



INSIGHT BRIEF

Zero Waste in NDCs

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NDC 
PARTNERSHIP

Contents

Zero Waste Requests: Facts and Figures	3
Breakdown of Requests	4
Focus Area	4
Sectors	5
Activity Type	6
Confirmed Partner Support	7
Zero Waste Core Themes	8
Circular Economy	9
Food Waste and Loss	10
Waste-Related Methane	11
Addressing Challenges to Integrating and Implementing Zero Waste Elements in NDCs	12
Engaging the Entire Supply Chain	12
Policy Solutions to Address Capacity Constraints and Leadership Changes	12
Finance Incentives for System Change	13
Investor Confidence and Lack of Data	13
Financing and Scaling Projects	13
Conclusion	14

About Insight Briefs

Insight briefs are analyses developed by the NDC Partnership Support Unit, members, or partners to share insights into thematic issues based on requests received by countries and the support provided through the NDC Partnership. This insight brief analyzes requests for support that the NDC Partnership has received from developing country members related to zero waste. It identifies trends across country requests and partner support offerings to inform how the NDC Partnership can refine and expand assistance.



Photo by Robert Peak / Adobe Stock

Zero Waste Requests: Facts and Figures

Achieving zero waste is one of the 10 priorities of the COP31 Presidency's Action Agenda. Zero waste has three core themes: preventing food waste across production and consumption, reducing waste-related methane emissions, and supporting circular economy policies. Zero waste includes unlocking the climate action potential of waste management through scalable circular economy solutions.

Through the NDC Partnership, countries are increasingly requesting support to achieve zero waste as part of the development, implementation, and financing of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Since 2018, 82 countries out of 105 have submitted 652 requests for support through the NDC Partnership related to zero waste, totaling 9% of all requests for support shared with the NDC Partnership. These requests mostly focus on building a circular economy, followed by reducing waste-related methane, and eliminating food waste and loss. The most frequently requested support activity—developing bankable projects and pipelines—is also the least fulfilled, with only 39% of requests supported.

A total of 82 countries (78% of the 105 countries requesting support through the NDC Partnership) have submitted 652 requests for support through the NDC Partnership regarding zero waste.

Only 48% of these zero waste requests have attracted support, with 35% receiving full support and 13% partial support. This is lower than the 56% overall support rate through the NDC Partnership (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Proportion of Zero Waste Requests Fully Supported, Partially Supported, or Receiving Indicative or No Support



Breakdown of Requests

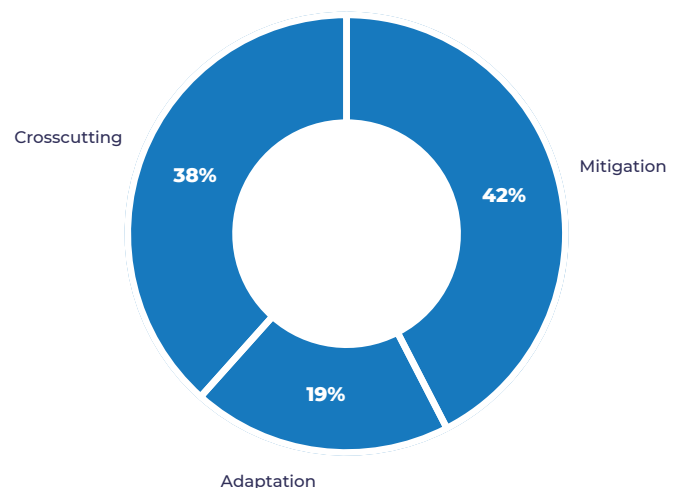
Focus Area

Zero waste requests are most commonly focused on mitigation (42%), followed by crosscutting measures, and adaptation (see Figure 2). This is to be expected, as zero waste measures often focus on reducing the emissions of products. While achieving zero waste can have adaptation benefits, these are often co-benefits to mitigation action—for example, improvements to soil health due to composting.

Mitigation-focused requests also have a significant support gap, with 54% of them unsupported.

