



Report of Mission City Support

Deliverable D2.2

Authors: Paula Serra Bachs (EuC), Irene Vivas Lalinde (EuC), Gabriela Uchoa (EuC), Mar Jiménez (EuC), Justyna Wieczorkiewicz-Molendo (CKIC), Elena Ricci (CKIC), Simon Warne (CKIC), Adriana O'Phelan (Demsoc).

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Table of contents

1	Background and Introduction	5
1.1	The evolution of the city support model	5
1.2	The principles of CSG: criteria and setting process	7
1.2.1	Key Principles of CSGs:	7
1.2.2	CSG Process and Structure	8
2	Annual Report of the CSG	9
2.1	City Support Groups overview	10
2.1.1	CSG A.....	11
2.1.2	CSG B.....	13
2.1.3	CSG C	15
2.1.4	CSG D	16
3	Recommendations after a first year of operations	18
4	Conclusion.....	21
5	Annex 1	22
5.1	City Support Group A.....	22
5.2	City Support Group B.....	22
5.3	City Support Group C	23
5.4	City Support Group D	24
6	Annex 2	25
6.1	Mission to Eastern Europe: strengthening the climate ambition in Gabrovo and Sofia	25
6.2	Valladolid: an ambitious medium size city in Spain	26
6.3	NEUTRON/KOZANI Pilot Project Update.....	27
6.4	Supporting a city in Ukraine (Rivne)	28
6.5	Limassol, Cyprus: Collaboration Between Mission Work and Pilot City Program.....	28
6.6	Climate Action and Community Engagement in Istanbul	29
6.7	Mission Team Visit to Sarajevo: Key Milestones in the Net Zero Journey	30
6.8	National Collaboration: Danish Climate Alliance (Klimaalliancen)	31
6.9	NetZeroCitiesEU City Advisors Visit to Košice: Strengthening Climate Action and Stakeholder Collaboration.....	31
6.10	Investment Roundtable in Espoo: Driving Climate Action through Investment Collaboration	32



Figure 1: SGA - NZC agile support - Starting position from the grant agreement	5
Figure 2 - Mission Team visit to Gabrovo and Sofia	26
Figure 3 - Meeting the Mayor and representatives from the private sector	27
Figure 4 - Joint session in Kozani with the Kozani, Ioannina and Trikala teams	28
Figure 5 - In site visit to Limassol with representatives from Viladecans (Spain) and Lorqui (Murcia) ..	29
Figure 6 - Mission team visit to Istanbul after local elections to work on the CCC, citizen engagement and how to build a narrative	30
Figure 7 - Launch of the first Citizen Assembly in Sarajevo.....	31

List of figures

List of tables

Table 1 - City Support Groups overview	10
Table 2 - CSG A overview.....	11
Table 3 - CSG B overview.....	13
Table 4 - CSG C overview.....	15
Table 5 - CSG D overview.....	17



Abbreviations and acronyms

Acronym	Description
WP	Work Package
NZC	NetZeroCities
CCC	Climate City Contract
CA(s)	City Advisor(s)
CSO(s)	City Support Officer(s)
PCP	Pilot City Programme
DWG(s)	Domain Working Group (s)
CESF	City Expert Support Facility
CMCH	Capital Matchmaking Hub
CFS	Climate Finance Support

Summary

NetZeroCities (NZC) project is designed to support the Mission for Cities, by enabling European cities and citizens to show the way forward towards an inclusive, thriving, climate resilient and sustainable future. The platform works with and for cities to accelerate the necessary transformations to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. SGA represents an evolution of the City Support Model envisioned in NZC, adding specialised expertise to the core support that we provide to cities. SGA has organised support services into City Support Groups (CSG), that include City Advisors (CA), City Specialists and one City Support Officer (CSO) per each, through which the platform has worked with cities to develop and implement Climate City Contracts (CCC), pilot city program actions, and twinning and learning programs. As of October 2024, one year since the start of the CSG, we aim to review the principles that drove the evolution of the city support model, outline the main activities per CSG, and provide recommendations for the next phase of NetZeroCities, that will be focused on the implementation of the CCC and the Pilot Programs, as well as the kick off of the iteration process in some cities.

Keywords

NetZeroCities; Cities Mission; Climate Neutrality; City Advisors; City Support Officers, City Specialists, City Support.



1 Background and Introduction

NetZeroCities (NZC) project is designed to support the Mission for Cities, by enabling European cities and citizens to show the way forward towards an inclusive, thriving, climate resilient and sustainable future. The platform works with and for cities to accelerate the necessary transformations to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. We have provided guidance, tools, expertise, and capabilities to Mission Cities. This support was initially articulated in the NZC agreement with the creation of the role of City Advisors (previously called City Guides), who were critical to supporting, accompanying and giving advice to cities in their process of designing the Climate City Contracts (CCC). SGA represents an evolution of the City Support Model envisioned in NZC, adding specialised expertise to the core support. SGA has organised support services into City Support Groups (CSG), through which the platform has worked with cities to develop and implement Climate City Contracts (CCC), pilot city program actions, and twinning and learning programs.

October 2024 marks the first anniversary of the start of the City Support Groups (CSGs). 111 Mission Cities are being supported through four different CSGs, which include City Advisors (CAs), City Specialists, and a newly introduced role crucial for effectively implementing the new model: City Support Officers (CSOs). This Annual Report reviews the principles that guided the evolution of the city support model, outlines the main activities for each CSG, and provides recommendations for the next phase of NetZeroCities, focusing on the implementation of the Climate City Contracts (CCCs) and Pilot Programs, as well as the initiation of the iteration process in selected cities.

1.1 The evolution of the city support model

The City Support Groups (CSGs) represent a critical evolution in the support structure for cities participating in the Mission. Since their inception in October 2023, the CSGs have become instrumental in delivering agile, coordinated, and tailored assistance across various strategic domains such as finance, public engagement, and systemic approaches to climate neutrality. This model emerged from a co-design process in mid-2023, allowing teams to align on shared principles, approaches, and methodologies that guide their work with cities. The initial design phase fostered collaboration across teams, laying the foundation for a more structured and effective support mechanism, enabling the scaling and refinement of city support across the consortium.

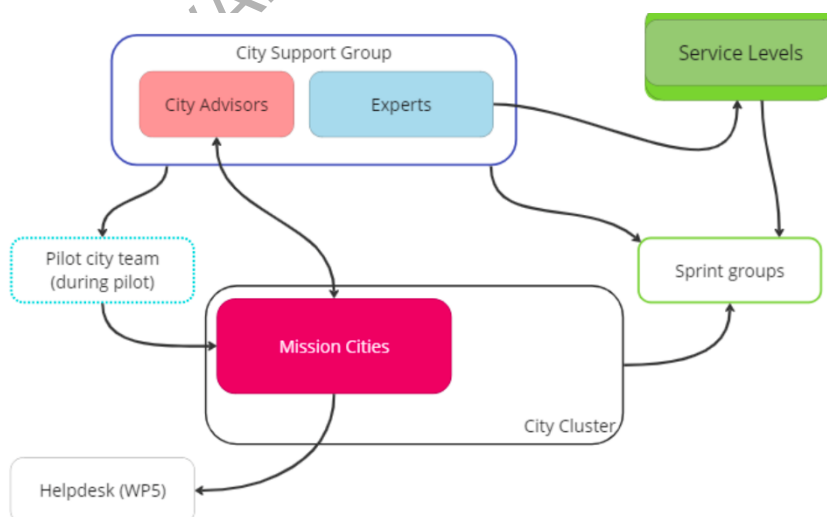


Figure 1: SGA - NZC agile support - Starting position from the grant agreement

The transition from a model where the support to cities was only articulated through CA to a model that included, beyond CAs, City Specialists, all grouped in what are called CSGs, has marked a significant change. Taking also into account that all CSGs have a CSO, a new role that has been highly important to ensure proper coordination. By assigning a Lead City Advisor and a Follower City Advisor to each city, we have enhanced the depth and breadth of expertise available to cities and reduced key person risk. This shift has also facilitated better continuity and adaptability, especially during critical periods such as holiday seasons, ensuring that cities continue to receive the support they need without interruption. The addition of specialists to the CA group has met the intention of building stronger relationships with key specialists and increasing the speed of information and support flowing around the system. As the CSG model continues to develop into the future, it will build on these foundations.

One of the key strengths of the CSGs lies in their interdisciplinary approach. By integrating work across various Work Packages (WPs), such as NZC WP13 and SGA1 WP2, the CSGs have developed a framework that is not only comprehensive but also flexible enough to adapt to the specific contexts of each city. This cross-collaboration allows for the blending of expertise from multiple areas, creating a robust support system capable of addressing the multifaceted challenges cities face in developing and implementing climate strategies. The engagement with external partners and participation in key events further extend the reach and impact of the CSGs, ensuring that our support aligns with broader trends and innovations in urban climate action.

Throughout 2024, the CSGs have demonstrated their value in various ways. Over the past year, CSG's have identified four main categories of support provided to cities:

- **Sustained communication**
- **CCC guidance and review**
- **Tailored support in the implementation phase**
- **Core support as part of the Pilot City Program**

Regular city visits, workshops, and feedback sessions have strengthened relationships between city teams and the consortium, building trust and advancing the development of their climate plans. Furthermore, CSG members have actively engaged in events and conferences, enhancing visibility and knowledge exchange while fostering collaborations with key stakeholders such as the European Commission and national mission hubs.

