



The Bitter (COP of) Truth



Belém 2025 climate conference not up to the challenge

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From 11 November to 22 November 2025, the 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP30) was held in Belém (Brazil). The Wuppertal Institute research team closely observed the climate change negotiations during the two-week conference and can now present their assessment of the conference outcomes.

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Key messages

- Brazilian President Lula labelled the Belém climate conference the “COP of Truth”, countering the disinformation campaigns by obstructionists and climate denialists, leading to a commendable new initiative on information integrity. However, the bitter truth is also that the outcomes of the Belém COP were highly disappointing and not in line with the challenge of staying within 1.5°C or at least 2°C global warming.
- As in Baku, the conference once again failed to further build on the outcomes of the first Global Stocktake (GST) on mitigation. While Brazil's President Lula da Silva had opened the conference urging to develop roadmaps for transitioning away from fossil fuels and ending deforestation, in the end it was not even possible to re-iterate the GST outcomes explicitly. More positively, more than 80 countries had demanded the development of a fossil transition roadmap and will now take discussions further at a dedicated conference that will be organised in 2026 in Colombia in cooperation with the Netherlands.
- Contrary to the stated intentions of Brazil, the COP in the Amazon was not a “Forest COP” and thus a missed opportunity to advance the integration of climate and biodiversity issues within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). But it delivered two important results on the sidelines of the official negotiations: Brazil launched the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF), a novel global fund of planned USD 125 billion that is aimed at rewarding the protection of standing forests. And the Forest and Climate Leader's Pledge was renewed, promising USD 1.8 billion for the protection of territories in the rainforest for Indigenous Peoples, local communities and people of African descent.
- Historically, the Action Agenda has been an important venue since COP20 (Lima), but it lacked an overarching framework, leading to an unorganized landscape of initiatives with sometimes overlapping objectives, unused synergies and unclear follow-up. Declaring COP30 as the “COP of Implementation,” the Brazilian Presidency sought to address this by structuring and organizing the Action Agenda along the GST outcomes.
- Contrary to expectations, the three advisory opinions delivered by the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) did not play a major role at COP30. Despite the fact that they formulated with utmost clarity that the duty to mitigate climate change is rooted deeply in treaty and customary international law, attempts by vulnerable countries to insert references into the decisions were not successful. This is a worrying sign of disrespect for public international law and human rights.
- The main result of the finance negotiations was the set up of a two-year work programme to develop solutions for fulfilling the goals formulated in the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) that was adopted at COP29. However, many issues remain unresolved and the challenge remains to hold developed

countries accountable for their share to the USD 300 billion goal until 2035 in times of tight fiscal budgets and climate backlash.

- Trade emerged as a key topic at COP30 in light of the criticism regarding unilateral trade measures such as the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). In times of the decline of the World Trade Organization (WTO), future COPs are likely to step in the emerging multilateral gap at the climate-trade-equity nexus. It was agreed to set up a three-year dialogue on this topic.
- The main result of the negotiations on just transition was the decision to develop a "just transition mechanism" within the next year. The objective of this mechanism is to promote international cooperation, technical assistance, capacity building and knowledge transfer in order to 'enable equitable, inclusive just transitions'. Several principles of a just transition have already been recognized from dialogues held in recent years. However, other pressing just transition issues regarding critical minerals or trade as well as stronger language on transitioning away from fossil fuels or on deep and rapid emission reductions were not included.
- With the adoption of the Article 6 rulebook at COP29 in Baku, no substantive negotiations on market-based cooperation were envisaged for COP30 in Belém. However, discussions proved to be more controversial than expected, with Parties expressing differing views on how to ensure the transparency and environmental integrity of voluntary cooperation on the one hand, and how to increase the attractiveness and broader applicability of the instruments on the other. While strengthening the currently weak transparency and reporting framework for cooperative approaches under Article 6.2 was not possible, attempts to adversely influence governance decisions taken by the Supervisory Body of the Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism (PACM) could be averted. By agreeing to relocate funding from the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) to the PACM, Parties at COP30 ensured the continued operationalization of the mechanism. Parties further agreed on an end date of the CDM - its predecessor.
- A major outcome at COP30 was the conclusion of the Baku Adaptation Roadmap with the adoption of 59 indicators to measure progress under the Global Goal on Adaptation and the establishment of a two-year programme to develop a guidance for the operationalisation of these indicators.
- COP29 in Baku had not adopted an adaptation finance subgoal under the NCQG. The push for a new adaptation finance goal of tripling adaptation finance, hence, dominated all adaptation related negotiations at Belém, because there was no dedicated room for it. Ultimately, Parties agreed on an appellative paragraph calling for efforts towards tripling adaptation finance by 2035.
- The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage is fully operational and issued USD 250 million under the first call for funding requests. The review of the Warsaw International Mechanism has been adopted but without reflecting

the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on climate change as requested by some Parties.

- Despite the successful adoption of the Belém Gender Action Plan at COP30, the term 'gender' was contested by ultra-conservative and right-wing Parties, including the Vatican and Argentina, reflecting a global trend against gender-related human rights.

1 Introduction

The door to limiting the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C is closing fast. Despite substantial progress in some areas, such as renewable energy and electric vehicles, the latest Global Carbon Budget report found that global carbon emissions from fossil fuels are still increasing and that the budget to stay within 1.5°C is virtually exhausted (Friedlingstein et al., 2025). More than one-third of the Parties to the Paris Agreement had not submitted their new nationally determined contributions (NDCs) by the time the conference opened, and according to the NDC synthesis report by the UNFCCC Secretariat (2025), the reports that have been submitted would reduce global emissions only by 12% below 2019 levels up to 2035 - while according to the IPCC a reduction of 60% is necessary.

At the same time, international tensions are increasing rapidly and each of the recent COPs was taking place in the context of yet another additional crisis. COP26 in Glasgow was postponed due to the Covid pandemic and the associated socio-economic upheaval. In the year of COP27, Russia attacked Ukraine. Shortly before COP28 the war in Gaza broke out and shortly before COP29 Donald Trump was again elected as US president. COP30 now took place in the context of the second Trump withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and a decidedly confrontational US course in trade policy while the European Union and China are also increasingly imposing restrictions on international trade. All this while the climate crisis accelerated, already causing severe damages to ecosystems and human livelihoods. Added to this are social polarisation tendencies in many countries around the world and the deliberate spreading of misinformation, which make ambitious climate policy much more difficult to implement today.

Against this background, progressive actors had hoped that the Belém COP could send a clear message that successful climate policy is not just a nice-to-have, but actually protects against further escalation of conflicts. A key theme ahead of COP30 was the widespread expectation that it would be the first true 'Implementation COP'. Unlike previous meetings, which were largely shaped by political bargaining, COP30 was expected to focus on the practical implementation of existing commitments. An issue was in particular whether the conference would be able to follow-up on the outcomes of the first Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement that had concluded at COP28 in Dubai with a call to transition away from fossil fuels by 2050, and, by 2030, to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation, triple globally installed renewable energy capacity and double global energy efficiency improvements. This decision had marked a milestone. After 30 years of discussing climate change mitigation only in abstract terms of emission targets, the Dubai decision had broadened the focus to directly target the activities that are causing GHG emissions (Obergassel et al., 2023; Obergassel et al., 2024).

However, at the subsequent COP29 in Baku, recalcitrant countries had successfully blocked all attempts at following up. On mitigation, the most important issue at stake in Belém was therefore whether the UNFCCC would be able to continue focusing on the transitions that are needed to achieve the mitigation objectives of the Paris Agreement - or would get forced back into discussing the global emissions gap only in abstract terms.

In Belém, Brazil's president Lula da Silva, together with the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Marina Silva, injected new momentum into this discussion. At the opening of the conference, Lula da Silva suggested that, “[w]e need roadmaps that will enable humankind, in a fair and planned manner, to overcome its dependence on fossil fuels, halt and reverse deforestation, and mobilize resources to achieve these goals” (Lula, 2025). He also announced that COP30 would be the “COP of truth”, condemning the misinformation spread by “obscurantists” and climate denialists (ibid.), which led to a laudable new initiative on information integrity.

