



Common time frames: Summary of discussions at the March 2018 Climate Change Expert Group Global Forum

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Introduction to the Global Forum and the session on common time frames for NDCs

The OECD/IEA Climate Change Expert Group (CCXG) hosts biannual Global Forums on the Environment and Climate Change (GFE) to discuss issues relevant to the international climate negotiations. The GFE is an informal meeting held outside of the UNFCCC negotiations, which seeks to facilitate technical work and implementation under the UNFCCC. The participants include practitioners and negotiators from governments as well as delegates from inter-governmental organisations, the private sector, research organisations and other relevant institutions. Discussions take place under Chatham House rules; that is, remarks are not attributed to speakers.

This summary reflects discussions during the GFE, which focused on selected issues within those relevant to common time frames. This document summarises the main ideas introduced during presentations and discussions during a dedicated session on common NDC time frames at the 7-8 March 2018 GFE. Respecting the Chatham House rules under which the session was conducted, the summary does not attribute comments to participants. The summary does refer to selected presentations, where the presenter has agreed to make them public. This summary document does not attempt to represent any consensus or agreed outcome from the session; it is produced under the sole responsibility of the Secretariat to the CCXG.

The agenda, presentation slides and summary slides from the session can be found online on the [March 2018 GFE webpage](#).¹ The session included a framing presentation and presentations by three speakers, followed by discussions. The session was guided by the three discussion questions below:

- What are the options for common time frames?
- How many years before the start of NDC implementation should the NDC be communicated?
- From when should common time frames be applicable?

Background on common time frames

Article 4.10 of the Paris Agreement calls on the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Agreement (CMA1) to “consider common time frames” for nationally determined contributions (NDCs). The term “time frame” is also referenced in paragraphs 23 and 24 of Decision 1/CP.21 which request:

- Parties’ whose NDC contains “a time frame up to 2025” to communicate a new NDC by 2020; and
- Parties’ whose NDC contains “a time frame up to 2030” to communicate or update their NDC by 2020.

Interpretation of the term “time frame” can be found in paragraph 27 of the Decision 1/CP.21. Paragraph 27 calls for certain information within NDC to be communicated including “time frames and/or periods for implementation”. In a synthesis report on the

¹ <http://www.oecd.org/environment/cc/ccxg-globalforum-march-2018.htm>

effect of INDCs by the UNFCCC, the term “time frame and/or implementation period” is also defined as “[...] a time period in the future during which an objective included in an INDC is to be achieved” (UNFCCC, 2016_[1]). Currently, NDC time frames vary across Parties; the most common time frames in NDCs are five- and ten-year time frames i.e. 2021 through 2025 and 2021 through 2030.

A discussion around time frames could also raise relevant questions on how ambition could be enhanced under the Paris Agreement. Certain text in the Paris Agreement reference ambition with respect to NDC communications and could be relevant in discussions on common time frames:

- Article 4.3, which states that a Party’s successive NDC “will represent a progression” beyond the Party’s current NDC and will “reflect its [the Party’s] highest possible ambition”, reflecting “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances”;
- Article 4.11, which states that a Party “may at any time adjust its existing nationally determined contribution with a view to enhancing its level of ambition”;

Another relevant text is Article 4.9, which states that all Parties “shall communicate a nationally determined contribution every five years” and “be informed by the outcomes of the global stocktake”.

Negotiations on the potential establishment of common time frames for NDCs are ongoing and are conducted under the aegis of the UNFCCC’s Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI). If a common time frame is agreed upon, another relevant question is how many years before implementation an NDC should be communicated as well as when the common time frame could be applied to future NDC communications.

Summary of discussions on common time frames

Usefulness of establishing common time frames

The usefulness of establishing a common time frame² was recognised and echoed by many participants. Some participants expressed that a common time frame facilitated clarity, transparency and understanding (CTU) of NDCs, referencing paragraph 27 of Decision 1/CP.21 to support this view. Paragraph 27 asks Parties to communicate information on NDCs including on “time frames and/or periods of implementation” in order to facilitate CTU. One participant highlighted that in the absence of a common time frame, Parties would have to explain their particular view on time frames. One participant reflected on whether and how different time frames and interpretations of time frames could add complexity in the technical expert review process. A few participants suggested that consistency on NDC time frames could facilitate clarity to reviewers. In particular, a common time frame could help in understanding the implementation status of elements in the NDC, for example which policies have been implemented and which are going to be implemented and when. Some participants highlighted that shorter NDC time frames could be useful to account for certain targets, for example baseline targets in NDCs,

