

UK public concern over climate crisis 'at all-time high' as crucial COP26 summit begins

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Concern over the climate crisis has reached record levels in the UK, according to the latest analysis of public attitudes from leading experts on the society-wide changes needed to tackle the issue.

The findings from the Cardiff University-led Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST) come at the start of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), which is being seen as a "make or break" moment in a vital decade for the planet's future.

The poll of more than 1,000 adults found concerns over climate change were at an all-time high in the UK, with 45 percent now reporting they are "very or extremely worried." This is an increase from 39 percent in 2020 and 25 percent in 2016.

More than half (50 percent) agree "drastic action" needs to be taken to tackle the [climate emergency](#), with government action and individual behavior change seen as the most important steps towards effective climate action. Technological solutions, winding down businesses and climate protest are ranked of less importance.

[In a briefing paper out today](#), CAST researchers say the results are the starkest indication yet that people recognize the need for urgent action to change our current way of life.

"Public concern over climate change and its implications has been consistently on the rise in the UK over the last few years—and this most up-to-date insight into citizens' views delivers a very clear message at a pivotal moment for the climate emergency," said lead author Dr. Katharine Steentjes, a co-investigator at CAST.

"We hope world leaders meeting in Glasgow this week will sit up and listen to this message that now is the time to take meaningful and concerted action on the [climate crisis](#)."

CAST polled more than 4,000 adults across four countries—the UK, China, Sweden and Brazil—and found similar patterns of public opinion across most of the issues surveyed.

It found:

- Many people in the UK, China and Sweden are very or extremely worried about climate change (40-50 percent) and want to see urgent action (55-58 percent). In Brazil, climate change worry and feelings of urgency are higher (75 percent worry, 85 percent high urgency);
- Most people (70 percent UK, 66 percent Sweden, 74 percent China, 84 percent Brazil) agree that tackling climate change requires drastic changes to our current way of living and how we operate as a society. Walking, cycling and using public transport are seen as the most effective way to tackle climate change in all four countries. People are less aware of strategies such as eating less red meat and reducing new purchases, especially in China;
- Across all four countries, there is majority (69 percent UK, 66 percent Sweden, 76 percent China, 67 percent Brazil) support for the international Paris Agreement to keep global temperature increase below 2 degrees Celsius;
- Government, businesses and industry are seen as the most responsible actors to initiate climate action, but most people also feel a strong personal responsibility to act.

Dr. Steentjes said: "As [world leaders](#) start to discuss how they want to fulfill the international commitment to avoid the worst of the climate crisis, it is important to understand what citizens think needs to happen—and what they expect from their respective governments.

"Our results demonstrate not only that people around the world are worried about [climate change](#) and that they feel the impacts, but they also recognize the need for urgent action from themselves and their governments that will have to change our current way of life.

"Policymakers should note that citizens expect their governments to take

responsibility and start to make changes towards effective climate action, but a large proportion of people also feel a personal responsibility to act themselves.

"Both [government](#) action and behavior change is needed—and will reassure decision-makers that many people are willing to enter discussions around how citizens and governments together can solve the challenge that the [climate](#) crisis poses to all of us. This is important to note for governments that are concerned about citizens' willingness to consider changes to their current way of living."

Provided by Cardiff University

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