

Conference of Parties – COP 27

Sharm El-Sheikh Climate Change Conference – November 2022

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Summary

This briefing focuses on the forthcoming Sharm El-Sheikh Climate Change Conference from the 6th to 18th November '22. In examining the vision, targets and priorities for the Conference of Parties 27 (COP 27), it has regard to the outcomes from the Glasgow COP 26 and the extent of progress or otherwise in the intervening period. In particular, it examines the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report¹ of February 2022 – Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability – which will in large part inform the COP 27 deliberations. The Briefing will be of interest to senior policy makers across government and local government in Ireland, all of whom are presently advancing actions under the Climate Action Plan, 2021.

Context.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has an almost universal membership of 197 Parties and is the parent treaty of both the 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement and 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The main aim of the Paris Agreement is to keep a global average temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius and to drive efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

This overriding objective has been a feature of subsequent Conference of Parties and so it was in 2021 when a range of decisions were taken at the Glasgow COP 26 as a collective effort to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees by 2030. Alok Sharma, UK President of COP 26 said that we can *'... now say with credibility that we have kept 1.5 degrees alive. But, its pulse is weak and it will only survive if we keep our promises and translate commitments into rapid action.'*

However, a COP does not take place in a vacuum. It must compete for agreement and implementation in often difficult political, geo-political, financial and other crises and circumstances. Climate Change, having been elevated in the order of political priority in recent years, has too often been relegated by the latest crisis.

President Trump announced his intention to abandon the Paris Agreement on 1st June '17. Economies have been struggling with a global Covid-19 pandemic since 2020 and as the world was starting to emerge from the pandemic, Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 heaping further pressure on financial and energy markets and consequently, national economies. Meanwhile, the Amazon rain forests continue to burn, drought and wildfires beset California, Hurricane Ian wreaked havoc in Florida, Venezuela endures major flooding accompanied by lethal mudslides, Belgium, Germany, New South Wales and Pakistan also suffer serious flooding. The 'urgent' takes precedence over the 'important'. Such is the backdrop to the Sharm El-Sheikh COP 27.

It's also fitting that the conference takes place this year in Egypt given its location on the African continent, a continent responsible for only 3% of global CO² emissions, but in the front line of the world's climate, energy and food crises.

2022 IPCC Report – Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability:

The 2022 IPCC report draws from 34,000 studies that involved 270 authors from 67 countries. It provides one of the most comprehensive examinations of the intensifying impacts of climate change and future risks, particularly for resource-poor countries and marginalised communities. It highlights the groups of people and ecosystems that are most vulnerable together with the most effective and feasible climate adaptation approaches.

