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# Explaining the Paris Rulebook

What You Need to Know for COP24

**One of the most critical tasks for negotiators at the COP24 global climate summit in Katowice, Poland is to agree on implementation guidelines—known as the Paris Rulebook—for the Paris Agreement on climate change. To understand the Paris Rulebook’s importance, this brief offers concise answers on what it is, what it does and why making progress at this year’s UN climate summit is so essential.**

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PARIS RULEBOOK?

The Paris Agreement established a new international framework to accelerate efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. To promote the climate transformation needed, it articulates three core goals:

1. to keep global temperature rise well below 2 degrees C (3.6 degrees F) above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees F);
2. to increase the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change; and
3. to make finance flows consistent with a low-emissions and climate-resilient development pathway.

While the Paris Agreement has provided the framework for international action, the Rulebook will set this Agreement in motion by laying out the tools and processes to enable its full, fair, and effective implementation. Countries agreed to develop and finalize the Paris Rulebook at COP24 (the 24th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) in December 2018.

Adopting the Rulebook will provide guidance for how countries should implement and strengthen their national climate plans under the Paris Agreement (known in the United Nations as nationally determined contributions, or NDCs), and create an institutional structure for doing so. Details and additional elements are likely to be adopted in the coming years to fine-tune the processes, but negotiators must make significant progress on the Rulebook at COP24 to establish a useful foundation for advancing climate action under the Paris Agreement.

The Rulebook's purpose is to transform the relatively short Paris Agreement into a functioning system that mobilizes concrete climate action in every country around the world. A robust Rulebook will spell out how countries plan their individual contributions, how they implement their efforts and how they review individual and collective progress to strengthen climate

commitments over time. The Rulebook will address how to track and mobilize finance and support for developing countries to curb emissions and adapt to increasingly severe climate impacts.

Importantly, an effective set of guidelines will enable countries to take these steps transparently and fairly while allowing the international community to hold countries accountable for their commitments. Clear, effective guidelines can help countries in the transformation to a low-emissions and climate-resilient world at the pace and scale needed to achieve the Paris Agreement's goals.

## HOW DOES THE PARIS RULEBOOK RELATE TO NATIONAL CLIMATE ACTION?

**The heart of the Paris Agreement is a framework aimed at enabling effective, ambitious climate action at the national level.**

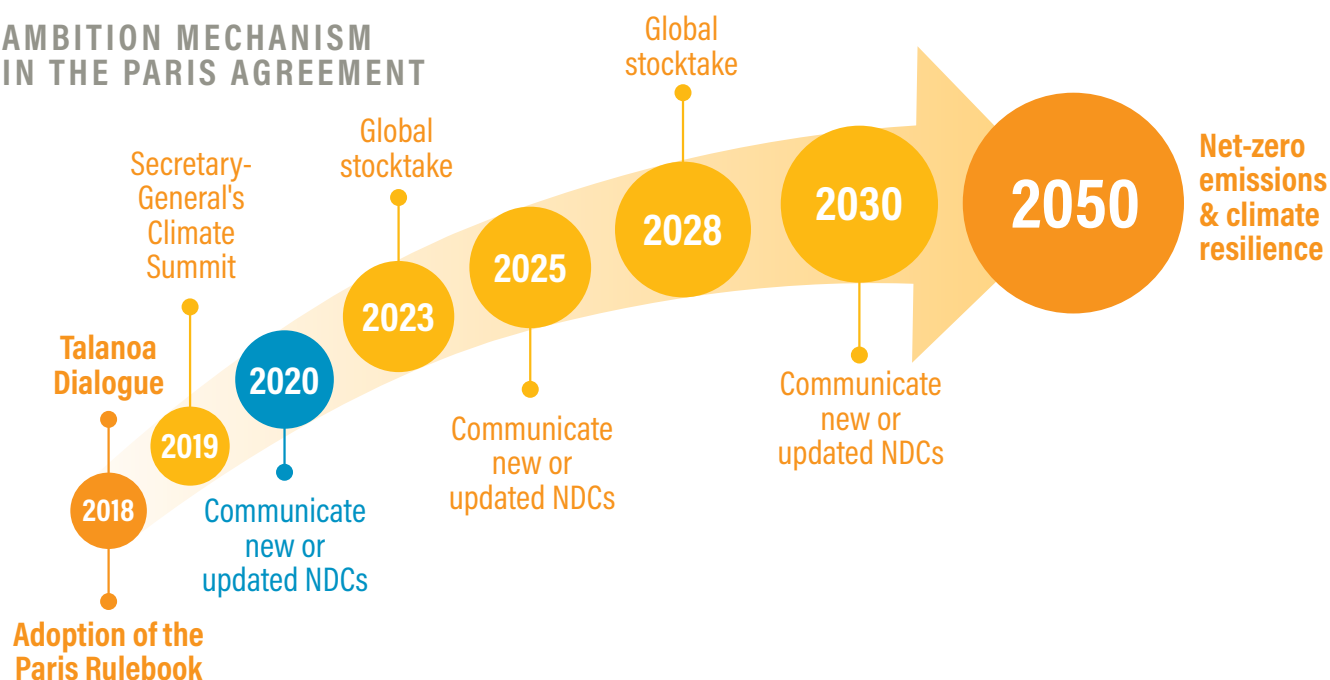
Countries develop and communicate their NDCs, undertake efforts to meet their targets and implement associated policies and measures, facilitated by support and finance, and report on their efforts and progress to the international community. After technical experts individually review these national efforts, countries discuss their efforts in a multilateral setting.

