

# Meeting climate commitments

Transforming cities and nations



How subnational and national governments can work together to achieve Nationally Determined Contributions and honour the Paris Agreement

## THE HEART OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT

# Understanding Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

In 2015, a historic moment in the fight to tackle climate change occurred. For the first time, 196 countries (including the European Union) came together and voluntarily agreed to limit global warming by entering into a legally binding international treaty on climate change. All signatory countries to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) met in Paris, for the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21), and adopted a clear strategy to curb global GHG emissions, strengthen the ability of countries to adapt to the impacts of climate change and aim for GHG emissions to peak as soon as possible. The agreement that was adopted between signatories came to be known as the “Paris Agreement”.

### Central to the Paris Agreement were three overarching goals:

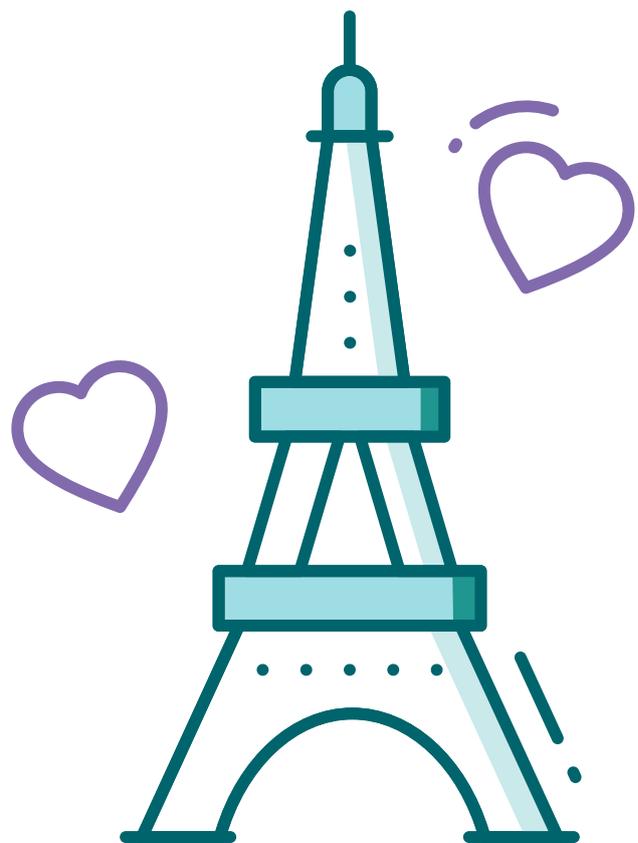
- i. Limit global temperature increase to 2°C this century, and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels
- ii. Increase the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, fostering climate resilience and low GHG emissions development, in a way that protects food production
- iii. Ensure financial flows are consistent with low emissions pathways and climate-resilient development

Since countries have different circumstances, resources and abilities, the Paris Agreement was formulated so that each country determined their own targets and contributions to the overarching three goals. In this way, **the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)** came into effect, whereby countries communicated domestic actions towards reducing GHG emissions to reach the PA targets, and those actions taken to build resilience to climate impacts. The premise behind the INDCs was based not only on what needed to be done to combat increasing global GHG emissions and adapt to climate fallout *at a global level*, but on what each country *could do* individually to grow their economies and keep on track with *developmental needs in parallel with climate change commitments*. Every five years, a global stocktake will occur to assess the collective progress of all Parties to the global targets of the PA, with the first taking place in 2023.

*The Paris Agreement (PA) was a landmark moment because it was the first time both developing and developed countries agreed to, and were bound by, a common and ambitious way forward in the fight against climate change and its impacts.*

Following national ratification of the Paris Agreement, a country's INDC was automatically converted into a NDC. Under the Paris Agreement, each Party shall revise their NDC every five years. The Paris Agreement requires that each successive NDC will reflect both a progression beyond the current NDC commitments, and include the country's highest possible ambition.