However, at the beginning of negotiations, the Brazilian presidency first had to fend off an agenda fight. Different groups of countries had demanded the addition of several new agenda items. The presidency managed to avoid an agenda fight by announcing that Presidency consultations would be held on the proposed agenda items, with a focus being put on four topics: In addition to the response to the weak level of ambition of current NDCs, these were Parties' transparency reports under the Paris Agreement, the provision of finance by developed to developing countries according to Art. 9.1 of the Paris Agreement, and unilateral trade measures.

In the course of the negotiations, Parties increasingly supported addressing these issues in the form of a “Mutirão decision”. The concept of a Global *Mutirão* was introduced by the COP Presidency to mobilize the international community for climate action. It became the central slogan of COP30. Rooted in the indigenous Tupi-Guarani languages, a *Mutirão* describes collective, often community-based, actions towards a common aim. The presidency introduced this concept in advance of the conference by calling on the international community to “join our global ‘mutirão’” and suggesting that the *Mutirão* spirit should collectively be brought to the mitigation ambition and implementation work programme (COP30 President Designate, 2025a, p. 3, p. 8).

However, instead of being inspired by the *Mutirão* spirit, the conference was once again marked by severe conflicts among Parties. The final *Mutirão* decision adopted at the closing Plenary contains agreements on all four topics but falls far short of what is needed to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement. In particular, the final text does neither contain a reference to transitioning away from fossil fuels, nor a provision to halt and reverse deforestation, but only to unspecified and voluntary initiatives such as the ‘Global Implementation Accelerator’, the ‘Belém Mission to 1.5’, and dialogues on trade (UNFCCC, 2025e). So the bitter truth of this ‘COP of truth’ is that the Belém climate conference was not up to the challenge. The resistance by incumbent interests was once again too strong to make real progress. The fundamental defect of the UNFCCC regime, namely the blocking of majority voting since 1994 by Saudi Arabia and the subsequent need to take decisions only by consensus, has once again contributed to the inability of the Paris Agreement to produce the required results.

The following sections trace the negotiation dynamics and final outcomes of the individual topics of the “*Mutirão* package” as well as other negotiation items related to mitigation, climate finance, just transition, market-based cooperation under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, adaptation, loss and damage, and the gender action plan.

2 Mitigation

Global Stocktake Follow-Up

After the success at COP28 to establish new benchmarks for overall mitigation ambition, the question in Belém was whether and to what extent COP30 would be able to further build on these outcomes given that initial attempts at following up on the GST had been blocked at COP29 in Baku (Obergassel et al., 2024). There were several avenues through which the GST follow-up could have been pursued. First, the Dubai decision established the “UAE dialogue on implementing the global stocktake outcomes” (UNFCCC, 2023, para 97). Second, an annual dialogue on how the GST outcome is informing NDCs had also been agreed in Dubai (UNFCCC, 2023, para 187). In Baku, in particular the Arab group and the like-minded developing countries (LMDCs, which include China, India, Saudi Arabia and other countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America) had blocked progress on these matters so that they ultimately had to be deferred to further discussion in 2025.

The Brazilian presidency had pledged to secure a follow-up to the GST in Belém and president Lula da Silva had suggested the development of a roadmap on transitioning away from fossil fuels. Over the course of the conference this suggestion was taken up by increasing numbers of countries, at one point numbering more than 80 (Parolin & Varin, 2025). The Environmental Integrity Group also called more broadly for the development of an “NDC roadmap” to close the ambition gap. At the same time, developing countries generally highlighted the need for enhanced support to enable them to enhance ambition and implementation (see also the finance chapter). However, other states pushed back. In particular the LMDCs, the Arab group, and the African group were opposed to what they considered “targeting” specific sectors, such as the energy sector, and also rejected references to sectoral approaches.

On the Friday of the second week, the conference even seemed close to collapsing. The Brazilian presidency submitted a draft of the Mutirão decision that contained no reference to fossil fuels or to the GST outcome more generally. In response, the EU and progressive Latin American countries declared that they would not accept this outcome.

However, these two groups of countries stood largely alone, there was little support from traditional allies, in particular the Alliance of Small Island Developing States (AOSIS) and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). According to news reporting, a key reason was that the EU was unable to make a sufficient offer on financial support for adaptation (Civillini & Rowling, 2025). Also according to news reporting, the position of the African group was to some extent hijacked by its current chair Tanzania, which has agreements with Saudi Arabia to exploit its gas reserves (Harvey, 2025). In addition, it had taken the EU a long time to internally agree on its position, it was therefore able to adopt a strong stance only towards the end of the conference. Finally, the US has turned from pro- to anti-transition and was formally not even represented in Belém (Weise & Mathiesen, 2025).

The EU and Latin American countries thus ultimately had to be satisfied with minor adjustments to the draft decision. Instead of explicitly referring to the “global efforts” agreed on in Dubai, the Mutirão decision now only refers to the name of the Dubai

decision, the UAE consensus, and thus only obliquely refers to the Dubai energy package. Instead of fossil transition and deforestation roadmaps, the COP agreed to establish a voluntary “Global Implementation Accelerator” under the responsibility of the COP30 and 31 presidencies (UNFCCC, 2025e, para 41), and a “Belém Mission to 1.5” under the COP29 to 31 presidencies (ibid., para 42) - but there is no detail what these are supposed to do.

Progress under the agenda items on the annual dialogue on how the GST is informing NDCs and on the “UAE dialogue on implementing the Global Stocktake outcomes” referred to above were similarly blocked by the LMDCs, the African Group and the Arab Group. On the former dialogue, as in Baku, these groups were again opposed to including any substantive conclusions in the conference decision. On the latter dialogue, as in Baku these groups again maintained the position that the dialogue should be limited to financial issues since it was established in the finance section of the GST decision (IISD, 2025h). Different from Baku, Parties ultimately managed to agree on a decision. The conference decided that the UAE Dialogue will facilitate the sharing of experience and of information on opportunities, challenges, barriers, and needs, including with a focus on the provision of finance, capacity-building, and technology development and transfer, as well as strengthened international cooperation as key enablers, in implementing the GST outcomes. Thereby, the Dialogue is supposed to have a focus on the provision of support, but is not necessarily limited to this aspect. The Dialogue will be held in conjunction with the SB sessions in 2026 and 2027, after which it will conclude. In terms of the dialogue on how the GST outcome is informing NDCs, it was not possible to include any substantive message in the conference decision (UNFCCC, 2025f).

To mollify the more ambitious countries, Brazil announced that it will now develop roadmaps for phasing out fossil fuels and ending deforestation under its own authority. Colombia has announced that it will support the fossil fuel process by organizing an international conference together with the Netherlands.

Action Agenda

With the (slow) pace of international climate negotiations, the UNFCCC process has increasingly sought to catalyse efforts of sub-national and non-state actors towards achieving the objectives of the Convention. Specifically, COP20 in Lima in 2014 established the so-called Action Agenda. Here, various actors like subnational entities, companies and civil society are encouraged to engage in activities that contribute to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Since COP20, the Action Agenda has been an important part of the COPs and climate action, until now there has been no overarching framework. With COPs being used as a stage by states and other organisations to declare initiatives, engagements and innovations, the announced actions often channeled into an unorganised landscape risking various initiatives having similar (or even the same) objectives. Potential synergies often remained untapped.

With COP30 being declared as the “COP of Implementation” (COP30 Brasil, 2025b), the Brazilian Presidency aimed to tidy up this unorganised landscape of the Action Agenda. Before the COP, in July 2025, in his fourth letter, COP30 President Correa

Do Lago outlined how the COP30 Action Agenda (also referred to as “COP30 Global Climate Action Agenda, GCAA” (High-Level Champions for Climate Action, 2025a, p. 4)) was supposed to follow three objectives: 1) “aligning the Action Agenda with what was already agreed at previous COPs”, 2) “support existing initiatives to accelerate and intensify their impact” and 3) “enhance the transparency and accountability of new and old initiatives” (COP30 President Designate, 2025b, p. 2). The COP30 presidency understands the GCAA as a part of its Mutirão narrative where “business, civil society and all levels of government in coordinated action” engage in “a global mutirão around the achievement of the GST as a ‘globally determined contribution’” (COP30 President Designate, 2025b, p. 3).

