



Raising EU 2030 climate ambition: overview European and international milestones in 2020

BRIEFING PAPER

Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe is Europe's leading NGO coalition fighting dangerous climate change. With over 170 member organisations active in 38 European countries, representing over 1.500 NGOs and more than 40 million citizens, CAN Europe promotes sustainable climate, energy and development policies throughout Europe.

2020 momentum for climate action persists despite COVID-19

Amidst the public health turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Governments' prime attention is directed towards finding ways to limit the number of fatalities and prevent a collapse of public health systems. At the same time, the international political agenda has been shaken, with major events, such as the UN Climate Change Conference COP26, being postponed.

However, 2020 is set to remain a vital year for climate action and a major test for the Paris Agreement. In 2015, all Parties to the Agreement have decided to revisit their greenhouse gas emission reduction pledges for 2030 (also known as NDCs, Nationally Determined Contributions), by 2020. Throughout the lockdown period, EU political leaders have underlined the need to stick to this commitment and increase the EU's 2030 climate target before the end of this year.

A large [majority of EU Member States](#) have publicly called for making the European Green Deal the heart of Europe's response to the recovery and committing to increase the Union's 2030 climate target before the end of the year. In order to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, a central objective of the Paris Agreement, it remains vital for the global community that emissions between now and 2030 are substantially reduced, as failure to do so will cause irreversible damage to the global ecosystem and to generations to come.

In order to get there, we are facing two major challenges this year:

1. Raising the ambition of the 2030 climate target to a sufficient high level so as to be in line with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C objective; and

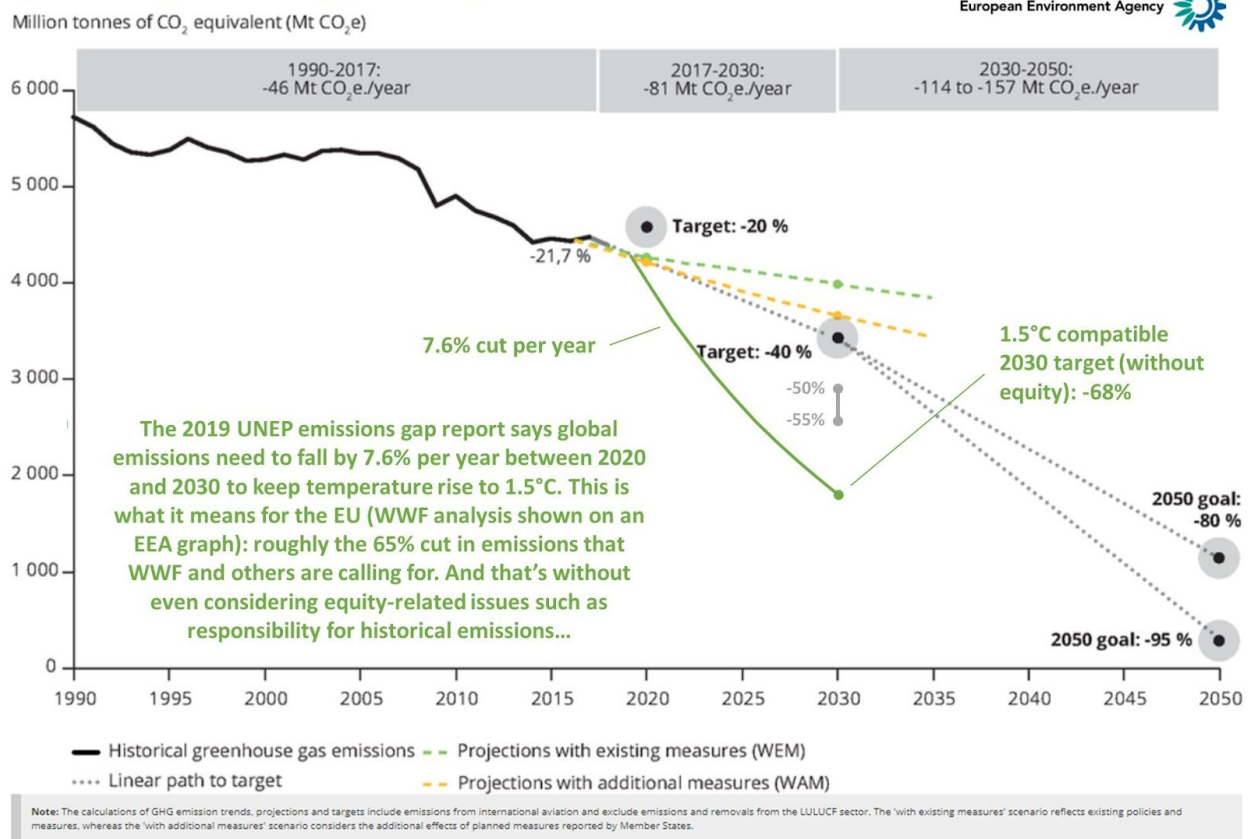
- Achieving a political agreement at European Council level in time to honor the agreed 2020 deadline for submission and make next year's COP26 a success.

Increasing 2030 climate ambition in line with the Paris Agreement

Current NDCs remain alarmingly insufficient. According to the most recent assessment of international pledges, they cumulatively limit temperature increase only to 3.2°C by the end of the century, causing severe threats to the survival of human civilisation.

