



NET ZERO CITIES SGA-NZC

Proceedings of the 2024 NZC Conference

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Abbreviations and acronyms

Acronym	Description
WP	Work Package
CCC	Climate City Contract
NZC	NetZeroCities
EC	European Commission
EIB	European Investment Bank

Summary

The third edition of the Cities Mission Conference, Empowering Cities – The Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission in Action, took place on 25–26 June 2024 in Valencia, Spain. The conference gathered over 450 participants, including Mission Cities, national governments, EU institutions, investors, and stakeholders. Organised by NetZeroCities and the European Commission, the conference was held within the framework of Valencia Cities Climate Week, the flagship event of Valencia's EU Green Capital 2024 celebrations. Key outcomes included the launch of the Climate City Capital Hub and the awarding of the EU Mission Label to over 30 cities.

Keywords

Conference, cities, climate neutrality, collaboration, finance

Introduction

The 2024 edition of the Cities Mission Conference, titled ***Empowering Cities – The Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission in Action***, took place on 25–26 June 2024 in Valencia, Spain. This third edition of the conference was another key moment in the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, bringing together over 450 participants, including political leaders, city practitioners, national governments, EU institutions, investors, and mission stakeholders.

The conference served as a platform for learning, collaboration, and capacity building, offering cities the opportunity to reflect on their progress toward climate neutrality, accelerate the implementation of Climate City Contracts (CCCs), and strengthen partnerships at all levels of governance. A key focus was placed on unlocking finance for cities' climate-neutrality efforts, deepening peer learning, and promoting multi-level governance approaches through national platforms.

Organised by NetZeroCities and the European Commission, the conference was held in the framework of Valencia Cities Climate Week, the flagship event of Valencia's EU Green Capital 2024 programme. This broader context provided unique synergies with other events such as the European Urban Resilience Forum (EURESFO) and Energy Cities' Annual Forum, fostering dialogue and collective action for sustainable and climate-resilient urban futures.

The 2024 conference marked an important milestone for the Cities Mission, with preparations underway to transition from CCC design to the implementation phase. Notably, more than 30 cities were awarded the EU Mission Label at the conference, recognising their commitment and progress towards climate neutrality. Additionally, the launch of the Climate City Capital Hub was announced, aimed at mobilising investments and accelerating project financing for Mission Cities.



Figure 1 Attendees at the Cities Mission Conference

1 Conference overview

1.1 Date and Venue

The 2024 Cities Mission Conference took place on 25–26 June 2024 in Valencia, Spain. The event was hosted at the Palau de la Música, a landmark venue in the city, providing an inspiring setting for the two-day programme.



Figure 2 Conference venue

1.2 Participants

More than 450 participants attended on day one, with a total of **489** registered for the Cities Mission Conference. On day two, when the event overlapped with the European Urban Resilience Forum and Energy Cities' Annual Forum, **over 750** participants were present at the Palau de la Música.

Representation from **94 of the 112 Mission Cities** ensured a strong presence from local political leaders and city teams. Of these cities, 28 were represented as speakers in the programme (for full list see annex 8). Participants also included national and regional government representatives, EU institutions, financial organisations, private sector actors, and civil society stakeholders.

1.3 Organisers and Partners

The conference was organised by NetZeroCities and the European Commission, in partnership with Valencia City Council. It was the central event of Valencia Cities Climate Week, the flagship event of Valencia's EU Green Capital 2024 celebrations. The conference aligned with other key events of the week, including the European Urban Resilience Forum (EURESFO) and Energy Cities' Annual Forum, fostering synergies across initiatives focused on both climate adaptation and mitigation.



Figure 3 Valencia Green Capital green wall

2 Programme Highlights

The conference programme was structured over two days with 23 sessions. Day one focused on practitioners, providing space for technical discussions, peer learning, and capacity building to support the delivery of CCCs. Day two brought together political representatives and high-level stakeholders to explore governance, leadership, and financing strategies essential for implementing the Mission's objectives.

2.1 Day One – Practitioner Focus and Peer Learning

2.1.1 Day One – Morning Plenaries

2.1.1.1 Opening Session

Speakers:

- **Patrick Child**, Deputy Director-General, DG RTD & Mission Manager for 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission
- **María José Catalá**, Mayor of Valencia

The opening session welcomed over 450 participants to Valencia, marking the start of the Cities Mission Conference within the Valencia Cities Climate Week. Both speakers emphasised the critical role of Mission Cities in leading the green transition and delivering climate neutrality in partnership with citizens. They also highlighted Valencia's sustainability initiatives and the need for multi-level collaboration to secure the funding and political support necessary for cities to succeed.

2.1.1.2 Keynote Panel: City Leadership in Achieving Climate Neutrality: Progress, Challenges, and Innovation

This keynote panel explored how cities are driving climate action while addressing social inclusion and economic development. Speakers highlighted the importance of citizen engagement, multi-level governance, and innovative financing models to achieve climate neutrality. A shared call emerged for

stronger political recognition of cities at the EU level, and for maintaining the momentum of the Green Deal as a cornerstone of Europe's climate future.

