Advancing Just Transitions In The Built Environment

A Global Research Project Exploring Human Rights in the Green Transition

IHRB

Institute for Human Rights and Business

Executive summary

> **Climate change and social inequality are two of the most pressing challenges of our time.**

Buildings and construction contribute 37% of global energy-related carbon emissions, and cities are often where people experience the greatest socio-economic inequalities and the most severe impacts of climate change. These are global issues: complex, systemic, and entangled, and both must be addressed. Ever-more frequent extreme weather events are disproportionately affecting vulnerable families in inadequate housing, and marginalised communities are losing their jobs when finite resources dry up. This fuels global instability and polarisation, with negative consequences for governments, businesses, people, and the planet.

Around the world, the past ten years have seen an increase in green policies and funding across all sectors. Global investment in the energy efficiency of buildings alone has reached US $285 billion in 2022[1], but climate action, like any other intervention, is not neutral. Efforts to address the climate crisis affect people differently depending on existing power structures, often rooted in historical, structural inequality.

This two-year research project by IHRB investigates the human rights impacts of built environment decarbonisation policies, such as renovation programmes, retrofit subsidies, or new energy-efficient buildings, focusing on the **right to housing, construction worker rights, meaningful participation, and spatial justice.**

The research is grounded in **eight city case studies:** Lagos (Nigeria), Prague (Czechia), Lisbon (Portugal), Melbourne (Australia), Copenhagen (Denmark), Jakarta (Indonesia), Athens (Greece), and Valparaíso (Chile). Investigating a diverse range of contexts uncovered how the dual global challenge of climate change and inequality is being tackled in different parts of the world, each with its own unique national, political, economic, and social context. The findings and recommendations for each city are available in dedicated reports available on the IHRB website.[2]

Lagos, Nigeria.

This study uncovered inspiring examples of governments, businesses, and other actors making homes greener and more affordable or working with marginalised communities to shape climate policies. However, it also uncovered worrying trends that must be addressed, such as renovations leading to evictions (renovictions) and green investment displacing communities (green gentrification).

Across the **four European cities**, communities that are being left behind are pushing back against green initiatives, including in Athens, where these are nascent. As a result, some policymakers are backtracking on their climate commitments, with disastrous consequences for the planet and for those same communities who are often at the frontlines of the climate crisis.

In **Valparaiso, Jakarta, Athens, and Lagos**, built environment decarbonisation policies are only beginning to translate into practice. Here, businesses and government leaders have a unique opportunity to learn from the experiences (and from the mistakes) of other cities and prioritise human rights principles when developing climate initiatives. An inclusive, participatory, and fair process helps legitimise shared goals, broaden support, and ultimately accelerate the transition.

Across all eight cities, there is a clear case for putting people first to unlock and accelerate climate action in the built environment.

The scale of the challenge requires systemic socio-economic transformations. To identify these, the project brought together representatives from governments, businesses, academia, NGOs, trade unions, tenants and other civil society organisations in each city to develop visions for a just transition. While each vision was unique, they all entailed a desire to respect human rights and the planet: two inseparable, mutually dependent outcomes. Decarbonisation does not conflict with reducing inequality; quite the contrary, the two can only be done in tandem.

Equity and decarbonisation are not mutually exclusive, but mutually reinforcing processes

Jorge Royan / Alamy Stock Photo
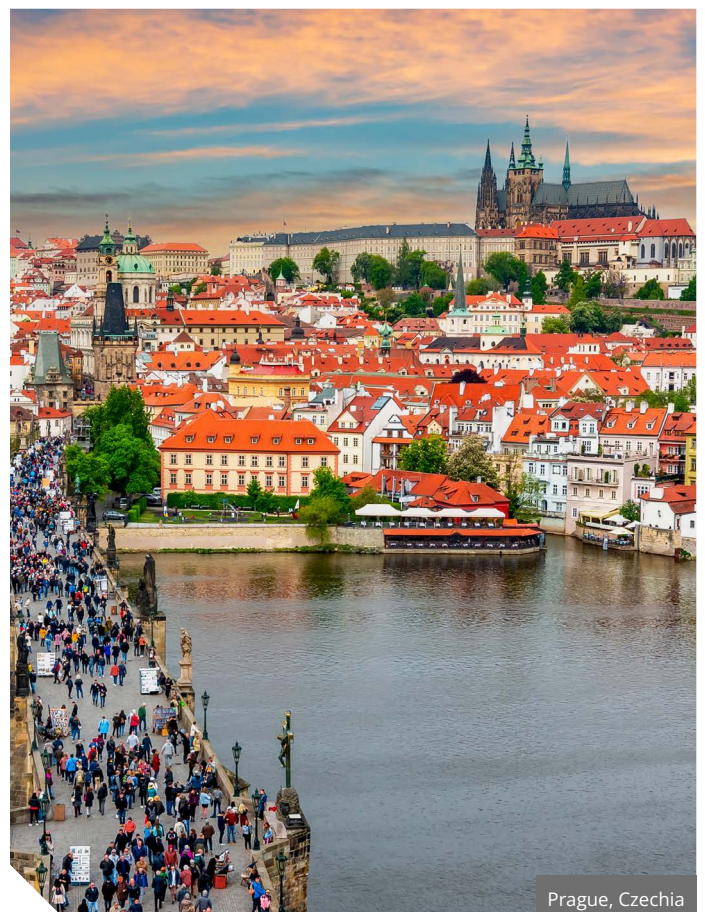
Prague, Czechia

This report is divided into four parts:

Part 1   introduces equity and climate in the built environment, unpacking the meaning of a 'just transition' and the four focus areas: right to housing, workers' rights, spatial equity, and participation.

Part 2   focuses on the status quo of the eight cities today, presenting the human rights risks and opportunities of their green transitions, and analysing the underlying factors.

Part 3   focuses on the future, showcasing the visions for just and sustainable transitions that emerged from the cities. This chapter also includes <u>emerging innovations</u> from businesses, governments, and civil society that are starting to shift the way the built environment is conceived and constructed towards a more just and sustainable direction.

Part 4   focuses on the roadmap to advance just transitions in the built environment. This chapter provides 44 recommendations for governments and investors, and it concludes with three steering principles and three collective endeavours towards system change.

Recommendations include:

Context-specific investments which recognise the existing building stock, local needs, population projections and socio-demographic make-up;	Expanded participation of affected communities, including the meaningful engagement of workers in the development of just transition plans; and	Government and business collaborations to develop a mix of regulations and incentives that unlock the potential of private capital in a socially responsible way

<u>Read the report's full set of recommendations</u>

Three steering principles for governments and investors:

1 A true commitment to transitioning from linear, extractive models to circular, regenerative, inclusive and equitable ones;

2 Educate with objective information, empower with independent tools, and create spaces for the flourishing of committed leaders; and

3 Respect human rights in everyday practice.

Three collective endeavours for all seeking a more just and inclusive world:

1 Rescue the social function and social value of the built environment: a place of shelter, interaction and human flourishing;

2 Develop and communicate a new narrative grounded in human rights and in this social value; and

3 Adopt and mainstream alternative indicators to the GDP to measure human progress and prosperity as a function of environmental preservation and social justice.

Respecting people's fundamental rights is the only way we can create the fair and sustainable societies we need for people and planet to flourish.

Endorsements

The release of this report is timely as countries continue to strive towards a zero-emissions, efficient, and resilient buildings and construction sector that is inclusive of all communities, ensuring no one is left behind. The Institute of Human Rights and Business makes a valuable contribution by advancing the agenda for a just transition for the sector.

Gulnara Roll, Head, Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction (GlobalABC) Secretariat

A vital study with varied geographic breadth contextualizing the challenges and opportunities to advancing an inclusive, equitable, regenerative and just transition in the built environment. A 'win-win' roadmap to prioritizing people's rights when progressing environmental goals.

Roxana Slavcheva, Global Lead for Built Environment, World Resources Institute

The just transition is a critical topic for the building and construction sector to address as we aim to mobilise rapidly, but sustainably, to a net zero, circular and resilient future which leaves no one behind. IHRB's leadership in illustrating this transition in action is an invaluable resource to catalyse momentum and drive necessary change.

Catriona Brady, Director of Programmes Strategy, WorldGBC

This report is a solid tool for championing workers' rights and participation in the just transition. It reflects valuable insights from the ground and provides recommendations that trade unions can use to advocate for fair labour practices and equitable transformations in the built environment.

Ambet Yuson, General Secretary, BWI

This new report showcases that a just transition in the built environment is both a necessity and a booster for effective decarbonisation.

Irene Domínguez Pérez, Policy Advisor on Embodied Carbon, Bellona Europa

Common security is a foundation for social inclusion which can be supported by liveable communities. This report's recommendation that states the need to 'rescue the social function and social value of the built environment' is central to both equity and sustainability. And where the 'participation of affected communities, including the meaningful engagement of workers in the development of just transition plans' is central to the design and retrofit required for decarbonisation then social license with jobs and consequently greater social cohesion is possible. This report provides an invaluable blueprint for people and for sustainability.

Sharan Burrow, Former General Secretary of the International Trade Union ConfederationI

It is clear that prioritising people is essential to unlocking and accelerating climate action in the built environment. Equity and decarbonisation can be mutually reinforcing processes if metropolises implement effective, inclusive, participatory, and fair strategies. Let's accelerate a just transition together.

Jordi Vaquer, Secretary General, Metropolis

This report provides inspiring examples of advancing social equity and human rights when greening our cities, a necessity to address climate change. But it also sheds light on the risks of overseeing poor working conditions in the construction sector or excluding the poor from the benefits of the green transition.

Elin Wrzoncki, Director of Human Rights, Business and Tech, Danish Institute for Human Rights

IHRB's Advancing Just Transitions in the Built Environment' is a critical contribution to guide sustainable development efforts across three intersecting issues of global importance that had previously not been explored together: respect for human rights while combatting climate change, in the context of accelerated urbanization.

Livio Sarandrea, UNDP Global Business and Human Rights Adviser

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Introduction

Equity and climate in the built environment

eye35.pix / Alamy Stock Photo

Climate change and social inequality are two of the most pressing challenges of our time. These are global issues that are complex, systemic, and entangled.

Their negative consequences have been felt for decades, but they are becoming more acute and severe each day, particularly for marginalised communities in urban areas. The built environment – the places where we live, work, and interact with others – has a defining influence over our ability to live healthy, fulfilling lives. Cities are where 70% of global carbon is emitted[5] and where people experience the most severe impacts of climate change, rising living costs, and socio-economic inequalities. It is also where these global challenges can be addressed, showing the important and inextricable link between local and global dynamics.

In all regions of the world, policymakers, planners, developers, real estate investors, engineers, architects, and construction companies are developing a range of policies and financial investments to reduce carbon emissions and address the climate crisis. **However, the impacts of climate actions, like the impacts of climate change, are not felt equally by everyone.** For example, policies like mandating the use of bio-based materials, introducing subsidies for building retrofits, or replacing leaky buildings with energy-efficient ones may all have positive environmental impacts. However, if they are not accompanied by purposeful strategies and mechanisms to equitably distribute the benefits they seek to generate, they may inadvertently exacerbate inequality between landlords and tenants, residents of different neighbourhoods, and different workers. Communities that feel left behind are likely to push back against these climate initiatives, which may result in further delays and roadblocks.

Despite such challenges, climate actions can and must be inclusive. Government- or business-supported climate initiatives that acknowledge existing inequalities within and between communities can address environmental issues while also fostering social inclusion and respect for human rights. Socially and environmentally sustainable models and paradigms are possible. They require concerted efforts and ongoing commitments to participatory processes, a shared responsibility for results, and accountability for adverse impacts on individuals and communities.

This way, the built environment sector can fulfil its critical role in helping address climate change and, concurrently, in reducing social inequalities.

Defining Just Transition

While there is no universally accepted definition of the term just transition, the concept was pioneered by the trade union movement and is considered today by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to entail *"greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities, and leaving no one behind."* [6]

It is key that just transitions processes include social dialogue, social protection and the recognition of labour rights. This means workers (and also local communities) should have agency and should be legitimate counterparts to governments and businesses.[7]

For the purpose of this project, just transitions refer to **climate actions that:**

➔ Are ecologically-conscious as well as supportive of societal development within planetary boundaries, and;

➔ Ensure the benefits of such shifts are equally spread and enjoyed, and that costs are not borne by traditionally excluded or marginalised groups.

From an IHRB perspective, a just transition should include <u>four essential elements:</u>

1. Preventing risks and adverse impacts;

2. Equal access to opportunities and benefits;

3. Accountability to, and agency of, potentially affected groups; and

4. Transformational systems change.[8]

Just transitions are intrinsically context-specific and efforts to implement related strategies in various sectors continue to evolve. For the purpose of this project, a human rights framework was used to assess the **social impacts of climate action in the built environment.**

Melbourne, Australia. Credit: Alejandra Rivera

Human rights:
four thematic areas

This project, and IHRB's wider Built Environment Programme[9], aims to make human rights part of everyday business by drawing attention to existing international standards and commitments, and detailing how these should inform the processes that shape the built environment around the world.

These include standards relating to the realisation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR)[10] such as the right to housing and access to health services, as well as to a healthy environment, workers' rights, and land-related rights. The work of the programme and this project also include a focus on civil and political rights, particularly non-discrimination, and procedural rights, including the right to meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

With this human rights grounding, the project researched how transition processes in eight cities are being planned or taking place with regards to four thematic areas:
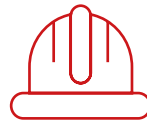
Workers' rights

Freedom of association and collective bargaining, social dialogue in transition processes, no forced or child labour, no discrimination, and a safe and healthy working environment[11], to apply on site and throughout supply chains.

Right to housing

"The right to live in a home in peace, security, and dignity, which includes security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, appropriate location, and cultural adequacy."[12]
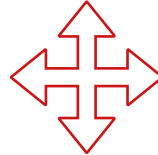
Spatial justice

Refers to the principles of equality and non-discrimination applied to space. Spatial justice is defined as "fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them", and an even development, free of biases imposed on certain populations because of their geographical location.[13]

Participation

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognises the right to participate in public affairs. This UN-recognised right to participation, when applied to the built environment, relates to the concept of the *right to the city* proposed by philosopher Henri Lefebvre who argues people should be able to take part in, appropriate, and shape the built environment they inhabit and use.[14] Therefore, it is "not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it".[15]

The eight cities selected as case studies were: Lagos (Nigeria), Prague (Czechia), Lisbon (Portugal), Melbourne (Australia), Copenhagen (Denmark), Jakarta (Indonesia), Valparaíso (Chile), and Athens (Greece).

Project overview and research design

This report summarises the results of the two-year action research project *Building for Today and the Future: Advancing a just transition in the built environment.*[16] The project's main goal was to open up pathways for ecological transitions in the built environment that are equitable, inclusive, and just. It did so through the following objectives.

Objective 1:
Strengthened the evidence base for a just transition

➔ **Action research:** investigated climate actions taking place in the built environment in the eight cities and identified positive and negative impacts on people, power relations in decision-making, and proposed what can be done differently.

➔ **Land ownership:** mapped the major private and public landowners in the four European cities as a step to increase transparency and accountability.[17]

➔ **Economic innovation:** identified examples of emerging innovations that aim to address root causes of inequality and climate degradation.[18]

Objective 2:
Built a collective narrative and vision

Visioning workshops: Brought together a large diversity of stakeholders in each of the eight cities, including governments, businesses, trade unions, tenant organisations, NGOs, academia and other civil society organisations. Actors workshopped their visions for their cities' future sustainable and just built environment. These sessions also helped strengthen local narratives for green and equitable transitions.

Objective 3:
Provided guidance for public policy and business practice

Findings from the research and visioning processes informed policy advocacy and communications at the European and global level, and yielded strategic recommendations, guidance documents, and tools dedicated to:

➔ **Local governments:** <u>City Toolkit: The role of local government in advancing a just transition in the built environment</u>

➔ **Investors:** <u>Making the case for green and affordable housing investment in Europe</u>

➔ **Worker representatives:** <u>Future green construction jobs: skills and decent working conditions</u>

➔ **Academia and future generations:** <u>Course on human rights in the built environment</u>

Leverage Across the Built Environment

WIDER GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

PLANNERS & GOVERNMENTS
Regulatory frameworks. Planning and zoning decisions. Public procurement.

INVESTORS
Coporate engagement. Capital allocation. Policy advocacy.

CONSTRUCTION & MATERIALS
Employment. Worksite practices and sub-contracting. Policy advocacy.

USERS COMMUNITIES WORKERS
Participation, organising, voting, advocacy.

PROJECT OWNERS
Project requirements. RFPs and contracts. Project team composition.

ARCHITECTS & DESIGNERS
Design decisions. Materials selection. Policy advocacy.

PROJECT-SPECIFIC CONTEXT

Research Questions

The project posed the following Research Questions (RQ)
in each of the eight cities:

RQ1. Discovering and describing the status quo:

To what extent are climate actions in the built environment considering human rights? How do local climate policy and actions reflect and consider the basic needs of inhabitants?

➔ Who are the key actors, and who is shaping decision-making?

➔ What are the positive and negative impacts on people, including different communities?

➔ How are these impacts distributed throughout the city?

RQ2. Explaining the status quo:

What are the political conditions that allow or hinder a just transition in the built environment?

➔ What are the linkages (or lack thereof) between environmental and socially sustainable developments?

➔ What are the current enablers and the barriers to a just transition?

➔ What are the linkages to relevant national and international processes?

➔ Is the current government willing and able to uphold human rights in climate policies?

RQ3. Exploring other <u>conditions of possibility</u>[19] for a just transition:

How can we build in a way that does not contribute to climate change, strengthens resilience, and benefits everyone regardless of income, ability, gender, race, or age? What innovative models, strategies, or initiatives are emerging to move towards a more just transition?

➔ What is the vision of stakeholders for a just transition?

➔ What is necessary and feasible to reach that vision?

➔ How and why are innovative models, strategies, or initiatives providing better social and environmental outcomes?

Melbourne, Australia

Research Methodology

The subjects of study in this project were the challenges and opportunities for the incorporation of human rights into the ecological transition of the built environment.

Transition processes included the relevant policies and actions underway in each city (decarbonisation policies, building renovations, and circular economy projects), as well as relevant national processes (climate commitments or adaptation plans), and the relationships, actions, and limitations of built environment stakeholders.

