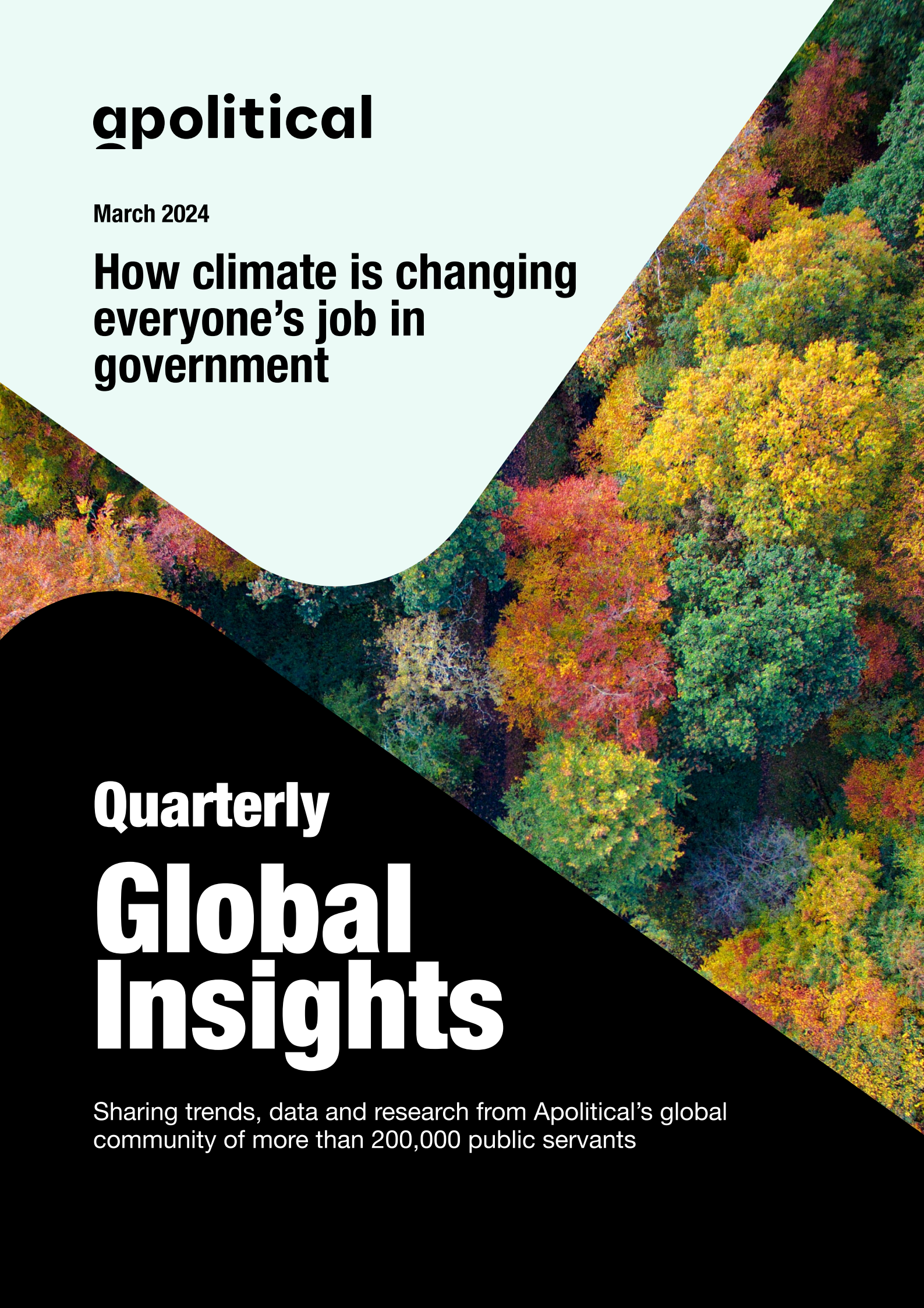




apolitical

March 2024

How climate is changing everyone's job in government

Quarterly **Global Insights**

Sharing trends, data and research from Apolitical's global community of more than 200,000 public servants



At a glance



Government is the essential actor in climate action.

In 2024, many countries are revising their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) — country-level commitments for emissions reduction and adaptation. In this critical decade for action, it's not an overstatement to say these NDCs will have historical significance.



But we need to build government's capacity to act.