Speakers:

- **Filipe Araújo**, Deputy Mayor of Porto
- **Dagur B. Eggertsson**, Deputy Mayor of Reykjavík
- **Pau Solanilla**, Commissioner, Barcelona
- **Eline Vigre**, Advisor, Stavanger
- **André Sobczak**, Secretary General, Eurocities (**Moderator**)

Speaker Highlights:

- **André Sobczak** highlighted that 92% of mayors in the Eurocities' Mayors Pulse survey view climate action as their top priority, reinforcing the central role cities play in driving the green transition. He emphasised the importance of linking climate action with social inclusion and housing, and noted the Mission's potential to strengthen multi-level governance frameworks.
- **Dagur Eggertsson** underscored that cities are where climate success or failure will occur, pointing to waste management and transport as key sectors for Reykjavík. He emphasised the role of Mission Cities as a community for shared learning, and stressed the political momentum that arises when citizens and business partners are engaged.
- **Eline Vigre** shared Stavanger's view that achieving climate neutrality relies on cumulative small actions, not silver bullets. She highlighted Norway's City Growth Agreements as a model for integrated multi-level governance, and stressed the importance of cross-border collaboration, trust, and patience.
- **Pau Solanilla** argued that the climate transition needs a compelling narrative of opportunity, not sacrifice. He shared Barcelona's innovative funding approaches, such as using the tourist tax for climate shelters, and called for stronger political representation for cities within EU governance structures.
- **Filipe Araújo** presented Porto's inclusive climate strategies, including public transport incentives, solar energy support, and citizen-led climate pacts. He underlined the need for continued private sector involvement and voiced strong support for the Green Deal and for using CCCs to shape future investment priorities.



Figure 4 Keynote panel speakers

2.1.2 Day One – Morning Breakouts

2.1.2.1 Thematic Peer-to-Peer Exchange Sessions

These sessions facilitated knowledge-sharing among Mission Cities and Cities Mission projects addressing common challenges such as stakeholder engagement, data management, and financing sustainable urban development. The discussions focused on practical aspects and collaborative strategies for the effective implementation of CCCs.

During these sessions, cities participated in peer exchange workshops on four thematic areas:

- Positive Energy Districts
- Mobility
- Adaptation & Nature
- Urban Design & Planning

Topic	City speakers	Project represented
Positive Energy Districts	Stockholm	ASCEND
	Dresden	Neutralpath
Mobility (Just Transition)	Munich	metaCCAZE
	Sofia	CLIMABOROUGH
Adaptation & Nature	Lappeenranta	ReGreenation
	Barcelona	GreenIn Cities
Urban Design / Urban planning	Thessaloniki	UP2030
	Torino	CLIMABOROUGH

Table 1 Cities and projects participating in P2P exchanges

2.1.3 Day One – Afternoon Breakouts

2.1.3.1 CCC Lab

This session was for the 50+ Mission Cities aiming to submit their CCCs in September 2024. It provided cities with practical insights and peer exchange on the evolving process of preparing and submitting CCCs. Introduced by Marina Littek (ICLEI), the CCC was described as each city's "transition narrative"

– a strategic tool for aligning local ambition with the goals of the Mission and communicating that story externally. The session also addressed common concerns, such as local political approval processes, which vary across cities.

The session was organised into three parts:

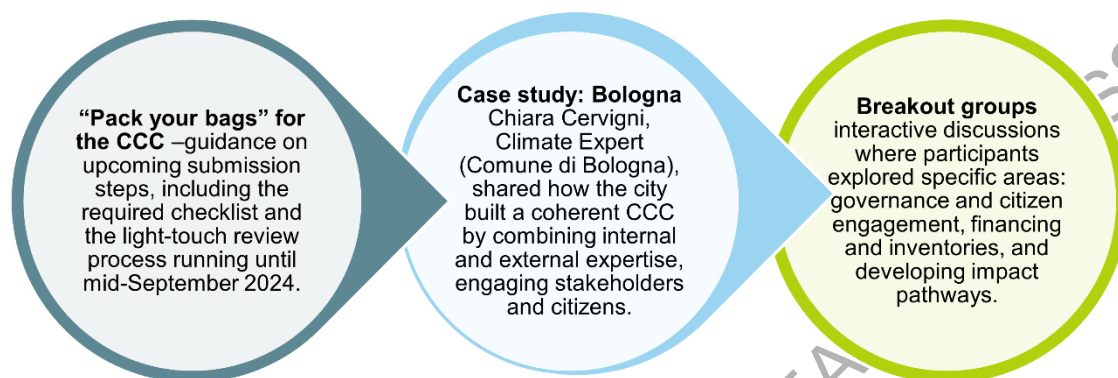


Figure 5 CCC Lab Breakdown

Breakout group summaries:

- **Inventories and Impact Pathways (led by ICLEI, with the city of Miskolc)**

Cities discussed the complexity of estimating the impact of actions due to variable contexts and limited data, particularly for behavioural change. While some cities follow the provided template, others have developed more detailed, locally relevant approaches. The discussion emphasised the need to align datasets across city, regional, and national levels while maintaining flexibility. Cities also highlighted the importance of incorporating co-benefits like health and wellbeing as part of a more systemic, people-centred approach.

- **Governance, Democracy and Social Innovation (led by Dark Matter Labs & Democratic Society, with the cities of Milan and Bologna)**

This group explored democratic participation and innovation in CCC processes. Milan's deep-sampling approach to citizen input raised questions about meaningful representation, noting that engagement often attracts the same demographic groups. Participants reflected on whether representation is always required to justify action, and discussed the need to simplify participatory processes while managing expectations.

Key takeaways included using cities as platforms for impact, innovation as an ongoing mindset beyond electoral cycles, and fostering trust through interactive feedback loops between government and citizens.

- **Investment Planning (led by Bankers Without Boundaries, with the city of Bristol)**

In this breakout, the discussion focused on translating CCC ambitions into investable projects. Bristol shared its experience in aligning funding strategies with climate objectives, stressing the need for blended finance, stakeholder coordination, and early engagement with investors.



