

## Big Picture Solutions for the Planet

### What does it take for the world to tackle the planetary crisis?

UNICEF is calling on all Parties to protect the lives of all children, who are increasingly threatened and [disproportionately affected](#) by the planetary crisis, [especially those living in poverty](#). To do so, UNICEF is urging countries to [“reduce emissions and fulfil ambitious international sustainability and climate change agreements”](#).

It is critical that we understand what meeting these agreements entails - for governments,

communities and private stakeholders alike. The provision of meaningful support for climate action requires mastering the systemic nature of the planetary crisis and its solutions - especially when it comes to helping governments and civil societies, together with other UN agencies and development actors, diagnose their situation and chose options for action.

Various international organisations have worked towards developing blueprints and roadmaps to tackle the planetary crisis, based on the best scientific findings available, including the reports of the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#). Multiple research institutions, non-profits, activists and philanthropists have also published their analyses and recommendations for action.

The below is an attempt at synthesising a list of high-level solutions found in authoritative sources, including publications from the [UN](#), [UNEP \(see also\)](#), the [World Bank](#), the [OECD](#) and the [Global Coalition to End Child Poverty](#).

The 3 overarching solutions to the planetary crisis are:

1. Making urgent and deep cuts in emissions to reach net zero as quickly as possible. This means decarbonising the economy and lives across the world, focusing on carbon-heavy activities and high-emitting populations first.
2. Preserving and restoring natural capital and ecosystems. This includes all actions aimed at protecting nature and reversing some of the damage done to date.
3. Undertaking rapid adaptation to the inevitable impacts of Climate Change and strengthening resilience of systems and communities affected.

To achieve these objectives, both people and the systems who rule and influence their lives need to change.

People, as citizens and consumers, need to reach a level of awareness, understanding and inspiration such that change is widely desirable and demanded. This is key because the solutions call for new ways of living, moving around, buying, eating, using energy, and fulfilling needs and desires.

But structural change is the critical foundation to encourage these lifestyle changes and facilitate new behaviours. For example, it is hard to live without a car in a world designed for cars. Or to avoid using plastic when plastic is everywhere around us, in every store and around every product. These require incentives and favourable contexts. People won't be protected from toxic marketing if we leave it to the private sector to self-regulate. Individuals also have very limited power to change the way electricity is generated, or what is legal for companies to sell. As summed up by UNEP, "[the economic, financial and productive systems can and should be transformed to lead and power the shift to sustainability. Society needs to include natural capital in decision-making, eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies and invest in the transition to a sustainable future.](#)"

The global shift to net-zero emissions by 2050 requires major structural changes in economies, from production to distribution and consumption of goods and services – also known as the Green Transition. This transition comprises several economic shifts: the shift away from fossil fuels and toward clean energy; the greening of agriculture, mobility and heavy industry; sustainable cities and infrastructure; and the move to a circular economy, among others. If these shifts are not managed in a just way, many developing countries will lose out on the chance to accelerate the green transition,

and children and young people will lose out on its benefits and/or face risks to their rights, well-being and future prospects.