Every five years, the international community will comprehensively take stock of collective progress toward the Paris Agreement's long-term goals (sometimes referred to as the pact's "ambition mechanism"). In response to the review and stocktaking processes, countries can be better informed as they consider how to achieve their commitments and strengthen their successive NDCs, in light of their different national circumstances. Though designed and put in motion at the international level, this cycle can inform national decision-making, policies and actions.

The process of communicating plans, undertaking efforts and reviewing progress creates a cycle of planning, implementing, and review. The Paris Rulebook is necessary to set that cycle in motion.



## AMBITION MECHANISM IN THE PARIS AGREEMENT



Source: [wri.org/publication/NDC-enhancement-by-2020](https://wri.org/publication/NDC-enhancement-by-2020)

## PLANNING NDCs

The Paris Agreement is built on individual country commitments that will be enhanced every five years. The Rulebook will provide guidance on what countries should consider when developing their plans to tackle climate change.

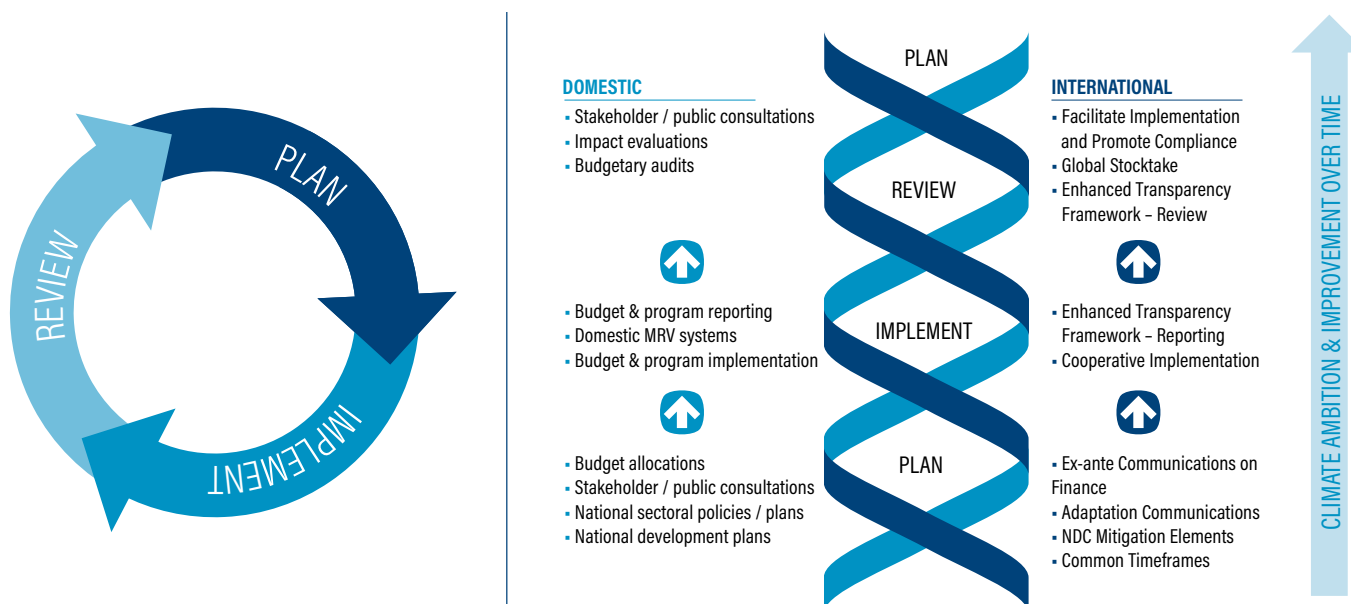
Countries convey their efforts in their NDCs in a variety of ways. Some provide economy-wide emissions targets, with information provided on how those targets are to be achieved, while others only specify sectoral targets or policies to reduce or slow emissions. Some NDCs combine these types of commitments. Economy-wide emissions targets take different forms, including absolute emissions targets, targets based on reductions against their Business As Usual emission trajectories (BAU) and targets based on emissions intensity compared to GDP. Most developing countries also include actions to adapt to climate impacts.

