



Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC)  
Global Outlook Report 2021

# The State of Climate Ambition



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Designer: Peter Ørntoft  
Editor: Florence Marchal

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## Acronyms

AFOLU	Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use
AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
BAU	Business as Usual
CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon dioxide
COP	Conference of the Parties
FACS	Food and Agricultural Commodity Systems
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
HLDE	High-level Dialogue on Energy
IEA	International Energy Agency
ILO	International Labor Organization
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
ITMO	Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes
IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LEDs	Low Emission Development Strategy
LTS	Long Term Strategy
LULUCF	Land-Use Change and Forestry
MRV	Measurement, reporting and verification
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NBS	Nature-based solutions
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SLCPs	Short-Lived Climate Pollutants
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

# Foreword

Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time: a crosscutting, multidimensional threat multiplier. The most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report confirms that climate change is now rapid, intensifying, and widespread. The United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) first children's climate risk index estimates that roughly one billion children – nearly half the world's 2.2 billion children – live in countries extremely vulnerable to climate change's impacts. Cumulatively, this signals a moment of reckoning for humanity.

We are in the race of our lives, with only days remaining until new climate talks begin under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP26). We must secure consensus from all countries to keep the 1.5-degree Celsius (°C) goal within reach and we must also ensure adequate support is in place for all countries to respond to growing climate impacts, ultimately to maintain hope in our shared future on our blue planet.

It is heartening to see in this report that there is a recognition of the climate crisis. The majority of countries are doing their part. Multilateralism is working. The Paris Agreement's ratchet mechanism is working – even though there is much more that we must do.

The COVID-19 pandemic has however overwhelmed States' capacities, just when they were needed most to address our climate priorities. Without global solidarity and innovative solutions to tackle COVID-19's impacts, all countries risk losing hard-won development gains, as well as losing the chance to develop the capacities needed to urgently act for our planet's climate health.

While the UNFCCC is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change, the United Nations General Assembly has a critical role in creating a space to foster political consensus, raise awareness, give strategic direction to the United Nations system and forge multi-sectoral partnerships among the broader global community for the scale and breadth of ambition needed to secure humanity's future.

Therefore, we find much that is useful in this report in terms of where we need to direct our energies. The report shows that one area where we can all improve is ensuring that just transition efforts are the centrepiece of climate action. We will not achieve the transformational change required unless we have the buy-in of the private sector and workers.

The report demonstrates that countries have made deliberate and concerted efforts to engage policymakers, the private sector and citizens through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. It is also pleasing to note the efforts being made to reach out to youth, who are rapidly becoming disaffected by our climate inaction.

The report makes clear – as we have always known – that finance remains a hurdle for climate ambition. But this barrier can be easily resolved if we recognise and treat climate change as the crisis that it is.

A loss of hope in climate action is at an all-time high globally, especially among youth. A sustained sense of despair, leading to public apathy and inaction, would not augur well for humanity's future, especially at this turning point that will determine our future for the decades to come.

This report recognizes that there is broad commitment to the notion of planet, prosperity and people, but now we need the political will for a transformational climate action that will create the pathway for a cleaner, greener and bluer planet.



**His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid**  
President of the 76th Session of the  
United Nations General Assembly



# Foreword

In 2019, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UNFCCC set out to examine the world's intended level of ambition for tackling climate change. The resulting report, [The Heat Is On](#), stated that 2020 would be a pivotal year to galvanise support for bold climate action so that greater ambition would be locked-in as quickly as possible. "In order to reach net-zero carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions by 2050, decisions need to be taken and enacted within the next two years," it argued.

This 2021 NDC Global Outlook report examines how far the world has progressed on this climate ambition. Despite many challenges, it demonstrates that there are many reasons to be hopeful for the future.

The number of countries that have enhanced their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) or intend to do so – by strengthening greenhouse gas emission reduction targets and/or adaptation goals – rose from 75 countries in 2019 to 178 in 2021. And most countries have abided by the key principle to submit increasingly ambitious NDCs every five years. The Paris Agreement's "ratchet mechanism" is working.

UNDP has been the heartbeat of the NDC enhancement process in developing countries across the world. In 2019, it made an ambitious pledge to support at least 100 countries to enhance their NDCs through our Climate Promise. In 2021, 120 countries and 35 partners are now part of the Climate Promise, the world's largest offer of its kind.

As a result of this support, governments are taking increasingly bold steps to decarbonize and take decisive climate action. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a radical re-think of deeply ingrained approaches. Consider Lao PDR, for instance, which is using its NDC to create a circular economy that will help to "design out" pollution and shape a low-carbon future. Countries such as Nigeria, Tunisia, Serbia, Chile, and Indonesia are promoting closer linkages between COVID-19 recovery and climate ambition. Over 70 countries are leveraging their enhanced NDCs to un-lock new investments in key areas like health, education,

clean energy, food and agriculture and nature. And countries are using the NDC revision process to innovate. Ecuador, Honduras, and Paraguay are exploring carbon market opportunities for the forest sector, for example.