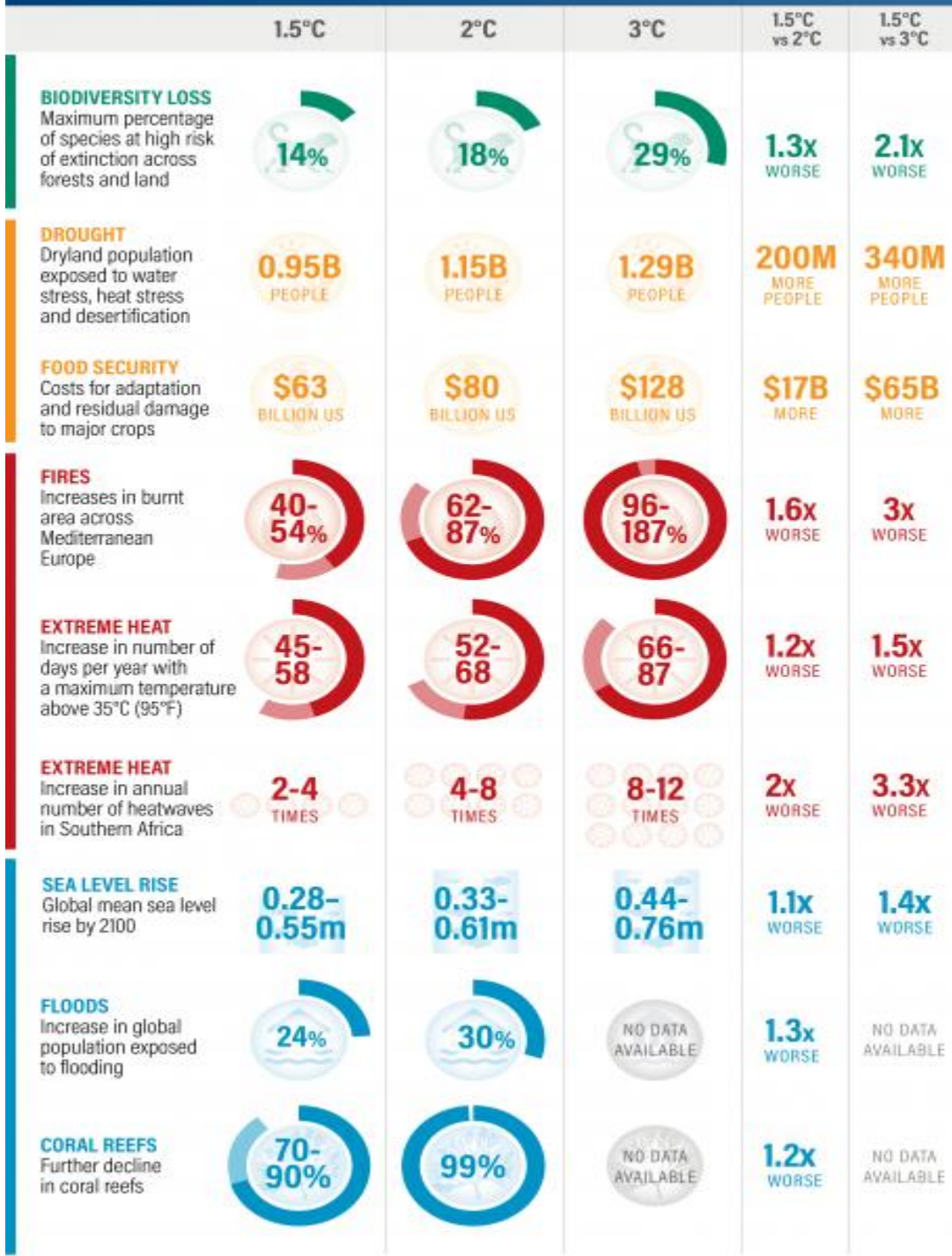
The report is clear that climate impacts are already more widespread and severe than expected and that climate change is already causing widespread disruption in every region in the world with just 1.1 degrees C (2 degrees F) of warming. Millions of people are already threatened by droughts, extreme heat and record floods, raising issues not only for livelihoods but which also threaten food security. Since 2008, more than 20 million people have been forced from their homes and crop productivity growth has shrunk in Africa by 33%

since 1961. Not only is the security of food threatened, but the report determines half the global population faces water insecurity at least one month per year and wildfires are scorching larger areas than ever before in many regions, leading to irreversible changes to the landscape.

And, we are locked into even worse impacts in the near-term, even if the world rapidly decarbonises. Existing emission trends, when added to greenhouse gases in the atmosphere make for very significant impacts up to 2040 at least. It is estimated that climate change will drive 32-132 million more people into extreme poverty, jeopardise food security and increase the incidence of heat-related mortality, heart disease and mental health challenges in the next decade alone.

Higher temperatures will escalate risks, the impact of which may be irreversible. For every tenth degree of additional warming, there will be further threats to people, species and ecosystems. Even limiting warming to 1.5 degrees C is not safe for all and the warnings are stark. Under a high emissions scenario, increased flood risk could lead to an additional 48,000 deaths in children under 15 years old in 2030 due to diarrhea. Should temperature increase beyond 1.5 degrees, additional irreversible impacts will occur. See Figure 1. below.

COMPARING RISKS FROM RISING TEMPERATURES: EXPLAINING THE IPCC'S WORKING GROUP II REPORT (AR6)



Note: For climate risks with projected ranges, we used the midpoint of the ranges to compare risks at different temperature thresholds. Sea level rise projections correspond to SSP1-1.9, SSP1-2.6, SSP2-4.5, which are roughly approximate to global warming of 1.5°C, 2°C, and 3°C, respectively.

