

Open COP Principles

Prioritizing health safety, normal business, openness and inclusion, and stakeholders' support for enhanced participation.

While the climate crisis intensifies, the COVID-19 pandemic emergency remains unresolved. Estimates are that less than 1/4 of the population worldwide will be vaccinated by the end of 2021. Action to reduce emissions and build resilience must not be delayed. This means that COP26 should operate with COVID safety measures assuming generalized community spread with a low immunity scenario. Strict COVID safety protocols, with detailed advance planning, could still allow a sizable and socially distanced in-person gathering—possibly longer in duration and spread beyond the SEC venue to avoid excluding any Party delegates or Observers.

A hybrid COP scenario, in which some participation is virtual, could provide both safe in-person meetings and full inclusion and participation, for negotiators and observers. Active engagement and meaningful dialogue from all relevant stakeholders, especially civil society organizations and Indigenous peoples, should be prioritized. Civil society and observers have expertise and lived experiences that strengthen climate action. We believe the pillars of ACE¹ should apply to all climate policymaking, including in supranational spaces like the COP. As such, it is imperative that remote participation not be limited to passive viewing of a livestream.

All decisions made regarding hybrid or remote participation must operate on the principle of equal, transparent and inclusive participation in the meetings for all Parties and Observers.

We urge that the following principles be followed for a best-case hybrid COP26:

1. All effort should be made to facilitate and manage normal attendance and participation by Party delegates and Observers.
2. Transparency and inclusion in virtual or hybrid negotiating sessions should be equal to or improved from those of on-site UNFCCC negotiations, for both Party delegates and Observers.
3. All meetings subject to distancing rules should be kept open through interactive and meaningful virtual participation, so those present and those intervening remotely are on equal footing in the process.
4. Virtual spaces for hybrid meetings should be opened 20 minutes prior and kept open at least 20 minutes after, to invite and make room for more free-flowing virtual interaction.
5. Open COP Facilitators should be recognized by the COP26 Presidency and the UNFCCC, as a special on-site role—drawn from Party, Observer, and UN delegations—with specific responsibility for assisting the coordination of remote participation in all sessions.

In order to honor Principle 1 (maintaining normal process), we expect there will need to be strict COVID safety protocols pre-travel, during travel, locally in Glasgow, and inside the COP venue. The COP26 budget should include some direct assistance to any who might need it, to ensure vaccinations are available, and any prolonged precautionary pre-COP stay is accessible to those who might not otherwise be able to afford it. We stand by to provide additional recommendations and practical support for the implementation of these principles in UNFCCC meetings.

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¹ The Action for Climate Empowerment agenda, rooted in Article 6 of the Convention. Our 2020 proposal for ACE reform under the Doha Work Programme is online at: <https://engage4climate.org/dwp2020>