How to join the Buildings Breakthrough?

Updated on 18 July 2023

FOR COUNTRIES

Countries are the primary target group of the Buildings Breakthrough (similar to the other Glasgow Breakthroughs Power, Hydrogen, Road Transport, Steel, Agriculture).

The statement

Countries are invited to endorse the Buildings Breakthrough statement ‘Near-zero emission and resilient buildings are the new normal by 2030’.

- The Buildings Breakthrough forms part of the Breakthrough Agenda - Glasgow Breakthroughs.
- The Buildings Breakthrough is co-led by the Government of France (Ministry for Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion) and the Kingdom of Morocco (Ministry for National Territory Planning, Land Planning, Housing and City Policy). It is coordinated under the umbrella of the UNEP-hosted Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction (GlobalABC).
- To date, 20 countries have joined the Buildings Breakthrough; 15 initiatives have endorsed the Buildings Breakthrough.

Brief overview over terms and concepts used

“Near-zero emission buildings” are highly energy efficient buildings with minimal carbon footprint, taking into account a whole life cycle assessment (LCA) approach, meaning using a low greenhouse gases (GHG) energy source, and built with low GHG building materials and equipment. It aims to get as close as possible to “net-zero” emissions, as a preparatory step towards full decarbonisation.

“Resilient buildings” are structures that are planned, designed, built, and operated in a way that anticipates, prepares for, and adapts to changing climate conditions. They should also be able to withstand, respond to, and recover rapidly from disruptions caused by these climate conditions. These buildings should contribute substantially to reducing or preventing the adverse impact of the current or expected future climate, or
the risks of such adverse impact, whether on that building itself or on the people that inhabit them, or the nature that surrounds them, and the assets they are composed of. “New normal” refers to the widespread adoption of near-zero emission and resilient buildings, following significant advancements in the construction sector. The aim is to establish an improved level of building performance as mainstream, while considering local realities and means. It is applied to new buildings and major renovations projects.

**Enabling conditions and priority actions**

Under the [Breakthrough Agenda - Glasgow Breakthroughs](#), a framework of enabling conditions and associated priority actions have been set (see table below). Through the Breakthrough report authors, each Breakthrough chooses 5-7 of the priority actions and associated recommendations as key for achieving their respective Breakthrough. Countries who have joined the specific Breakthrough then choose which of the priority actions they wish to work on - normally 5-10 countries work on a priority action.

We invite countries interested in joining and initiatives interested in endorsing to respond to [this survey](#) on which enabling conditions and priority actions are key for achieving the Buildings Breakthrough target. Responses are non-binding on both sides.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enabling condition</th>
<th>Priority action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long term vision &amp; action plans</td>
<td>Strategies, targets and action plans to provide longer-term confidence in and clear direction on the transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand creation &amp; management</td>
<td>Public procurement to grow demand</td>
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<td>Promote high standards to grow demand</td>
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<td>Agree shared target to grow demand</td>
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<td>Share best practice to improve implementation of public policies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure &amp; supply chains</td>
<td>Share best practice to improve supply chains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share best practice to improve infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance &amp; Investment</td>
<td>Improve international financial assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 European Commission 2023
Market structures  
Structure markets through policy and regulation, in partnership with business, supporting the large-scale, rapid adoption of clean solutions

Research & Innovation  
Delivery of projects (R&J)  
Increase investment for R&D

Knowledge, capacity, & skills  
Identify data gaps and indicators to measure progress

Trade conditions  
Strategy dialogue on trade

Standards & certification  
Agree shared definitions & standards

Social engagement & impact  
Support just transition

Landscape coordination  
Improve coordination of international collaboration

| Table 1: Enabling conditions and international priority actions. For more information/description of the enabling conditions please see 'Background'. |

How do countries express interest in joining?

Countries can send an e-mail or a letter to global.abc@un.org,

- Confirming endorsement of the statement above, noting the terms and concepts used and the definitions and explanations thereof.
- Naming the ministry (or ministries) which is focal point for the Buildings Breakthrough
- Naming a person (or persons) of director-level as focal point within that ministry for the Buildings Breakthrough.
- We invite countries (and initiatives) interested in joining to respond to this survey on which enabling conditions and priority actions are key for achieving the Buildings Breakthrough target. Responses are non-binding on both sides.

What happens next?

After countries have joined, they will be officially listed on the GlobalABC website and any associated communications materials as Buildings Breakthrough members. They will be kept informed on the Buildings Breakthrough process and invited to work on priority actions together (see further information on priority actions above). Countries who have joined are invited every 1-2 months to online meetings on progress where
their input is requested. Respective focal points are also invited as speakers at high-level events (e.g., Regional Climate Weeks, COPs).

