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Lara Lázaro Touza, Alina Averchenkova & Andrea Briones

Elcano Policy Paper

April 2026

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28006 Madrid
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ISSN 2255-5293
Depósito Legal: M-8692-2013

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Executive summary[1]

(a) The Paris Agreement has delivered significant results since its adoption, yet we are still far off track to meet the goals established in 2015

Since its adoption in 2015 the Paris Agreement has played a central role in shaping global climate governance. It established long-term goals to limit global temperature increases and created a framework for countries to submit, review and periodically update national commitments. The agreement has delivered significant results since its adoption, successfully lowering expected temperature rises from 4ºC to a projected 2.3ºC-2.5ºC, provided current commitments are met. However, we are still far off track to meet the established goals. Closing the ambition-action gap will require significantly strengthening climate commitments and accelerating implementation efforts before the end of the decade. Enhanced action at scale and speed by all actors is required to align scientific recommendations to actions that help significantly bend the emissions curve rapidly.

(b) In a context of geopolitical fragmentation, COP30 can be dubbed a lifeline for (climate)

1 The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge the suggestions and comments to the policy paper by Professor Gonzalo Escribano, director of the Energy and Climate Programme at Elcano Royal Institute. The usual disclaimer applies.

multilateralism that yielded some –rather modest– results

Ten years after the agreement's adoption, the climate summit held in Belém in 2025 took place amid rising geopolitical tensions, the announced second US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and an isolated EU that has found it hard to achieve ambitious climate commitments. During a period of significant international fragmentation and a diminished global appetite for ambitious climate commitments, expectations for the conference were modest. COP30 nevertheless managed to reach several agreements and helped sustain the multilateral climate process at a time when the legitimacy[2] and effectiveness of international climate governance are increasingly questioned.

COP30 will be remembered for the submission of updated climate commitments, an agreement on adaptation indicators, a call to treble adaptation finance, the development of a Mechanism for Just Transition and the 2026-34 Gender Action Plan, among others. Several issues remained unresolved, notably progress on the COP28 commitment to transition away from fossil fuels and stronger action on deforestation. Acknowledging the difficulty of incorporating these topics into formal decision texts, the Brazilian presidency of COP30 announced the development of two roadmaps on transitioning away from fossil fuels (TAFF) and addressing deforestation.

Preserving the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) while adapting it to ensure Paris-aligned action on the ground will be essential to maintain global coordination on climate at a time when climate extremes are becoming increasingly frequent, generating growing economic, human and environmental costs.

(c) Political divisions, the EU's limited influence and the need to reposition itself as a structural leader

The closing plenary at COP30 proved particularly contentious, as numerous countries, the EU included, criticised the COP presidency for gavelling through decisions without a full consensus, particularly regarding the adaptation indicators. The closing session also made the EU's relative isolation

2 Legitimacy according to Dellmuth, Gustafsson & Segovia-Tzompa (2025, p. 1) is understood as the 'belief or acceptance that authority is appropriately exercised', which is gauged to be a prerequisite for the effectiveness of the climate regime.

increasingly visible, as it struggled to secure stronger mitigation outcomes, more robust adaptation indicators and explicit references to transitioning away from fossil fuels. Moving forward, the essentials of EU climate leadership can include: developing a long-term strategy on climate diplomacy; improving internal coordination ahead of COPs; exercising structural leadership – in addition to holding the line on directional leadership–; and rebuilding coalitions and strengthening alliances with state and non-state actors capable of advancing climate ambition, particularly when consensus proves difficult.

(d) While the UNFCCC process remains essential to develop and uphold the consensus-based global norm to address climate change, it is exhibiting diminishing marginal returns

Insufficient results after three decades of annual climate summits have once again raised the question of the usefulness of (and the need to reform) the UNFCCC process. This is so despite a widespread consensus regarding the process being considered the best tool there is to reach consensus and ensure legitimacy as we strive for a stable climate. With the Paris Agreement rulebook now largely completed, future negotiations are expected to have less negotiated outcomes, although reviews, updated commitments and mechanisms are ongoing. Academic and policy-oriented reviews of the process could consider reflecting on the universality and consensus principles that have guided negotiations over 30 years, possibly embracing a two-tier diplomacy inclusive of climate clubs within negotiated COP decisions.

1. Introduction

After celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement, the need for a climate negotiations process re-set (Tubiana, 2026) is becoming increasingly clear. While the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process remains essential to develop and uphold a consensus-based global norm to address climate change, it is exhibiting diminishing marginal returns.

And yet, despite the ongoing turmoil which makes it difficult to provide public goods, the Paris Agreement still stands. Its goals were established in 2015, and the rulebook has all but been completed. Future climate negotiations will, however, have less negotiated outcomes, although reviews, updated commitments and mechanisms are still being developed and are of essence to bend the emissions curve. Enhanced action at scale and speed by all actors is required to align scientific recommendations with delivery on the ground.

Reflecting on the ability of the Paris Agreement to deliver, expected temperature rises have gone down from 4°C before its adoption in 2015 to 2.3°C-2.5°C if the goals included in the Nationally determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted in 2025 are met. Adaptation is advancing, with an initial list of disputed indicators gavelled at COP30. International climate finance has roughly doubled since the adoption of the Paris Agreement, but the alignment of climate goals and financial flows is yet to come. Facilitated by the Paris Agreement, and international climate negotiations after 2015, the climate agenda has advanced from agreeing on goals and forging consensus among Parties to fostering multilevel implementation by Party and non-Party stakeholders alike.

However, in line with the last COPs, the climate conference held in Belém was broadly assessed as yielding modest results and shining a light on the need for change in climate negotiations. Some of the most salient outcomes of COP30 and its run-up included: (a) the 122 NDCs submitted that are still far from being aligned with the 1.5°C temperature goal; (b) initiatives to accelerate ambition such as the Global Implementation Accelerator and Mission 1.5°; (c) the adoption of 59 indicators for adaptation that caused a significant stir at

the closing plenary and that need further refinement to ensure their rigour and usability, with their final form expected at COP32; and (d) the call to treble funding for adaptation by 2035. An agreement has been reached to develop a Just Transition Mechanism that expands the concept of just transition to adaptation, recognises the rights of workers and indigenous peoples and the role of renewables as enablers of such a just transition. More importantly, 194 nations reaffirmed that the low-carbon transition is 'irreversible'.

Additionally, the COP30 delivered the Gender Action Plan 2026-34 that, despite pressures to the contrary, did not backtrack on terminology. The plan included priority areas such as enhancing capacity building, striving for gender balance and participation in climate action, enhancing cooperation on the matter across the Rio Conventions, seeking gender-disaggregated data and gender-responsive implementation. The role of science as the basis for decision-making was reaffirmed at COP30, despite resistance from countries such as Saudi Arabia. Complementarily, fighting disinformation was prioritised in Belém through the Global Initiative for Climate Change Information Integrity. The year 2026 will see advances on transitioning away from fossil fuels and addressing deforestation through two distinct roadmaps proposed by Brazil, as the inclusion of these topics in negotiated outcomes was not possible in Belém. In fact, hopes that countries would commit to roadmaps to end fossil fuel use and halt deforestation within the COP texts were dashed after opposition from petrostates.

While COP30 can be characterised as a lifeline for climate multilateralism, its results have been limited and actors such as the EU were isolated. Limited results achieved globally and by the EU have reinforced calls for recalibrating climate diplomacy (Kalcher, Cerisola & Gorissen, 2026) and reforming international climate negotiations (COP30 Brazil, 2026). Simplification and flexibility proposals are thriving both in academic and grey literature alike, despite the risks inherent in procedural change in the current context of multilateral fragmentation. The goal of enhancing both the agility of the negotiation process and climate action on the ground remain, as will discussions on the future of climate negotiations in COPs to come.

This Policy Paper seeks to analyse the heretofore significant, yet insufficient, advances made on climate action since the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the most salient results from COP30, the EU's and Spain's role and commitments in Belém and the future of climate negotiations as we navigate the implementation phase of the Paris Agreement.

The remainder of this Policy Paper is structured as follows: section 2 provides a short reminder of some of the key elements of the Paris Agreement; section 3 briefly discusses the developments since its adoption regarding scientific evidence that emerged after the adoption of the agreement, climate action

undertaken since 2015 including mitigation, adaptation, finance, climate laws and governance as the backbone of the Paris Agreement; section 4 reviews the salient outcomes of COP30, highlighting the EU's role and Spain's engagement; and section 5 reflects on the future of COPs. Section 6 concludes.