To carry out this global research over a period of two years, IHRB staff were supported by independent, local researchers (see Acknowledgements for a full list of the research teams) contracted for 3-4 months in each city. The research employed qualitative research methods, including field visits, observation at local events, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from different sectors, and a visioning workshop.

The eight cities were selected to ensure diversity in:

➔ **Location:** four cities in Europe with a geographic spread within the continent and one city on each of the other continents, with a focus on coastal cities given their greater vulnerability to climate change.

➔ **Contexts: a wide range of characteristics, including:** population, urban extension, city's contribution to global emissions, as well as different political, social, and economic spheres deriving from path dependencies and resulting in different local priorities.

➔ **Built environment decarbonisation processes:** a mix of cities with more- and less-developed climate policies and initiatives allowing comparative analyses of their impact on human rights.
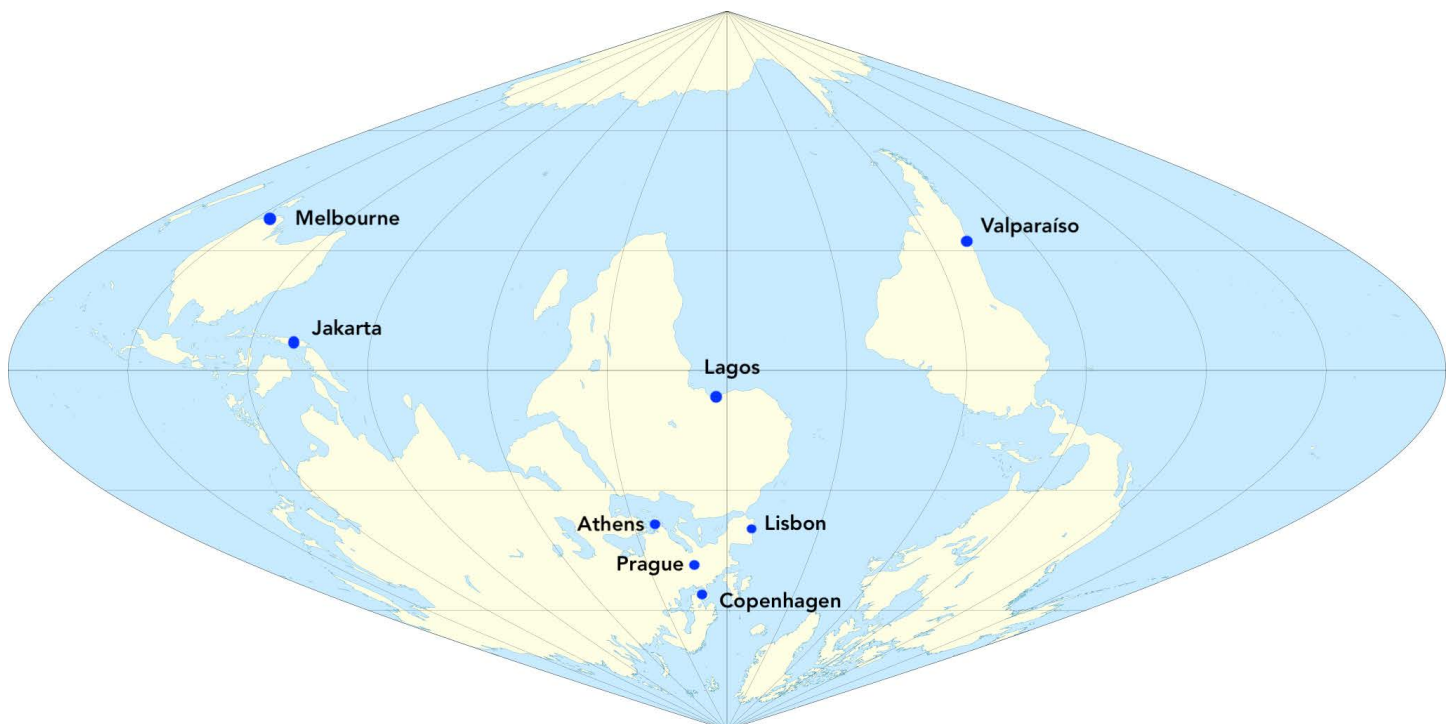
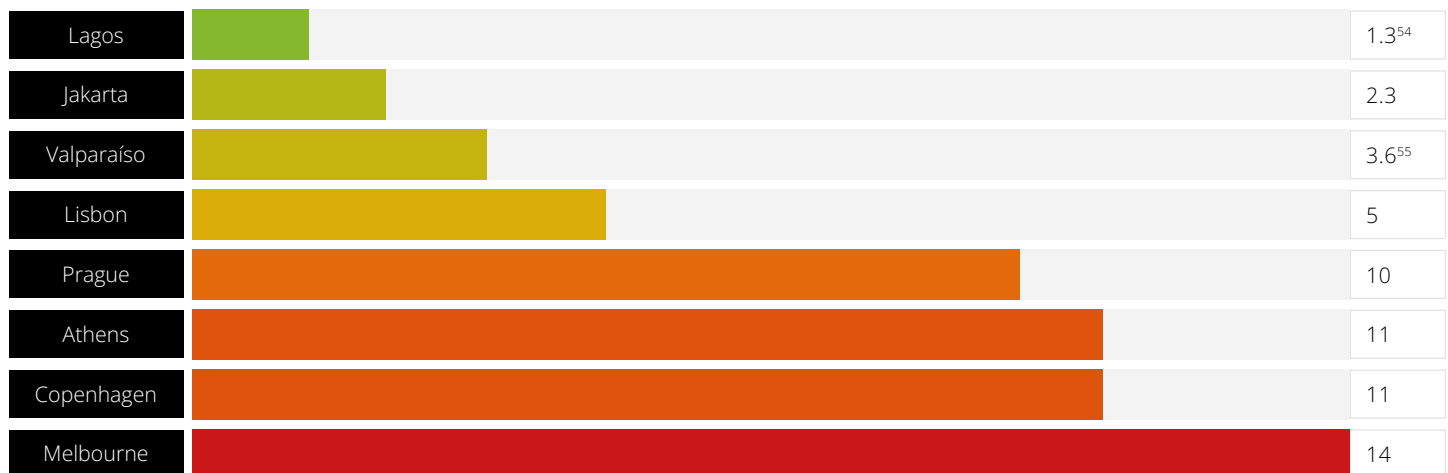Case study cities in a south-oriented sinusoidal projection

Today: Human rights in built environment climate action

This chapter provides an overview of where the eight cities stand today. City snapshots provide the historical and social-economic context of each city, along with relevant facts and findings from the research and a brief summary of city trends. The following section, human rights risks and opportunities, takes a cross-sectional perspective to analyse the relationship between climate action and human rights in the eight cities, including the identification of regional and global trends relevant for other countries and cities. Finally, the underlying factors section dives into the possible reasons that could explain the findings.

City snapshots a quantitative look

Tonnes CO_2 / capita[53]

City		Value
Lagos	▌	1.3[54]
Jakarta	▌	2.3
Valparaíso	▌	3.6[55]
Lisbon	▌	5
Prague	▌	10
Athens	▌	11
Copenhagen	▌	11
Melbourne	▌	14

Housing cost overburden rate*[41]

City		Value
Lisbon	▌	5.4%
Melbourne	▌	7.1%
Prague	▌	10.6%
Valparaíso	▌	13.9%
Copenhagen	▌	22.3%
Athens	▌	27.3%
Jakarta	▌	N/A
Lagos	▌	N/A
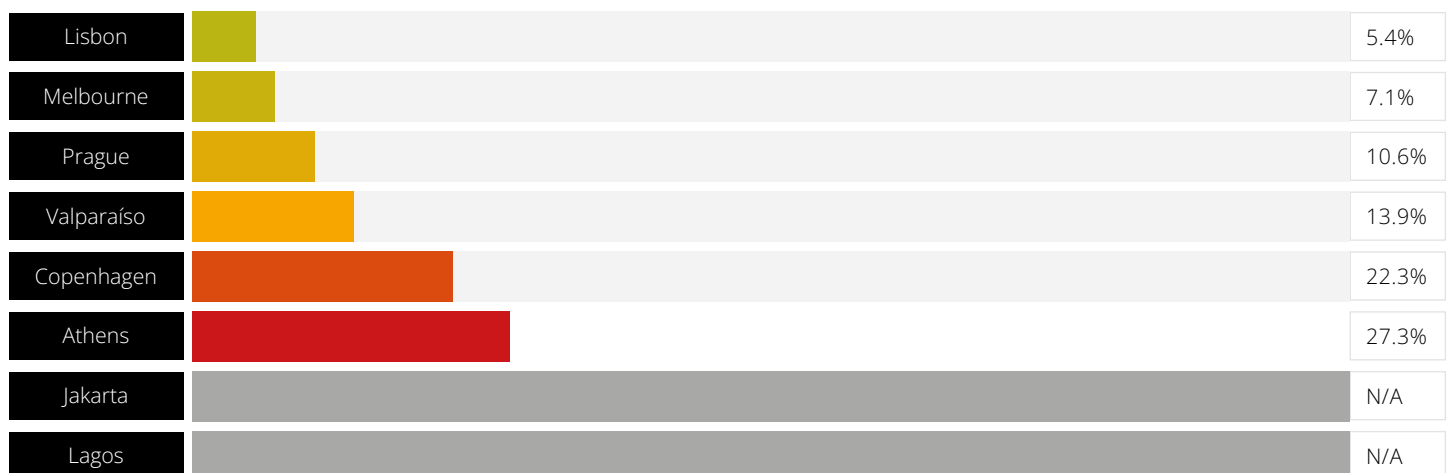
	Athens	Copenhagen	Jakarta	Lagos	Lisbon	Melbourne	Prague	Valparaíso
Population city[20]	660,000	640,000	10,500,000	12,800,000[21]	550,000	150,000[22]	1,300,000	320,000
Population metropolitan area	3,700,000	2,000,000[23]	31,700,000[24]	21,000,000[25]	2,800,000[26]	4,600,000[27]	2,200,000[28]	1,900,000[29]
Population country*[30]	10,400,000	5,900,000	275,500,000	218,500,000	10,400,000	26,000,000	10,700,000	19,600,000
HDI* [31]	0.893	0.952	0.713	0.548	0.874	0.946	0.895	0.860
Gini Index*[32]	32.9	28.3	38.3	35.1	34.6	34.3	26.2	43.0
In informal settlements	N/A	N/A	63%[33]	66%[34]	N/A	N/A	N/A	8.5%[35]
Homeless	15,000[36]	1,500[37]	N/A	N/A	3,700[38]	1,725[39]	10,000[40]	N/A
House price to income ratio*[42]	110	109	80	N/A	144	113	155	116
House price to rent ratio*[43]	131	124	105	N/A	155	142	170	132
% of social / subsidised housing	1.6%[44]	20%[45]	N/A	N/A	2%*[46]	2.8%[47]	5%[48]	N/A
% private home ownership*[49]	70%	60%	48%[50]	25%[51]	78%	64%[52]	76%	60%
Unionisation rate*	25%[56]	67%[57]	12%[58]	10%[59]	19%[60]	12.5%[61]	17%[62]	17%[63]
Civil society participation index*[64]	0.82	0.98	0.8	0.83	0.82	0.84	0.79	0.89
Happy Planet Index*[65]	48.8	45.3	49.6	34.1	46.3	43.1	46.8	45.6

*These are national statistics

In Jakarta and Lagos, over

60%

of people live in informal settlements

In seven of the eight countries, fewer than

25%

of workers are unionised

Athens, Greece

The worst of the 2009–2018 economic crisis appears to be over, and Greece is now posting strong GDP growth figures and attracting significant foreign investment. Due to its location, the country is the first point of arrival for many people fleeing violence abroad, yet, despite a complete lack of social housing, Athens has relatively low levels of socio-economic segregation compared to similar European cities.

Despite being a coastal city and one of the hottest in Europe, Athens is making slow progress in decarbonising its built environment and embedding resilience. National, regional, and local adaptation plans have been developed, and the Athenian Resilience Strategy[66] has explicit references to protecting vulnerable populations, equitable access to resources, and enhancing transparency and accountability in governance. However, these policies have not translated into significant climate action, largely because they are not supported by specific goals and accompanied by resources for implementation.

The impact of nascent efforts is mixed: the Exoikonomo[67] renovation programme is resulting in higher rents that are displacing communities, a process called renovictions; and a relatively low unionisation rate stifles the 1.5 million potential green construction jobs. The Ellinikon development, converting the old airport into a new green urban extension, is promising but could end up being an exclusive, luxury city. On the other hand, the emergence of civil society organisations and the influence of the EU are contributing to a growing culture of participation and evaluation that gives cause for optimism.

Population city	660,000
Population metropolitan area	3,700,000
Population country*	10,400,000
HDI*	0.893
Gini Index*	32.9
In informal settlements	N/A
Homeless	15,000
Housing cost overburden rate*	27.3%
House price to income ratio*	110
House price to rent ratio*	131
% of social /subsidised housing	1.6%
% private home ownership*	70%
Tonnes CO2 / capita	11
Unionisation rate*	25%
Civil society participation index*	0.82
Happy Planet Index*	48.8

*These are national statistics

For more information, read the Athens City Summary Report[68]

Copenhagen, Denmark

Today, Denmark ranks amongst the top 15 countries both by GDP per capita and by income equality. Since the 1970s, Copenhagen has overcome multiple financial crises, and is now one of the most attractive and liveable cities in the world,[69] but also one of the most expensive.[70] While it has relatively low socio-economic inequalities, not all citizens have equally benefited from its approaches, including the controversial parallel societies agreement[71] and the development model pioneered by By & Havn (City & Harbour), the publicly owned, for-profit port authority.[72]

Over the past two decades, Copenhagen has positioned itself as a global leader in the transition to greener, healthier cities. It is aiming to become a climate-neutral city by 2035 through a comprehensive climate plan that aims to simultaneously enhance climate resilience and liveability.[73]

Copenhagen has reduced its carbon emissions by 42% since 2005,[74] but remains among the top 400 cities by emissions per capita.[75] Greener buildings are often more expensive and have led to green gentrification,[76] and investigations by the Municipality have uncovered widespread violations of construction workers' rights.[77] Businesses like Home.Earth and philanthropic associations like RealDania are trying to align social and environmental outcomes through affordable green homes and retrofit-first approaches, and the Municipality is empowering children to drive its biodiversity strategy, but these seeds of a just transition need to spread across the city to ensure the benefits of the climate transition are experienced equitably by all citizens.

Population city	640,000
Population metropolitan area	2,000,000
Population country*	5,900,000
HDI*	0.952
Gini Index*	28.3
In informal settlements	N/A
Homeless	1,500
Housing cost overburden rate*	22.3%
House price to income ratio*	109
House price to rent ratio*	124
% of social /subsidised housing	20%
% private home ownership*	60%
Tonnes CO2 / capita	11
Unionisation rate*	67%
Civil society participation index*	0.98
Happy Planet Index*	45.3

*These are national statistics

For more information, read the Copenhagen City Summary Report[78]

Jakarta, Indonesia

Indonesia is the world's fourth-largest country by population.[79] Following a long history of colonisation and dictatorship, it has been a democracy since 1998 and is set to become the sixth-largest economy in the world by 2027.[80] Jakarta, one of the world's largest cities, is currently its capital, but this is set to change in 2045 with the opening of the planned Indonesian Capital City (IKN) in Nusantara, currently under construction.[81]

Jakarta faces major urban human rights issues: uncontrolled groundwater extraction is causing the entire urban basin to sink at a rate of 28 cm per year,[82] with 95% of Northern Jakarta expected to be underwater by 2050;[83] clean potable piped water is not available to residents; and the city's groundwater, surface rivers, and canals are extremely polluted.[84]

To meet its net zero by 2050 target[85] Jakarta, and Indonesia more broadly, have recently introduced ambitious climate change policies and initiatives, some of which recognise the need to prioritise marginalised communities in engagement and, crucially, delivery. The Indonesia Green Affordable Housing Programme[86] aims to combine affordability and sustainability, while the new green spaces programme is not going far enough to tackle the imbalance in park access between more and less affluent neighbourhoods. As these programmes are relatively new, it's too early to assess their human rights impact, but the deep underlying inequalities undoubtedly present structural barriers to effective action.

Population city	10,500,000
Population metropolitan area	31,700,000
Population country*	275,500,000
HDI*	0.713
Gini Index*	38.3
In informal settlements	63%
Homeless	N/A
Housing cost overburden rate*	N/A
House price to income ratio*	80
House price to rent ratio*	105
% of social /subsidised housing	N/A
% private home ownership*	48%
Tonnes CO2 / capita	2.3
Unionisation rate*	12%
Civil society participation index*	0.8
Happy Planet Index*	49.6

*These are national statistics

For more information, read the Jakarta City Summary Report[87]

Lagos, Nigeria

Nigeria is the sixth-most populous country in the world, and, by 2050,[88] almost one in every thirteen children born in the world will be Nigerian. First pillaged through the slave trade, the country remained under British rule until 1960, but military conflict continued until 1999, when the country became a democracy. Lagos, Africa's most populated city, is home to 10% of Nigeria's population, but two thirds of its residents live in informal settlements,[89] under living and working conditions that do not respect the right to live in dignified, affordable, and healthy housing.

This coastal city, whose name originates from the Portuguese lake, is at the frontlines of climate change, routinely experiencing flooding and extremely high temperatures, and is at risk of being submerged by 2050.[90] The Department of Climate Change has introduced a series of national policies,[91] but these have not been translated into practice, often overshadowed by the ambitious economic growth targets embedded in local development plans inspired by imported ideas and models disconnected from local needs.[92]

There are some exceptions, such as the Ajegunle-Ikorodu Community Resilience Action Plan[93], which grounds climate action in human rights, and civil society organisations like Spaces for Change,[94] which are working to expand the space for marginalised residents to participate in built environment decision-making.[95] However, initiatives such as Eko Atlantic, displacing entire local communities to build privatised gated communities under the guise of resilience,[96] show that there is still a long way to go to ensure the transition benefits those most at risk from climate change.