² Many participants during the Global Forum equated time frames with periods of implementation, citing paragraph 27 of Decision 1/CP.21 as a reason. A few participants however cited a preference for the term “implementation period”.

which could be regularly updated to improve accuracy.³ Some participants also indicated that a common time frame could facilitate periodic reporting in a co-ordinated manner, which could in turn be useful for regular assessments of collective progress towards global goals, e.g. under the five-yearly global stocktake (GST), beginning in 2023. One participant noted that developments in climate action are continuous and not constrained to time frames, but that time frames could act as check points when ambition could be potentially ramped up. If the communication of an NDC could serve as a pressure point to facilitate enhancement of ambition, some participants noted that the absence of a common time frame could create an imbalance in pressure points across Parties.

Comparing the five-year and ten-year common time frame options

Several participants thought that there were two options for a common NDC time frame: five and ten years, consistent with the options offered in paragraphs 23 and 24 of Decision 1/CP.21. The presentations by speakers and subsequent discussions pointed out several pros and cons of the two options for common time frames (of 5 and 10 years) which have been summarised in Table 1 and are further explained below.

³ The CCXG has produced a recent paper (Vaidyula, M. and Hood, C., 2018) on the accounting of baseline targets in NDCs and examines the issues related to updating of baseline target, which will be available shortly here: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/environment/oecd-iea-climate-change-expert-group-papers_2227779x.

Table 1. Selected pros and cons of five- and ten-year common time frames

	Five-year common time frame	Ten-year common time frame
Pros	<p>More regular opportunities to make technical and fundamental adjustments to NDCs as well as to incorporate effects of technology and other developments.</p> <p>More regular signals to inform action by policymakers and non-State actors. However, all Parties are required to communicate or update NDCs every five years, and this could also enable provision of regular signals.</p> <p>Parties with a five-year NDC time frame are requested in the Paris Agreement “to communicate” a new NDC, representing a progression beyond the previous NDC and reflecting the highest possible ambition while being informed by the five-yearly GST. Parties with a ten-year NDC time frame are requested to “to communicate or update” their contributions every five years. Since Parties with a ten-year time frame are implementing the NDC over two GST cycles, the NDC target communicated originally may not be updated mid-term and the target would thus only be informed by one GST cycle.</p> <p>More frequent NDC communications could provide opportunities for more “political moments” which could facilitate strengthening of climate action.</p>	<p>More time to conduct consultations and other preparations necessary for (political) approvals, if needed, and communication of the NDC.</p> <p>Longer time horizon for planning and making investment decisions.</p>
Cons	<p>Some Parties have indicated that preparing a new NDC can involve potentially sequential processes, i.e. international (e.g. taking into account outcomes of the GST) and domestic (technical preparations and political approvals) processes, which could make it challenging to communicate a new NDC every five years.</p>	<p>Greater likelihood of locking-in a potentially lower level of ambition for a longer time period, if Parties communications conservative NDCs. However, Parties are also encouraged to adjust their NDCs at any time with a view to enhancing ambition, under Article 4.11.</p> <p>Should a new NDC with a ten-year time frame be communicated every five years, the lag time between communication and the start of that NDC implementation could grow (Barba, 2018^[2]).</p>

Many participants emphasised the nationally determined character of NDCs and did not see a conflict between common time frames and this national determination.

For example, some participants floated the idea that Parties with a ten-year NDC time frame could translate this NDC into an interim five-year NDC, as part of a mid-term review, to align with a possible five-year common time frame. Several participants also noted that the first round of intended NDCs (INDCs) – with varying time frames – were communicated before the Paris Agreement was adopted. Some participants suggested that Parties should not feel constrained to continue using the same NDC time frame for successive NDCs in the post-Paris Agreement period.

Both options of NDC time frames can present arguments for enhanced ambition.

