

Workers need action on climate change: The ABCs of NDCs

Transforming transport is vital to tackling climate change. All countries need to make an ambitious, just transition in transport central to their climate plans. This means planning for a radical transformation in how people and goods move in countries' Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs.

The ABCs of NDCs

A Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) outlines how each of the 190 countries that have signed onto the Paris Agreement will contribute to the common goal of averting catastrophic climate change. NDCs usually contain both emissions reductions targets and plans to achieve them.

These pledges are left up to countries individually in recognition of unequal circumstances, capacities, and historical responsibility for emissions. However, because NDCs are left up to countries, they do not have to sum up to action that will meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. In fact, existing NDCs will only cut emissions by a quarter of what is needed according to the UN.

NDCs must be revised every five years, giving trade unions constant opportunities to make demands on governments for stronger climate action and a just transition. You can track your government's current NDC submission through the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) NDC registry. SLOCAT has a transport-specific tracker. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has an NDC scorecard that rates each country's NDC.

What do today's NDCs say about transport?

Although the majority of NDCs now mention transport in some form, very few contain specific targets for transport. While this is an improvement from the first round of NDCs when less than a fifth mentioned transport, it is still not nearly enough.

Today's NDCs are also missing opportunities to link transport to national strategies. Decarbonizing transport will require more clean electricity, the production of zero-carbon alternative fuels, and new infrastructure - from charging stations for electric trucks and buses to port fuelling stations for zero-carbon container vessels.

What *should* NDCs say about transport?

NDCs must contain specific emissions targets for transport. This means at least net zero by 2050 and at least a 45% reduction in emissions relative to 2010 by 2030. NDCs should also specify targets for transport not directly related to the amount of emissions, for example, how fast transport emissions will fall and how. NDCs must be aligned to pre-existing national climate plans and sustainable transport policy frameworks.

What should NDCs say about a just transition?

All NDCs must include just transition measures. Reducing emissions must go along with improving working conditions. This means higher pay, stronger social security, better health and safety protections, gender equality, job security, and the formalisation of informal work.

And reducing emissions cannot be allowed to lead to reduced employment. Affected workers must be retrained without cost to themselves. If redeployment is necessary for transport workers, there needs to be a strategy to protect them, offering placements in new roles of equivalent quality.

Young workers are the guarantee of a sustainable future. They need to be supported in decision-making processes, and have the skills, education, and training needed to meet the demands of new jobs created in a sustainable transport model. Decarbonization must also address gender-based segregation and violence at work: ratifying and implementing ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment should be part of the transition.

Unions should be the loudest advocates for a just transition. The ILO Just Transition Guidelines can act as a framework to support governments and all stakeholders.

Which transport sectors should be included in NDCs?

Every transport mode operating with a country must be included in its NDC. Today, NDCs are mainly focused on passenger road transport. In contrast high-speed rail, aviation, and freight transport are hardly mentioned. These must be included as must be expanded public transport, which is crucial to addressing emissions across the entire transport sector.

What about international shipping and aviation, which are both outside the Paris Agreement?

Emissions from international maritime shipping and international aviation were originally left out of the Paris Agreement because they cannot easily be attributed to individual countries. However, emissions targets set by both the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) are much more modest required by the Paris Agreement.

All countries should therefore align emissions targets for international shipping and aviation with the Paris Agreement, either by ensuring the IMO and ICAO are in full alignment or through their NDCs.

What else does decarbonizing transport require?

All countries should adopt a 'whole economy' approach – transport must decarbonise with other sectors of the economy, and the energy sources on which it depends – and NDCs should reflect this.

Countries must pursue green industrial policy that actively creates the conditions for transport and other sectors to decarbonize rapidly in tandem. This should include everything from research and development to massive public infrastructure investment to alternative fuels production. A programme of investment, industrial policy, and fiscal policy to address climate change is even more necessary now with the Covid-19 recovery.

There must also be a recognition that some transport industries will need to grow or shrink. Where a modal shift needs to take place, there should be a framework in the NDC or national climate plan to promote co-operation, not competition, between transport modes. Transport is a public good and must meet the human needs of all groups of society, providing mobility for all people in rural and urban areas, and make sure all people get the goods they need.

How do we pay for it?

So far, very few NDCs specifically declare government support to finance the necessary transition or set forth investment plans. NDCs must include concrete figures and fiscal or monetary mechanisms to achieve them. Wealthy countries must commit climate finance contributions for developing countries in their NDCs. Similarly, developing countries should specify their needs for investment support (in concrete amounts) in their NDCs.