How technology can contribute to maintaining political momentum for Paris Agreement ambitions

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The 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was scheduled to be held in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2020, and was expected to gather

thousands of negotiators, policymakers, researchers, journalists and campaigners.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Parties decided to postpone this big event, instead of moving it online as they did with smaller meetings in the past months. As announced a few days ago, COP26 will now take place between 1 and 12 November 2021 in Glasgow.

In the correspondence "A digital climate summit to maintain Paris Agreement ambition," just published in *Nature Climate Change*, a team of scientists from the CMCC Foundation—Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change, Ca' Foscari University of Venice and University College London (UCL) call for re-thinking the way climate diplomacy works, and the role digital technology can play in making the UNFCCC process transparent and accessible to everyone. They suggest a "digital COP26-Part 1" as a way to complement, rather than substitute, COP26 next year, and to support climate ambition throughout 2020. This year is indeed crucial for climate action, as Parties are called to submit strengthened climate action plans—the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) - and to publish long-term decarbonization strategies.

If technical feasibility would not be an issue, as demonstrated by many ongoing efforts to move crowded in-person meetings online, there are many reasons why a totally digital climate summit might not be as effective as a traditional one. Besides issues of real-time translation into the six UN languages," explains Elisa Calliari, researcher at CMCC Foundation, UCL and Ca'Foscari University of Venice. "The digital divide between developed and developing countries could result in an additional source of power asymmetry within the UNFCCC process. Moreover, a digital negotiation would ask to renounce to face-to-face diplomacy, which plays an important role in building trust and fostering international cooperation. Yet, after having participated to COPs for

many years now, we wonder whether these mega-events are the most efficient and effective way to foster cooperation on climate action."

Hence, the team suggests that securing the benefits of face-to-face negotiation does not necessarily imply postponing all the formal announcements and side events that every year make COPs crowded.

"We suggest imagining a new format, which can maintain political momentum for climate action while ensuring participation from business, research and civil society. A 'digital COP26-Part 1' can serve this purpose, as a virtual space where all the aspects that do not need to be formally negotiated by countries can be announced and discussed" explains Jaroslav Mysiak, director of the Risk Assessment and Adaptation Strategies Division at Fondazione CMCC. "Parties' unilateral pledges on more ambitious national climate plans and strategies to reach net zero emissions by 2050 can be announced in this virtual space, together with their climate finance commitments and initiatives to strengthen communities' resilience. Moreover, our proposal includes the translation into video conferences of the rich programme of side-events, which characterizes COP each year."

More information: Calliari E., J. Mysiak, L. Vanhala, A digital climate summit to maintain Paris Agreement ambition, *Nature Climate Change*, dx.doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0794-0

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