1.5°C. While incorporating critical references to upholding human rights including the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the actual rules, the agreement fails to fully respect international human rights standards, including Indigenous Peoples' right to free, prior and informed consent; allows for risky carryover of junk credits from the failed Clean Development Mechanism (CDM); and opens loopholes for unauthorized credits to flood in.⁵ There is no reference to Just Transition in the criteria for the activities, only the standard reference to *"Minimize and where possible, avoid negative environmental and social impacts."*

Unions mobilise on climate change

Outside the COP venue activists, frontline health workers and garbage collectors, unions, scientists and indigenous people from all over the world took to the streets of Glasgow when over 100,000 people joined up their messages to governments to listen to the people and raise the bar on delivering for climate justice.

On Saturday 6 November more than 120,000 people marched in Glasgow to demand more action on the climate crisis. Among them a strong union block. The protest was a major signal to the climate negotiators at the COP26 summit and took place alongside hundreds of similar events around the world.

On Sunday 7 November, some 100 trade union reps from all corners of the world met to jointly discuss our strategy to increase our impact on the climate policy debate as the global labour movement. Before 2030 we need Just Transition plans in place in every country with decent and quality jobs at the heart. Workers and their unions are needed to ensure that transformative action moves our economies and societies to stabilise our climate and keep global warming under 1.5°C. The science is clear, the targets are there. This is the decade for transition.

⁵ <https://www.ciel.org/news/at-cop26-a-failure-of-vision-action-equity-and-urgency/>

From 7 to 10 November there was a People's Summit with physical and digital participation, including with strong engagement from the unions. While world leaders were discussing our future at COP26, social movement joined to build power for system change. Bringing together the climate justice movement to discuss, learn and strategize for system change.

General overview of the trade union activities at COP26: www.tinyurl.com/unions-cop26

Bert De Wel
Climate policy officer ITUC



The imperative of a Just Transition for the workforce to save our climate, lessons from the unions.













