

Is 1.5°C within Reach for the Asia-Pacific Region?

Ambition and Potential of NDC Commitments
of the Asia-Pacific Countries





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FOREWORD

Ahead of the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called “for all countries to commit to net-zero emissions by 2050, backed up by concrete long-term strategies, and enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which collectively cut global emissions by 45 per cent by 2030, compared to 2010 levels”.

The Asia-Pacific region will be in the spotlight of COP26 since many of the member States most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are located here. The seven G20 members from this region are responsible for over half of global GHG emissions, and five of the 10 top countries with the greatest historic responsibility for emissions since the beginning of the twentieth century are from Asia.

This joint assessment report by ESCAP, UN Women, UNEP and the greenwerk shows that while momentum is building in the Asia-Pacific region with over 34 carbon neutrality pledges made and counting, the current NDCs for 2030 will not deliver on those pledges. What is needed is for all Asian and Pacific countries to critically review their NDCs - both the updated and those being updated - and significantly raise ambitions if there is to be any hope of keeping the world temperature increase well below two degrees.

The Asia-Pacific region has great potential to drive the transition of the world towards low-carbon, low emissions development and eventually to carbon neutrality by 2050. Many Asia-Pacific countries have also mainstreamed climate change into their legal frameworks and development plans and established bespoke climate funds. At the same time, pathways towards deep decarbonization are being implemented across different sectors.

While there is an increase in the share of renewable energy in the energy mix, more needs to be done to support those countries that are still planning to rely on coal to meet their future energy needs to transition to cleaner energy sources. Developing long-term low emissions development strategies (LT-LEDS) will support such pathways. Low-carbon and electric vehicle-mobility are emerging, and local governments are making commitments to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and support the greening of our cities. Investments in nature-based solutions and empowering women and girls have also emerged as significant factors in ensuring inclusive and effective climate and sustainable development outcomes.



Such ambitious climate action will require a realignment of finance and investment towards green industries and green jobs. Innovative financial instruments and the implementation of debt-for-climate swaps can help to mobilize this additional funding. Putting a price on carbon and applying carbon pricing instruments will create liquidity to drive economic activity up and emissions down. Mandatory climate-related financial disclosure will help investors direct their investments towards climate action solutions that will help manage risks and reap social, economic, and environmental co-benefits.

It is clear from the science and the frequency of disasters in the region that time is not on our side. Without concerted action, carbon neutrality is not within the reach of the Asia-Pacific region by 2050. All stakeholders need to collaborate and build a strong case for decisive climate action. ESCAP, UNEP, and UN Women together with the UN and development partners in the region stand ready to support Asia-Pacific member States and help turn the full power of the region's ingenuity and dynamism into the "net zero" development pathway that our future depends on.



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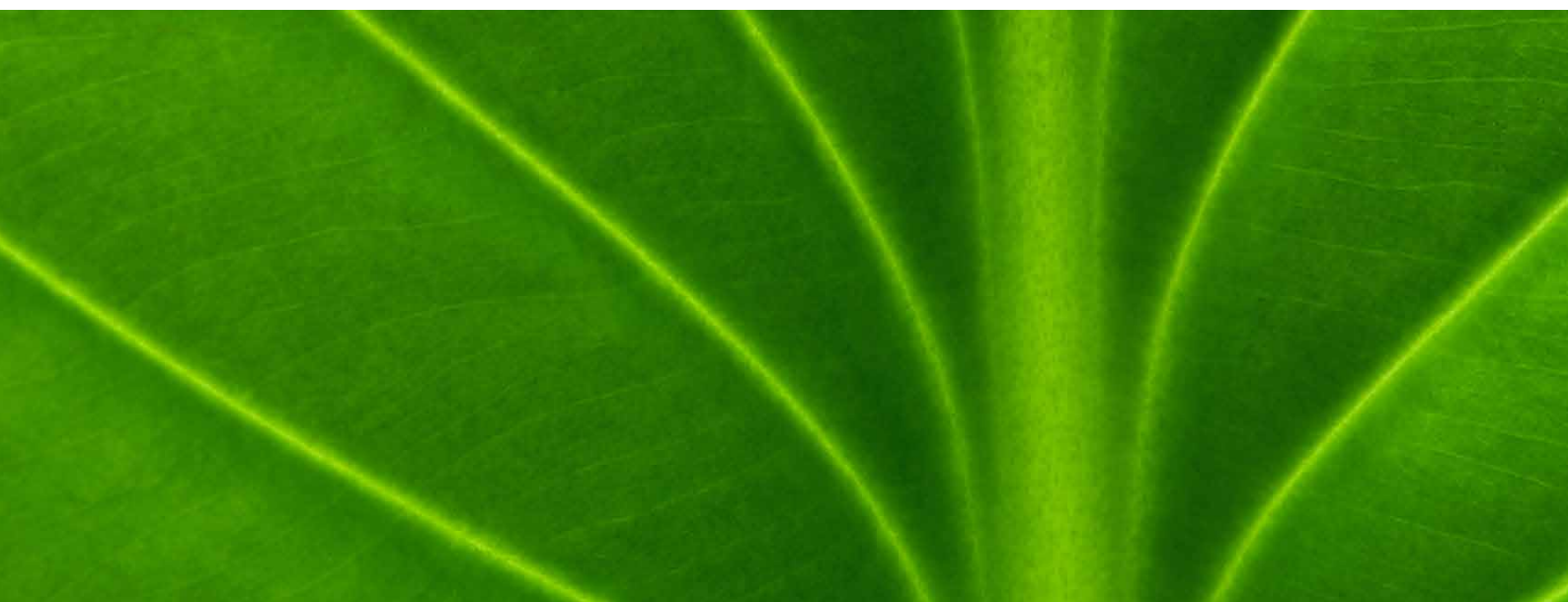
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Current commitments contained in the nationally determined contributions (NDC) of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and in particular the G20 regional members and the top 10 regional emitters are too low. They need to be significantly enhanced to achieve carbon neutrality in the decade 2050-2060, and to avoid irreversible and devastating outcomes.