Figure 6 CCC Lab in action

Overall, the lab reinforced that the CCC is a critical but evolving tool – and that the submission in September 2024 is not a final destination, but a foundation for ongoing delivery and learning.

2.1.3.2 Policy Lab: Built Environment

This session focused on the critical role of building renovation in achieving climate neutrality and the importance of aligning local action with national and EU-level policy.

Speakers:

- **Alejandro Alonso**, European Project Officer, Valencia
- **Ramon Canal Oliveras**, Barcelona City Council
- **Yann Françoise**, Deputy Head of Climate and Ecological Transition Directorate, Paris
- **Pau García Audi**, Policy Officer, DG ENER, European Commission
- **Meline González Piloyan**, Project Coordinator, NetZeroCities, Eurocities
- **Andrzej Łazęcki**, Director of the Department of Municipal Economy and Climate, Kraków
- **Clara Lorente Martin**, CIRCE (Centro Tecnológico en I+D+i), Zaragoza
- **Stefania Mascolo**, Project Coordinator, NEUTRALPATH, Eurocities
- **Eugenia Mansutti**, Senior Project & Policy Coordinator, NetZeroCities, Eurocities
- **Itxaso Molinero**, Project Coordinator, Vitoria-Gasteiz
- **Iztok Mori**, Head of Municipality Administration, Velenje
- **Anh Minh Vu**, European Project Coordinator, Dresden

To start, Pau García Audi (DG ENER, European Commission), set the context. While EU legislation provides a strong framework, Member States (MS) have flexibility in how they implement and incentivise renovation efforts, creating disparities and challenges for cities working under different national systems.

Following this context setting, a series of city presentations showcased real-life experiences and highlighted persistent barriers:

- **Dresden & Zaragoza (Neutralpath project):** Both cities highlighted the difficulty of implementing district-scale energy retrofits in socially vulnerable areas, due to fragmented building ownership, long procurement processes, and political challenges.
- **Barcelona, Valencia & Vitoria-Gasteiz (Urbanew project):** Shared experience from one-stop-shops for building renovation, noting the aging building stock and slow renovation rates. Trust-building, clear models (public/private/hybrid), and skilled renovation managers were cited as key for scaling up.
- **Velenje:** Demonstrated success in energy renovation through phased work and direct citizen engagement, supported by a Climate and Energy Office and public subsidies.
- **Krakow (NEEST project):** Introduced digital twins for energy planning, while raising concerns about data protection and citizen trust.
- **Paris:** Focused on challenges in accelerating private-sector renovation, particularly for non-residential buildings, and the role of fiscal policy in incentivisation.

Following these presentations, participants split into breakout tables to explore thematic issues raised by the cities and to discuss these questions:

From the presentation on EU policy framework, what could be an interesting opportunity for your city and what is still missing to support your city climate efforts further?

How can the implementation of these EU policies at local level successfully solve the challenge?

Breakout discussion takeaways:

- **One-stop-shops:** There is a need for EU-level guidance and a taxonomy of models already in use. Participants debated the balance between scaling up and maintaining local trust and proximity.
- **Data & Standards:** Cities called for harmonised open-data standards and clearer national support for data sharing, especially regarding building stock.
- **Public-Private Coordination:** Suggestions included partnerships with chambers of commerce and targeted financial mechanisms to stimulate private investment in renovation.
- **Governance Gaps:** Participants stressed the importance of brave political leadership, proximity to citizens, and more robust frameworks for aligning EU and national regulations with local realities.

This Policy Lab made clear that while buildings are central to the climate transition, renovation efforts remain fragmented and underfunded in many contexts. Cities are eager to scale up successful models, but face recurring governance, financial, and technical hurdles. Participants agreed on the need for stronger multi-level coordination, improved regulatory clarity, and citizen-centred approaches to unlock the full potential of the built environment.

A key output of this session was a policy brief on the built environment, developed by Mission Cities and addressed to EU and national decision-makers. This brief presents concrete recommendations to support cities in overcoming systemic barriers and scaling effective renovation strategies. It forms part of a broader series of five policy briefs developed in the framework of the EU Cities Mission, which also cover circular economy, nature-based solutions, finance and investment.

The brief is available on the NetZeroCities website and on the Portal Knowledge Repository:
<https://netzerocities.app/resource-4539>

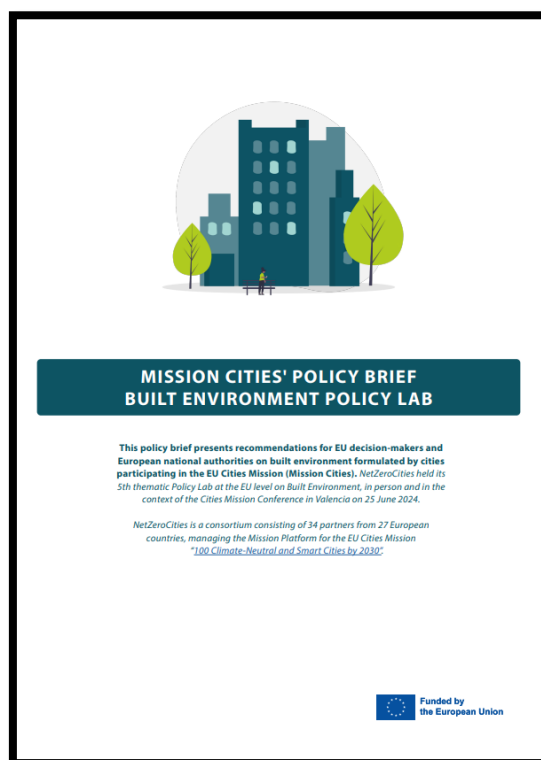


Figure 7 Built Environment Policy Brief - output of Policy Lab session

2.1.3.3 City panel: Climate City Contracts as Instruments of Governance & Facilitating Access to Finance

This city panel explored how Climate City Contracts (CCCs) are being used to align local efforts with European and national programmes. It focused on improving coordination, mobilising funding, and embedding climate action across governance systems. The session provided concrete city examples of how CCCs are fostering internal transformation and external alignment.