Figure 2

Proportion of Zero Waste Requests Focusing on Mitigation, Adaptation, and Crosscutting measures



Sectors

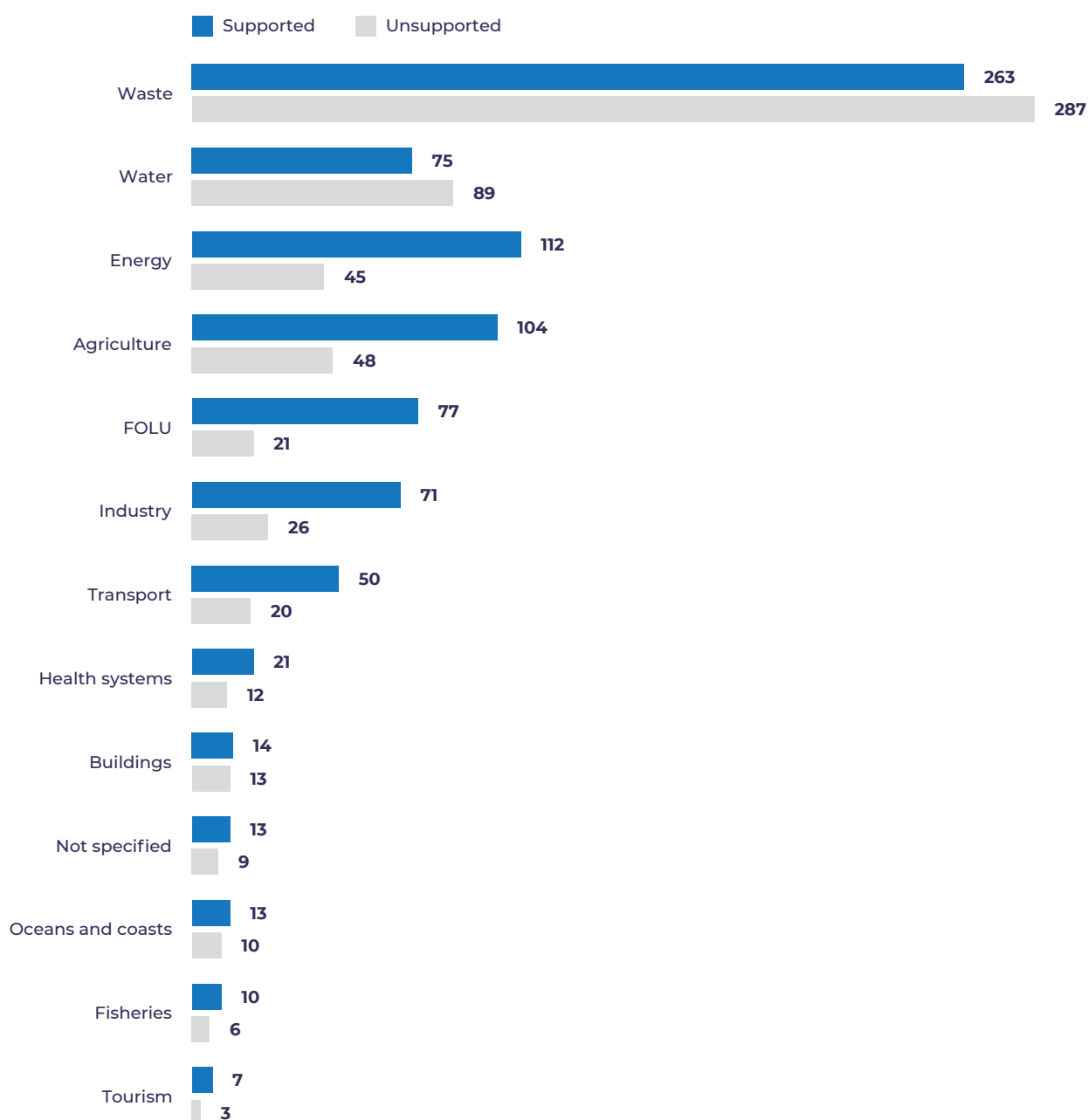
Unsurprisingly, most requests (87%) specify the waste sector (see Figure 3).¹ Of those requests that specify other sectoral needs, the most common sectors are water (27%), energy (26%),

and agriculture (25%). Water is more heavily represented in zero waste requests than other requests for support, such as solarizing wastewater treatment plants or reducing water loss. These water-focused zero waste requests are also where the most support is needed, as 54% of them are currently unsupported.