Example: The Steel Breakthrough - countries’ role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority International Action</th>
<th>How this will be taken forward</th>
<th>Coordinating initiative(s)</th>
<th>Collaborating governments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakthrough Agenda Report Recommendation: Governments and companies willing to lead the transition in the steel sector should agree on common definitions for low emission and near-zero emission steel, along with a timeframe for the adoption of standards by the mid-2020s. This is an important market signal and will be vital for unlocking a series of subsequent actions, most notably high-quality demand commitments and trade agreements.</td>
<td>By participating in the work of CEM Industrial Deep Decarbonisation Initiative (IDDI) – drawing on work done by the IEA and Responsible Steel, coordinating with the First Movers Coalition, and recognising ISO standards (e.g. 14404).</td>
<td>● Clean Energy Ministerial Industrial Deep Decarbonisation Initiative (CEM IDDI) ● Responsible Steel</td>
<td>16 countries</td>
</tr>
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S1. Definitions and standards: Accelerate the development of standards for low emission and near-zero emission steel by developing draft common definitions and standards, and consulting on these over the course of 2023, to announce by COP28 a common timeframe for the formal adoption of shared standards.
FOR INITIATIVES

Initiatives are invited to express support for the Buildings Breakthrough as well as the terms and concepts used (see statement and terms and concept sections above).

They act as channels of action for the countries, showcasing where action is already happening, what the gaps are, and what other stakeholders (e.g., private sector, sub-national governments) need from countries to jointly achieve the Buildings Breakthrough. Concretely, they coordinate chosen priority actions (see Steel Breakthrough example below; and the framework of enabling conditions and priority actions above).

Please note: support is expressed by initiatives, not organisations. For example, organisations such as the World Green Building Council or the World Business Council for Sustainable Development have several initiatives on sustainable buildings which are all invited to express interest (and several already have, see background below). The respective initiative is listed as supporting, not the organisation.

How do initiatives express interest in joining?

Initiatives can send an e-mail or a letter to global.abc@un.org,

- Confirming support of the statement above, noting the terms and concepts used and the definitions and explanations thereof.
- Naming the initiative (or initiatives) which is focal point for the Buildings Breakthrough and how it plans to support the Buildings Breakthrough
- Naming a person (or persons) of director-level as focal point within that initiative for the Buildings Breakthrough.
- We invite initiatives (and countries) interested in supporting to respond to this survey on which enabling conditions and priority actions are key for achieving the Buildings Breakthrough target. Responses are non-binding on both sides.
Example: The Steel Breakthrough - initiatives’ role

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- Responsible Steel | 16 countries |
Background

The Breakthrough Agenda and the Glasgow Breakthroughs

The [Breakthrough Agenda](#), launched at COP26, is a commitment by world leaders from 45 countries, representing over 70% of global GDP, with the goal of halving global emissions by 2030 and achieving global net-zero emissions by mid-century.

The Breakthrough Agenda provides a framework for countries, businesses and civil society to strengthen their actions each year in key emitting sectors. It fosters collaboration and cooperation through a coalition of leading public, private and public-private global initiatives. It focuses on identifying critical areas that require collaborative action (e.g. on trade, standards, research & innovation, finance & investment, etc.), create the international conditions necessary and meet these goals.

In each sector, the Breakthrough Agenda aims to accelerate the adoption of clean technologies and sustainable solutions, making these options the most affordable, accessible, and attractive option in all regions by 2030. The Breakthrough Agenda will be embedded as an annual process to speed up and scale progress and achieve Breakthrough goals by 2030.

The Glasgow Breakthroughs, the first set of government-led Breakthrough goals launched at COP26, covered five key emitting sectors (power, road transport, steel, hydrogen and agriculture) that together represent over 50% of global emissions. More countries are stepping forward with the introduction of Breakthroughs in new sectors, such as the Buildings Breakthrough, which is expected to be launched by France and Morocco in the upcoming year.

The Breakthrough Report

Progress towards the Breakthrough goals is reviewed each year in the annual Breakthrough Agenda Report. Last year, an inaugural independent assessment was undertaken by IEA, IRENA and the UN High Level Champions for the five Glasgow Breakthrough sectors. Countries agreed to support a set of priority actions in response to the report’s recommendations for the initial five sectors, and committed to working together to deliver these through existing initiatives. The report is designed to inform policy makers, business leaders and civil society organisations of the most urgent ways to strengthen collaboration in and across major emitting sectors, ahead of the next UN Climate Change Conference COP28 in Dubai and beyond. The buildings sector will be
included in this year’s Breakthrough Agenda report for the first time. GlobalABC is working in close collaboration with the report authors to develop the chapter.

