

NDC 101: A Guide to Nationally Determined Contributions



In a world facing the intensifying impacts of climate change, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) represent the most crucial promise from each country to safeguard our future. Understanding these commitments is key to holding nations accountable and driving global change.

What are Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)?

According to the United Nations, Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs, are national climate action plans by each country under the Paris Agreement. A country's NDC outlines how it plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to help meet the global goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5C and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The Paris Agreement requires that NDCs are updated every five years with increasingly higher ambition, taking into consideration each country's capacity.

After the original NDCs in 2015, and the second round in 2020/2021, the next round of NDCs – “NDCs 3.0” – are due in early 2025 and will detail countries' intended climate actions through 2035. These new NDCs will take into account the Global Stocktake, which evaluated global progress on achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, intended to help policymakers and stakeholders strengthen their climate policies and commitments.

Why Are NDCs Important for Fighting Climate Change?

Firstly, NDCs matter because they reinforce the global goals agreed under the Paris Agreement and show exactly what each country is committing to reach these goals. They show us how much each Party aims to reduce their GHG emissions, by when, and which actions they will implement to get there. Taken collectively, NDCs can also demonstrate how close (or far) the world is to meeting our collective climate goals.

Secondly, NDCs also establish political support for specific climate actions, sending an important signal about the country's commitment to a zero-carbon future. This can help drive the social and economic changes needed to meet national climate goals, including spurring investment from a wide variety of sources (public, private, national and international).

In addition, according to the World Resources Institute, NDCs can contribute to achieving countries' longer-term climate and development priorities. For example, near-term actions to reduce emissions laid out in a country's NDC should align with any mid-century net-zero targets in its ["long-term low-emissions development strategy" \(LT-LEDS\)](#). NDCs can also support the implementation of countries' [National Adaptation Plans](#), such as by outlining actions to make key sectors, like energy and agriculture, more resilient to climate shocks.

The Case of Japan

Japan's Commitment

Japan aims to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 46% in fiscal year 2030 relative to 2013 levels—a significant increase from its previous target of 26%, set in its 2015 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). Additionally, Japan has stated it will continue efforts to meet a goal of 50% emissions reduction by 2030. However, this goal is severely insufficient given the country's historical emissions and carbon budget. The NDC encompasses all sectors and greenhouse gases, including:

- Energy-related CO₂ emissions: spanning industry, commercial, residential, transportation, and energy conversion sectors.
- Industrial processes and product use
- Agriculture
- Waste management
- Land use, land-use change, and forestry (LULUCF)

Key Policies

Green Transformation (GX) Basic Policy: Japan introduced its GX Policy in February 2023, signifying a significant shift towards clean energy and decarbonization. The GX policy is a mix of fiscal and policy measures with a potential budget of roughly \$1Tn (150 trillion yen) that outlines a roadmap for the next decade while fostering economic growth.

Strategic Energy Plan: Created by The Government of Japan as the framework of Japan's energy policy under the Basic Act on Energy Policy. The Sixth Strategic Energy Plan agreed in 2021 has been formulated with two key themes: achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 and the greenhouse gas emission reduction target, and ensuring stable energy supply and reducing its costs while taking action against climate change. Under the plan, renewables should account for 36-38% of power supplies in 2030, double 2019's level and well above its previous 2030 target for 22-24%.

Japan's Challenges

The Climate Action Tracker rates Japan's policies and actions towards NDCs as "Insufficient", citing the deficiencies of the Green Transformation (GX) Basic Policy, which does not prioritize ambitious decarbonization targets. The new strategy provides no details on the expected emission reductions for 2030 and 2050. There are also concerns that the carbon pricing scheme envisioned by the government will not be effective in reducing Japan's emissions. It remains unclear whether the emissions trading scheme planned for 2026 will still be based on voluntary participation, and the carbon levy, which will only be implemented in 2028, is expected to be set at a low level. Furthermore, the GX Basic Policy still promotes the development of so-called "clean coal" technologies, such as Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technologies, ammonia and hydrogen co-firing in the power sector.

History of NDCs: Key Milestones in the Past 20 Years

❖ 2005: Kyoto Protocol Enters into Force

The Kyoto Protocol was a binding international treaty that set targets for industrialized countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It laid the groundwork for global climate agreements but had limitations, particularly as it only imposed obligations on developed nations.

❖ 2009: Copenhagen Accord

At COP15, the Copenhagen Accord was established. Although it wasn't legally binding, it was the first time both developed and developing countries agreed to submit voluntary emission reduction targets. This set the stage for the Paris Agreement's bottom-up approach.

❖ 2011: Durban Platform for Enhanced Action

At COP17, nations agreed to negotiate a new legal framework involving both developed and developing countries. This was a key turning point, leading to the Paris Agreement and the birth of NDCs, emphasizing inclusivity in climate action.

❖ 2015: Paris Agreement Adopted

Adopted at COP21, the Paris Agreement officially introduced NDCs. It shifted from the Kyoto Protocol by requiring all countries—both developed and developing—to set their own climate targets, aiming to limit global warming to below 2°C, ideally to 1.5°C.

❖ 2020: First NDC Submission Cycle

Countries were required to submit their first NDCs by 2020, marking the first round of commitments under the Paris Agreement. Countries outlined their climate goals based on national circumstances and capabilities.

❖ 2021: Glasgow Climate Pact

At COP26, renewed commitments were made to strengthen NDCs. The Glasgow Climate Pact emphasized the need for more ambitious climate targets, pushing countries to update their NDCs by 2022 to align with the 1.5°C target.

❖ 2023: Global Stocktake

The first Global Stocktake, a key element of the Paris Agreement, took place in 2023. It reviewed collective progress towards climate goals, assessing the effectiveness of current NDCs and encouraging countries to raise ambition in their next submissions.