¹ Note that requests can be tagged with more than one sector.

Figure 3

Zero Waste Requests by Sector



Note. FOLU = Forestry and Other Land Use

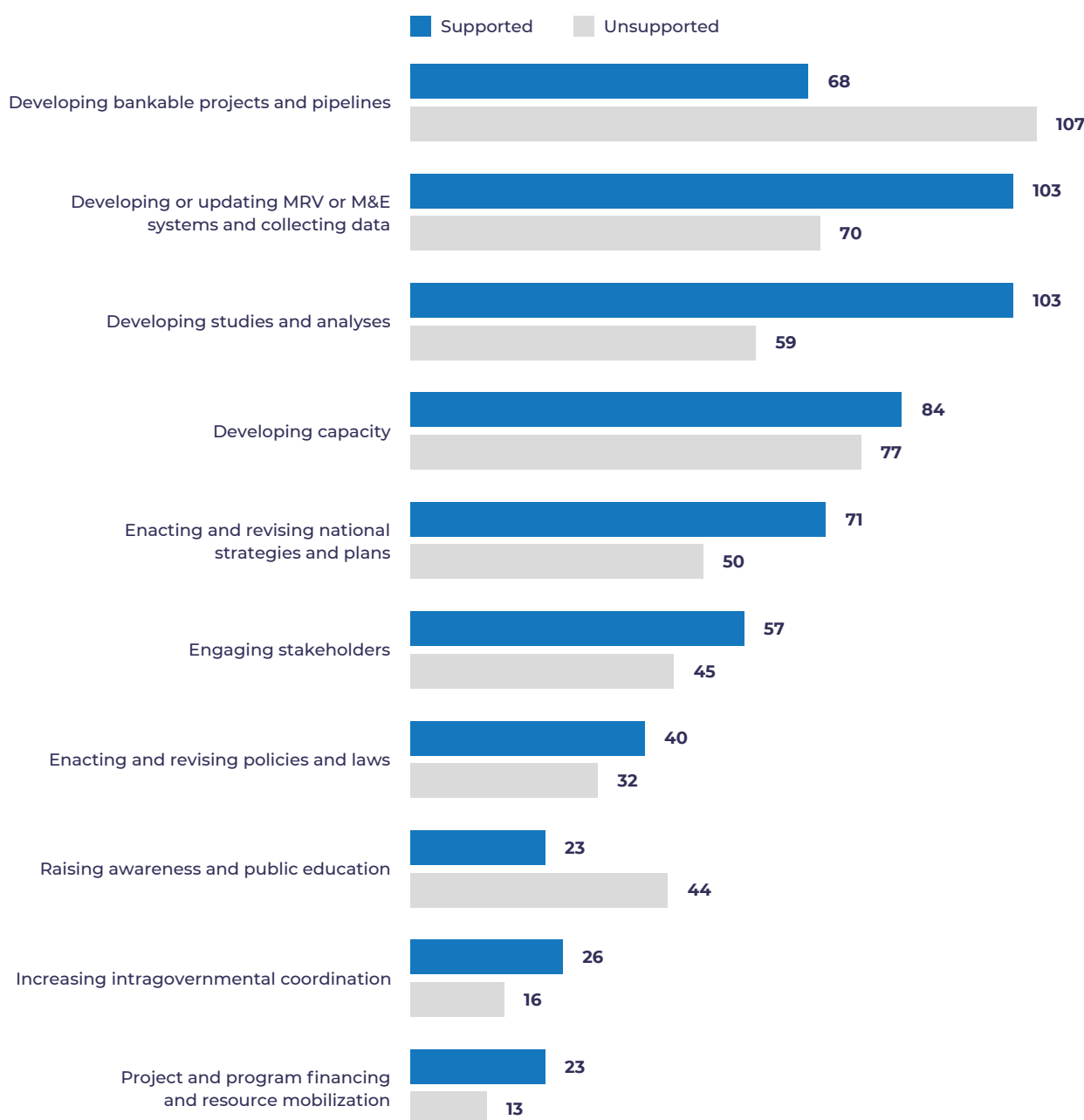
Activity Type

Developing bankable projects and project pipelines is the most frequently referenced activity type among zero waste requests (see Figure 4), such as using cleared alien invasive plants as biomass feedstock to generate electricity. The biggest gaps in support are for requests related to raising awareness and