Figure 1. World Resources Institute: Comparing risks from rising temperatures.ⁱⁱ

Presently, between 3.3 and 3.6 billion people live in countries highly vulnerable to climate impacts and most of which are under-developed and developing countries. They include much of sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Arctic, Central and South America and Small Island Developing States. Limited access to healthcare and other basic services constrain community's ability to adapt to climatic changes. A stark fact is that mortality from droughts, storms and floods in the period 2010-2020 was 15 times greater than countries with very low vulnerability.

Given the anticipated impact of climate change, the report highlights the need for adaptation. While some 170 countries now include adaptation in their climate policies, there is a serious absence of implementation with many countries advancing in a small-scale, reactive or largely incremental way. Technical solutions are available but successful adaptation requires large scale funding, estimated by IPCC as between \$127 and \$295 Billion for developing countries alone by 2030 and 2050 respectively.

If that wasn't challenging enough, the report highlights that some impacts of climate change are already too severe to adapt to and there is now an urgent need to address losses and damages. The adaptation limits that can be reached in some areas are considered 'soft' i.e. effective measures exist but political, economic and social challenges such as access to finance hinder implementation. Other areas however are already facing 'hard' limits where the impacts are so severe that no adaptation measures will prevent losses and damages.

COP 27 Vision:

Against that background, the Egyptian Presidency Vision for achieving a successful COP 27 outcome is to achieve progress across all items under negotiation in a balanced and equitable manner. While this is a broad general statement, it means delivering a comprehensive and ambitious Mitigation Program, achieving and capturing meaningful progress on the Global Goal on Adaptation, addressing the Loss and Damage deficit including through finding a balanced solution to the funding issue, and, effectively addressing the climate finance challenge in a manner that creates trust in the process and allays concerns that developing countries will be called to contribute to the global effort without commensurate support.

Egypt seeks to base all work on the most reliable and credible science available in the form of IPCC and other relevant reports that have consistently established the need for urgent action to address the existing gaps on mitigation, adaptation and climate finance. It wants to ensure no country is left behind by building mutual trust and understanding and it emphasises the need to move from negotiations to implementation through specific, measurable, impactful initiatives to be implemented on the ground.

COP 27 Targets:

1. From pledging to implementation. There is no denying that urgency is being injected into the process with the primary target being to shift from pledging to implementation both at scale and on time. Based on the agreed work streams in Paris and the ambition reflected until and during Glasgow, this target aims to accelerate, scale up, replicate success stories and deliver through the right mechanisms.
2. Adaptation. The February IPCC report concludes that climate change is impacting every corner of the world and much more severe impacts are in store if we fail to halve greenhouse emissions this decade and immediately scale up adaptation. Emission reduction alone will not address climate change as it's clear from ongoing extreme weather events that some impacts are inevitable. A Transformative Adaptation agenda based on science and responsive to the actual needs of countries and communities in climate vulnerable situations is deemed necessary.
3. Support for Loss and Damage. Loss and Damage is the term given to the consequences of climate change and include issues such as droughts that turn once-productive farms barren, or rising seas that permanently flood low-lying island communities. There is a recognition of the need for action to clarify support for loss and damage to those most vulnerable to climate change impacts. With the increasing impacts of more frequent extreme weather events and speeding slow onset events, it is time to respond to the calls and needs for an effective mechanism to meet those needs.
4. Making finance flows a reality. Providing, mobilising and delivering climate finance for developing countries will require a new mindset. This will be particularly difficult against the backdrop of the current financial crises, debt challenges and increasing interest rates. Appropriate financial flows should be based on needs with a focus on

concessional financial instruments and grants as appropriate. Clear revision of definition of bankable projects that take into consideration climate benefits and not only risks. Achieving cross-cutting impacts should also be provided.

5. 'Just Transition'. Ensuring a managed and just transition, based on the agreed principles in the Convention and its Paris Agreement, to deliver the agreed transition to an economic model based on low emission and climate resilient development as envisaged in the Paris Agreement and the enhanced action identified in Glasgow. There is a recognised need to manage the transition in a manner that ensures the needed shift and quick phasing-in of low emission technologies and phasing-down of high emission ones, while keeping in mind the impacts of implementation of response measures, meets the needs of all those who are impacted. In this regard, there is a particular emphasis on food and water security.

