

The EU too must revisit its 2030 climate pledge (NDC) as -55% is not compatible with 1.5°C

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One of the main outcomes of the Glasgow Climate Summit (COP26, November 2021) is the recognition that the world's governments are still failing to achieve the target they set themselves in Paris: to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C. When assessing the impact of national contributions (NDCs) that countries have submitted to the UN, the conclusion is that we are likely heading towards a temperature increase of 2.7°C by the end of this century (UNFCCC¹). When including announcements that have not (yet) been submitted to the UN, we are set to reach an increase of 2.6°C (UNEP²). And when adding already existing policies we might limit temperature rise to 2.4°C (CAT³). All of these assessments, which are based on the assumption that all pledges will be implemented, clearly show the world is set up to largely overshoot the 1.5°C target.

As a direct follow up to these assessments, all countries agreed in the Glasgow Climate Pact⁴ "to revisit and strengthen the 2030 targets in their nationally determined contributions as necessary to align with the Paris Agreement temperature goal by the end of 2022".

This engagement clearly also applies to the EU, and statements that the EU will not update its climate target are unacceptable⁵. The EU and its 27 Member States need to look how they can improve the current target of achieving an at least 55% reduction of net greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (as compared to 1990⁶). The discussions on the different legislative proposals that need to put this target into practice offer an ideal opportunity for the EU to discuss how to strengthen their target. To be aligned with the 1.5°C objective a greenhouse gas emission reduction target of at least -65% is needed.

Next to the fact that the EU refusing to revisit its 2030 climate target will likely rather negatively influence the trust and thus also the level of action of our international partners, below are **seven arguments** on why the EU's -55% NDC is not fit for 1.5°C and why both the proposed legislation and the NDC need to be revised to at least 65% by 2030.

1. All countries need to contribute, on the basis of equity

All of the above assessments make it clear that all countries need to contribute to closing the current gap between the 1.5°C commitment and planned national action, or as the Climate Action Tracker report states: "*Even with all new Glasgow pledges for 2030, we will emit roughly twice as much in 2030 as required for 1.5°. Therefore, all governments need to reconsider their targets.*"

While defining the contribution of each country is not an easy task, countries did agree in 1992 when the Framework Convention on Climate Change was agreed that countries would need to engage on the basis of

1 UNFCCC (2021). Nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement. Revised synthesis report by the secretariat. 25 October 2021. <http://unfccc.int/documents/307628>

2 UNEP (2021). The Heat Is On. A world of climate promises not yet delivered. Emissions Gap Report 2021. October 2021. <http://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2021>

3 CAT (2021). Glasgow's 2030 credibility gap: net zero's lip service to climate action. Warming Projections Global Update. November 2021. <http://climateactiontracker.org/publications/glasgows-2030-credibility-gap-net-zeros-lip-service-to-climate-action>

4 UNFCCC (2021). Decision 1/CMA.3. Glasgow Climate Pact. <http://unfccc.int/documents/310497>

5 see: www.politico.eu/article/eu-will-not-strengthen-climate-action-plan-in-2022/

6 All further references to the EU's 2030 greenhouse gas emission reduction target are expressed as compared to 1990. And unless explicit reference is made to 'net' emissions all numbers exclude emissions/removals from LULUCF

their (historic) responsibility for the problem and their capacity to act⁷. This clearly means the EU, with its greater than average responsibility and greater than average capacity needs to do more than average and more than most other countries in the world. For the EU, applying the equity principle needs to be translated in both strong domestic action to reduce emissions beyond average, and provision of substantial financial resources to help poorer countries to do their share (as well as to support adaptation and loss and damage action in these countries).

Moreover, countries agreed that each 2030 pledge (called NDCs or Nationally Determined Contributions) would need to indicate how a country "*considers that its intended nationally determined contribution is fair and ambitious*"⁸. The EU's NDC indeed addresses this issue (under a chapter called "fairness considerations, including reflecting on equity", but does not really indicate how its contribution fits the UNFCCC's equity principle. It says "*The IPCC Special report on Global Warming of 1.5°C shows that pathways limiting warming to 1.5°C typically achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions at global level in the second half of this century. This enhanced NDC is in line with the EU's agreed objective of achieving a climate-neutral EU by 2050. The EU therefore considers the enhanced NDC to be a fair contribution towards the global temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.*"⁹

2. The EU's current -55% target is assessed as 'Insufficient' by the Climate Action Tracker

The Climate Action Tracker (CAT) is an independent scientific assessment exercise that tracks government climate action, and measures it against the objectives of the Paris Agreement. CAT quantifies and evaluates climate change mitigation targets, policies and action. It also aggregates country action contribution to the global level, and develops sectoral analysis to illustrate required pathways for meeting the global temperature goals.