***The NDCs thus act as a vehicle for long-term, sustainable transformation, and bring together a coherent approach that meets both national and international needs and commitments.***



# Timeline

YEAR	RATIFICATION OF PARIS AGREEMENT & EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF NDCS		
2015	Paris Agreement COP21		
2016	Paris Agreement Signing Ceremony in New York 22 April 2016. 175 nations sign on the day and open for 1 year	National Ratification of the Paris Agreement and submission of first NDC to UNFCCC registry	
	4 November 2016: Paris Agreement enters into force when 55% of parties covering 55% of global emissions ratify		
2018	IPCC 1.5°C report What needs to happen to reach 1.5°C goal above and beyond first NDC pledge		
	COP24 Facilitative Dialogue Discussion of 1.5°C long-term goal. Informs preparation of second NDC		
	NDC updating and long-term goals		Five-yearly review
2020	2nd NDC COP26 second round NDCs. New NDC if first NDC runs to 2025, or updated NDC if first NDC runs to 2030		
2023			COP29 First Global Stocktake to inform third round of NDCs. This marks the start of a "review & ratchet" cycle to increase ambition
2025	3rd NDC COP31 third round of NDCs (considering first global stocktake findings)		
2028			COP34 Second Global Stocktake to inform fourth round of NDCs
2030			4th NDC COP36 Fourth round of NDCs (considering second global stocktake findings)
2035	Long Term Goal Combine impact of NDCs to keep warming as far as possible below 2°C, with aim of 1.5°C.		
2040			
2045			

# Terminology

- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** An international environmental treaty addressing climate change, which entered into force on 21 March 1994. As of December 2020, 197 countries have ratified the Convention, and are called Parties to the Convention. The Convention aims to stabilise greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions concentrations "at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human induced) interference with the climate system". Implementation measures of the UNFCCC include the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, which superseded the Kyoto Protocol in 2016.
- The Conference of the Parties (COP)** The supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC. It is the collective, annual meeting of all signatory countries (or Parties) to the UNFCCC processes. All countries that are Parties to the Convention are represented at the COP, where a key task is to review the national communications, such as reporting on the NDCs, submitted by signatories. At every COP, the measures taken by Parties and the progress made in achieving the overarching goals of the UNFCCC are assessed.
- Ratification** By signing a treaty, such as the Paris Agreement, a country expresses the intention to comply with the agreements of the treaty. Thereafter, once approval is granted under a state's own due national processes – such as parliamentary approval – the country will notify other Parties that they consent to be bound by the treaty. This is known as ratification.
- The Enhanced transparency framework (ETF)** was established under the Paris Agreement (PA), whereby all signatories – or Parties – will report in a transparent way on mitigation and adaptation actions, and support received. The ETF process will begin in 2024, and will feed into the global stocktake, which assesses the collective progress of all Parties to the PA every five years.

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## reasons why cities are key in meeting climate commitments



The Paris Agreement specifically calls on subnational governments in the fight against climate change. Indeed, many countries' NDC targets are reliant on sector-based commitments that have urban relevance for subnational authorities.



Cities account for 80% of global GDP, consume the vast majority of energy, and are responsible for 70% of global energy-related GHG emissions. Sub-national governments are closest to the consumption and growth pathways that generate the world's GHG emissions. Over 50% of the global population lives in urban areas today, and it is predicted that by 2050, 70% or more of the global population will live in cities.



In 2015, the World Bank estimated that global average annual losses from both weather-related and other disasters in cities was estimated at approximately US\$314 billion. Climate-related disasters are most often concentrated in urban or peri-urban areas and disproportionately affect the most poor and vulnerable communities.



Subnational governments carry the mandate to serve their communities and deliver services in contextually appropriate ways. They are the primary implementers of localised actions, **and** the 'first responders' to the crises associated with climate change. Cities can be said to be the main cause of climate change, as well as the best solution to climate change.



Urban centres are where inclusive economic, development and climate change policies intersect. International and national commitments to combat climate change provide the overarching framework, but real change happens in cities. It falls to city officials to activate and implement transformative change and drive sustainable, low-emission and resilient development.



