



## Analytical Brief on Climate Ambition and Sustainability Action

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# Visionary Leadership in Industrialized Countries

Are responses sufficient to address a 'global commons' issue?

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### Key Questions >>>

- Which industrialized countries can be considered as role models when it comes to tackling the global issue of Climate Change?
- How can industrialized countries better combat climate denialism and resistance to climate action in view of changing political dynamics across the world? Who will drive this response: governments, businesses, citizens, international organizations?
- How can the question of historical cumulative emissions be better addressed by industrialized countries? How can industrialized countries better design cooperation mechanisms that address gaps of research, technology and finance for developing countries to respond to climate change both in terms of mitigation as well as adaptation?
- Has the international community failed to convince the Trump administration over the dangers of Climate Change? What ramifications will this hold for the rest of the world when the United States pulls out of the Paris Agreement?

### Urgency for action

Under government real-world action based on current policies, the global temperature is projected to rise by 3°C and under the most optimistic policy scenario, the global temperature is projected to rise by 2.8°C (CAT 2019). Since 1751, the world has already emitted over 1.5 trillion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, and the global average temperature has increased by more than 1°C (Ritchie and Roser 2020). Historically, the United States has contributed the most, accounting for 25 per cent of the cumulative emissions. Followed by the 28 European countries grouped under the European Union (EU), which collectively account for 28 per cent, China 13 per

cent, Russia 6 per cent and Japan 4 per cent. The following looks at how the EU and the G8, a group of the world's most industrialized countries have performed to tackle the climate change issue (ibid).

### Action by European Union

The EU has been one of the early adopters of climate targets. In 2009 itself, a goal of reducing GHG emissions by 20 per cent by 2020 was set and in the Paris meet it increased that target to 40 per cent to be reached by 2030 (Mulvaney 2020). The EU has also bound its member countries to work towards generating 32 per cent of its energy through renewable sources (Tidman 2019; Mulvaney 2020). However, experts say that

currently, the EU is not on track to meet its “under-ambitious” 2030 target (Germanwatch 2019). The European Investment Bank (EIB) has also set an important benchmark for others to follow. In November 2019, EIB announced that it will no longer finance fossil fuel energy projects from the end of 2021 as a part of its new climate strategy and energy lending policy.

### **Germany**

Germany has propagated climate policies not just at the national level but has been a norm leader in EU and international deliberations. Apart from Energiewende, in 2019, Germany announced a coal phase-out by 2038, which is yet to be ratified by the national legislation. Ambitious plans like a carbon pricing system are to be introduced in 2021. These also include measures to improve public transport and increase the share of renewable energy. These plans indicate positive signals, but according to experts, these measures are still not sufficient to put Germany on track to a well below 2°C temperature increase pathway (Germanwatch 2019).

### **Japan**

Japan, on the other hand, has managed to reduce its relatively high levels of per-capita emissions and energy use over recent years. A long term Japanese strategy includes over 80 per cent reductions by 2050. However, experts say that it lacks a concrete roadmap to achieve such an over-ambitious target (*ibid*).

### **France**

Experts have commended France on its most ambitious energy efficiency target worldwide in terms of reducing final energy consumption by 50 per cent between 2012 and 2050. Other targets include Carbon Neutrality by 2050 and the launch of a low-carbon level in forestry and agriculture sectors. However, the French have been criticised for the lack of implementation measures. On the international scene, France has regularly taken up leadership roles like for the One Planet Summit and One Planet Lab.

### **United States**

The United States, since 2005, has reduced its emission by 760 million metric tonnes (EESI 2018). Between 2010 and the first quarter of 2019, US power companies announced the retirement of coal-fired power units with a total capacity of 102 GWs (EIA 2019). However, considering the current developments under the Trump

administration, the Climate Action Tracker (CAT) has categorised US’s efforts as “critically insufficient”, their lowest ranking (Rosen 2019). United States climate policy has worsened under the current regime. Trump has called climate change a hoax and has done plenty to reverse his predecessor’s pro-environmental policies.