Putting this in practice, the presidency introduced a new framework for the Action Agenda: Based on the outcomes of the GST, the framework contains six thematic axes with a total of 30 key features - also covering contentious topics like “(t)ransitioning away from fossil fuels” and “(c)limate and sustainable finance, mainstreaming climate in investments and insurance” (COP30 Brasil, 2025a). With this, the GCAA is also supposed to be a “safe space for discussing contentious topics and for finding ways to overcome obstacles in the negotiations” as Carbon Brief cites Mauricio Voivodic, executive director at WWF-Brasil (Carbon Brief, 2025).

The thematic axes are 1) Transitioning Energy, Industry and Transport, 2) Stewarding Forests, Oceans and Biodiversity, 3) Transforming Agriculture and Food Systems, 4) Building Resilience for Cities, Infrastructure and Water, 5) Fostering Human and Social Development as well as a cross cutting axis on Unleashing Enablers and Accelerators including on Financing, Technology and Capacity Building (COP30 President Designate, 2025b, p. 3). Each axis is linked with the respective paragraph(s) of the GST.

Further, each of the 30 key objectives is linked to a dedicated Activation Group that is itself coordinated by respective secretariats. The secretariats shall also monitor the progress of the activities with the respective Activation Group as well as ensure the continuity after COP30. During COP30, the Activation Groups had scheduled invitation-only meetings which were embedded into the Action Agenda Program, taking place in six Action Rooms, one room for each axis. This dedicated space was a novum at the conference and underlines the COP30 Presidency's focus on the topic. The participation in the Activation Groups is voluntary. Before the conference, the presidency reached out to government-led and non government-led initiatives and invited them to join a respective group. By the end of COP30, 482 initiatives engaged in the Activation Groups (High-Level Champions for Climate Action, 2025, p. 4).

In the closing plenary, Correa Do Lago highlighted the outcomes report and pointed towards the five-year vision for the GCAA in order to continue organising initiatives under the newly proposed framework (High-Level Champions for Climate Action, 2025b). At COP31, Türkiye will be in charge of the Action Agenda.

The Influence of International Courts on the Negotiations

Whereas international climate diplomacy has been slow in recent years, progress took place elsewhere – in the international courts. Three Advisory Opinions in the

past two years have provided insight into the state of the law with regard to the climate crisis: The International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS, 2024), the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR, 2025) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ, 2025) had provided detailed accounts of States' duties under various international treaties and customary international law.

Especially the advisory opinion of the ICJ, commonly called "The World Court", carries a lot of weight. It was asked by the UN General Assembly to look at all available sources of law and determine not only the state of the law, but also the duties of States emerging from it. This it did with great clarity. The court affirmed that every person has a right to life, health and food, that global warming is threatening these rights and that all states have a duty under international law to mitigate the climate crisis. These duties emanate not only from international treaties, but also from customary international law, irrespective of whether a state is Party to a climate treaty.

It was widely expected that these legal verdicts would have a visible impact on the diplomatic negotiations. However, due to a very effective blockade by a number of countries, these advisory opinions did not have a great influence at COP30. Vanuatu, which had sponsored the UNGA Resolution for the ICJ, and other small island states repeatedly tried to insert references into texts. However, these were countered by Saudi Arabia and other members of the Arab Group as well as by members of the LMDC. The EU, on the other hand, did not strongly support references to the court briefings since it feared a backlash due to its own inadequate climate policies.

This is a worrying sign of disrespect towards public international law. It will frustrate people and nations that had put great hope on those advisory opinions. These are not binding, of course, but carry substantial legal weight, especially taken all three together. Small Island States will now turn to the courts again and seek to obtain binding decisions against large offenders of those legal rules protecting individuals and states under public international law, as they have been formulated authoritatively by the highest international courts.

3 No "Forests COP"

It had been a conscious decision by Brazilian President Lula to place COP30 in the Amazon Rainforest. Dubbed by some as the "Rainforest COP", it was the first climate conference that was supposed to systematically bring together issues of climate and nature. This did not happen, at least not at the diplomatic level. As noted above, the "Deforestation Roadmap" called for by President Lula at the beginning of the conference and during his visit in the second week failed to muster enough support and was at some point taken out of the draft "Mutirão" decision.

Forest issues have long been regarded as a secondary issue in global climate negotiations, although protecting forests could contribute a sizeable share to protecting the climate. Or, to reverse the argument: the world will not achieve net zero emissions if deforestation does not come to a complete halt. This was echoed in the many side events taking place in Belém and by the hundreds of Indigenous representatives that were expressing deep concern. At the level of civil society,

therefore, the merger of the climate and nature communities has happened. This provides hope that civil society will not fall into two camps again after this COP and that they will combine their strengths towards tackling deforestation as an important part of fighting the climate crisis.

Belém saw two diplomatic developments, however, that were taking place outside of the formal negotiations and that have the potential to substantially support forest protection at the institutional and financial level: the launch of the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) and the renewed Forest and Climate Leader's Pledge (FCLP).

The idea of a novel fund for the protection of standing rainforests has been around for some years and at COP28 in Dubai, President Lula announced that Brazil would pursue the establishment of a new instrument for that purpose. At the High Level Segment a few days before COP30, the TFFF was officially launched. The TFFF will be a fund of "blended finance", with initial investments by states that are supposed to attract four times the amount by private investors (TFFF, 2025). The expected USD 125 billion would be invested in bonds mainly of developing countries, the returns partly channelled to the investors and partly to Tropical Forest Countries (TFCs). Overall, some USD4 billion is expected to be disbursed to TFCs annually, if they keep their deforestation rate below a certain threshold. It thus uses the global financial markets, but not the so-called carbon markets. Twenty percent of the USD 4 billion is expected to be channelled to Indigenous peoples and local communities – preferably in ways independent from national governments ("direct access").

During COP30, the TFFF received commitments of some USD 6.6 billion overall, with USD 5.5 billion from Brazil, Indonesia, Norway, Portugal, France, the Netherlands and later EUR 1 billion (roughly USD 1.1 billion) from Germany. It was endorsed by 34 tropical forest countries, representing more than 90 percent of forests. Brazil expects the initial investment to reach some USD 10 billion by mid-next year, when operations are supposed to start.

Despite some criticism (Global Forest Coalition, 2025), the TFFF has the potential to provide substantial international forest finance. For the first time, standing forests receive protection through the provision of financial compensation if forests are not destroyed - by logging, through mining or agricultural activities. It thus closes a crucial gap and might provide a counterweight to economic incentives to exploit those resources. However, the initial commitments from states for the fund fall short of the expected USD 25 billion and it remains to be seen whether it can work nevertheless. And, most importantly, it has to be secured that the TFFF is designed in a way that it can serve its purpose, for example as regards the criteria for finance flows to TFCs and for investments. However, the expected compensation is still much less than what forest converters can make financially from agricultural or mining activities. This raises doubts about the extent to which this will transform rainforest governance.

Another development taking place in the context of COP30 was the renewal of the Forest and Climate Leader's Pledge. This has its origins in Glasgow at COP26. This pledge was a joint commitment made by 25 donors, 5 countries and 20 private foundations, to support the advancement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities' tenure rights and forest guardianship with USD 1.7 billion between

2021 and 2025. In Belém on 6 November, this pledge was renewed with a total of USD 1.8 billion through 2030 in support for the territories of Indigenous peoples, local communities and Afro-descendants (FCLP, 2025).

4 Finance and Trade

Finance

The lead-up to COP30 was dominated by unresolved tensions over climate finance from COP29. In Baku, Parties finally agreed on a new collective quantified goal (NCQG) for climate finance which called on developed countries to mobilize at least USD 300 billion per year by 2035 for developing countries. This fell far short of developing countries' demands backed by scientific estimates in the area of USD 1.3 trillion annually by 2035 (Obergassel et al., 2024). Although this goal was also formulated in the NCQG it came with a weaker UN language and was referring to all actors instead of developed countries. The outcome left a large credibility gap: vulnerable nations questioned how they could meet their climate goals with such limited support, especially as the USD 100 billion/year promise for 2020-2025 had barely been met. In response, COP29 launched a “*Baku-to-Belém Roadmap*” process to discuss the options for scaling climate finance up to USD1.3 trillion. Ahead of COP30, 36 submissions from Parties and blocs on this roadmap revealed familiar divides: developing countries emphasized the need for more grant-based finance, while developed countries pointed to the mobilization of private-sector funds (CarbonBrief, 2025). There were also calls to improve the quality of climate finance, not just quantity. Experts noted that climate finance to date relies heavily on loans, exacerbating debt burdens. However, the NCQG contains no sub-target for grants or limits on loans. This led to contestation over fairness: vulnerable countries argued they require grants for adaptation and loss & damage, whereas loans simply shift costs back onto them (Obergassel et al., 2024).