We can't expect public servants to design and deliver multidimensional climate policies, reimagine their planning and budgeting, or procure more sustainably unless they are also equipped with relevant knowledge and skills. The green skills gap in the wider workforce is gaining international recognition, but public servants themselves are frequently overlooked.



Apolitical's global research shows climate change is already affecting the work of public servants right across government.

We found that 68% of public servants surveyed say climate change is impacting their work but only 35% have ever received any climate related training. When asked, 71% said that they do not think their government is doing enough to address climate change.



We now need a whole-of-government approach to climate action.

More teams and departments across all levels of government need to prioritise climate action as a critical part of their work.



At a glance



A handful of countries are betting big on closing the government green skills gap.

France is a global leader with plans to roll out ecological training to nearly 6 million public servants by 2027. The United Arab Emirates has made foundational climate training mandatory for its entire federal workforce of 65,000, which will be delivered by Apolitical's [Government Climate Campus](#). Demand for climate training keeps growing – in its pilot year, the Climate Campus trained more than 30,000 government officials, six times greater than the initially projected demand.



The forthcoming NDCs are an excellent opportunity to embed capacity building into climate action strategies.

That should include a whole-of-government approach to developing climate capability and skills.



We think of climate action in terms of costs, but inaction is more costly.

Building inclusive, broad-based momentum around skills and capability across the whole of government is key to successful climate action in this critical decade.



Explore the trends in government green skills

Table of Contents

1. Public servants are asking for climate training page 04
2. Building government capacity is emerging as a key fix for the climate implementation crisis page 08
3. Some pioneering governments are taking bold steps to boost climate capability page 14

Key terms

In this report, we use the terms ‘capability’ and ‘capacity’ extensively. When referring to **capability**, we mean the knowledge and skills public servants need to design and implement climate policies. When referring to **capacity**, we mean a government’s overall level of capability. Governments whose workforces are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need for climate action have the capacity for climate action. Or, in other words, they are ‘**climate capable governments**’. Of course, there are other elements of government capacity, such as funding and technology, which are necessary for implementing climate policies. However, the focus of this report is people and skills and therefore defines capacity in terms of workforce capability.



TREND 1

Public servants are asking for climate training

Apolitical's research shows public servants want climate training. The impacts of climate change are being felt across governments and public servants need to be better equipped to respond.

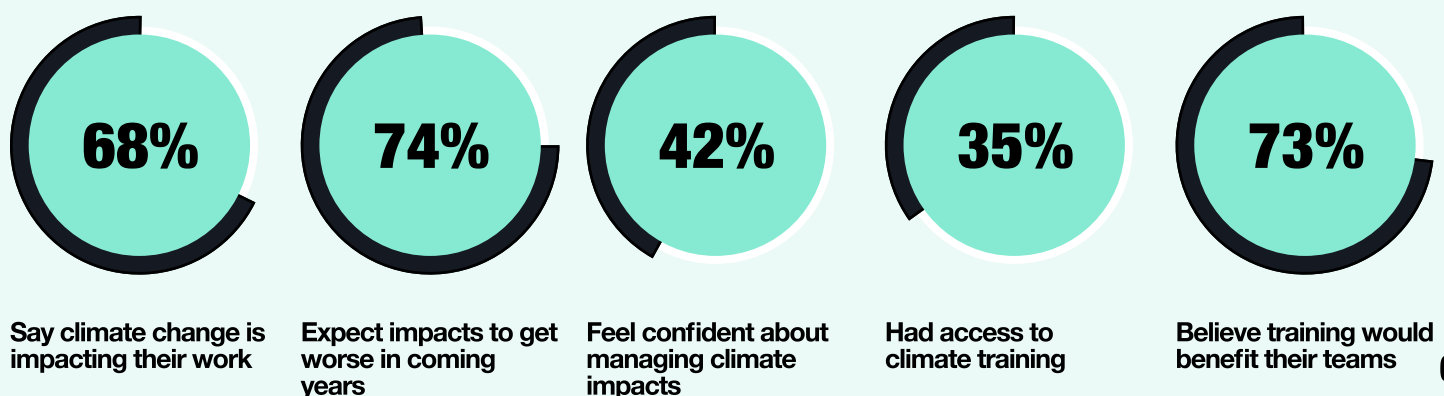
Apolitical surveyed our global community of 200,000 public servants in 160 countries in the run up to COP28 to understand the impacts of climate change on their work and whether they feel equipped to manage these challenges.

