

The UN climate change summit begins on Monday (3 December) with a warning that today's generation is the last that can prevent catastrophic global warming, as well as the first to be suffering its impacts. EURACTIV's media partner, The Guardian, reports.

Almost 200 nations were set to meet in Poland for two weeks, aiming to hammer out a vital agreement to turn the carbon-cutting vision set in Paris in 2015 into reality. Moves to rapidly ramp up action would be another key goal, with current pledges leaving the world on track for a disastrous 3C of warming.

The negotiations will take place against a background of ominous news: the past four years have been the hottest on record and global emissions were rising again, when they need to fall by half by 2030. Climate action must be increased fivefold to limit warming to the 1.5C scientists advise, according to the UN.

The political backdrop contains challenges as well, with climate change denial from the US president, Donald Trump, and attacks on the UN process from Brazil's incoming Bolsonaro administration. The hosting of the summit by a coal-friendly Polish government further worries some observers.

But the EU's new intention to become climate neutral and the plummeting cost of renewable energy have been positives, while a year of extreme weather was anticipated to focus minds. "We are clearly the last generation that can change the course of climate change, but we are also the first generation with its consequences," said Kristalina Georgieva, the CEO of the World Bank. The bank announced on Monday that its record \$100bn (€88bn) of climate funding from 2021-2025 would for the first time be split equally between projects to cut emissions and those protecting people from the floods, storms and droughts that global warming is making worse.

In recent years, just 5% of global funding has gone on protection, but 2018 has seen climate impacts hit hard, with heatwaves and wildfires in Europe and California and huge floods in India, Japan and east Africa. "We are already seeing the devastating impact of climate change," Georgieva told the Guardian. "We strongly believe that action ought to go both on mitigation and on adaptation."

"Climate extremes are the new normal," said Prof Patrick Verkooijen, the CEO of the Global Center on Adaptation, in the Netherlands. "The climate debate can no longer only be about the causes - it also needs to focus on how billions of people at risk can rapidly adapt."

Rich nations have promised \$100bn a year by 2020 to help poorer countries adapt to climate change and develop clean energy. Negotiators in Poland would have to bring the two blocs together with firm agreement on how the promise would be fulfilled.

Gebru Jember Endalew, the chair of the 47-strong Least Developed Countries Group, said:

"We represent almost one billion people, the people who are least responsible for climate change but among those most vulnerable to its effects. The longer poor countries have to wait [for funding], the larger the cost will become."

The negotiators in Poland must also produce a rulebook governing how action pledged under the Paris agreement was tracked and reported to ensure all nations play their part. "Fair and effective rules for accounting must be established, with special responsibilities for the big emitters such as the US and Europe but also China and India," said Prof Johan Rockström, at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany. "While defining a rulebook sounds boring, it is in fact essential."

The role of the Polish hosts will be crucial and the deputy energy minister Michał Kurtyka has said it would focus on using forests to take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, electric vehicles and ensuring workers in fossil fuel industries were helped into new jobs. Poland generates 80% of its electricity from coal and the UN summit will take place in a coal mining town, Katowice. The Polish government has also allowed two coal companies to sponsor the summit.

"Having major coal companies as climate summit sponsors sends the worst possible signal at the worst possible time," said Robert Cyglicki, Greenpeace's director in Central and Eastern Europe. "It would be like Philip Morris sponsoring a health summit where a cigarette ban is supposed to be agreed. We will know this was a successful summit if coal companies regret sponsoring it."

Many nations remain firmly committed to climate action, particularly France and China. But the UN secretary general, António Guterres, warned last week that the rise of populism was undermining the political will of some countries to work with others. "We have more and more nationalist approaches being popular and winning elections," he said. "This has led in my opinion to a lack of political will."

"Every day, we witness the effects of the changing climate on poor and vulnerable people around the world," said Adriana Opromolla, at NGO Caritas Internationalis. "Transformation is possible, but political will is needed to make it happen."

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