Geopolitical factors further complicated the finance landscape. The result of the 2024 US election cast a long shadow over climate finance discussions. With the “loud” absence of the United States in climate governance there were heightened doubts that developed countries would fulfill even the modest USD 300 billion pledge. At the same time, pressure mounted on wealthier emerging economies (e.g. China, Gulf states) to contribute. These countries had fiercely resisted formal obligations, but by COP29 there were hints of a shift in the sense that major emerging economies indicated openness to voluntarily contribute to climate finance goals (Obergassel et al. 2024). Still, heading into COP30, no mechanism ensured such contributions. As such, the core equity debate remained unresolved: those most responsible for emissions are not necessarily those paying the costs. Civil society groups stressed that the global finance system is failing developing countries, trapping many in debt even as they attempt to invest in climate action (Climate Action Network International, 2025).

At COP30, the Brazilian Presidency started by convening informal consultations on finance, to avoid an agenda fight over the issue (CarbonBrief, 2025). These talks centered on how to implement and build upon the NCQG and climate finance became one of four major issues to be covered in the “Global Mutirão” decision (IISD, 2025h). Through this and related decisions, Parties grappled with two major

questions: How to deliver the NCQG commitments, and whether to set a new adaptation finance target. While mitigation is usually better funded, COP30's "Global Mutirão" decision now *"calls for efforts to at least triple adaptation finance by 2035"* (UNFCCC, 2025e). More on this topic can be found in the chapter on adaptation.

One clear outcome of this year's COP was the establishment of a two-year work programme on climate finance under the UNFCCC. This work programme, running until 2027, was a direct response to developing countries' concerns that the finance discussion cannot wait for the next NCQG update. It is tasked with ensuring continued political attention on meeting the Baku climate finance commitments and scaling up support under Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement, which states that developed countries shall provide financial resources to developing countries (IISD, 2025h). Alongside this, Parties also agreed to initiate a dialogue on Paris Agreement Article 2.1(c) while signaling recognition that global financial systems must be reformed for climate goals (World Resources Institute, 2025). On the NCQG, COP30 also saw the culmination of the "Baku-to-Belém" process. The COP29 and COP30 Presidencies jointly presented the Baku-to-Belém Finance Roadmap. This report outlines how public, private, domestic, and international sources can collectively mobilize the targeted USD 1.3 trillion per year by 2035. The roadmap entailed measures such as debt relief initiatives, innovative funding instruments, and coordinated investments through "country platforms" (UNFCCC, 2025o). However, detailed negotiations on those recommendations did not occur and as such, there was no binding decision on, for example, debt restructuring or private finance mandates at COP30.

In conclusion, climate finance was again a key topic at COP30. Although incremental progress was made, the level of ambition in providing financial means remains critically misaligned with the reality of the climate crisis and the needs of developing countries. With the lack of clear climate finance definitions, the challenge is to hold developed countries accountable for their fair share to the USD 300 billion goal of the NCQG in times of tight fiscal budgets and climate backlash. At the bare minimum, COP30 was at least able to keep those discussions on the agenda with a new work programme.

Trade

Trade issues rose rapidly on the climate agenda in the years leading up to COP30, as countries' unilateral climate measures began to spark international economic tensions. While the effects of the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) were heavily discussed prior to the second Trump administration and its climate backlash, the prime example is now the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), whose definitive phase starts in 2026. The CBAM places a carbon price on imports of emissions-intensive goods (like steel, cement, aluminum) to prevent "carbon leakage" and encourage trading partners to decarbonize (TESS, 2023). In the EU's perspective this is a measure which levels the playing field, keeps domestic companies competitive in the decarbonization process and potentially generates positive ripple effects for other countries to decarbonize, e.g. through the development of their own carbon pricing mechanisms such as Emissions Trading Schemes (ETS) (European Commission, n.d.).

However, many developing countries and emerging economies perceive CBAM and similar measures as unilateral and unfair. The BASIC bloc (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) issued statements condemning carbon border taxes, arguing that such unilateral measures could distort markets and “*aggravate the trust deficit*” among nations (TESS, 2023). They emphasized that these policies undermine the UNFCCC principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR-RC) by effectively shifting the burden of carbon reduction onto developing countries. In other words, instead of developed countries providing finance and technology to support poorer nations cut emissions, border taxes might simply penalize those exports.

Prior to Belém, calls intensified for a rules-based approach to climate-aligned trade rather than ad hoc unilateralism. Concern arose that without some framework, the world could see fragmented carbon tariffs and retaliatory measures that undermine both the trading system and climate cooperation (TESS, 2023). In this context, Brazil’s COP30 Presidency (and President Lula da Silva) developed the idea that trade policy must support climate action, not impede it. Lula, in fact, convened discussions on a “*Global Forum on Climate and Trade*” on the sidelines of COP30, aiming to bring key players together outside formal negotiations (World Resources Institute, 2025).

At the negotiations itself, a group of developing countries (reportedly led by India and partners in the Like-Minded Developing Countries bloc) pressed to formally add “unilateral trade measures” to the COP30 agenda (World Resources Institute, 2025). This initiative was a direct response to the concerns about CBAM and similar policies. To avoid an agenda fight, the COP Presidency moved the proposed item to informal consultations as part of the “Mutirão package”, keeping it off the official agenda. As such, the Presidency held closed-door presidency consultations on trade and climate throughout the first week (CarbonBrief, 2025). These talks ran in parallel to other negotiations, underscoring how trade cuts across traditional UNFCCC themes. Observers noted that “trade emerged as one of the hottest issues” in Belém, “*spilling into other negotiation areas*” (IISD, 2025h).

The main issue of the negotiations was finding common ground on how to address unilateral climate-related trade measures within the climate regime’s context. After intense negotiations, a compromise emerged in the final “Global Mutirão” decision. Rather than a negotiated rule on trade measures, parties agreed to establish a series of dialogues on trade and climate policy under the UNFCCC process. Specifically, the COP30 decision mandates three annual ministerial-level dialogues (2026, 2027, 2028) to discuss how international trade can “enhance collaboration” and “not pose barriers” to climate action (UNFCCC, 2025e). These dialogues will be held during the annual intersessional meetings in Bonn (mid-year sessions of the Subsidiary Bodies) and will involve not just climate negotiators but also trade experts – significantly, the decision invites participation from the WTO and other relevant organizations. By 2028, the final year of this workstream, a high-level event or report will synthesize the dialogue outcomes and present options for the COP to consider (World Resources Institute, 2025; IISD, 2025h). In effect, COP30 created a formal space to address trade-climate issues, kicking off a multi-year process rather than resolving the issue outright in Belém.

In parallel, the COP30 Mutirão decision reaffirmed some important principles to guide the intersection of trade and climate. Parties collectively “reaffirmed that an open, non-discriminatory, and equitable multilateral trading system” is crucial for climate objectives, echoing language from the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement about avoiding trade restrictions that run counter to climate progress (UNFCCCd, 2025). The decision emphasizes that countries should cooperate to ensure trade policies support climate action, which underlines the idea that measures like CBAM should ideally be developed cooperatively, not unilaterally. Meanwhile, the “Integrated Forum on Climate Change and Trade” will run in parallel outside the UNFCCC and WTO processes in order to find common ground on climate and trade related issues (World Resources Institute, 2025).

Finally, while COP30 saw the emergence of trade as a major issue in climate negotiations, this comes at a time of demise for an increasingly paralyzed WTO, which effectively results in a shift from one regime to another. The challenge ahead is to translate this momentum into agreements that align measures at the climate-trade nexus with equity, so that unfair side-effects e.g. regarding development goals can be avoided.