Speakers:

- **Mar Jiménez**, Senior Coordinator, Eurocities (moderator)
- **Silvia Gugu**, Senior Governance Expert, ICLEI (moderator)
- **Dr. Katalin Döbrönte**, Management Consultant, Pécs
- **Ioannis Fallas**, Director Cluster of Biodiversity and Environment, Kozani
- **Kristine Hess-Akens**, Project Manager, Aachen
- **Niina Nousjärvi**, Development Manager, Espo



Figure 8 CCCs as instruments of governance panel

Using CCCs to Unlock Funding Opportunities

- Aachen used the CCC process to clarify financial strategy, supporting the rollout of climate budgeting and improving access to targeted funding streams.
- Pécs reported improved capacity to apply systematically for EU funds and highlighted growing interest from private actors as a result.
- Kozani accessed the Just Transition Fund by establishing a flexible stakeholder group to coordinate and scale action beyond municipal limits.

Building Internal Capacity and Engaging Stakeholders

- Kozani formed informal yet strategic working groups to overcome internal limitations and foster shared ownership.
- Pécs leveraged an existing urban development agency to integrate technical, project management, and communication functions.
- Espoo partnered with 25 organisations and will launch a new citizen engagement and organisational development effort starting in September 2024.

Strengthening Governance and Cross-Departmental Coordination

- Aachen restructured its internal governance using retreats and campaigns supported by consultants.
- Espoo developed a dedicated Climate City Platform with five thematic working groups.
- All speakers agreed that CCCs had provided much-needed clarity and cohesion—structuring existing efforts rather than completely overhauling governance.

Lessons for Effective CCC Implementation

Participants identified four key ingredients for a successful CCC approach:



Figure 9 Key ingredients for a successful CCC approach

2.1.3.4 Challenge Workshops

The Challenge Workshops provided a collaborative peer-learning format in which Pilot Cities presented a real challenge from their climate neutrality journey and invited feedback, ideas, and inspiration from fellow cities and experts. Each presenting city ('Challenge Owner') introduced the context, goals, and barriers tied to their Pilot City Programme and facilitated a structured discussion around potential approaches to overcoming their challenge.

This dynamic format was designed to foster honest reflection, build community, and deepen collective problem-solving among Mission Cities.

Cities Presenting (Challenge Owners):

- **Spanish Cities** – Advancing Multi-City and Multi-Stakeholder Governance
- **Galway** – Accelerating Individual Action for City-Wide Decarbonisation
- **Lund** – Measuring Success in Climate Project Portfolios
- **Turku** – Maximizing the Potential of Climate City Contract Partners

Session Outcomes:

- Cross-pollination of strategies and peer-driven suggestions tailored to the presenting cities' challenges.
- Strengthened relationships between Pilot Cities and a deeper understanding of how different contexts shape common climate transition challenges.
- Many cities noted the value of hearing how others are overcoming similar roadblocks and left with new contacts for future bilateral exchanges.



Figure 10 Challenge workshops in action

2.1.3.5 Making the Mission Label Work for your City

This panel explored how cities are leveraging the **Mission Label** to strengthen local engagement, communicate ambition, and drive systemic change. The panel featured contributions from Mission Cities that have already received the Label, highlighting both opportunities and challenges in turning recognition into impact.

Speakers:

- **Wolfgang Hafner**, Coordinator of the Smart City Strategy and Mobility Officer, Klagenfurt
- **Agnes Schönfelder**, Climate City Advisor and City Coordinator for the EU Mission/EU Green Deal, Mannheim
- **Aino Kulonen**, Environmental Coordinator, Lahti
- **Thomas Osdoba**, Programme Director at NetZeroCities, Climate-KIC (moderator)
- **Philippe Froissard**, Head of Unit - DG RTD, European Commission

Speaker highlights:

- **Mannheim** presented a creative local narrative by aligning the Mission Label with their own “iDEAL for Mannheim” and “StronGER” branding. They stressed that the label is not just for cities, but for citizens, NGOs, and businesses working toward shared goals. Mannheim called for the Mission Label to unlock fast-lane support from regional, national, and EU levels.
- **Lahti** shared how media attention was initially low until they launched a large-scale public event to showcase efforts and bring national actors and private sector partners on board. They now view the Mission as a framework for collaborative climate action beyond the municipality.
- **Klagenfurt** detailed efforts to apply the label visibly to services like bike sharing and reusable event cups, while recognising that visibility remains limited. They emphasised the label's value as a certification of progress and expressed a need for simplified communication and stronger financial support.

- **Philippe Froissard** reaffirmed that the Label is awarded based on the quality and credibility of Climate City Contracts. It's intended to validate the commitment of cities and their stakeholders, not as a symbolic charter but as a basis for serious investment planning. He underscored that cities themselves raise the Label's value by leading through action.
- **Thomas Osdoba** framed the Label as a tool for value creation – not a reward but an instrument for cities to use strategically with their stakeholders. He noted that while strong examples are emerging, the greatest impacts of the Mission Label are still to come.

The discussion made clear that the **Mission Label's value is defined by how cities activate it**. Cities are using it as a vehicle to build cross-sector alliances, secure media visibility, inspire community engagement, and align internal governance structures. However, challenges remain around public recognition, resource constraints, and alignment across government levels. The panellists agreed that the label is not a static badge, but a dynamic opportunity, requiring continuous communication and strategic deployment to unlock its full potential.

2.2 Day Two – Political Dialogue and Shared Programming

Day Two of the conference, held on 26 June, was the main shared day of Valencia Cities Climate Week, with the European Urban Resilience Forum (EURESFO) and the Energy Cities Annual Forum, bringing together city practitioners, political leaders, and stakeholders from across Europe. The day featured plenary sessions focused on high-level dialogue, alongside a diverse programme of thematic breakouts.

Details of the plenary sessions and Cities Mission Conference breakout sessions are provided in the following subsections.

2.2.1 Breakfast with Cities Mission Mayors

An exclusive session for mayors of Mission Cities and Mission Managers focused on reflecting on the Mission's progress and sharing leadership experiences. Discussions emphasised the need for high-level political commitment and the importance of peer exchange in navigating shared challenges.



Figure 11 High level attendees on day 2

2.2.2 Day two – morning plenaries

2.2.2.1 Joint Opening Plenary: The Role of Local and Regional Governments in Climate Neutrality and Adaptation

This high-level plenary brought together mayors and senior regional representatives from across Europe to discuss the central role of local and regional governments in achieving climate neutrality and advancing climate adaptation. The session marked the first joint gathering of participants from the Cities Mission Conference and EURESFO, underlining the importance of aligning mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Speakers:

- **Jevgeni Ossinovski**, Mayor of Tallinn
- **Nadezhda Bacheva**, Deputy Mayor of Sofia
- **Harriet Tiemes**, Regional Representative, Arnhem-Nijmegen Region
- **Mohamed Ridouani**, Mayor of Leuven
- **Eckart Würzner**, Mayor of Heidelberg
- **Rosalinde van der Vlies**, Deputy Mission Manager, 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, European Commission (moderator)

Panellists reflected on the increasing responsibility placed on cities and regions, not only as implementers but as strategic leaders in the climate transition. Several speakers highlighted the disconnect between local ambition and the limitations imposed by national-level frameworks or siloed governance systems, calling for a stronger direct relationship between cities and the EU.

The panel closed with a clear message: **local and regional governments are not only ready but already delivering climate solutions and require enabling frameworks at national and EU levels to accelerate their work.**



Figure 12 Visual summary of panel: *The Role of Local and Regional Governments in Climate Neutrality and Adaptation*

2.2.2.2 Panel: Unlocking Climate Finance for Urban Transformation

The session opened with a video message from **Nadia Calviño, President of the European Investment Bank (EIB)**, who congratulated the 33 cities that had secured the Mission Label. She announced that **€2 billion in dedicated financing has been earmarked by the EIB** to support the implementation of concrete climate projects in labelled cities. She highlighted that in 2023 alone, over €21 billion was invested by the EIB in sustainable urban development, and that this investment is not only about climate mitigation but also about social and territorial cohesion, ensuring that opportunity and investment reach all parts of Europe.

Speakers:

- **Patrick Child**, Deputy Director-General, DG RTD & Mission Manager for 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission (moderator)
- **Tereza Czerwińska**, Vice-President, European Investment Bank
- **Allison Lobb**, Director, Bankers without Boundaries
- **Mohamed Ridouani**, Mayor of Leuven
- **Jesús Julio Carnero**, Mayor of Valladolid
- **Fabien Perez**, Deputy Mayor, Marseille
- **Jaana Kiiski**, Member of the City Development Board, Lappeenranta
- **Matiss Paegle**, Investment Director, BaltCap Equity Fund



Figure 13 Finance Panel speakers

This session also marked the **official launch of the Climate City Capital Hub** and the announcement of a €2 billion EIB lending envelope for Mission Cities. Panelists discussed the need for blended finance models, investment-ready projects, and frameworks that align public and private sector financing.

The discussion reinforced that finance alone is not the bottleneck - the real challenge is moving from ideas to investment-ready projects. Cities consistently raised the need for technical and advisory

support, particularly in developing pipelines of mature projects and structuring blended finance packages that combine public and private funding.

Several speakers stressed that project bundling and portfolio approaches are essential to attract capital at scale. This also allows cities to balance climate impact with social goals, such as school retrofits or inclusive mobility infrastructure.

Cities highlighted the importance of stable policy frameworks and regulatory clarity to build investor confidence. The role of the Capital Hub was welcomed as a mechanism to bridge the gap between cities and financial institutions, helping both with matchmaking and capacity-building.

Finally, the session surfaced a strong message around the need for speed and flexibility. With only five years remaining in the Mission timeline, cities are looking for mechanisms that fast-track financing, simplify access to EU and national funds, and allow smaller cities with limited resources to participate meaningfully in the transition. The EIB's commitment to flexible framework loans and advisory services was a positive signal, but participants urged that these tools be deployed with urgency and simplicity.

Key takeaways

- Need for Speed: Project pipelines must accelerate to meet 2030 goals.
- Blended Finance: Public funds should be used to crowd-in private capital.
- Capacity Building: Cities, especially smaller ones, need advisory support.
- Flexibility & Bundling: Framework loans and packaging small projects help meet financing criteria.
- Governance & Guarantees: Strong leadership, stable regulation, and risk guarantees are critical.
- Mission Linkage: Emphasis on linking climate mitigation and adaptation (e.g. Valladolid's river project).
- Innovation in Financing: Creative structures like city funds, PPPs, and ambassador networks show promise.