This study shows that current unconditional and conditional NDC targets will reduce the Asia-Pacific regional GHG emissions to 29 GtCO₂e by 2030, however this represents an increase of 34 per cent of the emission levels of 2010, and is creating a significant barrier to achieving the aspired regional carbon neutrality by 2050. In addition, it is estimated that under the current climate policy scenario the Asia-Pacific region will reach a total high of 42.7 GtCO₂e GHG emissions by 2030, which is a projected increase of 16 per cent from the record high 2019, and a 96 per cent increase from the GHG emissions levels in 2010.

Even if the Asia-Pacific regional member States adhere to and achieve these NDC targets, their commitments will not deliver on the recommended global reductions of 7 per cent per year for the period 2021-2030, in order to keep the region and the world within the 1.5°C global temperature rise.

Without region-wide carbon neutral pledges, supported by more ambitious NDC targets, carbon neutrality is not within the reach of the Asia-Pacific region by 2050.

Where are the bottlenecks?

The analysis of four enabling factors found that vast the majority of countries in the Asia-Pacific region have worked hard to mainstream climate change in their legal frameworks and development plans, as well as set up bespoke climate funds. Several countries have also demonstrated that a transition to green growth can be in line with the COVID-19 recovery. Indeed, most countries in the region cannot afford to double spend on climate and recovery efforts.

However, while national coordination and transparency in the region is improving, both are further behind than mainstreaming and actions on climate finance. Transparency, in particular, features as the weak spot of NDC implementation, with more than 80 per cent of countries needing to intensify their efforts to establish well-operating monitoring and review systems.

Furthermore, some of the lowest income countries are the most ambitious and are leading the way in terms of ambition and mainstreaming gender in climate policy. In recognising the interlinkages between gender mainstreaming many Asia-Pacific countries included references to the SDG 5 on Gender Equality for meeting climate outcomes in their NDCs, and national climate policies and strategies.



With these findings in mind, it is important for the Asia-Pacific member States to:

- **Firmly commit to implementing even those very cautious GHG emissions' reductions pledges included in the earlier submitted and currently updated NDCs;**
- **Adhere to and follow through with their carbon neutrality pledges;**
- **Put a price on carbon and apply carbon pricing instruments to generate revenues and create the fiscal space that can support a shift towards low-carbon and no-carbon energy sources;**
- **Commit to freezing the expansion of coal-based capacities, and phasing out existing capacities in defined timeframes;**
- **Align COVID-19 recovery with NDC targets and commitments, and with SDG implementation and Long-Term Low Emission Development (LT-LED) strategies;**
- **Strengthen gender mainstreaming to ensure more inclusive and impactful climate outcomes;**
- **Increase efforts under all four enabling factors, and especially coordination and transparency (Measurement Reporting and Verification), to support higher ambition;**
- **Further assess any measures taken to address the impacts and threats of the COVID-19 pandemic for their climate compatibility;**
- **Share best practices and lessons learned, including for investments in nature-based climate solutions with all stakeholders at the local, national, and regional levels to build a stronger case for decisive climate action and policy measures from the whole society.**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This joint ESCAP, UN Women, UNEP and the greenwerk assessment report, *Is 1.5°C within Reach for the Asia-Pacific Region? Ambition and Potential of NDC Commitments of the Asia-Pacific Countries*, provides a critical review of the current NDC commitments of the regional member States and how these contribute to keeping global temperatures way below 2°C as per the Paris Agreement. The Report includes an elaborated assessment framework of climate ambition and enabling factors, assessment of gender mainstreaming for improving readiness of countries to accelerate implementation and develop ambitious NDC reviews. This comprehensive assessment represents a first baseline of ambition and enabling factors in 2021, and the NDCs that were analysed were the ones submitted up to the end of August 2021.

The report has been developed by a joint team led by Aneta Nikolova, including Hannah Ryder, Lubomir Kalniev (ESCAP), Amy Reggers, Inkar Kadyrzhanova, Riina Haavisto, Samira Yasmin (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women-UN Women), Mozaharul Alam, Sudhir Sharma (UNEP), Björn Dransfeld and Christine Nettersheim (the greenwerk, Germany) that was guided with substantive inputs from Katinka Weinberger, Chief, Environment and Development Policy Section, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP. The report was peer reviewed by Jens Radschinski and Björn Fonden (UNFCCC/RCC for Asia-Pacific).

The report was prepared under the overall direction of Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary and O-I-C of the Environment and Development Division of ESCAP, Dechen Tsering, Regional Director, UN Environment Programme, Asia and the Pacific and Mohammad Naciri, Regional Director, UN Women in Asia and the Pacific.

Data and graphs were provided by Vorada Amphan, Research Assistant, Lubomir Kalniev, Consultant and Hannah Ryder, Regional Climate Consultant, Environment and Development Division. Anoushka Ali edited, proofread and finalized the publication and final design, layout, art work and refined graphs were done by Jeff Williams. Siriwat Theerawong, Environment and Development Division arranged for the timely online publication and ensured that the report is accessible by readers worldwide.

The Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section of ESCAP collaborated in disseminating and communicating the findings of the report through media outlets.

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