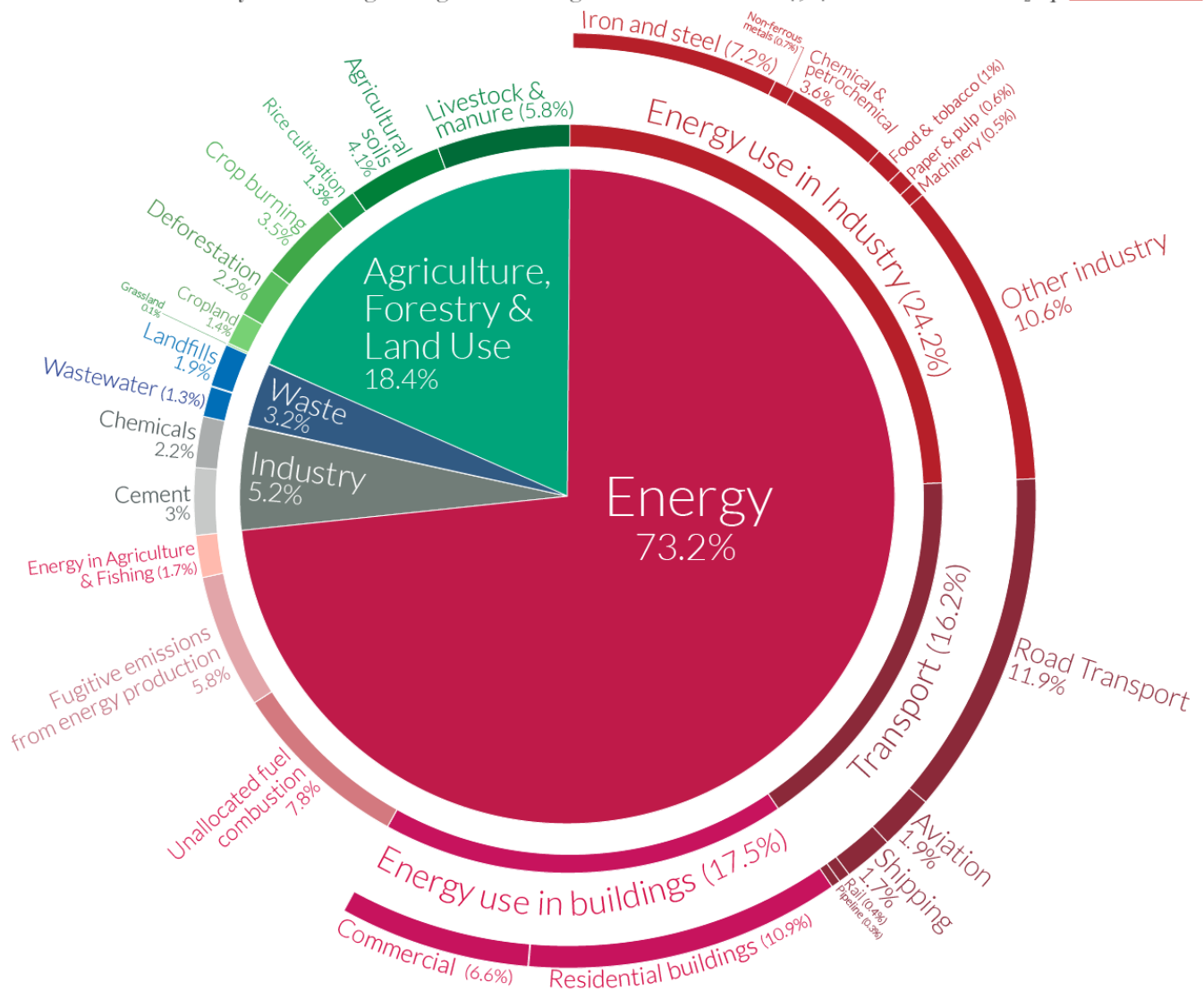
These systemic problems can only be tackled through political action and active public planning: formulating new pro-Earth policies, developing and implementing international, regional, national and local action plans, strong and ambitious, with associated regulations and incentives. Public decision makers hold the keys to structural change.

This complex requirement, from individual level to global economy change through every productive sector, is also underpinned by existential and philosophical questions. ["To achieve effective action, we must tackle the underlying causes of climate change. While the consequences are environmental and human, the drivers of climate change are rooted in the social and economic values, choices and behaviour of our societies."](#)

## Global greenhouse gas emissions by sector



This is shown for the year 2016 – global greenhouse gas emissions were 49.4 billion tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>eq.



OurWorldinData.org – Research and data to make progress against the world’s largest problems.  
Source: Climate Watch, the World Resources Institute (2020).

Licensed under CC-BY by the author Hannah Ritchie (2020).

<https://ourworldindata.org/ghg-emissions-by-sector>

The necessary elements to meet the 3 ambitious goals above include:

#### **Desire for something better**

- Work with the media to publicise accurate evidence, viable solutions, stories of hope and success, and limit the spread of misinformation - creating a positive and inspiring narrative that supports change and frame it as progress, not sacrifice.
- Support introspective processes and a renewed relationship with and respect for nature - including leveraging local and national worldviews, indigenous values and knowledge.
- Change values, norms and perception around social status and achievement, to move from behaviours relying on consumption, accumulation of individual goods and high use of resources, towards sustainability and less carbon-heavy lifestyles (especially the rich).
- Promote the idea of shared prosperity based on increased public services and social protection.
- Strengthen local capacities of communities to move into collective action (social cohesion and ownership), developing resilience through collaboration.