public education (66% unsupported), followed by developing bankable projects and pipelines (61% unsupported). Requests to develop or update monitoring and evaluation systems, and to collect data are more common in zero waste requests than other types of request. Zero waste requests for support cover the national, regional, and city levels, reflecting the importance of local solutions.

Figure 4

Zero Waste Requests by 10 Most Common Activity Types



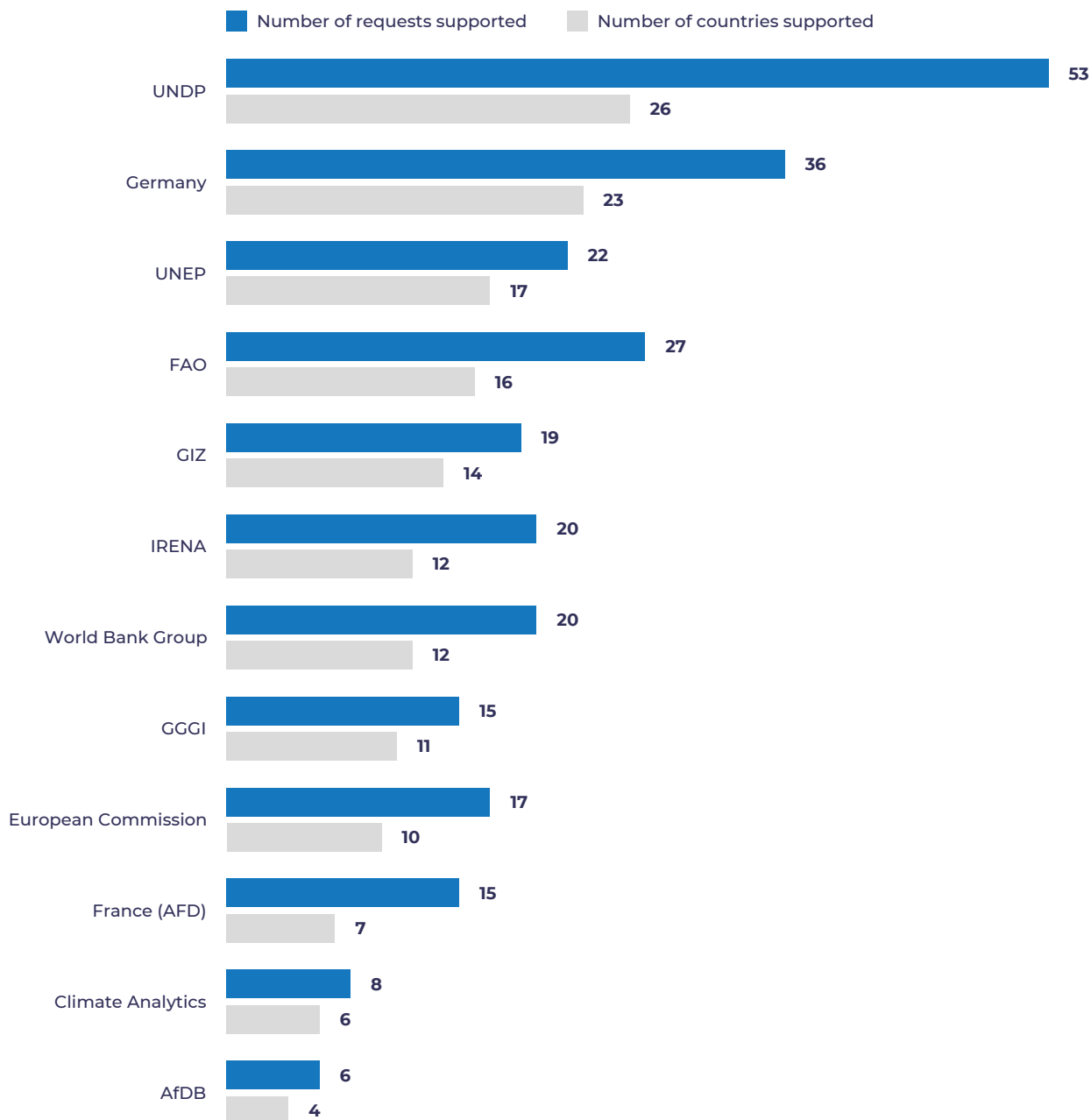
Note. MRV = Monitoring, reporting, and verification; M&E = Monitoring and evaluation.

