

2021: The beginning of a critical decade of action

The year 2020 was a strange year, to say the least. The destructive bushfires engulfing Australia, a global pandemic, and a heatwave in the Arctic circle are just some of the most catastrophic events that hit our planet in [2020](#) (NASA, 2021), and the recovery is still ongoing. However, with a new year, comes new opportunities for growth and change. Could 2021 be the beginning of a critical decade of climate action?

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Looking at [COVID-19](#) and its economic effects, it is evident that it has caused government debts to rise sharply over the past year (WEC, 2021). There is also much less available public money for activities, such as climate protection or ecosystem restoration. Promisingly, since the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015, many ambitious partnerships for action on climate and nature have been taking root and growing (WEC, 2021). We are now able to see some of their early results. For example, the Mission Possible Partnership, which encourages leading companies, banks, and governments to create “net zero” strategies for their [greenhouse gas emissions](#), has grown. So far, more than 200 companies and organizations are involved and this movement has the potential to tackle 30% of the global [GHG emissions](#) (WEC, 2021).

However, we must ensure that the large-scale collaborations for climate, nature, and food sustainability can increase and become mainstream during 2021. Partnerships involving global organizations and governments can propel the necessary changes needed in the precious little time we have. Following the SDG17’s goal of partnerships for prosperity at a time when public funds are scarce will ensure that we do not stand idle in these desperate times. We must draw on wide networks of innovation, expertise, and resources from across the globe to create powerful, long-lasting change (WEC, 2021). As 2021 can be the year for innovation, the sustainable development needed can finally help tackle climate change head-on.

CLIMATE CHANGE: THE TOP RISK IN THE NEXT DECADE



World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey 2020 from [The Global Risks Report 2021: 16th Edition](#)

According to the [World Economic Forum](#) Global Risks Report 2021, climate action failure, extreme weather, and biodiversity loss, alongside infectious diseases, are the top global risks for the next decade in terms of impact and likelihood (WEC, 2021). Climate change also threatens to increase poverty, food insecurity, water stress, and environmental damage (UN, 2019). However, we have the tools to address the crisis in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change, but the technology and resources at hand are of no use if they are not being implemented correctly and effectively.

In November 2021, world leaders will be gathering in Glasgow for the successor to the landmark [Paris meeting of 2015](#) (Justin Rowlatt, 2021). A problem from the 2015 conference was that the commitments that different countries have made to cutting carbon emissions fell short of the targets set. The world agreed to try to limit the global temperature from increasing to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century (Justin Rowlatt, 2021). At the moment, we are sadly not on track to reach this target. If current trends continue, we are set to breach the 1.5C ceiling within 12 years or less (Justin Rowlatt, 2021). Glasgow 2021 will also give us a forum in which those issues can be rectified and that solid plans for [sustainability](#) can be put in place.