Population city	12,800,000
Population metropolitan area	21,000,000
Population country*	218,500,000
HDI*	0.548
Gini Index*	35.1
In informal settlements	66%
Homeless	N/A
Housing cost overburden rate*	N/A
House price to income ratio*	N/A
House price to rent ratio*	N/A
% of social /subsidised housing	N/A
% private home ownership*	25%
Tonnes CO2 / capita	1.3
Unionisation rate*	10%
Civil society participation index*	0.83
Happy Planet Index*	34.1

*These are national statistics

For more information, read the Lagos City Summary Report[97]

Lisbon, Portugal

Lisbon's built environment is largely shaped by rapid, unregulated post-World War urbanisation, which has resulted in today's poor-quality building stock. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the Portuguese government received loans from the International Monetary Fund and the EU, for which the country agreed to follow a strict austerity programme. However, the deficit increased and GDP decreased, so the government attempted to attract foreign investment by focusing on tourism (including liberalising short-term rentals) and foreign investment (through golden visas). While this growth strategy helped the country economically, it has contributed to make Lisbon, where only 2% of residential housing is publicly owned,[98] the third most expensive rental city in Europe.[99]

Lisbon, sitting at the mouth of the River Tagus, is particularly vulnerable to sea level rise. The landscape of climate plans and strategies is extensive, from national energy poverty plans and long-term strategies for the renovation of buildings to the Lisbon Climate Action Plan 2030,[100] and the country has made impressive progress in reducing its climate emissions,[101] particularly through renewable energy generation.

Built environment decarbonisation initiatives, on the other hand, have been slower. Attempts to improve the outdated housing stock have focused on new builds, but these mostly cater to high-income families, and the golden visa for renovations has exacerbated affordability issues for middle- and low-income households.[102] The green transition requires at least 80,000 more skilled construction workers, but these are difficult to attract due to poor working conditions and widespread obstructionism to unions.[103] The recent creation of a new housing ministry and the adoption of the Mais Habitação.[104] (More Housing) initiative, which ends golden visas and aims to provide affordable housing, is a promising sign of a shift towards a more just transition.

Population city	550,000
Population metropolitan area	2,800,000
Population country*	10,400,000
HDI*	0.874
Gini Index*	34.6
In informal settlements	N/A
Homeless	3,700
Housing cost overburden rate*	5.4%
House price to income ratio*	144
House price to rent ratio*	155
% of social /subsidised housing	2%*
% private home ownership*	78%
Tonnes CO2 / capita	5
Unionisation rate*	19%
Civil society participation index*	0.82
Happy Planet Index*	46.3

*These are national statistics

For more information, read the Lisbon City Summary Report[105]

Melbourne, Australia

Australia ranks amongst the top ten countries by GDP per capita but sits outside the top 50 for income equality. Melbourne is third on the global liveability index for cities[106] but rising property prices mean new homeowners have to save on average for eleven years to afford their first home deposit.[107] Greater Melbourne's population is expected to grow to 8 million by 2050, adding pressure on infrastructure, energy, and housing, with the wider State of Victoria already experiencing a 57,000 deficit in social housing units.

Notwithstanding these pressures, the State of Victoria, where wildfires already run rampant, has committed to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2045 and, to complement national-level policies, introduced a number of climate action policies, including Victoria's Climate Change Strategy[108] and the Built Environment Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022-2026.[109]

Building decarbonisation efforts have focused on providing new energy-efficient homes, often replacing low-priced stock, rather than retrofits. New homes tend to only be affordable for higher income groups, effectively displacing lower-income communities. The Retain, Repair, Reinvest framework, developed by OFFICE, aims to tackle this issue through an approach to improving social housing that retains existing tenants. The patchwork of Greater Melbourne's 32 municipalities makes collective, long-term planning challenging, but emerging initiatives such as the Council Alliance for Sustainable Built Environment and Homes Victoria's new social procurement practices could shift the tide towards more inclusive decarbonisation efforts.

Population city	150,000
Population metropolitan area	4,600,000
Population country*	26,000,000
HDI*	0.946
Gini Index*	34.3
In informal settlements	N/A
Homeless	1,725
Housing cost overburden rate*	7.1%
House price to income ratio*	113
House price to rent ratio*	142
% of social /subsidised housing	2.8%
% private home ownership*	64%
Tonnes CO2 / capita	14
Unionisation rate*	12.5%
Civil society participation index*	0.84
Happy Planet Index*	43.1

*These are national statistics

For more information, read the Melbourne City Summary Report[113]

Prague, Czechia

Between 1948 and 1989, Czechoslovakia was ruled by the Communist Party. In 1993, the country was peacefully divided into two states: Czechia and Slovakia. Since then, Czechia has implemented significant economic reforms to create a market economy, including the privatisation of its socialist housing stock. Today, 76% of the residents of Prague, Czechia's capital, own their home, but 12% are threatened by the loss of housing and 1% live in substandard homes,[114] with state support limited to housing allowances.

As with many other capital cities, Prague's climate ambition is more advanced than the rest of the country's, but its comprehensive Prague Climate Plan 2030[115] is hindered by poor national climate leadership and ambition,[116] with ministries failing to comply with the Paris Agreement.[117] Built environment decarbonisation and resilience processes currently lack transparency, inclusion, and clear communication, leading to general distrust in institutions and fear of the ecological transition.[118]

The lack of tenant safeguards means that the New Green Savings[119] programme, funded by the EU, is improving energy efficiency but resulting in renovictions.[120] The lack of impact assessments leads to scepticism about the green transition among construction workers, many of whom are migrants and work in precarious conditions. There are few causes for optimism, but the wide range of NGOs scrutinising government performance can hopefully ensure that incipient initiatives such as Bubny-Zátory,[121] the country's first carbon-neutral neighbourhood, protect human rights.

Population city	1,300,000
Population metropolitan area	2,200,000
Population country*	10,700,000
HDI*	0.895
Gini Index*	26.2
In informal settlements	N/A
Homeless	10,000
Housing cost overburden rate*	10.6%
House price to income ratio*	155
House price to rent ratio*	170
% of social /subsidised housing	5%
% private home ownership*	76%
Tonnes CO2 / capita	10
Unionisation rate*	17%
Civil society participation index*	0.79
Happy Planet Index*	46.8

*These are national statistics

For more information, read the Prague City Summary Report[122]
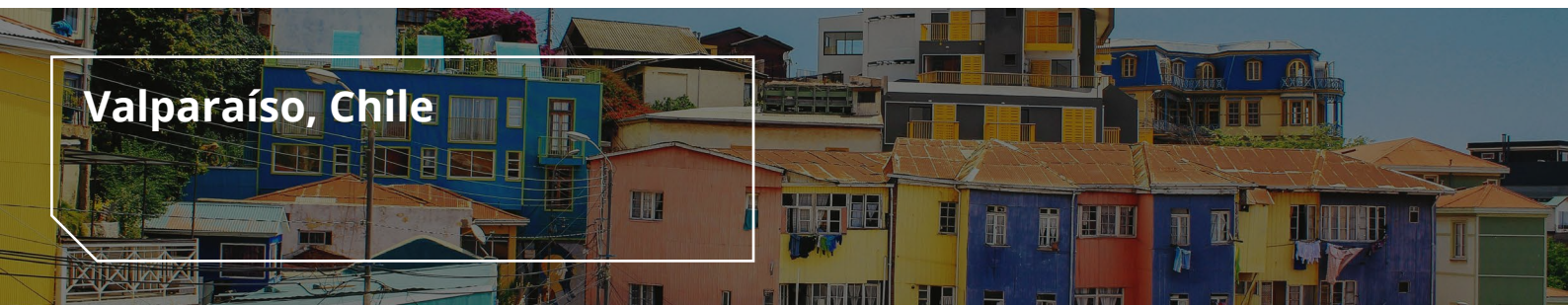
Valparaíso, Chile

Chile's rich history encompasses indigenous communities, 300 years of Spanish colonisation, and 30 years of military dictatorship. Since 1990, democracy has brought stability and economic growth while also continuing inequality, resulting in widespread demonstrations and repressions in 2019. The city is rough, rustic, working-class, and nostalgically embedded within its port. Port city, touristic city, and university city — its three identities also lead to tensions: pressure for port expansion reduces resident access to the waterfront and available urban land; the city's touristification has displaced many residents from the flatlands to the impoverished hills, where informal settlements are vulnerable to floods and fires;[123] and it has been challenging to create employment opportunities beyond academia to retain university graduates.

Valparaiso is the Chilean region that is most vulnerable to climate change,[124] yet climate action is most visible at the national level. Initiatives include the Framework Law on Climate Change[125] and Construye 2025,[126] which put the roadmap for decarbonisation of the built environment on the agenda. At the regional level, the Clean Production Agreement for the Circular Economy in Construction[127] focuses on circular business models for managing construction and demolition waste, but its implementation has been limited.

In fact, built environment climate action in Valparaiso has been so limited to date that it is difficult to assess its social impact. Underlying urban development trends suggest reasons for concern, with market-led port development causing gentrification and exacerbating the proliferation of informal settlements in mountains and ravines. With 95% of land and buildings privately owned, the local government has limited agency to steer inclusive efforts, and a unionisation rate of 15.1% makes construction workers vulnerable, with their industry ranking third overall in injury rates. Participation appears to be the main area where there are signs of change, with the local government engaging in a binding public consultation to update its Communal Regulatory Plan,[128] hopefully a sign of greater inclusion in future climate action.

Population city	320,000
Population metropolitan area	1,900,000
Population country*	19,600,000
HDI*	0.860
Gini Index*	43.0
In informal settlements	8.5%
Homeless	N/A
Housing cost overburden rate*	13.9%
House price to income ratio*	116
House price to rent ratio*	132
% of social /subsidised housing	N/A
% private home ownership*	60%
Tonnes CO2 / capita	3.6
Unionisation rate*	17%
Civil society participation index*	0.89
Happy Planet Index*	45.6

*These are national statistics

For more information, read the Valparaíso City Summary Report[129]

City trends

All eight cities face underlying human rights challenges, with varying levels of severity depending, in part, on historical factors and path dependencies.

Whilst all have introduced decarbonisation policies, none are moving fast enough to meet current international targets. Some cities, often those that disproportionately contributed to climate change, have moved from policy to implementation, but their emissions remain higher than in many other cities where climate action is in its infancy.

Across all eight cities, the research revealed positive and negative impacts of local and national level climate actions on the human rights of individuals and communities. In cases where decarbonisation strategies have exacerbated inequalities, the result has been visible pushback by communities that do not feel included in the transition, which risks slowing down climate action. Many cities are beginning to move from commitments to action, so there is a tremendous opportunity to build on positive examples of decarbonisation initiatives that respect human rights, and, in doing so, widen support for, and ultimately accelerate, the green transition.

Jakarta, Indonesia

Human rights risks and opportunities

This section provides a thematic cross-sectional analysis of the trends that emerged from the research in the eight cities and responds to research question 1.

RQ1. Discovering and describing the status quo:

To what extent are climate actions in the built environment considering human rights? How do local climate policy and actions reflect and consider the basic needs of inhabitants?

Athens, Greece

Right to housing

Housing is a right, not a commodity

Housing is a fundamental human right and a key enabler for the fulfilment of other rights. Secure housing is crucial for an individual to be able to turn their attention to other aspects of life, such as education and work. Most governments around the world have recognised the right to adequate housing through the ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and other international human rights treaties. Some countries have explicitly enshrined this right in their constitutions.

Even when the right to housing is formally recognised, there is a clear gap between recognition and action. This study found that the right to housing is violated or not being implemented, to varying degrees, in all of the eight cities examined.[132] Housing unaffordability was the most prominent issue. While there were variations in its acuteness, the ubiquity of this issue is evidence of a global, structural failure to uphold the human right to adequate and affordable housing.

> **Too often violations of the right to housing occur in part because, at the domestic level, housing is rarely treated as a human right. The key to ensuring adequate housing is the implementation of this human right through appropriate government policy and programmes, including national housing strategies.[131]**

Extensive literature is available on the underlying causes of these issues, from post-colonial resource extraction to a lack of affordable public housing options and the increasing privatisation of land in some places, which, combined with expanded deregulation of the real estate market and the mobility of global capital, leads to the commodification of housing. This is particularly noticeable when corporate landowners, whose business models often rely on rent extraction and profit maximisation, become major players in local markets, often enabled by government initiatives such as golden visas,[133] which are now banned in some countries like Portugal but still available in others such as Greece.

In Prague, publicly owned social housing has been privatised and replaced with housing allowances for those spending more than 35% of their income on housing costs.[134] This is a regressive, direct transfer of public tax-payer funds to landlords that, in some cases, are corporate, global companies. This is part of a wider socio-economic phenomenon of rising income and wealth inequality in many countries, with stagnant wages and a growing gap between the middle class and the wealthiest 10%.[135] This power imbalance is clearly visible in the housing sector:

> **The development lobby is incredibly small, but well organised and powerful. The community sector is incredibly large, disorganised, fragmented, and not very powerful.[136]**

OECD Average
House Prices and Wage Growth (2015=100)
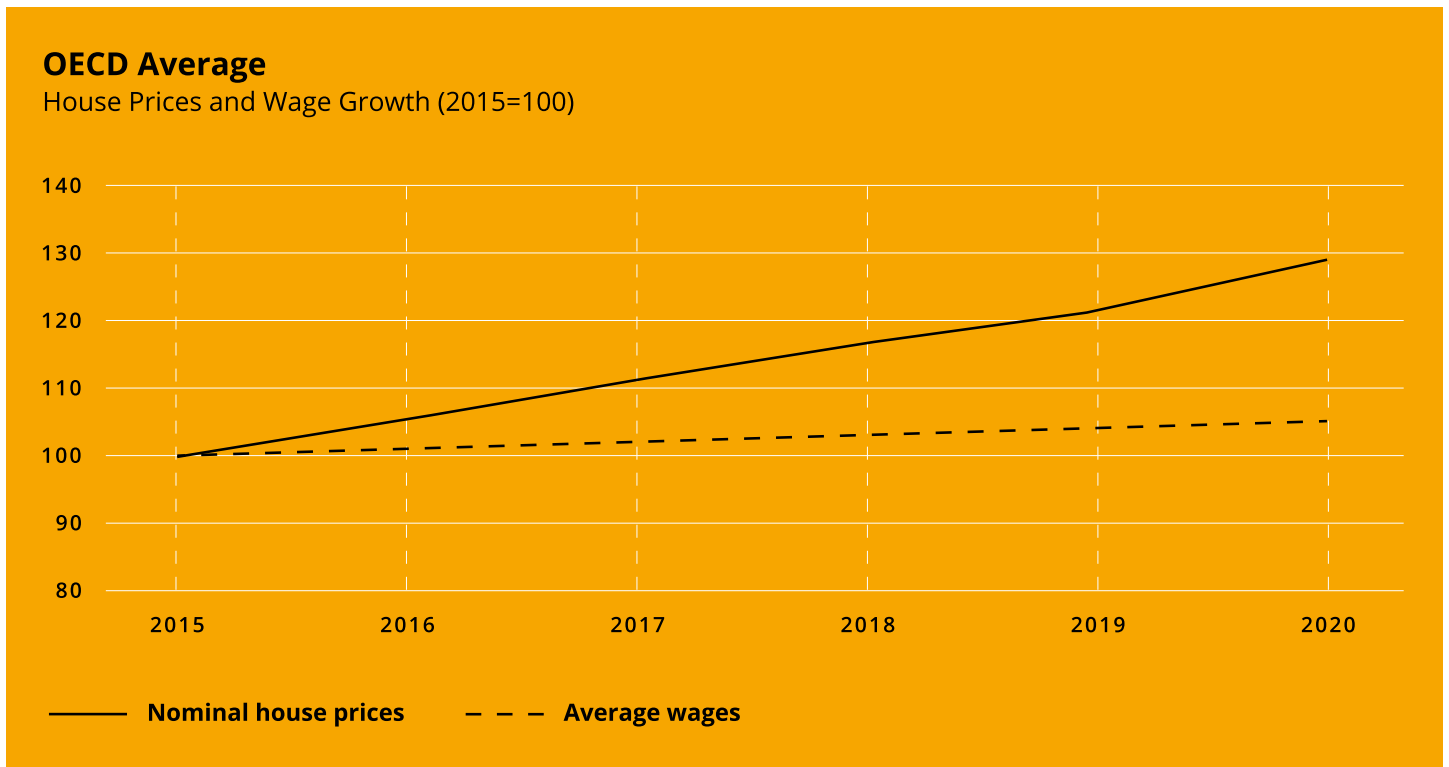
OECD Average House Prices and Wage Growth. Source: The Shift, "The Shift Directives" (December 2022)

This study found that these issues are being exacerbated by climate change and the ongoing dependency on fossil fuels. These contribute to migration from rural areas into cities, which therefore must accommodate an increasing population, as well as higher energy bills and energy insecurity, leading to energy poverty and decreasing tenants' ability to pay rent, with the potential for displacement.

Where built environment decarbonisation initiatives are taking place, research carried out for this project found a mix of positive and negative impacts on the right to housing.

Decarbonisation actions strengthening the right to housing

Copenhagen

Home.Earth[137] is a Danish evergreen real estate company that builds low-carbon homes. Its governance model includes tenants as shareholders, giving them a return on investment that effectively means their rents are approximately 20% below the market rate.[138]

Melbourne

The Retain, Repair, Reinvest Framework by OFFICE assesses the refurbishment potential of existing public housing, by seeking to reduce carbon emissions from building processes without demolishing homes and displacing communities.[139]

Athens

Antiparochi is a mechanism, used in the past, to increase housing supply and attempt to lower prices through mutual exchange. In this case, individuals exchanged land or existing houses with developers who built blocks and reimbursed the owner with several apartments in return. A similar initiative, led by the public or private sector, could help address unaffordability whilst minimising urban sprawl.[140]

Jakarta

Indonesia's Green Affordable Housing Programme aims to provide affordable and environmentally-friendly housing for low-income communities. It supports green housing adaptation and mitigation, certification, and green housing finance to deliver 100,000 green housing units by 2024, 1 million Green-NetZero Ready units by 2030, and ultimately aims for 100% NetZero Carbon Housing by 2050.[141] Whilst the ambition is impressive, rollout has been slow and impact hampered by illegal brokerage.[142]

Decarbonisation actions putting the right to housing at risk

Athens

The government-led Exoikonomo programme offers financial incentives for energy-saving renovations.[143] It has been successful in reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, but it predominantly benefits property owners with sufficient financial means to invest in renovations. The programme does not appear to benefit owners with less means, along with renters, who may experience further rent increases, particularly when public funding is used to improve ageing buildings. A local architect stated: "Development in Athens has climate justice as a pretext, but just leads to price increases which aren't mitigated by policies to protect housing rights. Where green renovations happen, apartment prices increase."[144]

Prague

The EU-funded New Green Savings programme provided incentives for building retrofits. Many landlords benefited from the public incentive but transferred the costs involved onto occupants through increased rents, which they often cannot afford. This leads to evictions as well as the direct transfer of public funds into the hands of landlords. A local association representative stated: "There are tendencies to save costs, but people complain that landlords try to transfer the costs [of retrofitting] onto occupants. In Czechia […] the tenant is protected only for a year. Then the landlord says, 'I've done the insulation, I want more. Take it or leave it'".[145]

Lisbon

In an attempt to increase foreign investment and improve its ageing building stock, in 2011 Portugal introduced a "golden visa" programme for those spending over 500,000€ to buy property or 350,000€ on renovating it. However, in 2024, an assessment of the scheme's impact concluded that it "may have exacerbated affordability issues for middle- and low-income households".[146]

Workers' rights

Workers' rights are recognised by most governments around the world through international labour standards agreements, ratification of human rights instruments, as well as national laws and constitutions.

However, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that over 2.3 million people around the world die from work-related accidents or diseases each year, with 340 million occupational accidents and 160 million victims of work-related illnesses annually.[147] Exposure to unsafe working conditions includes injuries and environmental and toxic hazards that affect construction workers' long-term health.

Manufacturer in Jakarta, Indonesia

Approximately 220 million people work in construction,[148] which ranks among the most precarious and dangerous sectors in many countries, accounting for one in five work-related deaths across the EU.[149] Hence, this is not only an issue for workers but also a substantial liability for developers, construction companies, and investors.

The research found many other human rights concerns across the construction sector. For example, gender disparity was a common trend, with males dominating the sector across all eight cities and widespread sexism, harassment, and discrimination.[150] In many cases, complex sub-procurement led to high degrees of informality, with rampant wage theft.[151] Construction workers were found to be living in substandard housing arrangements, with many unaware of their rights and employers' obligations.[152]

In this context, it is unsurprising to see construction sector labour shortages of 100,000 workers in Australia, 80,000 in Portugal, and 200,000 in Greece. The sector heavily relies on migrant workers, many of whom have a higher vulnerability to abuse by employers, in part because they are in a foreign country and have limited proficiency in the local language. The power imbalances between workers and employers were most visible in countries with low unionisation rates. Evidence from Lisbon and Valparaíso suggests that workers openly stating their affiliation to a union could trigger discrimination or even layoffs.

Climate change poses escalating risks for workers, notably through rising temperatures that significantly impact outdoor construction labour. While worker representatives acknowledge the potential of the green transition to offer improved wages and safer employment, the absence of comprehensive transition plans from governments and employers sparks concerns that new job opportunities may not benefit those displaced from carbon-intensive industries.[153]

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has projected a demand for 6.5 million jobs in green construction to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius.[154] However, without clear outlines of these roles and without robust initiatives from businesses and governments to train and re-skill existing construction workers, many remain sceptical of and resistant to embracing the green transition.

Decarbonisation actions strengthening workers' rights

Athens

The Greek government has announced plans to regulate the status of up to 300,000 undocumented migrants to address labour shortages, particularly in the construction and agriculture sectors.[155] However, decent working conditions must also be ensured to effectively address these labour shortages. The proposed legislation is not exempt from criticism as it does not grant family reunification rights, and is limited to three years, but the International Organisation for Migration and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees have welcomed it as a positive first step.[156]

Copenhagen

The Human Rights Due Diligence Guide for the Danish Construction Sector,[157] grounded in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the EU's Environmental Taxonomy, and Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, helps construction companies uphold human rights in their supply chains, from material extraction through the construction site to the people living in the newly-constructed buildings.

Decarbonisation actions putting workers' rights at risk

Copenhagen

Data from the Danish construction unions indicates that 15-20% of construction assignments contain some abuse of workers' rights.[158] Breaches are particularly common in construction projects with opaque supply chains and in smaller jobs. With the Danish construction sector's urgent need to shift focus from large new builds to smaller retrofit jobs, there is a risk that the green transition may therefore exacerbate workers' rights violations.

Prague

The current lack of assessments quantifying the impact of the green transition on construction workers means public and private actors are unable to re-skill and fill the jobs needed, as well as organise to ensure new jobs are decent. As a result, businesses will struggle to recruit, and governments may miss their climate targets. A local ministry official stated: "We are concerned about the impacts on the economy and people. If these [impacts] were more understandable and calculated, people would have a better attitude. Personally, I think that decarbonisation is a huge benefit, but it is hard to explain to people without more concrete information. Unions have been asking for impact assessments since 2020, and we still have nothing".[159]

Participation

> **Meaningful participation is one of the fundamental principles that underpin the human rights-based approach, as it enables the advancement of all human rights.[160]**

Decision-making in the built environment is profoundly influenced by power relations, often rooted in local context and history. These influence governance structures, mechanisms, and channels for citizen engagement, the range of stakeholders with a voice at the table, and even the culture of participation in a city: whether civil society is dormant, suppressed, or demanding and outspoken.

This project investigated the key actors shaping decision-making in transition processes in the built environment. The image below can be taken as the starting point: the basic configuration of city actors that interplay in the making of the built environment, in climate actions and policies, and on how just and inclusive these are.

In the eight cities analysed, climate action predominantly stems from government and private sector initiatives, sidelining or excluding local communities, including construction workers. In extreme cases, this exclusion can result in greenlash – pushback against green initiatives, now visible in various European countries.[161]

Across all cities, there was a clear sense of tension between the speed at which decisions need to be made, legislation passed, and climate actions undertaken, and the time that meaningful citizen participation processes can take. However, there was also a recognition that poor engagement is a risky business decision, as it can result in widespread opposition, with the potential for greater delays further down the road and even in projects being cancelled.[162]

Participation was the area in which promising initiatives were observed in all eight cities. Online tools are enabling large-scale, city-wide engagement at relative speed.

Bespoke participatory and co-creation processes are also providing local insights that can improve and ultimately expedite projects. However, allowing such forms of community participation does not necessarily mean citizens can influence outcomes.

Moreover, it's crucial to acknowledge that communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and climate action often encounter numerous systemic barriers. These may encompass language obstacles, geographical isolation, limited internet access, time constraints, and lack of a permanent address, that hinder their ability to participate in even the best-designed engagement processes. From Copenhagen to Lagos, marginalised residents, lacking a voice and decision-making power, are frequently excluded from shaping the development of their built environment, which perpetuates their marginalisation.
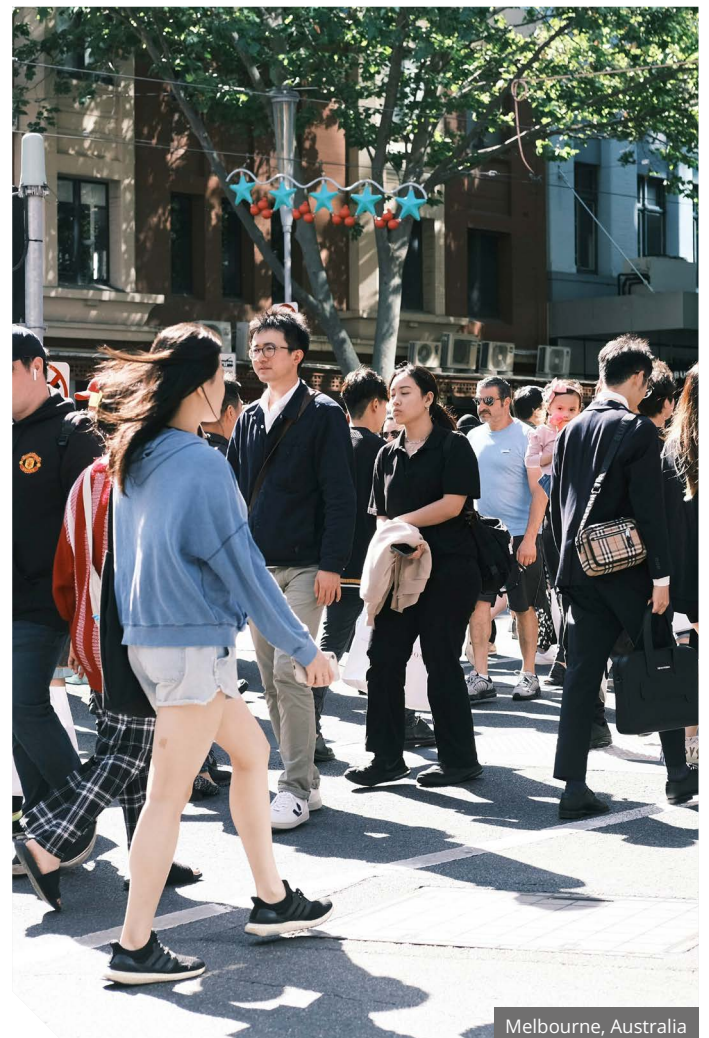
Melbourne, Australia

Decarbonisation actions strengthening participation

Athens

The synAthina platform is a government-led hub for civic engagement launched in 2013 "geared towards problem identification, problem-solving and political reform", filling a civic engagement gap and launching hundreds of projects across the city,[163] from litter-picking to the inclusion of marginalised groups. One of Europe's first municipal platforms for participatory decision-making, synAthina has been commended as a pioneering example of public sector innovation by the OECD.[164]

Lagos

Spaces for Change was created as a platform for young people and women to participate in decision-making around the built environment through citizen-led advocacy initiatives and capacity-building programmes.[165] It has also created the Community Alliance Against Displacement, which brings together the leaders of marginalised communities to improve security of tenure and prevent forced evictions.[166]

Lagos

When developing the Ajegunle-Ikorodu Community Resilience Action Plan, the University of Lagos selected and trained women from Ajegunle-Ikorodu to act as citizen scientists to undertake asset mapping.[167] Their involvement broadened the range of residents who took part in participatory workshops, where they developed initiatives to make the local community more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous.[168]

Jakarta

ProKlim (Climate Village Programme) is a government initiative that combines local wisdom, community capabilities, climate impact exposure potentials, and interactive community participation in crafting adaptation plans to climate change.[169,170] The Jakarta Government's Ikhtiar Jakarta[171] initiative developed interfaith guidebooks to tackle climate change, recognising the crucial role of religious leaders and the potential of *eco-preaching* to reshape people's mindsets.[172]

Copenhagen

The Municipality partnered with schools to encourage children to express what they would like to see more of with regards to biodiversity, with the ideas compiled in a report titled Children's and Young People's Recommendations for The Biodiversity Strategy 2050.[173]

Valparaíso

The local government has opened a binding public consultation to update its Communal Regulatory Plan. This plan aims for "territorial planning with social and gender justice (including the voice of indigenous groups), protection and reduction of the degradation of environmental heritage, and local economic development, integrating its three urban areas: Valparaíso, Placilla, and Laguna Verde".[174]

Decarbonisation actions putting participation at risk

Lisbon

When consulting on its *Mais Habitação* (More Housing) initiative,[175] the government received 2,700 submissions. However, the plan was voted on and approved in Parliament just one week after the consultation period ended, with no significant changes to the initial text, raising questions about the meaningfulness and effectiveness of the entire public consultation.[176]

See IHRB and The Shift recommendations on the *Mais Habitaçao* Programme, submitted to the Government of Portugal in 2023.[177]

✛ Spatial Justice

The principle of non-discrimination is, like meaningful participation, a cross-cutting human rights principle.[178]

The extent of its realisation in the spatial context of a city can usually be explained by historical patterns of investment and disinvestment across different neighbourhoods by both the public and private sectors.

This study found spatial inequalities in all eight case studies, with variations in severity depending on the local socio-economic context. Valparaíso's case highlights the tension between competing forces: the port is a key economic driver in the city, but its operations impact residents' quality of life by dominating public space, creating noise and environmental pollution, and blocking public access from most of the city's waterfront.

With the exception of Athens,[179] low-income communities in the cities studied were mostly residing in peripheral areas, living in lower-quality housing or informal settlements. In some cities, mixed-use planning and high-quality transport infrastructure enable residents to conveniently access goods and services, but in places like Jakarta and Lagos, these can often be hours away.

Another common spatial justice issue is access to green space, which is crucial for mental and physical health and the main antidote to the growing urban heat island effect. The lack of green spaces is particularly severe in Athens, Jakarta, Valparaíso, and Lagos, especially in low-income neighbourhoods, which often experience the highest temperatures.

In Jakarta, glittering skyscrapers sit alongside the 16% of the city categorised as slums. This disparity is shockingly visible in neighbourhoods such as Penjaringan and Kamal Muara, where high-density settlements by polluted canals are a far cry from the affluent areas like Menteng, where lush gardens surround luxury homes.[180]

This research reinforced that capital, including green investment, generally flows along historical power lines: towards property owners rather than tenants, more affluent neighbourhoods rather than deprived ones. Green initiatives at the local level therefore have to intentionally take an approach based on equity and non-discrimination to ensure that they do not exacerbate socio-spatial inequalities.

Given that all the cities analysed have largely deregulated housing markets, it is unsurprising to see decarbonisation efforts result in green gentrification. Small-scale renovations, large-scale redevelopments, new transport infrastructure, or parks make homes more desirable, attracting higher prices and displacing marginalised communities. Cities like Copenhagen, with a healthy and distributed public housing stock, can try to mitigate against this, but others like Athens have no social housing at all.[181]

Extreme spatial inequality recognised through aerial photography in Jakarta. Source: Unequal Scenes, "Jakarta" (April 2024), at: https://unequalscenes.com/jakarta

Decarbonisation actions strengthening spatial justice

Prague

After the end of communist rule, Prague's Municipality sold almost all its housing stock and stopped building new homes, leaving that task to the private sector. In 2020, facing growing housing unaffordability, the Municipality established its own Prague Development Company, with the aim of developing 6,000-8,000 public, affordable housing apartments by 2030. The company has already been handed 70 hectares of land previously owned by a mixture of public agencies, and it has developed a pipeline of ten projects to deliver high-quality, energy-efficient rental units available at affordable prices for key workers, single-parent families, and independently-living seniors. This is an example of how a public development company, by not sacrificing location nor sustainability standards to offer affordability, is able to benefit people across the city.

Lisbon

The Portuguese government recognised that touristification,[182] unregulated short-term rentals, and golden visas exacerbated socio-spatial inequalities. In January 2023, it created a new Housing Ministry and, only five months later, launched its new housing plan, _Mais Habitação_,[183] supported by 2.7 billion euros in investment from the EU Recovery and Resilience Plan. The plan aims to solve the housing crisis by increasing housing supply, simplifying licensing procedures, combating speculation, and protecting families.[184] If successfully implemented, such measures would help address housing unaffordability and cushion gentrification, displacements, and spatial inequalities.

Decarbonisation actions putting spatial justice at risk

Copenhagen

Green investments in areas like Vesterbro, Christianshavn and Nørrebro[185] have developed and supported cafes and restaurants, but they have also increased prices (land and cost of living). The result has been limiting access to public spaces, fostering a sense of exclusion, and displacing people who can no longer afford the cost of living in these areas, a process known as green gentrification.[186]

Lagos

The Eko Atlantic project sets out to protect Lagos from coastal erosion by building a new, eco-friendly city. However, it is doing so by displacing a community of 80,000 traders, cleaners, waiters, and clerks, mostly living in stilted homes above the water, servicing the nearby wealthy Victoria Island.[187] For the project, public land was handed over to a private investor, with large-scale evictions. Today, it's being turned into a privatised green gated community for the ultra rich.[188]

| Underlying factors

This section seeks to answer the second research question by analysing why, in certain contexts, built environment climate action is resulting in positive social outcomes, whilst, in others, such actions exacerbate human rights issues.

RQ2. Explaining the status quo

What are the political conditions that allow or hinder a just transition in the built environment?

When analysing the factors influencing transition processes, it becomes apparent that political, economic, and social conditions are interconnected. These conditions are shaped by complex global inequalities, rooted in history. Hence, it is crucial to recognise that contemporary urban issues are the ice on the surface of a deeper iceberg of global structural disparities.

Historical factors include colonial extraction and exploitation that yielded unequal and asynchronous industrialisation processes in different countries. More recent factors include neoliberal capitalism, injustices in international trade, foreign debt (including the associated financing conditions like high interest rates and 'strings attached' such as conditional austerity programmes), ecological debt, and more, all of which have been exacerbated by globalisation.[189] It is also essential to note that there are additional determinant factors that stem from within individual countries, adding layers of complexity to the task of explaining the status quo.

Within this historical, geopolitical framing, this study identified a series of underlying political conditions that are playing a major role in hindering or enabling a just transition in the built environment.

Hindering political conditions

Low public trust in government and high levels of **corruption**, among other challenges, erode democracy and reduce governments' and businesses' ability to address urban (environmental, social, and economic) problems. They therefore present structural barriers to a green transition that respects the rights of individuals and communities.

In Indonesia, Nigeria, Chile, Greece, and Portugal, **limited job opportunities** have resulted in large-scale brain drains, which reduce the local human resources, innovation, and productivity needed for the transition. Another common challenge, especially in Global South countries, is **foreign debt.** This pressures governments to pursue GDP growth, often by selling off assets such as land, housing and infrastructure, which could otherwise provide the bedrock for a just transition.

Limited social dialogue has also been identified as an obstacle to decent employment and a missed opportunity to increase climate action legitimacy. Similarly, insecure or informal tenures, and the prevalence of major debts (rents, loans, utilities) make marginalised communities vulnerable to any negative impacts of decarbonisation initiatives such as renovations.

Both the public and private sector have a key role to play in delivering a just transition, but in balance. By relying too heavily on private sector-led strategies, some countries have **reduced public ability** to protect citizens from extractive market forces. In Melbourne, Prague, and Athens,[190] where public housing is almost non-existent, governments help households with housing subsidies to make units more affordable. By doing so, they behave like a market actor rather than as a market shaper. *Market-shaping* alternatives like rent caps, taxation, redistribution mechanisms, and the use of regulation were not as predominant as the use of incentives.

