

UK Cabinet Office

# Hybrid approach strengthens inclusivity at COP26

Cisco enables global voices to be heard as U.N. climate conference strives for critical agreement



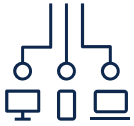
## The customer summary

**Customer name**  
UK Cabinet Office

**Industry**  
Events

**Location**  
Glasgow, UK

**Number of attendees**  
>38,457



### Business challenge

- Ensure network access for up to 40,000 attendees
- Allow secure, hybrid access to event sessions and voting
- Enable operational teams to work across a 197,000m<sup>2</sup> site



### Network solution

- Webex<sup>®</sup> Meetings
- Legislate for Webex
- Webex device endpoints
- Secure network and analytics



### Business results

- Underpinned the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference
- Connected 14,000 unique users across the two-week event
- Enabled 2944 hybrid meetings, with more than 5000 people connected

## Organising a critical global conference in a pandemic

COP26 (Conference of the Parties 26) was billed by many as our “last best chance” to find an agreement and common purpose in tackling the climate emergency. Postponed by a year due to the pandemic, it was also an opportunity to bring many important decision makers and influencers together. All virtual was never an option.

“Given the sensitivity of the negotiations, it was always the intention this should be an in-person event,” says Helen Wright, COP26 Head of Events (Venue Operations and Digital Platform), “but we also wanted it to have inclusivity at its core.”

COP26 was much more than headline negotiations between global leaders. It included 85 country and NGO pavilions and hundreds of corporate events, along with YOUNGO, the Official Children’s and Youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Among calls for action from global leaders at COP26, this was an opportunity to network, share ideas, listen to fresh perspectives, and reach a new audience through global media coverage.

This meant connecting people in-person and virtually, providing in-room and virtual voting, and generating live translations of meetings for delegates from nearly 200 countries. The entire 197,000m<sup>2</sup> site, with many temporary structures, also needed to support a range of digital use cases, from health checks to ticket scanning and payment terminals. The Cabinet Office obviously had additional requirements: “Given the nature of the event, we also wanted to act sustainably,” Wright adds. “As much as possible, we wanted to be able to recycle or reuse materials used at COP26.”

**“Cisco was more than a supplier; they were a partner in creating something that had never been done before. Their expertise shone through.”**

**Helen Wright**

COP26 Head of Events (Venue Operations and Digital Platform)

## Building contingency with a hybrid option

Cisco technology underpinned the entire COP26 experience. The Glasgow site was served by a Cisco network with a digital operations centre on-site. Hybrid and virtual events were enabled through Webex and Legislate for Webex, developed by Cisco's partners, Davra and ITGL.

The complex design and integration work required to fully utilise the Webex platform was also managed by ITGL and Davra, who had worked at the Cornwall G7 summit held earlier in the year.

"COP26 presented a unique challenge that required a bespoke solution," says Glyn Taylor, ITGL's Co-CEO. "With around 200 countries in attendance, setting up real-time translation was a priority. We also needed to integrate a secure, digital voting mechanism with physical voting. Our work included training 100 digital clerks, providing on-site support and a good deal of configuration."

Legislate for Webex was the key integration point for several systems ranging from the Social27 virtual events platform to the COP26 Active Directory for security clearance. This ensured users needed only to enter their password once to unlock the full suite of digital features. This simplified secure access to conference calls and location-based services.

Network connectivity was provided to every corner of the site, including the two plenary halls, the vast tented areas, logistics depots, dozens of shipping containers used as temporary offices, and a nearby hotel. In total, more than 600 Cisco access points were installed, both indoors and out. Cisco brought technology to prepare for any eventuality. The Cisco network was delivered with Pylon One, a provider of enterprise event infrastructure.

Importantly, the Cisco Takeback and Reuse programme, part of Cisco's Circular Economy principles, ensured all network infrastructure components could be returned and used again, meeting COP26's sustainability criteria. Similar programmes were in place across the event, for everything from crockery to furniture. "Cisco was more than a supplier, they were a partner in creating something that had never been done before," says Wright. "Their expertise shone through."

## Applying a digital layer to enhance the attendee experience

The event itself concluded with new commitments on the reduction of coal, new financing for developing countries, and the recognition of more urgent cuts to greenhouse gas emissions. Across the two weeks, Glasgow hosted 120 world leaders, including the presidents and prime ministers of India, the U.S., Germany, and Indonesia, along with Barack Obama, Prince Charles and Sir David Attenborough.

"We delivered a safe and secure event for more than 38,000 attendees," says Wright. "This was the largest international summit the UK has ever hosted—and in the middle of a pandemic."

Wright says the platform had more than 14,000 unique users registered across the event. Webex was used in 2944 meetings, with more than 5000 people connected to hybrid meetings, all moderated by the ITGL-trained digital clerks. There were 222,000 minutes of meetings auto-transcribed. Around 40 percent of meetings were scheduled; Webex enabled the remaining ad hoc 60 percent to include hybrid elements, with participants able to join on the fly. All of this was achieved with real-time translation available.

**"We wanted this to be an inclusive COP, and we also had to build in flexibility and contingency."**

### Helen Wright

COP26 Head of Events (Venue Operations and Digital Platform)

“This wouldn’t have been possible if this was manual,” says Taylor. “It had to be automated, through APIs, which Webex was able to facilitate. The beauty of Legislate for Webex is that it is intuitive.” The result, despite health and travel restrictions, was that COP26 set new records in terms of diversity of voices and social content shares.

“The beauty of the platform was that we were able to move quickly as events changed. We had occasions where delegates tested positive for COVID and had to self-isolate. Webex meant they could attend sessions virtually. We could ensure people had an equal seat at the table.”

At its peak there were 20,000 devices connected to the Cisco network, supporting video calls and ID checks. Meeting rooms were equipped with cameras and HD TVs, so event teams could work off mobile devices. There were no network downtimes and no reported issues.

“Given the popularity of some sessions, we could live-stream content to a wider, virtual audience, meaning we reduced congestion in certain areas,” Wright explains.

Despite the high connectivity numbers, Wright says COP26 remained an in-person event. The digital layer served to enhance the attendee experience. For example, attendees could schedule a daily calendar of events via the COP26 app, while another function made it possible to find and connect with attendees with shared interests. The network also supported a huge rise in social media broadcasting. “Networking is a huge part of in-person events, but digital can make that easier,” says Wright. “We designed the space to encourage informal gatherings and chance encounters. Not everything has to be scheduled.”

Summarising the successes of the event, Wright continued, “Operationally, there is a huge amount we can be proud of. Post-event, we’re all excited about the upward trajectory of digital functionality. We’ve demonstrated there are many ways technology can enhance the live event experience, not simply act as a contingency.

“International engagement and multilateralism are central to the world being able to tackle a range of challenges including climate, health, and conflict. It’s clear from the COP26 experience that in-person meetings are needed to reach agreement. But it is not an either-or situation. As COP26 showed, a strong virtual/digital element to in-person meetings can help increase success.”

## Learn More

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## Product list

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[Legislate for Webex](#)

[Cisco Collaboration Endpoints](#)

[Network Analytics](#)