These are the key findings from the 2023 Global Government Green Skills Survey:

- 68% of public servants surveyed say climate change is already impacting their work, across all areas of government.
- 74% of public servants surveyed expect the impacts of climate change on their work to increase over the next five years.
- Despite this, just 35% said they have received any climate or environment-related training in government.
- 73% of respondents believed that climate training would benefit their teams.

Apolitical surveyed public servants globally. Here's what they told us...

Apolitical Global Government Green Skills Survey, November 2023





The days of climate as a niche concern are over. Now everyone in government is being impacted

More than two thirds of public servants we surveyed told us climate change is already impacting their work. In 15 out of 17 areas of government, from agriculture to urban development, public servants reported having to contend with the impacts of climate change. These are the key dynamics:

➤ For those in more public-facing areas, such as health, tourism and education, the challenges are immediate.

For example, public servants in Canada are spending more time supporting local communities to plan for and adjust to extreme heat. And for Brazil's tourism officials, protecting and preserving cultural heritage sites is becoming more difficult due to unpredictable weather patterns.

➤ For strategic departments, such as foreign affairs and the treasury, climate change is adding a layer of complexity to policy work.

For example, public servants are working on re-evaluating the quality of assets in the financial sector based on climate risk exposure. Climate change is also impacting diplomatic relations.

➤ Productivity and ways of working are also being affected.

Nearly 1 in 5 respondents said climate change was impacting their productivity and ways of working. Public servants in Asia and South America were most impacted by heat-induced fatigue, commuting challenges and even office closures. In Europe and North America, there was a noticeable trend of public servants choosing to increase their remote working for sustainability purposes.



Public servants say a climate conscious culture matters

“[Climate change] has completely engulfed my work; it is now an integral part of my work to consider the impact of climate change.”

Public servant working in health, Canada

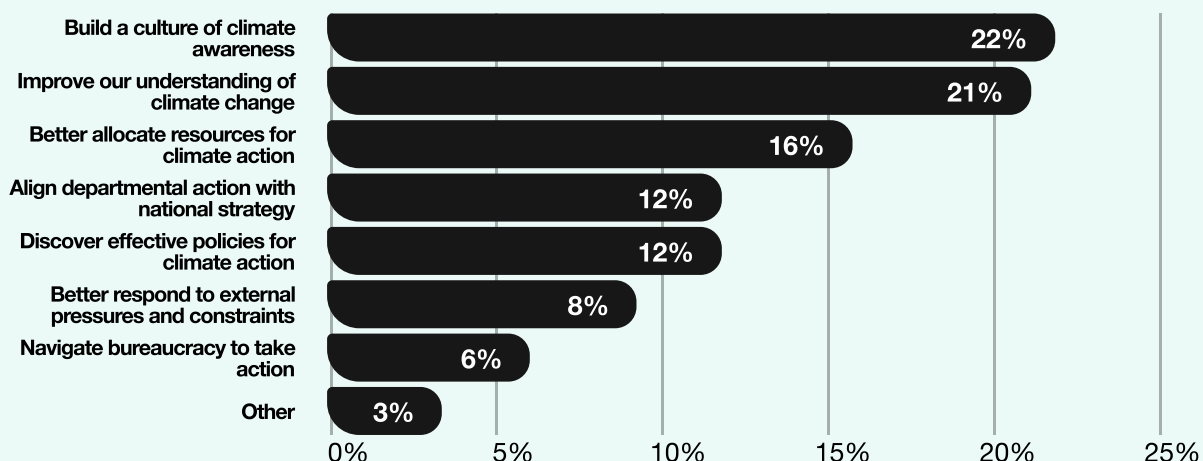
Building governments’ capacity to address climate change is not purely a technical challenge, there’s also an important cultural component. Nearly three quarters of respondents to our survey believed that climate training could benefit their teams. When asked about the potential impact of this training, the top selected reasons were:

- Building a culture of climate awareness;
- Improving our understanding of climate change.

Even though most public servants do not work in climate or environment specific departments, our evidence suggests they still want training and value working in an organisational culture that supports climate action.

How could climate training benefit government?

Apolitical Global Government Green Skills Survey November 2023



There are often policies in place to encourage, or even mandate, climate considerations in planning and decision-making, such as environmental impact assessments. But these measures can fail to have a meaningful impact if they are not embedded in a climate conscious culture.

For government leaders, that means shifting team conversations from being compliance-led to commitment-led; and empowering public servants, particularly those in management roles, to proactively contribute to climate action through their decisions and actions.