2. The Paris Agreement: a (very) short reminder

The date of 12 December 2025 marked the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement where long-term climate objectives designed to prevent the worst impacts of climate change were established. These included, first, limiting temperature increases compared with preindustrial levels to well below 2°C, striving to limit the increase to 1.5°C as the safer goal (Art. 2.1 (a)). Meeting these temperature limits will require emissions to peak as soon as possible and balancing anthropogenic emissions and removals by the second half of the century (Art. 4), with developed countries taking the lead on climate action in accordance with the Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) depending on national circumstances (Art. 2). Secondly, adapting to the impacts of climate change without threatening food production (Art. 2.1 (b)). And, third, making finance flows consistent with low emissions and climate resilient development (Art 2.1 (c)).

The Paris Agreement was characterised as being 'inclusive' (Bailey & Tomlinson, 2016) for being quasi universal –195 Parties ratified it (UNFCCC, 2015)– and 'messy' (heterogenous) given that the Parties set out their own climate plans (known as Nationally determined Contributions, NDCs). The flexible nature of the accord was also highlighted given its legally binding procedural nature but a weak enforcement mechanism. The main accountability mechanism for implementation is the Global Stocktake (GST), a five-yearly assessment mechanism designed to evaluate collective progress towards limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5°C. It operates as a 'facilitative' rather than punitive tool, guiding countries to update and enhance their climate actions through NDCs based on technical findings.

The agreement was known to be insufficient as climate commitments presented would not deliver on the above-mentioned climate objectives. With this ambition limitation in mind, the Paris Agreement was designed to be dynamic in nature, requiring recurrent (five-year) reviews, known as NDC updates. For the first time, a climate agreement anchored expectations of a net zero future, as practically all countries committed to a climate-

neutral development model. Finally, it provided countries with an enhanced transparency mechanism to monitor, report on and verify emissions (Bailey & Tomlinson, 2016).

In legal terms the Paris Agreement is a hybrid instrument. It contains binding procedural and conduct-based obligations (such as preparing, communicating, and maintaining NDCs; the obligation to pursue domestic mitigation measures; reporting and transparency requirements; participating in the global stocktake; and an expectation of increased ambition over time). However, the nationally determined mitigation targets remain non-binding (Rajamani, 2024). Nevertheless, its legal force is also amplified by its broader 'normative environment', including human rights law and the best available science principles, which strengthen the legal expectations placed on states. Yet the primacy of national determination in the Paris Agreement and resistance by the states to limit their discretion over it have arguably contributed to an insufficient implementation (*ibid.*).

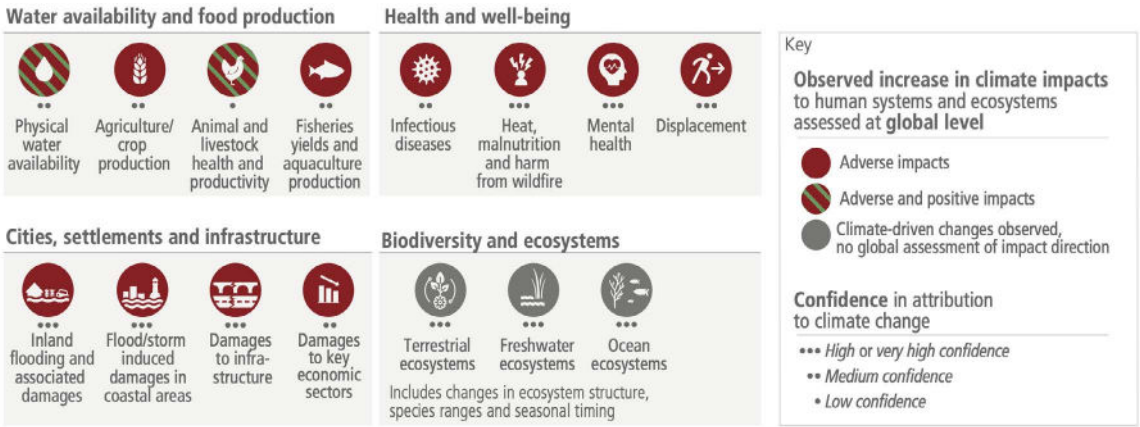
The global relevance of the goals established in the Paris Agreement can hardly be overstated. If achieved, the Paris Agreement will lead to the largest socioeconomic restructuring since the Industrial Revolution, but geopolitical headwinds are set to delay the net zero transition.

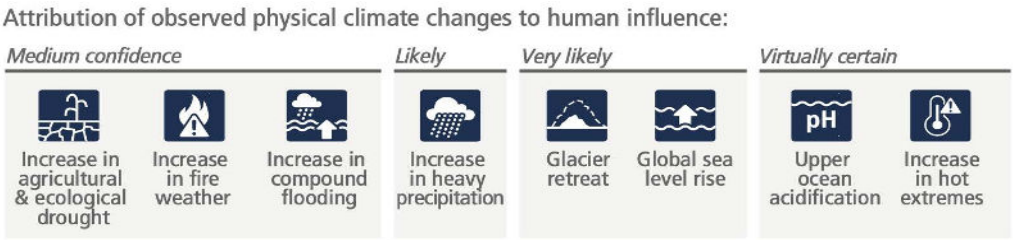
3. Climate science and action: mitigation, adaptation, finance and laws

3.1. Increasing certainty, the energy conundrum and bracing for the impacts

Since the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) highlighted in its Sixth Assessment Report, known as AR6, that anthropogenic climate change is unequivocal, with weather and climate extremes on the rise, impacting socioeconomic and environmental systems alike (see Figure 1) and affecting vulnerable communities the most.

Figure 1.
Impacts from anthropogenic climate change

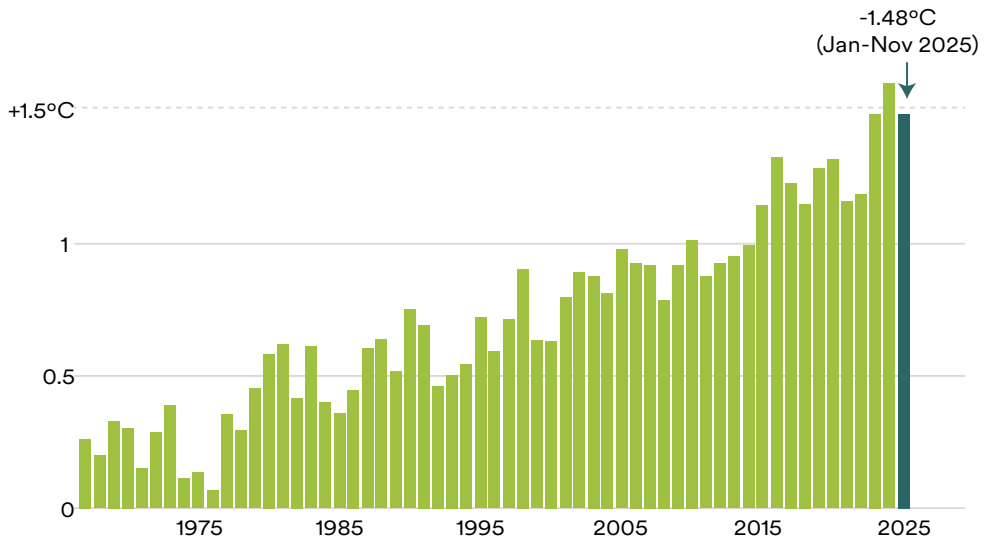




Source: IPCC (2023, p. 7).

Prior to the adoption of the Paris Agreement, expected temperature increases were at 4°C warming (UNFCCC, 2025a) by the end of the century (JRC, 2025). Greenhouse gas emissions grew more rapidly in the decade preceding its adoption (2005-15) than in the decade that followed. According to the University of Exeter (2025), whereas the average annual growth rate of CO2 emissions in the 2000s was 3%, it dropped to 0.8% from 2015 to 2025. However, temperatures continued to rise (see Figure 2) at a rate greater than before the adoption of the Paris Agreement (Foster & Rahmstorf, 2026). Furthermore, full implementation of updated NDCs submitted in 2025 would put us on a 2.3°C to 2.5°C trajectory, versus 2.8°C today if current policies continue to be implemented, which is not a given due to political headwinds against climate action. We are still far from the 1.5°C Paris-aligned temperature mark.

