

UN: 18 nations have gone green on climate, raked in green

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Proponents of clean energy and think tanks have long said it's possible to reduce emissions and keep an economy growing. Now the latest report from the world's top climate scientists says 18 countries have done just

that, sustaining emissions reductions "for at least a decade" as their economies continued to grow.

The United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) did not name the [countries](#), citing inconsistency in the data.

But using figures from Global Carbon Project, which are not part of the report, The Associated Press found 19 nations where the pre-pandemic annual carbon dioxide emissions were at least 10 million metric tons less in 2019 than in 2010. They are the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Italy, Ukraine, France, Spain, Greece, Netherlands, Mexico, Finland, Singapore, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Poland, Romania and Sweden.

The IPCC identified three common factors for countries that have been able to decarbonize: They used less energy, transitioned away from fossil fuels to [renewable energy](#) and increased the energy efficiency of their products.

Such countries "can export a model that shows we can reduce emissions and still have high levels of well-being," said Greg Nemet, a professor of energy and [public policy](#) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison La Follette School of Public Affairs. "We can export policies that have played a role in achieving that."

While the list of countries points a way forward, it also raises questions of equity. The United States, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom are among the largest contributors to historical carbon emissions. Their residents already have electricity and to a large degree, vehicles.

Nemet, who is also a lead author of the IPCC report, added that developed countries that have been historical contributors to [climate](#) change and have been able to decarbonize need to take a "leadership"

role in helping developing countries do the same.

Historic emissions and discussions of responsibility are always discussed during U.N. climate conferences. But getting industrialized countries to agree on whether compensation for damages is warranted or how much they should pay to help poorer countries invest in green technologies, has all proved elusive.

The least developed countries in the world are estimated to have emitted just 3.3% of global greenhouse gases in 2019, Inger Andersen, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, pointed out in a statement to the AP. Some experts note that developing countries often are forced to borrow money at higher rates of interest than developed nations, which can make large capital projects prohibitive.

"The 18 countries that have balanced emissions reduction and [economic growth](#) are indeed examples that give us hope for the future but... all [developed nations](#) have a historic responsibility to ensure that they lean in – whether on the Paris Accord targets of delivering \$100 billion a year in climate finance, on ensuring [poorer countries](#) have access to technology and knowledge to make these shifts," or by leading, making these transitions first, she said.

Michael Grubb, a lead writer on the IPCC report and professor of energy and climate change at the University College of London, said in the report that scientists ran economic and emissions scenarios to see what would happen globally at different levels of carbon pollution reduction. In nearly every scenario—including the "most aggressive" ones to cut carbon emissions—the global gross domestic product still nearly doubled by mid-century. Even in the scenario with the deepest emission cuts, GDP jumped 96%, Grubb said.

"The point is in practice, what we do in climate mitigation in

macroeconomic terms is really going to be lost in the noise of the overall effectiveness of our economic policies," he said.

Grubb said the IPCC report declined to name the 18 countries because the data for some counted only carbon dioxide while for others included all greenhouse gases. Baseline years also differed. Depending on the parameters, there are more nations that reduced emissions while growing their economies, he said.

Patricia Romero-Lankao, a senior scientist at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory and lead author of the portion of the IPCC report on national and subnational policies, said she's optimistic. But she stressed how much more must be done to aid disadvantaged communities and regions in decarbonizing and repairing the impacts of climate change.

"This is not a technical problem," she said. "We need to understand what they need, what challenges they face and how we can adapt our toolset to help us respond to that."

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