

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13: Climate Action

In 2012, the United Nations developed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to provide shared objectives that address environmental, political, and economic world challenges. These goals were adopted by all United Nations members in 2015, serving as a call to action.



Goal 13 focuses on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impact. Climate change affects every living organism on earth. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has risen by 25% since 1958.¹ The increase in carbon dioxide is causing multiple complex issues for the environment. These issues include rising temperatures and more frequent catastrophic weather events such as storms, flooding, and droughts. Droughts can impact food production and availability. Flooding disrupts ecosystems and spreads disease.²

Rising global temperatures significantly impact the world's oceans. Scientists estimate that the global sea level could rise another one to eight feet by 2100 due to melting arctic ice sheets.³ In the United States, the increased sea level will put millions of people and billions of dollars of real estate at risk from rising tides causing erosion, flooding, and environmental changes to wildlife habitats and farmland.

Measures to Achieve SDG 13

On the bright side, the international community is making progress in collectively lowering our carbon footprint. The Paris Agreement, a legally binding international treaty on climate change, was adopted in 2016. Its primary purpose is to unite member nations in their commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions substantially. Current members include 192 countries plus the European Union.⁴

The Paris Agreement provides a strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by limiting the temperature increase in this century to only 2 degrees Celsius above the preindustrial baseline temperature. In 2020, the global average temperature was 1.2 degrees Celsius above the preindustrial baseline temperature.⁵ Climate scientists say that global carbon dioxide emissions need to be reduced by 45% by 2030 from 2010 levels to achieve this goal. Developed nations provide climate finance to developing countries to achieve a more sustainable future. Climate finance increased 10% from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018, totaling \$48.7 billion.⁶

Organizations throughout the world can contribute to achieving the SDGs. The UN Global Compact was created to help align company strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labor, and environment. As of 2022, there are over 11,000 companies in 157 different countries that have joined this initiative.⁷

1. NOAA. (August 31, 2021). Climate change impacts. Retrieved from <https://www.noaa.gov/education/resource-collections/climate/climate-change-impacts>

2. Ibid.

3. NASA. The effects of climate change. Retrieved from <https://climate.nasa.gov/effects/>

4. United Nations. The Paris agreement. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>

5. United Nations. (2021). The sustainable development goals report 2021. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2021.pdf>

6. Ibid.

7. United Nations. The world's largest corporate sustainability initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc>