

# 5

## Inaction on climate change



**Christiana Figueres** is Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and a Member of the Global Agenda Council on Climate Change

Over the past three to four years, we've seen extreme weather events happening more frequently and more intensely in an increasing number of countries. That is one reason why people have woken up to the very real threat of climate change.

Inaction on climate change is fifth in this year's top 10 list. That's not due to climate scepticism, which is now less pervasive than it used to be. It is fifth because the consequences of insufficient action are still completely underestimated, otherwise it would be first. Because the fact is that if we don't take action in a timely fashion at the scale that we need, climate has the potential to wipe out the progress we have made over the past 20 years in economic development, in social development, in environmental protection. It is the major 'wipe out' factor.

I think that's why people all around the world aren't happy with the amount of attention climate change receives. The Survey on the Global Agenda shows that of the top 10 trends, respondents are by far the least satisfied with the response to climate change. But we shouldn't mistake that for genuine inaction.

### From the Survey

"We are losing the battle on climate change – the sense of urgency we had two years ago has disappeared."

There is action, and it's moving in the right direction, but it's not moving fast enough. For example, we have \$1 trillion of cumulative investment in renewable energy. That's good news, but it's not enough. We need \$1 trillion per year. There's action nationally, internationally and on the ground, but it is absolutely not enough, and that's why there is the perception of inaction.

Our changing climate is the most pressing challenge we face, but it's also the most compelling opportunity we've ever had. Because there is no response to climate change that doesn't take us into a very exciting future. To reduce deforestation actually has many co-benefits environmentally, socially and economically; to accelerate the introduction of renewable energies into the energy matrix doesn't just have positive climate change implications, it transports us into the cutting-edge ►

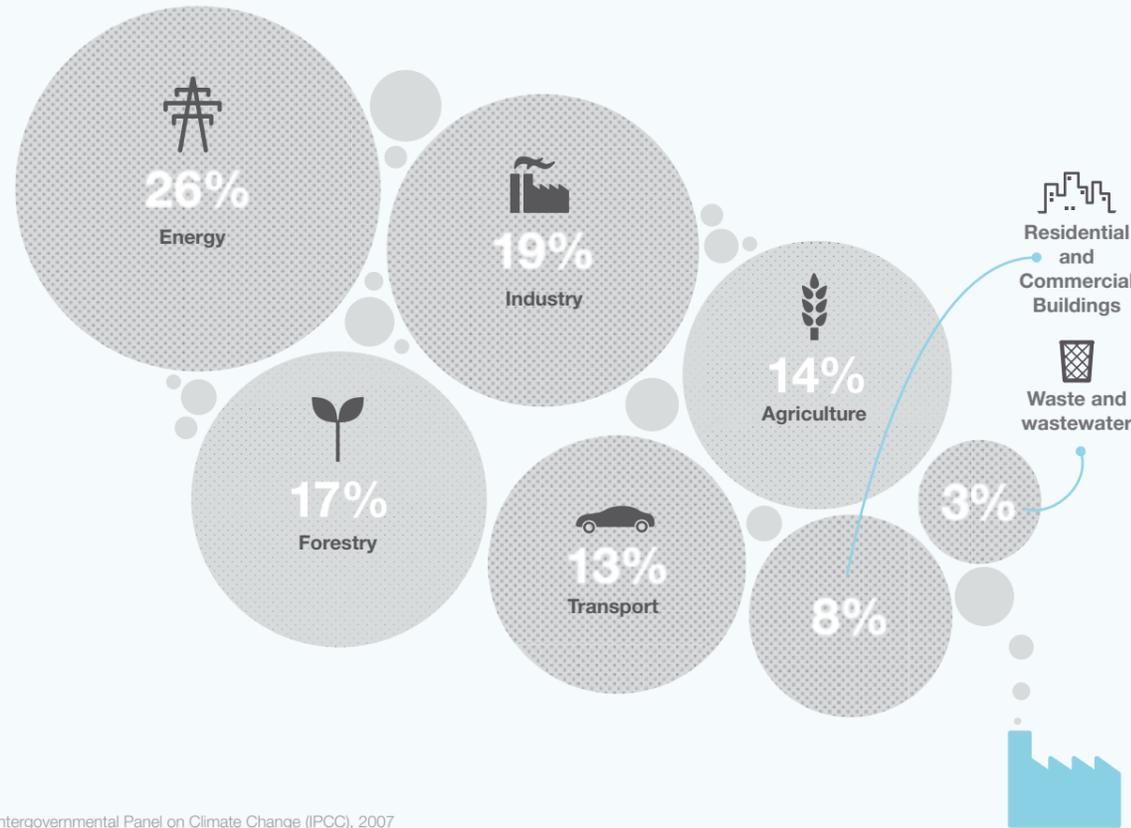


A Chinese worker inspects panels at a solar farm in Dunhuang, northwest of Lanzhou © Reuters / Carlos Barria