The next phase of the Climate Promise, From Pledge to Impact, will increase our support to countries to accelerate the implementation of their NDCs. That involves boosting the connection between NDCs, sustainable development plans, and credible net-zero pathways. UNDP will also continue to innovate and explore, using tools like the [Peoples' Climate Vote](#) to engage more people on climate solutions. And we will scale-up our ability to share solutions amongst countries to drive forward an equitable and just transition.

On behalf of UNDP, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the NDC Partnership and its implementing partners, our UN partners including UNFCCC, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), as well as the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). I would also like to thank the European Union, Germany, Sweden, Spain, and Italy – early investors in this work – alongside emerging partners including Belgium and Iceland, as well as UNDP's core financing partners who make this work possible.

The initiatives and solutions detailed in the 2021 NDC Global Outlook report demonstrate that countries and communities across the globe are now taking up the baton for decisive climate action. With the Sustainable Development Goals helping to guide us out of this climate crisis, the entire UN family and its partners will continue to offer the level of support that is needed at this crossroads for people and planet.



**Mr. Achim Steiner**  
UNDP Administrator

**“This 2021 NDC Global Outlook report examines how far the world has progressed on this climate ambition. Despite many challenges, it demonstrates that there are many reasons to be hopeful for the future.”**



# Executive summary

Against a backdrop of increasing scientific concern and public awareness about the climate crisis, UNDP set out to review if policymakers were keeping the promises they made in 2019 when the global state of climate ambition was assessed with UNFCCC in the first NDC Global Outlook report, *The Heat is On*. We were curious. *Is the Paris Agreement working? And if yes, then who is doing the work? Which countries are leading the way on ambition – and which ones are falling behind?*

UNDP had also launched the *Climate Promise* initiative at the UN Climate Ambition Summit in September 2019 as a commitment to ensuring that lack of funds and/or capacity would not be a barrier for any developing country that wished to prepare a more ambitious national climate pledge, or NDC. The *Climate Promise* quickly became the world's largest offer of support to countries for the NDC revision process.

At that time, there was no warning that the world would soon be facing a global health pandemic and that UN climate negotiations would be postponed a full year to November 2021 in Glasgow. But even as countries began to indicate that they would miss the original UNFCCC deadline of December 2020 for submission of

## The Paris Agreement's "ratchet mechanism" is working ...

On the surface, the overall global trend of climate ambition appears promising. A key principle of the Paris Agreement adopted in 2015 was that nations would "ratchet up" their efforts to combat climate change every five years. The aim is to demonstrate a progression beyond the previous pledge, and to reflect a country's "highest possible ambition."

**Figure 1. Ladder of ambition 2019 vs 2021**

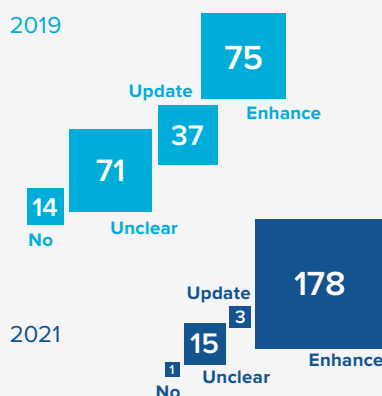


Figure 1 compares global ambition intentions in 2019 to 2021. The number of countries intending to enhance their NDCs – either by increasing their GHG emission

Turkey in 2021, while Iraq is well-advanced towards that aim. This leaves only four countries out of 197 still pending: Eritrea, Iran, Libya, and Yemen. For all UNFCCC ratification dates, see [here](#).

## NDC submissions are strongly aligned to UNFCCC deadlines

The COVID-19 health pandemic left most countries grappling with the timing of their NDC submissions, as government priorities shifted to minimizing the economic fall-out and human impact of a world in lockdown. Despite this major challenge, as of 12 October 2021, 143 countries had submitted second-generation NDCs to the UNFCCC (including four interim NDCs) – a significant increase from the two that had submitted by September 2019. It is anticipated that 38 more countries will submit NDCs by the end of 2021, with the majority still aiming to do so by the COP26 negotiations in Glasgow in November. As shown in Figure 3, this would bring the total number of submitted second-generation NDCs to 181 – representing 92% of all Parties to the Paris Agreement.

The timing of NDC submissions aligns strongly with deadlines established by the UNFCCC for inclusion of NDCs in the NDC synthesis report. At the end of 2019, four countries had submitted second-generation NDCs, but by December 2020 – which was when COP26 was initially expected to take place – 67 more countries had made submissions, of which 84% were submitted in Q4. Similarly, in 2021, 40 countries submitted NDCs (excluding interim submissions) by the UNFCCC deadline of 30 July for inclusion in its synthesis report and an additional 32 countries made a 12 October deadline to be included in an update to the report.

... but the world needs even greater

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