5 Just Transition

After deciding to establish a just transition work program in Sharm El-Sheik in 2022, and defining elements of the work program in Dubai in 2023, the Parties struggled to reach a common understanding on the substance and objective of the work program in Baku in 2024. This prevented the adoption of a CMA decision on just transition. In Baku, developed countries strongly linked just transition to mitigation, especially transitioning away from fossil fuels at the domestic level and impact on workers. In contrast, many developing countries took a broader stance. They emphasized the objective of sustainable development, the international dimension of just transition, including the need for international support, and criticized developed countries’ planned unilateral trade measures. They also linked just transition to adaptation and responding to loss and damage. AOSIS, LDC, AILAC and the African Group eventually proposed the development of a just transition framework (Oberghassel et al., 2024).

The subsidiary body negotiations in Bonn in June 2025 broke through the impasse, resulting in an informal note forwarded to the Belém climate conference (Kuehl, 2025). Based on lessons learned from several dialogues, the note already pointed to principles that could guide approaches to just transitions (SBSTA & SBI, 2025). However, no consensus had been reached regarding the development of a just transition mechanism, the extent to which trade restrictions should be addressed, or the continuation of the work program.

Before and during the Belém climate conference, the Climate Action Network (CAN) lobbied intensely for the development of the “Belém Action Mechanism for a Global Just Transition”. At the start of the Belém negotiations, the G77/China bloc also demanded the development of a just transition mechanism. However, several developed countries, including UK and Norway, initially opposed the development of

such a mechanism, fearing it would lead to a long process of work, duplication of work by other institutions, and even to efforts to lower ambition on mitigation. The EU was also initially hesitant, but, by the end of the first week, softened its stance by proposing a just transition action plan, opening the door for a broad coalition to support the development of a just transition mechanism. At the end of the Belém negotiations, the Parties agreed to develop a “just transition mechanism”, with negotiations on its operationalization set to begin at the subsidiary body negotiations in Bonn in summer 2026. The new mechanism aims to promote international cooperation, technical assistance, capacity building and knowledge transfer in order to “enable equitable, inclusive just transitions” (UNFCCC, 2025p).

Based on input from the dialogues, the CMA decision already recognizes several principles of a just transition. These include their “multi-stakeholder, people-centric, bottom-up, whole-of-society” and “multisectoral” (Ibid., p. 3) character. Yet, much work remains to cover all important dimensions of a just transition, including procedural, distributive, recognition, restorative, cosmopolitan and intergenerational justice according to the current state of art in the literature (Banerjee, 2024; Fraser, 1998; McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Wang & Lo, 2021). Moreover, the CMA decision encourages countries to integrate these principles in their national climate policies. The decision also recognizes the importance to respect, among others, intergenerational equity, labor rights, human rights, environmental and health rights, and the rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups. It also recognizes the importance of fostering participation of stakeholders (incl. from the above-mentioned right-holders) in climate policy-making. Just transition approaches are recognized as relevant not only for mitigation, but also for adaptation and responding to loss and damage, as requested by developing countries (UNFCCC, 2025p).

Other elements did not make it into the decision text. China prevented a reference to the importance of a just transition in the context of extracting and processing critical minerals. Oil-producing states, such as those in the Arab Group and Russia, as well as the conservative emerging and developing countries from the LMDCs, prevented a stronger linkage of a just transition to rapidly and deeply reducing GHG emissions in line with the 1.5°C target and transitioning away from fossil fuels (Carbon Brief, 2025; IISD, 2025h). Already, at the 2024 Baku climate conference, the LMDC and the Arab Group had rejected references to the GST outcomes, deep emission reductions, and transitioning away from fossil fuels (Obergassel et al., 2024). AILAC, AOSIS, EIG and the EU had hoped for more ambitious language regarding the transition away from fossil fuels. The LMDCs, the Arab Group, and Russia lobbied intensely to include a condemnation of unilateral trade measures in the decision text, targeting the EU’s carbon border adjustment mechanism. In response, the EU denounced China’s trade restrictions on critical minerals. Ultimately, none of these issues were addressed directly in the decision (IISD, 2025h). Importantly in the context of previous international efforts to facilitate a just transition - notably the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) - the decision emphasizes that “enhanced international cooperation ... [is] essential to facilitating the pursuit of just transition pathways”, while also pointing out the problems of “high debt burdens”

(UNFCCC, 2025p, p. 5) in recipient countries, which is a major problem under the JETPs, since most funding is loan-based with high interest rates.

The decision about continuing the work program was postponed until the negotiations in Antalya in November 2026. The next year will also show the extent to which a helpful mechanism can be established to foster social justice and provide support for the increased legitimacy of ambitious climate policies. Ultimately, the question remains as to what extent just transition principles will be able to influence global and national climate policy approaches, considering that the Mutirão decision text did not prominently refer to a just transition. Although the Belém conference successfully agreed upon developing a just transition mechanism, much work remains to promote an ambitious just transition both globally and domestically.

6 Market-Based Cooperation According to Article 6

The negotiations on the rules for market-based cooperation under Article 6 were concluded at last year's COP29 in Baku. With the Article 6 rulebook in place, no substantive negotiations on the Article 6 rules were envisaged for COP30 in Belém. However, discussions on the topic proved more controversial than expected for both, the implementation of cooperative approaches under Article 6.2 and the operationalisation of the Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism (PACM) established under Article 6.4 of the Paris Agreement.

Cooperative Approaches under Article 6.2

With the Article 6 rulebook adopted at COP29, Parties in Belém were able to reflect on the current implementation status of cooperative approaches. The deliberations kicked-off with the so-called Ambition Dialogue (UNFCCC, 2025a), which focused on the potential of cooperative approaches to contribute to ambition raising and possibilities to accelerate implementation. The dialogue provided the basis for a peer-to-peer exchange among Parties while also allowing for the interaction with non-Party stakeholders. In the course of the dialogue, diverging views on the actual ambition raising potential of Article 6 emerged. While some Parties pushed for speeding-up implementation - including through a broader sectoral scope that also allows for the generation of internationally transferred mitigation outcomes (ITMOs) from the forestry sector, others called for a more cautious stance and highlighted the need to ensure environmental integrity and for cooperative approaches to be used to go beyond carbon offsetting. During the open exchange, Parties and stakeholders also raised concerns about insufficient transparency and reporting inconsistencies that were identified through the Technical Expert Reviews (TERs) of initial reports. The TERs are of key relevance for the functioning of Article 6.2, which is characterized by its decentralized nature and limited international oversight.

The findings of the TERs then also took centre stage in the actual Article 6.2 negotiations, where Parties deliberated on the annual report by the UNFCCC secretariat on the implementation of the Art. 6.2 guidance (UNFCCC, 2025l). While the annual report also provided information on the current status of the UNFCCC infrastructure, namely the international registry, the centralized accounting and

reporting platform (CARP) and the Article 6 database as well as the funding situation - the synthesis of the findings from the TERs soon became the focus area of the negotiations. The report provided a compilation of the first round of TERs - covering the initial reports of six Parties (Ghana, Guyana, Suriname, Switzerland, Thailand and Vanuatu). While several Parties were concerned and disappointed about the large number of inconsistencies identified in the TERs of initial reports covered by the synthesis, there was also a general notion that inconsistencies are due to the early stage of the implementation of reporting provisions.

However, the question of how to deal with such inconsistencies and finding ways to improve overall transparency and reporting quality loomed large in the negotiations. Some Parties, such as the EU, called for increased granularity and disaggregation of the information in future reports to allow for a better understanding of the TERs findings. In the course of the negotiations, the TER teams and their mandate became subject to the discussion: Some Parties such as the Coalition for Rainforest Nations (CfRN) called for stricter enforcement of the guidelines for the TER teams, citing concerns about reviewers overstepping their mandate and bringing-in their personal views during the review process. Others, instead, pushed for the mandate to be specified and expanded by asking TER teams to provide explanations of the inconsistencies identified and whether Parties have provided additional information to address the inconsistencies.

