

IMD-SUTD

Smart City Index 2021



Singapore maintains its lead and European cities dominate top 5, with Swiss cities in the spotlight, in 2021 global smart city index

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Singapore (1st), **Zurich** (2nd) and **Oslo** (3rd) have come top in the [2021 IMD-SUTD Smart City Index \(SCI\)](#), with a deep dive into the data showing how urban populations are attributing increasing importance to health and environmental-related dimensions of their cities ever since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The SCI ranks 118 cities based on their citizens' perceptions of how technology can improve their lives, as well as on economic and social data taken from the [UN Human Development Index \(HDI\)](#). It is the annual joint work of the Institute for Management Development (IMD) and the Singapore University for Technology and Design (SUTD) and is the third to be released.

The data indicates that environmental concerns are comparatively higher in richer cities. Worldwide, the number one concern is access to affordable housing. However, the data also shows that access to better air quality and access to health services has become a greater priority in cities worldwide since the pandemic outbreak.

Some 15,000 city dwellers were surveyed globally in July 2021. They were asked 39 questions about how they feel their respective cities are doing across five key areas: health and safety; mobility; activities; opportunities (work and school); and governance. They were asked how technology is helping to address specific urban challenges with statements that included: 'Recycling services are satisfactory', 'Public safety is not a problem' and 'Air pollution is not a problem'.

They were also asked to select five priority areas for their city from a list of 15, and asked four further questions to gauge their attitudes. For example, 'Do you feel the availability of online information has increased your trust in authorities?'

"Clearly, COVID has changed the ways in which leaders and citizens of Smart Cities view the challenges ahead," said IMD's Professor of Finance [Arturo Bris](#), who oversaw the work of the ranking as the Director of the World Competitiveness Center. "Environmental emergencies will also remain very high on the agenda of smart cities, and this is an area in which citizens' expectations – and sometimes ambivalent attitudes *vis-à-vis* technology – will need careful attention."

"It is not just urban management that is being revisited in the light of the pandemic experience; urban design and urban planning also need to be adapted to new challenges," remarked [Cheong Koon Hean](#), Chairperson of the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities at SUTD.

Smart cities are proving innovative and resilient

The report writers explained how, in all parts of the world, the rapid spread of COVID-19 among urban populations has led city leaders to face new responsibilities. They said this had been particularly visible in countries in which central governments proved slow or reluctant to take action. Often cities had proved more agile than central governments, with innovative approaches taken at the municipal level to organize the distribution of protective equipment, the use of available medical facilities, and vaccination campaigns.

Globally, the data shows how in smart cities, the availability of a strong technological culture and good digital infrastructure has facilitated such initiatives, in particular through the tracing of citizens' movements and contacts.

"The pandemic has seen an acceleration of digital and ecological transformations in smart cities," said [Bruno Lanvin](#), President of IMD's Smart City Observatory. "This acceleration is redefining resilience, which is increasingly becoming a local objective. And cities that have been seen as handling COVID challenges in an efficient and effective way rank high in the report; examples include **Singapore** (1st) and **Taipei City** (4th)."

"But size is not necessarily an advantage for smart cities," he added, "We see in the 2021 index how mid-size cities such as **Oslo** (3rd), **Lausanne** (5th), **Geneva** (8th) and **Bilbao** (10th) are performing remarkably well."

Indeed, three cities in **Switzerland** made it into the top 10. The authors said that this is partly thanks to the country's good healthcare system, meaning Swiss cities mastered the pandemic without any major moments of crisis. It left time and space for them to address the widespread affordable housing issue. On top of this, the inhabitants of Swiss cities continue to enjoy the luxury of a well-developed school, education and further education system with a high degree of permeability and a fairly high level of digitally competency.

Globally, each region has its own leaders in the SCI, offering examples of how smart cities can help improve the value delivered to citizens, and become competitive hubs for investment

and talent: **New York City** (12th) is leading in North America, **Abu Dhabi** (28th) leads the Middle East and **Moscow** (54th) leads Eastern Europe.

“While Latin American and African cities largely remain part of the lower quartiles of the Index, relatively successful examples in Buenos Aires (98th) or Cairo (104th) should serve as stimuli for other cities to make efforts to become smarter,” said Bruno Lanvin.

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