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**Identified city needs for MEL, metrics, indicators**

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### Summary

The main objective of this deliverable, D2.3, is to better understand cities' needs and inform the development of the Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) framework and Expected Impacts for the NetZeroCities Mission Platform and by extension, the EU Mission on enabling 100 Climate-Neutral & Smart Cities. Three overarching themes were identified in the research: the need for capacity and consolidation of data; the need to consider local realities and political will within these; and the need to prioritise co-benefits for citizens and for governance. The overarching themes have generated key insights for the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework development, regarding the operationalization of NZC MEL. These insights include maximising the integration of urban data, clear and appealing visualisation of data, the development of a storyline to communicate the MEL activities, and the value of increasing innovative data, such as crowd-sourced or other bottom-up data.

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# Identified city needs for MEL, metrics, indicators

## Deliverable D2.3

Version N°2

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## Disclaimer

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

Acronym	Description
EU	European Union
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NZC	NetZeroCities
WP	Work Package



## Executive Summary

The main objective of this deliverable, D2.3, is to better understand cities' needs and inform the development of the Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) framework and Expected Impacts for the NetZeroCities Mission Platform and by extension, the EU Mission on enabling 100 Climate-Neutral & Smart Cities. Three overarching themes were identified in the research: the need for capacity and consolidation of data; the need to consider local realities and political will within these; and the need to prioritise co-benefits for citizens and for governance.

The overarching themes have generated key insights for the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework development, regarding the operationalization of NZC MEL. These insights include maximising the integration of urban data, clear and appealing visualisation of data, the development of a storyline to communicate the MEL activities, and the value of increasing innovative data, such as crowd-sourced or other bottom-up data.





# 1 Background and objectives

NetZeroCities is a four-year project designed to help cities overcome the current structural, institutional, and cultural barriers they face in order to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. It will enable European cities and citizens to show the way forward towards an inclusive, thriving, climate resilient and sustainable future. NetZeroCities is part of the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme in support of the European Union's Green Deal and supports the work of the EU's Mission 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030.

This deliverable, D2.3, is developed as part of the NetZeroCities WP2, dedicated to the **“Impact Metrics & Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning activities”**, which operates in close interaction with other key strategic WP of NZC. This deliverable reports the results from project task 2.1.3 “Cities needs assessment”, which was designed to identify the cities' needs regarding Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning activities. Monitoring, evaluating progress and learning on emission reduction targets and socio-economic co-benefits and impacts of the transition to Climate Neutrality is critical in order to inform and guide climate action. However, the NetZeroCities, with its 100 participating cities, will go beyond current practice by combining different GHG reporting frameworks into one platform and by addressing emerging fields of evaluation, such as, Scope 3 emissions, social innovation, nature-based solutions, governance, democratic participation, and finance. The principal aim of this deliverable is thus to inform the development of the Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) framework and by extension, the EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities.

Specific objectives of this deliverable included:

- Understanding cities' barriers for improving their monitoring, evaluation and learning practices and exploring expected impacts, co-benefits, solutions, and related support needs.
- Getting clarity on what cities' think is missing from their current monitoring, evaluation and learning practices and exploring what other ways (methods, data, processes etc.) would be needed to improve.

Democratic Society and ICLEI have been the partners responsible for the preparation of the deliverable, while our partners, EIT Climate KIC, POLIMI, and VTT, have played an important role in providing valuable inputs along the way.



## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Workshop with cities' representatives

An online workshop was organised with cities' representatives to **collectively explore cities' needs** in relation to MEL. A total of 30 cities were contacted for the online workshop, and a total of 9 cities participated in the workshop and/or completed the pre-workshop survey (Please see Annex 1).

The workshop was designed as a dynamic and participatory focus group that lasted 2 hours (Please see Annex 2). An invite was sent to contacts from the working group and included a survey covering initial questions on cities' MEL practices and barriers to inform the design of the workshop.

The workshop included the following three lines of enquiry:

- Understanding the status quo in cities – how do they currently collect and use data and indicators?
- Understanding barriers and enablers in cities – what stops cities from collecting and making use of data and what are the enablers that make it feasible?
- Exploring ideas to improve cities' MEL experience in relation to net zero targets.

The workshop started by sharing the insights from the survey (Please see Annex 3) sent with the invite. Although the data was not generalisable due to the small sample, it helped to present prompts and to frame the purpose of the workshop. A discussion guide was then followed to facilitate each line of enquiry in three different stages. An online board was used for participants to put their thoughts in writing into post-its at different points during the workshop. This was combined with a discussion to reflect on the different views.

Qualitative thematic analysis was then conducted from all parts. Three key themes were identified, which cut across the three stages of the workshop.

The findings are presented thematically below with an insights' summary at the end. The thematic analysis was complemented with the findings from the NZC Deliverable 13.1 City Needs, Drivers and Barriers towards Climate Neutrality (NetZeroCities, 2022):

- Capacity and consolidation
- Consider locality
- Prioritising co-benefits and citizen collaboration
- Thematic summary



## 3 Thematic analysis

### 3.1 Capacity and Consolidation

#### 3.1.1 Resource intensive data collection and management

- When prompted to think about the usefulness of MEL processes, participants emphasized that **data and MEL** are only useful if they are used, and this requires staff time, which is currently limited.
- **Lack of capacity was identified as a significant barrier** by all participants. According to the NZC report, local authorities often do not have the **internal capacity to collect reliable data**, which hinders their capacity to collect good quality data and integrate key information to inform policy making (NetZeroCities).
- Building on this idea, participants discussed how usefulness increases when data is updated regularly. Given that updating takes a lot of time, **participants requested automation** on several occasions during the workshop.
- The request for automation aligns with the request for a common platform described below.
- Participants also noted that **capacity is required to get citizens involved in MEL**. Groundwork is needed to build relationships with citizens, and ongoing support is needed for crowd sourcing the data. As described in theme 3, participants imagined **robust governance systems** that ease this process. Additionally, cities stressed the difficulty in accessing private sector data and engaging with businesses for data collection (NetZeroCities).

#### 3.1.2 A common platform

- When prompted to describe current MEL processes in their cities, participants named the **city network and EU platforms which already defined relevant indicators**, and into which they already enter data, e.g., Global Covenant of Mayors and C40.
- Throughout the workshop several participants reiterated requests for a common, **consolidated platform**.
- They noted how **tracking separate indicators and entering data into separate platforms requires too much capacity**, and they are unable to meet the needs and requests of all these separate MEL processes.



## 3.2 Consider locality

### 3.2.1 Aligning with the local and staying local

- It is well known that adapting best practices to a city's local context increases the lasting impact of climate actions. Several participants repeated this maxim after sharing **unique challenges they face, which shape their strategic objectives**. For example, one participant explained how their city's strategy to decarbonize transport is significantly shaped by the fact that the motorcar was invented there in 1883.
- Participants' **unique visions of sustainability** also emerged from descriptions of local context, culture and hopes. They envisioned a MEL framework that enabled cities to **start with visions, not the data**.
- Participants also wanted to **localise projects**. For example, two participants told us how their city's climate neutrality strategy outlined plans to keep carbon sink initiatives local, such as tree planting. They suggested MEL take this into account.
- Participants described **benefits to the local economy as integral to their climate plans**, most often through job creation and growth. Two participants added specifics from their local green deals, which outline **how wealth could be embedded in the local community**.
- Several participants requested **MEL indicators related to the local economy**.

### 3.2.2 Political will

- When prompted to think about the usefulness of MEL processes, one participant emphasized that **MEL processes must be connected to political will to be useful**. This comment resonated with other participants.
- In the discussion that followed, participants **shared how political will differed in their local contexts**.
- According to the NZC report, Cities expressed their need to incorporate monitoring frameworks **to measure progress, results and impacts** and thereby to evaluate public policies after their implementation (NetZeroCities).
- Local differences aside, participants agreed that **tapping into political will was necessary to reach climate goals**. They envisioned using evidence of climate, social and economic impact gathered through MEL processes to connect with politicians and shape the political agenda.
- However, **misaligned timescales**, short-term political timescales, and medium-term climate action timescales, was identified as a barrier to using MEL to catalyze political will on climate action.