This year, the space for collaboration and coordination among City Support Groups has been redefined and is now known as the City Interface Meeting. This operational, rather than strategic, space brings together all members of the CSGs, including specialists and representatives from other thematic areas, on a weekly basis. The focus is on cross-city coordination, enabling CSG members to stay informed and share knowledge across different cities. This platform has proven invaluable in fostering collaboration, aligning efforts, and ensuring the consistency and quality of support provided throughout the network of cities engaged in the Mission. At the City Interface Meeting, every week, CSG teams review the most urgent/emergent questions related to CCC's, Pilots, Twins and the Capital Hub.

Looking ahead, several key directions for further development have emerged based on the experience so far. These areas are outlined in more detail in the recommendations section below.

First, there is a need to continue refining the support model, ensuring it remains adaptable to the evolving needs of cities. This is especially important in the coming months as the final Climate City Contracts (CCCs) are completed and cities enter the implementation phase, where even more flexible and agile support will be required.

Second, further enhancing the integration of thematic expertise is crucial, linking City Support Groups (CSGs) more closely with Domain Working Groups (DWGs) and ensuring that the full range of expertise is readily available to cities. In high-demand areas like climate finance and citizen and stakeholder participation, continued focus and prioritisation will be essential in helping cities transition from planning to implementation.



Finally, strengthening partnerships with external organisations and exploring new collaboration opportunities will be crucial in scaling our efforts and ensuring long-term impact.

In conclusion, the CSGs have proven to be an effective mechanism for delivering tailored, strategic, and interdisciplinary support to cities engaged in the NZC Mission, but their role is changing as the programme itself changes.

Continued refinement and adaptation will be necessary to meet the growing challenges of urban climate transitions, and a shift from a structured planning phase to a more responsive implementation phase. By building on the successes and lessons learned, we can ensure that our support remains both impactful and sustainable, driving cities towards climate neutrality in the years to come.

1.2 The principles of CSG: criteria and setting process

The City Support Groups play a central role in the NetZeroCities programme, offering tailored, adaptive support to cities participating in the EU Cities Mission. This support is facilitated through collaborative, agile, and responsive processes. The creation and operation of CSGs are underpinned by principles of co-design, adaptability, and multidisciplinary engagement, which were jointly developed within the framework of the programme to address the complex needs of cities undergoing climate transition.

Key Principles of CSGs:

- **Co-Design and collaboration:** The CSGs were co-designed between June and October 2023, incorporating contributions from City Advisors, City Support Officers, City Specialists, and representatives from thematic partners across NZC. This process remains ongoing, enabling continuous refinement as cities progress from drafting CCC to implementation. The collaborative approach encourages active participation from all CSG team members and the wider consortium, ensuring shared ownership and the integration of diverse perspectives into the support framework.
- **Agility and responsiveness:** Cities face a variety of unpredictable challenges on their path to climate neutrality, including political and administrative shifts, resource constraints, and broader contextual changes that impact their efforts. CSGs are structured to offer agile support, adapting to these evolving conditions without imposing undue pressure on city teams. This approach involves customising support to align with the pace of each city, offering both light-touch and intensive interventions as required.
- **Multidisciplinary and layered engagement:** CSGs employ a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on expertise in governance, public participation, finance, and systemic innovation. The teams operate in squad-like formations, allowing for in-depth focus on specific city needs while fostering knowledge exchange through cross-CSG interactions. Engagement with cities is multi-layered, involving regular check-ins as well as more intensive working sessions, adjusted to the evolving needs of each city.
- **Holistic and orchestrated support:** Recognising cities as complex systems with diverse challenges and opportunities, CSG teams provide first-line support across key specialisations while also drawing upon the broader expertise available within the NZC platform. By adopting a holistic approach, CSGs facilitate connections between cities and relevant expertise, both within the EU Cities Mission and across NZC's wider network. This approach allows for ongoing adaptation and refinement of support, encouraging continuous reflection and collaborative problem-solving across teams.



CSG Process and Structure

In October 2023, 112 Mission and Pilot Cities were allocated to one of four City Support Groups (CSGs) through a detailed clustering process (refer to *D2.1: Model for Coherent Implementation of Work at Local Level*). Cities were grouped according to shared challenges, geographical contexts, and expertise requirements, ensuring that the support provided was tailored to their specific local conditions.

As previously outlined, each CSG is comprised of 3-5 City Advisors, City Support Specialists, and a City Support Officer. This structure ensures that cities receive comprehensive, hands-on assistance from multiple perspectives, including participation and governance, finance, and systemic innovation. City Interface sessions play a crucial role in coordinating collaboration and ensuring cohesion within and across teams. These sessions facilitate the alignment of efforts, the sharing of lessons learned, and the coordination of resources across the broader NZC support systems to deliver the most effective assistance to cities.

The principles, processes, and structure of the CSGs emphasise adaptability, collaboration, and a holistic approach to supporting cities on their climate-neutral journeys. By maintaining flexibility, fostering multidisciplinary engagement, and integrating continuous learning, the CSGs provide impactful and tailored support that enables cities to address both present and emerging challenges on their path to climate neutrality. The design of the CSG structure and processes was intended to be adaptive, evolving alongside the cities' journeys and accommodating co-designed, fit-for-purpose modifications as necessary.



2 Annual Report of the CSG

The following section reviews the support provided by all City Support Groups (CSGs) over the past 12 months, detailing the assistance according to the four key dimensions of support outlined earlier:

- **Sustained communication:** an overview of how continuous communication, engagement with the public, and the formation of strategic partnerships have been facilitated across cities.
- **Climate City Contract (CCC) guidance and review:** A summary of the guidance offered, and the review processes undertaken to support cities in the development and refinement of their Climate City Contracts.
- **Tailored support in the implementation phase:** An examination of the specific, customised assistance provided to cities during the implementation phase of their climate action plans.
- **Core support under the Pilot City Programme (PCP):** A report on the core support delivered as part of the Pilot City Programme, with a focus on how this foundational assistance has helped cities advance their climate-neutral objectives.

Each CSG works with different cities, but common approaches and working models are employed, which continue to be refined and developed over time. All CSGs prioritise sustained communication with cities through multiple channels tailored to their specific needs. Regular engagement via in-person visits, strategic workshops, and consistent check-ins has been fundamental in building trust and maintaining strong working relationships between city officials, City Advisors, City Support Officers, and CSG specialists. This ongoing communication enables CSGs to respond quickly to city-specific needs, ensuring that support is both timely and tailored to the context of each city.

There is a shared focus on Climate City Contract (CCC) development and review among all City Support Groups (CSGs). Extensive support has been provided throughout the drafting and submission process, including the organisation of feedback sessions and the conduct of in-depth reviews of cities' CCCs. This process often involves both light-touch reviews and more intensive, targeted feedback, supplemented by visits to cities for hands-on support in areas such as greenhouse gas reduction, finance, and governance. Across the groups, there is a strong emphasis on helping cities align their CCCs with the strategic goals of NetZeroCities (NZC), ensuring that each city's plan is actionable and aligned with their long-term climate neutrality objectives. CSGs have demonstrated a commitment to offering tailored assistance, helping cities overcome specific barriers to executing their climate plans. This often involves cross-CSG collaboration, where knowledge-sharing and peer-to-peer exchanges enable cities facing similar challenges to learn from one another's experiences. For example, peer-to-peer learning initiatives in areas such as mobility for smaller cities and agricultural sustainability have been coordinated across multiple CSGs, providing a forum for cities to share solutions and best practices.

Furthermore, CSGs have played a crucial role in supporting the Pilot City Programme, with most cities receiving individualised attention and guidance tailored to their pilot projects. CSGs have facilitated workshops, roundtables, and direct coaching, helping cities secure necessary resources, develop investment strategies, and implement their pilot initiatives effectively. Despite differences in the scale and scope of pilot projects, CSGs focus on helping cities transition from planning to action, leveraging their collective expertise to support cities at various stages of their climate journey.

Additionally, the CSGs are further developing the integration of digital tools for internal coordination and project management, which presents challenges in a large consortium where different organisations utilise various tools. Platforms such as Notion, SharePoint, and Teams have been employed to move beyond "lowest common technology" communications, enabling progress tracking, updates sharing, and task management, ensuring that teams remain aligned and responsive. This use of digital tools fosters transparency and agility, enabling CSGs to quickly adapt to evolving needs and provide more cohesive, cross-city support. It is one of the areas for further development and cross-consortium alignment in the coming years.



Overall, these shared approaches demonstrate the consistent framework within which the CSGs operate—centred on collaboration, communication, and flexibility to effectively support cities in achieving their climate neutrality goals.

2.1 City Support Groups overview

The following table provides an overview of the City Support Groups (CSGs), highlighting their structure and key activities. Each group comprises City Advisors (CAs), City Support Officers (CSOs), and specialists working across different cities to provide tailored support. This summary offers insights into the distribution of responsibilities, the cities involved, and the core areas of expertise that guide the work of each group.

Table 1 - City Support Groups overview

	CSG A	CSG B	CSG C	CSG D
Total n° of cities	26	28	32	26
Labelled cities	12	15	10	14
N° of pilots	18	21	22	23
Countries represented	Germany, Slovakia, Norway, Israel, Finland, Italy, Austria, Czech Republic and Poland (9)	Italy, UK, Belgium, Romania, Ireland, Sweden, Portugal, Greece, Iceland, Spain, Estonia, Lithuania (12)	Denmark, Netherlands, France, Belgium, Hungary, Luxembourg, Albania, Malta, Turkey, Latvia, Cyprus, Sweden and Bosnia (13)	Greece, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, Poland, Ukraine (non-Mission city), Montenegro, Slovenia, Croatia (10)
Members of CSG (n °)	7	8	9	9



CSG A

City Support Group (CSG) A comprises three City Advisors from different organisations: Anna Huttunen (CKIC), Svea Heinemann (ICLEI), and Anna Sokolowska (Eurocities). The group also includes four City Support Specialists: Alicia Puig (Demsoc), Simon Höher (DML), Ryan McManus (BwB), and Belen Ortiz (BwB), along with one City Support Officer, Simon Warne (CKIC). This diverse team employs various methodologies and tools to identify and address the support needs of cities, ensuring a coordinated and tailored approach that aligns with the unique characteristics of each city.