Figure 2.
Annual global surface air temperature increases above the pre-industrial level, 1970-2025



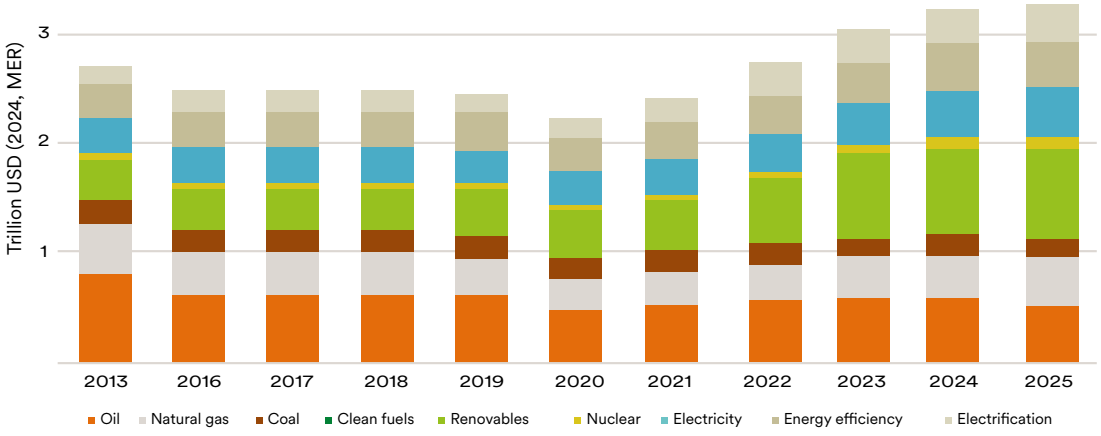
Source: Copernicus (2025).

As for addressing the main causes of climate change, it was not until COP28 in Dubai when Parties agreed to include a direct reference to 'transitioning away from fossil fuels' (UNFCCC, 2023) in the negotiation texts, having

been impossible to include additional direct references or roadmaps to deliver on this goal since then. Calls to treble renewables, double energy efficiency, reducing non-CO2 emissions (particularly methane, CH4), halting deforestation by 2030, and accelerating net-zero and low emission technologies, including nuclear and Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS), were also made in Dubai.

Global investments in fossil fuels amounted to US$1.1 trillion in 2025 (key as energy contributes around 75% to global emissions). These investments have declined from 2015 to 2025. Clean energy investments,[3] on the other hand, have been on the rise year-on-year, overtaking fossil fuel investments (Li, Jaeger & Singh, 2025) as the Paris Agreement entered into force in 2016, reaching US$2.2 trillion in 2025 (see Figure 3), with China investing the lion's share of US$625 billion in 2025 according to the IEA (2025b), just under a doubling of its 2015 clean-energy investment. Additionally, clean-energy patents have also shifted East, with China accounting for 75% of clean-tech patent applications (Yang *et al*., 2025).

Figure 3.
Global investment in Energy 2015-25



Source: IEA (2025b, p. 12).

As for the Critical Raw Materials (CRMs) needed for the energy transition, and according to the IEA, since the Paris Agreement was adopted electric vehicles (EVs) and batteries have become the largest consumers of lithium, currently accounting for 30% of global demand. Under the IEA's Sustainable Development Scenario (IEA, 2021) by 2040 clean technologies will represent 40% of the demand for copper and rare-earth elements, over 60% of demand for nickel and cobalt and under 90% of lithium demand. The global, and EU, dependence on China for transition minerals (IEA, 2025a) is very significant as it is the dominant refiner of 19 out of 20 minerals analysed with a market share of around 70%.

3 In renewables, grids, electrification, storage, energy efficiency, nuclear power and low-emission fuels (IEA, 2025b).

On the economic impact of climate change, the current consensus highlights that it is necessarily underestimated, amongst others, due to uncertainty and modelling limitations (eg, analyses do not include socially contingent outcomes such as climate-induced migration and conflict).[4] Recent estimates suggest a 12% reduction in GDP for a 1ºC temperature increase (Bilal & Känzig, 2024), six times larger than previous estimates. Bilal & Känzig (2024) explain their higher estimates due to their modelling of global climate change based on local projections to estimate the impacts of global temperatures on GDP, which help better predict extreme climate-related events, vis-à-vis country level data.

Regarding the cost of climate action, the macroeconomic impact of enhanced NDCs is small but positive according to the OECD/UNDP (2025). GDP is expected to be 0.20% higher in 2040, 3% higher by mid-century and 13% higher by the end of the century under an Enhanced NDC (aka Paris-aligned) scenario versus a Current Policies Scenario. However, delaying private investments due to political and climate policy uncertainty could more than erode the growth potential of Paris-aligned NDCs (*Ibid.*).

3.2. Lagging behind in adaptation and addressing its limits

As for adaptation, the IPCC (2023) stressed that despite global progress, adaptation gaps remain and some limits to adaptation have been reached, leading to increasing losses and damages, an under-addressed policy area with potential implications for peace, security and social cohesion (Calvet, 2025). Regarding the governance of adaptation, analysts have characterised the journey from Paris to Belém as moving from a 'loose set of aspirations' (Wubet, 2025) for delivering adaptive capacity, resilience and reducing vulnerability to working on a structured tracking system. This system is to be centred around an agreed definition and indicators to deliver on the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA). The indicators –which must still be refined to ensure usability– refer to water management, food security, health, infrastructure, ecosystem conservation, poverty alleviation, cultural heritage and means of implementation (finance, capacity building and technology transfer).

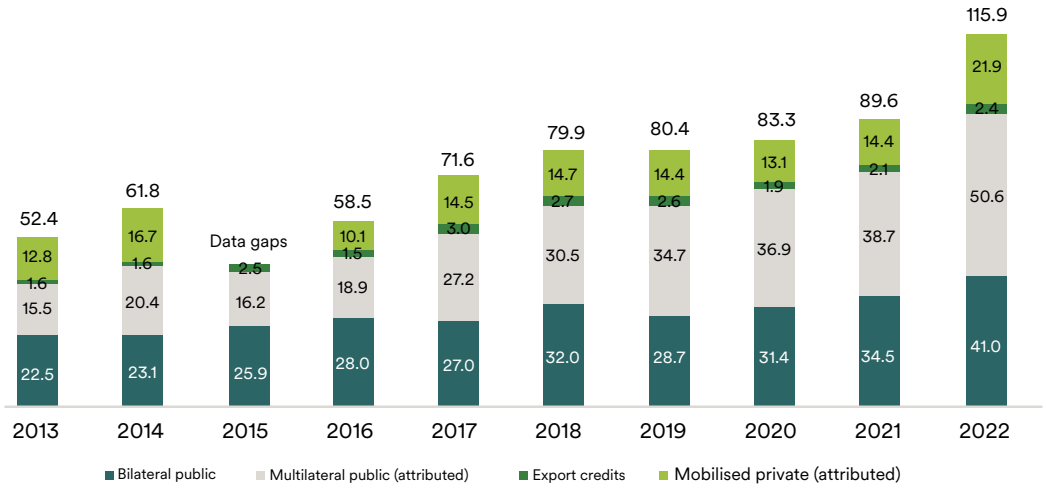
According to modelling results, adaptation finance needs in developing countries estimated 10 years after the Paris Agreement was adopted range from US$310 billion to US$365 billion per year by 2035 as stated in NDCs (UNEP, 2025a). Reaching these figures would require multiplying by 12 to 14 times the current public adaptation finance at a time when fiscal space and appetite for climate finance is running low in developed countries.

4 That are known to be multicausal and dependent on pre-existing socioeconomic, political and environmental conditions.

3.3. Climate finance

Since the entry into force of the Paris Agreement, international climate finance from developed to developing countries (as per art 9.) has roughly doubled (see Figure 4). Developing countries, nonetheless, demand commitments to be met on time, better access to climate finance and to avoid increasing debt levels of recipient countries. Developed countries delivered on the COP15 pledge of mobilising US$100 billion annually by 2020 two years late, undermining the trust between developed and developing countries. Additionally, countries including India (Reuters, 2022) and civil society organisations such as Oxfam (Thériault, 2023) have argued that climate finance figures had been overestimated by developed countries given the large share of loans counted as climate finance that result in a higher debt for recipient countries.

Figure 4.
Climate finance provided and mobilised, 2013-22



Source: OECD (2024, p. 6).