EXPERT INSIGHTS

Mamadou Biteye on three barriers climate capable governments face



Mamadou Biteye OBE

Executive Secretary of The African Capacity Building Foundation, the African Union's Specialised Agency for Capacity Development, Zimbabwe

Q: How would you define the challenges inhibiting public sector investment in capacity building?

The disparity between the scale of the climate challenge and public sector investment in capacity and capability building can be attributed to a variety of factors.

Lack of political will: Governments often focus on short-term priorities due to electoral cycles. Additionally, many African governments continue to see capacity development as an effort that should primarily be funded by external partners. In fact, effectively addressing the climate challenge requires long-term, sustained and primarily domestic investment in capacity and capability building.

Complexity and the interconnected nature of climate issues: Climate-related projects often require interdisciplinary collaboration and coordination across different government agencies. This can make it challenging to allocate scarce resources effectively without an affirmed and non-partisan commitment to success.

Lack of innovation and initiatives for collaboration: Governments are not exploring innovative opportunities for tackling climate-related challenges. Exploring partnerships with the private sector and communities may return additional investment opportunities including capacity and capability building.



TREND 2

Building government capacity is emerging as a key fix for the climate implementation crisis

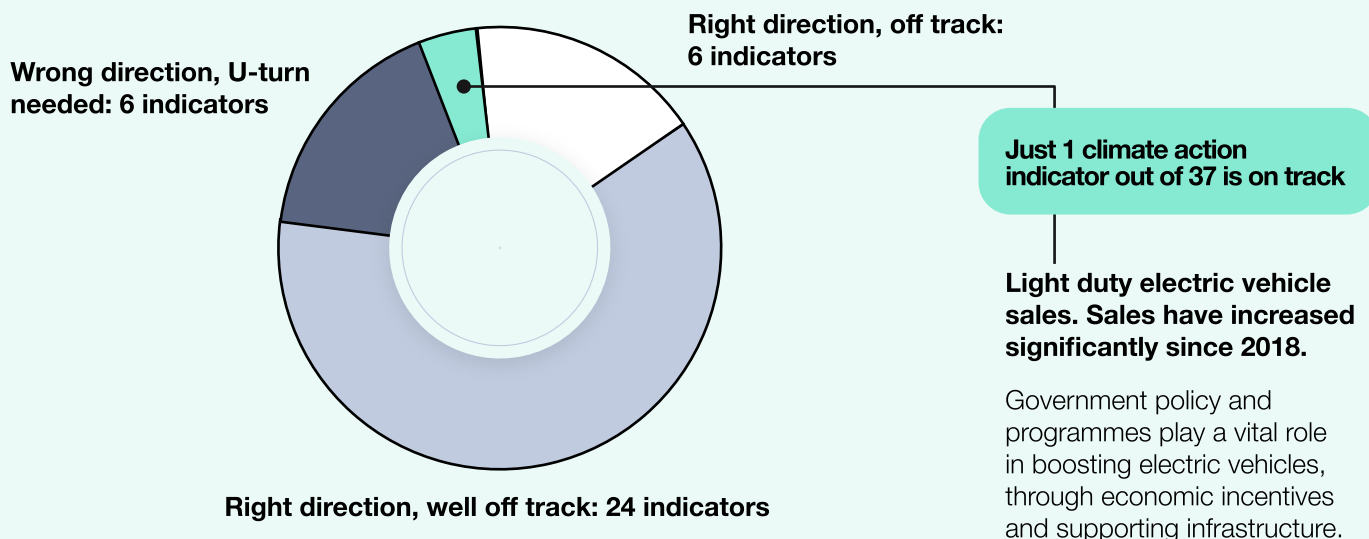
Governments can't design and deliver ambitious climate policies if public servants don't have the relevant knowledge and skills.

As any public servant knows — from heads of state to front-line managers — implementation is hard in government. The challenge of translating the Paris Agreement's high level framework for climate action into granular actions, particularly at the local level, is immense.

The recent Global Stocktake provided a stark reminder that the world is far off-track to limit warming to 1.5°C. The total global carbon budget for this target could be spent as soon as 2028.¹

The world is struggling to meet 2030 climate action targets

Source: State of Climate Action 2023



1. COP28 DeBriefed 8 December (Carbon Brief, 2023)



Why does the gap between climate targets and actual performance persist? Wade Crowfoot, Secretary of California's Natural Resources Agency described this as an "implementation crisis," at a COP28 event co-hosted by Apolitical.