## 3.3 Prioritising Co-benefits and Citizen Collaboration

### 3.3.1 Linking citizens and co-benefits

- Several participants stressed the **importance of using crowd sourced data** for MEL and explained that they need assistance developing **strategies to engage citizens** in this process.
- As stated in the NZC report, Cities expressed the need for frameworks and indicators to measure the quantitative and tangible impacts of their actions, as well as **to measure the qualitative and intangible impacts** (NetZeroCities).
- For example, carbon savings from retrofit vary widely. To understand the retrofit, one participant said, it is important that **citizens submit their household energy use data**, which they already have. This idea was supported by the group.
- Whilst discussing how their cities could improve MEL, all participants saw the need for communicating co-benefits. They urged NetZeroCities to consider **the accessible communication of co-benefits** while developing the MEL framework. Cities are particularly faced with challenges while trying to measure the co-benefits of their projects (NetZeroCities).
- They continued to suggest that the **social value highlighted through co-benefit communication could incentivize citizen involvement**.
- A few participants noted the difference between co-benefits that matter most to citizens, such as health and leisure, and those that matter to politicians, primarily the economy.

### 3.3.2 Governance systems and emotional data

- Participants described the **inextricable link between MEL and governance systems** and returned to this connection at several points during the workshop.
- For example, they explained how **MEL must be connected to a communication strategy, and clear decision-making processes**. Results from MEL should feed into policy adaptation and redesign, as well as decision making about new climate actions. A governance plan can highlight **how to build and nurture relationships** with stakeholders who are integral to MEL.
- Some participants emphasized **how co-benefits should be considered whilst designing governance structures**.
- Several ideas from the workshop coalesced into a phrase that resonated strongly with participants: **making data emotional**. They explained how both MEL and governance systems are needed for transformational change, how **emotion drives transformation**. They saw the idea of emotional data bring together several requests from earlier in the workshop, including data visualization and prioritization of social co-benefits.



### 3.4 Thematic summary

In general terms, three overarching themes were identified in the workshop: the need for **capacity and consolidation of data**; the need to **consider local realities** and political will within these; and the need to **prioritise co-benefits for citizens and for governance**.

- MEL is seen by participants as important if it is **used and influences decision-making** AND if it **aligns with local realities**.
- MEL is considered resource-intensive and **lack of capacity** to collect and manage data is seen as a barrier.
- A **common platform** was suggested to streamline data collection and management efforts **BUT** this common platform needs to account for the desire for **reflecting local realities** (local vision, locally relevant indicators).
- **Political will** is needed to use MEL insights but it **differs across** local contexts and **short-term political timescales** do not align with medium-term climate timescales.
- Citizen's involvement is needed in MEL processes, but cities **need support in how to engage residents** and MEL frameworks need to **reflect the co-benefits for citizens**.
- There is need to use data in a way that can resonate with governance structures and stakeholders and **seen as transformational** ("emotional data").



## 4 Conclusions

Within the context of NZC MEL, metrics and indicators, the thematic analysis has generated key insights for the overall MEL framework regarding the operationalisation of NZC MEL components 2 & 3 – the strategic learning and sense-making and the monitoring and evaluation of cities' transition to climate neutrality respectively:

- Cities are often overwhelmed with reporting obligations for different initiatives and are thus looking for a **maximum of integration of urban data**. Duplication of cities' reporting efforts in other initiatives need to be minimized to be successful in the long term. This will need to be considered in the design specifications of the NZC portal
- To enhance sense-making and learning based on monitoring data, clear and **appealing visualisation of data** is necessary to generate political will and ensure continuity in direction.
- **Storytelling and "emotional data"** must be considered. NZC WP2 should provide a clear strategy around that (e.g., as part of the NZC Deliverable 2.9)
- Some cities see value in increasing the use of **innovative data**, such as crowd-sourced or other bottom-up data. This should be taken up by NZC WP2 in the form of working with a small group of volunteering Mission Cities to test the use of e.g., consumption-based emission inventories, scope 3 reporting using crowd-sourced data such as the Google Environmental Insights Explorer (EIE), remote-sensing and others.