Figure 14 Visual summary of panel: *Unlocking Climate Finance for Urban Transformation*

2.2.2.3 Panel: Leveraging Multi-Level Governance for Climate Action

The panel explored how collaboration between national, regional, and local governments can advance climate action and support Mission Cities in achieving their goals. National platforms are becoming critical enablers.

Speakers:

- **Lina Liakou**, Global Director of City Engagement & Practice, Resilient Cities Network (Co-Moderator)
- **Holger Robrecht**, Deputy Regional Director for Europe, ICLEI Europe (Co-Moderator)
- **Maider Etxebarria**, Mayor of Vitoria-Gasteiz
- **Elina Rantanen**, Deputy Mayor of Turku
- **Elina Bardram**, Director for Adaptation & Resilience, Communication and Civil Society Relations, DG CLIMA & Mission Manager for Adaptation to Climate Change, European Commission
- **Rosalinde van der Vlies**, Director, Clean Planet Directorate, DG RTD & Deputy Mission Manager for 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission
- **Ovidiu-Vasile Cîmpean**, State Secretary, Ministry of Investments and European Projects, Romania

The discussion highlighted that achieving climate neutrality at the city level depends heavily on strong, structured cooperation across all levels of government. Cities repeatedly underscored that multi-level governance (MLG) is not only a policy ambition but a practical necessity which is critical for unlocking funding, aligning strategies, and delivering long-term climate outcomes.

Speakers emphasised that the Climate City Contract (CCC) process is already driving greater alignment across governance levels, acting as both a technical tool and a political lever. However, many cities lack the institutional capacity to engage effectively with national frameworks or navigate complex EU funding instruments. National platforms were praised as a practical innovation to help address these gaps and promote consistent dialogue.

From the Commission's side, instruments like the Capital Hub and the upcoming CapaCITIES 2.0 programme aim to build bridges between local ambition and European funding and policy support. Yet participants cautioned that despite growing awareness at the EU level, fragmentation remains a key barrier. Truly enabling multi-level cooperation requires not just funding, but also trust, clarity of roles, and the recognition that cities are delivery agents and not just stakeholders.

Finally, the session made clear that skills and staffing are now as important as finance. While some cities have already built the necessary capabilities, others called for targeted support to grow their workforce and mainstream climate action across departments. MLG must therefore be matched by capacity-building so that every level of governance can play its role effectively.

Key takeaways:

- **Whole-of-Government Delivery:** Climate neutrality requires coordinated action between cities, regions, and national authorities.
- **National Platforms as Enablers:** Structured mechanisms for dialogue and joint planning are key to overcoming fragmentation.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Cities need investment in skills and staff, not just funding.

- CCC as Governance Tool: The Climate City Contract helps align funding, planning, and cooperation across levels.
- Flexible Support Mechanisms: Frameworks like the EU Taxonomy and Capital Hub help cities navigate complex finance systems.
- Systemic Embedding: Climate action must move beyond environment departments to become a shared responsibility across city administrations.
- Recognition of Cities' Role: Cities should be formally included in national and EU planning processes, with mandates that reflect their central role in delivery.

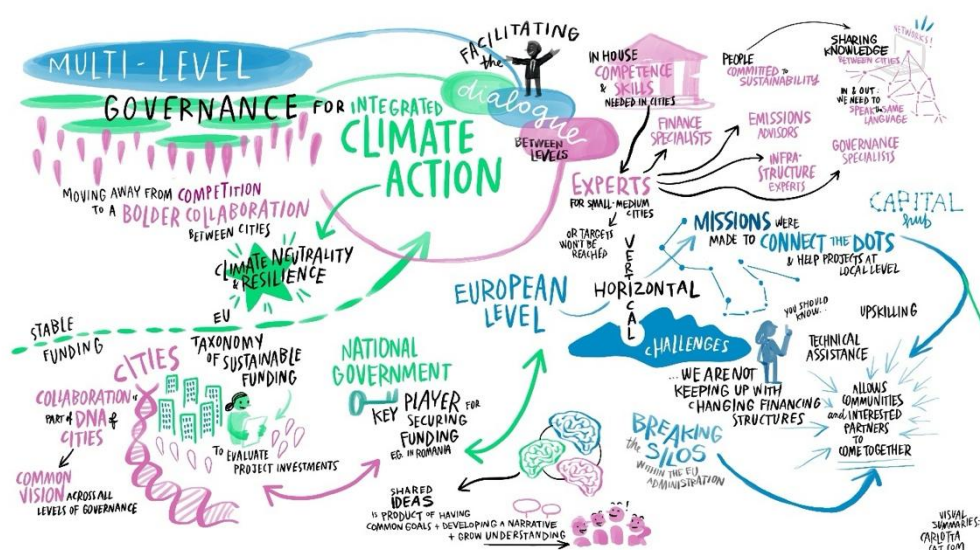


Figure 15 Visual summary of panel: *Leveraging Multi-Level Governance for Climate Action*

2.2.2.4 Closing Plenary

The final plenary of the Cities Mission Conference focused on the path forward for cities accelerating action towards climate neutrality. Speakers stressed the urgency of aligning mitigation with adaptation, embedding citizens in governance, and strengthening collaboration across all levels of government. The session underscored the role of the Missions as bridges between local innovation and broader EU strategies.

Speakers:

- **Wolfgang Teubner**, Regional Director for Europe, ICLEI
- **Claire Roumet**, Executive Director, Energy Cities
- **Thomas Osdoba**, Programme Director – NetZeroCities, Climate-KIC

Key Takeaways and Action Points

1. Prioritise Integrated Climate Investment

Cities must plan and fund mitigation and adaptation together, optimising scarce resources to tackle both challenges in parallel.