Good governance enables subnational governments to adequately monitor and report on activities and how they contribute to development objectives. Global – and national – climate finance favours projects and programmes that achieve this. Thus, good governance practices, and a strong enabling policy environment, enhances financial flows.



Urban planning is a critical issue in light of climate change, especially due to urbanisation and increasing demands on cities by their populations. This especially for Africa, where there is huge domestic migration.



By implementing localised NDC activities, subnational governments can match national perspectives and commitments to the real needs on the ground, in order to ultimately recalibrate current business-as-usual systems for transformative change.



Integrated development and spatial planning at a local level is the primary mechanism for delivering climate action while strengthened fiscal capacities and systems will provide a sustainable platform for transformative action where it is most needed. Implementation of climate change solutions, if well considered and aligned with development goals, can have strong ancillary benefits.



Low-carbon, sustainable pathways for cities will not only help combat climate change, but will also increase resilience and produce the best possible economic outcomes for both people and planet in the long-term. Well-managed, resilient cities can accelerate economic growth and employment, create liveable environments for their citizens, attract investment, drive innovation and break urban poverty cycles.

## Localised actions and how they make a difference

### Stats and facts from around the world



**Improving transport and pedestrian infrastructure:** Well-designed cities with good public transport and infrastructure can improve options for mobility, encouraging walking, cycling, or the use of trains or buses, which decreases carbon emissions and improves air quality. Using a bicycle instead of a car for transport saves 150g of CO<sub>2</sub> per kilometre; every 7kms by bicycle (rather than by car) saves 1kg of CO<sub>2</sub>. If bikes and e-bikes could account for 14% of urban miles travelled by 2050 it could save approximately 11% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.



**Increasing urban reforestation:** Urban reforestation can address air pollution, habitat loss, environmental degradation, soil and stormwater remediation, heat waves, carbon sequestration and quality-of-life for cities. In a recent study across 10 of the world's megacities, researchers estimate that tree cover has an average annual payoff of US \$505 million in decreased air pollution, improved stormwater remediation, savings in heating and cooling costs, and CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration.



**Improved waste management:** All waste and consumed goods result in GHG emissions, with waste disposal responsible for 5% of global GHG emissions. Most products and materials contain embedded GHG emissions throughout their lifespan, through their extraction, manufacturing, packaging, distribution and use, as well as disposal of the resulting waste. By taking a low-waste approach, through minimising, recovering and treating waste, cities can save money, protect the local environment, build resilience to climate change, and curb emissions by 15–20%. In addition, low waste strategies also create 10 times more jobs in the waste sector on average than landfilling or incineration.

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE



# What makes a robust NDC?

A robust NDC shows the world that a country takes international climate change commitments seriously.

### IT SHOULD:



Follow a transparent, inclusive development process to build trust with domestic and international stakeholders

Clearly unpack the country-specific risks and vulnerabilities

Outline the national context and priorities



Include ambitious, specific and measurable targets across sectors, for both adaptation and mitigation activities, that meet country priorities for development

Specify which targets are conditional and which are non-conditional



Include targets, measures and policies that are children and/or youth-sensitive

Identify steps for an inclusive, just transition of the workforce

*“Cities and regions may also be powerhouses of ambitious mitigation and adaptation measures that are hard to legislate and implement at the national level”.*

*– Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C*

Articulate the country’s climate finance strategies and needs, including costing of investment requirements, and means of implementation



Ensure NDCs align with national, sectoral or subnational development strategies, including the SDGs

Hold national and subnational governments accountable

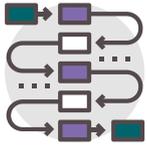


Incorporate transparent reporting and collaborative processes so stakeholders, donors and the international community can track progress

Be submitted timeously and clearly communicated so climate related activities can be assessed on their contribution to global emission reductions and climate resilience



Ultimately lead to transformation in carbon-intensive sectors and industries, while promoting transformational change