In the end, a stricter interpretation of the rules for review teams could be prevented, while it was also not possible to agree on strengthening the mandate. Similarly, an attempt to strengthen the Article 6.2 framework by including a provision that would prevent transfers of ITMOs that do not meet the transparency provisions could not be included in the final text (Carbon Market Watch, 2025). Hence, Parties were not able to go beyond Baku, where they had decided to request Parties “not to use the internationally transferred mitigation outcomes that are identified as inconsistent in the consistency check...” (UNFCCC, 2024a, para 40). The impact of the final outcome of the Article 6.2 negotiations (UNFCCC, 2025c), therefore, remains limited. While strengthening the transparency and reporting framework for cooperative approaches was not possible, the discussions provided input to the planned review of the Article 6.2 guidance scheduled to begin in 2028.

Article 6.4 - The Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism

Regarding Article 6.4, Parties discussed the annual report of the Supervisory Body of the Article 6.4 mechanism (SBM) – in particular, the implications of selected decisions the SBM took in 2025 on further operationalising the Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism (PACM), the funding of the secretariat’s work servicing the SBM, as well as – among other things – the transition from Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects to the PACM.

Throughout 2025, the SBM had adopted a series of decisions completing the regulatory framework of the PACM. This included standards on determining the additionality of PACM activities or preventing leakage. The SBM’s decisions taken in

October 2025 on permanence of activities involving removals and addressing reversals had caused considerable controversy among stakeholders. While the newly adopted PACM Reversal Standard establishes an overarching framework, it explicitly delegates all operational requirements – including risk assessment, the design of buffer pools, the length of post-crediting monitoring, and the role of insurance – to subsequent methodological advancements. Proponents of nature-based solutions (NbS) feared that the requirements on monitoring beyond the project lifetime were too strict and would effectively exclude NbS from the PACM. Others underlined that the SBM's approach to consider reversal-related requirements at the level of individual methodologies is more suitable to safeguard environmental integrity and ensure permanence.

At COP 30, Indonesia and other rainforest nations suggested that the CMA task the Supervisory Body with revising the related standards in order to remove the cautious case-by-case approach of the SBM and to have the reversal risks addressed at a more general level, with the intention to remove the perceived barriers to NbS. This push, however, was successfully fought back against by the EU and others, arguing not only in favour of the SBM's approach, but also underlining that regulatory uncertainty is to be avoided. Developing and integrating specific methodologies is therefore what will drive forward improvements in the disputed reversal provisions, empowering their practical implementation at the local level. The final text does also refer to best available science and robust evidence, further adding robustness to the decision (UNFCCC, 2025b).

The dominating aspect of the deliberations at Belém, however, proved to be the funding required for the operation of the mechanism. In its annual report, the SBM had pointed to a significant budget shortage due to the lack of income from project fees. Parties therefore debated solutions for finding other sources of income, such as transferring money from the CDM trust fund to the PACM. This proposal, however, saw fierce opposition from some developing country Parties, who argued that these resources should go either to the Adaptation Fund or into capacity building. Yet, Parties found a creative solution that was acceptable to all, which foresees that the CDM trust fund's money is reallocated to the PACM as loan that will be repaid to the Adaptation Fund once the PACM market is self-financing after 2030. Additional resources will go into capacity building.

Parties also discussed the transition of CDM activities to the PACM. Here, a previous CMA decision was revoked, extending the deadline to submit transition requests to 30 June 2026. In particular African countries had argued that the timeframe for dealing with the transition had been too short and that only a small fraction of activities had so far managed the transition, while the EU, New Zealand and others had been reluctant to change the agreed deadline. Yet in the end the extension was kept as part of a package deal. Finally, Parties agreed to an official end date to the CDM, which was set as 31 December 2026.

7 Adaptation

Expectations for COP30 in the field of adaptation were high: the conference was expected to deliver results on the indicators for the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) and to assess progress in National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). Furthermore, while this issue was not on the official conference agenda, it was the opinion of many that the conference should agree on a new adaptation finance goal.

In the run-up to COP30, the messages were clear: the World Meteorological Organization (WMO, 2025) stated that 2025 was „on track to be among the three warmest years on record“. The multiple and accelerating global impacts of extreme weather and climate events ranged from damaged croplands, eroded livelihoods, to deepened poverty and contributed to displacement across regions. UNEP concluded in its Adaptation Gap Report 2025 that so far insufficient adaptation action has been taken compared to the global effort needed (UNEP 2025). Nevertheless, there was progress reported in mainstreaming adaptation in national plans and strategies as agreed in the United Arab Emirates Framework for Global Climate Resilience (UAE FGCR) adopted in Dubai at COP28 (UNFCCC, 2024b).

Adaptation costs have been estimated at USD 310–365 billion per year for developing countries by the year 2035 (UNEP, 2025). Considering a decline in adaptation finance flows in 2023, which is the year with the latest available data, the goal of the Glasgow Climate Pact of doubling adaptation finance to USD 40 billion by 2025 adopted at COP26 (UNFCCC, 2021) will probably not be met. To the contrary, the adaptation finance gap is expected to widen to US\$284–339 billion per year until 2035, so needs are 12–14 times higher than current finance flows (UNEP, 2025).

Overall, the adaptation agenda was highly contentious, with controversies over a new „tripling adaptation finance“ goal for which LDCs had pushed for since the June 2025 meetings in Bonn. While the official COP30 agenda did not provide space for negotiating a new post 2025 goal, the issue was the “elephant in the room”. As a consequence, other adaptation items almost appeared to be a bargaining chip for the push for a new adaptation finance goal. Tripling adaptation finance was said to transpire „across rooms –sometimes at the cost of progress on other issues“ which appeared to be a result of the failure to include an adaptation finance subgoal under the NCQG at COP29 (IISD, 2025b). The topic was then dealt with in the Global Mutirão consultations of the COP presidency. After having discussed several options, the final decision reaffirms the goal to double adaptation finance by 2025 and calls for efforts to at least triple adaptation finance by 2035. It urges developed country Parties „to increase the trajectory of their collective provision of climate finance for adaptation to developing country Parties“ (UNFCCC, 2025e, para 53).

Regarding the GGA, the UAE FGCR adopted at COP28 determined several targets for the GGA to be achieved by 2030 (UNFCCC, 2024b). In the two-year UAE-Belém work programme an expert group convened by the Chairs of the Subsidiary Bodies defined about 10,000 indicators to measure progress under the GGA (N.A., 2025). After disagreement on indicator categories such as means of implementation (MoI) indicators had dominated the negotiations at COP29 in Baku, COP29 had concluded with a mandate to reduce the number of indicators considerably to a manageable number of 100 indicators before COP30 (UNFCCC, 2024c). The “Baku Adaptation

Roadmap” (BAR) was then launched to establish the GGA as an agenda item in future meetings and to enhance the UAE FGCR.

From the first days of COP30 on, the negotiations on the GGA and the definition of a final list of indicators based on the condensed list of 100 indicators proposed by the expert group (N.A., 2025) became controversial again when the African Group expressed opposition to the immediate adoption of indicators at this COP. They proposed to instead establish another two-year “political refinement process” until CMA 9 in 2027, whereas developed countries (Australia, EU, EIG, UK) urged the adoption of the indicator list at CMA 7 (IISD, 2025a; 2025c). Arguments of the African Group were that in their view the proposed list of 100 indicators was “problematic” as it included “intrusive” indicators that track domestic policies while shifting responsibility from developed to developing countries. In the course of the negotiations, LDCs, the African Group, AOSIS, AILAC, LMDCs argued that adaptation was “fundamentally incomplete without finance”. Not least, almost half of the proposed indicators would require support and finance in order to be actionable (Carbon Brief, 2025). These countries therefore argued that tripling adaptation finance to at least USD 120 billion annually by 2030 should be embedded in the GGA text, which was strongly opposed by developed countries, for example the EU and Japan, who wanted to keep indicators focused on domestic resource mobilisation. The EU warned that expanding the BAR beyond COP30 risked further fragmentation of the adaptation agenda (IISD, 2025d).

A compromise was ultimately found and the final GGA decision (UNFCCC, 2025g) was adopted in the closing plenary of COP30 including an Annex with 59 Belém adaptation indicators and a two-year programme, the “Belém-Addis vision” to further refine the indicators and develop guidance for their operationalisation. The adaptation decision includes the wording of the Mutirão decision calling for efforts to triple adaptation finance. However, there were mixed responses to and disappointment of Parties with the decision not least due to the related weak language on tripling adaptation finance.