Ten years after the Paris Agreement, governments are still discussing the scope of (and how to deliver on) Article 2.1(c) that calls for aligning financial flows with climate goals (Alayza, 2025; C2ES, 2025a; Argueta, 2025). To this end, the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF), the Sharm-el-Sheik dialogue (SeSD) and the Global Stocktake (GST) view alignment as including international and national flows by the public and private sectors. Ongoing discussions also reflect on the relationship between Article 2.1.(c) and Article 9.1 on finance from developed to developing countries. Article 2.1.(c)

is furthermore seen as requiring a transformation of the financial system (Feyertag & Robins, 2023) and ensuring both financial stocks and flows are in line with climate goals.

Delivering on the financial alignment goal would require increasing climate finance for the net zero transition and reducing finance for fossil fuels. Public tools for alignment can include financial and monetary policies, disclosure requirements, green fiscal reforms, budgeting and public procurement, the use of public finance instruments (grants, debt, equity and insurance) and information instruments such as labelling. Private-sector initiatives to align finance flows with climate goals can include climate-risk management, disclosure frameworks and transition plans. Some of the initiatives directed at enhancing disclosure and facilitating the alignment of finance flows (eg, in the EU) are currently undergoing reversals that, while providing simplified compliance frameworks, introduce uncertainty (Azizuddin, 2025) regarding the roadmap to net-zero and send contradictory messages to partners, investors and citizens alike.

The updated climate finance goal that (mainly) developed countries would channel to developing and climate-vulnerable countries (known as the New Collective Quantified Goal, NCQG, agreed in Baku at COP29) set the objective of reaching US$300 billion annually by 2035. The decision text stressed the need for better access to climate finance by recipient countries, opened the door to a broader donor base and called for balancing mitigation and adaptation finance. References were made to loss and damage finance, but no sub-goals were assigned either to addressing losses and damages nor to mitigation and adaptation, the latter being a longstanding demand from developing countries. Delivery checks and reviews of the new NCQG will take place in 2028, 2030 and in the second Global Stocktake (Pettinotti, Watson & Tan, 2025). The discontent voiced by developing and emerging economies as well as by civil society with the US$300 billion figure led to the goal of striving for a US$1.3 trillion a year climate finance goal by 2035 from multiple sources and a Baku-Belém Roadmap to help deliver on this higher finance goal.

3.4. The climate action backbone: climate laws and governance

Climate laws can set the direction of climate action (Averchenkova *et al.*, 2024) providing a long-term signal to investors. They are known to strengthen national climate governance systems. They may also improve the political debate around climate change. Additionally, they can enhance climate policy acceptance by citizens (Lipari *et al.*, 2024). Climate laws and governance can also work as countercyclical issue attention cycle (Downs, 1972) instruments by providing institutional structures that remain in the face of political and social headwinds against climate action.

Climate laws and policies have increased more than 20-fold since the mid-90's, with a significant uptick since the Kyoto Protocol entered into force. There are now over 7,000[5] laws, policies and UNFCCC submissions (Climate Change Laws of the World, nd). Climate litigation has also increased significantly from 1986, reaching 2,967 cases filed in 2024. Between 2015 and 2024, 276 cases reached apex courts (supreme and constitutional courts), 42% of them in the US (Setzer & Higham, 2025).

The impact of framework climate laws on carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions per unit of output has been limited in the past but not negligible. Eskander & Fankhauser (2020) indicate that in the short term (three years after the adoption of a framework climate law), CO_2 emissions per unit of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dropped by 0.78% annually, with further annual reductions of CO_2 emissions per unit of GDP of 1.79% in the long-term (beyond the three years after the adoption period) across 133 countries studied over the 1999 to 2016 period. However, quantitative attribution of emission reductions to specific laws is a challenging task, as laws often have an enabling and signalling role, leading to further adoption of more concrete and sometimes more ambitious subsidiary laws, regulations and policies (Averchenkova *et al*., 2024).

Stechemesser *et al.* (2024) analysed 1,500 climate policies implemented from 1998 to 2022 across 41 countries and identified 63 policy interventions that amounted to Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emission reductions between 0.6 and 1.8 billion metric tonnes of CO2. They conclude that policy mixes have a larger effect on average than a stand-alone use of climate policy instruments, except for taxation that can have a large impact even when used on its own. Pricing instruments within a policy mix tend to have (or be a driver of) the largest emission reductions, but interpreting interaction effects across instruments is challenging (*ibid.*). As regards the relationship between instruments within a

5 Note that as of October 2025, the Grantham Research institute's Climate Laws of the World database includes over 1,500 climate laws, 75 of which are framework laws across 69 countries, over 4,200 policies and 2,700 UNFCCC submissions.

policy mix, Stechemesser *et al.* (2024) argue that complementarity, essential to deliver on emission reduction goals (Fankhauser, Hepburn & Park, 2011), is context dependent.

Qualitative analysis of the impact of framework climate change laws in several countries suggests that they are delivering on several key expectations that are associated with the objectives of such all-encompassing laws. Specifically, the laws are helping to address key governance challenges by strengthening cross-sectoral coordination and integration, addressing short-termism and piecemeal approaches in policy planning, and improving accountability for implementation. Debates around the adoption of framework climate laws can help consolidate political consensus on climate change, while implementation is enabled by policies, plans and associated processes. Initial impacts of framework climate laws could also be seen in helping shift financial flows for climate action (Averchenkova *et al*., 2024).

3.5. Implementation via non-Party stakeholders

The adoption of the Paris Agreement has led to transitioning from consensus building and mobilisation to implementation and delivery (Mai & Elsässer, 2022). In this transition, the role of Non-Party Stakeholders (NPS)[6] has been recognised as indispensable to deliver on collectively agreed climate goals.

From 2015 onwards, NPS were encouraged to register their climate actions[7] in a UNFCCC managed repository (UNFCCC, 2025b), the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action Platform (NAZCA platform) (see Figure 5) with the UNFCCC acting as its custodian. Additionally, the Climate High-Level Champions were appointed, and the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action was created to help bridge the Party-NPS gap and accelerate climate action (UNFCCC, 2026a). As of 11 March 2026, actions by 14,437 cities, 300 regions, 6,488 organisations, 1,814 investors and 26,125 companies, a total of 49,359 actors, are registered in the NAZCA Platform (NAZCA, nd), with Spain's actors amounting to 3,830 (NAZCA Spain, nd). This represents 9.7 times the 5,098 actors that had registered their climate commitments in 2015 (UNFCCC, 2025c).

In a note from the High-level Champions produced in 2025, a five-year vision for Global Climate Action 2026-30 has been introduced to accelerate implementation, guided by the outcomes of the first global stocktake and geared towards strengthening the impact of voluntary commitments through tracking.

6 NPSs include businesses, investors, sub-national actors and civil society.

7 Note that actions by NPS registered in the NAZCA platform include mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation (finance, technology transfer and capacity building).

Figure 5.
Non-Party stakeholder timeline, 2014-25

Year	COP location & presidency	Marrakech Partnership milestone
2014	COP20 – Lima, Peru	Lima-Paris Action Agenda (LPAA) and the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA) portal were launched to mobilise nonstate and subnational climate action (UNFCCC, 2025b).
2015	COP21 – Paris, France	HighLevel Champions approved. Two champions would be appointed from the current and future presidencies of the COP to mobilise voluntary climate action.
2016	COP22 – Marrakech, Morocco	The Marrakech Partnership was launched – HighLevel Champions created the Marrakech Partnership to accelerate nonstate action.
2017	COP23 – Bonn, Fiji	N/A
2018	COP24 – Katowice, Poland	N/A
2019	COP25 – Madrid, Chile	Parties decided to continue appointing High-Level Champions for the 2021-25 period and sought to improve their work through a 5-year plan. Climate Action Pathways released – sectoral pathways and milestones toward a 1.5 C world in 2050 (UNFCCC, nd-a).
2020	(No COP due to the pandemic)	Race to Zero campaign launched – global netzero mobilisation.
2021	COP26 – Glasgow, UK	Race to Resilience campaign launched to mobilise climate resilience; improved Marrakech Partnership plan and relaunched Global Climate Action Portal at COP26.
2022	COP27 – Sharm ElSheikh, Egypt	Sharm ElSheikh Adaptation Agenda launched; sets measurable adaptation goals to protect lives and ecosystems.
2023	COP28 – Dubai, UAE	The High-Level Champions launched the 2030 Climate Solutions to help support the Global Stocktake process.
2024	COP29 – Baku, Azerbaijan	2024 Work Programme published – HighLevel Champions and Marrakech Partnership work programme. Development of the five-year vision and Plan for the Global Climate Action Agenda.
2025	COP30 – Belém, Brazil	2025 Work Programme published – work programme launched to align climate action across systems; emphasises collective effort (*mutirão*).

