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Paris aligned EU external action for a climate just world for all

Study from the International Cluster

PRESENTATION

COP26 sounded the alarm at the insufficient pace and scale of climate action in the 2020s to keep warming below 1.5°C and address inevitable climate impacts. The Summit came at a time of low levels of trust and confidence between countries after failures to mobilise solidarity on COVID vaccines and finance for economic recovery during the pandemic. This was exacerbated by under-delivery by developed countries on their Paris Agreement promises to reduce emissions and mobilise finance for least developed and more vulnerable countries to address climate change.

The decisions taken at COP26 that have the potential to see countries closing these gaps – regular ministerial events checking-in on faster emissions cuts this decade, a decision to double collective finance for adaptation, and opening a dialogue on addressing the support needs for loss and damage. However, they have barely nudged the trust deficit. **Without game changing cooperation we will not be able to close the gaps to a safe and climate-just world for all this decade.**

The diplomatic dance over including references to phasing out coal and fossil fuel subsidies in the final hours of COP26 highlighted that many emerging economies – including India – do not yet feel in a position to do significantly more this decade. Meanwhile, small island nations made clear that they would no longer accept inaction and a lack of support in dealing with devastating climate impacts in the future.

The key barrier to further, faster action this decade is the lack of financial and technical support for green, resilient and just transitions mechanisms to mobilise the trillions in public and private finance needed for the 1.5°C transition.

While the USA and China came together in the final days of COP, after weeks of a media ‘blame game’, their agreement shows that while they will choose cooperation in multilateral spaces, the G2 cannot be expected to form the basis of high-ambition action this decade. Simply put, cooperation on the scale needed to tackle the climate crisis this decade will not be driven by the two superpowers.

Looking towards this critical decade, European diplomacy has the potential to help bridge the trust, confidence and finance gaps, if cooperation and climate-just approaches are at the centre of EU external action.

The 2022–2025 period is the critical time to influence investment decisions for the rest of the 2020s – the decade that will decide whether climate safety can be regained for all. Right now, rather than a 45% reduction in emissions from 2010 levels by 2030, as prescribed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, just after COP26 we are still on track for a rise in global aggregate emissions. With a majority of those emissions in countries where public engagement is less able to drive policy change than it has done in Europe, it will be essential to deploy all the diplomatic tools at the EU's disposal to bridge the gap. **As a global actor, the EU can play a key role not just in deploying its external action to drive transitions and resilience in other countries, but also in driving reforms to make its external action fit for a climate-changing world, for tackling loss and damage and adaptation, and for doing the above in a gender-sensitive way. The EU is also well placed to make sure the objectives go hand in hand with increasing respect for human rights.**

If the 2020s are really to be the decade of delivery, we cannot wait for marginal improvements to EU external action. By 2030, the EU's current 8% share of global emissions is projected to decline by 41%1 in a context of rising global emissions2. If we do not have diplomatic capacity to deal with the growing adaptation pressures, losses and damages and manage the global just and green economic transition, we will lose the ability to shape and accelerate global action.

Both the USA and China are integrating climate into their foreign policy structure – but with a strong focus on self-interest. This study sets out a European alternative – one that cares about a climate-just world for all.

COP26 signalled a new political focus by European leaders behind the need to reform the wider international system – particularly the development system – to better build resilience and support climate transitions. This is a foundation to build upon.

- READ THE FULL STUDY (pdf)

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