Many participants suggested a five-year time frame could favour enhanced ambition as shorter time frames could provide more frequent opportunities for “political moments” (i.e. when the issue of climate change is high on the national and/or international agenda). These “political moments” could help increase collective efforts. Some participants pointed out that current collective efforts are not on track to meet the Paris Agreement long-term temperature goal of “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C” and “pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C”. Some participants indicated that five-year NDC time frames could enhance the chances of not locking-in levels of emissions in 2030 that are inconsistent with such pathways. One

participant noted that frequent political moments could be important as not all Parties enter into international political dialogues with the same level of ambition, including the 2018 Talanoa Dialogue. On the other hand, some participants viewed ambition as being connected to many factors and not just to a target number or time frame. Some participants noted that ambition means something different for different Parties. To this point, one participant noted that it could be more useful to focus on what is a more pragmatic option rather than on ambition, when deciding between a five- or ten-year common time frames.

Some participants indicated that the choice of a common time frame should facilitate sending clear, short- and long-term signals to inform policy design and other non-Party stakeholders. Some participants pointed out that the NDCs should be in line with national long-term strategies. In the context of long-term strategies, shorter NDC time frames could allow for communicating NDCs that align with the trajectory towards the Party's long-term strategy. On the other hand, some participants indicated that ten-year common time frames facilitate longer horizons for planning and for investors. Some participants noted that longer NDC horizons could be particularly beneficial to sectors and activities that require long-term planning. Some participants expressed views that Parties with long-term goals could communicate intermediate goals or translate their longer-term NDC targets into shorter-term milestones, to deliver more precise signals.

The choice in common time frame could have implications on raising the ambition of NDCs. Countries with an NDC time frame of five years are required to submit a new NDC that would have to represent a progression, as per Article 4.3 of the Paris Agreement. Some participants highlighted that this would result in more ambitious NDCs being communicated every five years. On the other hand, it is not clear from the Paris Agreement whether countries with an NDC time frame of ten years would have to update the ambition of this NDC in any mid-term review. Some participants indicated that mid-term reviews of NDCs with a ten-year time frame would not necessarily lead to a more ambitious NDC being communicated at this point. Other participants, however, understand that regardless of their NDC time frames, Parties do need to communicate more ambitious NDCs every five years (as per Articles 4.3 and 4.9).

Exploring how long before implementation should an NDC be communicated and point of applicability of common time frames

The main option of timing for communication of NDCs discussed by participants was five years before the start date of NDC implementation. For example, NDCs to be implemented in 2031-2035 (or 2031-40) would be communicated in 2025. Many participants also noted that the NDC should also be submitted in line with paragraph 25 of Decision 1/CP.21 that states "Parties shall submit" their NDCs "at least 9-12 months in advance of the relevant session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement".

Many participants supported the idea for a common time frame to be applicable from 2030 onward. This is likely because a post-2030 point of applicability would not necessitate those NDCs with a time frame to 2030, to be modified. A few participants however did note that Parties could voluntarily apply the common time frame before 2030.

Allowing for adequate time to prepare NDCs and consideration of the length of the implementation period has implications on when NDCs should be communicated.

Some participants addressed the need to consider the trade-offs involved in deciding how many years in advance of implementation NDCs should be communicated. Many Parties noted that significant time is needed for preparing an NDC and others pointed to the risk of communicating conservative NDCs if the time frames for implementation are longer. One speaker presented the terms “preparation period” and “organising period”, to be considered in addition to a common time-frame, where the latter is included in the period of implementation of the previous NDC. The term “preparation period” was defined as the time needed to prepare the NDC, taking into account inter alia the outcomes of the GST. The term “organisation period” could be viewed as the period after the NDC communication and before the NDC start date, where certain time is allotted to establish or strengthen policies and supporting measures needed to implement the NDC and meet the targets. Should Parties require more time to set up their policies and measures to implement NDCs, this time may need to be taken into account when deciding on when NDCs need to be communicated for a certain target year. Table 2 below presents two options of organising periods and highlights the associated time needed between communication and target year.

Table 2. Options of “organising periods” and the implication for NDC communication and target year

Communication year	Organising period	Start date	Implementation period	Target year
2025	0 years	2026	5 years	2030
			10 years	2035
	5 years	2031	5 years	2035
			10 years	2040

Source: Authors, based on (Baribeau, 2018^[3])

Participants raised questions on the choice of the NDC time frame, timing of communication, preparation and organising periods and the interactions with other elements of the Paris Agreement:

- If accounting for NDCs occurs after the end of the implementation period, would this need to be taken into account when deliberating on a common time frame and on the associated timing of communication period relative to the implementation of the NDC?
- If and how could this accounting issue affect single- and multi-year targets as well as conditional NDCs? What implications do different time frames have on transfers conducted under Article 6?

References

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