Restrictions have been lifted on coal-plant emissions, pollution standards for vehicles have been rolled back and the permit for laying of the massive Keystone XL oil pipeline has been approved. The US is also set to withdraw itself from the Paris agreement by the end of November 2020 (Tidman 2019). At the national level, policies to reduce GHG emission levels are in a dismal state but at the federal level, the landscape is encouraging wherein many individual states have set their own renewable energy and emission targets.

### **United Kingdom**

Many experts have proclaimed the United Kingdom (UK) as a leader when it comes to taking action on climate change (Rosen 2019; Mulvaney 2019). Since 1990, GHG emissions have fallen by 40 per cent and in November 2019, UK passed a measure requiring the country’s emissions to reach net-zero by 2050 (Rosen 2019). In 2008, the UK passed the Climate Change Act intending to decarbonise its economy (Rosen 2019). In 2019, for the first-time, energy through renewable sources provided more electricity to UK homes than fossil fuels (Germanwatch 2019). In the same year, a Climate Emergency was declared after major public protests (Tidman 2019). However, according to one government report, there have been gaps between targets and implementation to achieve its medium-term carbon budgets (Germanwatch 2019). Practices like fracking, reducing subsidies on renewable energy and opposing wind farms have hindered the UK’s ability to fulfil its pledges (Tidman 2019).

### **Russia**

Russia, the world’s fourth-largest emitter, has finally started the process to ratify the Paris Agreement. For the first time, it has started to regulate its emissions and impose a carbon tax. As per the agreements, Russia will increase its GHG emissions by 6 to 24 per cent over 2016 levels by 2020 and 15 to 22 per cent by 2030. Its renewable target is set at 2.5 per cent by 2024 and 4 per cent by 2035. This target does not require the government to adopt a low-carbon economy

development strategy. Russia has been criticised for setting such weak commitments and unambitious targets (Mulvaney 2019).

## Canada

Canada has been commended for its proactive role at the international level. It has implemented an

ambitious plan of introducing a Carbon Tax in 2019. However, it has been criticised for approving a multi-billion-dollar oil pipeline expansion, but the Trudeau administration claims that a part of its profits will be funnelled into green projects (Germanwatch 2019; Tidman 2019)

## Key Questions

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2. How can industrialized countries better combat climate denialism and resistance to climate action in view of changing political dynamics across the world? Who will drive this response: governments, businesses, citizens, international organizations?
3. How can the question of historical cumulative emissions be better addressed by industrialized countries? How can industrialized countries better design cooperation mechanisms that address gaps of research, technology and finance for developing countries to respond to climate change both in terms of mitigation as well as adaptation?
4. Has the international community failed to convince the Trump administration over the dangers of Climate Change? What ramifications will this hold for the rest of the world when the United States pulls out of the Paris Agreement?

## References

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## **Analytical Brief on Climate Ambition and Sustainability Action**

The brief series, brought out jointly by the World Sustainable Development Forum and the Protect our Planet Movement, seeks to highlight a topical issue relevant to the realization of the sustainable development goals and ambitious climate actions. This brief is to feed into the discussions of the Second World Sustainable Development Forum to be organized in Durango, Mexico (5-7 March, 2020).

### **About WSDF**

The World Sustainable Development Forum (WSDF) is a not-for-profit organization incorporated separately in Europe, Norway and the U.S. Its North American arm WSDF-NA, headquartered in Washington, DC carries 501c3 tax exempt status. WSDF is a global initiative to promote and mobilize global action for effective implementation of both the Paris agreement on climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN General Assembly. WSDF's relevance and role lies in acting as a facilitator for helping with implementation of actions required under these two sets of agreements.

### **About POP Movement**

Protect our Planet (POP) Movement believes that the impacts of climate change will not affect a single country but the planet, in its entirety. POP believes that the power of the youth of the world will unite and to address this challenge. POP believes that the time to act is now and that knowledge is the true currency of changing the future.



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