Confirmed Partner Support

Of the 305 partners providing support through the NDC Partnership, 104 (34%) have provided support to at least one zero waste request (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Partners Providing the Most Support for Zero Waste Requests by Number of Requests and Countries Supported

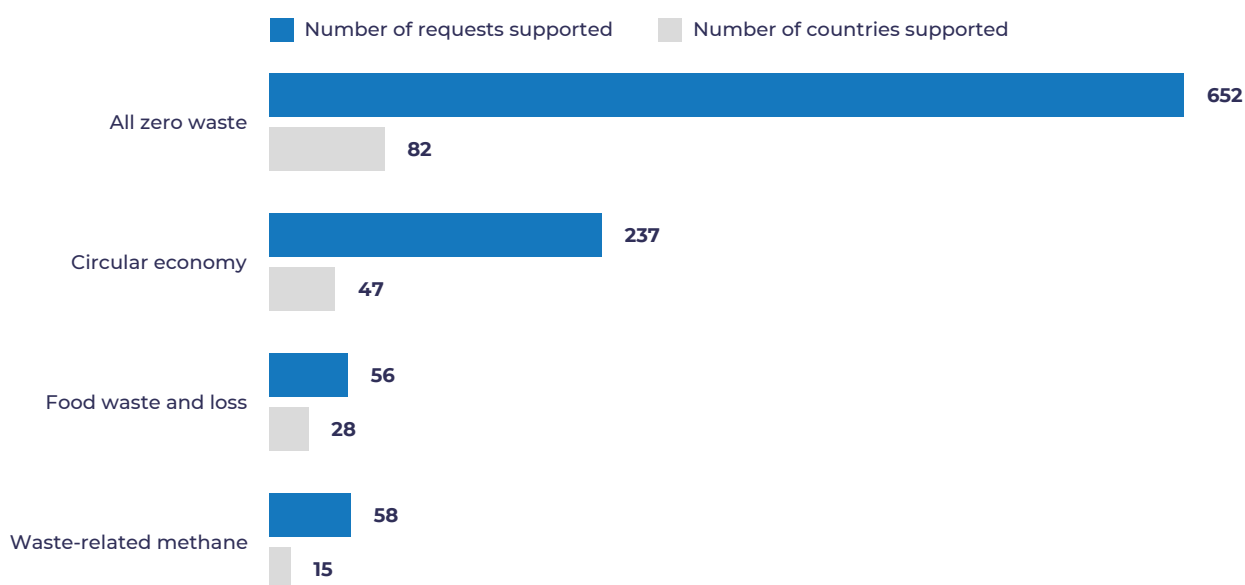


Zero Waste Core Themes

This chapter and Figure 6 below summarize trends across requests according to the three themes of zero waste: preventing food waste across production and consumption, reducing waste-related methane emissions, and supporting circular economy policies.