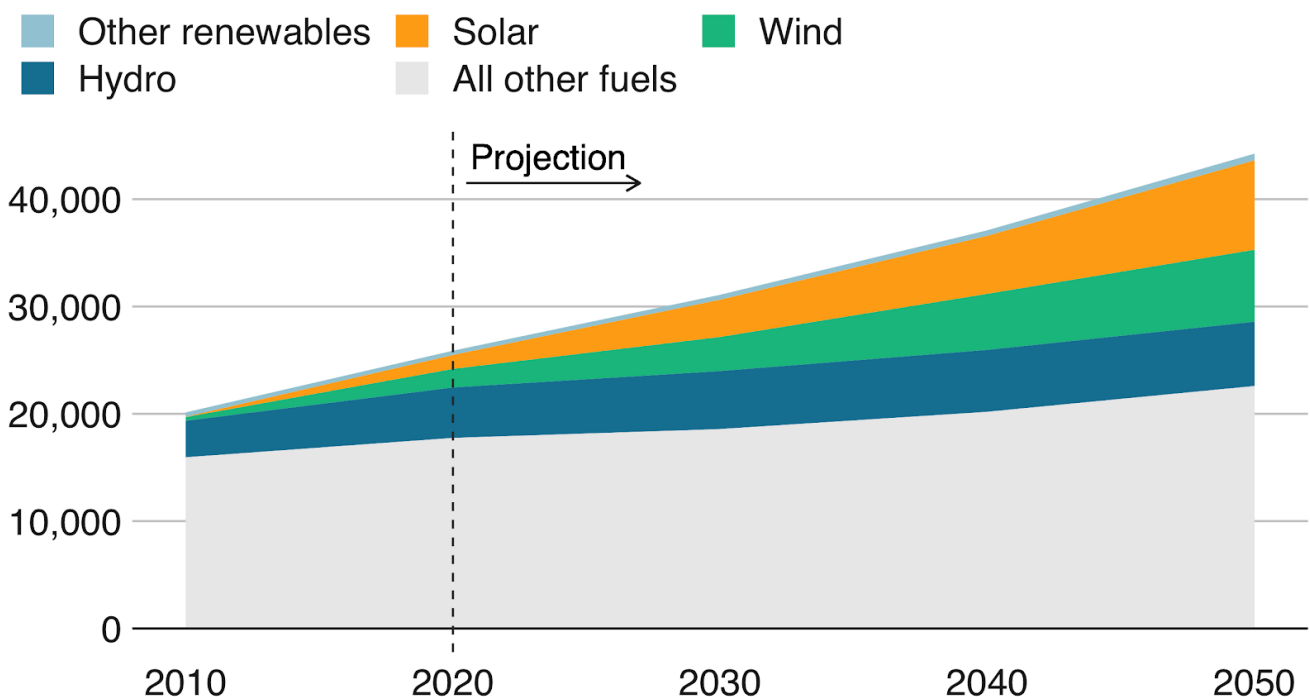
BUILDING A NET-ZERO ECONOMY

Recent discussions at the [World Economic Forum](#) meeting in January 2021 included the topic of building a net-zero, nature-positive economy. Some

countries, such as China, are already signing up for deep carbon cuts. This is surprising, but it brings hope, because cutting carbon has always been seen as an expensive activity. In 2019, the UK was the first major economy to produce a legally-binding net zero commitment (Justin Rowlatt, 2021). This was closely followed by the European Union in 2020 and now over 110 countries have committed to a net-zero by the mid-century (Justin Rowlatt, 2021). The United Nations also estimates that, together, they represent more than 65% of the global emissions and more than 70% of the world economy (Justin Rowlatt, 2021). With the election of [Joe Biden](#) as the United States' president, the world's economy has now rejoined the net-zero target countries.

Half of electricity from renewables by 2050

Electricity generation in trillion kilowatthours



Source: US Energy Information Administration

BBC

The amount of energy created by renewable sources is predicted to increase. When it comes to building new power stations, [renewables](#) are already often cheaper than fossil fuels. In October 2020, the International Energy Agency concluded that some solar power schemes now offer the cheapest source of electricity in history (Justin Rowlatt, 2021). If nations invest more in wind and solar energy, prices are likely to fall even further, allowing more countries to do the same. There may come a point where it becomes so cheap that it will make sense to transition exclusively to [renewable energy](#) and shut down existing coal

and gas power stations. Governments could also benefit from this to boost their nation's economy, creating opportunities for investors to willingly swap to green energy sources without being bullied by climate activists.

Moreover, the falling cost of [renewable energy](#) and the growing public pressure for action on climate change is also transforming attitudes in business (Justin Rowlatt, 2021). For one, it would financially benefit a [business](#) to invest in sustainable energy sources. Secondly, it would appease the growing movement aiming to get businesses to embed climate risk into their financial decision-making. Mandatory reporting on the environmental impacts of activities and investments that a [business](#) makes would also be a gigantic step towards building a net-zero world.

WHY A 2030 TARGET?

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), we need to halve the total emissions by the end of 2030 to stand a reasonable chance of hitting the 1.5C target (Justin Rowlatt, 2021). This means reaching the level of emissions reductions that were observed in 2020 due to the massive international lockdowns every year until the end of the decade. Alarming, emissions are already creeping back up to the levels that they were in 2019. Many countries have expressed ambitions for cutting carbon and becoming sustainable, but only a few have strategies in place to meet those goals. Hence, the year 2021 will be a challenging year for climate action. Getting nations to sign up to and successfully enact policies that will start reducing emissions now will be tough, but to achieve these goals, people globally must change their patterns of consumption (UN, 2019).

Highlighting the theme of the General Assembly, President María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés called for an intergenerational approach to climate change. "Climate justice is intergenerational justice," she said (UN, 2019). This statement echoes the sentiments of global youth climate activists, who demand that today's leaders act on behalf of future generations. It is also important to understand that climate change and poverty are linked. It threatens lives, incomes, development progress, and plans for inclusive sustainable development (United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, 2019). We are in the midst of a global emergency that must be fought with ambition and urgency. At *THRIVE*, we believe that to build a [sustainable world](#), there is no other option, 2021 must be

the beginning of a critical decade of action.

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