## **Bibliography**

NetZeroCities (2022), Report on Cities' Needs, Drivers and Barriers to Climate Neutrality.





## Annex 1: List of cities

List of the cities that were engaged in the online workshop:

- Aarhus
- Apeldoorn
- Athens
- Barcelona
- Belfast
- Brussels
- Budapest
- Dijon
- Dortmund
- Essen
- Evora
- Freiburg
- Ghent
- Grenoble
- Helsinki
- Madrid
- Malmö
- Mannheim
- Milan
- Napoli
- Porto
- Riga
- Rotterdam
- Stockholm
- Thessaloniki
- Torino
- Turku
- Valencia
- Vienna
- Zagreb



## Annex 2: Workshop Structure and Agenda

The focus group meeting was organised online on zoom with 6 participants representing the following cities: Mannheim, Napoli, Turku, V\alencia, and Zagreb. The online tool Miro was used to present the information and to capture the key messages during the discussions. The workshop was facilitated by Democratic Society, and cofacilitated by ICLEI, AIT, VTT and EIT Climate-KIC. The workshop mainly drew on participants' expertise and experience in this field, but it counted on the support and small interventions from the co-facilitators.

### 1 Agenda



**13:00-13:07 Welcome & Introductions**

Democratic Society

**13:08-13:17 Introduction to the EU Mission on Climate Neutral and Smart Cities**

Nikhil Chaudhary, Climate KIC

**13:18-13:28 Setting the scene - introduction to the MEL framework and scope of the workshop**

Nikolai Jacobi, ICLEI Europe

**13:29-13:34 Presentation of MEL Survey results and key findings**

Democratic Society

**13:35-14:10 Understanding the status quo and barriers in cities**

Online Fishbowl exercise

**14:10-14:15 Short Break**

**14:15-14:55 Exploring ideas to improve cities' MEL experience**

Idea creation and prioritization

**14:55-15:00 Wrap-up and next steps**

Democratic Society

**15:00 End of event**

Figure 1 : Agenda Online NetZeroCities Workshop on MEL



## Annex 3. Results from Pre-Meeting Survey

A total of 4 cities responded to the Pre-Meeting Survey. These cities are: Essen (Germany), Thessaloniki (Greece), Torino (Italy), València (Spain).

Main MEL Survey Results:

