

# Environmental policies

## ■ Definition

**Environmental policies** involve any measures taken by governments, public or private organizations regarding the effects of human activities on the environment, preventing or reducing dangerous effects on ecosystems.

## ■ The beginnings

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation increased and became harmful to human health, **governments began developing rules** for urban hygiene, sewage, and housing, as well as the first laws for the protection of natural landscapes and wildlife.

## ■ Evolution of environmental policies

At the beginning of the 1960s, environmentalism became an important movement in the Western countries and many laws were passed in the following decades including acts about waste disposal, air and water pollution, and the protection of endangered species. In 1970, in the United States, the government created the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**, whose mission is to protect human and environmental health.

The United Nations (UN) held its **first conference on environmental issues in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972**. The conference led to the creation of the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**, which became the world's main international environmental organisation.

In 1988, UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization founded the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** to study global warming, providing governments with scientific information that can be used to develop climate policies.



## ■ From Kyoto Protocol to recent days

In 1997, in Kyoto, Japan, delegates from more than 150 countries approved the **Kyoto Protocol**, which required developed countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2012. Some countries, such as the USA, which had the highest gas emissions, **strongly** opposed the protocol. The **21<sup>st</sup> UN Climate Change Conference (COP 21)\***, held in Paris in 2015, was a further step; in fact, representatives from nearly 200 countries signed the **Paris Agreement**. To accelerate actions to implement the Paris Agreement, the **2019 Climate Action Summit** took place in New York with the purpose of maintaining the global warming limit of 1.5 °C. The summit activated political and economic forces to promote climate action that will enable implementation of the goals of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

In November 2021, 197 countries took part in **COP26**, held in Glasgow. After two weeks of intense negotiations, COP26 confirmed the Paris Agreement as to global temperature limits (1.5 °C) by the end of the century. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will have to be cut by 45% by 2030 in order to reach 0% by 2050 (2060 for China, 2070 for India).

### GLOSSARY



**act:** provvedimento legislativo

**housing:** abitazioni

**to implement:** mettere in atto

**sewage:** sistema fognario

**strongly:** fortemente

**waste disposal:** raccolta e smaltimento rifiuti

The UN climate conference held in Egypt in November 2022 focused on climate justice, reduction of emissions and acceleration on renewable sources. The participants of 2022 COP27 reaffirmed their intention to keep the global warming limit within 1.5 °C from pre-industrial levels.

One of the historic resolutions concerned the establishment of the “Loss and Damage Fund” to provide financial assistance to

the most vulnerable nations affected by the effects of climate change.

This financial mechanism was taken for the benefit of the developing countries most exposed to the damage of climate change. They will be able to draw on this fund to deal with the enormous problems caused by extreme weather events, sea level rise, prolonged heat waves, desertification, from the acidification of the seas to the huge losses in terms of biodiversity.

**1** Complete the sentences in the first column with the right ending in the second one.

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dangerous effects of human activities on ecosystems can be limited .....</li> <li>2. The first laws to protect the environment, wildlife as well as rules of public hygiene were approved .....</li> <li>3. Many laws about waste disposal, air and water pollution, and the protection of endangered species .....</li> <li>4. The mission of the EPA is .....</li> <li>5. Today, the UNEP is .....</li> <li>6. The IPCC .....</li> <li>7. The main purpose of Kyoto Protocol was .....</li> <li>8. The 2015 Paris Agreement .....</li> <li>9. Maintaining the global warming limit of 1.5 °C. ....</li> <li>10. COP26 confirmed .....</li> </ol> |  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> a. have been passed since 1960s thanks to environmentalist movements.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> b. the world's main international environmental organisation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> c. the Paris Agreement as to global temperature limits.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> d. was signed by representatives from nearly 200 countries.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> e. the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2012.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> f. by measures taken by governments, public or private organizations.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> g. was the main purpose of the 2019 Climate Action Summit held in New York.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> h. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> i. provides governments with scientific information in order to develop climate policies.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> j. to protect human and environmental health.</li> </ol> |
|--|---|---|

**2** Here are some famous people who are/were activists and speak/spoke out for the environment. Match them to the descriptions.

- |                                 |                          |   |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1. David Attenborough           | <input type="checkbox"/> | a. Politician and environmental activist, ex vice president of the USA.                               |
| 2. Greta Thunberg               | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. 19 <sup>th</sup> century American philosopher, writer and naturalist, one of the first ecologists. |
| 3. Gisele Bundchen              | <input type="checkbox"/> | c. British naturalist, documentary maker and prominent environmental activist.                        |
| 4. Leonardo Di Caprio Programme | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Ex top model, ambassador for the U.N. Environment  |
| 5. Al Gore                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | e. Young Swedish activist known around the world for her protest speeches against climate change.     |
| 6. Henry Thoreau                | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. American actor, environmentalist and philanthropist.   |

**3** **Alarm over Amazon road project.** Listen to a journalist talking about the choice of the Brazilian government about Amazonia. Decide if these sentences are true (T) or false (F). Correct the false ones.

- |   | T                        | F                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. The protest of the activists was against the construction of a road through the Amazon rainforest.                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. The Amazon rainforest plays an essential role in regulating the global amount of oxygen in the atmosphere.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Politicians supporting the project say that the road can help the transport of agricultural product to Atlantic ports in Peru. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. More than 100 miles of forest will be cut down.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The road will pass through a National Park.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. The National Park is very poor in biodiversity.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. The National Park hosts 130 species of bird.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. The project is considered "irresponsible" because it will affect three indigenous communities.                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. The project has accelerated since 2009.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. A Brazilian environmentalist working in Germany says that the Brazilian government wants to destroy the environment.          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

\*COP stands for Conference of the Parties and the number refers to the sequence of its events. COP27, which was held in Sharm el-Sheikh in 2022, was the 27<sup>th</sup> conference.

