

# Climate Change Mitigation through a Well-being Lens “Putting people at the centre of climate action”

**“Strong climate action is not a threat to, but the foundation of our future economic well-being”.**

Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General

## Background

The impacts of climate change on human well-being are increasingly being felt. Rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are necessary to limit climate risks and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keeping the change in global average surface temperatures well-below 2 degrees or lower will require a transformation of economies on an unprecedented scale. Moving away from the current dependence on the unabated combustion of fossil fuels will be challenging, but will be easier if we ensure that we maximise the synergies with other well-being goals such as health and equity, and identify and manage trade-offs where these exist.



## Objective

The OECD’s latest report on “Climate change mitigation through a well-being lens” aims to encourage and support governments in meeting their national and international climate mitigation goals. It argues that mitigation policies are likely to be more feasible to implement, politically, economically and socially, as well as more effective, when there is a **two-way alignment** between climate action and broader goals of well-being and sustainable development.

Applying a **well-being lens** to climate change mitigation is a way for governments to achieve this two-way alignment by systematically addressing a wide range of **synergies and trade-offs** between mitigation and well-being goals.

## The Well-being Lens

### Adopting a well-being lens means that:

- Societal goals are defined in terms of well-being outcomes (climate change risks and impacts included) and these goals are systematically reflected in decision-making across the economy;
- Decisions are taken keeping multiple well-being objectives in mind, rather than focused on reaching a single (or very narrow range of objective(s) independently of others;
- The interrelations between the different economic sectors and systems in which a policy intervenes are sufficiently well understood.

**Wider visibility  
of synergies and  
trade-offs**



### Two-way alignment:

- Action in non-climate policy is supportive of and does not undermine the pursuit of climate change mitigation goals;
- Climate action meets other important societal goals and does not negatively impact on key dimensions of well-being.

## Moving beyond GDP as measure of success at economy-wide level

The OECD recognises that promoting better policies for better lives requires a rethinking of societal goals, prioritising improvements in people's well-being that include but go beyond traditional economic activity indicators such as GDP. GDP growth and well-being are inextricably linked through income, earnings, jobs and investment in capital. A well-being lens encourages a focus on the quality of economic growth and the well-being outcomes it delivers and not just the magnitude of that growth. A well-being approach explicitly forces attention on those things (social connections, a clean environment) that money alone cannot buy and GDP does not value. The OECD Well-being framework provides an analytical tool to examine this multidimensional concept of well-being.

The well-being lens proposed in the report takes into consideration both the OECD Well-Being Framework as well as the Sustainable Development Goals in analysing a range of economic sectors.

## From theory to practice: changed perspectives at the sectorial level

The report highlights how adopting a well-being lens could lead to a change in perspective and different policy approaches to mitigation in different economic sectors: electricity, heavy industry, residential, transport and agriculture. This could enlarge the scope for achieving synergies and managing the trade-offs between climate change mitigation and well-being goals, increasing political support for ambitious climate mitigation action. Three specific actions are identified as central and are addressed in Parts I and II of the report:

### Part I

**Changing perspective:** In each sector, the report reassesses current policy priorities, making sure these effectively guide the sector to align decisions with climate and other well-being and sustainability goals.

**Adjusting the measurement system:** A more comprehensive set of indicators can help monitor and set criteria to ensure progress on multiple policy priorities, making synergies and trade-offs between them visible. A number of new and complementary indicators are introduced and discussed in relation to existing indicators, including for the SDGs and the OECD Well-being Framework.

### Part II

**Climate policies through a well-being lens:** Drawing on this changed perspective and measurement system, Part II of the report will analyse and evaluate how different climate policies can support or hinder the achievement of wider well-being goals in each of the sectors. Policy analysis is illustrated throughout the report with examples of cities and countries that have been able to bring two-way alignment benefits.

## Changed perspectives in a nutshell

### Electricity

- Going beyond the energy trilemma i.e. providing reliable, affordable and low-carbon electricity – and looking at objectives such as maintaining a healthy and safe environment and sustainably managing natural resources;
- Systematically incorporating network infrastructure and electricity demand to make visible the potential of activating the demand-side.

### Heavy Industry

- Going beyond maximising production to consider well-being losses due to rising emissions, pollution of air, water and soil; and sustainability concerns linked to future resources;
- Shifting towards net-zero, circular and resource-efficient production.

### Residential

- Considering the implications and reinforcing effects across different spatial scales (i.e. dwellings and buildings, neighbourhoods, cities and ecosystems);
- Taking a comprehensive vision of ‘good housing’, i.e. beyond access to a dwelling and considering affordable housing and services, equitable access to opportunities, ensuring safe and healthy living environments, fostering efficient use and conservation of natural resources and ecosystems, and limiting climate change.

### Transport

- Shifting focus from facilitating physical movement to ensuring and improving accessibility, i.e. that people are able to easily reach jobs, opportunities, services and amenities;
- Taking a comprehensive view of accessibility that looks to provide affordable and safe services, while also incorporating environmental (including climate-related) and health considerations.

### Agriculture

- Defining priorities that go beyond food production (e.g. accessibility to a healthy diet, limiting climate change, a healthy and safe environment and sustainable management of natural resources); and placing these objectives at the same level of priority as economic objectives;
- Taking a food systems approach that analyses changes in multiples levers, including the supply (agriculture) and the demand side (consumption and waste management).