"The challenge we face around the world regarding climate change is an implementation crisis. The Paris Agreement set a strong set of targets for us to meet... and simply put, we are not meeting them."

Secretary Wade Crowfoot, California Natural Resources Agency, US.

Financing, technology and, of course, political will are the reasons we tend to hear about most. But capability building, a critical factor, is often overlooked, particularly when it comes to the government workforce, which is directly responsible for delivering on so many targets. ²

The fact that government capacity plays such a key role in the implementation crisis is cause for cautious optimism. Relative to other more contentious or expensive barriers, building skills and capability within government is a straightforward issue to address, with potentially outsized benefits that can unlock progress elsewhere.

Addressing climate change is going to be everyone's job. Literally.

While there is no fixed definition of the term "green skills", it broadly describes the knowledge and skills required to support a more sustainable economy and society.³ Green skills are required to fulfil green jobs – roles which directly contribute to environmental goals. These are typically concentrated in sectors directly working on the transition to net zero emissions. By 2030, for example, the global energy sector will need millions more workers with the skills to help design, build and install the essential infrastructure we need for more renewable energy.⁴

2. *Issues brief: Means of Implementation (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013)*

3. *Green skills in education and employment (UK Parliament, 2024)*

4. *Will a green skills gap of 7 million workers put climate goals at risk? (Boston Consulting Group, 2023)*



However, there is a shift underway in the global economy. Green skills are expanding beyond highly technical sectors and they are no longer exclusively reserved for green jobs. More workers in more sectors need knowledge and skills that contribute to climate action. This is a growing trend with implications for governments.

The public sector urgently needs green skills

The work of public servants requires more green skills and knowledge than most other sectors. Research by professional networking firm LinkedIn shows that public administration has the fourth highest demand for green skills of any global sector. That means there is already a greater need for green skills in public sector work than construction, agriculture, healthcare, transport and logistics or tourism.⁵ From policymaking and procurement to designing public services or managing large public organisations, there are millions of public servants whose work can influence climate action.

The stories from our Green Skills Survey demonstrated that the need for climate knowledge and relevant skills is rapidly expanding beyond specialist roles. It's not just scientists and policymakers working in energy departments who need to be involved in government climate action. The Global Stocktake calls for decarbonisation “across all sectors and contexts”.⁶ Achieving that will depend on a wide range of public servants whose work shapes the critical systems underpinning our societies and economies, from housing and health to transport and agriculture.

That's why climate is changing everyone's job.

Gaps in capability mean slower climate action — including on NDCs

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that the lack of green skills in government, particularly at the local level, is slowing down important work.

A 2023 study by the European Investment Bank found that 69% of municipalities do not have the internal environmental and climate assessment skills they need to deliver investments in crucial infrastructure for mitigation and adaptation. A Scottish parliamentary inquiry, presented later in this report, made similar findings.⁷

5. *Global green skills report 2022* (LinkedIn, 2022)

6. *Technical dialogue of the first global stocktake* (United Nations, 2023, p. 6)