#### **Governance**

- Create the governance frameworks and mechanisms for public participation in decision-making, citizen demand and accountability for transformative change - to ultimately make more collective decisions and generate trust that leaders act in people's best interest.
- Create in countries climate institutions to drive the policy changes across ministries and/or layer climate functions into all existing government structures.
- Sequence policies strategically to start from short-term / immediate political feasibility towards long-term ambition / bigger impact.
- Work with the segments of societies and / or sectors most negatively impacted by the new pro-Earth policies to craft transition and compensation plans.
- Implement system strengthening plans to increase the capacity of public sectoral systems to withstand shocks and provide quality services to communities.

#### **Economy**

- Rapidly reorient the models, indicators and strategies which drive our economies towards environmental preservation and restoration.
- Include all environmental externalities in production and retail costs (e.g., for plane tickets, meat, fashion, etc.), having industries pay for the damages and driving prices up.
- Implement measures to ensure equitable access of the most disadvantaged families to essential goods.
- Turn economies towards re-localised supply chains (including re-industrialising tertiary economies), more regulated international trade, more circular and energetically sober productions and industries.
- Create massive amounts of planet-positive jobs (in sectors like public transport, green energy,

insulation, electrification), specialised and entry levels alike.

- Strongly regulate marketing to reduce consumerism, and prohibit advertising for carbon-heavy and polluting products.
- Improve policies and regulations in main manufacturing sectors towards sustainability (e.g., laws aimed at prolonging the life of electronic devices).

### **Energy**

- Rapidly phase out the use of fossil fuels.
- Restructure the energy systems / create an energy mix with a higher proportion of clean and renewable energy.
- Electrify machines and buildings and plug them into non-carbon-emitting energy sources and networks.
- Insulate buildings at scale to reduce heat flows and losses.

### **Financial resources**

- Align financial flows with the goals of the Paris Agreement through comprehensive green finance reform packages.
- End public subsidies and other support for fossil fuel production, exclude fossil fuel from public finance, and direct greater support towards low-carbon energy development.
- Tax polluting industries and major tax evaders to finance supply-side financial incentives (subsidies, tax credits, rebates) to make clean energy, clean machines and quality plant-based food cheap and affordable for low-income families - driving consumption, research and innovation - and to make planet-damaging investments less profitable for companies.
- Ensure carbon taxes are progressive to deliver social justice.
- Regulate and cap private profit, improve wealth redistribution to level inequities and reduce poverty.
- Expand child-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection (cash transfers) for vulnerable populations.

### **Land use and resources exploitation**

- Switch from industrial, chemical-based and single-crop agriculture geared to feed animals and export products towards family-based, diversified and regenerative farming (agricultural techniques to sustain and increase the fertility of soils).
- Promote the move away from eating animals towards more plant-based diets.
- Protect the ocean from pollution and over-exploitation.
- Stop deforestation and expand the forest.
- Develop new urban models and policies to limit horizontal spread, re-localise lives, focus on public transports, improve building insulations and energy efficiency.