2. Embed Citizen Participation

Establish structured mechanisms—such as climate assemblies and citizen panels—to involve residents in planning and decision-making from the outset.

3. Strengthen Multi-Level Governance

Foster alignment and collaboration across local, regional, national, and EU levels to unlock policy coherence and financial support.

4. Break Down Silos Within Cities

Adopt cross-departmental strategies to ensure climate targets are embedded across all municipal functions and services.

5. Use the Mission as a Bridge

Position the Cities Mission as a connector between local innovation and EU-level industrial, climate, and economic agendas.

6. Build on Collective City Leadership

Encourage peer learning and shared advocacy to amplify the role of cities in shaping national and EU policies.

7. Embrace the Momentum

Capitalise on the growing commitment and progress within cities to transition from planning to impactful, system-wide implementation.

2.2.2.5 Closing keynote speakers & presentation of Valencia Green Charter

Closing words from the host of the Cities Mission Conference 2025

The Deputy Mayor of Vilnius looked ahead to the next edition of the Cities Mission Conference, which will be hosted in Vilnius in 2025. He reflected on the city's climate efforts and European Green Deal recognition, noting that the conference will provide space to tackle some of the most pressing questions cities face today. He expressed hope that Vilnius can help deliver answers, even if partial, to these complex challenges.

Speakers:

- **Tomas Gulbinas**, Deputy Mayor of Vilnius
- **Patrick Child**, Deputy Director-General, DG Environment, and Mission Manager for the EU Cities Mission, European Commission
- **María José Catalá**, Mayor of Valencia

Presentation of the Valencia Green Charter

Figure 16 The Valencia Green Charter signed by Spanish cities

Patrick Child closed by celebrating one of the conference's key symbolic moments: **the presentation of the Valencia Green Charter by the Spanish Mission Cities**. This declaration reflects the Spanish cities' collective vision for the future of the Mission and serves as a call for continued collaboration across national platforms. He highlighted the emerging strength of national networks - including the Spanish 2030 Community, Viable Cities in Sweden, and Romania's growing platform - and expressed confidence that a strong urban agenda will be embedded in the next European Commission mandate.

The Mayor of Valencia, María José Catalá, joined Patrick Child on stage to formally present the Valencia Green Charter, marking a handover moment that symbolised Spain's leadership and the collaborative momentum built during the event. The Charter will now serve as a reference point for cities across Europe and a contribution to shaping the future of the Mission.



Figure 17 Visual summary of closing plenary

2.2.3 Day 2 - Afternoon breakouts

In total, 11 breakout sessions took place throughout the day, often running in parallel and curated across the three events. Of these, three sessions were organised specifically within the Cities Mission Conference framework, continuing the programme's focus on Mission implementation and city-level innovation. A full agenda for the breakouts on day two can be seen in Annex 6.

2.2.3.1 All hands on deck: how do national platforms help cities go climate neutral?

This session explored the strategic role of national platforms in advancing the objectives of the EU Cities Mission. It began by setting the scene with reflections on why national-level involvement is crucial and what defines an effective platform.

Speakers:

- Julio Lumbreras (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid) - Spanish National Platform
- Anna Wang (Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Austria)
- Ovidiu Cimpeanu or Elena Simion – Romanian National Platform
- Taina Tukiainen – Finnish National Platform

Session Summary:

Platform representatives from Spain, Austria, Romania, and Finland shared diverse models and insights into how their platforms are structured and how they support cities. Examples included capacity building, technical assistance, stakeholder convening, and aligning national policy frameworks with local climate goals. They also offered tips for other countries, including how to build trust, engage national ministries, and measure impact.

Participants then split into two groups - those with and without national platforms - to reflect on the practicalities of either launching a platform or strengthening one. Discussions covered the types of national allies needed, storytelling strategies to gain traction, and what “good support” from a platform should look like.

The session closed with a report-back and shared reflection, reinforcing that national platforms are critical to bridging city ambition with national policy and funding frameworks. Whether emerging or

established, platforms can offer the structure, legitimacy, and leverage cities need to implement their CCCs and accelerate climate neutrality.

2.2.3.2 Engaging Stakeholders: Innovations for Climate Action

This session focused on how cities can move beyond conventional engagement to connect with “unusual suspects” — stakeholders who are not typically involved in climate action. Through roundtable exchanges, city representatives and community conveners shared their experiences building inclusive partnerships to implement their Climate City Contracts (CCCs).

Speakers:

- **Daniel Freitas**, Representative, Empresa Municipal de Ambiente do Porto
- **Ángela Rivada**, Representative, City of Valladolid
- **Alejandro Gómez**, Representative, Clima i Energia, Valencia
- **Cristina Robledano**, Representative, Porticus
- **Annemie Wyckmans**, Representative, NTNU & CRAFT Cities

What was shared:

- **Daniel Freitas** described Porto's use of the Porto Climate Pact to engage a wide spectrum of actors, including FC Porto, the private sector, and citizens — fostering a city-wide climate movement.
- **Ángela Rivada** explained how Real Valladolid Football Club became a visible and influential climate actor, setting an example for how cities can engage high-profile partners to mainstream climate neutrality.
- **Alejandro Gómez** highlighted strategies to bring in diverse stakeholders from across sectors, using the CCC framework as a catalyst to unify efforts across the city.
- **Cristina Robledano** provided a funder's perspective, sharing methodologies to build trust and network capacity among actors that don't typically engage with municipal climate processes.
- **Annemie Wyckmans** spoke about experimental governance approaches and successful examples of integrating the cultural sector, private property owners, and grassroots groups into the climate transition journey.

