

Sustainability Tracker

A monthly update on the most important tech-related policy developments tackling the urgent challenge of climate change and sustainability

September 2020

#GreenTech #FairTech



Harmonising Sustainability Policy as a Path to Fair Tech

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2020 may yet be aptly named if policymakers find vision enough to read the signs through ever-thickening smoke: climate change won't wait for governments. Almost a quarter century since the Kyoto protocol commitments, it's clear that corporations and NGOs will lead humankind out of the global climate crisis. But as some companies focus on becoming carbon neutral or negative, and others work steadily at tools that build towards these goals, there is a lack of coordination and purpose that creates an obscurity of its own and does not match with the urgency of the moment.

That urgency demands that companies start to shape the policy environment themselves. Multilateral sclerosis, nationalist reaction, and economic momentarism have created a howling vacuum that companies with carbon-reducing solutions must begin to fill. But it's not enough simply to lead by example and hope others will imitate you, or just to lay out your carbon-neutralising wears and hope that consumers will drift your way. They won't, because they're manifestly busy elsewhere: despite rising awareness of the risk, consumers have pushed fully 40% of all global fossil fuel emissions since before the industrial revolution into the earth's atmosphere just since the Kyoto Protocol was agreed... in 1997.

The private sector now needs to do better business precisely by pushing forward onto the market, and into the policy space, solutions that reduce our Dangerous Anthropogenic Interference, and companies should be unhesitating about using time-tested practices to achieve this end:

- Drive the policy agenda in treaty-binding forums with teeth: COP 26 and its successors, UN Bio Diversity Conference, UN Oceans Conference.
- Drive credible national and international standards for those of your solutions that invite more ubiquitous uptake.

- Participate in the carbon-neutral build-back of the G20's stimulus packages by leveraging those monies to augment and push forward your solutions.
- Insert your solution into large projects that will attract attention and emulation, such as the European Green Capital Award or those of the Dubai Carbon Centre of Excellence.

These “government affairs” methods work: widely-adopted standards such as those for carbon-reducing eSignatures are popular because they worked well and because they were pushed forward by their creators. They not only get published and adopted by organisations, they also drive [profitability](#). But while many companies – Unilever, Tesla, General Electric to name a few – have enabled sustainability offerings to contribute to their bottom line, companies that sit squarely in the tech space – those providing connectivity, Internet platforms, and data services – have yet to contribute all the necessary leadership to a green-centred re-tooling of the economy. This inattention is difficult to explain, given that those same qualities which place tech companies in the leadership roles they occupy today will also enable them to roll order out of the current policy chaos around climate change: audacity, and a clarity of purpose, will restore trust in their services and stasis to this ailing planet.

The key takeaways from the report include:

- Over the summer, industry giants and various governments across the globe announced their plans to achieve carbon neutrality. The world's largest polluter, China, committed to carbon neutrality by 2060 at the UN General Assembly.
- Recent UN reports reveal that the world will not achieve its 2020 Biodiversity Targets and Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. While government and industry inaction are the principal cause, the UN also calls for further investment in data and innovation to help decision-makers monitor progress and respond to the climate crisis.
- The EU will allocate 30% of its seven-year budget and COVID-19 recovery package to help meet the objectives of its Green Deal. The flagship plan includes a sustainable product policy initiative to lengthen the life span of ICT equipment, among others.
- US policymakers from both sides of the aisles are developing legislation to tackle climate change. The Clean Economy Jobs and Innovation Act is being discussed in the house this week. Meanwhile, Joe Biden recently presented his \$2 trillion plan to boost clean energy and rebuild infrastructure in the United States.