### 1. Results of the sources of data collected

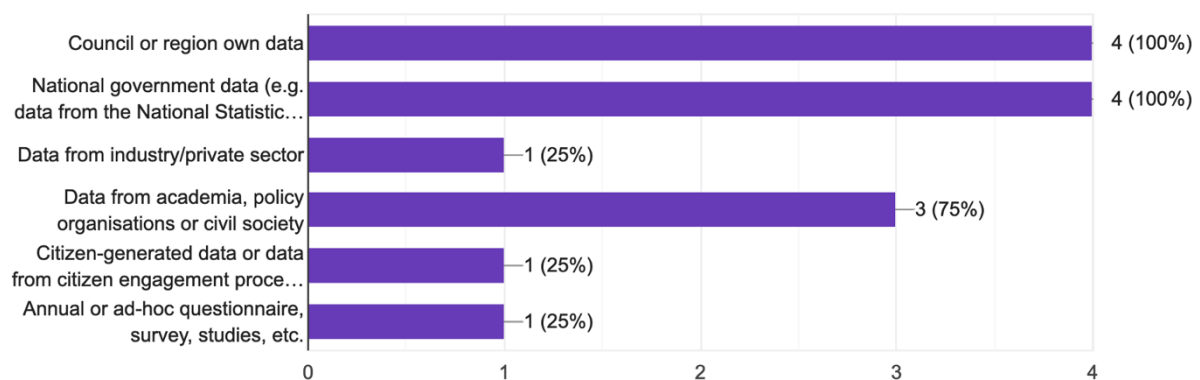


Figure 2 : Type of data collected

### 2. Access to data collected to understanding the realities of underrepresented groups.

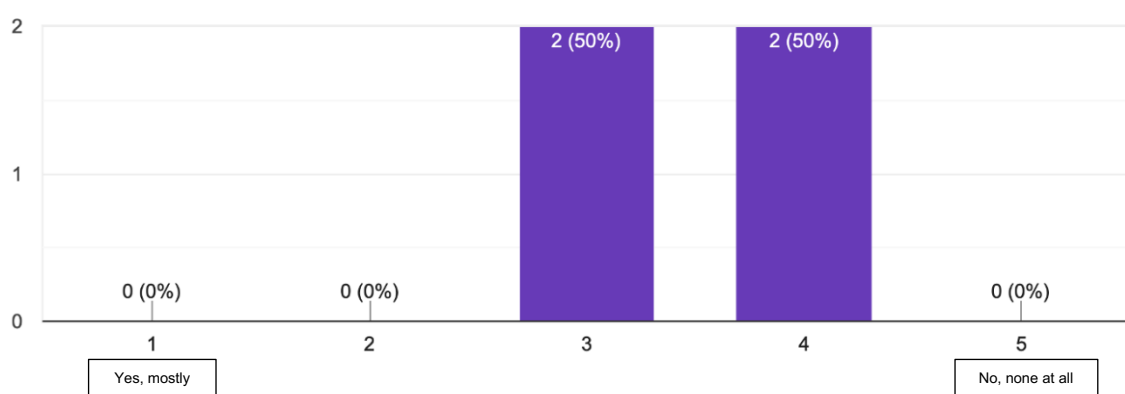


Figure 3 : Data from underrepresented groups



3. Barriers to data collection and monitoring to evaluate the advancements towards climate neutrality.

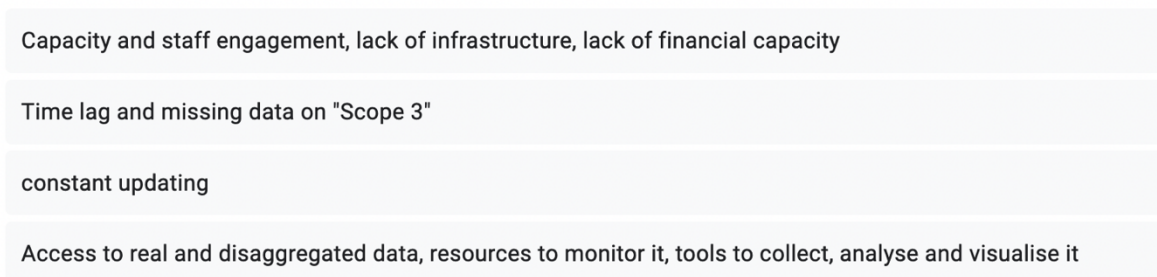


Figure 4 : Barriers to data collection

4. MEL activities where cities need more support

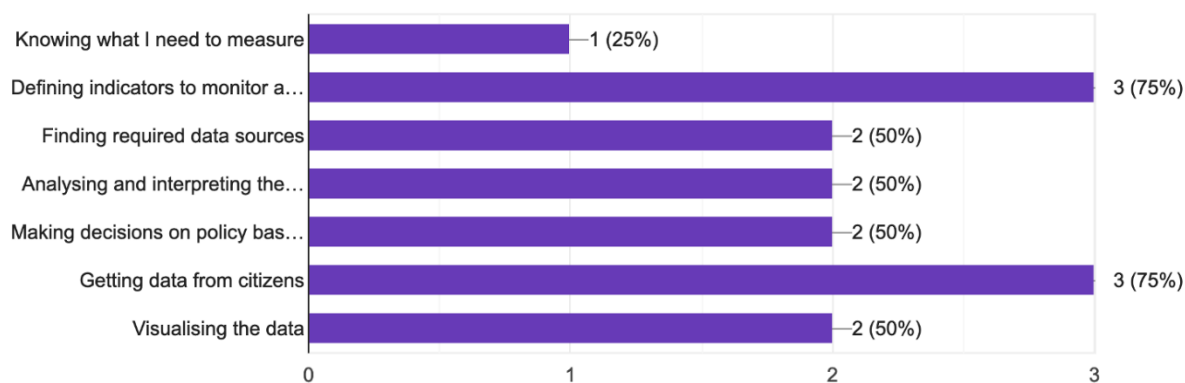


Figure 5 : Areas where help is most needed