



# United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: **Short Way to Go**

On 12 December 2020 the UK submitted their first NDC to the UNFCCC. In this, the UK commits to reduce economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by **at least 68% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels**. The UK mitigation target represents an ambition enhancement from its 2015 commitment as part of the EU NDC of at least 40% by 2030 (where the UK contribution implied by effort sharing is a reduction of 53% from 1990 levels).

The NDC is complemented by two further submissions to the UNFCCC. *The Adaptation Communication* sets out the UK's domestic and international ambition and action on adaptation and resilience, and the *Finance Biennial Communication* outlines the UK's climate finance commitments to developing countries. The main gaps in the UK's overall NDC relate to the lack of a structured consultation process with key stakeholders and the non-inclusion of aviation and shipping in the emissions reduction target despite recommendations from the Climate Change Committee.

Taking into account that the UK has large historical responsibility for the carbon already in the atmosphere and more capability than most countries to do something about the problem, our analysis considers that the UK NDC has a *short way to go* to become the NDC We Want.

## Advances

**Mitigation target:** The UK commitment to reduce economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by at least 68% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, aligns with the independent UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) advice which has a 2050 net-zero target in mind. The CCC has indicated this could be further strengthened in the future.

**Adaptation:** The NDC is complemented by an *Adaptation Communication*, which refers to adaptation objectives set out in separate National Adaptation Plans for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The focus is England, but it also contains plans for the Devolved Administrations – Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. It includes strategies on flooding and coastal erosion, terrestrial and marine environments, health, infrastructure, food security, and climate security. It also highlights that the England National Adaptation Plan sets out actions across a wide range of sectors, including on the natural environment, infrastructure, people and built environment, business and industry, and local government. The Communication mentions that notable adaptation progress is being undertaken in exploring and supporting the vital role of nature-based solutions; managing floods and coastal erosion; and transforming our financial sector to respond to and manage climate-related financial risks. All the National Adaptation Plans work within 5-year time horizons. The next England NAP will be published by 2023 and all NAPs will be updated by 2025

**Finance:** The UK submitted its *Finance Biennial Communication* in December 2020. It reaffirms doubling of climate finance, including to uplifts to the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and that this is additional finance. It has also introduced commitment to end UK public money to overseas fossil fuel projects – via UK Export Finance, Overseas Development Aid and Multilateral Development Banks rules. The Communication establishes a balanced split between mitigation and adaptation but has makes no reference to loss and damage. In the same period, during the Climate Ambition Summit, the UK restated the 2019 pledge of £11.6bn in International Climate Finance over the next five years (doubling) and announced a new £10m commitment to a multilateral Green Recovery Initiative, which will support developing countries to build back better.

**Nature-based Solutions:** The NDC mentions plans that address the ocean and marine environment and terrestrial biodiversity. The “vital role of NbS” is explicitly mentioned in the Adaptation Communication. However, there is insufficient information about how the UK will deliver the nature-based solutions to which it has committed in principle to get the UK’s mitigation efforts to net-zero by 2050. In January 2021 the Prime Minister committed to spending at least £3bn (of the UK’s existing commitment of £11.6bn for international climate finance) on nature and biodiversity over five years. The funding should deliver transformational change in protecting biodiversity-rich land and ocean, shifting to sustainable food production and supply, and supporting the livelihoods of the world’s poorest.

## Gaps

**Equity:** Civil society argued for a reduction target of at least 72% on 1990 levels to make up for the UK’s fair share of historical emissions (some ask for more than 100%). The UK should also recognize that it has a disproportionately large historical responsibility for the carbon already in the atmosphere and more capability than most countries to do something about the problem. Fair and ambitious leadership requires that, over and above its own net-zero pathway, the UK should contribute significantly to emission reductions in developing countries and support them to pursue alternative development pathways. This could take the form of a finance commitment or a commitment to deliver additional emission reductions abroad as part of a fair and ambitious approach. This could also take the form of, for example, supporting vulnerable countries to deliver additional emissions reductions that are outlined in the conditional parts of their NDCs or supporting nature-based solutions elsewhere.

While it is welcome that climate finance commitment is increasing and that a portion of this will recognise the importance of nature in tackling climate change, it is concerning that the support aimed at fighting poverty is reduced, as part of the overall aid budget cuts in 2020 and plans to cut the aid budget from 0.7% GNI to 0.5% from 2021.

**International aviation and shipping:** The inclusion of those sectors should be brought into future UK carbon budgets so that policies can be introduced (such as a frequent flier levy) to enable demand to be contained. In addition, ambitious policy and investment should be rolled out to support short and long-term cuts in emissions including investment in new technologies, fair carbon pricing (e.g. fuel tax) and new airport expansion should be conditional to the establishment of a credible decarbonisation pathway for the sector. The CCC has also consistently albeit, yet, unsuccessfully called for the inclusion of international aviation and shipping in UK climate targets.

**Participation and inclusiveness:** Although the UK mention some level of engagement with civil society, this is either ad-hoc depending on department/organization, or highly structured and infrequent, with little real interaction on the detail of the NDC and related documents. There was a Climate Assembly process run by Parliamentary committees, not by the government. In addition, there have been calls for evidence – particularly from the CCC, who do engage more actively than central government departments. Engagement could be deeper and wider, particularly ahead of the establishment of the Long-Term Strategy and ahead of COP26. Overall, public engagement should be more systematic as climate action becomes more and more part of people’s day-to-day lives.

**Policy and investment gaps:** Although the NDC has mainly followed the CCC's recommendations, which is commendable, there remain large policy and investment gaps. The CCC's annual report to Parliament in 2020 recommends that Ministers seize the opportunity to turn the COVID-19 crisis into a defining moment in the fight against climate change. Although some steps have been taken over the past year to support the transition to a net-zero economy and improve the UK's resilience to the impacts of climate change, much remains to be done in terms of policy progress.

| WWF's NDC rating grades | WWF checklist for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's 2020 NDC assessment       |
|-------------------------|--|
| NDC We Want             | Mitigation   |
| Short Way to Go         | Adaptation   |
| Some Way to Go          | Finance  |
| NDC We Don't Want       | Fostering system change  |
|                         | Inclusiveness and Participation  |
|                         | Contribution to Sustainable Development  |
|                         | Tracking progress  |
|                         | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's rating grade after assessment:  Short Way to Go |

**For more information**

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