

Zeroing in on net zero

UNEP's Emissions Gap Report 2021 finds that annual greenhouse gas emissions need to almost halve by 2030 to limit global warming to 1.5°C, but the updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement are still insufficient. This factsheet looks at how net-zero pledges can further reduce greenhouse gas emissions and catch up on climate action.

Why are net-zero pledges important?

The report shows that new or updated NDCs and other mitigation pledges for 2030 give a 66% chance of the world hitting a global temperature rise of 2.7°C. To keep global warming below 1.5°C this century, the world needs to urgently put additional plans and action in place to almost halve annual greenhouse gas emissions in the next eight years. Net-zero plans, if implemented effectively and reflected in NDCs, could go a long way to closing the gap.

What is the status of net-zero pledges?

49 countries plus the EU have pledged a net-zero target. This covers:

>1/2

over half of
global domestic
greenhouse gas
emissions

>1/2

over half of
gross domestic
product

1/3

a third of the
global population

11 targets are enshrined in law, covering 12% of global emissions.



If implemented effectively and in addition to the unconditional NDCs, net-zero targets could reduce global warming projections by about 0.5°C relative to unconditional NDCs, thus coming closer to meeting the 2°C goal of the Paris Agreement.

However, climate plans of many countries delay action until after 2030.

Twelve G20 members have pledged a net-zero target, but they are still highly ambiguous. Few of the G20 members' NDC targets are consistent with achieving net-zero emissions by around mid-century.

Of the nine G20 countries for which both a net-zero target and an NDC assessment was available, only five have NDC targets that put the country's domestic emissions onto a direct, linear path towards achieving their net-zero targets.

What do governments need to do to make net-zero pledges work?

More G20 members – and indeed all countries – should pledge net-zero emissions.

All countries should increase the robustness of their net-zero pledges.

All net-zero targets should be backed up by near-term actions that give confidence they can be achieved.

An illustration of a woman in a yellow top and red skirt carrying a child in a blue outfit on her back. They are walking in a city with industrial smokestacks in the background. One large smokestack is prominent on the right, emitting grey smoke. The scene is set against a light blue sky with stylized clouds.

All countries need to make their net-zero plans more concrete and rapidly begin implementing policies and putting them into action.