Figure 6

Number of Countries and Requests by Zero Waste Core Themes



Circular Economy

Forty-seven countries submitted 237 requests related to circular economy.

Creating a circular economy is the most common theme of zero waste requests. Among circular economy requests, renewable energy and cities are the second and third most common key topics, whereas among all requests, these are the sixth and thirteenth most common key topics. This indicates the specific importance countries place on local governance within circular economy solutions as well as the renewable energy sectoral focus of circular economy solutions.



Photo by Radoslav Cajkovic / Adobe Stock

CASE STUDY

Circular Economy in Samoa

An example comes from Samoa, which requested support in 2026 to develop and implement its End-of-Life Vehicle Program, which aims to safely remove, dismantle, and recycle 90% of end-of-life vehicles by 2029. This is projected to prevent 4,722 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e) of emissions between 2029 and 2035, reduce land and water pollution, and recover valuable materials for reuse or export. While the program applies to both electric and conventional vehicles, it strengthens the resilience of Samoa's emerging electric mobility sector by establishing systems to manage electric vehicle batteries and other components at their end of life—an essential step for ensuring circularity in the future electric vehicle network.

Food Waste and Loss

Twenty-eight countries submitted 56 requests related to food waste and loss.

Of all zero waste requests, these attract the most support, with only 39% unsupported. Compared to all requests, adaptation is more common in those related to food waste and loss (38% are adaptation-focused), as are gender equality (29%), just transition (16%), and civil society (16%).



Photo by Jens / Adobe Stock

CASE STUDY

Food Waste and Loss in Gambia

Gambia requested support in 2023 to develop and implement a five-year Agriculture Food Loss and Waste Reduction Strategy and Action Plan, with a specific focus on promoting the participation of women and girls in its implementation.

Waste-Related Methane

Fifteen countries submitted 58 requests related to waste-related methane.

This is the least common theme in zero waste requests. It also has the lowest support rate, with 71% unsupported. Compared to all requests, references to cities and subnational government are more common (40% and 19% of requests, respectively).



Photo by David Durán / Adobe Stock

CASE STUDY

Waste-Related Methane in El Salvador

In 2024, El Salvador requested support to conduct a technical and financial assessment and develop an implementation plan for a laboratory that would analyze waste sludge for its anaerobic digestion potential, nutrient and water content, and suitability for composting. The aim is to support waste management practices that minimize methane emissions.

Addressing Challenges to Integrating and Implementing Zero Waste Elements in NDCs

The following challenges and solutions were identified during the NDC Partnership's July 2026 thematic partner discussion, which brought together experts from across 16 organizations to explore the topic of zero waste.

Engaging the Entire Supply Chain

Challenge: Zero waste discussions focus disproportionately on solutions in the waste sector (such as waste disposal), overlooking upstream solutions to limit waste production.

Solution: A circular economy approach can help governments broaden their focus on downstream waste management to include upstream solutions and production processes. Specific sectors for countries to prioritize may be identified through greenhouse gas hotspot assessments. Engaging across supply chains requires all-of-society approaches, bringing together different industries and communities. Leveraging support networks can be particularly valuable for channeling greater support to country requests related to zero waste.

Policy Solutions to Address Capacity Constraints and Leadership Changes

Challenge: Cities often fail to connect zero waste efforts to urban planning and lack the capacity to carry out projects. Changes in leadership also create challenges for sustained progress.

Solution: Waste management is a traditional function and responsibility of local government, and opportunities exist to integrate zero waste into urban planning. Integrating waste management into planning processes allows for greater policy continuity across leadership changes. Additionally, voluntary pledges to reduce waste and methane can be an effective way to implement zero waste climate action. For example, addressing food waste via pacts (such as the Plastics Pact Network) or voluntary agreements saves money, reduces methane, and creates market incentives. Pacts tackling plastics and packaging are driving single-use plastics off the market and increasing recycling. National bioeconomy strategies to accompany NDCs and Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategies may also facilitate more effective systems approaches to the implementation of NDCs.

