

Policy Matters



Your weekly digest of policy reports that **matter**.
Edited by [Toby Green](#) and [Gary Price](#) of *Policy Commons*.

Incompetence, dishonesty, and greed

In June 2017, a twenty-four-story residential tower block in west London caught fire, killing seventy-two people, mostly minorities. The final report of the public inquiry found that the disaster was the result of “decades of failure” by the authorities to stop the use of combustible cladding, combined with the “systematic dishonesty” of multimillion-dollar companies whose products spread the fire. The “Phase 2 Report,” with findings relevant for any multistory building that uses cladding, comprises 1,700 pages [in seven volumes](#) and an [executive summary](#).

Is Australia about to change its policy on open access?

Australia’s Chief Scientist has just [released her advice](#) to the Australian government on open access. The report advocates for a new public-access model that would provide all Australians with free access to publicly funded research literature.

Conflicts drive record levels of displacement in Africa

[Over the past year](#), more than forty-five million people in Africa were driven from their homes by ongoing conflicts, an increase of 14 percent over 2023 and more than double the number seen in 2017. Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia top the table.

Back to the office?

[This report from the Centre for Cities](#) explores office-based work in London, Paris, New York, Singapore, Sydney, and Toronto following the pandemic. Where the pre-pandemic average among these cities was four days, in Toronto it’s now just 2.5. Curiously, London is the only city where the young are in the office more than their older colleagues.

Mental health: is nature more helpful than medication?

A government led project has been tackling mental health by prescribing community gardening, tree planting, and even wild swimming. [The result?](#) Among people with mental health needs, feelings of happiness and of life’s being worthwhile jumped to near national averages, while levels of anxiety fell significantly. Better still, the cost of a “green prescription” is much lower than that of traditional treatments.

Better data for better policy making

Crime data in the US goes realtime

If data on the number of pigs going to market in the US is available in real time, why not crime data too? Until now, you’d have to wait a year or more to see data on violent crime and property crime. The lag made it hard for policymakers to build arguments for change. [But now, policymakers and researchers can access crime data in real time.](#)

Data to ensure that new infrastructure won’t cut migration routes

Scientists working with the UN Convention on Migratory Species have launched a new, interactive [Atlas of Ungulate Migration](#). The new tool, a repository for up-to-date migration routes, can inform conservation planning, infrastructure development, and policymaking.

Gender equality goes backwards

[The SDG Gender Index](#), compiled by Equal Measures 2030, a coalition of NGOs, finds that gender equality has stagnated or gone backwards in fifty-four countries. Only twenty-four have made good or very good progress. Almost every country in the world agreed to targets to achieve gender equality by 2030 as part of the UN’s SDG initiative. Not one country is on track.

“What struck us is the sheer size of the problem”

Consultants from Mandala teamed up with the insurance provider Zurich to look into the [impact of climate on Australia’s tourist industry](#). They found that half of tourist assets around the country—from national parks to city attractions and airports—are facing major climate risks, and hundreds of thousands of jobs are threatened.

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