

Introduction by the Secretary-General

The OECD Green Growth Strategy: A lens for examining growth

The world economy is slowly, and unevenly, coming out of the worst crisis most of us have ever known. While dealing with immediate problems such as high unemployment, inflationary pressures or fiscal deficits, we have to look to the future and devise new ways of ensuring that the growth and progress we have come to take for granted are assured in the years to come.

A return to “business as usual” would indeed be unwise and ultimately unsustainable, involving risks that could impose human costs and constraints on economic growth and development. It could result in increased water scarcity, resource bottlenecks, air and water pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss which would be irreversible.

Strategies to achieve greener growth are needed. If we want to make sure that the progress in living standards we have seen these past fifty years does not grind to a halt, we have to find new ways of producing and consuming things. And even redefine what we mean by progress and how we measure it. And we have to make sure to take our citizens with us on this journey, in particular to prepare the people with the right skills to reap the employment benefits from the structural change.

But we cannot just start from scratch. Changing current patterns of growth, consumer habits, technology, and infrastructure is a long-term project, and we will have to live with the consequences of past decisions for a long time. This “path dependency” is likely to intensify systemic environmental risks even if we were to get policy settings right relatively swiftly.

The modern economy was created thanks to innovation and thrives on it, and in turn the economy encourages new ways of doing things and the invention of new products. That will continue to be the case. Non-technological changes and innovation such as new business models, work patterns, city planning or transportation arrangements will also be instrumental in driving green growth.

No government has all the technological, scientific, financial and other resources needed to implement green growth alone. The challenges are global, and recently we have seen encouraging international efforts to tackle environmental issues collectively, including the path-breaking Cancun agreements to address climate change.

At the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting in June 2009, Ministers acknowledged that green and growth can go hand-in-hand, and asked the OECD to develop a Green Growth Strategy. Since then, we have been working with a wide range of partners from across government and civil society to provide a framework for how countries can achieve economic growth and development while at the same time combating climate change and preventing costly environmental degradation and the inefficient use of natural resources.

This publication summarises the work done so far. As a lens through which to examine growth, the analysis presented here is an important first step to designing green growth strategies while at the same time providing an actionable policy framework for policy makers in advanced, emerging and developing economies.

The OECD will continue to support global efforts to promote green growth, especially in view of the Rio+20 Conference. The next step will see green growth reflected in OECD country reviews and the output of future OECD work on green growth indicators, toolkits and sectoral studies, to support countries’ implementation efforts towards green growth.

We have set ourselves ambitious targets, but I am confident that by working together we will reach them.



Angel Gurría
OECD Secretary-General

Acknowledgements

This report was launched at the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting on 25-26 May 2011 as part of the Green Growth Strategy.

"Ministers welcomed the Green Growth Strategy and provided guidance on future work. They agreed that green growth tools and indicators can help expand economic growth and job creation through sustainable use of natural resources, efficiencies in the use of energy, and valuation of ecosystem services. Ministers noted that innovation, supported by a strong intellectual property rights system, is a key to countries' abilities to achieve economic growth, create green jobs, and protect the environment."

- OECD Ministerial Council Meeting 2011, Chair's Summary

This report was developed as part of a multidisciplinary process that was jointly led by experts from four key Directorates: Giuseppe Nicoletti from the Economics Department, Nick Johnstone from the Environment Directorate, Paul Schreyer from the Statistics Directorate, and Dirk Pilat from the Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry. Nathalie Girouard, John Stephenson and Elianna Konialis were responsible for drafting the report. The report draws on work undertaken across the OECD, including valuable material contributed by focal points in all relevant Directorates. The process was conducted under the leadership of the Chief Economist and Deputy Secretary-General Pier Carlo Padoan and benefitted from the guidance of Simon Upton, Director, Environment Directorate. The project has been managed by Nathalie Girouard and supported by the Green Growth team, including Sylvie Foucher-Hantala, our statistician and Catherine Jeffcoat, our communications coordinator, as well as Patrick Love in the Public Affairs and Communications team.

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For more information on the OECD Green Growth Strategy, see www.oecd.org/greengrowth.



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