In its September 2021 assessment of the EU's 2030 climate target, Climate Action Tracker concludes: "*The CAT rates EU's climate targets, policies, and finance as "Insufficient". The "Insufficient" rating indicates that the EU's climate policies and commitments need substantial improvements to be consistent with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature limit. The EU's 2030 emissions reduction target and its policies and action are consistent with 2°C of warming when compared to modelled domestic pathways. The EU is not meeting its fair-share contributions to climate action. To improve its rating, the EU should strengthen its emissions reduction target to at least 62% below 1990 levels, adopt policies necessary to reach this goal, and significantly increase its support for climate action in developing and least developed countries.*"¹⁰

3. The EU's current proposals do not fit with its fair share of the global carbon budget

The Working Group 1 contribution to the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report¹¹ provides new estimates for the remaining global carbon budget. These estimates foresee a global remaining budget of 300 GtCO₂ to be emitted in the period from early 2020 till the world reaches net zero CO₂ emissions, for a likelihood of 83% to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C; and of 400 GtCO₂ for a 67% likelihood. When calculating the EU's carbon budget between 2020 and 2050 on the basis of both the EU's Climate Law and the current legislative proposals under the Fit for 55 package, the EU's carbon budget would be around 40 GtCO₂¹². This would

7 Referred to as "common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities", also taken up in the Paris Agreement and the Glasgow Climate Pact

8 UNFCCC (2014) Decision 1/CP.20. Lima Call for Climate Action. 14 December 2014. <http://unfccc.int/news/lima-call-for-climate-action-puts-world-on-track-to-paris-2015>

9 EU (2020). Update of the NDC of the European Union and its Member States. Submission by Germany and the European Commission on behalf of the EU and its Member States. 17 December 2020. [http://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NDCStaging/Pages/Search.aspx?k=European Union](http://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NDCStaging/Pages/Search.aspx?k=European+Union)

10 CAT (2021). Country assessment of the EU. Update 15 September 2021. <http://climateactiontracker.org/countries/eu>

11 IPCC(2021). Summary for Policy Makers. In: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group 1 to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. August 2021. <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/#SPM>

12 See: Trio, W (2021). Counting The Numbers: EU's carbon budget not compatible with 1.5°C target. December 2021. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/128PfmFQaleeGyldwFQcDFcpGCfTVP1S4ZKIO3c4LzHc/edit>

mean the EU, with around 5% of the world's population would use 10% to 13% of the remaining global budget. This clearly is not in line with the UNFCCC's equity principles. An alternative approach, based on the positions of Climate Action Network Europe (the federation of the region's climate NGOs) calling for emission reductions of at least 65% in 2030 and reaching net zero by 2040 would see the EU's budget reduced to 19 GtCO₂.

4. A balanced equity approach still needs the EU to reduce its emissions by 68%

There are many different ways to interpret the UNFCCC's equity principles and there are thus also many approaches to share the effort between countries. This is a moral/political issue on which it is rather unlikely that countries will find a compromise. As a way forward, the Paris Equity Check¹³ initiative developed an approach through which all countries would be able to choose the effort sharing approach that is most favourable to them, while still fitting within the needed global emission reduction pathways to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C. Even with such a balanced approach, reflecting the bottom-up nature of the Paris Agreement, the researchers recommend for the EU's 2030 climate target to be increased to -68% by 2030.¹⁴

5. Pathways based on the highest plausible ambition need to EU to reduce emissions beyond 60% and reach climate neutrality well before 2050

Climate Analytics assessed what could be considered 1.5 compatible pathways¹⁵, not on the basis of a given equity principle but on the notion of “highest plausible ambition”. These are thus pathways that are technically and economically feasible, but with steep medium-term emissions reductions. These pathways take into account present day characteristics, such as the current infrastructure (e.g., emissions intensity of the economy) of individual countries. For the EU27, such pathways indicate greenhouse gas emission reduction scenarios of -61-74% by 2030 are needed as well net zero emissions between 2040 and 2050.

6. The EU would need to become climate neutral by 2040 and 65% by 2030 would ensure this is possible

As indicated above, based on available pathways and fairness considerations, the EU will need to plan to become climate neutral in 2040 rather than in 2050. This is feasible, as indicated in the PAC scenario¹⁶. With current net greenhouse gas emissions at -34% in 2020¹⁷, a linear reduction towards net zero emissions in 2040 would lead to a -67% net greenhouse gas emission reductions target in 2030.

7. UNEP's suggestion for G20 countries to reduce emissions annually by 7.6% would bring the EU's emissions at -68%

The UN Environment Program's 2019 Emissions Gap Report¹⁸ called upon G20 countries to reduce their annual emissions by 7.6% between 2020 and 2030 to meet the 1.5°C temperature limit of the Paris Agreement. Applying this annual reduction target to the EU's 2019 emissions (at 3.743 MtCO₂) would reduce the EU's total emissions in 2030 to 1.569 MtCO₂, which is 68% below 1990 levels.

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13 See: <http://paris-equity-check.org/>

14 Robiou du Pont, Y. e.a (2016). Equitable Mitigation to Achieve the Paris Agreement Goals. Nature Climate Change. December 2016

15 Climate Analytics (2021). 1.5°C Pathways for Europe: Achieving the highest plausible climate ambition. October 2021.

<http://climateanalytics.org/publications/2021/15c-pathways-for-europe-achieving-the-highest-plausible-climate-ambition>

16 Paris Agreement Compatible scenario. See: <http://www.pac-scenarios.eu/>

17 See: European Commission (2021). Speeding up European climate action towards a green, fair and prosperous. EU climate Action Progress Report. October 2021. http://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5555

18 UNEP (2019). Emissions Gap Report 2019. November 2019. <http://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2019>