CSG A works with a total of **26 Mission cities across 9 different countries**, mainly in northern and central Europe with a high representation of German and Nordic cities. There are also 26 cities in CSG A in the Pilot City Programme, including one non-Mission city from Cohort 1, Drammen.

CSG A operates through regular meetings, including internal preparations and weekly check-ins, ensuring smooth communication and continuous alignment in decision-making. CSG A CAs meet with the CSO at the beginning of the week, to prioritise which issues will be most important for the whole group session on Thursdays. The tools used include digital platforms like Notion for internal organisation and tracking needs, along with more traditional communication channels such as Outlook and support request forms.

CSG A has established a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to supporting cities in their efforts to develop and implement the CCC. The identification of needs usually starts at the CSG level, and it is nourished by seasonal schools, bootcamps, Pilots sensemaking, the Twinning Learning Programme and other NZC activities.

Table 2 - CSG A overview

<p>Sustained communication</p>	<p>The City Support Group has engaged in a series of strategic visits and regular check-ins to enhance communication and collaboration among cities. These interactions serve to assess ongoing needs, foster relationships, and facilitate the exchange of best practices.</p> <p>Participation in key events and conferences has also played a vital role in this engagement strategy. Notable events include the Denksalon in Görlitz (September 2023) and the Federal Urban Development Policy Conference in Jena (September 2023), which provided valuable insights into urban development policies, as well as Horizon Lighthouse project CityXChange final conference in Trondheim with several mission cities present and a NetZeroCities session dedicated for scaling up pilots (October 2024).</p> <p>Additionally, a municipal finance workshop in Frankfurt (November 2023) focused on funding mechanisms essential for sustainable urban initiatives. The NeutralPath collaborative roundtable, "Towards Climate-Neutral Cities: Integrating Sustainable Energy and Mobility Solutions," held in Dresden (May 2024), aimed to explore synergies between energy and transport sectors. Furthermore, the URBIS Smart City Meetup in Brno (June 2024) fostered discussions on innovative urban solutions.</p> <p>In addition to these activities, a member of CSG A participated in the Nordic Edge cooperation with Stavanger and Trondheim in May 2024, which included a panel session, a meeting for establishing national platforms, and a transport workshop co-organized with EIT Urban Mobility and Nordic Edge.</p> <p>These collaborative efforts aim to enhance climate-neutral strategies and promote sustainable urban development across the participating cities.</p> <p>The City Advisors have supported the preparation and engaged closely on Deputy DG Environment of the European Commission, Patrick Child visits to Mission cities: Austria and Slovakia (April 2024), Germany (July and Sept</p>
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	2024), Norway (January 2024), Finland (Sept 2023, May 2024, August 2024).
CCC guidance and review	<p>The development of the Climate City Contract (CCC) has utilized significant consortium resources in the first year, encompassing both in-person and online support sessions alongside a light-touch review process. This process involved providing written feedback on Window 3 (3 cities) and Window 4 (13 cities) drafts and one resubmission for Window 3.</p> <p>City Support Group A (CSG A) conducted several in-person visits to W3 and W4 cities, including to the Czech Republic, Poland, multiple in Germany (one in Leipzig and two in Dresden, also Aachen and Dortmund), one in Slovakia (Kosice, Bratislava), Oslo as well as visits to Stavanger and Trondheim, Norway for workshops held with internal and external stakeholders for their CCC development. These visits aimed to build trust with transition teams and different levels of government, guide cities through document development, and offer specialist support on issues such as finance.</p> <p>In addition, regular internal feedback sessions were held prior to submission deadlines to discuss insights from vertical reviewers, greenhouse gas (GHG) experts, finance specialists, city advisors, and other stakeholders regarding the submitted drafts.</p>
Tailored support in the implementation phase	<p>Upon identifying a barrier in Aachen's IP - the lack of involvement of their finance department/treasury, a workshop was organised with CSG financial specialists in a format where they could discuss, ask some questions, and then follow up on their IP. As a result of the meeting, they now have an internal finance working group led by their mayor dedicated to the implementation of climate actions which had a kickoff meeting including BwB CSG financial specialists and the German City Financial Specialist (CFS). In a separate process via regular city support meetings with Aachen, needs were identified to improve the cities' communication with citizens and responses to criticism of climate measures, for which CSG and NZC consortium specialists prepared a workshop on climate narratives and storytelling to be conducted in mid-October 2024.</p> <p>To enhance the effectiveness of city support, it is recommended to strengthen cross-City Support Group (CSG) links. This approach would enable better matchmaking among cities facing similar support topics, fostering peer-to-peer (P2P) collaboration and resource sharing. Out of CSG A, in collaboration with other CSGs, two peer-to-peer groups for cities have already been initiated, on mobility for smaller cities, and the issue of tackling AFOLU emissions, which involve CSG members and specialists from the consortium on these topics to facilitate brainstorming on approaches to challenges presented by the attending cities.</p> <p>The Finnish W2 Label cities stepped into the Capital Hub process already in February 2024 and have been actively engaging in this process since then. In May 2024 there was a Finnish cities' Mission Label event in Finland as well as an investment roundtable to kick off the implementation phase for Finnish cities, attended and co-organised by the CSG A financial specialist and city advisor where cities presented some investment needs in detail and started the dialogue with investors. The CSG is also currently working with the Finnish cities on policy innovation work stream.</p>
Core support as part of the pilot city program	The City Support PCP Cohort 1 appraisals focused on scoping needs across various pilot projects, including CoLab (Mannheim, Aachen, Muenster), Turku, Lahti, Liberec, and Drammen. All pilot appraisals have



	<p>been completed, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the specific requirements and support mechanisms necessary for these initiatives.</p> <p>Sometimes there are opportunities via the Twinning Learning Programme for City Advisors to learn more about their Pilot cities, when the site visits occur within a certain geographic proximity. This was the case for Drammen, where their City Advisor also attended the TLP site visit in that city.</p>
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CSG B

City Support Group B (CSG B) consists of four City Advisors - Keira Webster (Climate KIC), Gabriela Uchoa, Maria Giordia, and Sozvin Al Youssef (Eurocities) -, one City Support Officer, Elena Ricci (Climate KIC), and three specialists - David Brito (DML), Jonathan Reyes (DemSoc), and Harry Wain (BwB). **The group currently supports 28 Mission Cities across 12 European countries, including 21 cities participating in the Pilot City Programme - while also collaborating with Galway, a non-Mission Pilot City.**

To effectively assess and address the support needs of these cities, CSG B utilises various methodologies and tools (Outlook, Miro, Notion, Sharepoint, Word), ensuring a customised approach. The group's operations are structured around three interconnected levels: weekly meetings on Thursdays to discuss support needs, challenges, and shared opportunities with the entire CSG B; weekly coordination meetings on Mondays between City Support Specialists and the City Support Officer to address urgent matters; and monthly individual meetings between each City Advisor and the City Support Officer to discuss detailed city-specific issues and task allocation. Moreover, for each CAs working in CSG B we set up a communication channel on SharePoint with specialists involved in the CSG to give immediate support, having the possibility to talk directly if something is needed. The agenda for the weekly meeting is set up based on urgent needs and support. Coordination efforts are further enhanced through communication platforms such as Notion, Outlook, and Teams, facilitating seamless information sharing and task management.

Support needs are typically identified within CSG B using various methodologies (regular check-ins with cities and SNAP-Up processes) and are informed by external initiatives like seasonal schools, bootcamps, and other collaborative activities. This comprehensive approach allows the group to remain responsive to the evolving needs of cities, thereby enhancing their implementation efforts and overall engagement in the Climate City Contract process.

Table 3 - CSG B Overview

Sustained communication	<p>CSG B members have actively participated in various modalities with the cities: in-person visits, regular check-ins, coaching sessions, and tailored-support workshop (both online and in-person). These interactions foster trust-based relationships, facilitate the exchange and enhance best practices, and give the opportunity to understand ongoing cities' needs.</p> <p>Notable engagement opportunities include meetings in Brussels with Patrick Child and other Belgian cities, the Swedish Cities Forum in May 2024, participation in the Guimarães Green Week in May/June 2024, and the NZC Mission to Greece with CSG D. In October 2023, an in-person visit to Reykjavik involved presentations and workshops with the transition team, stakeholders, and the political steering group. Additionally, Patrick Child visited Bristol in May 2024. Finally, CSG B specialists (together with non-city support specialists) organised an in-person workshop in Guimaraes in October 2024 to focus on stakeholder engagement – particularly the industrial sector. Workshops like</p>
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	<p>this showcase even more the coordination between the NetZeroCities consortium.</p> <p>Almost all cities in the group have attended the seasonal schools, further enhancing collaboration and knowledge sharing.</p>
CCC guidance and review	<p>The support for cities that submitted their CCCs this year has been structured around a comprehensive framework facilitated by consortium resources, involving non-city support people in the discussion. This support has included coaching sessions with various CSG B cities focused on greenhouse gas emissions and action planning, which provided valuable guidance tailored to each city's specific needs. Additionally, an impact pathways workshop was conducted to help cities identify and strategize their approaches to achieving climate goals. Investment plan sessions have also been organized to assist cities in securing the necessary funding for their initiatives.</p> <p>Throughout the drafting process, ongoing support has been provided, featuring regular meetings and informal reviews to ensure that each city's CCC is well-prepared and aligns with best practices.</p> <p>Overall, the cities in this group have maintained strong engagement with the consortium, ensuring effective communication throughout the process. This collaborative approach has fostered a supportive environment, allowing cities to navigate the complexities of drafting their CCCs successfully while leveraging the expertise and resources of the consortium.</p>
Tailored support in the implementation phase	<p>During the implementation phase, tailored support has been crucial for cities as they navigate their specific challenges and opportunities. Cross-city support group work has been valuable and indispensable to achieve this milestone. To do so, different peer-to-peer learning exchanges have been set up. Taurage has engaged in an agriculture-focused peer-to-peer group, allowing for the sharing of best practices and insights related to sustainable agricultural practices. Additionally, discussions have been facilitated within the informal collaborative Portuguese cities' Mission platform, particularly in Guimarães, enhancing cooperation and knowledge exchange among cities facing similar issues. Moreover, Gavle and Bergamo have participated in peer-to-peer learning opportunities focused on mobility for smaller cities (population under 200,000), fostering collaboration and innovative solutions in transportation and urban planning.</p> <p>Moreover, CSG B together with CSG D is continuously supporting the Spanish cities and Spanish national platform in moving forward into the implementation phase.</p> <p>This tailored approach ensures that cities receive the relevant support and resources necessary to successfully implement their initiatives.</p> <p>Only three cities out of 28 are part of the w4+ group – namely Rome, Bristol and Tartu. Out of all the cities that have submitted a CCC, 54% have obtained the Mission label. 25 cities (89% out of the 28 cities in CSG B) submitted in W4.</p>