# 5

## Inside the data

### Sectors responsible for the greatest levels of greenhouse gas emissions



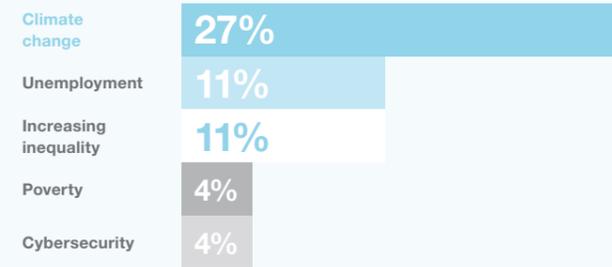
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2007

### A lack of attention for inaction on climate change

Of all the top 10 trends, respondents are **least satisfied** with the level of attention the world is currently giving to **inaction on climate change**

Source: Survey on the Global Agenda 2013

### Which global challenge is currently seen as the least effectively addressed?



Source: Survey on the Global Agenda 2013



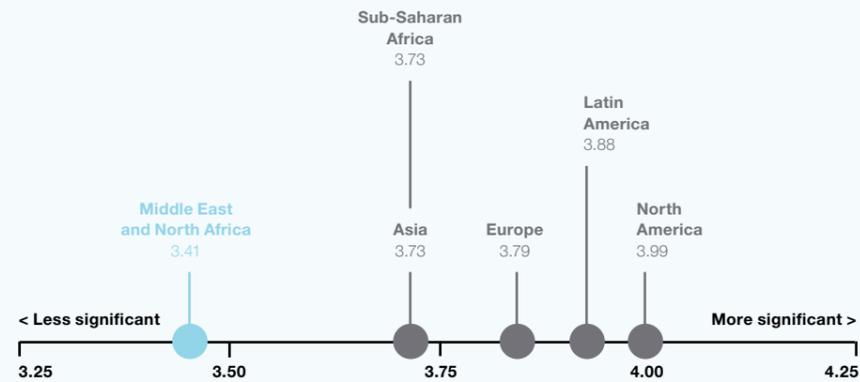
“There is action, and it’s moving in the right direction, but it’s not moving fast enough. That’s why there is the perception of inaction.”

future of a low-carbon economy. That’s the wonderful thing about the climate – it’s the bridge to an exciting future that we should all feel very attracted towards.

Addressing climate change is daunting in its complexity. There’s no human endeavour that is not in some way linked to the climate change challenge. We are facing a complete transformation of our economy, but we have transformed our economies before – look at the industrial revolution or the revolution that the internet brought to the world. It is doable. We have the technology, we have the finance, we have the wherewithal, but we cannot allow ourselves to be paralysed, because the fact is that we do not have the option to ignore the problem as though that would make it go away.

It doesn’t help that you can’t point to any one economy that has already succeeded. You have economies like Germany, which has made a very serious commitment to the transformation of energy. And you have economies like tiny little Costa Rica, the country I come from, which has said it is going to become climate-neutral. But they’re isolated examples of this transformation and we need to move

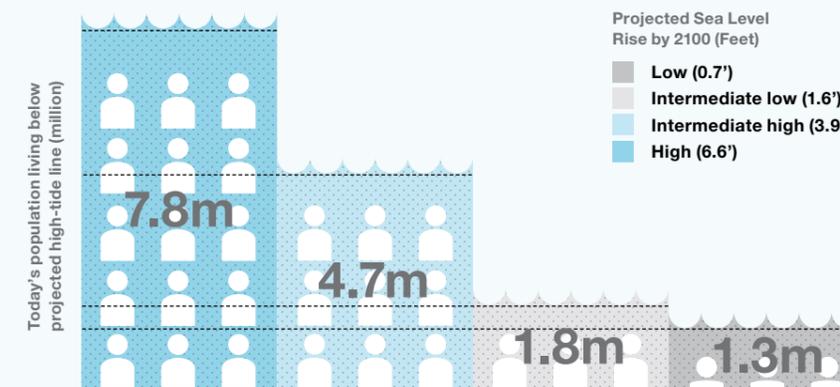
### How significant do different regions consider inaction on climate change?



1.00 = Not significant at all 2.00 = Not very significant 3.00 = Somewhat significant 4.00 = Very significant 5.00 = Extremely significant

Source: Survey on the Global Agenda 2013

### Number of people who could be affected by rising sea levels



Source: Global Sea Level Rise Scenarios for the United States National Climate Assessment, NOAA, 2013

from isolated examples to making this the norm.

Wherever you are in the world, policy cannot wait for transformative action and action cannot wait for policy perfection. It is completely unacceptable for those who have the power to effect change to stay in a ‘you first’ stance. Policy and action must progress hand in hand, learning from each other. We have to bring these two factors together.

It’s clear this is not just a government responsibility, a business opportunity or an academic exercise – this is something from which no single human being is exempt from responsibility. This is not just an environmental challenge and it’s not a future challenge; it is a transformational challenge that we must embrace today, not tomorrow ■