Source: the authors based on UNFCCC (2026) and Davison (2026).

Salient commitments from NPS have been summarised in the Yearbook for Global Climate Action, now organised along six axes: (a) energy, industry and transport; (b) nature and biodiversity; (c) food and agriculture; (d) cities and infrastructure; (e) human and social development; and (f) means of implementation. This year's Yearbook reflects on the advances made by NPS since the adoption of the Paris Agreement. It highlights that 95% of Parties acknowledge the collaboration of NPS in their updated NDCs.

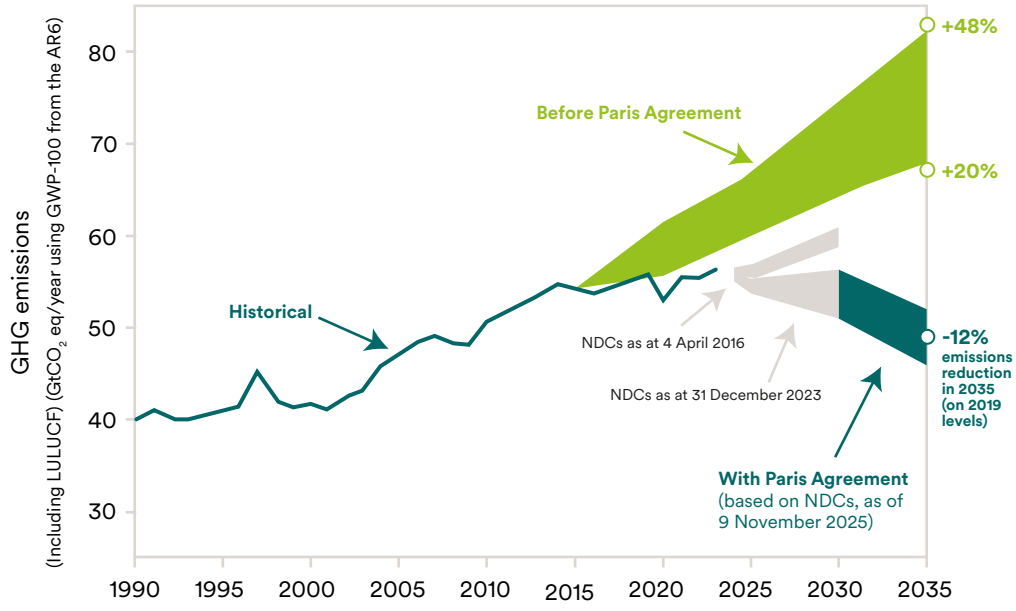
4. COP30: Amazon, truth and implementation?

4.1. Before the COP

Amid the greatest geopolitical fracture the world has seen in decades, diplomats, climate negotiators, academics and civil society at large turned to the annual climate conference in November 2025, known as COP30, as a lifeline for (climate) multilateralism. This was a COP like no other. The second US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement was to materialise in 2026 and an overarching retreat from globally concerted (and federal) climate action was in the making in the US (Briones *et al.*, 2026). There was a clear sense that climate was being deprioritised, climate action vilified as 'woke' (Tadeo, 2025) and considered of limited value (Cohen, 2023) by some just as the first cycle of the Paris Agreement has been completed; with its first major review (the Global Stocktake, GST) having concluded in 2023,[8] a new round of climate pledges presented and the first Biennial Transparency Reports submitted in 2025. On the pledges made, updated climate commitments were expected to be able to bend the emissions curve by 12% by 2035 (UNFCCC, 2025d) compared with 2019 emission levels (see Figure 6). A noticeable yet insufficient reduction compared with the 60% needed for a >50% chance of limiting temperature increases to 1.5°C (UNFCCC, 2025e).

8 The next cycle for the GST will start in 2026 and end in 2028.

Figure 6.
Historical and projected emissions before and after the Paris Agreement, 1990-2035



Source: UNFCCC (2025d).

Additional pressure on the process and expectations regarding the results of COP30 arose due to fact that between 2022 and 2024 the annual climate summits were hosted by fossil-fuel-dependent countries with authoritarian governments (World Population Review, nd), such as Egypt (COP27, Sharm el-Sheikh, 2022), the United Arab Emirates (COP28, Dubai, 2023) and Azerbaijan (COP29, Baku, 2024). The effect on COP30 was significant. It raised civil-society expectations for a genuine break with the petrostate sequence, intensified demands for structural reform of host selection and lowered trust in the process.

The Brazilian presidency of COP30 set out three priorities ahead of the annual global climate gathering: (a) support multilateralism; (b) bring the COP process closer to people; and (c) accelerate implementation. Advances were made across the three priorities, but much remains to be done. There was no backtracking (a possibility feared by European negotiators who are immersed in their own climate action struggles –Thomadakis, 2025–, rollbacks –Schwartzkopff *et al.*, 2025– and delays –Krukowska, Wilkes & Nardelli, 2025–). Multilateralism held the climate line (just barely), and, despite some countries' best efforts to the contrary, climate science has been vindicated as a key input into the negotiations.

Within the formal negotiations, decision texts were included in the Belém Political Package (UNFCCC, 2025f). Some of the key outcomes of COP30

included: (a) the *Global Mutirão*[9] decision text; (b) the agreement on a first version of adaptation indicators that will have to be refined to ensure usability –acknowledging the adaptation finance gap, a call was made in Belém to treble adaptation finance by 2035 within the US$300 billion a year by 2035 NCQG goal agreed in COP29–; (c) advances on just transition included, among other, a broad recognition of rights for numerous groups, the expansion of the concept to adaptation, a prominent role of renewables in delivering a just transition and the development of a novel Mechanism for Just Transition; and (d) after significant debate regarding language, the 2026-34 Gender Action Plan was also adopted. Other issues included new guidance on market mechanisms, advances on the loss and damage framework and decisions aligning climate goals with financial flows.

Two highly divisive issues, TAFF and ending deforestation, were not resolved in the decision texts. To tackle these, the Brazilian presidency decided to launch two roadmaps in 2026 and high-level dialogues, with the First International Conference on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels (Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative, 2025) to be co-hosted by Colombia and the Netherlands in Santa Marta, Colombia, in April 2026.

4.2. Salient elements across decisions in COP30

4.2.1. A Global *Mutirão*

In the Global *Mutirão* text (UNFCCC, 2025g) the difficult issues landed at COP30 (ie, finance from developed to developing countries, ambition, unilateral trade measures and transparency) recognised the significant contribution of the Paris Agreement to climate action. Regarding the countries' commitment to the COP process, the text reports: the submission of 122 NDCs –which have improved in coverage and detail over time–; 80 long-term low GHG emission development strategies; 71 national adaptation plans (61 of which belong to developing countries); and 119 biennial transparency reports. These submissions signal that, despite political headwinds, the transition commitment process is firmly in motion. The NDC –1.5ºC misalignment resulted in requests to the secretariat to conduct NDC exchange workshops intended to enable the diffusion of best practices.

The *Mutirão* text welcomes the efforts of non-Party stakeholders and puts forth two initiatives to enhance ambition and implementation: the *Global Implementation Accelerator* as a facilitative tool for NDCs and National

9 A Tupi-Guarani word that embodies the spirit of collective action and effort (Souto, 2025).

Adaptation Plans (NAPs) implementation with summary reports, exchanges and a high-level event expected in 2026. A second initiative, whose report will also be presented in 2026, is the *Belém Mission to 1.5* (COP30 Brazil, 2025a) envisaged to 'enable' ambition and cooperation on mitigation, adaptation and investment.

The Global *Mutirão* decision also refers to insufficient climate finance, highlighting that the cost of inaction far outweighs the cost of early action and takes note of the Baku to Belém Roadmap to US$1.3 trillion. A two-year work programme on climate finance was established, and a high-level ministerial round table will be organised on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) agreed in Baku (COP29). Recalling the previous goal of doubling adaptation finance by 2025 compared to 2019 levels, the *Mutirão* text calls for trebling adaptation finance by 2035 and for replenishing the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage.

As for trade, the text included, at the behest of China among others, a (limited) reference to unilateral trade measures (aka Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, CBAM) stating that these should not lead to discrimination or restrictions to international trade, requesting dialogues on the matter at the meetings of subsidiary bodies and with the participation of UNCTAD, WTO and the International Trade Centre.