Enabling political conditions:

Political international efforts were seen as a key factor for success. The Paris Agreement[191] and Nationally Determined Contributions[192] are clearly key drivers for global climate action. In Athens and Lisbon, EU climate funding has been instrumental in kick-starting the Renovation Wave,[193] and its related requirements have also led to greater community participation in decision-making.
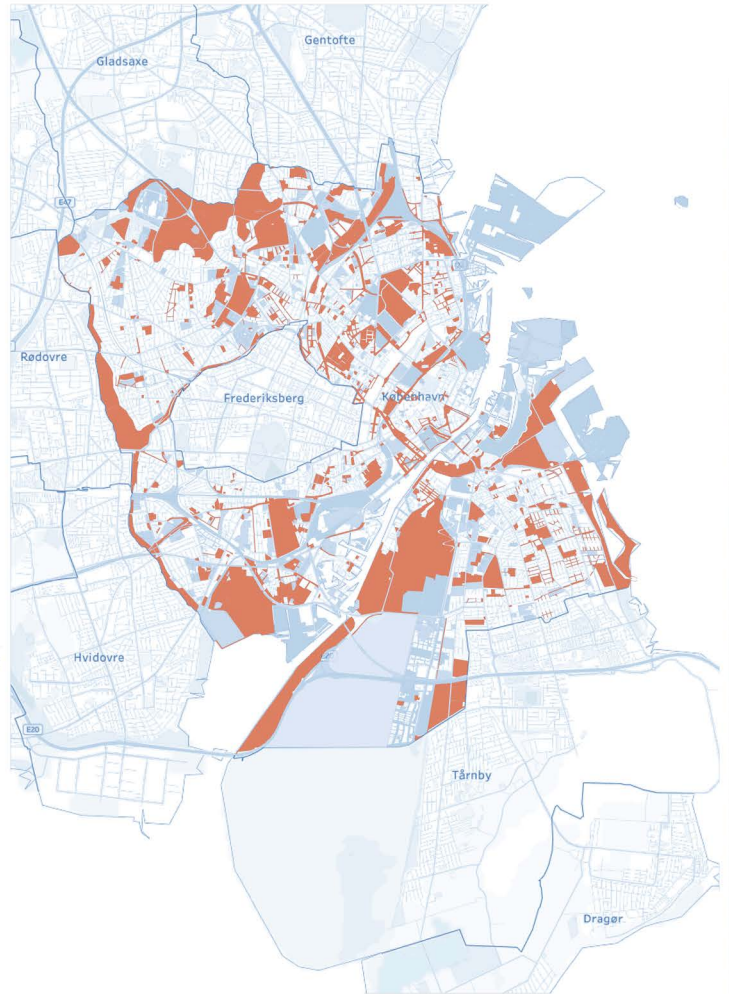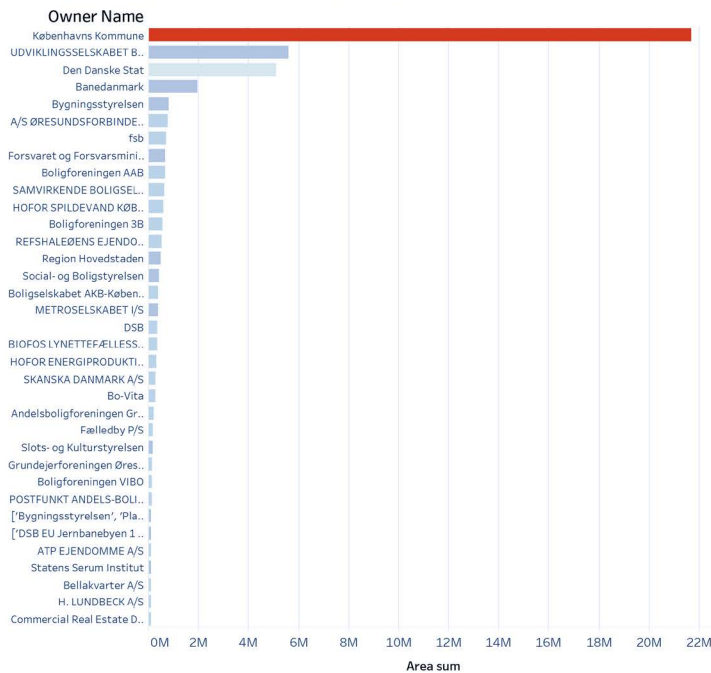
In Europe, policies such as the EU Taxonomy,[194] Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD),[195] Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), and European Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD)[196]

are key drivers in aligning climate and social outcomes, and can unlock more socially responsible business models. Furthermore, clear sightlines into future social regulations allow businesses to mobilise capital, reduce risk, and develop innovations to maximise pre-competitive advantages.

Land ownership is another important enabler. Countries that have retained greater **public ownership** of built environment stock have greater agency in urban planning and can plan and design for equity. This project investigated land ownership patterns across four of the eight cities in the study. In Copenhagen,[197] land ownership data is available for free. In Prague,[198] Lisbon,[199] and Athens[200] the data is also available, but the pricing structure makes large-scale searches prohibitively expensive. In each city, the research identified the ten largest landowners. Most of these were large multinational investment companies, an unsurprising finding given investor-owned housing in Europe has reportedly increased by 700% since the global financial crisis.[201] The rankings also included public or state agencies, although the total amount varied significantly between cities. Across the world, cities like Paris, Leeds, Eugene, and many others are buying land and homes from private owners, including through right-of-first refusal mechanisms, in an attempt to grow public housing stock.[202]

Land ownership: Copenhagen

Owning more than 100000sqm (excl.roads etc.)

Owner Name
- Københavns Kommune
- UDVIKLINGSSELSKABET B..
- Den Danske Stat
- Banedanmark
- Bygningsstyrelsen
- A/S ØRESUNDSFORBINDE..
- fsb
- Forsvaret og Forsvarsmini..
- Boligforeningen AAB
- SAMVIRKENDE BOLIGSEL..
- HOFOR SPILDEVAND KØB..
- Boligforeningen 3B
- REFSHALEØENS EJENDO..
- Region Hovedstaden
- Social- og Boligstyrelsen
- Boligselskabet AKB-Køben..
- METROSELSKABET I/S
- DSB
- BIOFOS LYNETTEFÆLLESS..
- HOFOR ENERGIPRODUKTI..
- SKANSKA DANMARK A/S
- Bo-Vita
- Andelsboligforeningen Gr..
- Fælledby P/S
- Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen
- Grundejerforeningen Øres..
- Boligforeningen VIBO
- POSTFUNKT ANDELS-BOLI..
- ['Bygningsstyrelsen', 'Pla..
- ['DSB EU Jernbanebyen 1 ..
- ATP EJENDOMME A/S
- Statens Serum Institut
- Bellakvarter A/S
- H. LUNDBECK A/S
- Commercial Real Estate D..

0M   2M   4M   6M   8M   10M   12M   14M   16M   18M   20M   22M
Area sum

Type (CVR)
- Primary municipality (Primærkommune)
- Association (Forening)
- Partnership (Interessentskab)
- State Administrative Unit (Statslig administrativ enhed)
- Stock-based corporation (Aktieselskab)
- Limited partnership/partner company (Kommanditaktieselskab/Partnerselskab)
- Self-public company or subsidiary (Selvstændig offentlig virksomhed eller dattervirksomhed heraf)
- Limited Liability Company (Anpartsselskab)
- Region
- Den Danske Stat
- Other forms of business (Øvrige virksomhedsformer)
- Commercial foundation (Erhvervsdrivende fond)
- Funds and other self -owned institutions (Fonde og andre selvejende institutioner)
- Non-profit organization (Frivillig forening)
- People's Church Institutions (Folkekirkelige Institutioner)

See also:

Land ownership: Prague   # Land ownership: Lisbon   # Land ownership: Athens

Another key factor in determining whether the green transition upholds human rights is the strength of **welfare protections and social safeguards** in each city. Across the cities studied, these seemed to be stronger in countries with unionised workforces and tenants. The presence of collective bargaining agreements, minimum durations of tenancy agreements, caps on rental increases, and constraints on evictions were key to avoiding adverse impacts on people during the green transition. As external reference, the existence of rental caps in Belgium has allowed the Flanders region to introduce regulations prohibiting landlords from increasing rents on poorly-insulated flats. Rents on even the best-performing flats can only be increased in line with inflation.[203]

From this project, it can be deduced that **economic and political stability** is essential for the long-term, cross-sector planning required to implement just transitions. In an unjust transition where residents are losing homes and workers are losing jobs without any alternative, the result is increased political polarisation, instability, and insecurity, with adverse consequences for governments, businesses, people, and the climate. Conversely, the **protection of human rights** is associated with stability and security, which are required for governments and businesses to plan and invest in long-term, equitable climate solutions.

The Future: Visions for just transitions and signs of change

During any transition, it is indispensable to think about the future. Therefore, an essential part of this research was the exploration of people's desires, hopes, and dreams about a more just and sustainable future. This was an invitation to dream big, unconstrained by the status quo, whilst remaining realistic about how such desired futures can be attained. Finding a balance between idealism and realism is crucial. By simultaneously embracing optimism and pragmatism, it is possible to nurture a forward-thinking mindset conducive to a just transition.

Given that the meaning of just transition is context-specific, this project engaged with local language, narratives, and perspectives in each of the eight cities to develop an understanding of what justice and transition mean in that context. To achieve this goal, a workshop was organised in each city, with stakeholders across a range of sectors invited to co-create a shared vision for socially-inclusive climate action in their city's built environment by 2030. The visioning exercise was structured around the following question:

RQ3. Exploring other conditions of possibility[204] for a just transition:

> How can we build in a way that does not contribute to climate change, strengthens resilience, and benefits everyone regardless of income, ability, gender, race, or age? What innovative models, strategies, or initiatives are emerging to move towards a more just transition?

Workshop participants included representatives from: local, regional, and national governments; the private sector (developers, construction, engineering, planning, and architecture companies and professionals); NGOs working in either climate action or social justice; universities and academics from urban planning and architecture departments; civil society representatives (neighbourhood or housing associations, tenants' unions, workers' unions, and community-based groups), and activists.

In addition to creating a shared vision of a just transition, these workshops:

➔ Connected individuals and organisations from different sectors around the built environment lifecycle,

➔ Elevated the importance of the social dimensions of building decarbonisation, energy efficiency and construction materials, and

➔ Contributed to a regional and international policy-agenda, while also identifying local opportunities.

This chapter is organised in three sections: the city visions that emerged from each city during the visioning workshops, including art pieces produced by local artists bringing the visions to life; shared vision analysing divergence and convergence across the eight cities; and, lastly, signs of change: emerging innovations presenting a window into the transformational initiatives that are sprouting towards those visions.

Credit: Taiwo Adebayo

City future vision

Lagos, Nigeria: Integrity-driven, sustainable and fair

Decentralisation enables the creation of localised policies tailored to local needs, developed in close collaboration with NGOs and CSOs. Governments and businesses implement inter-sectoral strategies that enable Nigerian households to shift from petrol-fuelled generators to renewable energy sources. Green urban design and non-motorised urban environments are the norm, ensuring sustainable living is available to everyone and not a luxury. Accountability and transparency mechanisms ensure inclusive and responsible governance, creating a conducive environment for the private sector to contribute to the just transition. Businesses mainstream human rights in their operations to minimise long-term risk and civil society holds governments and businesses to account, with young people driving a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive transition.

See the full insights report from the Lagos visioning workshop held on 3 November 2022[205]

Credit: Terezie Unzeitigová

City future vision

Prague, Czechia: Collaborative and knowledge-driven

Disparate government agencies work together to ensure a cohesive, bold approach to inclusive building decarbonisation. Knowledge hubs facilitate learning between different cities and regions, that become emboldened to test new models such as cooperative housing and citizen advisory teams. Governments create the opportunities and market for the transition, and provide dedicated funding for smaller towns, where grassroots innovations often emerge. The private sector uses its huge transformative potential in a socially responsible way by increasing transparency, engaging citizens and local communities, and shifting from short-term profit maximisation to long-term thinking and planning.

See the full insights report from the Prague visioning workshop held on 19 January 2023[206]
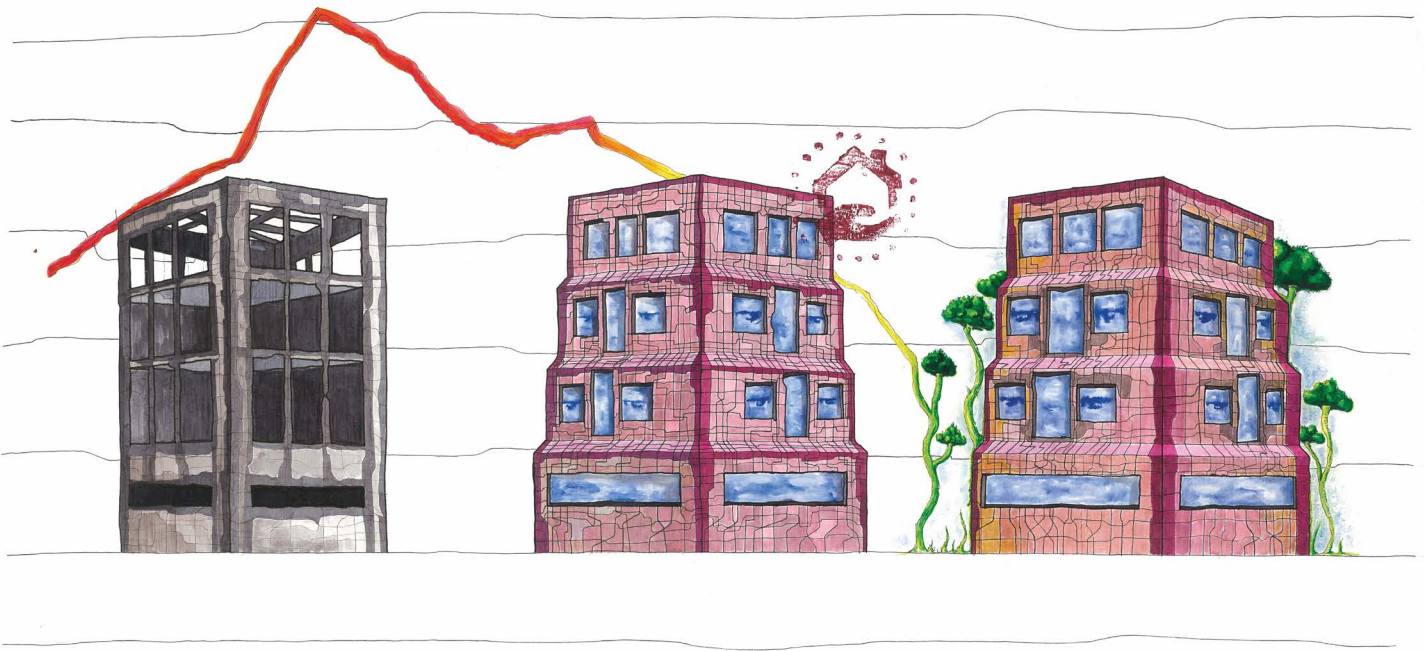
Credit: Mafalda Filipe

City future vision

Lisbon, Portugal: People-centred, participatory, and affordable

Local communities sit at the heart of decision-making: governments involve residents in addressing climate change and housing issues, and businesses proactively engage with workers through social dialogue and collective bargaining with their trade unions, improving their wages, rights, and safety. The public sector starts providing sustainable, affordable homes. The private sector also plays an active role in solving the housing crisis, as well as developing new materials and increasing transparency in its supply chains. Civil society and academia work closely together to build the evidence base for climate action, counteracting fake climate news and sensationalism.

See the full insights report from the Lisbon visioning workshop held on 29 April 2023[207]

Credit: Sasha Heath

City future vision

Melbourne, Australia: Proactive, affordable, and innovative

The government reactivates underutilised land by granting charitable status to projects that meet clear criteria, while also leading housing retrofit efforts and expanding the public housing stock. There is a successful programme for affordable housing construction near major activity centres funded by zoning uplift tools and revenues from second home land tax and industry levies. The private and public sectors collaborate closely to develop alternative financing models, increase transparency and accountability. Sharing and commons-based approaches are widespread, and health, environmental, and social outcomes are highly valued.

See the full insights report from the Melbourne visioning workshop held on 29 May 2023[208]

Credit: Syifa Hykmanto

City future vision

Jakarta, Indonesia: Integrated, green, inclusive, and resilient

The Jakarta Metropolitan Authority is a fully established and properly resourced government agency that coordinates regional development policy across the JMA's five existing municipalities. A complete overhaul of the water system has addressed the city's sinking issue. Green spaces and the public transport network extend to peripheral areas, helping mitigate environmental and noise pollution. Inclusive urban design strategies create a city that accommodates the needs of children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Inclusive, community-led projects transform informal settlements into decent, safe, and affordable housing.

See the full insights report from the Jakarta visioning workshop held on 5 September 2023[209]

Credit: Vivian Monteiro Malta

City future vision

Copenhagen, Denmark: Re-balanced, social-value focused, inclusive and affordable

The long-standing gap between city centre and suburbs has been addressed by rebalancing resources and power. Government regulations, such as the national implementation of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) raise social indicators in line with environmental ones. This results in private investment shifting from extractive to redistributive business models. Governments, businesses, and civil society recognise their collective responsibility in providing affordable housing and fostering inclusivity within the city. Joint initiatives optimise space usage, repurpose existing buildings, and promote shared living arrangements to ensure accessibility for all residents, not just a select few.

See the full insights report from the Copenhagen visioning workshop held on 12 September 2023[210]

Credit: Sebastian Varas Mackenzie

City future vision

Valparaíso, Chile: Green, integrated, and innovative

There is comprehensive resource distribution among the neighbourhoods in the city's hills, improved transportation infrastructure, and the development of subcentres and cultural hubs. Governments and businesses meaningfully engage with all citizens when developing cross-sector, strategic plans. Social and affordable housing is provided, and local manufacturing is prioritised. The port is transformed into an inclusive-productive hub that delivers economic and social benefits for local residents.

