

Reflecting on My Experiences at COP26 Brigid Deegan ('22 MALD Candidate)

One of the primary reasons that I wanted to attend COP26 is because I am interested in climate change and migration, specifically understanding how cities engage or ignore migrant communities in climate change resilience planning, community engagement, and sustainable urban development. Much of my prior and current work is with communities in low-lying urban coastal areas within the Asia-Pacific region. The voices of these communities, including the youth, and more generally, those who are the most vulnerable and at the frontlines to the impacts of climate change, are who I and so many others believe should be included at the forefront of such international dialogues. With this in mind, I was really interested in witnessing, firsthand, dialogues at the intersection of migration with climate justice and international policy in order to see whether or not inclusiveness was legitimately being taken seriously by the UNFCCC and negotiating Parties.



Taken at the COP26 Action Hub



Taken from the Fridays for Future protest led by Greta Thunberg in Glasgow city centre

It was through side events, discussions at pavilions, and through protests, such as Fridays for Future, that I was able to hear their firsthand accounts of the impact of climate change on their lives and desire to incorporate local knowledge and experiences with governmental actors. However, in many instances, these very frank and sobering dialogues were far removed from the negotiating table and mainstream media. While every conversation I engaged in or witnessed offered a different perspective, these stories had the same core messages: We are far from having the necessary transparency and reporting mechanisms, financing measures, and accessibility and inclusion needed to tackle the stark urgency of our climate crisis. We are not being flexible enough to react immediately. Many offered the same grim words I had been thinking to myself throughout the week at COP26—So many of our systems must be seriously restructured. But how can we do that? And what would this possibly look like?

There were many moments throughout my week that I was deeply moved by youth activists, indigenous communities, and historically marginalized groups who I met and listened to.

Accountability will continue to be held as there is great power in the voices and actions of the people. The mobilization of youth calling for nations to address loss and damage and an end to fossil fuels will not cease.

If I learned anything from my time at COP26, it would be this: There are good people in the world who care deeply for their communities and environment and will continue to keep moving forward without waiting for world leaders to get their acts together. Innovations to make our energy transitions not only green, but just, will continue to dare us to be more creative in our solutions. There are bold women and fellow students at the Fletcher School who are climate leaders that I am proud to look up to. But that is not enough. Big changes are and will be happening soon across the international system and we must hold our leaders accountable to do more. I am incredibly grateful for the assisted funding from CIERP that helped to allow my journey to Scotland. My experiences at COP26 were both overwhelming and incredibly eye opening.



Walking home through Kelvingrove Park after a long day at the Scottish Event Campus