Latest Industry Developments

- WEF CEO Action Group for the European Green Deal [expressed](#) their support for the European Green Deal as a call on Europe to catalyse a new growth model based on circularity, renewable energy and low-carbon industries.
- 150 companies—including **Google, Microsoft and Apple**—[called](#) on EU leaders to reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030.
- **Uber** [unveiled](#) its plans to combat climate change through a transition to electric vehicles and the proliferation of sustainable alternative travel options, like e-bikes and e-scooters.
- **Google** [pledged](#) to operate carbon-free data centres and campuses by 2030, by pairing wind and solar power, and using AI to optimise electricity demand. In August, its parent company **Alphabet** [issued](#) green bonds totalling \$5.5 billion to support environmental and social initiatives.
- **Facebook** [announced](#) that its global operations will be 100% supported by renewable energy this year, and committed to achieving net zero emissions across its value chain in 2030. Facebook [bought](#) 806 megawatts of additional solar and wind power in the US and Ireland last month to power its data centres.
- **Amazon** [signed](#) a global partnership with **Mercedes Benz** to add more than 1,900 electric vehicles to its delivery fleet in Europe this year.
- A group of global firms - including **Amazon, Allianz, Microsoft and S&P Global** – are [establishing](#) an open source climate data platform to help manage climate-related

risk and finance climate solutions. The work will be spearheaded by the LF Climate Finance Foundation (LFCF).

- **Apple** [announced](#) it will invest in two of the world's largest onshore wind turbines in Denmark. The tech giant also committed to carbon neutrality across its entire business, manufacturing supply chain and product life cycle by 2030.
- **Microsoft** [committed](#) to achieving zero waste for its direct operations, products and packaging by 2030. Earlier this summer, Microsoft [launched](#) Transform to Net Zero, a research initiative to help businesses achieve net zero emissions.
- **HP** [announced](#) its plans to eliminate 75% of single-use plastic packaging by 2025.
- **Mastercard** [introduced](#) sustainable credit cards made from recyclable, bio-sourced, chlorine-free, degradable and ocean-safe plastics.



Policy Developments

National and Regional

Asia

China Commits to Carbon Neutrality By 2060 at UN General Assembly

With most world leaders limiting their speeches to the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical landscape, China distinguished itself with a commitment to [reach](#) carbon neutrality before 2060. Adopting a similar narrative as his European counterparts, Xi Jinping called for a green recovery from the pandemic and pledged to hit peak emissions by 2030.

Europe

European Union Prioritises Climate Action in Recovery Plan

This summer, EU leaders [committed](#) to allocating 30% of their €1.82 trillion seven-year budget and COVID-19 recovery package to help meet the objectives of the [European Green Deal](#), the Commission's flagship green initiative. With its ambitious targets, including climate neutrality by 2050 and a 55% emissions cut by 2030, the European Union will leverage its economic response to accelerate the green and digital transition.

European Commission to Present Legislation on Sustainable Products in 2021

The European Commission will present its Sustainable Product Policy Initiative in Q4 2021, a key instrument from the [Circular Economy Action Plan](#). According to the [initial impact assessment](#) (open for consultation until 2 November), the executive will widen the scope of the [Ecodesign Directive](#) to include electronics and ICT equipment. The Commission is considering establishing product sustainability principles, requirements on mandatory sustainability labelling, and a ban on the destruction of unsold durable goods.

This legislation will complement the [Waste Framework Directive](#), the rulebook on waste management for all products sold in the EU regardless of origin.

European Parliament Committee Calls for Ambitious Emissions Reduction Target

In the European Parliament, Environment Committee MEPs [voted](#) to make climate neutrality obligatory by 2050 in both EU and member states and called for a 60% emissions cut by 2030. MEPs will vote on the final target in their plenary session on 5 October and EU Environment Ministers are set to present their agreed targets on 23 October before entering into inter-institutional negotiations with the Commission.

British Government to Set Legally Binding Sustainability Targets From 2022

The UK government will [introduce](#) legally binding targets on air quality, waste reduction, biodiversity and cleaner water. The new target, outlined in the revised environment bill, are part of the government's commitment to [build](#) a "green and resilient recovery" in support of climate action and Sustainable Development Goals. The bill, originally introduced last year, will resume its passage through parliament later this month.

United States

House Democrats Unveil Clean Energy Package

This week, the US House of Representatives will begin discussion on the Clean Economy Jobs and Innovation Act, a 900-page proposal [tabled](#) by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (Maryland). The proposal would boost green infrastructure and energy efficiency, as well as investment in renewable technologies, workforce training, and electric vehicles. The bill also includes an environmental justice section, creating grant programmes for underserved communities.