Finance Incentives for System Change

Challenge: Producing and disposing of waste is often inexpensive or costless, and there are rarely financial benefits for consumers to adopt new approaches like recycling. This presents a significant hindrance to behavior and system change.

Solution: Funding zero waste initiatives can make zero waste solutions more cost effective than waste incineration, which is often where most waste finance is focused. Focusing on organic waste management—including eliminating open burning to decrease methane emissions—is less costly than traditional collection, transport, and landfill disposal. Economic instruments, such as differentiated waste fees through opt-in smartphone apps, can create important incentives for consumer behavior change and sustaining new markets.

Investor Confidence and Lack of Data

Challenge: Uncertain revenue streams, limited data, and a relative lack of investor confidence make it difficult to attract private finance to zero waste initiatives. For example, Samoa imports significant amounts of compost, but a lack of market information prevented investors from recognizing the viability of establishing a domestic compost industry.

Solution: Partners can help boost investor confidence by building capacity for data collection in countries and subnational areas where data issues have discouraged investment, and by collecting and presenting successful examples from other projects. Supporting the development of bankable projects with a successful track record can further encourage investors to commit to zero waste initiatives.

Financing and Scaling Projects

Challenge: Waste management is often fragmented and short term. For instance, most organic waste composting projects are small and disconnected, making them expensive. While technologies for organic waste disposal exist, financing and scaling their implementation remains a challenge, particularly for those requiring large capital investments and policy coordination.

Solution: Extended producer responsibility—where producers pay for the collection and treatment of the products they produce—could be an effective financing system for waste management. Blended finance mechanisms can provide longer term and more stable finance to scale projects. Additionally, cities may create and lead innovator or incubator zero waste projects utilizing innovative technological solutions in different sectors. These types of projects attract diversified, blended finance, meaning cities do not need to rely solely on public funding for their implementation and scaling.



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Conclusion

Zero waste is emerging as a practical and investable climate priority for countries working to develop, implement, and finance their NDCs. Requests submitted through the NDC Partnership show strong and growing country demand across circular economy, food waste and loss, and waste-related methane mitigation, with needs concentrated in project development, financing, data systems, public awareness, and local implementation. Yet support gaps remain significant, particularly for waste-related methane, mitigation-focused requests, water-linked zero waste opportunities, and the development of bankable project pipelines.

The analysis of requests also points to the need to move beyond a narrow focus on downstream waste management and toward system-level approaches that prevent waste, strengthen value chains, and create incentives for circularity. This is especially important in sectors where material demand is rising, such as the energy sector. As the clean energy transition expands, circular economy approaches can help reduce future waste streams, lower costs, and improve resource security—for example, by planning now for the reuse, recycling, and responsible management of solar panels and other clean technology materials.

The NDC Partnership is well positioned to help countries move from zero waste ambition to investment. The NDC Partnership can connect country demand with technical and financial support; help governments identify priority sectors and investment-ready opportunities; and support the data systems and monitoring and evaluation systems, and market information needed to build investor confidence.

Looking ahead, the NDC Partnership can use these insights to target support where demand is high and gaps are greatest: developing bankable project pipelines, scaling city and subnational solutions, strengthening upstream circular economy approaches, and directing finance toward waste avoidance, organic waste management, and methane reduction. By helping countries translate zero waste priorities into investable actions, the NDC Partnership can support more effective NDC implementation while advancing climate mitigation, adaptation co-benefits, economic opportunity, and more resilient circular systems.



Zero Waste in NDCs

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At the bottom of the page, there are three overlapping geometric shapes: a blue parallelogram on the left, an orange parallelogram in the middle, and a green parallelogram on the right. To the far right, a dark blue triangle points upwards from the bottom edge.