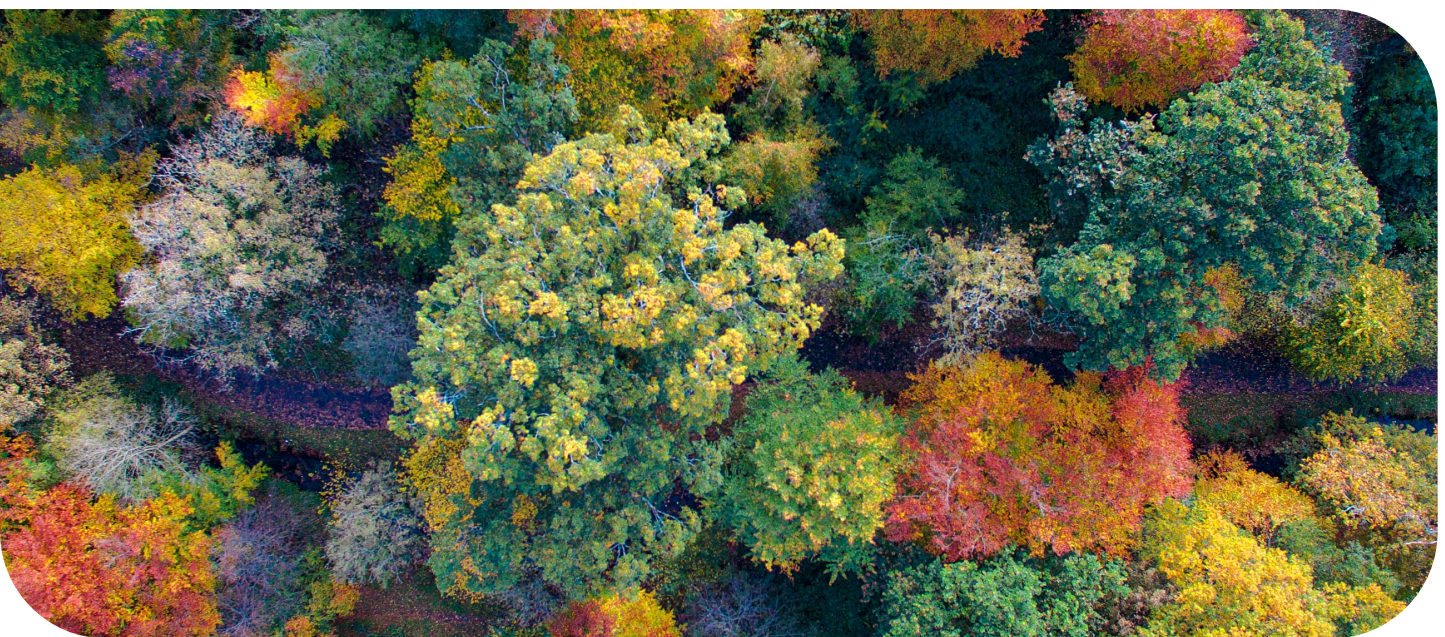
7. *The state of local infrastructure investment in Europe* (EIB, 2023)



Governments have unrivalled scale: they control 40% of global GDP, directly spend 15% on procurement, and employ 16% of the global workforce. That gives them enormous power to be climate leaders, through the power of the purse and leading by example. From policy and planning to procurement and practical implementation, the potential opportunity for public servants to accelerate climate action globally is immense. But only if they have the knowledge and skills they need to lead this work.

Throughout 2024, as governments plan to renew their national climate commitments and targets for 2030, there is an opportunity to learn important lessons from the last decade of climate action, which has seen limited progress against the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Ambitious new commitments for climate action in 2025 must be supported by large scale initiatives to build capacity. It's an important opportunity to give the next round of NDCs a strong foundation for success, and it's one that every government should be seizing.





CASE STUDY

Scotland's (local) government green skills gap

A 2023 parliamentary enquiry found that a lack of climate capability in local government is a major barrier to reaching net zero.

Scotland's agenda for climate action is ambitious. Enshrined in legislation is a target to reach net zero by 2045 — a full five years before the global target which most other countries have agreed to. In 2023 the Scottish Parliament conducted a review to better understand how local government was contributing to delivery of the national net zero strategy.

Skills emerged as one of the key themes of the enquiry. The findings state that councils simply “do not have the skills base they will need for this journey” in a range of areas. This included technical work, like spatial planning, managing building standards, conducting environmental impact assessments and monitoring greenhouse gas emissions. However there were also gaps in more generic areas, such as attracting investment for projects and sustainable procurement.

The enquiry's evidence emphasises the need for broad-based climate training. One council, for example, called for training that could promote a “shared understanding” across different services of how they can contribute to net zero targets. This would include staff in “management, HR, procurement, facilities, teachers” and beyond. They wanted to build a culture where all staff ask: “how can they best contribute to net zero with the expertise and skills in their service?”⁸

“There is a significant gap in training and capacity to make sure that...new developments support the national net zero targets. Planning staff within the Council are not qualified to assess the technical submissions of carbon calculations in planning applications...”

8. *The role of local government...in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland* (Scottish Parliament, 2023)

EXPERT INSIGHTS

Baroness Helene Hayman on how understanding climate essentials accelerates climate action



Baroness Helene Hayman,
Chair, Peers for the Planet,
United Kingdom



"We need to support learning and capacity building for those tasked with delivering this change."

Q: Have governments under-invested in building climate capability?

A: We have never faced a challenge quite like this before. To adequately respond to the climate crisis, the entire machinery of government will need to work differently to secure a step change in action and coordination across all departments and levels of government.

This challenge will shape every future government and the policy outputs of every individual department. We therefore need to support learning and capacity building for those tasked with delivering this change, by developing the essential knowledge and skills needed to overcome the 'implementation' crisis we now find ourselves in.