Representatives to Present Bipartisan Plan on Climate Change

Representatives David McKinley (Rep, West-Virginia) and Kurt Schrader (Dem, Oregon) are [preparing](#) a bipartisan plan to tackle climate change. The proposal calls for public and private investments in clean energy innovation and infrastructure development, as well as new regulatory standards to help meet environmental and energy objectives. Reps. McKinley and Schrader are soliciting input from stakeholders on the discussion draft, with the goal of introducing the final version before the end of the year.

Democratic Presidential Candidate Joe Biden Presents Clean Energy Plan

This summer, presidential candidate Joe Biden [presented](#) a \$2 trillion plan to boost clean energy and rebuild infrastructure in the United States. The plan would aim to achieve a net-zero emission target by 2050 and a carbon pollution-free power sector by 2035. Biden also committed to re-integrate the United States in the Paris Agreement. The plan,

which includes elements of the Green New Deal, was welcomed by environmental activists and the Democratic party's left wing.

Senate Democrats Release Climate Plan

Last month, Senate Democrats' Special Committee on the Climate Crisis [released](#) their roadmap on climate action. The report has broad goals including net-zero emissions by 2050 and increased federal spending on climate action to at least 2% of the annual GDP, with at least 40% of the benefits from these investments to support communities of colour and low-income, deindustrialised, and disadvantaged communities. The roadmap also calls for campaign finance reform and lobbying laws to limit the influence of fossil fuel corporations.

Senator Harris and Representative Ocasio-Cortez Introduce Climate Equity Act

Democratic vice-presidential candidate Kamala Harris (California) and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (New York) [introduced](#) a bill that would require the government to make stronger consideration of racial and economic inequalities in its environmental policies. The Climate Equity Act would require legislation to be weighted with an "equity score" to estimate the impact on front-line communities.

Multilateral

UN Presents Global Biodiversity Outlook Report

The UN's Convention on Biological Diversity [published](#) its Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO), a report card on progress against the [20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets](#) agreed in 2010. Despite efforts to tackle pollution from plastics, pesticides, deforestation and conservation, none of the targets will be fully met by the 2020 deadline. The report calls for bold and interdependent action from individuals, governments, and businesses to restore the ecosystem by 2050 to achieve the world's [vision](#) of 'Living in harmony with nature'.

Companies Fail to Take Sufficient Action to Meet the UN 2030 Agenda

The UN Global Compact [released](#) its report on 20 years of corporate sustainability progress among its corporate participants. The report finds that only 46% of participants embedded the [Ten Principles](#) of the UN Global Compact into their operations and only 37% are designing business models that contribute to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The report also reveals that progress remains uneven across SDG with companies focusing on economic growth and innovation objectives, while setting aside socially-focused SDG, such as reduced inequalities. After calling on companies to step-up and transform their business models to turn policy commitments into action, the UN Global Compact [introduced](#) new benchmarks to help companies evaluate their activities.

Data Gaps Limit Achievement of SDG

According to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, global efforts to date [remain](#) uneven and insufficient to meet the SDG. The report highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic offset decades of progress, but also exacerbated global data inequalities with a lack of country-level data, preventing policy-makers from monitoring progress and identifying trends. The UN calls for further investment in data, statistics, and innovation to address this gap and support governments' response to the crisis.

Policy Events For Your Agenda

15-29 September 2020

[UN General Assembly](#)

21-27 September 2020

[Climate Week NYC](#)

21-24 September 2020

[World Economic Forum Sustainable Development Impact Summit](#)

20-22 October 2020

[EU Green Week](#)

1-12 November

[2021 UN Climate Change Conference, COP26](#)

21-22 November

[G20 Leaders' Summit](#)

Meet the Access Partnership Sustainability Team



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We lead countries to fair tech

Access Partnership is the world's leading public policy firm that provides market access for technology. Our team uniquely mixes policy and technical expertise to optimise outcomes for companies operating at the intersection of technology, data and connectivity.

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