4.2.2. Adaptation

According to the Spanish Climate Change Office (MITECO, 2025), COP30 was able to close the adaptation cycle, even though it is a standing agenda item that will continue to be discussed in 2026. A list of 59 adaptation indicators (the Belém Adaptation Indicators) across 11 targets were adopted in the final day of COP30 based on the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience,[10] the UAE-Belém Work Programme on indicators and the input (UNFCCC, 2025h) of 78 experts[11] (see Figure 7). The relevance of adaptation indicators lies in their potential contribution to analyse the progress made in meeting adaptation targets set by the Global Goal on Adaptation (UNFCCC, 2025i). They are also expected to be used as an input into the second Global Stocktake (Leiter, 2025).

10 The adaptation agreement at COP30 invites the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and the Adaptation Fund to support the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience.

11 Experts helped reduce the initial list of 9,529 adaptation indicators to 100.

Figure 7.
Development of the indicator list ahead of COP30

Target in paragraph of decision 2/CMA.5	**No. of indicators** *(Initial compilation)*	**No. of indicators** *(ahead of SB 62)*	**No. of indicators** *(Final proposed)*
9a. Water supply and sanitation	1.046	33	10
9b. Food and agriculture	1.801	66	10
9c. Health impacts and health services	747	62	10
9d. Ecosystem and Biodiversity	1.294	40	10
9e. Infrastructure and human settlements	842	99	7
9f. Poverty eradication and livelihoods	391	24	9
9g. Cultural heritage and knowledge	282	63	8
10a. Impact, vulnerability, risk assessment	3.126	18	10
10b. Planning	3.126	26	10
10c. Implementation	3.126	39	11
10d. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning	3.126	20	5
Total number of indicators	9.529	490	100

Source: UNFCCC (2025j).

The gavelling of the adaptation text at COP30 took place amongst significant disagreements and accusations regarding the limited use of the experts' input in the final list of 59 politically negotiated indicators included in the decision text (Njuguna, 2025), compromising their usability. Indicators adopted at COP30 will hence be refined by the subsidiary bodies in a two-year process to improve methodologies and metadata through the Belém-Addis Vision[12] to ensure indicators are comparable, consistent, usable and (it is to be hoped) aligned with expert recommendations (Wubet, 2025).

Given that the NCQG fell short of establishing sub-goal on adaptation finance at COP29, developing and emerging countries as well as civil society demanded additional adaptation finance throughout 2026. Belém delivered a call to treble adaptation finance by 2035, five years later than requested by civil society. Although there is no formal reference point for the trebling goal, the fact that 2025 was the year when the goal to double adaptation finance (vis-à-vis 2019 levels) expired, it could be reasonable to assume 2025 as the baseline.

12 The process will conclude during COP32 to be celebrated in Addis Abeba, providing the African Group with a win on their demand for a strong adaptation mandate for the COP.

4.2.3. Just Transition (JT)

The decision text on the UAE Just Transition Work Programme (UNFCCC, 2025k) recognises as substantive elements to deliver just transitions the respect for workers and Indigenous peoples' rights, social dialogue and gender equity, among others. The agreed text also acknowledges just transitions as nationally determined.

Interestingly, the concept of just transition was broadened at COP30 with the inclusion of both just adaptation[13] and renewables as contributors to just energy transitions. On the latter, highlighting the risks of the energy transition, renewables were acknowledged as increasingly cost-effective and contributing to energy security, with interconnections and grid infrastructure supporting system security and energy access. Renewables are also acknowledged in the text as contributing to health and environmental improvements.

Finally, after the G77 and China taking on board the idea proposed by Climate Action Network (CAN) International of the need to develop a Just Transition Mechanism, the JT text decides to develop such a mechanism, although the EU would have preferred a Just Transition Action Plan that it expected to be more operational (European Commission, 2025). The main purpose of the mechanism is to enhance international cooperation, technical assistance, capacity building and knowledge sharing with a decision for its operationalisation expected at COP31 in Antalya, Turkey.[14]

4.2.4. Gender

A new Gender Action Plan 2026-2034 (UNFCCC, 2025m) was also adopted in Belém. After tense debates (where Parties like Argentina, the Holy See, Paraguay and Iran wanted to ensure gender references were based on biological sex) the adopted text does not backtrack on past terminology, resisting a wave to backtrack on gender equity according to observers (Climate Home News, 2025a). The priority areas of work for the action plan include: (a) institutional and individual capacity-building, knowledge management and communication through traditional and social media; (b) gender balance, participation and women's leadership, including travel funding to enable participation; (c) coherence within the work of the UNFCCC to integrate and mainstream gender considerations in its work, strengthen the cooperation on gender across the Rio Conventions and encourage gender-responsive climate policies at international, national and local levels; (d) strive for gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation, including gender-responsive climate finance and fostering the collection, analysis and

13 Although no generally agreed definition exists, UNFCCC texts and academic literature can provide elements to define just adaptation as climate impact response strategies that abide to recognition, procedural and distributive justice principles, prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable.

14 Note that one of the novel institutional arrangements that emerged from COP30 is that COP31 will have two presidents (UNFCCC, 2025l). Turkey will preside over the COP and host the conference while Australia will preside over the negotiations, holding exclusive authority over them.

dissemination of gender-disaggregated data; and (e) enhance monitoring and reporting regarding equal participation of women in the UNFCCC process and the implementation of climate policies and actions that are sensitive to gender inequities (Molina, 2025).

4.2.5. Market mechanisms

After finalising the rules on Article 6 at COP29, which will be reviewed in 2028 (see Johnstone & Kuci, 2025), new guidance was issued at COP30 for implementing Article 6.2 on country-to-country carbon trading (UNFCCC, 2025n). Initial reports on bi-lateral deals were presented at COP30 (Chandrasekhar *et al*., 2025), finding inconsistencies and requesting parties to address them.

Guidance (UNFCCC, 2025o) was also issued on Article 6.4 (the Paris Agreement Credit Mechanism or PACM). The closure of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)[15] under the Kyoto Protocol was determined. A six-month extension to transfer projects from the CDM to the PACM was granted, with civil society arguing against the extension (Mair, 2025), stating it could endanger the integrity of Article 6.4. Additionally, the remaining CDM funds, amounting to US$26.8 million (MITECO, 2025), will initially be transferred to the Article 6.4 Trust Fund, an amount that is later expected to be transferred to the Adaptation Fund once the PACM reaches financial sustainability (UNFCCC, 2025p).

4.2.6. Loss and damage

Limited advances were achieved in Belém regarding loss and damage. After the COP29 deadlock on loss and damage, COP30 did, however, manage to conclude the third review of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM)[16] with the goal of achieving greater coordination with the Santiago Network for Loss and Damage and the Fund for Responding to Losses and Damages (FRLD) (UNFCCC, 2025q). A call was made to increase funding for the FRLD and the first grant disbursement cycle will take place through the Barbados Implementation Mechanism. Additionally, a report on losses and damages (called the State of Loss and Damage or Loss and Damage Gap Report) will also be produced as requested by developing countries (The Loss & Damage Collaboration, 2025).

15 The Clean Development Mechanism (UNFCCC, nd-b) under article 12 of the Kyoto Protocol allowed countries that had greenhouse gas emission reduction goals to implement projects in developing countries and claim Certified Emission Reductions (CERs) to be counted towards those goals. It has recently been argued that the GHG emission reduction impacts of CDM projects have been 16%-26% lower than CDM project proposals (Lo & Cong, 2022).

16 The WIM is the first instrument addressing loss and damage and a knowledge hub to help Parties address impacts that are beyond adaptation capacities. Its goals are to enhance knowledge, dialogue, coordination and action (The Loss & Damage Collaboration, 2025).

4.2.7. Aligning financial flows and climate goals

The decision text on matters relating to the alignment of financial flows and climate goals adopted at COP30 expresses gratitude for the Sharm el-Sheikh finance dialogues regarding discussions on the scope of Article 2.1.c of the Paris Agreement. It decides to continue working on the alignment through annual meetings (named the 'Veredas Dialogue' (UNFCCC, nd-c) that include a high-level round table among Party and non-Party stakeholders under the Veredas Dialogue called the 'Xingu Finance Talks', producing an annual report on these dialogues. The challenges and opportunities of Article 2.1.c and its complementarity with Article 9 will also be discussed. The Veredas Dialogues will be reviewed in 2028.

4.3. The EU and Spain at COP30

The current fragmentation of multilateralism, a world in disarray, or disorder according to Simon Stiell (UNFCCC, 2026b), and a new –and now complete– withdrawal from international climate negotiations by the US[17] has left the EU partially orphaned, isolated and with limited capacity to exercise its directional leadership and bridge-building role at COP30. Some key shortcomings –vis-à-vis EU COP30 priorities (Council of the EU, 2025) and negotiating positions (Climate Home News, 2025b)– included: (a) the disappointment on advancing on mitigation; (b) inadequate adaptation indicators; and (c) the lack of direct references to transitioning away from fossil fuels.

