



Briefing paper

# **Pledges and policies: are we on track to meet climate goals?**

2025

# Contents

KEY POINTS	3
REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS: PLEDGES OR POLICIES?	3
HOW CREDIBLE ARE NET ZERO TARGETS?	3
WHAT LEVEL OF TEMPERATURE RISE IS EXPECTED BASED ON CURRENT PLEDGES AND POLICIES?	4
THE NEED FOR CREDIBLE CLIMATE MITIGATION ACTION	6
THE UK'S POLICIES AND PLEDGES	6

## Key points:

- Current pledges and policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions put the world on a high-risk climate track, towards warming levels of 2.8°C by the end of this century.
- In the most optimistic assessment, where all current climate pledges and policies are delivered, temperatures are projected to be kept to 1.9°C over the 21st century.

## Reducing greenhouse gas emissions: pledges or policies?

The Paris Agreement, with its commitment to “pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels” has been ratified by almost every country in the world. In order to meet this ambition, countries have put forward various pledges (promises of future action) and translate these into policies (where governments have already legislated to affect reductions in emissions).

### Pledges:

- **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs):** Under the Paris Agreement, countries are required to develop national climate pledges that set out what their contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions will be. These are usually short- to medium-term plans and must be updated and “ratcheted up” at least every five years. The next round of improvements is was due in February 2025 (however, as of November 2025, only 72 countries had done so). For example, the [UK’s NDC](#) includes a commitment to reduce emissions by at least 81% by 2035 (compared to 1990 levels).
- **Net Zero targets:** As of October 2025, [141 countries](#) also have longer-term net zero targets. For example, the UK has a target to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

### Policies:

- **Emission reduction policies:** these are legislative decisions, executive orders or equivalent that represent *active steps* that countries are taking to reduce emissions. Examples of policies that the UK has implemented include (among many others) the Boiler Upgrade Scheme heat pump grant, Building Regulations minimum energy performance standards and Contracts for Difference to support low-carbon electricity.

## How credible are net zero targets?

Although many countries have net zero targets, some are more credible than others. One way of assessing the credibility of climate pledges is to use the following criteria:

1. **Is the target legally binding?** Legally binding targets are less susceptible to changes resulting from political turnover and tend to promote cross-government coordination.
2. **Is the target accompanied by a published implementation plan?** Implementation plans are crucial to clarify which changes are needed, identify necessary resources and assign responsibility for action.
3. **Is the country's current policy trajectory already putting its emissions projections on a clear downward path by 2030?** Domestic policies provide a more reliable indication of the level of action a country is likely to make (although even these are still subject to successful implementation).

In the assessment in Table 1, 'credible' net-zero pledges are defined as those that meet criteria 2 and 3 from this list.

## What level of temperature rise is expected based on current pledges and policies?

Projections of likely future levels of global warming depend on how much confidence we have that countries will deliver on the pledges they have made. If we are pessimistic and assume that the less credible targets will not be delivered, then we can expect to see more modest reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. If, on the other hand, we are optimistic and assume that everyone delivers on the promises they have made, then we can anticipate a larger reduction in emissions.

Table 1 shows the results of future global warming projections based on five different scenarios assessed in the UNEP's most recent [Emissions Gap Report](#). These range from the most pessimistic scenario—where only current near-term domestic policies are delivered—through to the most optimistic view where all net-zero targets and all NDCs come through.

*Table 1: Future global warming scenarios based on current global pledges and policies*

Scenario	Peak warming above pre-industrial levels throughout the twenty-first century (°C)*
<b>Current policies continuing (most conservative scenario)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate mitigations that have been adopted and implemented as of November 2024 (and include the policy rollback in the United States of American as of September 2025)</li> </ul>	2.8°C
<b>Unconditional NDCs continuing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current policies plus</li> <li>all NDCs that do not depend on explicit external support (cut-off date: 30 September 2025)</li> </ul>	2.5°C