If we get this right, through mainstreaming climate as a skillset at all levels of decision making, we can empower public servants to deliver the frameworks and policies urgently needed to make progress on our climate targets and secure the significant social and economic opportunities decarbonisation and nature recovery presents.



TREND 3

Some pioneering governments are taking bold steps to boost their climate capability

Governments like France and the UAE are making big bets to become climate capable.

Encouragingly, several governments have recently taken decisive action to make wide-spread climate training a priority for their workforces, with more considering commitments.

➤ The French government has set itself the ambitious goal to train 5.6 million officials in climate by 2027, starting with 25,000 senior executives across government by the end of 2024.

➤ The United Arab Emirates government has already made climate training mandatory for all 65,000 of its federal government workers, including its most senior leaders.

These initiatives illustrate a recognition that effective government climate action requires a broad base of knowledge and skills across levels and disciplines — from senior leaders making strategic policy decisions to frontline operational staff contributing to sustainability practices.



CASE STUDY

France will train 5.6 million officials in climate, starting with 25,000 senior executives in 2024

The French government is determined to make 2024 a trailblazing year on climate action. The ambitious targets for the *Formation À La Transition Écologique Des Cadres De L'État* (which translates to 'State executives training in the green transition') were unveiled by Stanislas Guerini, then Minister of Transformation and Public Service in late 2022. The French government has lost no time getting started. The first training cohorts of 2023 can be seen in the photographs on this page, courtesy of the Ministry. The training initiative was part of a broader effort to mobilise public servants to respond to the climate crisis and put ecological planning at the heart of public policies.



Image Credit | ©Axel Dorr • Institut national du service public (INSP)

The training includes three half-day modules centred around the themes of understanding, imagining and acting in relation to climate, natural resources and biodiversity. For leaders, the training helps their teams identify and focus on specific steps they can take in their daily work. A fact which reflects quite how much enthusiasm there is for enabling climate action: a group of 1,500 scientists is volunteering to support the delivery of the training.

“The training also caused a real change of attitude among some colleagues: many came to see me afterwards, anxious to launch the energy renovation of their buildings.”

Nearly 1,000 senior executives had completed the training by September 2023, including 180 ambassadors, with enthusiastic feedback. The quote on the left is from Alain Resplandy-Bernard, a senior French civil servant who is in charge of the government's portfolio of real estate.



Emerging lessons from climate capability building



The demand for climate training is being underestimated.

Within 12 months of launching in January 2023, the **Government Climate Campus** had exceeded its training goal: more than 30,000 public servants from Brazil, South Africa, the UAE and United States were learning on the Climate Campus by early 2024, six times the original target for the pilot.



Climate training needs to be government-wide, hopeful and inclusive.

To support comprehensive action, training should cover three levels of government:

Awareness: equipping every public servant with an understanding of the basics of climate and their country's climate commitments

Practitioner: giving specialist practitioners training to design and deliver specific policies, programmes and services

Leadership: advancing national commitments and understanding the impact and co-benefits of climate action across departments and for future scenarios



Countries want learning customised to their context.

Simply taking playbooks from developed nations and applying them to emerging economies is not effective. Countries want climate knowledge and insights to be adapted to their local context to ensure relevance and impact. Governments have asked for the Government Climate Campus's support, for example, in communicating their climate commitments to public servants, in order to build a shared understanding of the national climate strategy.

The focus on building climate capability is gathering momentum

At COP28, Apolitical co-hosted ‘Building Climate Capable Governments’, an event with C40 Cities, the Bezos Earth Fund, and the Office for Government Development and the Future in the government of the United Arab Emirates. The event catalysed a new movement to address the green skills gap in government. The session featured 10 senior government leaders, including from Brazil, South Africa, Canada, the UAE, and the US, all of whom pledged to provide climate and nature training at scale across their organisations. More governments are expected to pledge, and the Climate Campus is set to expand after its very successful pilot. **Visit the Government Climate Campus** to learn more.



"Building Climate Capable Governments" session at COP28, Dubai



"It's clear that green and climate skills are key for government employees... We understand the need to invest in climate and nature skilling as a key to unlock climate action. Sustainability and climate change is everyone's responsibility."