Another topic at COP30 was the assessment of the progress in NAPs, as this assessment could not be concluded at COP29. In the negotiation on NAPs at COP30, finance was again the main conflicting issue. Finally, however, the core message in the text on NAP progress was that NAPs are robust, but their implementation is hindered by a lack of finance. Some Parties called for the provision of fast-track funding for NAP implementation by 2030, arguing that language on means of implementation was to focus on “provision and mobilization” of finance from developed countries (Arab Group, G-77/China, LMDCs) and that the lack of MoI threatens to turn the NAP process into a “theoretical exercise” (Mauretania) (IISD, 2025c). Regarding support needs for NAP implementation, developed countries (Australia, Canada, EU, Japan, UK) argued that NAP implementation was not only a finance issue and opposed deleting the wording enabling conditions for NAP implementation, which was demanded by developing countries who proposed to include alternative language referencing means of implementation with the argument that policies would imply costs and enabling conditions would thus depend on means of implementation (IISD, 2025g). Finally, a consensus was reached on a NAP decision which concluded the assessment of progress in NAPs at Belém. The

LDC expert group together with the Adaptation Committee and the Standing Committee on Finance was requested to compile an overview of climate finance flows and financial support provided by developed country Parties to developing country Parties for formulating and implementing national adaptation plans. The decision welcomed the updated technical guidelines for formulating NAPs. LDCs were invited to meet the GST goals of having NAPs in place by 2025 and progressing their implementation by 2030 (UNFCCC, 2025h).

8 Loss and Damage

Generally, at COP30, loss and damage received less attention compared to Dubai and Baku. COP29 saw the full operationalisation of the “Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD)”. Negotiations at COP30 focused primarily on finalizing the technical guidance and re-defining the scope for the Fund (UNFCCC, 2025i). The guidance adopted at COP30 links the FRLD to the climate finance targets agreed at COP29. An important agreement for many was reached regarding the scope of the fund, namely to remove the restriction that not only “particularly vulnerable” developing countries would have access to these financial resources but all developing countries (IISD, 2025g). Parties welcomed the rapid operationalization of the FRLD including the launch of the first call for funding requests for its start-up phase (USD 250 million), the so-called Barbados Implementation Modalities (BIM), which is a test run for the fund. However, it was pointed out that the fund remained critically underfunded (IISD, 2025b) as only USD 397 million of the USD 790 million originally pledged to the fund has been actually paid (Carbon Brief, 2025).

Other results were the adoption of the “Joint annual report of the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) and the Santiago Network” and the “2024 review of the WIM”, on which Parties had not reached agreement after controversial discussions at COP29. Another controversial discussion focused on demands for a reflection of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on Climate Change (ICJ, 2025). This was regarded by some Parties as a document that provides long-overdue legal clarity concerning states' obligations regarding climate change, including Loss & Damage (IISD, 2025d). However, some Parties (the Arab Group, LMDCs) fundamentally blocked the inclusion of the ICJ opinion in the final WIM review text.

9 Belém Gender Action Plan

Although the Belém Gender Action Plan was adopted at COP30 (UNFCCC, 2025k), its approval unfolded against a backdrop of renewed contestation of the term ‘gender’ by ultra-conservative and right-wing populist parties. This reflects a broader global backlash against liberal values, a trend already visible in earlier UNFCCC negotiations (Obergassel et al., 2024).

The mandate to develop and adopt a new Gender Action Plan stemmed from the previous year’s decision on gender and climate change (UNFCCC, 2025d, p. 24). The purpose of the Plan is to strengthen gender-responsive climate action across the UNFCCC process as well as at national, subnational and local levels. It also

emphasises the particular roles and needs of Indigenous women and women of African descent (UNFCCC, 2025k).

At the closing plenary on 22 November, Parties adopted the Belém Gender Action Plan, which includes a detailed implementation framework for 2026–2034. The annex outlines five priority areas: 1. capacity-building, knowledge management and communication; 2. gender balance, participation and women’s leadership; 3. coherence with other UNFCCC workstreams and national or subnational gender policies; 4. gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation; and 5. the monitoring and reporting of gender-related data, including data on women’s leadership within UNFCCC processes. While the adoption of the Plan secures continued gender-related work within the UNFCCC, the negotiations themselves were marked by intense disputes over the definition of ‘gender’ and the exclusion of other issues that were considered sensitive by certain Parties. For example, the Arab Group rejected language on reproductive health and rights as a ‘red line’ and requested its deletion, while Iran called for text relating to the formulation of gender-responsive budgets to be bracketed (IISD, 2025f).

The negotiations opened with a widely supported statement from the Women and Gender Constituency, calling for “a new ambitious and action-oriented Gender Action Plan,” backed by 92 countries (Women and Gender Constituency, 2025). The central issue of contention concerned whether the term ‘gender’ includes trans and non-binary people—a definition supported by the majority of Parties. A vocal minority, including Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iran, Egypt, Paraguay, Argentina, the Holy See, Indonesia and Malaysia, insisted that ‘gender’ should be understood as referring exclusively to biological sex. This position was reiterated by the Holy See in the closing plenary, stating that all gender-related terms should be interpreted as referring solely to “the biological sexual identity that is male and female” (COP30 Brasil Amazônia, 2025, 49:00). The reaction from the room, including audible booing, demonstrated the degree to which most Parties reject this narrow interpretation.

These disagreements surfaced repeatedly throughout the negotiation process of the Belém Gender Action Plan under agenda item 14. The draft dated 12 November included a footnote from Paraguay contesting the term ‘gender’ (UNFCCC, 2025n). The version issued on 14 November added objections from Argentina, Iran and the Holy See (UNFCCC, 2025j), followed by Indonesia and Malaysia in the draft of 18 November (UNFCCC, 2025j). Similar disputes arose in other negotiation tracks, including the Just Transition Work Programme, where Argentina and Paraguay requested footnotes clarifying their binary interpretation of the term (UNFCCC, 2025m). In reaction to this contestation by footnoting, the EU stressed that it cannot accept ‘backsliding’ on agreed language. This applies to footnotes and other forms (IISD, 2025e).

In the end, none of these footnotes appeared in the adopted text, although the Holy See ensured that its position was formally recorded in the official report on the closing plenary.

Observer organisations and NGOs argue that these objections go beyond semantics and form part of a broader strategy to delay progress and undermine efforts toward

gender equity (Wedo, 2025). While contestation of gender-related language is not new in the UNFCCC context, it is argued that its intensity has increased. The former Irish president Mary Robinson, now a member of The Elders, stated that the debate over the term ‘gender’ is a means for pushing women’s rights backwards (Lozada et al., 2025). This suggests that the dispute reflects a wider effort to erode human rights-based language and commitments in international climate negotiations.

10 Conclusions and Outlook

In summary, it remains the bitter truth of this year's COP in Belém that once again it has failed to provide what is needed to effectively combat climate change. Countries that profit greatly from the use of fossil fuels, such as the OPEC states as well as Russia, China and India, have once again succeeded in largely blocking concrete progress. Limiting climate change to 1.5 °C or at least 2 °C cannot be met with the measures taken so far. Instead of switching to emergency mode and at least seriously implementing what has been decided so far – fossil fuels are not even mentioned in the conference decisions.

Obviously, the framework conditions that enabled agreement on the call for transitioning away from fossil fuels in Dubai 2023 are no longer in place: The US turned from pro- to an anti-transition stance and even obstructionist, the EU is too weak and undecided to fill the gap and China does not want to. Those who had hoped China would take on a leading role were left disappointed. Although the country is present and active (with the second biggest delegation), it continues to position itself as a developing country, reproducing the same narratives since the 1990s. It thus continues to support initiatives that align with its economic and geopolitical interests in a way that does not limit its future development. At the same time, potentially due to China's growing power and influence in most Global South countries, there have been no demands from vulnerable developing countries for China to take responsibility as the largest emitter and step up as a climate leader based on its green technology potential.

The EU, on the other hand, was unable to take on an international leadership role since it is not a climate leader itself. The EU announced its NDCs only just before the COP and it represents a lowered ambition level compared to what would be needed for its fair share to stay within 1.5°C. The EU is also characterized by a problematic hubris. Internationally, the EU delegation has lobbied for transitioning away from fossil fuels, while domestically, for example, Germany has just decided to add another 8 GW of gas power plants by 2031, and the EU promised to buy more liquid gas from the US to strike a trade deal with the Trump presidency earlier this year. Recalcitrant states thus had ample space to wield their veto power.