In fact, there is an ongoing reflection process in the EU regarding its place and strategy in international climate negotiations (Council of the EU, 2026). Ministers and civil society are calling for significant upgrades to the EU's international climate engagement (Kalcher, Cerisola & Gorissen, 2026) including: (a) longer-term climate diplomacy that transcends the upcoming COP; (b) improvements in internal coordination within the EU;(c) reinforcement of its climate diplomacy outside the UNFCCC process (eg, biodiversity COPs); (d) delivering continued support for coalitions of the willing to advance climate action; (e) frontloading engagement with Parties well ahead of annual climate gatherings; and (f) embracing a more structural climate leadership based on market access and the EU's climate finance leadership stance (Averchenkova, Lázaro-Touza & Escribano, 2025).

As the EU's fifth largest GHG emitter and given its current leadership role in advancing climate ambition, Spain's historical engagement[18] and commitment with international climate negotiations continued during COP30. After having

17 The US is the first historical emitter of GHG and the second current emitter after China.

18 For a fourth year in a row, Spain (AdapteCCa, 2025) had its own Pavillion where 52 events were organised, with researchers from the Elcano Royal Institute participating in eight of these events (Elcano Royal Institute, 2025). A breakdown of the institutions represented shows that 27% were Spanish. There were 29% of government officials, 27% civil society representatives, 10% private sector representatives and 3% of young people –including four representatives from the fourth edition of *Generación Clima* (Generación Clima, 2025). The events can be seen online (COP30 Spain Pavilion, 2025).

co-facilitated several adaptation negotiations in the past, this year Sara Aagesen, Third Vice-president and Minister for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, was selected as co-facilitator for mitigation during the second week of negotiations. The mitigation text agreed (UNFCCC, 2025r) incorporated references to forests and circular economy, agreed to use the Non-market Approaches (NMA) website to register mitigation projects and established a process to discuss the continuation of the Mitigation Work Programme in 2026. Spain has also submitted its Biannual Transparency Report (BTR) and underwent its Facilitative, Multilateral Consideration of Progress at COP30 answering written questions on renewables, electrification, the agricultural sector, AI and methodological issues, among others (UNFCCC, 2025s).

As has been the case in the past, Spain supported and joined numerous initiatives outside the formal negotiations. Some of these are summarised in Figure 8 below.

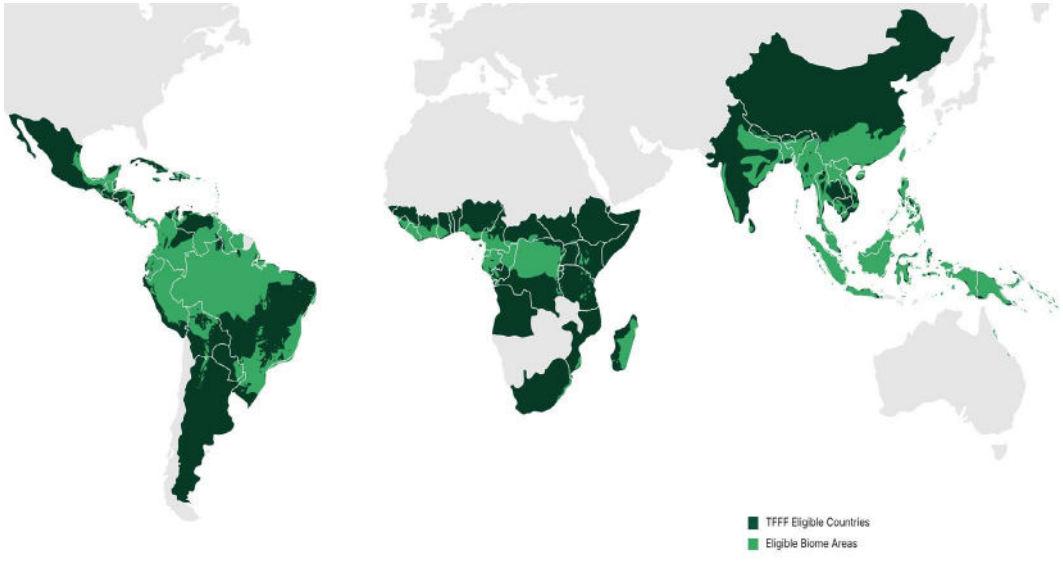
Figure 8.
COP30 initiatives that Spain has joined

Initiative	Description
Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF, 2025a). At COP30 the Brazilian government sought pledges amounting to US$25bn to then leverage US$125bn to incentivise the protection of tropical forests (WRI, 2025). Just US$6.7bn were pledged at COP30. The initiative has been endorsed by 66 countries, including the EU (TFFF, 2025b) and Spain (MITECO, 2025)	A fund that will raise money in international markets at a low interest rate, invest in a diverse portfolio of fixed income assets from Emerging Markets and Developing Economies (EMDEs) earning returns that will then pay tropical forest countries to maintain or enhance forest cover proportionally to their conservation efforts (Ministério da Fazenda, 2025). The money borrowed will be returned to investors at a profit. The use of the funds will be nationally determined. It is designed as a complementary instrument to REDD+ and international carbon markets. 70 rainforest nations are the potential beneficiaries (See Figure 9).
Belém Declaration on Hunger, Poverty and Human-Centred Climate Action (COP30 Brazil, 2025b). The initiative was signed by 43 countries including Spain and the EU	Climate change is exacerbating preexisting conditions that lead to hunger, poverty and instability. This declaration seeks to align international efforts to address poverty with those devoted to address climate change through the expansion of social protection efforts (by 2% a year), supporting just transitions and delivering on the human right to adequate food, among others (COP30 Brazil, 2025b).
Call to action on Integrated Fire Management and Wildfire Resilience (COP30 Brazil, 2025c).	Acknowledging that climate change increases the likelihood and severity of wildfires, the call to action seeks to transition from reactive fire management to prevention, strengthening international cooperation and adaptation. It embraces the inclusion of local actors as those who are most affected by wildfires. It promotes interoperability, compatibility, capacity building and exchanges of best practices.

Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change (UNESCO, nd). The initiative was signed by 22 countries including Spain	The goal is to analyse, inform about and dismantle climate-related disinformation. The initiative acknowledges that climate action needs to come from all sectors of society, which requires rigorous information on climate change. It recognises the increase of disinformation, misinformation and climate-change denial as a challenge. It notes the pressures, pursuit and attacks on climate scientists, researchers and defenders. The initiative calls on public and private actors alike to commit to and promote the dissemination of accurate information related to climate change.
Belém Health Action Plan for adapting the health sector to climate change (COP30 Brazil, 2025d). 33 donors have pledged to contribute to this initiative with US$300 mn	Climate change is recognised as a health crisis. The goal is to increase the resilience of the healthcare system to a changing climate. To do this, the Health Action Plan will advance integrated monitoring systems, increase capacity building, and promote innovation and science-based policies. The plan will initially focus on extreme heat, air pollution and climate-sensitive infectious diseases.
Belém declaration on the transition away from fossil fuels (OECD, 2025).	The goal is to enable a scientifically based 'just, orderly and equitable transition away from fossil fuels, aligned with pathways consistent with limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C'. It recognises the different national circumstances for this transition and calls for renewables buildout and energy efficiency to replace fossil fuels. It highlights the need for just transitions, international cooperation and the impact of transitioning away from fossil fuels on public finances.
Premium Flyers Solidarity Coalition (Global Solidarity Levies Task Force, 2025).	Located within the Global Solidarity Levies Taskforce (2025), it is a coalition of the willing formed by Benin, Djibouti, France, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan and Spain, with Antigua & Barbuda, Brazil, Fiji and Vanuatu as observers. It seeks to tax first-class air travellers.

Source: MITECO (2025).

Figure 9.
TFFF eligible countries and biome areas



Source: TFFF (2025c).

5. The future of COPs

Since 1992 countries have negotiated (slowly but surely) a structural reform of the development model guided by science and increasingly supported by laws (Ramakrishna, 2025). The UNFCCC process has been designed to strive for universality, accountability and legitimacy. Yet given rising temperatures, extreme weather, slow-onset climate change-related events, insufficient commitments and even more limited climate action, one of the recurrent questions is whether the process is fit for the purpose.