**Her Excellency Ohood Khalfan Al Roumi,
Minister of State for Government Development
and the Future, United Arab Emirates, speaking
at COP28**



CASE STUDY

How the UK's framework can help other governments think about wide-scale climate training

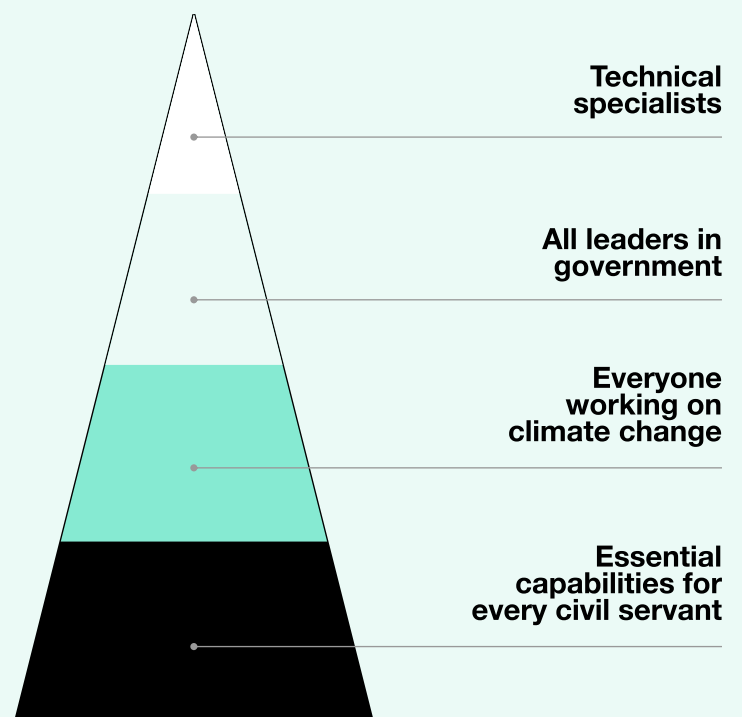
Broad-based climate training was identified as priority by the UK ahead of COP26 in Glasgow.

The UK government's [Net Zero Strategy](#) was published ahead of COP26 in 2021. The strategy noted that climate action will be a government priority for at least the next 30 years, which is why capability building should be an urgent priority. The UK's net zero skills pyramid places training on four tiers, from general essentials to advanced needs for specialists. It's a useful model which could be replicated by other local or national governments.

Evidence from Apolitical's Green Skills survey suggests that technical specialists and those working directly on climate issues tend to have access to training. It's the broader base of civil servants and leaders who need to develop general knowledge to promote climate action in their respective fields. That could be AI policymakers thinking about [mitigating its environmental impacts](#), finance managers promoting green procurement or health and education leaders planning to address the growing impacts of climate change on their service users.

This framework guides how the UK government is approaching climate training. The skills and training unit within the UK civil service has expanded the curriculum for civil servants to include specific training on climate change. Additionally, new hires recruited onto its future leaders scheme will also receive climate training.

Ambition for climate capabilities across UK government



Adapted from the UK Government's [Net Zero Strategy](#), 2021



Building a strong skills foundation for the new NDCs in 2025

With planning underway for a new round of Nationally Determined contributions (NDCs), 2024 presents a unique window of opportunity. Government decision makers need to ensure their climate action plans are underpinned by a robust strategy for building capability

The last decade of climate action since the Paris Agreement should inform how we approach this critical next decade. Governments have a chance to reflect on what's worked, what hasn't and why. Focusing on the big enablers of government climate action – including skills – presents a clear and simple next step.

Senior climate policymakers planning for new NDCs in 2025 should consider including measures for public sector capability building, particularly in local government. More ambitious commitments to reach our Paris Agreement targets must be met with increased capacity to deliver them.

Next steps for supporting the NDCs

For governments

If capability building is a key pillar of your climate action plan or strategy, Apolitical can help. To learn more about our training at foundational, practitioner and leadership levels, please contact:

katherine.weber@apolitical.co



For experts

If you would like to share expertise and research to support governments in building capability to implement their NDCs, please contact:

nigel.smith@apolitical.co



For foundations

To learn more about how you can accelerate climate action by supporting governments to build their climate capability, contact:

pooja.warier@apolitical.co



Talk to us

Apolitical provides a range of world class, customisable learning programmes exclusively for the public sector — from climate, digital and AI to leadership and inclusion.

Get in touch with our Chief Partnerships Officer **Pooja Warier Hamilton** to hear how we could support your organisation.



pooja.warier@apolitical.co

If you'd like to receive future editions of our quarterly insights report

[Sign-up for updates](#)

apolitical