See the full insights report from the Valparaíso visioning workshop held on 12 December 2023[211]
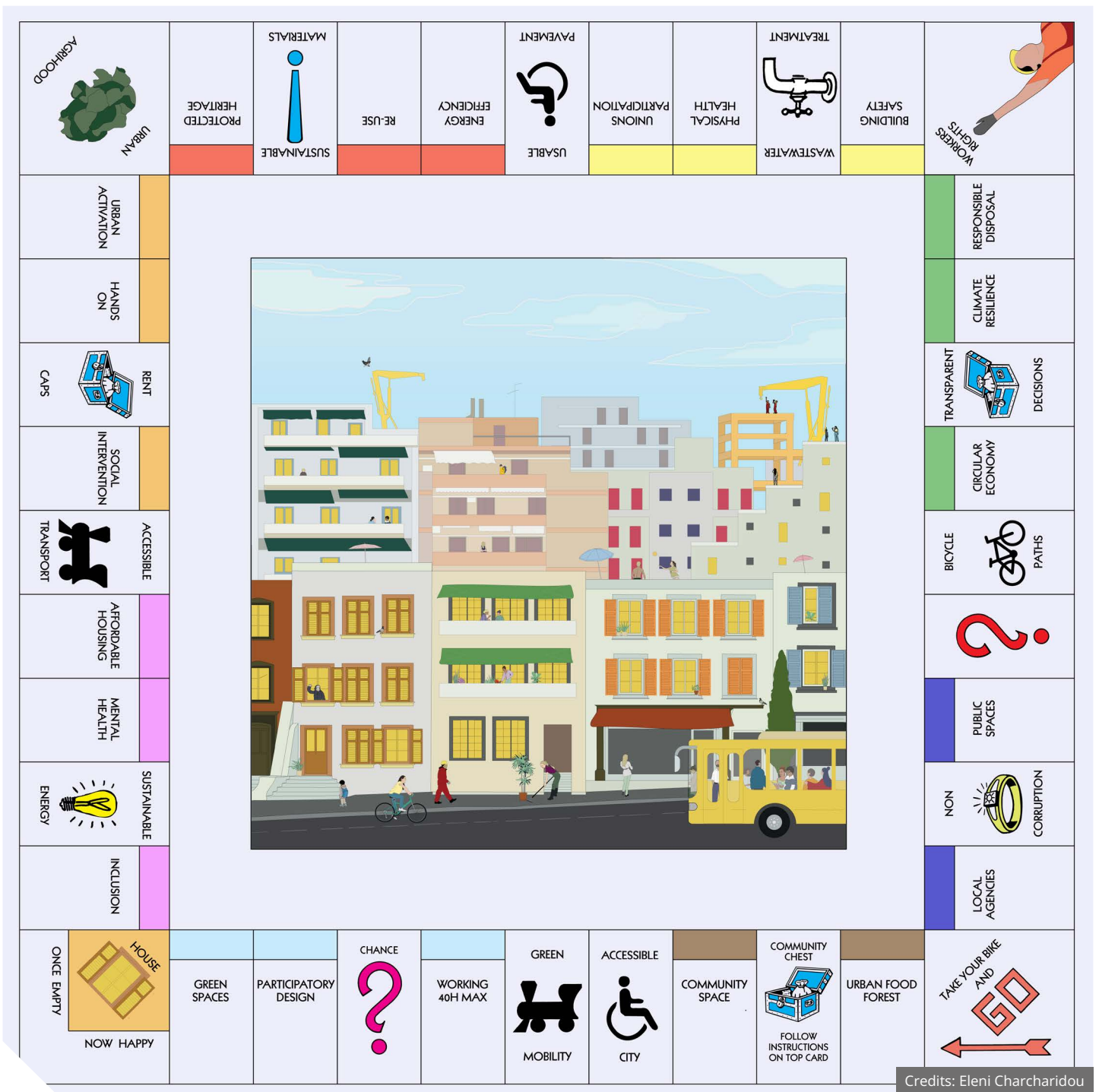
Credits: Eleni Charcharidou

City future vision

Athens, Greece: Socially-innovative, equitable, resilient, and progressive

Athens has adapted to climate and social challenges. Affordable, renovated, and climate resilient homes are provided uniformly across the city, thanks to social innovation, the optimisation of empty buildings, and the introduction of social safeguards. Equitable access to green areas and public transportation throughout the city increases climate resilience and keeps segregation low. Businesses meaningfully engage with CSOs, particularly trade unions, offering stable and high-quality employment, and invest in the social economy, meeting local needs.

CSOs collaborate with governments to develop green policies and monitor their impact, raising awareness of climate action, guaranteeing transparency, and enabling citizens to shape the city.

See the full insights report from the Athens visioning workshop held on 25 January 2024[212]

Shared vision

The visioning workshops yielded a multiplicity of visions for a just transition in the built environment. These were very different depending on the context, circumstances, and status of the ecological transition in each city or country. It is difficult to join them into a sole, unified, and shared vision for the just transition applicable to all eight cities, yet alone globally, as the meaning and understanding of what is 'just' and what is 'needed' in each city varies greatly. This exercise underscored that there is not one green transition happening in the world, there are multiple ones happening in different places, at different paces, in different ways, responding to different incentives and disincentives. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify some themes around which there is convergence and divergence.

Convergence

In line with human rights principles, a just transition entails fulfilling everyone's basic needs, while remaining within the planetary boundary. Dominant extractive urban economic models have proven unable to deliver on this vision, and there's an urgent need to shift to regenerative models, deeply shaped by the individuals and communities who are most at risk from climate change.

These must acknowledge local and global structural imbalances, and aim to redistribute power, privilege, and opportunity. The right to housing can be the cornerstone of this future, but only if housing and climate policy are integrated to provide adequate, sustainable, and affordable housing for all.

The realisation of this ambitious vision requires deep cross-sectoral collaboration and communication, as solutions developed in silos by government, civil society, or business are likely to leave some people behind. Policymakers must lead the way, by creating frameworks, opportunities, incentives, spaces for social dialogue, and regulations for market transformation. The private sector can then leverage its innovation, resources, and creativity to develop solutions that work for business, people, and the planet. These will require experimentation, particularly for housing, with delivery and ownership models, construction materials, and design approaches that combine local forgotten traditions with emerging technology.

Cities must uphold the rights of nature as well as human rights, regenerating and sustaining biodiversity, increasing green and blue public spaces, and strengthening resilience against the effects of climate change. Renewable energy generation, circular approaches, and urban farming are critical to guaranteeing self-sufficiency while minimising waste and pollution, ensuring that no one is negatively impacted by the transition.

Divergence

The role of foreign investment in creating greener, more equal cities is divisive. Some see it as a crucial economic propeller for the transition, bringing knowledge, innovation, and jobs. For others, it's an avenue to exacerbate inequality by perpetrating speculation and the extraction of rent and resources.

Unsurprisingly, no silver bullet was identified to tackle housing affordability, the principal issue across the eight cities. Given the range of stakeholders involved and each city's unique context, radically different approaches were proposed. Debate lines emerged between new builds and retrofits, increasing supply or controlling prices of the existing stock, and whether responsibility principally lies with governments or investors. The climate crisis and planetary boundaries add a further layer of complexity, with calls for whole-life carbon measurements, individual carbon budgets, and conflicting opinions between prioritising the building of new green certified homes or limiting new builds and focusing on refurbishing existing buildings.

Signs of change: emerging innovations

Economic models in real estate have predominantly operated by exploiting materials and energy, in thirst for capital, thus driving a model of rapid linear consumption.

Traditional real estate investment practices have inherently prioritised financial gain over societal and environmental well-being, exacerbating inequality and depleting finite planetary resources.

Hence, this project was also interested in exploring emerging innovations, models, and strategies with the potential for transformational systems change.

This project ignited the collection of "concrete utopias"[214] – tangible manifestations or expressions of utopian ideals within society. These are not fantastical or distant dreams, but rather practical embodiments of hope and imagination that emerge within existing structures. These initiatives provide a "glimpse of the possible" with the potential to transform the status quo into a new, desired future.[215]

Identified initiatives are being collated in a global map, with selected examples from across the world reported below. See the full map of emerging innovations.[216]

> **A just transition cannot simply replace an extractive carbon economy with a system of green extraction where fundamental power relations remain unchanged. A sustainable and just future requires more fundamental reshaping of economies to produce regenerative systems that address unequal power dynamics head on.[213]**
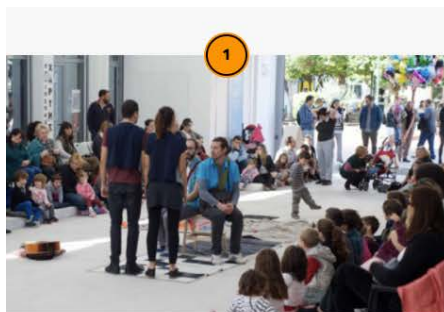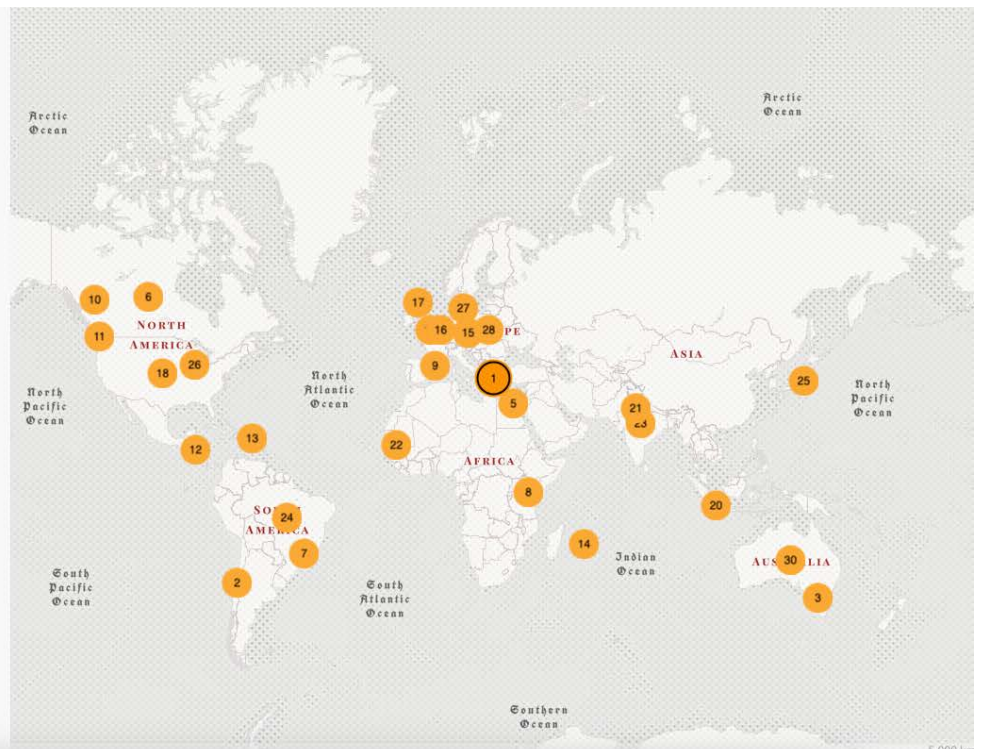
Global map of signs of change in the built environment

Athens: Adopt Your City[217]

Pocket parks are small gardens developed in previously unkempt corners of the city's densely populated neighbourhoods. They were created through the *Adopt Your City platform*, which fosters partnerships between the Municipality of Athens and companies, associations, or citizens willing to take on the cost of urban improvements. By 2024, ten pocket parks had been created: some examples are the support of the Deloitte Foundation to create a small garden in Kypseli in 2020, or the support of Organization Earth in 2022 to develop another one in Neos Kosmos.[218] These parks improve biodiversity, mitigate against the worsening urban heat island effect, help address loneliness, particularly for older citizens, and even contribute to reducing crime.

Lisbon: Just a Change[217]

Just a Change is a non-profit that brings together volunteers and businesses to retrofit leaky homes. Local agents highlight cases of housing poverty to the organisation's employees; international businesses like Saint-Gobain, Ikea, and Leroy Merlin provide the materials; and Just a Change deploys young volunteers with construction skills to retrofit the homes. "We rehabilitate houses because we know it brings improvements to public health and energy efficiency in our country. We know that this can be the starting point for a new life."[219] In addition to warmer homes, this model forges intergenerational connections, equips young people with retrofit skills, and effectively connects international businesses with local needs.

## KOTAKU: a community-led slum upgrading programme in Jakarta[222]

KOTAKU is a programme launched by the Ministry of Public Works and Housing which aims to revitalise slum areas by improving neighbourhood infrastructure such as water supply, drainage systems, sanitation, streets, public spaces, and sidewalks, as well as the floors, roofs and walls of substandard homes. This initiative emphasises local value and active community engagement: the government provides funds and facilitators, but each local community develops the programme, including direct involvement in building infrastructure or renovating homes.

The Jakarta Post (2017). "Slum dwellers' homes in Surakarta to be upgraded"

A New Normal City Plan in Melbourne

A New Normal is a city plan to transform Greater Melbourne from an energy consumer to an energy producer by 2030. This model targets Melbourne's water, energy and waste systems to reduce carbon emissions and achieve a "net-zero code" to guide new architecture. The process outlines key initiatives such as mandating the retrofitting of all existing buildings to reduce energy and water consumption, and using energy storage systems to power homes through the electrification of the transport system. The ultimate outcome will see all new construction projects achieving net-positive energy production, water neutrality, and not producing any waste destined for landfill.
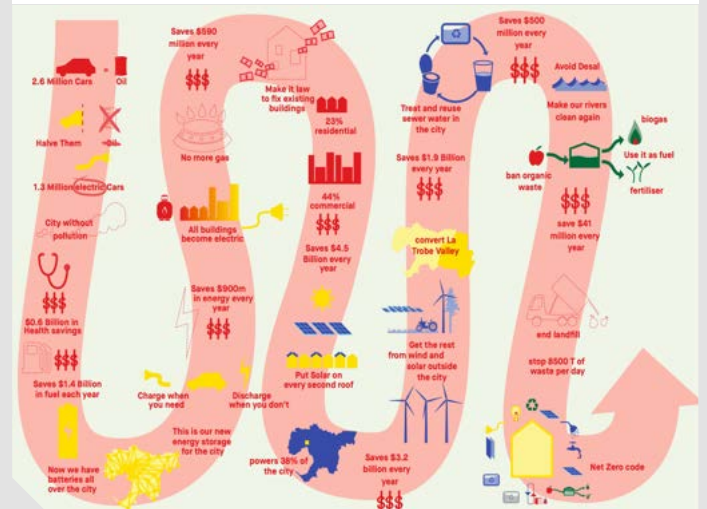
A New Normal is a city plan to transform Greater Melbourne from an energy consumer to an energy producer by 2030. Source: www.normalise.it

Social Urbanism in Medellín[225]

Social Urbanism (SU) is an urban governance model labelled the "Medellín model" in 2008 by the Organization of American States. It is, in large part, the reason for the spectacular urban, social and environmental transformation that occurred in the city since the 2000s. Medellín invested purposefully in the most disadvantaged areas of the city. Investments were not directly in housing (real estate) but in public infrastructure, to provide people with resources that promote and sustain human flourishing: libraries, parks, public transport, sport facilities, community centres, hospitals, and schools. The role of citizenship through education, civics, culture, arts, and sports was also fundamental. From the "Medellín model" of SU, there are five key and intertwined elements that can be discerned: (1) tangible improvements in the built and natural environments, (2) complementary social interventions, (3) driven by community-co-created processes, (4) facilitated by effective public institutional management, and (5) an economic model that is sustainable and redistributive.

Mapping for change in Kenya[228]

Partly due to widespread corruption, land parcels in Kenya can often be sold to two different people, resulting in two separate titles and entries in the land registries. This generates confusion and a lack of confidence in land transactions and ownership. Geographical mapping company GeoDevOps[229] helps people understand the ways that land is owned and used. The organisation hosts Kenya WEBGIS,[230] which provides multiple layers of information such as plot dimensions and ownership in Langata, Nairobi. Surveyors are also able to upload information from their surveys. Chrispine Omondi, Head of GeoDevOps, asserts that transparency about land ownership patterns, especially in this context, is important to help curb corruption and provide clarity for people, government, businesses, and investors.

Eco-Town Project in Kitakyushu, Japan[226]

The city of Kitakyushu has undergone an impressive social and environmental transformation. From being an iron-producing, highly-polluting city, in the early XX Century to being internationally recognised as a "modern leader in green initiatives". The Eco-Town Project in the Wakamatsu-ku Ward in Kitakyushu is the earliest and most complete eco-town in Japan. The project started in 1997 to transform the polluting city of the past into a "resource-recycling-based society" which turns all its waste into resources. In partnership with the Kitakyushu Science and Research Park, the project has also been developing initiatives in education, environmental research, and commercial strategies, to disseminate their learnings as a 'zero-waste' model.[227]

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) globally[224]

A CLT is a non-profit corporation that holds land on behalf of a place-based community, while serving as the long-term steward for affordable housing, community gardens, civic buildings, commercial spaces, and other community assets on behalf of a community. CLTs are innovative in terms of ownership model, organisation as non-profit landowner, and operation – disadvantaged people have the first claim on a CLT's resources. This model does not allow real estate speculation, keeping prices affordable and preventing displacement. They also support environmental sustainability, contribute to local economic development, and help preserve cultural identity within communities.

Citizen Energy Communities (CECs) in Europe[223]

Energy communities are grassroots initiatives led by citizens all over Europe, aimed at promoting clean energy adoption and enhancing energy efficiency at the local level. CECs can take various legal forms, including associations, cooperatives, partnerships, non-profit organisations, or limited liability companies. They are backed by EU law and can operate as a unified entity to gain access to energy markets on par with other market players. These communities promote public support for renewable energy projects and facilitate private investments for the clean energy transition. CECs empower citizens to actively participate in the transition process, leading to various benefits such as improved energy efficiency, reduced energy bills, alleviation of energy poverty, and creation of local green job opportunities.

Housing Cooperatives in Prague

Almost 10% of Prague's residents live in cooperative housing. In this model, the housing cooperative owns the buildings, and the residents are its members, with their monthly payments granting them the right to use their homes. The model is so popular that the City of Prague is aiming to roll out its own housing cooperative. Sdílené Domy (Shared Homes) was the first Czech cooperative to join MOBA, a network of housing cooperatives across East-Central and South-Eastern Europe. Concerned about the potential for homes to be sub-let or privatised with some housing cooperative structures, it set itself up as a social cooperative instead, with one vote per resident rather than one vote per housing unit. To purchase its first property, it secured a loan from the German foundation Umverteilen which covered 70% of the cost, with 30% coming from private loans from supporters or future residents, as well as funding from MOBA.[220]

First Nations Major Project Coalition (FNMPC) in Canada[231]

FNMPC is expanding indigenous participation and control in infrastructure and real estate projects. The First Nations Major Project Coalition is a First Nations group of over 145 elected councils, hereditary Chiefs, Tribal Councils and Development Corporations, who "have made the decision to come together to advance our shared interests of participating, and, where appropriate, gaining equity positions in the major projects [in energy, minerals and real estate] taking place in our territories." This is an example of democratisation of infrastructure - ensuring that the people who live on the land where infrastructure and real estate development takes place have the opportunity to shape projects and benefit from them, and countering the traditional development model in which local communities, particularly indigenous communities, bear the burdens of projects while others reap rewards.[232]

Roadmap: Recommendations to advance just transitions in the built environment

Conclusion

At the outset of the green transition, all studied cities were already facing urban challenges to varying degrees: housing provision and affordability; informality, precariousness, and workers' rights' breaches in the construction sector; low or unequal access to green spaces, jobs, and opportunities; and low or unequal degrees of participation in city-shaping.

