

# New national climate plans offer the best opportunity yet to secure a healthy and stable future



Countries are due to update their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement by 2025. These national climate plans represent the main policy vehicle for countries to outline and share their individual efforts to confront the global climate crisis.

At the first global stocktake of the Paris Agreement—adopted at the 28th Conference of the Parties UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in 2023—countries agreed to transition away from fossil fuels, to triple renewable energy capacity, and halt deforestation by 2030. They also agreed to submit stronger NDCs by 2025, including by setting economy-wide emission reduction targets

for the year 2035, covering all greenhouse gases and sectors, and to present a credible national pathway to achieve the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C.<sup>1</sup>

New guidance by WHO identifies opportunities for countries to raise the climate ambition of their NDCs while protecting and promoting health and wellbeing.<sup>2</sup> A 2023 review by WHO found that 91% of NDCs already recognise health as a priority area and sector in countries' climate responses.<sup>3</sup> The new WHO guidance explores best practice examples from existing NDCs and highlights opportunities for countries to further strengthen integration of health considerations and

	UNFCCC guidance*	Quality criteria for integrating health in NDCs
Leadership and enabling environment	Lead government agency typically ministry of environment or climate change; description of national cross-sectoral mechanism for preparing, updating, implementing, and monitoring NDC, including definition of roles and responsibilities across sectors	Ministry of health leads the health contribution to NDCs and is actively engaged in the NDC process; health planning and programming is climate-informed; cross-sectoral coordination and coherence between national climate change and health policy processes
National circumstances and policy priorities	Introduction to document containing information on national development context; existing policy priorities, including any existing legislative or regulatory mechanisms; climate change vulnerabilities and risks; and other country-relevant information	Population health and wellbeing is the ultimate goal and guiding principle of the NDC; national health context is described; relevant health policy priorities and legislative and regulatory mandates are included; health is identified as vulnerable to climate change and current and projected risks are quantified
Mitigation	Quantifiable information on the reference point (including, as appropriate, a base year); time frames, scope, and coverage of mitigation efforts; mitigation planning processes; assumptions and methodological approaches, including those for estimating and accounting for anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and removals; rationale for how the NDC is considered fair and ambitious in the light of its national circumstances and contributes towards the prevention of dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system	Health co-benefits of mitigation actions of key health-determining sectors are identified; health co-benefits of mitigation actions of key health-determining sectors are quantified; targets for reduction of air pollution and short-lived climate pollutants are specified; emission reduction targets for national health systems are established
Adaptation	Impacts, risks, and vulnerabilities; national adaptation priorities; implementation and support needs of and provision of support to, developing country Parties; implementation actions and plans for adaptation; rationale for how adaptation actions contribute to other international frameworks or conventions; gender-responsive adaptation action; traditional knowledge, knowledge of Indigenous peoples, and local knowledge systems related to adaptation	Health is a priority sector for adaptation; NDC complements and supports national approaches to adaptation planning and implementation; health is integrated into the adaptation targets of health-determining sectors; synergies are identified between mitigation and adaptation for health
Loss and damage	National circumstances on loss and damage from climate change; information on national efforts to avert, minimise, and respond to loss and damage; financial considerations in relation to loss and damage	Climate-sensitive health risks and outcomes are quantified, including in health systems and facilities; financial implications of health-related loss and damage are quantified; priority interventions are included to avert, minimise, and address loss and damage to health and health systems and facilities
Finance	Information on the projected levels of public financial resources provided or required, where appropriate; other means of implementation, including technology transfer and capacity building	Resources required to implement health-related actions and policies in the NDC, including in other sectors, are estimated; conditionality of climate finance for health actions and plans is specified;† health impacts and indicators are used as a basis to prioritise investments in key health-determining sectors
Implementation	Gap analysis; assessment of resource needs; detailed costing; prioritisation of activities; plan and schedule for agreed implementation activities; monitoring and evaluation plan	Health sector plan for implementation and capacity building is developed; relevant national mitigation and adaptation targets are translated into health sector targets, indicators, and benchmarks; health sector monitoring and evaluation plan is developed, with inclusion of health indicators in the overall NDC monitoring and evaluation framework

Summary of the main opportunities for countries to inform health priorities in their NDCs (adapted from WHO, 2024<sup>2</sup>). NDC=Nationally Determined Contribution. UNFCCC=United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. \*Based on UNFCCC guidance where available; certain elements are commonly included in the majority of NDCs, but the structure of individual NDCs may vary slightly, depending on nationally determined priorities and processes. †A conditional contribution is a contribution that a country would undertake if international means of support were provided or other conditions are met; an unconditional contribution is financed from domestic sources.

**Table: General structure of NDCs, with opportunities to protect and promote health**

priorities into their climate policies (table). For example, WHO recommends for NDCs to include standalone reduction targets for air pollution and short-lived climate pollutants, alongside comprehensive carbon dioxide mitigation policies. The inclusion of such targets would enable delivery of early public health benefits through reduced air pollution. Linking climate objectives with air quality goals also enables improved monitoring of progress and the associated social and health benefits of implementation.

As a second example, NDCs are important planning tools for governments, as well as subnational governments and the private sector, providing a blueprint for countries' investment needs to finance a just transition away from fossil-fuel based economies and support climate-resilient development.<sup>4</sup> WHO recommends for countries to include detailed estimates of the resources required to implement health-related actions and policies in their NDCs. Well-articulated NDCs can, therefore, help unlock the necessary finance to support the implementation of climate and health priorities.

The climate crisis is a health crisis, with climatic extremes increasingly claiming lives and livelihoods worldwide.<sup>5</sup> Healthy NDCs are those that address the health impacts of climate change, support climate resilient and low-carbon, sustainable health systems, and develop climate policies that maximise both climate and health outcomes across sectors. Ultimately, healthy NDCs are national climate commitments that

promote and protect our health and the health of future generations in the face of climate change.

At COP28, 150 countries committed to "pursuing the better integration of health considerations into [their] climate policy processes".<sup>6</sup> In the 12 months leading up to COP30 in December, 2025, countries now have the opportunity to translate that commitment into their national climate plans.

AW is the lead author of the WHO guidance for integrating health into Nationally Determined Contributions. The views expressed in this Comment are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent the positions of any affiliated organisations.

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- 1 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Report of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement on its fifth session, held in the United Arab Emirates from 30 November to 13 December 2023 [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023\\_16a01\\_adv\\_.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023_16a01_adv_.pdf) (accessed Nov 10, 2024).
- 2 WHO. Quality criteria for integrating health into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). World Health Organization, 2024.
- 3 WHO. 2023 WHO review of health in Nationally Determined Contributions and long-term strategies: health at the heart of the Paris Agreement. World Health Organization; 2023.
- 4 Jeudy-Hugo S, Lo Re L, Hyun H, Pouille C. Considerations for informing, implementing, and investing in the next nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/International Energy Agency, 2024.
- 5 Romanello M, Walawender M, Hsu S-C, et al. The 2024 report of the *Lancet* Countdown on health and climate change: facing record-breaking threats from delayed action. *Lancet* 2024; **404**: 1847–96.
- 6 WHO. COP28 UAE declaration on climate and health. World Health Organization, 2023.