**Countries that have joined**

**To date, 20 countries have joined the Buildings Breakthrough:**

1. Republic of Armenia 🇦🇲
2. Republic of Austria 🇦🇹
3. Canada 🇨🇦
4. Republic of Côte d’Ivoire 🇨🇮
5. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 🇪🇹
6. Republic of Finland 🇫🇮
7. French Republic 🇫🇷
8. Federal Republic of Germany 🇩🇪
9. Japan 🇯🇵
10. Republic of Mauritania 🇲🇳
11. Mongolia People's Republic 🇲🇳
12. Kingdom of Morocco 🇲🇦
13. Kingdom of the Netherlands 🇳🇱
14. Kingdom of Norway 🇳🇴
15. Republic of Senegal 🇸🇳
16. Republic of the Sudan 🇸🇩
17. Kingdom of Sweden 🇸🇪
18. Republic of Türkiye 🇹🇷
19. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 🇬🇧
20. Republic of Zambia 🇧🇿

**Initiatives that are supporting**

**To date, 15 initiatives have endorsed the Buildings Breakthrough:**

1. WBCSD Transforming the Built Environment Project
2. WorldGBC Advancing Net Zero & The Net Zero Carbon Buildings Commitment
3. WorldGBC Building Life
4. Programme for Energy Efficiency in Buildings (PEEB; co-led by GIZ-AFD)
5. WRI Zero Carbon Building Accelerator
6. WRI Building Efficiency Accelerator
7. C40 Clean Construction Accelerator
8. C40 Private Building Efficiency Network
9. C40 Net Zero Buildings Accelerator
10. GlobalABC Market Transformation Work Area
11. RMI Clean Heat Forum
12. Building ToCOP coalition
13. Solar Impulse Foundation
15. Cool Coalition

**Explanation of enabling conditions**

- **Long Term Vision & Action Plans**: Put in place strategies and targets and develop action plans to provide longer-term confidence in and clear direction on the transition.
- **Demand Creation & Management (Public Procurement)**: Grow demand commitments for NZER buildings by working together to develop packages or coordinated high-quality public and private procurement and purchase agreements for these buildings.
- **Infrastructure & Supply Chains**: Develop corresponding best practice policy, finance, and private sector incentive packages (to increase the share of buildings (new & deep renovations) regulated by a NZER codes, building standard, and/or corresponding label).
- **Finance & Investment**: Enhance the overall public offer of international assistance towards near-zero emission and resilient building (to increase funds supporting the transition to NZER buildings and construction in emerging and developing countries).
- **Market structures**: Use policy and regulation to structure markets in partnership with business, supporting the large-scale, rapid adoption of clean solutions.
- **Research and Innovation**: Identify a growing number of globally significant priority demonstration projects for NZER buildings/ Delivery of projects (R&J) - Increase investment for R&D.
- **Knowledge, Capacity & Skills**: Drafts of NZER buildings criteria to include in public education institution curricula/ Identify data gaps and indicators to measure progress.
- **Trade Conditions**: Strategy dialogue on trade.
- **Standards and Certification**: Develop draft common definitions and standards (to boost markets).
- **Social Engagement and Impact**: Support just transition.
- **Landscape Coordination**: Mapping out existing initiatives and gaps / improving coordination of international collaboration.
Detailed explanation of terms and concepts used

“Near-zero emission buildings” refers to highly energy efficient buildings with minimal carbon footprint, taking into account a whole life cycle assessment approach. It aims to get as close as possible to “net-zero” emissions, as a preparatory step towards full decarbonisation. The concept prioritises integrated and smart design to achieve passive and low carbon buildings. Wherever needed, highly efficient systems (i.e. for heating, cooling, etc., and the use of renewable energies) may be used to fill energy requirement gaps. The term “near-zero” is used to reflect the fact that the building itself has done what it can to get as close to zero energy demand. Its principles use a whole life cycle approach, considering operational emissions as well as embodied carbon emissions from materials, including transport emissions and waste disposal. The whole life cycle approach involves all aspects of planning in the construction of new and renovation projects, and is recommended from early planning and design phases.

“Resilient buildings” are structures that are planned, designed, built, and operated in a way that anticipates, prepares for, and adapts to changing climate conditions. They should also be able to withstand, respond to, and recover rapidly from disruptions caused by these climate conditions. These buildings should contribute substantially to reducing or preventing the adverse impact of the current or expected future climate, or the risks of such adverse impact, whether on that building itself or on the people that inhabit them, or the nature that surrounds them, and the assets they are composed of. Its principles use a systemic approach and involve integrating adaptation challenges throughout the extended building lifecycle, conducting risk assessments, establishing regulatory frameworks, and engaging stakeholders. Adaptation and mitigation efforts are recommended to be pursued simultaneously to improve both resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Adaptation measures require enough flexibility to accommodate various future climate scenarios and risks. An adaptation plan is required to be developed and implemented at the start of a project, while reviewed and adapted throughout the building’s lifecycle.