In addition to the consensus principle that provides fossil interests with enormous negotiation power, another key reason for the weak outcome is that many countries in the Global South need considerable support to implement the energy transition, adapt to the consequences of climate change, and deal with climate change-induced losses and damage. However, the wealthy countries are not yet providing anywhere near the level of support that is needed, but instead have even reduced international financial support in 2025. As was the case last year in Baku, it was therefore once again not possible to form a broad alliance to isolate the countries that are holding back progress.

The energy transition is nonetheless making progress - but only based on market dynamics and voluntary action. It is progressing haphazardly in fits and starts, not fast enough, not equally across countries, and without systematically taking into account its distributional impacts. No care is taken not to leave anyone behind, nor to spread the benefits equitably.

COP30 fell short of the ambitious hopes for a bold, progressive agenda. Yet, the worst-case scenario did not occur: Despite adverse circumstances, Parties were able to negotiate a final declaration demonstrating the continued commitment to multilateralism. However, the “Mutirão decision” only adopts voluntary and unspecified initiatives on mitigation, such as the ‘Global Implementation Accelerator’ or the ‘Belém Mission to 1.5’, whose potential future contributions to solving the climate crisis remain questionable.

Disappointment is also warranted regarding the advancement of forest issues at this ‘Rainforest COP’, as there has been little progress in addressing these issues within the UNFCCC. The Brazilian COP presidency was awkwardly unambitious about further integrating responses to the climate and biodiversity crises, despite the raised expectations from announcements by the presidents of all three Rio COPs in 2023 on a “coordinated approach to tackle climate change, desertification, and biodiversity loss” (Rio COP Presidencies, 2023), and the COP Troika statements (including Brazil) in summer 2024 on “leveraging synergies between climate and biodiversity agendas” (Troika, 2024), as well as indications at the end of the 2024 Baku COP that Brazil would prioritize rainforest and biodiversity issues in Belém (even labelling it the ‘nature COP’) and with Brazilian Environment Minister Marina Silva being considered as a champion on rainforest issues (Carbon Brief, 2025; Obergassel et al., 2024). The deforestation roadmap was quickly removed from the negotiations on the ‘Mutirão cover decision’ and even diplomatic technical work in the UNFCCC, such as introducing a new work program on forests and biodiversity, was not even attempted. While consultations were held on “creating a space for continuous discussions [and recommendations] to enhance cooperation among the Rio conventions” (Carbon Brief, 2025), the matter was silenced by the current presidency of the desertification COP Saudi Arabia, and the matter was postponed to the SBSTA negotiations in Bonn in Summer 2026.

Civil society constituted a visible and heterogeneous presence at COP30, with Indigenous groups receiving approximately 900 official badges - a record number (Urzedo et al, 2025). However, limited hotel capacity and exceptionally high accommodation costs posed significant barriers to participation, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups and contributing to the decision of some Indigenous participants to breach the venue in protest (Engelbrecht, 2025). Civil society's influence on formal negotiations continued to be limited, constrained by internal political divisions over the war in Gaza and the leverage of fossil fuel interests. The intensified security measures implemented in the second week following the breach of the venue introduced barriers to participation, particularly for individuals with disabilities and delegates from conflict-affected regions. Nevertheless, civil society maintained a significant impact in parallel spaces, including the People's Summit and the 70,000-participant People's March (Watts & Noor, 2025), while securing tangible achievements within the Just Transition Work Programme.

How to assess the outcome of the conference is also a question of the assessment criteria. For decades, climate change has mostly been viewed as a prisoner's dilemma. That is, it was assumed that all actors had an interest in solving the problem, but that individual actors had incentives to hold back on their own contributions as much as possible. On this basis, UN conferences have spent decades

trying to find a formula for “burden sharing” that all countries could agree on based on abstract emission targets.

However, it is becoming increasingly clear that climate change is more of a distribution and transformation problem (Aklin & Mildenerberger, 2020; Colgan et al., 2021; Patt, 2017). Serious climate protection would result in a significant devaluation of remaining fossil fuel reserves, as well as a devaluation of all facilities based on the use of fossil fuels. Per the sixth IPCC assessment report (IPCC, 2023), if warming is limited to 2°C, about 80% of coal, 50% of gas, and 30% of oil reserves cannot be burned. A significantly higher share of reserves would need to remain unburned if warming is to be limited to 1.5°C. And the owners of these economic assets are obviously aiming to slow down climate protection as a whole at all political levels, not just to keep their own contributions small. While many of these actors have posed as conditional cooperators, i.e. willing to take action if everybody else also did, many can more accurately be described as unconditional non-cooperators (Aklin & Mildenerberger, 2020).

It is therefore encouraging that, since Glasgow in 2021, the UN climate conferences have increasingly focused on the specific causes of climate change, particularly the use of fossil fuels, rather than abstract emission targets. Given the veto power of fossil fuel-producing countries, the (renewed) withdrawal of the US and even global climate obstruction by the Trump presidency, and the weak, undecided and hubristic position of the EU, it was probably almost inevitable that no concrete results could be achieved in Belém. But at least the conference discussed the right question, even if it was unable to answer it. The conference thus helped to highlight the main barrier to climate protection, namely the resistance of incumbent high-emission interests.

It therefore seems advisable to continue to place the transition away from fossil fuels, as well as the halt of deforestation, at the center of discussions, despite all the obstacles. In order to appease the more ambitious countries and to circumvent the power of fossil states in the UNFCCC, Brazil has announced that it will now develop roadmaps for moving away from fossil fuels and ending deforestation outside the UNFCCC process, which has been backed by a coalition of 24 states which launched the “Belém Declaration on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels” (Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, 2025). Colombia, together with the Netherlands, has announced that it will support the process of moving away from fossil fuels by organizing an international conference entitled “First International Conference on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels” in April 2026. However, such parallel voluntary processes on fossil fuels and deforestation roadmaps must also lead to concrete measures. Therefore, a note of caution is warranted regarding the voluntary roadmaps outside of the UNFCCC. Previous voluntary pledges have failed to deliver on their promises. For example, the 2021 Glasgow Leaders Declaration announced plans to halt and reverse forest loss by 2030. However, 17 out of the 20 countries with the largest areas of primary forests now have increased primary forest loss compared to 2021 (Goldman et al. 2025). Similarly there also has been a proliferation of “International Cooperative Initiatives”, many of which have focused on weak functions such as knowledge sharing and capacity building and have had weak transparency and follow-up requirements (Forner & Julien Díaz, 2023; Kuramochi et al., 2024), resulting in limited change on the ground. If such parallel

tracks are supposed to be more than cheap virtue signalling, they will have to be significantly strengthened. The “roadmaps” should therefore identify potentials, barriers, and possible measures as concretely as possible, and be backed by funding and implementation. Progressive countries should do everything in their power to put these roadmaps also at the center of discussions at the next UN conference in Türkiye.

New forms of “counter-institutionalization” (Goddard et al., 2024) are also emerging. One parallel track that is aiming high is the initiative to establish a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT). This initiative is a direct reaction to the view that the UNFCCC process consistently fails to produce the action required to prevent dangerous climate change, and it aims to establish a new international treaty, not yet another initiative with questionable value-added. The fossil transition conference in Colombia *inter alia* aims to advance the discussions on this treaty. In addition, more attention should in particular be paid to how to overcome the blocking power of fossil incumbents. For instance, Green (2025) suggests using international taxation and investment agreements to undermine their material base.

In addition to the ‘roadmaps’ and counter-institutionalization efforts, efforts to transition away and to end deforestation should also build on one of the few concrete advances from Belém, the agreement to develop a mechanism to promote just transition. Integrating social justice and stakeholder participation of affected groups in climate policy-making is essential to achieving an increased legitimacy for deep and rapid emission reductions. Previous approaches outside of the UNFCCC, such as the Just Energy Transition Partnerships, have so far been very limited in their integration of social justice aspects. Much work still remains within and outside of the UNFCCC to promote an ambitious and just transition both globally and domestically.

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