Discussion and Comment:

A clear 'line of sight' exists on the road to Shark El-Sheikh from a climate change policy perspective. The UNFCCC parent treaty, Kyoto, Paris, Glasgow and 2022 IPCC report of February 2022 all serve to set the agenda for COP 27. Structures exist within the process for collaboration and cooperation between the Presidents of COP 26 and 27 to ensure continuity and consistency of purpose. The challenges are urgent, clear and substantial. But perhaps the greatest challenge lies in transposing supra national agreements and objectives into local and national action.

The IPCC report was launched to considerable publicity and public debate in February. Its conclusions were clear. While it remains a seminal report and informs the agenda for COP 27, it appears to have been overtaken by other global events and has been relegated in the public consciousness in the intervening period.

Climate change leadership has been demonstrated by the UN, scientific evidence and data have been comprehensive and compelling and the conclusions are stark. However the climate challenge remains for nation states who have for their own reasons failed to afford climate change the priority it requires. Economic development, pandemic, war, energy, global markets, inflation and recession, have all taken precedence in recent years when time

for dealing with the climate issues are at a premium and when two years have effectively been lost to the pandemic.

Dire predictions have failed to have the intended impact and the already stretched 2030 targets have now to be achieved in 8 years. The clock is ticking. Whether already developed countries aggressively engage in and advance climate action as per the forthcoming COP 27 target areas remains to be seen. As the communication strategy and messaging has so far fallen short of their intended effect on national governments, it will be interesting to see if the strategy and messaging changes or, whether they become more fatalistic.

What then are the policy choices for Ireland, a small island country in the north-eastern Atlantic Ocean? Can it afford to implement the adaptation measures necessary to retrofit the housing stock and protect our coasts, riverbanks and critical infrastructure in the short to medium-term? Can it afford not to? Will the cost of not advancing an aggressive adaptation programme be greater?

While adaptation will cost significant €billions, mitigation choices present different political challenges. The body politic has already witnessed intense debate from the greatest carbon emitting sectors, debates that are anticipated to further intensify post COP 27. Added to the debate will be the issue of job displacement, and lobbying from Unions and other sectoral interests can be expected.

With these challenges however come opportunities. Ireland came late to the industrial revolution and in the absence of 'natural' resources, has been a net importer of fossil fuels to meet our energy needs. Climate change presents the opportunity to meet much of those needs from renewable energy and perhaps become a net exporter. Achieving such an ambition in the medium to long-term will require urgent implementation of appropriate climate policies.

Renewable energy is a developing sector and major employment growth area. Developing a competence and expertise in the workforce requires investment and policy decisions focused on education, research and development, targeted subsidies for start-up enterprises and the development of appropriate apprenticeship and training programmes. Policy development

and investment today will facilitate the evolution of a workforce that is fit for purpose in an emerging climate friendly environment and will ensure the competitiveness of the country into the future.

Addressing the challenges of job displacement, training and upskilling the workforce and achieving competitiveness will fall to the various agencies of State. The 2021 Climate Action Plan and its' 493 Actions are a good start and represent the government's commitment to the process. State agencies across the entire public sector spectrum are at various stages of advancing actions relevant to them and reporting progress centrally to a dedicated section within the Taoiseach's Department.

From the Local Government sector's perspective, all Councils have adopted an Adaptation Plan, signed a Climate Action Charter with the Department of Environment, Communications and Climate (DECC), implement an annual climate action programme developed through and with the assistance of the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) who have also developed a six-module bespoke climate training programme. The training programme has to date been rolled out to over 17,000 of the sector's 30,000 staff.

Post COP 27, the opportunity should be taken by Government and the wider public sector to review and evaluate the adequacy or otherwise of existing policies and the preparedness of the public sector to meet the fast emerging and accelerating climate challenges. Should the trend of recent years continue, we can expect to see more exacting climate targets that will increase the challenges for the public sector and all private sectoral interests. Regardless of the outcome however, difficult political choices lie ahead.

ⁱ Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability

ⁱⁱ <https://www.wri.org/insights/ipcc-report-2022-climate-impacts-adaptation-vulnerability>