This study found built environment climate actions in all eight cities studied, however, the ecological transition is not happening at the same scale or at the same pace around the world. Drivers and incentives for the transition, and specifically for the decarbonisation of the built environment, vary greatly by city, country, and region.

Some climate actions helped tackle socio-economic issues, while others exacerbated them. The difference: an inclusive and equitable approach.

Initiatives that tackled climate change with an equity lens gained widespread support, attracting further investment. When climate actions were disconnected from inequality issues in the city, this was reflected in the discontent of workers and tenants, in the form of street protests, and government and business leaders' reputations suffered.

The communities pushing back against decarbonisation are often those whose human rights remain unaddressed and who stand most to lose from the lack of climate action: for example, if their homes are leaky and in climate-vulnerable areas, if their jobs rely on dwindling natural resources with no alternatives to transition, or if their voices are not heard. Their further marginalisation risks compromising the political and economic stability that allows governments and businesses to play their role in society.

Cities are at a juncture: they can be reactive to greenlash and end up rolling back climate actions, or they can develop and implement holistic strategies that address both climate and social issues together, thus ensuring future climate initiatives are grounded in equity.

This report discusses each city within its unique geographical, political, and economic context. With the need to identify common trends to galvanise collective action, this conclusion brings together the commonalities identified in the study. This requires the use of terms like 'global north' and 'global south' which can be reductive but are necessary to highlight underlying global differences. As recognised in Modern Housing: An Environmental Common Good:

" **While terms like Global North and Global South are gross simplifications, and examples of living environments typically associated with the term Global South can be found within the North and vice versa, it is also possible, and necessary to recognise that these patterns of extraction are highly visible within global flows of material, capital, culture and people themselves, and that the Global North has extracted resources, natural and otherwise, from the Global South to produce its built environment.**[233]

There was a clear difference between cities in the **Global North** (Prague, Lisbon, Athens, Copenhagen, Melbourne) and in the Global South (Lagos, Jakarta, Valparaiso). Global North cities were found to be more advanced in their implementation of decarbonisation initiatives. However, their per capita emission levels remain significantly higher than those in the Global South. While their emissions are reducing, they are amongst the countries that, along with the US and, more recently, China, are disproportionately responsible for climate change.

In the **Global South** cases of this study, the transition narrative is visible at the country level, with a myriad of international commitments to net zero and national policies, plans, and strategies in place that promise to achieve sustainability. In some cases, these even explicitly mention inclusivity and fairness, showing promising intentions. However, there is a clear gap in their implementation at the local level. It was found that these ambitious national commitments and green pledges do not translate into actionable steps for lower levels of government, contrasting sharply with the realities found on the ground.

This can be explained, in part, by a clear difference in priorities. **Global South megacities** like Jakarta and Lagos face large-scale, critical, urgent urban problems such as informal settlements, air and water pollution, and lack of public services such as electricity, waste management, and more. Tackling these urban issues is rendered more challenging by shortcomings in governance and civic engagement. Hence, it is difficult to imagine how ambitious national climate plans can be implemented on the ground unless they simultaneously address these basic issues.

Global South cases were found to be more concerned with environmental justice issues, such as the differentiated impact of climate change on local communities, and the impact of industrial activities on their natural environments, for example, the pollution of water streams and nature. In the **Global North** cases, this study found a greater focus on a just transition, meaning climate actions, their implementation, and their differentiated impacts on people.

As shown in this report, there are multiple risks of not undertaking the green transition in a just and inclusive way, or not undertaking it at all. Delays in climate actions mean most vulnerable communities will continue to experience the negative impacts of climate change, exacerbating inequality and risks to human rights. The large size of cities in the Global South scales both the risks of exacerbating, and the opportunities of addressing, social inequalities through holistic and inclusive climate actions.

Jakarta, Indonesia. Credit: Alejandra Rivera

European context

The EU's climate policy has been a key driver of built environment decarbonisation action in the four European cities analysed as part of this study. The EU's climate goals have led to national climate policies and guided decarbonisation of residential buildings, channelling public and private resources into reducing emissions from the built environment.

Climate action has created opportunities to modernise inefficient and ageing housing stock, increase sustainable and affordable housing, and create employment opportunities in the construction sector. To stay within their carbon budget, EU countries can only build a combined 176,000 residential units per year.[234] Therefore, retrofitting existing homes must be prioritised over building new.

The climate agenda took the EU's centre stage during the 2019-2024 mandate of the commission, which significantly increased the resources dedicated to climate action. In each of the four European cities researched, this resulted in governments, businesses, and civil society developing and implementing, to varying degrees, initiatives to reduce climate emissions in the built environment.

The extensive investment has resulted in visible (albeit insufficient) progress in decarbonising Europe's built environment. This creates opportunities to modernise inefficient and ageing housing stock, increase sustainable and affordable housing, and create employment opportunities in the construction sector. Unfortunately, Europe has also been the region where greenlash has been most visible. This results in notable instances of climate policy reversal, with negative consequences for green businesses, which need long-term certainty, as well as for climate targets.[235]

EU investment in climate action must continue, but its next phase must be grounded in equity. A just transition is rooted in the needs of the communities most at risk from climate change. A human rights-led approach to climate action can achieve this goal, particularly by protecting and upholding the right to housing, workers' rights, participation, and spatial justice.

Roles and responsibilities

The advancement of human rights in societies around the world is complex and therefore a constant and collective endeavour. This includes the right to housing, worker rights, meaningful participation, and spatial equity in the built environment's green transition.

Since its inception in 1945, the United Nations has been the main international body defining and promoting human rights. Since the second half of the 20th century, human rights have become a fundamental issue for business operations. Rapid globalisation has led to greater international business operations and more complex supply chains, increasing the risk of overlooking responsibilities or systematically violating human rights in countries with weak regulations.

In 2011, the UN's Human Rights Council unanimously endorsed the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs),[236] which set out the roles and responsibilities of governments and businesses in ensuring human rights are protected and respected across all sectors, including the built environment.

" The UNGPs are the world's most authoritative, normative framework guiding responsible business conduct and addressing human rights abuses in business operations and global supply chains.

Construction worker, Indonesia

The UNGPs were field-defining because they clearly stated the duties and responsibilities of States and businesses, and highlighted the need for their complementarity to ensure human rights are upheld. The UNGPs comprise 31 principles organised in three pillars:

Pillar 1: States' duty to protect human rights in the context of business operations.

This requires States to set clear expectations for companies by enacting effective policies, legislation, and regulations. In doing so, States establish that appropriate steps are in place to prevent, investigate, punish and redress adverse human rights impacts.

Pillar 2: Corporate responsibility to respect

This pillar outlines how businesses can identify the negative human rights impacts of their business operations, and how to demonstrate that they have adequate policies and procedures to address them. Businesses should also undertake ongoing human rights due diligence to identify, prevent and mitigate human rights abuses.

Pillar 3: Access to Remedy

This pillar stipulates that when a right is violated, victims must have access to effective remedies which are legitimate, accessible, predictable, equitable, transparent and rights compatible. Pillar 3 sets out criteria for effectiveness of judicial and non-judicial grievance mechanisms implemented by both States and businesses.

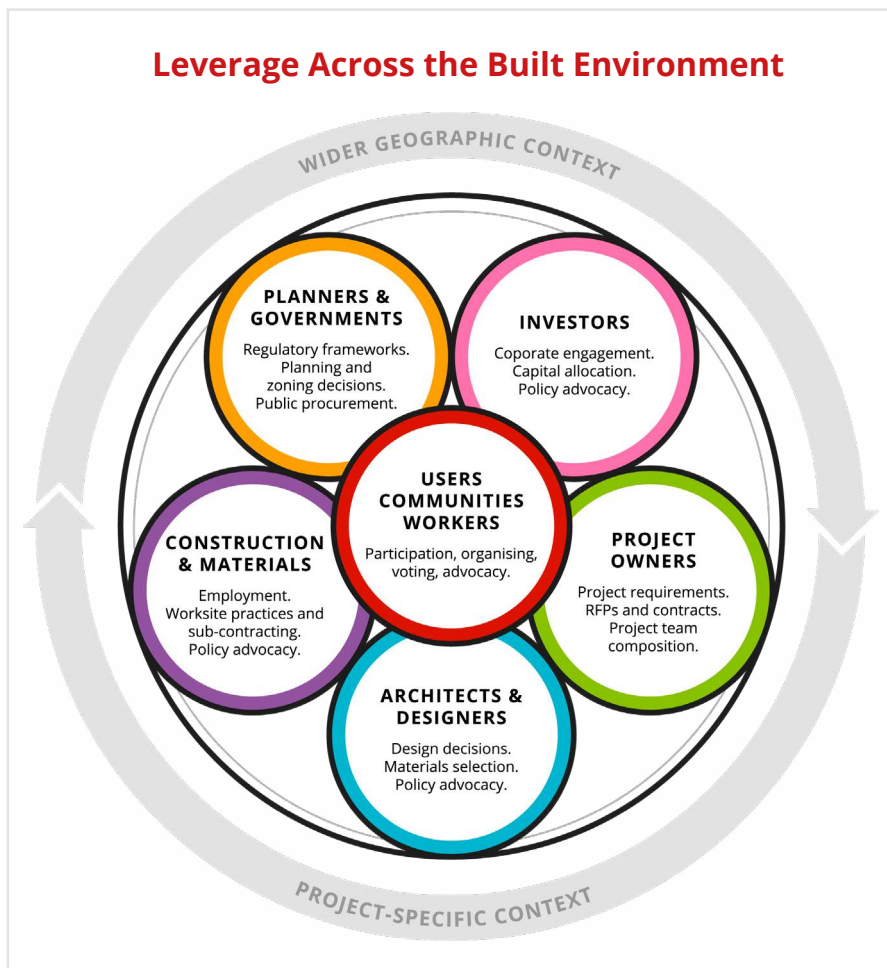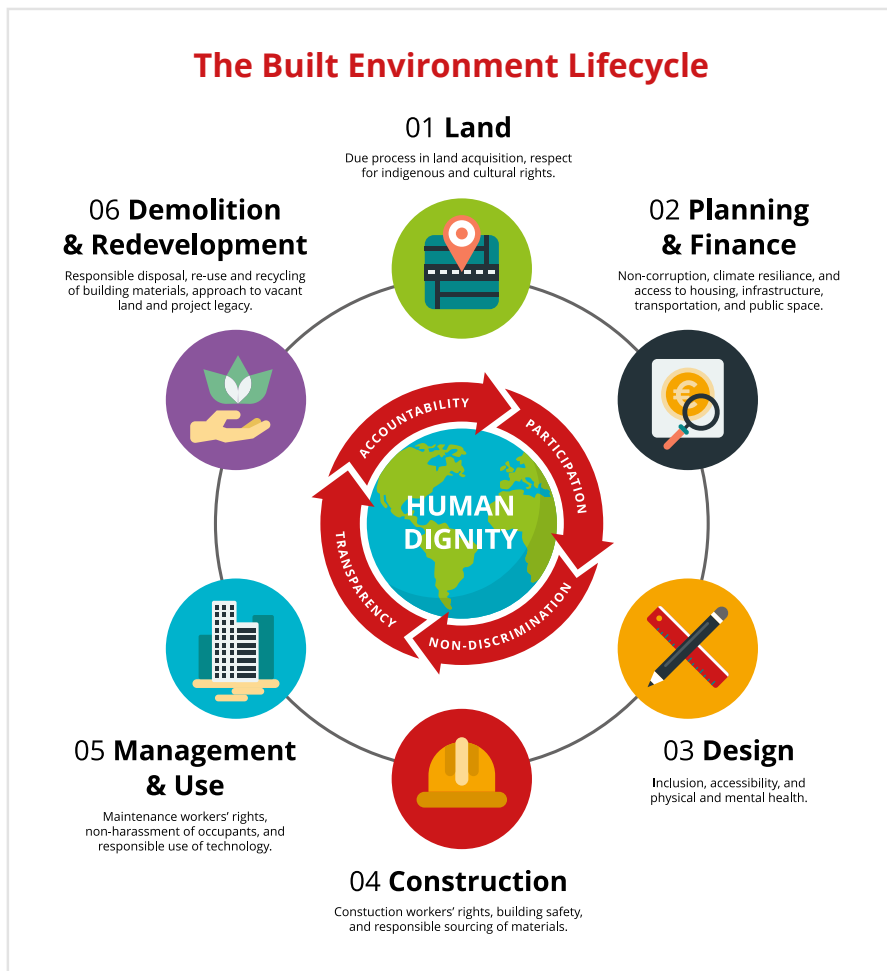Jakarta, Indonesia. Credit: Alejandra Rivera

Applying the UNGPs to the built environment industry, it is evident that every actor has important roles and responsibilities to contribute to the realisation of human rights in the industry. It is also abundantly clear that these rights cannot be upheld without tackling climate change, as extensively evidenced through this research.

1. **Governments** from local to national levels, including city councils, regulatory bodies, urban planning departments, public procurement departments, and all public institutions, have the responsibility to **use public policy to protect human rights in their built environment.**

2. **Businesses**, including real estate investors, developers, project owners, small and large architecture, planning, and design firms, construction companies, their respective contractors and sub-contractors, and their business partners throughout the supply chain, all have the responsibility to **use their internal policies and business operations to respect human rights in the built environments where they extract, operate, and sell.**

3. **Both actors above,** governments and businesses operating in the built environment sector, are responsible for providing **access to remedy** when a human right has been violated. This includes, for example, providing legal and practical solutions and fair compensation to people who have been forcedly evicted from their homes. The right to access remedy also applies in other areas like construction workers' rights, or spatial discrimination.

The infographics below summarise the continuum of human rights risks and responsibilities across the built environment lifecycle, the inter-relatedness of the actors, and points of leverage between them. The distribution of power between these actors largely determines the nature of the built environment, and whether it responds only to narrow financial interests or also to the needs of users, communities, and workers, particularly the most vulnerable.[237]

The Built Environment Lifecycle

01 Land
Due process in land acquisition, respect for indigenous and cultural rights.

06 Demolition & Redevelopment
Responsible disposal, re-use and recycling of building materials, approach to vacant land and project legacy.

02 Planning & Finance
Non-corruption, climate resiliance, and access to housing, infrastructure, transportation, and public space.

HUMAN DIGNITY

ACCOUNTABILITY • PARTICIPATION • NON-DISCRIMINATION • TRANSPARENCY

05 Management & Use
Maintenance workers' rights, non-harassment of occupants, and responsible use of technology.

03 Design
Inclusion, accessibility, and physical and mental health.

04 Construction
Constuction workers' rights, building safety, and responsible sourcing of materials.

Leverage Across the Built Environment

WIDER GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

PLANNERS & GOVERNMENTS
Regulatory frameworks. Planning and zoning decisions. Public procurement.

INVESTORS
Coporate engagement. Capital allocation. Policy advocacy.

USERS COMMUNITIES WORKERS
Participation, organising, voting, advocacy.

CONSTRUCTION & MATERIALS
Employment. Worksite practices and sub-contracting. Policy advocacy.

PROJECT OWNERS
Project requirements. RFPs and contracts. Project team composition.

ARCHITECTS & DESIGNERS
Design decisions. Materials selection. Policy advocacy.

PROJECT-SPECIFIC CONTEXT

The built environment lifecycle (top) and the leverage points of each actor to protect and respect human rights (bottom). **Source: IHRB Framework for Dignity in the Built Environment**

Recommendations

The following section provides 44 recommendations across the four human rights areas that this research study dives into. These are organised by scope (global or EU only) and directed to either governments, investors or both. Their implementation requires close collaboration between the public and private sectors, as well as meaningful engagement with the communities directly impacted by built environment decisions and climate actions.

This would be possible through mission-oriented[238] stakeholder collaborations that cut across disciplines, sectors, departments, and levels of governance. These holistic collaborations facilitate working together towards the complex, but attainable, goal of a just transition in the built environment.

Recommendations for all countries

For both 🏛 Governments and 💲 Investors

Key 🏠 Housing   ⛑ Workers' rights   ✋ Participation   ✥ Spatial justice

Context-specific investments

In many European countries, there is more than enough residential real estate to house everyone, without the need to build more. With 16% of homes across Europe unoccupied and countless vacant commercial buildings, just transition investments must focus on retrofits and sufficiency. In many other countries around the world, there are not enough homes for everyone, and populations keep growing. Hence, investments in those contexts require a combination of energy-efficient new builds and retrofits.

🏠 ⛑ ✋ ✥

Expand participation

Businesses and government should involve NGOs, universities, and civil society organisations such as tenants associations and workers unions, in the design and implementation of green transition strategies. Meaningful engagement processes such as citizen assemblies are crucial to respect local communities, but they can also provide unique insights that can improve the projects for all stakeholders involved. Additionally, early-stage engagement helps reduce the likelihood of push-back and delays further down the line.

🏠 ⛑ ✋ ✥

Blended finance for social housing

Set financial incentives for blended finance in social housing, such as state credit guarantees or attractive interest rates, that require both environmental and social sustainability. This can also guide green finance to create green construction training and jobs in territories and neighbourhoods most impacted by economic restructuring.

🏠 ⛑ ✋ ✥

Key 🏠 Housing ⛑ Workers' rights ✋ Participation ✛ Spatial justice

Consolidate funding pots

Provide clear avenues for governments, businesses and residents to access funding for green and affordable housing. At the EU level, consolidate loans and guarantees for green and affordable housing provided by EBRD and EIB into a single dedicated funding pot. The different pots available for retrofit and renovation should also be integrated into a single platform directly accessible to housing finance applicants, rather than being channelled through multilateral, national, regional or commercial banks.