Core support as part of the pilot city program	<p>The City Support PCP Cohort 1 appraisals centered on assessing needs across a variety of pilot projects, including those in Bristol, Cluj Napoca, Galway, Guimaraes, Umea, Uppsala and the Italian pilot cities. All pilot appraisals have now been completed, providing a detailed understanding of the specific needs and the support structures required for each initiative.</p> <p>Occasionally, the Twinning Learning Programme offers opportunities for City Advisors to gain deeper insights into their respective pilot cities, particularly when site visits are geographically nearby. This was the case for the Italian pilot cities, where the City Support Officer became the main contact person – able to share insights both for the TLP and the PCP.</p>
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CSG C

The CSG C team comprises five City Advisors - Deniz Celik and Jakob Stolt (Climate KIC), Bob D'haeseleer (ICLEI), and Joanna Kompedra (ERRIN) -, a City Support Officer (Paula Serra Bachs, Eurocities), and three specialists: Eugénie Cartron (DML), Carlotta Fontana Valenti (DemSoc), and Ede Boberly (BwB). **The group provides support to 32 cities across 13 countries:** Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Hungary, Luxembourg, Albania, Sweden, Malta, Turkey, Latvia, Cyprus, and Bosnia.

City Support Group C was established in September 2023 with the goal of providing comprehensive support to cities throughout the Climate City Contract submission process and into the implementation phase. Currently, the group is focused on guiding cities in the W4+ cohort through this implementation stage, while leveraging various internal tools and methodologies that are being developed.

CSG C maintains an active pace, holding three weekly meetings, which amount to around 12 meetings per month. The team utilises digital platforms such as Notion for internal organisation and Excel for tracking city needs, along with traditional communication tools like Outlook and support request forms. The identification of city needs originates at the CSG level and is enriched through NZC activities such as seasonal schools, bootcamps, sensemaking workshops, and the Twinning Learning Program.

City needs are typically identified through direct conversations or formal requests. The team is currently working on establishing a coordinated methodology across National Platforms, the City Expert Support Facility (CESF), Pilot Cities Program (PCP), Capital Matchmaking Hub (CMCH), Climate Finance Support (CFS), and Policy Labs.

Table 4 - CSG C overview

Sustained communication	<p>Throughout 2024, members of City Support Group C (CSG C) have conducted in-person visits to mission cities requiring the most assistance, utilizing these visits as both an advocacy tool and direct support for finalizing their Climate City Contracts (CCCs). This group has distinguished itself by achieving the highest number of cities submitting their CCCs in W4 and W4+.</p> <p>One of the most notable visits occurred in Turkey in May 2024, where connections were established with the new municipal team in Istanbul after local elections. During this visit, several thematic workshops were organized, focusing on areas such as storytelling, the mission, and the CCC, all tailored to the city's specific needs. Additionally, collaborative efforts were made across different CSGs to engage with Dutch cities in Amsterdam, alongside workshops on stakeholder engagement with all Hungarian cities. Sessions were also conducted with French cities grouped under Group Mirroir.</p>
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	Furthermore, City Advisors have regularly visited the cities they support, complemented by online check-ins with specialists and City Support Officers (CSOs) to prepare for the CCC and facilitate pilot submissions and implementations.
CCC guidance and review	As the group with the highest number of cities submitting their CCC in the last window, efforts have focused on coaching sessions, regular check-ins, and meetings with specialists to review Implementation Plans (IP) and Action Plans. Within this framework, an in-person visit to Sarajevo took place. It was a strategic and key mission visit in the support efforts for the city. From the perspective of the City Support Group (CSG), the visit consolidated the role of the City Advisor as a key point of reference, and the focus was placed on developing their CCC.
Tailored support in the implementation phase	Two distinct speeds have been identified in the implementation phase. One group consists of cities where the Climate City Contract (CCC) serves as a starting point for climate action—such as Limassol, Gozo, Elbasan, Sarajevo, among others—requiring regular support with internal transition teams, funding, and European-level opportunities. In contrast, the other group comprises front-runner cities that seek connection, knowledge sharing, policy development, and more one-on-one interactions with other cities. Most of these cities are in the Nordic countries, such as Copenhagen, Malmö and Sønderborg.
Core support as part of the pilot city program	<p>Participation in boot camps has enabled the refinement of applications to the pilot program, alongside the appraisal of pilot reports to ascertain the optimal framework for further support. Currently, Group C encompasses 22 pilot cities, with 10 from Cohort 1 and 8 from Cohort 3 set to commence at the end of the year.</p> <p>The connection with other Themes and programs within NetZeroCities is crucial for strengthening the impact of the pilot cities. In this regard, the role of the City Support Officer (CSO), who also acts as a facilitator of the program, has significantly accelerated connections and knowledge sharing. This has been key to ensuring that cities can leverage the broader network and resources available to them, enhancing their capacity to implement effective climate actions. A similar case occurred with Dijon, where the support offered was aligned, and efforts were coordinated during in-person visits to discuss the CCC and the city's climate action within the consortium.</p> <p>For instance, during the on-site visit as part of the Twinning Learning Program to Limassol, Cyprus, in April 2024, collaboration within the City Support Group (CSG) was pivotal. The CSO acted as the facilitator for the Limassol pilot, and in coordination with the City Advisor present during the visit, engagement with the city was facilitated, providing valuable insights into the status of the pilot.</p>

CSG D

City Support Group D was established at the end of September 2023 and has regularly met in a weekly coordination call. It supports 25 Mission cities from nine different European countries: Greece, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, Poland, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Croatia. And one non-Mission city from Ukraine: Rivne.

The team is composed of nine members, including five City Advisors who are the main nexus between the NZC consortium and the Transition and Pilot teams, three specialists in three strategic areas identified by the consortium (finance, engagement and systemic approach) and a City Support Officer,



in charge of the coordination of the group's work: Justyna Wieczorkiewicz-Molendo (City Advisor, Climate KIC), Nilofer Tajuddin (CA, Resilient Cities Network), Alvaro Soldevila (CA, RCN), Vlatka Berlan Vlahek (CA, Energy Cities), Francisco Gonçalves (CA, Energy Cities), Renata Haseth (Finance specialist, Bankers without Boundaries), Mike Duff (Systems innovation specialist, Dark Matter Laboratories), Ignatius But (Citizen Engagement specialist, Democratic Society, previously Adriana O'Phelan) and Irene Vivas Lalinde (City Support Officer and facilitator of the Twinning Learning Programme, Eurocities).

In CSG D, an agenda was prepared ahead of the weekly meeting, which took place in Teams. The CSO then followed up via email with key action points, if any, and updated a slide deck with summary information about all ongoing activities. A folder in SharePoint and a Notion space were created to share materials and update information. However, the use of these tools has not been consistent.

Table 5 - CSG D overview

Sustained communication	<p>City Advisors have regularly visited the cities they support, complemented by online check-ins with specialists and City Support Officers (CSOs) to prepare for the CCC submission and implementation. Additionally, CSG members, particularly CAs, have actively engaged in events with their cities, including the International Degrowth Conference in Zagreb (September 2023), the Ljubljana Forum (October 2023), and the NEUTRON project workshops organized by Kozani. Further engagements included the Smart City Expo in Barcelona (November 2023) and the Climate Forum in Athens (March 2024), among others.</p> <p>Collaboration with external partners, such as CitiES, EnEffect, TAIEX (EC), and the Romanian and Polish CapaCities programs, has also strengthened the design and delivery of city support. Notably, CAs have often been invited by the Deputy DG Environment of the European Commission, Patrick Child, to join his visits to Mission cities, further enhancing the integration and impact of the CSG's work.</p>
CCC guidance and review	<p>The development of the Climate City Contracts (CCC) has been the consortium's primary focus in its first year, involving both in-person and online support sessions, alongside a light-touch review process. Reviewers provided written feedback on 13 drafts submitted by cities. CSG D organised visits to cities in the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Greece, and Poland to build trust, guide document development, and offer expert support. These efforts were crucial for cities like The Hague, which was submitted in W3, and for reactivating relationships with lagging cities such as Sofia. Additionally, pre-submission internal feedback sessions were held, integrating insights from vertical reviewers, GHG experts, finance specialists, and city advisors.</p> <p>Out of all the cities that have submitted a CCC so far, 54% have obtained the Mission label. All CSG D cities aimed to submit in W4, but Rotterdam and Podgorica are still working on their CCC.</p>
Tailored support in the implementation phase	<p>4 cities in CSG D (15%) submitted their CCC in W1 (March 2023). After they obtained the Mission label, the CSG provided thematic expertise in areas such as partnerships with the private sector and climate finance. 5 additional cities (19%) submitted their CCC just before the establishment of the CSG, after the closing of Window 2 on 15 September 2023 and have since obtained the Mission label. In Barcelona, for instance, the CA is working with the CFS to provide project preparation support to 4 strategic projects. Most labelled cities have started conversations with the Capital Hub and the EIB to find capital for bankable and impactful local projects.</p>