### Innovation

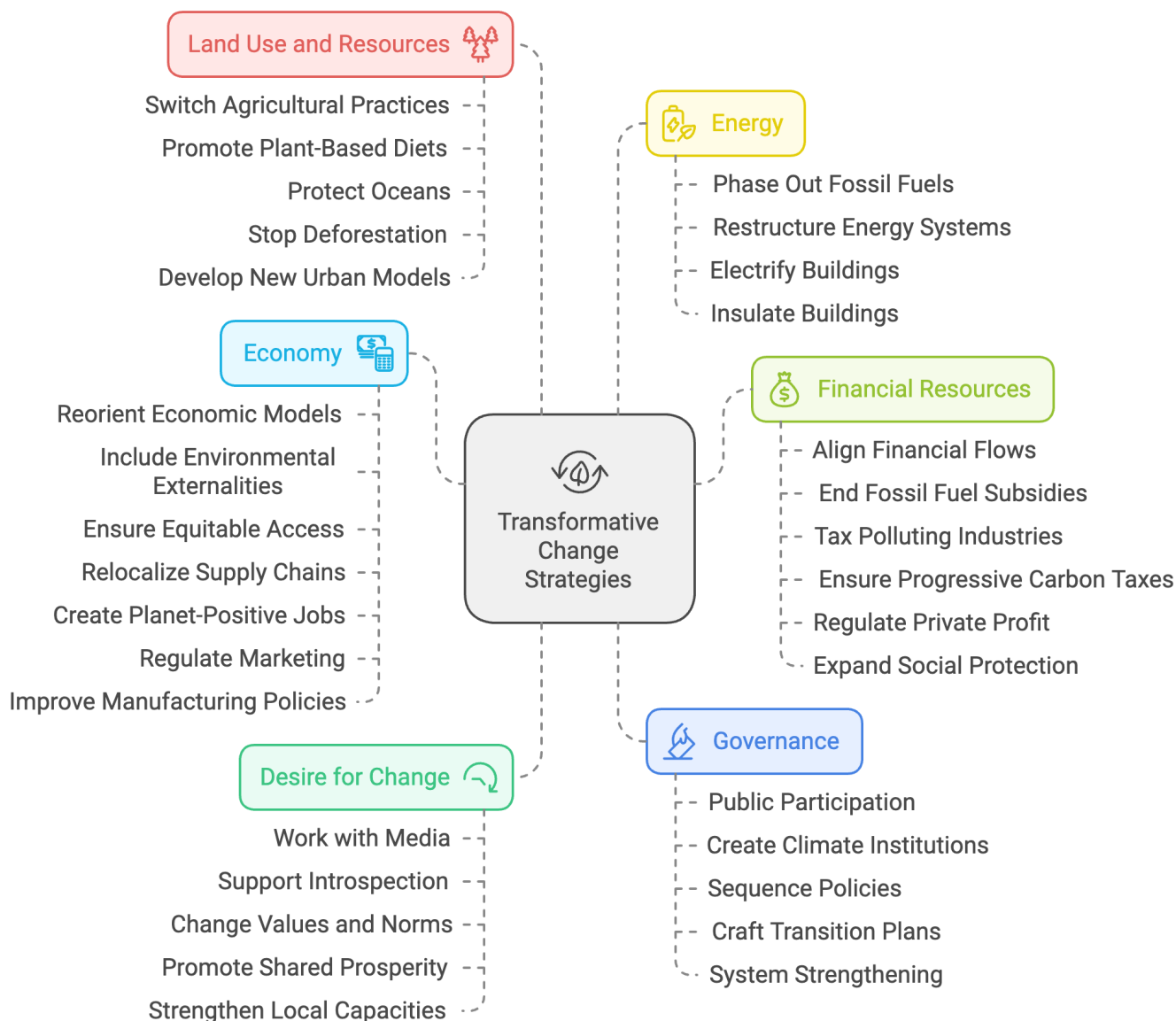
- Implement all under-used existing technical solution (e.g., on-site carbon capture for large industries, efficiency gains, circular circuits, etc.).
- Increase public investments in innovations, develop and diffuse new technological solutions.
- Create frameworks to encourage philanthropists and companies to invest in emerging clean-energy research and solutions.
- Overall, orient research and education to support all of the planet-friendly transitions mentioned above and new models / systems.

These world-changing, revolutionary measures only require political will to be implemented. As [the World Bank highlights](#), real policy change is not an impassable obstacle: there are examples of successfully implemented climate policies. In 2014, defying political and economic challenges, Egypt's Energy Subsidy Reform eased fiscal pressures and encouraged greater private investment in clean energy, with solar and wind generation growing almost threefold in the following five years. In Canada, the province of British Columbia introduced a carbon tax after the financial crisis in 2008, covering 70 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. That reform has reduced emissions and inequality, has raised growth and employment, and now has the support of a majority of citizens. And Kenya managed to reform its power sector, a sensitive and important source of revenues and influence, thus improving efficiency, increasing cost recovery, and mobilising private sector investments into renewable energy.

Yet, political will to change is still dramatically lacking worldwide.

SBC has a specific role to play in this process, contributing to the establishment of participatory governance frameworks, and supporting engagement with all stakeholders to build consensus and momentum for transformative policies.

Beyond global, regional and national policy measures needed across the world, inspiration for action can be found in the many databases that reference local initiatives of change that have met success, providing inspiring examples of what can be done.



**Additional Resources**

- [Power of Possibility - #MoveTheDate \(overshootday.org\)](https://overshootday.org/)
- [#MoveTheDate Solutions \(overshootday.org\)](https://overshootday.org/)
- [Listen to a global mosaic of climate adaptation solutions \(unep.org\)](https://unep.org/)
- Welcome | YALE PLANETARY SOLUTIONS