

Climate Emergency, Urban Opportunity

How national governments can secure economic prosperity and avert climate catastrophe by transforming cities

Umbrella Message

National governments that prioritise zero-carbon cities today will secure economic prosperity and better living standards tomorrow. Countries that do not embrace this transition will be left behind.

Key Messages

1. [Economic] **National governments can achieve faster, fairer economic development by investing in zero-carbon cities. Thriving cities make prosperous countries: investments in low-carbon measures in cities would provide a return of at least US\$23.9 trillion by 2050.**
 - It is possible to cut 90% of emissions from cities using proven technologies and practices, while also making an attractive economic return. Doing so would require an investment of US\$1.8 trillion (approximately 2% of global GDP) a year, which would generate annual returns worth US\$2.8 trillion in 2030, and \$7.0 trillion in 2050 based on energy cost savings alone.
 - Zero-carbon cities will be more efficient, productive and innovative, offering countries a competitive advantage as they seek to attract global talent and investment. The leading countries of tomorrow will be those that support an equitable and sustainable transition to a new urban economy in their cities.
2. [Social & Political] **Pursuing zero-carbon, resilient cities in an inclusive way will yield higher living standards and quick political dividends.**
 - Low-carbon investments could address urgent public priorities, including choking air pollution, chronic traffic congestion, poor services and lost work hours. Zero-carbon cities will allow people to live, breathe, and move safely and be productive.
 - Implementing low-carbon measures in cities could support 87 million jobs by 2030 in sectors such as clean energy and public transport.
 - There is growing public call for leaders to act on climate change. National governments should prioritise zero-carbon cities to respond to this popular demand.
3. [Costs of inaction] **The costs of inaction are staggering. Science tells us that further temperature increases pose an existential threat to entire cities and countries.**
 - The world faces a climate emergency. Global heating is already causing serious loss of life, exacerbating political tensions and threatening vital ecosystems.
 - The battle for our future will be won or lost in cities. Cities are home to more than half the world's population and are responsible for 80% of global GDP – and three quarters of energy-related carbon emissions. Low-carbon measures in cities could deliver over half the emission reductions needed to keep global temperature rise below 2 degrees.
 - Cities are also hotspots of vulnerability. Climate mitigation and adaptation must go hand-in-hand to secure sustainable economic development.
 - Over 10% of the world's population – 820 million people – live in coastal zones less than 10 meters above sea level, and 86% of these people live in urban or quasi-urban areas. This

means that storm surges and sea-level rise from climate change are overwhelmingly an urban threat.

- Continued urban sprawl threatens vital agricultural land and natural ecosystems. Urban settlements expanded by an area of land two times the size of Sri Lanka between 2000 and 2014. This unmanaged growth threatens food and water security, produces emissions from land use change, and erodes resilience to new climate hazards.
 - Countries that do not proactively manage the transition to zero-carbon, resilient cities will be locked into high-carbon systems. These will become unprofitable or inoperable as markets and regulations evolve. The result will be stranded assets and stranded workers as industries fail or relocate.
4. [Role of national governments] **Local governments cannot drive the zero-carbon transition on their own: national governments must play a critical role.**
- Local governments have direct power over less than 1/3 of the emissions reduction potential in their cities. National and state governments have power over a further 1/3. More than a 1/3 depends on different levels of government working together to cut emissions. If electricity decarbonisation is included, national and state governments have over two thirds of the responsibility for urban mitigation.
 - Half of the possible urban emissions reduction lies in cities with fewer than 750,000 people, which often lack the financial and technical resources of larger cities, and therefore are in particular need of national government support.
 - National governments are uniquely placed to seize this opportunity by putting inclusive, zero-carbon cities at the heart of long-term economic and social development plans. Today, fewer than two in five countries have an explicit national strategy for cities, and only a handful of these prioritise emission reductions.
5. [Feasibility & urgency] **There is a short window of opportunity open now. Decisions made about cities in the next decade will put countries on a path to prosperity and resilience – or decline and vulnerability.**
- Trillions of dollars will be invested in urban infrastructure in the next decade. The urban population will grow by nearly a billion people in the same period. And in that period of time, science tells us that carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions must be reduced by nearly half. Bold national action is essential to secure economic prosperity and tackle the climate crisis.
 - This report offers case studies from around the world where national and local governments have worked together to rapidly and profoundly transform their cities for the better within two or three decades, including: Chile, China, Colombia, Denmark, Germany, India, Indonesia, Namibia, Rwanda and South Korea.

Read the key priorities for national government action here:

<http://bit.ly/CEUOPrioritiesNG>