

***High-level OECD Conference***  
***ICTs, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE***  
*27-28 May 2009*  
*Helsingør, Denmark*

*Conference summary*

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[www.oecd.org/sti/ict/green-ict](http://www.oecd.org/sti/ict/green-ict)

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have a major role in improving environmental performance and addressing climate change across all sectors of the economy. Smarter and cleaner environmental and economic strategies and policies will help tackle global warming and contribute to “green growth” in the economic crisis and recovery. ICTs and the Internet have key roles in increasing energy efficiency, reducing energy use and managing scarce resources, and in buildings and urban systems, transport and logistics, electricity generation, distribution and consumption.

Addressing these urgent challenges was the subject of a major conference with over 200 government, business and civil society experts. The Conference was opened by the Danish Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Helge Sander, and the OECD Secretary General, Angel Gurría.

The Conference emphasised that global warming and environmental challenges are at the same time economic challenges, which have become even more crucial in the current global recession.

The Conference agreed on two major work areas for collective action and policy to tackle these challenges. The ICT industry itself produces around 2% of the carbon footprint and there is much still to do to improve this environmental performance. The remaining 98% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions come from other sectors of the economy where ICT applications are a major part of the solution. ICTs are key for improving and overhauling infrastructures and systems that are major emitter of greenhouse gases, most notably urban infrastructures, buildings and construction, energy generation and distribution.

The conference urged moving from discussion to action – shifting from the “think-tank” to the “do-tank” – in both areas of action.

Information and awareness are crucial. Better measurement and greater transparency for all involved players are crucial to achieve systemic change in government, business and consumer behaviour. Better and more comprehensive life cycle analysis of ICTs is part of the solution. But better measurement of the enabling impacts of ICTs in key sectors such as transport, buildings and energy is just as important: “If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it” as Lord Kelvin said.

Governments can lead by example by improving their own performance and by encouraging information exchange across their own activities, economy and society. Governments have traditionally supported new technologies and diffusion by addressing market failures and providing public goods: including through support to R&D, training and skill formation, infrastructure and information exchange. Governments can again pave the way through the economic and environmental crisis by being model users, by investing in key infrastructures including broadband and “smart” systems, by investing in basic research, and education, encouraging innovation and by supporting demonstrations and experiments that have potential to be scaled up.

But is this government business as usual? Or are there new policies for new circumstances? What can be sped up and what cannot?

The OECD survey of government policies and industry consortium initiatives suggests that most governments are still following business as usual paths (<http://oecd.org/dataoecd/47/12/42825130.pdf>). They still overwhelmingly focus on improving environmental performance of ICTs instead of looking more broadly and harnessing the sector’s innovation potential to develop applications across the economy. And governments have only begun setting measurable objectives and evaluating policy outcomes and much more is needed to increase accountability and transparency.

Bridging the differences across different policy groups is increasingly important. Solutions need to address all actors -- business, government and individuals. Co-operation is essential across countries and national administrations and international bodies. The OECD is a place where co-operation can be advanced, not only between member countries but also to emerging economies. OECD countries must lead by example in the battle to improve our collective environment.