<p>Core support as part of the pilot city program</p>	<p>In CSG D, there are 23 pilot cities: six pilots in Cohort 1 (4 of which are multi-city pilots), four individual pilots in Cohort 2 and three individual pilots in Cohort 3, that have just started. The support to cohort 1 pilots has been limited due to the prioritization of the CCC development. Nevertheless, CSG D provided in-person and online thematic expertise throughout the pilot implementation, including scoping needs as part of the City Expert Support Facility application process.</p> <p>Team members have also taken part in bootcamps to refine applications to the pilot programme as well as in an appraisal of the pilot reports to understand how to best frame further support. As an example, the Demsoc Specialist, along with a DML NZC team member, facilitated an in-person meeting with the Pilot team in Thessaloniki to better understand the Pilot context, surface Pilot needs particularly around their just transition work package, and planned future support on just transition and governance structures for the Pilot.</p>
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3 Recommendations after the first year of operations

The City Support Group model has demonstrated its value by fostering closer working relationships between city advisors and specialists, aligning with initial program goals. However, as the program evolves and cities progress in their sustainability efforts, the CSG model must also adapt. Strengthening connections between CSGs and the wider consortium is crucial, particularly as cities transition from planning to implementation phases. This shift will require CSGs to be more responsive and agile in addressing the evolving needs of cities as their requests become less structured and more diverse.

Over the course of this year's work within the City Support Groups, valuable insights and experiences have been gathered to inform a series of recommendations. Twelve key areas of recommendations have been identified, aimed at enhancing support for participating cities, particularly those facing unique challenges in their transition to a more sustainable future.

1. **Enhance Internal Coordination within CSGs:** Effective internal coordination within the City Support Groups (CSGs) is essential for managing resources efficiently. This coordination will enable better support for the 20-35 Mission cities that each group works with as their implementation develops. CSGs need to establish clearer lines of communication and shared goals, ensuring that tasks are distributed equitably among members. Furthermore, leveraging collaborative tools, such as the adoption of Notion, and promoting the wider use of these tools at the consortium level can significantly enhance the operational agility of the groups. This will allow for a swift response to emerging challenges in the cities being supported, reduce the time spent on administration and information sharing, and increase the time dedicated to supporting design, sense-making, and shared learning.
2. **Improve External Coordination and Project Management:** Addressing challenges in external coordination with staff outside the City Support Groups (CSGs) is crucial. Establishing clear availability of project managers and creating a centralised knowledge and document repository will ensure a more equitable allocation of resources across cities. This is particularly important as CSGs work remotely, making coordination complex. Progress is being made in moving away from a "lowest common technology" communications approach, with city information stored in Notion and other systems to follow DRY ("Don't Repeat Yourself") practices. In the coming year, a comprehensive database accessible to the consortium will list NZC services and tools for cities, track resources, and map skills outside the CSG team. This will facilitate a balanced



workload distribution, maximise the utilisation of specialised skills across the consortium, and increase efficiency in addressing city-specific challenges (e.g., through DWGs).

3. **In-Person Support for Cities in Challenging Situations:** Providing in-person support to Mission Cities is essential, particularly for those with low capacity, limited technical expertise, or uncertain political mandates. In-person assistance fosters a deeper understanding of local contexts and strengthens relationships between city officials and NZC support teams. In the coming year, efforts will focus on identifying cost-effective methods for delivering hybrid support, targeting travel resources to areas of greatest need while ensuring that in-person relationships and actions are sustained through online interactions. To maximise impact, visits will be structured to bring in the necessary specialists for action-focused engagements, optimising costs by involving multiple Mission cities simultaneously.
4. **Enhance Peer-to-Peer Support:** Improving the approach to peer-to-peer support is crucial. While joint workshops involving multiple Mission Cities have been organised, increasing these collaborative efforts can foster stronger networks and shared learning. Facilitating more structured peer-to-peer exchanges will enable cities to learn from one another's successes and challenges. Various initiatives have already been established, focusing on areas such as mobility for small cities, AFOLU, just transition, and energy communities, further deepening the collaborative spirit within the network and empowering cities to leverage the collective expertise of their peers.
5. **Define a Clear Scope of Online Support:** Online support has proven most effective when it targets specific goals and timelines. For example, processes like light-touch reviews can be efficiently managed online, enabling quick feedback loops. However, the impact of online support is maximised when linked to in-person efforts developed collaboratively in advance. In such instances, in-person engagements establish a foundation for online follow-up, which helps maintain momentum and ensure commitments are fulfilled. As the group of specialists engaged in online support expands and city demands diversify, it will be essential to provide experts with the context needed to make informed recommendations without overwhelming them with information. One focus area will be supporting cities in formulating their requests, allowing them to articulate their needs and context, enhanced by CSGs' experience with the wider programme and awareness of each city's unique characteristics.
6. **Tailored Approach for Larger Cities:** The diversity of NZC is its strength, but supporting larger cities requires additional resources and a tailored approach. While larger cities may have greater internal capacity, their internal divisions and the scale of their operations often mean they must achieve more with less political attention or fewer resources than smaller cities. These cities also face complex coordination challenges that can hinder the implementation of key initiatives. Identifying the right partners, aligning stakeholders, and ensuring sustained engagement are critical components of a tailored strategy. By dedicating specific resources to these cities and addressing their unique needs, their capacity to manage projects effectively can be enhanced.
7. **Address Strategic Coordination:** While many cities have developed robust plans, gaps often exist in the political and strategic consensus necessary for effective implementation. Without adequate political support, cities may struggle to execute their plans. Although CSGs cannot make decisions for cities, enhanced support for decision-making processes can be provided through high-quality citizen and stakeholder engagement, as well as the system innovation needed for informed choices and smooth implementation. This support is a priority action area for the coming year, underscored by the fact that citizen and stakeholder engagement is the most requested support alongside finance and investment. Facilitating dialogue and building consensus among stakeholders and citizens will be critical to advancing initiatives. Strategic coordination also entails addressing governance challenges, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and enhancing execution capacity to prevent delays in project implementation.



8. **Targeted Interventions for Earlier Stage Cities:** Cities at earlier stages of development require targeted interventions to enhance their capacity for scaling and growing action. These interventions should be designed to help such cities build on their progress and take the next steps in their development journey. Tailored support packages, including access to technical assistance (e.g., CSG structure), funding opportunities (e.g., CEFS, PCP), and strategic guidance, enable these cities to accelerate growth and more effectively integrate into the broader network of Mission cities.
9. **Engage with Political Leadership Changes:** Several Mission cities have experienced changes in political leadership since the initiative began, which can pose challenges to maintaining engagement and continuity. Best practices for managing these political transitions include demonstrating patience, scheduling in-person meetings (when possible) with the new team, and adjusting the narrative of the Mission to align with the new administration's priorities. CSGs are enhancing their understanding of how to predict and respond to political changes and how to support cities in building coalitions for action that can sustain the mission during political and personnel transitions. This approach ensures smoother transitions and fosters renewed commitment to the city's objectives under the Mission. Flexibility in communication strategies and an emphasis on aligning with the new leadership's goals will help maintain momentum during periods of political transition.
10. **Prioritise Operational Capacity:** Enhancing the operational capacity of transition teams is pivotal for ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in cities. Prioritising the strengthening of operational frameworks enables CSGs to facilitate the seamless execution of planned initiatives. This involves streamlining processes, improving team structures, and deploying technology solutions to support operations. Ensuring that transition teams have the necessary resources, tools, and expertise will enable them to deliver services more effectively and respond to the evolving needs of the cities they support.
11. **Connecting Cities:** By fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among cities and facilitating the exchange of best practices, CSGs can enable the replication of successful models across urban contexts and promote innovation and adaptation. Additionally, CSGs can assist cities in refining engagement and communication strategies, enhancing visibility, and fostering partnerships at various levels. This support strengthens cities' capacity to implement climate action plans and achieve their 2030 goals.
12. **Effective Integration with Finance and Investment Support:** The onboarding of City Finance Specialists has been well managed. However, as their work accelerates, CSGs and colleagues focused on finance and investment support must ensure that investment and financial planning draws on the full range of expertise that CSGs possess regarding the cities and their contexts. Engaging with financial instruments from both private and public sectors should be done in a manner congruent with the political culture and investment opportunities present in each city.

Moving forward, the work of City Support Groups will be essential in facilitating this transition, necessitating closer collaboration with domain working groups. Emphasising learning and sharing insights across CSGs will be vital to ensure that the net-zero cities model continues to develop effectively. By fostering these relationships and remaining adaptable, better support can be provided to cities on their journey toward sustainability.



4 Conclusion

The first year of the City Support Groups has been fruitful and impactful. A total of 101 out of 111 Mission cities have submitted their CCCs and many cities are developing their pilots, with several already entering the iteration process. The NZC City Support is now fully operational, leading to an exciting challenge: the transition towards the implementation phase, which is crucial for making a tangible impact at the local level.