Dissatisfaction with insufficient progress so far and controversy around the closing plenary at the COP30 intensified discussions on the future of the UNFCCC process and its potential reforms, a topic that has been gaining increasing attention in recent years. CAN warned that COP29 in Baku had been deeply challenging and Belém had not been much better, with growing fossil-fuel lobbying and an increasing pattern of negotiations taking place behind closed doors (CAN, 2025).

In November 2024 a coalition of climate leaders and scientists published an open letter calling for COP reform to streamline decision-making, improve accountability, increase transparency, make representation more equitable and amend the COP presidency selection criteria to ensure host countries advocate UNFCCC goals rather than other interests (Club of Rome, 2024). This followed controversy over COP29's hosting by Azerbaijan, a fossil-fuel-dependent state.

The central themes in the UNFCCC reform debate are making the COP process more efficient (C2ES, 2025b) (eg, addressing procedural overload), more equitable and more democratic (eg, addressing procedural imbalances in resources, capacity and improving access to decision making). Research finds that UNFCCC negotiations are significantly hampered by overloaded agendas and the consensus rule, which often leads to lowest-common-denominator decisions. While the process allows all parties to be heard, asymmetric power and unequal participation affect equality between them (Petri & Karlas, 2025).

This creates a dilemma: reforms that boost efficiency (eg, moving to majority voting) could undermine the inclusivity that gives the process its legitimacy among developing nations.

Proposals on the future of climate negotiations (Depledge, 2024; Walker & Groen, 2025; CAN *et al.,* 2025) to ensure a more agile negotiation framework include: (a) better integrating non-Party stakeholders and their commitments in negotiations; (b) holding biannual climate conferences; (c) reducing inflationary agendas at negotiations; (d) downsizing mega COPs by limiting attendance (of country delegates, party-overflow participants and non-Party stakeholders); and (d) ensuring a more meaningful participation. Other ideas include proposals to focus on laws, policies and private sector action (Depledge, 2024). While the EU has advocated a more policy-prescriptive role for the COP process, countries like the US, China and Saudi Arabia have resisted such moves.

Since Saudi Arabia blocked the adoption of the Rules of Procedure (Vihma, 2011), the COP process has operated under draft rules (FCCC/CP/1996/2) without a voting rule (Rule 42). This means decisions are taken by consensus,[19] arguably limiting ambition. Some proposals suggest that by introducing a voting rule[20] in some of the COP decisions (eg, cover decisions that have significant signalling power), ambition could be unlocked as the limited number of recurrent blockers would be sidelined.

However, a recent research report concludes that the potential for reforming UNFCCC decision-making is limited, and that major reform proposals –such as a greater role for non-Party stakeholders or a move to majority voting– are unlikely to obtain consensus (Petri & Karlas, 2025).

Another set of reform proposals, which first emerged around the disappointment with the multilateral process after the collapse of the Copenhagen summit in 2009 and intensified more recently, focus on the idea of bypassing the UNFCCC consensus requirement with smaller, more ambitious coalitions or 'clubs'. These proposals assume that voluntary groups sharing excludable benefits can overcome free-riding and include concrete proposals for climate clubs with harmonised carbon prices and trade sanctions against non-members.

Drawing on the polycentric governance tradition, an increasing number of scholars argue that clubs, sector-specific partnerships and the UNFCCC can form a mutually reinforcing ecosystem where the UNFCCC set the overarching norms while clubs serve as laboratories for ambition and implementation (eg, Falkner, Nasiritousi & Reischl, 2022).

19 While consensus does not formally require unanimity it does imply the COP President has to interpret there are no significant formal objections to the adoption of decisions.

20 Even with a 7/8 majority requirement. Note that a 7/8 majority is significantly more demanding than the two-thirds majority requirements included in rule 42 of the draft Rules of Procedure (three-quarters if the decision pertains to adopting a protocol under a second option formulated in rule 42b).

This debate moved to policy when the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, promoted a climate club during Germany's G7 presidency (Climate Club, nd). In December 2022 the G7 formally launched the initiative and a Climate Club was constituted at COP28 in December 2023, initially comprising 37 member countries plus the EU, with a stated mission to support the implementation of the Paris Agreement and accelerate industrial decarbonisation (Erbach & Scalamandrè, 2023). By March 2026 it had grown to 48 members.

In a further innovative procedural proposal, Depledge (2024) argues that climate clubs, which have historically developed outside the COP process (Falkner, Nasiritousi & Reischl, 2022), could develop within the negotiation process. In-COP Climate Clubs would lead to the introduction of initiatives or commitments by coalitions of the willing as part (eg, in Annexes) of COP decisions. This development would allow those who want to advance to do so while allowing other countries to join when they are ready, benefitting from the systematic transparency and accountability process enshrined in the COP (vis-à-vis a patchy framework to follow-up on the progress made on commitments presented outside the negotiation process). The universality principle would hence be made flexible while accommodating action by more ambitious actors within the negotiation process. Exploring how this innovation could include non-Party stakeholders could be a future avenue for their meaningful engagement and impact, although legal avenues to do so, their implications, data availability and monitoring costs would need to be explored.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Paris Agreement has delivered significant and heretofore insufficient results (UNEP, 2025b). Expected temperature rises have gone down from 4°C degrees before its adoption to a 2.3°C-2.5°C expected global average temperature rise if current climate commitments are met (UNFCCC, 2025a). Adaptation is advancing and climate finance has increased. The climate agenda has broadened its scope (Mai & Elsässer, 2022), from agreeing on the goals and rules to govern the delivery of the Paris Agreement to fostering multilevel implementation by Party and non-Party stakeholders. However, we are still far off track to meet the climate goals set out in 2015.

Closing the Paris Agreement gap will require its Parties to significantly strengthen Nationally Determined Contributions and accelerate implementation efforts. Enhanced action at scale and speed by all actors is required to align scientific recommendations to bend the global emissions curve with delivery on the ground.

Ten years after the Paris Agreement was adopted, COP30 can be dubbed a lifeline for (climate) multilateralism. Amid significant geopolitical tensions, a second withdrawal announcement from the Paris Agreement by the US –plus its withdrawal announcements from the UNFCCC and the IPCC, etc– and reduced appetite for climate ambition, the summit will be remembered for the following, among others: (a) the submission of updated climate commitments that can reduce emissions by 12% by 2035; (b) an agreement on a first version of adaptation indicators; (c) a call to treble adaptation finance; and (d) advances on a just transition that include the development of a Mechanism for Just Transition and the adoption of a 2026-34 Gender Action Plan. It will also be remembered for a tumultuous closing plenary where numerous countries felt the COP presidency gavelled through the outcome without consensus

being achieved on issues such as the indicators on adaptation. The closing plenary made the EU's isolation painfully visible as it largely failed to achieve its goals and was less able than in previous COPs to put forth ambitious outcomes in the absence of the US.

Moving forward, the EU could ramp-up its structural leadership –in addition to holding the line on directional leadership–. To regain (some of) its leader and bridge-builder stance, the EU could develop a longer-term climate diplomacy and engagement strategy, rebuild coalitions and strengthen alliances with state and non-state actors capable of advancing climate ambition, particularly when consensus proves difficult. Efforts are more likely to bear fruit if climate diplomacy is exercised well ahead of COPs and is complemented by strengthened internal coordination.

Key issues remained unresolved in Belém. Among them, advancing on the agreement made at COP28 in Dubai to transition away from fossil fuels and tackling deforestation. Hence, at the behest of the Brazilian presidency of COP30, two roadmaps on the transitioning away from fossil fuels and deforestation will be developed to address key issues that have been extremely hard to agree on in decision texts.

Insufficient results after 30 COPs have once again raised the question of the usefulness of the UNFCCC process, which is arguably the best tool we have to reach consensus and ensure legitimacy in securing a stable climate. Preserving the UNFCCC framework or adapting it will be essential to maintain global coordination on climate action at a time when climate extremes are becoming increasingly frequent, generating growing economic, human and environmental costs.

Potential avenues for process reform are being analysed by the COP presidency who has suggested a two-tier diplomacy (COP30 Brazil, 2026) to accommodate the slower pace of consensus-based negotiations and the faster pace based on implementation by coalitions of the willing. Academic analyses suggest revisiting the principles of consensus and universality in climate decision-making as we advance in the delivery phase of the Paris Agreement.

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Recommended citation:

Lázaro Touza, L., Averchenkova, A. & A. Briones (2026), 'From the Paris Agreement to the future of climate negotiations after COP30', *Elcano Policy Paper*, Elcano Royal Institute

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