Negotiators are still debating a number of issues in the Paris Rulebook that address different elements of future NDCs, such as:

**Common Timeframes.** Countries are debating whether all Parties to the Paris Agreement should communicate NDCs with a common implementing period. Currently, countries' initial NDCs have different implementing periods, ending in 2025 or 2030. As part of the Rulebook, countries may decide whether their NDCs should all have the same target year. For example, the Rulebook could require all countries to submit an NDC in 2025 with a target year of 2035 or 2040. Alternatively, they could submit NDCs with a firm target for 2035 and a tentative target for 2040.

**Information on Mitigation Action.** This involves what information countries should communicate in their NDCs to provide clarity, transparency and understanding (sometimes referred to in the climate talks as "CTU") of their efforts to reduce emissions, which is important to ensuring comparability and mutual understanding among countries. The information needed for clarity and understanding may vary depending on the type of commitments chosen by the countries (e.g., absolute greenhouse gas (GHG) targets, targets compared to a BAU emissions scenario, GHG intensity targets, sectoral targets, etc.).

## THE PARIS AGREEMENT'S IMPLEMENTATION AND AMBITION CYCLE: CONNECTING THE DOMESTIC TO INTERNATIONAL



Source: [wri.org/publication/pact-implementing-guidelines](https://wri.org/publication/pact-implementing-guidelines)

Parties must decide what level of information must be included in the NDCs and level of guidance can be specified to facilitate confidence in countries' efforts.

**Accounting of Mitigation Action.** This involves crafting guidelines for countries to define, assess and, when possible, quantify the mitigation targets and other commitments in the NDCs and the progress being made to achieve them. This guidance will inform future rounds of NDCs as countries pursue their commitments. One approach being discussed is to distinguish the accounting guidance based on the type of targets in the NDCs, rather than distinguishing based on whether a country is developed or developing.

**Predictable Financial Information.** Developed countries are required to communicate every two years indicative information on finance to be provided and mobilized. Other countries providing resources are encouraged to communicate such information. Information from developed countries on future financial support, including how this will support efforts to shift and align all financial flows, can enable developing countries to better plan and implement climate action. However, a key challenge is that the national budget processes of some contributor

countries make it difficult to communicate projected levels of public finance in future years. As part of the Rulebook negotiations, countries are debating what information should be provided and the process for considering the information once communicated.

**Adaptation Communications.** Under the Paris Agreement, countries should provide an adaptation communication, including their priorities, plans and actions, and implementation and support needs. Negotiations must address what information countries should provide and how they should communicate it — including whether it should be communicated in NDCs or in another way.

### IMPLEMENTING NDCs

Countries will implement the mitigation and adaptation components of their NDCs using a variety of approaches. Effective implementation will: a) depend on adequate support and capacity building; b) be driven by cooperative approaches to implementation; and c) be informed by reporting on individual countries' progress towards implementing their commitments – along with identifying the challenges and barriers that need to be overcome.

**Support and Capacity Building.** Many developing countries will need significant support to implement their climate actions. Developed countries have a responsibility to provide and mobilize financial resources to assist developing country Parties. The Agreement also recognizes the importance of scaling up technology transfer and development and ensuring collaborative approaches to research and development, facilitating access to technology, and capacity building efforts. In addition to the scaling of support, efforts must be made to make financial flows consistent with the low-emissions and climate resilient transformation, one of the three core goals of the Agreement. Meanwhile, support and capacity building will be essential to help some developing countries enhance their data collection, storage, and analysis, thereby enabling developing countries to fulfill their transparency requirements and strengthen their institutional, legislative and decision-making progress.

**Cooperative Implementation.** Countries can engage in cooperative approaches through “Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes” (ITMOs) provided that these transfers contribute to emissions reduction, support sustainable development, and ensure environmental integrity. As part of the Rulebook, Parties need to establish robust transparency and accounting rules to ensure that international cooperation avoids double counting emissions, preserves environmental integrity, and generates additional and verifiable emission reductions. Parties are negotiating the type of governance system to be put in place for those Parties wishing to engage in cooperative approaches. This includes, for instance, whether to establish a centralized registry for transfers of ITMOs, and eligibility criteria for countries to participate in such transfers. It also remains unclear how specific and common the accounting rules will be, bearing in mind the diversity of types of contributions (making it more complicated than under the Kyoto Protocol).