While some cities have begun deploying their CCCs, the majority of Mission Cities are preparing to kick off the implementation phase. Adapting the Platform to meet the evolving needs of cities is essential during this transition, necessitating ongoing refinement of the support model to enhance its flexibility and agility. City Advisors will continue to serve as trusted points of contact, collaborating closely with specialists and City Support Officers (CSOs) to ensure the effective functioning of the entire support framework.

Integration of thematic expertise will also be vital. Closer links between City Support Groups (CSGs) and Domain Working Groups (DWGs) will ensure that a comprehensive range of expertise is readily available to cities. The anticipated demand for specialised support will extend beyond climate finance and citizen and stakeholder engagement, making it essential to strengthen partnerships with external organisations and explore new collaborative opportunities. This approach will enhance the scalability of efforts and ensure long-term impact.

Importantly, the City Interface and the dedicated spaces for collaboration will play a significant role in fostering this engagement. The support identified by City Advisors has provided valuable insights, which can inform tailored interventions for cities at different stages of development. Furthermore, attention to non-Mission cities is essential, as these 112 cities can serve as models for replication. Engaging with these cities presents opportunities for sharing best practices and fostering collaboration, especially among twin cities.

In conclusion, City Support Groups represent an effective mechanism for delivering tailored, strategic, and interdisciplinary support to cities involved in the NZC Mission. However, the model requires constant adaptation and flexibility in the coming months to ensure that support remains impactful and sustainable, driving cities toward climate neutrality in the years ahead.

As this deliverable is being finalised, a reflection process is underway within the City Support structure to accelerate the necessary changes and adjustments that will guarantee the achievement of consortium goals, with a primary focus on steering Mission Cities toward climate neutrality by 2030.



5 Annex 1

The following annex provides detailed conclusions and insights for each City Support Group (CSG), offering a comprehensive overview of the outcomes and support provided throughout the engagement process.

5.1 City Support Group A

It is recommended that **specialist support be integrated more centrally** within the support provided by the CSG. By providing the CSG specialists with a dedicated platform during weekly meetings to present their work, the opportunity for city advisors to leverage specialists' expertise in responding to city needs as they arise can be maximised. A series of productive sessions with CSG specialists focused on impact pathways, portfolio design, and citizen and stakeholder engagement have proven invaluable in informing collaborative efforts and this approach to be taken forward.

Additionally, there is a need to continue **identifying and addressing horizontal issues to facilitate the formation of peer learning groups** on different topics. Building on the success of the peer-to-peer workshops on mobility for smaller cities is essential, as these workshops allow cities to learn from each other's efforts on the ground in implementing their CCC actions, highlighting the importance of sharing experiences and knowledge. Such initiatives foster a culture of collaboration that enhances the effectiveness of city projects.

Finally, to enhance the effectiveness of our support, it has been observed that **cross-City Support Group (CSG) formats are invaluable for promoting collaboration**. Ensuring that the separate efforts of CSOs, specialists, and City advisors (CAs) are effectively integrated and coordinated is critical for this. By facilitating seamless cooperation, the impact of the collective city support team can be significantly enhanced, helping to drive meaningful change in the cities.

5.2 City Support Group B

CSG B effectively utilises a range of digital platforms, such as Outlook, Miro, Notion, and SharePoint, to manage its support activities across cities. However, there is potential to further streamline these tools to improve coordination. A more integrated approach to communication could help prevent overlap in task management and ensure quicker responses to emerging issues. Establishing a clearer structure for how these platforms are used across all communication levels - weekly meetings, individual check-ins, and urgent coordination sessions - could significantly boost efficiency.

Regarding the direct work with cities, **peer-to-peer learning exchanges have been a valuable resource for cities and for the group**, enabling cities to share best practices and tackle similar challenges collaboratively. For example, the agriculture-focused peer group in Taurage and the mobility initiatives in Gavle and Bergamo have fostered practical exchanges of knowledge and solutions. Building on these successes, expanding these initiatives to cover a broader range of themes could enhance learning opportunities. Moreover, increasing collaboration between CSGs would promote cross-pollination of ideas, allowing cities with common issues to benefit from a wider pool of expertise and insights.

By focusing on the unique challenges faced by each city, such as political constraints or technical hurdles, CSG B has helped cities make meaningful progress. To build on this, there should be an even greater emphasis on **identifying specific needs and matching them with targeted resources**. This could involve more frequent workshops or one-on-one coaching sessions tailored to cities' ongoing



challenges, ensuring that all cities receive the specialised support they need to overcome obstacles in their path to climate neutrality.

The guidance and review CCCs process has been well-structured, but there is always room for improvement. While regular feedback and coaching sessions have provided valuable support, cities may benefit from more frequent informal reviews to ensure they stay on track. Additionally, **targeted coaching sessions on specific topics** like financial planning, stakeholder engagement, or impact pathway development could be offered to help cities refine the most challenging aspects of their CCCs. In-person visits and workshops have proven to be highly effective in building trust and fostering stronger relationships between CSG members and city teams. These engagements allow for a deeper understanding of local contexts and a more direct response to city-specific needs. Prioritising in-person interactions, where feasible, and ensuring that these opportunities are distributed geographically across cities will help maintain momentum and ensure that cities feel supported throughout their journey. These engagements should also be used to address the more complex or sensitive issues that require face-to-face discussions.

On the other hand, the PCP has provided valuable insights into the specific needs of cities through its detailed appraisals. However, it is important to ensure that the support offered to these cities is consistent and proactive throughout the program. Building on the successful approach taken in the Italian pilot cities, assigning a dedicated point of contact would ensure that there is a continuous and structured flow of communication. This would also allow for more timely and tailored interventions, helping cities advance their pilot initiatives more effectively.

While CSG B has maintained strong engagement with most cities, it's important to ensure that those cities with lower levels of participation, such as those in the W4+ group (Rome, Bristol, and Tartu), receive more focused attention. These cities may be facing unique challenges that require additional support to bring them fully on board. Prioritising outreach, offering tailored assistance, and addressing any barriers to their full participation will be essential to ensure that they, too, can meet their objectives under the NetZeroCities initiative.

5.3 City Support Group C

CSG C is the largest group, consisting of 32 cities, and it has seen the highest number of cities submitting their Climate City Contracts (CCC) during W4. As a result, efforts have been focused on reinforcing and finalising these contracts. **Support has been most effective in cities where in-person visits were possible, regular check-ins of 30 minutes every two weeks were maintained, or fluid communication was established.** Conversely, support has been more challenging in cities where these conditions could not be met.

In terms of support, **significant differences were observed among cities.** Some cities view the CCC as their starting point for climate action, others see it as just another step in their existing climate strategies, and some face greater political instability and frequent changes. These three categories will require differentiated approaches during the implementation phase: **eastern and non-EU cities**, for instance, need greater representation within the consortium and access to experts familiar with their specific contexts. Comparing Turkish cities with Danish cities, for example, highlights the significant differences in needs and resources.

For more advanced cities, the term "implementation" has sometimes posed challenges. In these cases, it is recommended to use the term **"execution"** or **"acceleration"** to foster a more open and proactive response to the CCC process.

Cross-CSG collaboration has also proven essential, especially when cities from the same country are involved. For example, French cities have been supported through cooperation between CSG B and C, while Dutch cities have similarly benefited from cross-CSG efforts. Coordinating across CSGs ensures a more cohesive approach, particularly when cities are subject to the same national policies and frameworks.



There is an increasing need for **expertise in storytelling** within the cities. A workshop on narratives was held in Istanbul, which was very well-received and demonstrated that cities are eager for further support in this area. Strengthening storytelling capabilities will be vital in helping cities communicate their climate goals and progress effectively.

Finally, **participation in events, conferences, and internal meetings** remains a crucial tool for cities. It not only enhances the reputation of the consortium but also reinforces its role in supporting cities through these critical transitions.

5.4 City Support Group D

In-person support to Mission Cities has proven essential, particularly for cities facing challenging situations, such as low capacity, limited technical expertise, or a lack of political mandate. However, the impact of such support has been significantly enhanced when specific conditions were met: the involvement of additional specialists alongside the City Advisor sustained support over time with follow-up online interactions and the inclusion of more than one Mission City in the process. These factors have amplified the effectiveness of in-person engagements.

Supporting **larger cities and capital cities** presents unique challenges and requires more resources. These cities often face complex coordination issues and need a tailored approach to address their specific needs. Identifying the appropriate stakeholders to collaborate with and maintaining continuous engagement demands considerable effort and resources, which must be accounted for in support strategies.

The Climate City Contract (CCC) model has proven less suitable for more advanced cities, particularly those in Western Europe that have long histories of climate action. Many of these cities have found it difficult to align their extensive activities and actions with the CCC template, given their strong focus on the implementation of climate measures. This highlights the need for a more flexible approach to accommodate the advanced status of such cities.

Internal coordination within the City Support Group (CSG) has been critical to the effective design and deployment of support. Given the limited resources—both in terms of time and staff—available to assist 20-35 Mission Cities in each CSG, strong internal coordination has been essential to optimise support delivery. However, **external coordination, particularly with staff members outside the CSGs** and in project management, has posed significant challenges and had a negative impact on the support provided. Ambiguities around the **availability of project managers (PMs)** for certain specialists, coupled with the absence of a centralised knowledge and document repository, have led to inefficient and uneven allocation of resources.

Some cities have received more support than others, while the distribution of cities across different CSGs, or among various City Advisors (CAs), has exacerbated these challenges. For instance, cities within the same country, which are subject to identical national policies, may not be grouped together in the same CSG, creating unnecessary complications. Additionally, mismatches between the languages spoken by the city support staff and the cities they are supporting have further hindered coordination.