# How to integrate subnational government into the NDC process

## 1. Planning

This is when officials establish emission targets, analyse vulnerabilities, identify adaptation options and lay the foundation for NDC implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The process should be **mutually supportive** between subnational and national levels. It should:

- **Include and engage diverse stakeholders**, including academia, civil society and the private sector
- Identify **existing collaboration mechanisms** that can facilitate linkages between national and subnational planning processes
- Identify the **capacity needs and gaps** for engaging subnational government in the planning processes
- **Unpack mandates** at both subnational and national levels
- Establish an **NDC focal person** at the subnational level
- Allow national government to establish a **subnational-level NDC implementation coordination team** that includes multiple sectors and seeks gender balance
- Determine **the information needed** between national and subnational actors to facilitate effective planning at different levels
- Ensure that **subnational perspectives are reflected** in the NDC

## 2. Implementation

This is when prioritised actions are implemented. A wide range of actors, including government ministries, subnational authorities, civil society organisations, the private sector and communities will implement actions. The context-specific nature of adaptation specifically means that much of the implementation will occur at subnational levels with the involvement of local organisations and communities. Coordinated implementation should:

- Identify synergies between national and subnational policies with common. The **process of alignment** involves **intentional coordination** and collaboration among government actors across ministries and levels
- Define the team's **roles and responsibilities**, ensuring appropriate expertise and official responsibilities across adaptation and mitigation actions
- Ensure needed institutional arrangements and coordinated actions at different levels, and **enable transfer of finance and other resources and services**
- Facilitate capacity development, enabling all stakeholders to fulfil their roles and responsibilities
- Constantly share information between the different levels to **support efficient and effective approaches to implementation**

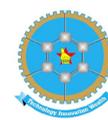
## 3. Monitoring and Evaluation

Both Monitoring, Reporting & Verification (MRV) for mitigation and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) for adaptation aim to assess successful implementation of policies, plans or actions as well as the changes that result from these achievements. Mitigation usually considers greenhouse gas emissions data and adaptation usually considers communities, ecosystems or vulnerable groups. The process should ensure:

- Results and lessons learnt from subnational levels are **captured and integrated** into ongoing decision-making and future NDC planning
- National-level results and **lessons learnt are shared** to inform planning and implementation at subnational levels
- The overarching frameworks for M&E and MRV developed at national level should include appropriate institutional arrangements to **facilitate linkages** with subnational governments
- Capacity development, **guidance and technical assistance** takes place to establish MRV and M&E systems at subnational levels
- **Indigenous and locally generated information** is captured at subnational authorities
- All information is synthesised and communicated downwards to the subnational governments **to inform implementation and updates to plans**

## Enabling factors for integration

	Planning	Implementation	Monitoring, Reporting and evaluation
Institutional arrangements	Collaboration mechanism exist to link national and subnational government planning processes	Mechanisms and resources are allocated for ongoing coordination between levels of government	Mechanisms to link national and subnational MRV and M&E systems
Information sharing	Relevant information is shared between national and subnational governments to facilitate effective planning	Stakeholders have the information they require for efficient and effective implementation of adaptation and mitigation actions	Information is generated and exchanged between national and subnational levels on a regular basis
Capacity development	Stakeholders at all levels have the capacity to engage in coordinated planning processes	Subnational authorities have capacity for long-term planning and implementation of actions	Subnational governments have the capacity to monitor and evaluate mitigation and adaptation actions



**ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability** is a global network of more than 1,750 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in 100+ countries, we influence sustainability policy and drive local action for low emission, nature-based, equitable, resilient and circular development. Our Members and team of experts work together through peer exchange, partnerships and capacity building to create systemic change for urban sustainability.

At ICLEI Africa, we serve our African members, working with cities and regions in more than 25 countries across the continent. We offer a variety of urban sustainability solutions through our dynamic and passionate team of skilled professionals.

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*Disclaimer: The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the IDRC or its Board of Governors.*