**Transparency Reports.** A vital component of implementation is ensuring all countries regularly develop and provide reports on progress towards implementing their commitments. Reporting is essential for countries to understand – about themselves and others – individual countries’ emissions levels and how they are working to achieve implementation, including the challenges and barriers they face. Reporting is also necessary to build trust among countries and to know whether we are globally on track to limit global warming.

The Paris Agreement represents a departure from previous arrangements that established different reporting requirements for developed and for developing countries. Instead, the Paris Agreement calls for common transparency guidelines, but also notes that “developing country Parties that need it in the light of their capacities” will have flexibility in implementing their obligations. Under these common guidelines, all countries are to report every two years on their national greenhouse gas emissions and progress made in implementing and achieving their nationally determined contribution. All countries are also encouraged to report information on climate impacts and adaptation.

The main difference in reporting requirements between developed and developing countries has to do with reporting on support (finance, technology and capacity building). Developed countries are required to report information on support provided, whereas developing countries who are providers are only encouraged to do so; developing countries are encouraged to provide information on support needed and received.

As part of the Rulebook, Parties must negotiate and adopt guidelines for how this information will be reported to facilitate the assessment of progress. Parties are debating whether countries could report on other elements than what is currently prescribed under the Paris Agreement. Critically, Parties must also decide when the existing transparency arrangements will end and when the Paris Agreement’s enhanced transparency framework will come into effect.

Key questions include how to make flexibility operational for developing countries that need it given their capabilities. That is, what does this flexibility look like in practice and which countries does it apply to? One approach is to use modes of reporting that would guide selection of the type and detail of data used according to national circumstances (e.g., use of the latest IPCC guidelines for reporting on emissions inventories). But flexibility should not be at the expense of improvement overtime.

## REVIEWING PROGRESS

Reviewing progress toward plans is crucial. The Paris Agreement establishes processes to review both individual and collective progress. Individual reviews are intended to assess progress toward implementation and achievement of NDCs, identify the types of challenges and barriers that countries may be facing in achieving their NDCs, and determine the needs and gaps to achieve their NDCs. They can be an enabling, peer-pressure and incentivizing tool for climate action.

**Reviewing Individual Progress.** The Agreement outlines a two-phase approach to reviewing individual progress. First, information reported will undergo a review by technical experts to ensure reporting requirements are met and to identify areas of improvement. The second is a “facilitative multilateral consideration of progress,” where other Parties get to ask questions of each other. For the review processes, questions remain about how to most effectively carry out such assessments for more Parties and do so more often. For example, negotiators are considering whether every report submitted must be reviewed or could reviews be undertaken for a group of small emitting countries with similar circumstances. Negotiators are also debating what type of advice could emerge from the technical review (that would point toward improvement without impinging national sovereignty).

**Reviewing Collective Progress.** The Agreement also provides for collective progress to be reviewed in the global stocktake (GST) every five years, beginning in 2023 (the Talanoa Dialogue is an initial stocktaking process in 2018). The purpose of the global stocktake is to assess collective progress towards the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement (the temperature goals, efforts to enhance resilience to climate impacts, and aligning financial flows with low-emissions and climate resilient pathways). There is emerging consensus regarding the valuable role that non-state actors can play in providing inputs to the stocktaking process.

Key questions include whether the format of the stocktake should be oriented around the long-term goals under the Agreement—limiting temperature increase, increasing resilience, and aligning financial flows. There are also questions about whether the stocktake should explicitly address specific issues addressed in the Agreement, such as loss and damage beyond the efforts of adaptation. Another issue is how to consider issues of equity in the stocktake.

**Facilitating Implementation and Promoting Compliance.** The Paris Agreement establishes a committee to “facilitate implementation and promote compliance” and note that this committee should conduct its work in a facilitative manner and non-punitive manner. If a country hasn’t communicated an NDC or a national report, this expert committee could play a role in assisting the country. In addition to assisting individual countries, there is the potential for the committee to be mandated to identify systemic issues faced by countries in general.

The Rulebook must provide guidance on when and how “cases” will be referred to the committee—whether Parties can request the committee’s assistance, whether the committee can step in at its own discretion, or whether the individual technical expert review can refer cases. The Rulebook must also address other questions, such as what latitude the committee has, the range of measures or actions that the committee can take and whether the committee will be able to address issues that have to do with more than one country.

## TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PARIS RULEBOOK, READ THE PUBLICATION:

Setting the Paris Agreement in Motion: Key Requirements for the Implementing Guidelines  
[www.wri.org/publication/pact-implementing-guidelines](http://www.wri.org/publication/pact-implementing-guidelines)

Building on prior analysis and the firsthand experience of negotiators and other key stakeholders, this paper by the Project for Advancing Climate Transparency provides both an overarching vision and practical suggestions for the foundational elements of the Paris Agreement's implementing guidelines.

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