Online support tends to be most effective when it has a clear target and timeline, such as a light-touch review process. When the scope of support is unclear, online engagements often become too generic and less effective. Conversely, when co-created and planned in advance, in-person support yields more successful outcomes. However, this type of support requires detailed follow-up to maintain momentum and ensure that agreed-upon commitments are upheld over time.

In challenging contexts and regions, partnerships with organisations and institutions that have greater experience on the ground have been vital to sustaining engagement and achieving progress. **Collaboration with local and regional partners** has helped overcome obstacles and ensured that Mission Cities in these areas remain committed to their climate action goals.



Several Mission Cities have experienced **political changes** since the start of the Mission, with some undergoing leadership transitions following elections. Despite these shifts, there have been several good practices that have helped maintain city engagement: exercising patience until the new leadership is in place, meeting with the new team in person when possible, and adjusting the narrative to align with the new political landscape.

There is also a need to improve the **approach to peer-to-peer support**. While a few joint workshops involving multiple Mission Cities have been organised, there remains room for improvement in defining the scope and structure of this support.

Finally, it is crucial to **establish clear parameters for the ongoing support within the CSGs**, particularly for cities that have already submitted their Climate City Contracts and are awaiting the outcome of the Mission Label evaluation. Clear guidance and next steps will help maintain engagement and momentum during this interim period.

6 Annex 2

The following annexe presents success stories from various cities across different City Support Groups (CSGs). These examples highlight key achievements and lessons learned, illustrating the value of cross-CSG collaboration and showcasing effective strategies implemented throughout the Mission.

6.1 Mission to Eastern Europe: strengthening the climate ambition in Gabrovo and Sofia

Local elections were held in Bulgaria in October 2023, just after the creation of City Support Groups, which paused communications for a few weeks. The CSG team was eventually introduced to the Mayor of Gabrovo and the Transition team between October and December 2023. Gabrovo was willing to submit in W3, but the City Advisor advised against it, given that they had not started developing their CCC. It took longer to re-establish contact with Sofia due to the ongoing political instability and a newly elected Mayor.

Patrick Child visited Bulgaria at the beginning of February 2024 to meet the new administration in Sofia and support the Mission mandate. A CSG Mission to Bulgaria was organised later in February which focused on different areas relevant to the CCC preparation (transition teams, emissions inventory, collaborating across sectors, stakeholder mapping and project planning). Presentations, workshops and informal discussions took place to address the city's needs. Getting to know the city teams, listening to their needs, and learning more about their challenges was very important. The team explained the process to develop the CCC step by step, helped them plan tasks, and effectively engage resources to submit by the last window of submission. The city teams had the chance to ask questions and discuss issues that were problematic for them, which also contributed to consolidating the teams. Undoubtedly, this visit was a breakthrough in our work with the cities, to build very good relationships with the local teams and gain their trust. This was particularly significant in the case of Sofia, which had been inactive for a long time. As a result, the work with the cities on CCC became much more effective, and the cities gained momentum.

The visit was followed by regular online check-ins with both cities, city specialists (DemSoc and DML) as well as with other partners working with Bulgarian municipalities such as Energy Cities and EnEffect which have vast experience in the region. The Demsoc Specialist also provided a coaching session on stakeholder mapping exercises to Sofia's transition team. Both cities shared their CCC drafts to achieve an 80% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030 in August 2024. The review team provided feedback on



the Action Plan and commitments and Investment Plan coaching. Both cities have thus received extensive in-person and online support from the city support group and other specialists from the consortium. As a result, both cities successfully submitted their CCCs in W4.



Figure 2 - Mission Team visit to Gabrovo and Sofia

6.2 Valladolid: an ambitious medium size city in Spain

Since the city of Valladolid has been awarded with the Mission Label, many things have happened. The city, through the Agencia de Innovación y Desarrollo Económico de Valladolid, is putting in place a bold governance system to break internal silos and to implement key projects in a very agile way.

The new political team that resulted from the local elections held in May 2023 has strengthened the local transition team. The success of Valladolid's climate neutrality is directed linked with the involvement of the private sector, responsible for 90% of the CO₂ emissions (baseline). There is a very relevant automotive industry with 3 big industrial players (Renault, Iveco and Michelin) and hundreds of small to medium-sized businesses in their supply chains are key contributors. The municipality is organising every year a call for SMEs to support financially and technically in the development of decarbonisation plans, and hence engaging them in the journey toward climate neutrality by 2030.

The narrative of Valladolid in this Mission targets the private sector and on how this territory can leverage on the Mission to become more attractive and create more jobs. That was exactly what the Mayor of Valladolid explained to the city advisor, during his visit to the city on November 20th and 21st 2023.

Valladolid's ambition is evident in its dedication and progress with the CCCH and EIB, centred around five main pillars:

1. **Residential Building Renovation:** In partnership with the EIB, the municipality aims to establish one-stop shops for home renovation services across the city.
2. **District Heating and Cooling (DHC) Network:** Funded by an EIB loan, the Castilla-León region is constructing a biomass-fuelled DHC network to serve the entire area.
3. **Renewable Energy Communities:** With support from the CCCH, Valladolid plans to enhance decentralised renewable energy production, starting with municipal buildings and later involving the residential sector.
4. **Mobility:** Through the national platform citiES2030, Valladolid will receive EIB advisory services to develop slow EV charging stations and collaborate with the CCCH on sustainable mobility plans for industrial areas.
5. **Regeneration of the Pisuerga River:** The city is working with the EIB and CCCH to improve the quality and liveability of this vital green asset.

Additionally, Valladolid is investing in communication efforts, including a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Real Valladolid Football Club to enhance local stakeholder engagement with the city's CCC initiative.





Figure 3 - Meeting the Mayor and representatives from the private sector

6.3 NEUTRON/KOZANI Pilot Project Update

NEUTRON is part of the first cohort of pilot cities, having received support from the DemSoc specialist, City Advisor, and other consortium experts during its implementation. The pilot has made notable progress in researching complex renewable alternatives to its lignite coal-powered district heating system. Successfully coordinating with multiple partners and analysing diverse data sets has been a significant achievement. However, governance and political challenges at both local and national levels may hinder the pilot's success. Engaging farmers and residents is essential to remove barriers and build acceptance for proposed changes while connecting pilot results with CCC actions on district heating remains crucial.

In July 2024, a mission to Greece was organised to further discuss pilot support and implementation next steps. The team, including the City Advisor, DemSoc Specialist, DML Specialist, and an additional DML NZC staff member, facilitated a three-day program, with two days in Ioannina. Discussions with Kozani focused on systemic challenges, prioritising needs, and addressing climate priorities. The team examined the CCC action plan, exploring barriers and potential support areas across the energy, buildings, and transport sectors. A joint session with Ioannina and Trikala fostered collective sense-making, project presentations, and knowledge sharing.

The mission aimed to address the implementation of CCC after receiving the Mission Label, focusing on the team's tasks and planning. Understanding the barriers and needs related to project implementation was vital, as was discussing the scope of pilot projects and challenges faced by city teams. Overall, the visit was a significant step in building relationships with the cities and identifying areas needing support from the NZC.



Figure 4 - Joint session in Kozani with the Kozani, Ioannina and Trikala teams

6.4 Supporting a city in Ukraine (Rivne)

Despite not being a Mission city, Rivne has received substantial support after joining the inaugural cohort of the Pilot City Programme. The consortium specialists and the CA's team have maintained regular meetings, offering various forms of assistance, including knowledge exchanges with Mission cities and guidance during the CESF application process. Earlier in 2024, specialists from DemSoc and VTT organised a meeting to provide technical advice.

The CSG members have also collaborated with organisations and projects experienced in on-the-ground initiatives, such as SUN4Ukraine, U_CAN, Vid Sertsya Budova, and CKIC.

The Rivne team also participated in a Reuters documentary focused on the pilot project, highlighting climate action efforts and the support provided by CKIC and NetZeroCities. Amidst the challenges posed by war, Rivne, Ukraine, joined the EU Mission project NetZeroCities to realise its ambition for a greener future. (reuters.com). The CA also contributed to the film. Furthermore, Rivne is receiving support from CKIC, aided by CAs, through a pilot initiative called the Climate Leadership Academy, which aims to strengthen the capacities of 25 city leaders in adopting a systemic approach to climate issues. This autumn, a series of online workshops organised by South Pole will assist Rivne in exploring carbon markets and funding for energy systems.

6.5 Limassol, Cyprus: Collaboration Between Mission Work and Pilot City Program

Limassol is experiencing significant urban and demographic growth. Its pilot project focuses on intervening in three municipal buildings—a school, a residential building, and a community centre—by implementing new techniques to reduce temperatures.

During the visit in April, as part of the Twinning Learning Program, we toured the neighbourhood where these interventions will take place and met with the experts advising the city, including Professor Mat Santamouris. He delivered a masterclass on the link between mental health and climate change, highlighting how heat islands, such as those in Cyprus, can pose public health challenges.

The City Advisor, who has visited also participated in this visit, providing an opportunity to strengthen collaborative efforts and enhance the city's climate action strategies. Overall, the visit underscored the

importance of integrating urban development with sustainable practices to address the impacts of climate change effectively.



Figure 5 - In site visit to Limassol with representatives from Viladecans (Spain) and Lorqui (Murcia)

6.6 Climate Action and Community Engagement in Istanbul

The in-person workshop in Istanbul focused on climate protection and development, highlighting the city's commitment to achieving climate neutrality. Key discussions covered strategies for energy production through waste management, adaptation tactics, multi-level governance challenges, and the vital role of stakeholder engagement. One significant aspect of the workshop was the session dedicated to "How to Build a Narrative," where participants explored how effective storytelling can galvanise community support for climate initiatives. The overarching narrative proposed was that "the climate transition could be possible, fuelled by a shared vision, driven by a diverse city through their local communities." This narrative serves as a foundational element for engaging citizens and stakeholders alike.