Just Transition Plans

Engage with workers, tenants, and their unions to develop just transition plans that identify and mitigate against potential human rights issues in the green transition. These could include initiatives supporting carbon-intensive workers in accessing new green jobs, ensuring these deliver improved working conditions, or protecting tenants from potential renovictions, ultimately strengthening public support for climate action. The plans must be accompanied by dedicated funding for at-risk communities, and investors can contribute by prioritising investments in companies that have Just Transition Plans in place.

Social Urbanism

Adopt, support and invest in the Social Urbanism model of city (re)development. This model prioritises investments in social infrastructure in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods of the city, unlocking both economic and social development potential.

Land ownership data

Increase transparency of real estate transactions through the creation of a publicly-available digital register of real estate ownership and transactions, as currently being explored by the OECD and the EU.

Support local social innovation

From European housing cooperatives and community land trusts, to the self-help model in Africa, people everywhere demonstrate that their knowledge and potential to find solutions is valuable and is often disregarded. Understanding and supporting such civil society innovations would increase their agency and the city's capacity to resolve its own urban problems.

Participation platforms

Invest in establishing and developing participation platforms, where municipal and national government, technical teams, investors, civil society, and cultural organisations can collaborate.

Grow the public housing stock

Grow, finance, or establish public housing corporations, to increase public housing stock (for example through right of first refusal mechanisms), have greater control of the housing market, and generate long-term revenue. When market properties are built on public land, ensure land ownership is retained in the public domain.

Key 🏠 Housing ⛑ Workers' rights ✋ Participation ✥ Spatial justice

Incentivise best practice

Offer regulatory (governments) and financial (investors) incentives rewarding developers who exceed building code requirements e.g. a building which exceeds the % affordable housing requirement and minimum energy efficiency rating is allowed to have an extra storey, etc.

Upskilling and re-skilling

Invest in upskilling and reskilling the entire value chain, e.g. through circular economy training programmes and other green skills for architects, engineers, and construction professionals of different skill levels and of different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Recommendations for all countries

For 🏛 Governments

Multi-level, long-term governance

Establish strong structures and institutions to allow for multi-level governance so that regional and city-level plans integrate national decarbonisation strategies. Develop long-term plans which provide the policy certainty and predictability required to foster long-term, responsible public and private investment

Citizen and evidence-led

Decision-making processes and policy development should be based on evidence and citizen engagement. This helps avoid politicisation, prevent greenwashing, and find bipartisan, common-ground solutions to urban issues. It will also facilitate the integration of climate policies and social policies.

Regulate investment

Introduce regulations that require responsible investments and conduct of (a) nationally headquartered companies operating overseas, as well as (b) foreign companies directly investing and operating in national territory.

Licenses and permits

Leverage business licensing and permits to prioritise businesses and social enterprises that commit to respecting human rights and align with the principles of a just transition.

Enshrine the right to housing

Enshrine the Right to Housing in national constitutions and in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Key 🏠 Housing   ⛑ Workers' rights   ✊ Participation   ✛ Spatial justice

Minimum energy efficiency standards with social safeguards

Introduce minimum energy efficiency standards for new homes, as well as national targets for retrofitting the existing stock. Crucially, these changes must be accompanied by **social safeguards** such as rental caps, prioritised funding for low-income groups and benefit-sharing mechanisms which prevent renovictions, green gentrification and job loss.

Dedicated housing agency

Establish a dedicated housing agency (ministry, department, etc.) with autonomy, appropriate financial and human resources, and executive power to create policies, programmes, plans and strategies to protect the right to housing. Housing-responsible agencies at the local and national levels should be in constant and direct communication and coordination to maximise results.

Develop a public housing investment programme

Consolidate multiple housing initiatives within a housing development investment programme, which can, for example, **map all under-used and vacant buildings** which could be converted into affordable housing, including through partnerships with investors. The programme should be developed in close partnership with CSOs, to ensure housing affordability – generating long-term financial returns from a large number of low-priced rents (citywide) rather than from a low number of buildings with high-priced rents.

Circular, equitable land use and spatial planning

Develop land use and spatial plans based on circularity and equity, upholding the rights to non-discrimination and spatial equity. This can include re-zoning to support mixed-use development, prioritising re-using existing buildings and incorporating social safeguards against gentrification and displacement. This approach revitalises communities, preserves cultural heritage, and minimises the environmental footprint of new developments.

Community retrofit hubs

To support citizens in their efforts to decarbonise the existing building stock, governments should partner with civil society organisations and businesses to establish community hubs which can provide guidance and expertise, particularly valuable for marginalised communities.

Integrated land use and transport planning

Integrate land use and transport planning to ensure that existing and planned buildings have adequate access to resources that improve quality of life e.g. transport infrastructure like metro stations, green spaces, workplaces, schools, healthcare facilities and stores for daily needs.

Leverage fiscal measures to tackle housing financialisation

To reduce housing speculation, improve affordability, and prevent green gentrification and spatial inequalities, explore the possibilities for taxes on empty homes or second homes, bans on renting low-priced, recently-purchased properties, and regulations for the short-term rental market.

Key 🏠 Housing ⛑ Workers' rights ✋ Participation ✛ Spatial justice

Affordable essential utilities

Ensure essential utilities (electricity, heating and water) are accessible and affordable for all residents, to provide the services required to uphold the human right to adequate housing. This can be possible through increased regulation of privatised utilities and reduced rates, discounted bills, and energy efficiency retrofitting programmes for publicly-owned utilities.

Local hiring preference

Ensure that building (re)developments benefit local workers and communities, by mandating a local hiring preference. This would promote upskilling and economic development within the community.

Promote energy-efficiency retrofits

Provide incentives for home owners through tax-deductions and subsidies, and negotiating special pricing with energy companies for volume business, at neighbourhood or district scale. Specify benefit-sharing mechanisms to ensure subsidies aren't simply transferred on to tenants.

Protect against renovictions

Measures can include rent caps, a ban on no-fault evictions, increasing the duration of standard rental contracts, requiring affordable housing in mixed use developments, tying retrofit loans to future energy savings, safeguarding the social categorization of social housing after retrofit, and more.

Public procurement to align social and environmental outcomes

For example, tenders could include social value metrics in the assessment frameworks or require training clauses to upskill and reskill the construction workforce and mandate the inclusion of apprenticeships . When the winning contractors are awarded a contract, these clauses ensure that they commit to training their staff (and possibly beyond) during the project in a specific set of skills. As a result, contractors contribute to the just transitions by dedicating time, budget, and means to train their employees and new workers, possibly directly on-site.

Strengthen corporate reporting and disclosures

Introduce mandatory reporting requirements for large companies, strengthening transparency and accountability. Disclosures also play a key role in allowing investors greater visibility of the organisations they are investing in.

In Europe, this process has been started through the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), but construction sector-specific standards must be developed as part of the European reporting standards (ESRS).

Unionised workforce

Ensure there is strong(er) **regulation** in place protecting workers including their **right for unionisation and collective bargaining**, as well as access to remedy without retaliation. This is crucial to address the current labour shortages in the construction sector.

Recommendations for all countries
For ⓈInvestors

Key 🏠 Housing ⛑ Workers' rights ✋ Participation ✥ Spatial justice

Maximise pre-competitive advantage

Gain competitive advantage and avoid stranded assets by developing investment products that comply with upcoming and emerging environmental and social regulations. In the EU, these include the EPBD, CSRD, CSDDD and Green Taxonomy.

Social license to operate

Ensure developers in the investment portfolio have adequate provisions to consult (at least) and co-create (at best) with end-users and local communities

Long-term, stable returns over short-term extractive investments

For example, by providing a mix of homes which meet the local socio-economic profiles rather than those of speculators, strengthening tenant protections to minimise tenant turnover, and including commercial spaces which create stable employment opportunities for residents.

Human rights due diligence

Perform human rights due diligence on portfolio companies in construction and real estate, and require them to do the same down their supply chain.

Alternative investment criteria

Include energy-efficiency and affordability (low price rents) as criteria for investments.

Protect workers' rights

Invest in companies with strong policies that protect workers' rights, such as transparent human resources processes, safety standards, providing adequate support for all workers, regardless of gender, age, or disability, programmes to reskill for refurbishing and retrofitting housing.

Embed diversity

Monitor and evaluate the diversity (gender, age, ethnicity, backgrounds) of the staff and boards of investment portfolio built environment companies.

Strengthened ESG reporting

Include respect for workers' rights (on construction sites and through construction materials supply chain) and impact on housing affordability **within ESG and impact investment frameworks, as well as in** engagement with current and potential companies in the investment portfolio.

Recommendations only for EU countries

For both 🏛 Governments and 💲 Investors

Key 🏠 Housing ⛑ Workers' rights ✋ Participation ✥ Spatial justice

Equitable National EPBD Implementation

Countries must embed a just transition approach into their national EPBD implementation plans. This may entail prioritising funding for lower-income groups, introducing **safeguards which prevent renovictions and green gentrification,** and upskilling programmes for existing construction workers.

Future iterations of the EPBD (from 2028) should include higher residential energy efficiency standards and a more explicit focus on social justice, including climate housing allowances which could be delivered through the Just Transition Mechanism.

Recommendations only for EU countries

For 🏛 Governments

European Social Taxonomy

Develop the European Social Taxonomy to accompany the green taxonomy, **increasing transparency and strengthening accountability** with regards to the social impact of business activity. In the meantime, assess the performance of the minimum safeguards in the green taxonomy, and consider potential strengthening.

National CSDDD Implementation

When developing their national implementation plans for the CSDDD, EU countries should clearly indicate that these apply to real estate and construction companies, including their impact on economic, cultural and social rights.

An equitable green deal, grounded in housing

Ensure the next phase of the European Green Deal has a greater focus on social equity, which will reduce public pushback. Sustainable, affordable housing should sit at its cornerstone, with the potential for a new Housing Commissioner.

Recommendations only for EU countries

For ⓢ Investors

Key 🏠 Housing ⛑ Workers' rights ✋ Participation ✛ Spatial justice

Taxonomy-aligned investment

Align investments with the EU Green Taxonomy (Regulation EU 2020/852), particularly with the Minimum Safeguards (MS) as laid out in Article 18.

Towards systems change

While the recommendations outlined above can provide incremental change towards a just transition, it is necessary to look at the structural and long-term changes necessary for justice to be the norm. A sustainable and just future requires a fundamental reshaping of economies to produce regenerative systems that address unequal power dynamics head on. Hence, to contribute ideas towards systemic change, this report provides three steering principles for governments and investors, and three collective endeavours for all seeking a more just and inclusive world.

1. The most important principle is for urban leaders, industry leaders, and finance leaders to **have a true and caring commitment of heart and mind to an inclusive and just ecological transition.** This means acknowledging that the current linear and extractive economic model is not good for the planet nor for the vast majority of people, and that the ecological transition to a circular, regenerative, and sustainable model is a political, business, and moral imperative. Commitment in heartset and mindset means having a high degree of honesty with oneself, colleagues, partners, and the wider society, that such transition is difficult, that there are clearly going to be winners and losers, and having the equally compelling political, business, and moral imperative to contribute to making the process more inclusive and just.

> **It is necessary to change the attitude, the willingness and approach to governance. There is an attitude required to deliver governance: an attitude of humility, of acknowledging power and responsibility as a privilege, which requires you to value individual citizens and motivates you to create policies for citizens.**
>
> **Tpl. Olutoyin Ayinde**
> President of the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners (NITP)
> Research Interview, October 2022

2. This study found evidence of human rights being violated or ignored in the built environment and in its green transition. At the same time, it identified a multitude of opportunities and solutions emerging from people committed to a just transition, and willing to contribute from their roles and leverage, but who often have less influence and decision-making given the current power relations in the cities. **The second steering principle is to educate with objective information, empower with independent tools, and create spaces for the flourishing of the committed.** This principle, if followed, has the potential to transform current injustices by opening spaces for innovative ideas, various forms of knowledge, and creative solutions to our current urban pains. The visions and the emerging innovative models exemplify this potential.

> **Action without vision is only passing time, vision without action is merely daydreaming, but vision with action can change the world.**
>
> **Nelson Mandela**

3. **The third principle is for government, finance and business leaders to embed human rights in their everyday practices.** This report adds to the comprehensive evidence demonstrating the negative impacts on productivity, efficiency, stability, and sustainability when human rights are undermined. Specifically, this research shows that climate change is a social issue, and hence that the right to housing, worker rights, spatial justice, and participation need to be upheld to tackle the climate crisis. With this in mind, it proposes a different lens for governing, a different lens for investing: one whereby all transition initiatives have the explicit goal of protecting and respecting human rights, with clear mechanisms in place for transparency, accountability, non-discrimination, and participation.

> **Housing should not be treated as a commodity like gold or steel [a transactional asset], it is a basic human right to have a place where you have peace, security, and most importantly dignity.**

Leilani Farha
Founder and Executive Director of The Shift, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing (paraphrased from public discourse)

Lagos, Nigeria

Three collective endeavours for all seeking a more just and inclusive world

Prior to the emergence of market economies, economic activities such as farming, barter, and local trade were embedded within their social contexts, and economic value was proportional to their societal contribution. Since the Industrial Revolution, there was a process of steady commodification of everything, including land, labour, and housing, and the development of market-led economies and profit-led behaviour. Karl Polanyi called this a process of disembeddedness, where economic activities became increasingly separated from their social value and environmental considerations.[240] This disembeddedness of the economy becomes particularly problematic when paired with a focus on consumption, economic growth, and its measurement through the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This leads to environmental degradation and growing social inequalities: two of the most pressing global challenges of our time.

Polanyi argues for the re-embedding of the economy within society to address social and environmental challenges effectively. For the purposes of this research study and the interests of its readers, this can be understood as the need to embed social value or respect for human rights (back) into the processes that shape the built environment and into the ecological transition itself. This two-year global research project has identified three global shifts that, if pursued collectively, can enable this re-embedding.

Shift in Value

A just transition in the built environment requires rescuing its social function and rethinking its value beyond its current conception as a commodity, as another transactional asset within market-led economies and subjugated to profit-led behaviour. **The first endeavour is the collective recognition of the value of the built environment as an enabler for human flourishing[241] and, therefore, a shift to valuing its social functions over its price.**[242] In cities, the adequate and fair provision of housing, transport infrastructure, urban systems like water and electricity networks, effective urban planning, and fair distribution of natural resources, are what determine

the positive or negative conditions of possibility[243] for people's lives. The building blocks of cities provide the foundation for the quality of life of their inhabitants. Hence, a built environment serving its social functions enables opportunities, whilst a highly-commodified built environment accentuates social inequalities.

The endeavour of rescuing the social value of the built environment requires rethinking what is important for us and how basic, simple, and common it is. Visitors to Jakarta can stay in the penthouse of a five-star hotel,[244] and realise they will not be able to open the window due to the dense fog of brown polluted air on the other side of the glass, and drinking tap water is likely to result in hospitalisation. What are we valuing the most? And is it aligned with our most intrinsic human needs?

From this point of view, the ultimate goal of urban (re) development projects and urban policies should be the optimisation, preservation, and regeneration of natural resources and of their social function. This is not at odds with economic gain, but it should be prioritised and defended besides the latter.

Shift in Narrative

Narratives matter because they influence which ideas are so widely accepted in culture as to have become 'common sense'. Mainstream narratives have the power to influence people's thinking about how the world works and, by extension, how people understand the stories and facts they encounter in daily life. These can be thought of as worldviews, or *meta-narratives:* beliefs about human nature and how the world works that are built up over time by influential experiences, beliefs, people, and institutions. [245]

There are two important narrative shifts that are necessary as part of this second collective endeavour.

First, while there has been progress on the introduction of environmental sustainability and the need to address climate change in **global narratives**, the same has not occurred with **social sustainability and the imperative to address social injustices,** in tandem with climate change. This has only started to change recently, with social dialogue being one of the processes that should be further promoted in shaping new narratives.

Secondly, there is the mainstream perception that the status quo is cemented and immobile. Market-led economies have dominated global narratives for over two centuries longer than any person living today has lived - and therefore have become a generational belief. This might explain the difficulty of imagining a world in which the mainstream value is otherwise, or the struggle of the visioning workshop participants in imagining a just and inclusive future for their cities. **It is necessary to embrace an alternative narrative, whereby this future is possible to imagine and to attain.**

Shift the Indicator

Lastly, it is necessary to transcend the main indicator used for measuring progress and development, as this speaks clearly of what is valued in that society. Since the 1930s, GDP has been the most important indicator of economic prosperity, with an increase in GDP seen as the sole thermometer of progress. A singular focus on GDP risks a vehement pursuit of economic growth for the sake of growth, rather than considering this alongside other development indicators.

The third collective endeavour is to move beyond GDP and mainstream alternative indicators to reflect new values and new narratives. As long as the indicator measures only economic value, it will remain challenging to capture and measure social impact or benefit. GDP does not measure fairness, health, happiness, nor quality of life.

Some progress has been made in various places towards alternative, more life-centred (people and planet) indicators, such as the Human Development Index (HDI), Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), Happy Planet Index (HPI), Better Life Index (BLI), Inclusive Wealth Index (IWI) or the Social Progress Index (SPI).[246] Each includes slightly different metrics, some overlapping, some complementary, but none have been globally mainstreamed to the extent the GDP has been for almost a century. Finding collective agreement on a new, post-GDP indicator that focuses on people and planet is a crucial collective endeavour.

The advancement of these three collective endeavours could re-embed social functions into the economy, advancing the socio-economic transformations needed to stay within planetary boundaries whilst respecting human rights

It is our right, responsibility, and endeavour to do so.

List of related resources

➔ Dignity by Design Framework

➔ ICLEI's Circular City Actions Framework for Buildings and Construction

➔ "Better Building(s): Financing Human Rights-Based Decarbonisation in Europe's Built Environment"

➔ Building for Today and the Future project website

➔ City Toolkit: The role of local government in advancing a just transition in the built environment

➔ Investors briefing: Making the case for green and affordable housing investment in Europe

➔ Future green construction jobs: skills and decent working conditions

➔ IHRB and Dark Matter Labs joint work on "Urban Land Ownership Mapping— Towards a just transition of Europe's built environment"

Footnotes

1. UNEP, "Global Status Report for Buildings and Construction" (2023), at: https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/45095/global_status_report_buildings_construction_2023.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

2. IHRB, "Building for Today and the Future" (April 2024), at: https://www.ihrb.org/focus-areas/built-environment/building-for-today-and-the-future

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Making respect for human rights part of everyday business