<b>Conditional NDCs continuing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current policies</li> <li>• all NDCs that do not depend on explicit external support plus</li> <li>• NDCs for which implementation is contingent on receiving international support such as finance, technology transfer and/or capacity (cut-off date: 30 September 2025)</li> </ul>	2.3°C
<b>Unconditional NDCs and credible net-zero pledges</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current policies</li> <li>• all NDCs that do not depend on explicit external support plus</li> <li>• net-zero pledges after 2030 that have implementation plans and where current policies put short-term emissions on a downward path.</li> </ul>	2.5°C
<b>Conditional NDCs and all net-zero pledges (most optimistic case)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current policies</li> <li>• all NDCs that do not depend on explicit external support</li> <li>• NDCs for which implementation is contingent on receiving international support such as finance, technology transfer and/or capacity plus</li> <li>• All net-zero or other long-term low emissions development strategy pledges</li> </ul>	1.9°C

*\*projections with a 66% chance of warming*

Source: United Nations Environment Programme (2025 [Off Target](#) Nairobi).

The scenarios show that we are on a high-risk climate track. Even under the most optimistic scenario, the projected temperature increase is greater than the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement. More worryingly, only a small number of net-zero pledges currently meet the criteria to be considered as ‘credible’.

## The need for credible climate mitigation action

These results demonstrate that there is no time to lose. Countries were due to submit updated NDCs by February 2025. However, as of November 2025, only 72 had done so. They must show how they plan to cut emissions in line with a 1.5°C pathway, including by setting out ambitious plans to rapidly move away from fossil fuels and scale up clean alternatives to reduce emissions across all parts of the economy.

Setting, implementing and achieving emissions reduction targets is the best way to hedge against the potential disastrous impacts of climate change.

## The UK's policies and pledges

The UK has a legally binding long-term target to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It also has an NDC commitment to reduce emissions by at least 68% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels).

In its [2025 annual report to Parliament](#), the independent Climate Change Committee (CCC) found that for the requires emissions savings to achieve the 2023 NDC:

- Credible plans exist for 38%
- Some risks are attached to 23%
- Significant risks are attached to 20%
- Insufficient plans exist for 14%.

However, the Government has subsequently published its [Carbon budget and growth delivery plan](#), which has provided updated detail on plans to meet its carbon reduction goals.

The UK's 2035 NDC target is to reduce all greenhouse gas emissions by at least 81% by 2035, compared to 1990 levels. This would be in line with the UK providing a fair contribution towards limiting global warming to 1.5°C.

## Authors and contacts

This background briefing was written by:

- [Professor Joeri Rogelj](#), Director of Research, Grantham Institute, Imperial College
- [Dr Robin Lamboll](#), Centre for Environmental Policy, Imperial College
- Jenny Bird, Campaign Manager, Grantham Institute, Imperial College

Media enquiries: [grantham.media@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:grantham.media@imperial.ac.uk)

Policy enquiries: [j.bird@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:j.bird@imperial.ac.uk)

## Further reading

- United Nations Environment Programme (2025). [Emissions Gap Report 2025: Off target](#), Nairobi.
- HM Government (2025) [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's 2035 nationally Determined Contribution](#)
- HM Government (2025) [Carbon budget and growth delivery plan](#)
- Climate Change Committee (2025) [Progress in reducing emissions – 2025 report to Parliament](#)
- Climate Action Tracker [net zero target evaluations](#)
- Climate Watch [NDC Tracker](#)
- Rogelj, J., Fransen, T., den Elzen, M.G., Lamboll, R.D., Schumer, C., Kuramochi, T., Hans, F., Mooldijk, S. and Portugal-Pereira, J., 2023. [Credibility gap in net-zero climate targets leaves world at high risk](#). Science, 380(6649), pp.1014-1016.
- van de Ven, D.J., Mittal, S., Gambhir, A., Lamboll, R.D., Doukas, H., Giarola, S., Hawkes, A., Koasidis, K., Köberle, A.C., McJeon, H. and Perdana, S., 2023. [A multimodel analysis of post-Glasgow climate targets and feasibility challenges](#). Nature Climate Change, pp.1-9.

## Please cite as:

Rogelj, J., Lamboll, R., Brandmayr, C., and Bird, J. (2025). Pledges and policies: are we on track to meet climate goals?. Grantham Institute background briefing.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International License.