“New normal” refers to the widespread adoption of near zero-emission and resilient buildings, following significant advancements in the construction sector. The aim is to establish an improved level of building performance as mainstream, while considering local realities and means. It is applied to new buildings and major renovations projects, and is supported by the following dimensions: i) it is standard practice, either through voluntary commitments or mandatory regulations (not necessarily referring to any

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regulatory international scheme); ii) it allows different standards or levels of performance, according to local capabilities (not necessarily referring to a specific set of standards or technical measures, although comparability and reaching a certain performance range is recommended); iii) it allows progressive implementation according to the type or size of building (not necessarily referring to a generalised implementation from the beginning); iv) it may be defined as the preferred choice in global markets, the most affordable and/or available option. The “new normal” concept prioritises the adaptation and repurpose of existing buildings and materials, rather than opting for new constructions, wherever possible. Deep renovations involve improvement works that capture the full potential of a building to reduce its energy demand, based on its typology and climatic zone. It achieves the highest possible energy savings and leads to a very high energy performance, and where possible, fully covers the remaining minimal energy needs by renewable energy³. Deep renovations primarily focus on climate-proofing the building envelope of existing buildings, and secondarily on the installation of efficient systems (heating, cooling, etc.) and appliances.

**Links with further information**

- [Buildings Breakthrough](a summary on the GlobalABC website)
- Buildings Breakthrough flyer
- [Breakthrough Agenda](
- [Glasgow Breakthroughs](
- [COP27 Breakthrough Agenda Ministerial](
- UNEP-hosted [Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction](GlobalABC)

**Contact**

- GlobalABC Secretariat: [global.abc@un.org](mailto:global.abc@un.org)

**FAQ**

**1. What is the Buildings Breakthrough?**

At COP26, the [Breakthrough Agenda](Breakthrough Agenda) was launched with considerable success and attention, aiming at strengthening international collaboration on the decarbonisation of high-emitting sectors (Transport, Power, Hydrogen, Steel). Despite being a heavyweight for climate action (around 37 per cent of CO2 emissions and over 34 per cent of global

³ BPIE 2021
final energy demand come from buildings and construction), a Buildings Breakthrough however was not part of this agenda.

In June 2022 the government of France announced, together with the Kingdom of Morocco, a Buildings Breakthrough as part of the Breakthrough Agenda, with a target towards zero emissions and sustainable buildings. On 11 November 2022, at the COP27 Breakthrough Agenda Ministerial, the co-leading countries re-confirmed their leadership of a Buildings Breakthrough, with the UK and Germany confirming support. The Buildings Breakthrough statement “near-zero emission and resilient buildings are the new normal by 2030” serves as a joint vision and a rallying point for all countries. The Ministry of National Territory and Urban Planning, Housing and City Policy (Kingdom of Morocco) and the Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion (France) are co-leading the development of the Buildings Breakthrough and under the coordination of the UNEP-hosted Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction (GlobalABC).

2. What are countries asked to endorse upon joining?

Upon joining, countries endorse the statement ‘near-zero emission and resilient buildings will be the new normal in 2030’.

3. Is there a financial commitment upon joining?

No, there is no financial commitment.

4. What is the anticipated time commitment expected from country focal points?

We will convene country focal points who joined on a regular basis, probably bi-monthly, via online meetings. The meetings aim to jointly establish global priority actions which will be validated at a ministerial meeting anticipated to take place in March 2024. Beyond this we invite country focal points to review background documents e.g. on actions proposed. We estimate a time commitment of ca. 1 hour/week.

5. What are the next steps after joining?

We will convene country focal points who joined on a regular basis, probably bi-monthly, via online meetings. The meetings aim to jointly establish global priority actions which will be validated at a ministerial meeting anticipated to take place in March 2024.
6. Our country is already a GlobalABC member. Why do we need to become a member of the Buildings breakthrough as well?

The Buildings Breakthrough forms part of the Breakthrough Agenda. It is co-led by Morocco (Ministry of National Territory and Urban Planning, Housing and City Policy) and France (Ministry for Ecological Transition) under the coordination of the UNEP-hosted Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction (GlobalABC). Being a member of the GlobalABC does not mean you are a member of the Buildings Breakthrough - the two are separate. The Buildings Breakthrough is open to members and non-members alike.

7. Will my country’s building policies be tracked and put on the spot after joining?

We aim to establish global priority actions together with the countries that joined. These will be tracked on a global level. No individual country tracking is anticipated.

8. Is the Buildings Breakthrough legally binding?

No. The Buildings Breakthrough is part of the Breakthrough Agenda and involves a non-binding commitment of countries towards “near-zero emission and resilient buildings being the new normal by 2030’. We look to establish regular country forums to exchange on progress, but no sanctions are in place for any members.