Participants emphasised the importance of young climate activists in advocating for local initiatives, as they actively engage with the municipality and participate in events. Discussions also highlighted the ongoing initiative titled "Just, Green and Creative Istanbul," which reflects the city's journey toward climate neutrality. However, challenges in coordinating efforts among the seven established themes were identified, particularly regarding collaboration with the private sector. While there have been limited interactions with private stakeholders, especially in the industrial sector, the need to establish a dedicated group for these discussions was recognised as crucial for future progress.

To enhance stakeholder engagement, the workshop focused on practical strategies for effective collaboration. Participants discussed finding incentives for business owners to contribute to climate action discussions and emphasised shaping existing actions rather than introducing new initiatives. Demonstrating tangible value for stakeholders and identifying positive deviants—individuals dedicated to fostering new behaviours—were seen as critical steps in building a supportive climate action community. The iterative approach to co-design was also highlighted, recognising the need for time and ongoing dialogue to effectively implement the Climate Action Plan.

Finally, the workshop underscored the importance of clear communication and the role of the Mayor and internal departments in championing the Climate Action Plan. By evidencing the value of these initiatives

for their work, departments can reflect this commitment in their budgets. Empowering the Environmental Protection Department to take a leading role in climate advocacy and leveraging existing resources, such as living labs and collaborations with organisations like the Marmara Municipalities Union, can significantly enhance the city's climate efforts. Ultimately, the workshop aimed to foster a collaborative spirit and a shared narrative that inspires collective action toward a greener future for Istanbul.

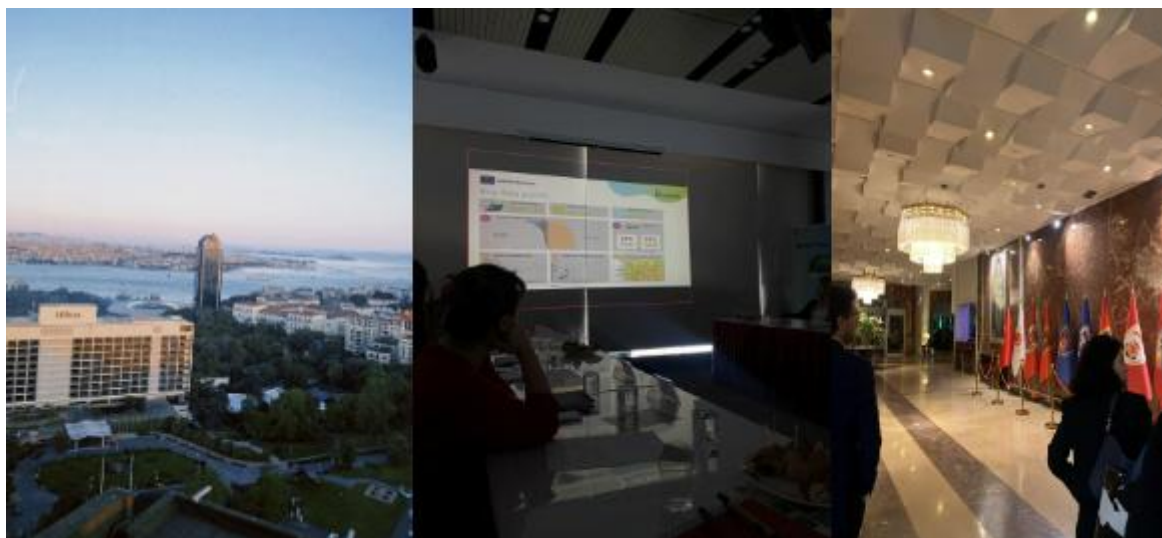


Figure 6 - Mission team visit to Istanbul after local elections to work on the CCC, citizen engagement and how to build a narrative

6.7 Mission Team Visit to Sarajevo: Key Milestones in the Net Zero Journey

The launch of the Net Zero Citizen Assembly Process represents the first Climate Assembly not only in Sarajevo but also in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entire Western Balkan region. This initiative sets a precedent for citizen engagement in climate action across the area.

Citizen engagement is at the heart of the journey to climate neutrality. By prioritising the needs and voices of the people, Sarajevo is building a resilient, cohesive community ready to tackle climate challenges together. This inspiring city is starting its journey to climate neutrality from the ground up, ensuring every citizen plays a vital role in shaping our collective future. This will be the foundation of participatory democracy, boosting transparency and accountability in governance while addressing climate change and sustainable solutions.

In collaboration with DemNet, a Regional Training on Citizen Assemblies was held, providing valuable insights into the societal benefits of these assemblies and generating excitement for the upcoming initiatives. Colleagues from Podgorica and Elbasan joined this effort, highlighting the importance of shared knowledge among the three cities participating in the EU Net Zero Mission.

Productive meetings took place with city advisor Deniz Celik and Fontana Valenti Carlotta, facilitating discussions on the next steps for climate action. The framework provider consortium, led by NTU International and ENOVA, also provided essential technical expertise for advancing the City Climate Contract.

Sarajevo was honoured with the Flag of Honor Award from the Council of Europe, affirming its commitment to European values. The ongoing support from the Cantonal Net Zero Working Group reinforces the collaborative efforts towards achieving a Net Zero City, Country, and Region.





Figure 7 - Launch of the first Citizen Assembly in Sarajevo

6.8 National Collaboration: Danish Climate Alliance (*Klimaalliancen*)

In Denmark, The Climate Alliance (*Klimaalliancen*) is the national entity working with Danish municipalities, as all 98 Danish municipalities have some kind of climate plan. The Climate Alliance is a partnership of the five Danish Regions, Local Government Denmark, the philanthropic organisation Realdania and the green think tank Concito. Thus, so far, the alliance has no governmental involvement or support.

NetZeroCities is having close contact with The Climate Alliance and are looking for synergies as the alliance is also having implementation of the municipalities' climate plans as one of their responsibilities. Until now, the attempt to involve ministries and other relevant government institutions has been futile, but signs are showing for a more dialogue-oriented future between the Danish cities, their organisations and the government, but as the existing Danish government has somewhat scaled down the climate actions in general, there is currently not much responsiveness of enhanced and orchestrated collaboration, but new initiatives are on the way from NetZeroCities' and The climate Alliance's side to change this in the future.

6.9 NetZeroCitiesEU City Advisors Visit to Košice: Strengthening Climate Action and Stakeholder Collaboration

In November, the NetZeroCitiesEU City Advisors visited the Slovakian Mission Cities of Košice and Bratislava. The in-person gathering took place in Košice, a former European Capital of Culture, which leverages its rich cultural legacy to advance its climate initiatives through innovative partnerships and civic engagement.

The visit included meetings with the Košice mission team and key partners, such as Creative Industry Košice (CIKE), which will host one of the EIT Culture & Creativity co-location centers, and the newly established Business Košice, dedicated to enhancing private sector engagement in the city's climate initiatives. Site visits highlighted impactful local projects, including a tactical urbanism initiative that transformed a busy roundabout into a safer space, and ETP Slovensko, which addresses energy poverty and housing issues within the Roma community.

The following day, the advisors met with the Bratislava climate team and representatives from CapaCITIES to discuss the common challenges faced by Slovakian cities, particularly in the area of transport solutions. This was followed by a visit to a former cemetery being transformed into an urban park, showcasing the city's commitment to green space development.



On the final day, a regional roundtable was held with representatives from Košice, Bratislava, Miskolc, and Rzeszów, fostering dialogue on stakeholder collaboration and agreeing to maintain regular exchanges. The visit concluded with two energy-related site visits: a newly renovated kindergarten and an Olympic-standard swimming center undergoing energy-efficient renovations, set for completion by 2026.

This visit exemplified Košice's dedication to climate neutrality, marked by strong partnerships, community involvement, and a commitment to long-term sustainability.

6.10 Investment Roundtable in Espoo: Driving Climate Action through Investment Collaboration

The first NetZeroCities Investment Roundtable in Espoo, Finland, marked a significant milestone for the Finnish Mission Cities. Organised by NetZeroCities, alongside the city advisor and CSG finance specialist, the roundtable brought together cities, investors, and financial institutions to explore innovative approaches to directing capital towards climate action.

As part of the EU Mission Cities initiative, European cities are striving for climate neutrality by developing Climate City Contracts. However, funding gaps remain a substantial barrier to implementing these ambitious climate plans. The roundtable served as a vital platform for cities to articulate their investment needs and for investors to present strategies aimed at bridging these funding challenges.

Throughout the day, discussions between city representatives and financial stakeholders focused on identifying new collaboration opportunities, reflecting on specific financing challenges faced by cities, and exploring sustainable investment models. The event underscored the importance of aligning financial strategies with climate goals to accelerate the green transition.

A day earlier, on May 28th, the Finnish Mission Label event took place in Espoo. This event recognised the five Finnish Mission Cities—Espoo, Tampere, Turku, Lappeenranta, and Lahti—for their commitment to achieving climate neutrality, as demonstrated by their awarding of the EU Mission Label. These cities were celebrated for their dedicated climate plans and their role in advancing the EU's green transition.

The day featured various sessions with key figures, including Patrick Child, city finance specialist, and climate advisors, discussing the importance of collaboration between cities and stakeholders at all levels. This two-day engagement highlighted Finland's dedication to climate action, particularly in fostering financial partnerships to support long-term sustainability goals.

The event initiated a critical dialogue between cities and investors to address funding gaps in climate action plans, emphasised the profitability of the green transition and its potential for collaboration beyond political boundaries, highlighted the need for a common language between cities and financial institutions to drive climate investment, and underscored the importance of continued collaboration and innovation in financing mechanisms to ensure the success of climate-neutral cities.