What is the progress in Europe towards international commitments regarding greenhouse gas emissions?

Fig. 1: Greenhouse gas emission trend projections and target



The EU's current 2030 climate target is utterly inadequate to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement. In response, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Vice-President Frans Timmermans have pledged as part of their European Green Deal to present a comprehensive plan to increase the EU's emission reduction target to 50-55% by 2030. This range however also remains off track with the Paris Agreement objective of limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C. According to the latest UNEP Emissions Gap Report, annual emission reductions of 7.6% between now and 2030 are required in order to keep the 1.5°C temperature

target of the Paris Agreement attainable.¹ Applying this annual reduction requirement to the EU would lead to an EU emission reductions target for 2030 of at least -65%.

Insufficient, delayed or lack of immediate action would cause tremendous additional welfare costs for the EU and future generations. A recent study of the Commission's Joint Research Center has estimated that lack of significant increase of climate ambition and action would lead to annual welfare losses of 175 € billion (1.38% of GDP), compared to 42 € billion/year (0.33% of GDP) if global temperature rise can be limited to 1.5°C².

The EU needs to take leadership and build global momentum for climate action

EU leaders need to act swiftly and ensure that the EU delivers on time. Revising its ambition upwards as early as possible this year is critical to enable the EU to play a global climate leadership role, to build momentum towards the 2020 deadline for increasing ambition and to move other big emitters.

The European Commission has confirmed it will present a comprehensive plan to raise the EU's 2030 climate target to 50-55% in September.³

The role of the European Parliament in increasing the EU's NDC

In this year's debate and decision on the EU's nationally determined contribution, the European Parliament has a limited role to play formally, as we can expect the political decision on the target level to be decided in the European Council.

However, with the Parliament's reading of the EU Climate Law running in parallel - with key moments just ahead of the decisive European Council meeting in October, European parliamentarians have a unique to become the sole and determined defender of the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement by defending an ambition level for the EU's 2030 climate target that is based on the latest available science, that takes into account global equity considerations and defends the voice of the youth and future generations that will bear the costs of today's insufficient actions against the climate crisis.

¹ UN Environment Programme Emissions Gap Report 2019.

<https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2019>

² Economic analysis of selected climate impacts, Joint Research Centre, 2020.

https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC120452/pesetaiv_task_14_economic_analysis_final_report.pdf

³ Statement by Frans Timmermans, April 2020.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_583

Environment committee rapporteur Guteland has done the first step by proposing a 65% emission reductions target as part of her report on the EU Climate Law. Supporting Ms Guteland's proposal is essential if Members of the European Parliament are serious about the climate and environmental emergency declaration of November last year. A clear signal from European parliamentarians after the summer calling for at least 65% emission reductions by 2030 would provide enormous support to those EU governments that support the higher band of the ambition range proposed and modelled by the European Commission. Merely reiterating its existing position of "at least 55%", inconsistent with the latest science and the 1.5°C goal of Paris, would condemn the European Parliament virtually irrelevant for the debate within the European Council.

Upcoming moments

September climate ambition moments

September will be marked by at least three specific moments that can individually and jointly contribute to building up European momentum on the 2030 target discussion.

After the summer the Commission will come forward with its 2030 Climate Target Plan, presenting a proposal on how to increase the EU's 2030 climate target to 50-55%. It will be crucial to both underline the feasibility of increased ambition, the co-benefits of higher climate ambition and the need to consider ambition levels beyond 55% as demanded by science and equity.

In addition, on 10 September (tbc), the European Parliament's Environment committee will vote on the report of rapporteur Jytte Guteland (Swedish S&D) on the EU Climate Law, including the amendment to increase the EU's 2030 climate target to 65%. Should a majority carry the amendment in the committee and in the September plenary vote, the European Parliament could become the first EU institution to call for a 1.5°C consistent 2030 climate target level.

October European Council and European Parliament vote on EU Climate Law

In the October plenary, the European Parliament will vote on the EU Climate Law which currently includes a specific reference to the EU 2030 climate target level, as amended by the Parliament's rapporteur Jytte Guteland. Should the Parliament support an increased target of 65% emission cuts aligned with the 1.5°C target of the Paris Agreement and with the latest available science, its position can still heavily impact the debate and put additional pressure on EU leaders ahead of the October European Council.

Following the official presentation of the 2030 Climate Target Plan, the European Council on 15-16 October is very likely the first European Council to explicitly discuss the ambition level of

the EU's NDC and a major advocacy moment to shift as many Heads of State and Governments to support a target of at least 65% emission reductions.

Late October EU-Africa Summit

With the postponement of COP26, the EU-Africa Summit is the only major international summit that can both send a strong signal internationally about the EU's and African countries' determination to increase ambition and increase pressure on the European domestic debate about the level of ambition. Particularly in the uncertain context of the US election, the clear commitment of the EU and Africa to increased climate action would be an important signal.

December European Council

As the last European Council before the "by 2020" deadline, the meeting of EU Heads of State and Government on 10-11 December is the crunch time for EU leaders to agree on a new EU NDC and send a strong signal to its international partners ahead of COP26. Advocacy efforts need to focus on those countries that could not be moved at the October European Council discussions. If an agreement is found, the EU leaders will ask the ministerial Council or the European Commission to prepare the official EU submission of an enhanced NDC to the UNFCCC.