Session outcomes:

- A deeper understanding of who the “unusual suspects” are in urban climate efforts and what barriers may prevent their participation.
- Practical strategies for identifying, engaging, and sustaining relationships with new types of partners.
- Shared insights on how the CCC framework supports more inclusive and distributed models of climate action.
- Inspiration to replicate successful engagement approaches and foster stronger, more diverse local coalitions in the journey toward climate neutrality.

2.2.3.3 Cities Mission Dialogues

This session brought together city leaders who have received the Mission Label and are entering the implementation phase of their Climate City Contracts (CCCs). The roundtable discussion explored

shared challenges, priority needs, and recommendations for tailored Mission support. It aimed to surface practical insights on implementing CCC actions and strengthening collaborative frameworks.

Speakers:

- Gianluca Borghi, Deputy Mayor for Environmental Sustainability, Energy and Mobility, Parma
- Léan Doody, Director of Cities, Planning and Design, Europe, Arup
- Fabien Perez, Councillor for European Funding, Marseille
- Ángela Rivada, Climate EU Missions Lead, Valladolid
- Thomas Osdoba, Programme Director at NetZeroCities, Climate-KIC (moderator)



Figure 18 NZC Programme Coordinator, Thomas Osdoba, at Cities Mission Dialogues

This session highlighted that while CCCs provide a strategic framework, cities face immediate challenges around multi-level governance, stakeholder mobilisation, and financing. It outlined the following strategic needs and priorities for cities :

- Cities require dedicated funding streams and simplified procurement mechanisms.
- Tailored technical assistance and policy alignment between EU, national, and local levels are essential to overcome regulatory barriers.
- The Mission Platform must evolve to a "bottom-up" support model responsive to emerging city-level needs.

The roundtable built on existing recommendations developed by Spanish, Swedish, and French Mission Cities, which identified strategic needs including leadership, finance, regulatory streamlining, monitoring, and learning. It reinforced the importance of scaling strategies ("scaling out, up, and deep"), shared innovation, and the co-design of Mission services to reflect cities' real-world challenges.

This session illustrated a key shift in the Cities Mission: from launching a common ambition to embedding it through collaborative, city-led implementation.

3 Communications & Engagement

Pre-conference communication

In the lead-up to the event, a series of targeted email campaigns were deployed to key stakeholders, including city representatives, project partners, and EU officials. These emails provided timely updates on speaker announcements, programme highlights, and logistical information. A coordinated social media campaign ran in parallel, raising awareness across multiple platforms and building momentum ahead of the event.

During the conference

Live coverage during the event extended its reach beyond the venue, using social media to share speaker quotes, session highlights, and on-the-ground photos in real time. The goal was to bring the energy of the conference to a wider audience, including those who could not attend in person, while encouraging online interaction through tags and resharing by partners and participants.

Post-conference dissemination

After the event, a comprehensive article was published on the NetZeroCities website, summarising key messages and takeaways: [That's a wrap! Key takeaways from the 2024 Cities Mission Conference in Valencia](#). This was accompanied by a series of social media posts and direct communications to participants, linking to session summaries and next steps.

3.1 Conference Website

A dedicated conference website was created using the idloom event management platform. This site functioned as the central hub for participants and included:

- Registration management and editing
- Speaker and agenda updates
- Downloadable practical information
- Real-time announcements

Accessible at: <https://eurocities.idloom.events/cities-mission-conference-2024>

3.2 Interactive Policy Board

To increase transparency and engagement with policy development, an interactive Policy Board was set up in the main catering area. It featured visual summaries of the recommendations from the four NZC Policy Labs (Circular Economy, Finance & Investment, Nature-Based Solutions, and Energy Communities). Participants were invited to review and add feedback directly on the board, especially valuable for those who had not attended the Labs. These inputs will be annexed to the final policy briefs and shared with EU decision-makers in the upcoming mandate.



Figure 19 Interactive Policy Board

3.3 Marketplace

The conference also featured a vibrant Marketplace of projects and initiatives linked to the Cities Mission and broader ecosystem. It provided a space for participants to discover peer efforts, connect with thematic projects, and exchange learnings across disciplines.

A total of 46 official stands were confirmed, covering a wide range of topics including resilience, mobility, citizen engagement, digital tools, and EU policy. See Annex 5 for full list of marketplace stands.



Figure 20 Marketplace stands

3.4 Portal Group

A dedicated group was created on the NZC Portal to support ongoing engagement around the conference. It served as a space for registrants to access programme updates, connect with one another, and ask questions in the lead-up to the event. The group's primary function is to host all presentations and materials used during the conference, ensuring participants can revisit content after the event. This resource was shared via post-conference communications.

The group can be accessed here: <https://netzerocities.app/group-citiesmissionconference>

Conclusion

The 2024 Cities Mission Conference in Valencia marked a pivotal moment in the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, bringing together over 450 participants from 94 Mission Cities and beyond. The event highlighted the power of collaboration, shared learning, and political leadership in driving climate-neutral urban transitions. Across plenaries, peer-learning labs, and thematic breakouts, cities showcased their progress, shared challenges, and called for stronger multi-level governance and investment mechanisms. The awarding of the Mission Label to 33 cities and the launch of the Climate City Capital Hub underscored the Mission's momentum as it moves from planning to implementation. The conference demonstrated the central role of cities in the EU's green transition and reaffirmed the importance of city-led innovation, citizen engagement, and collective action to meet the 2030 climate neutrality goals.

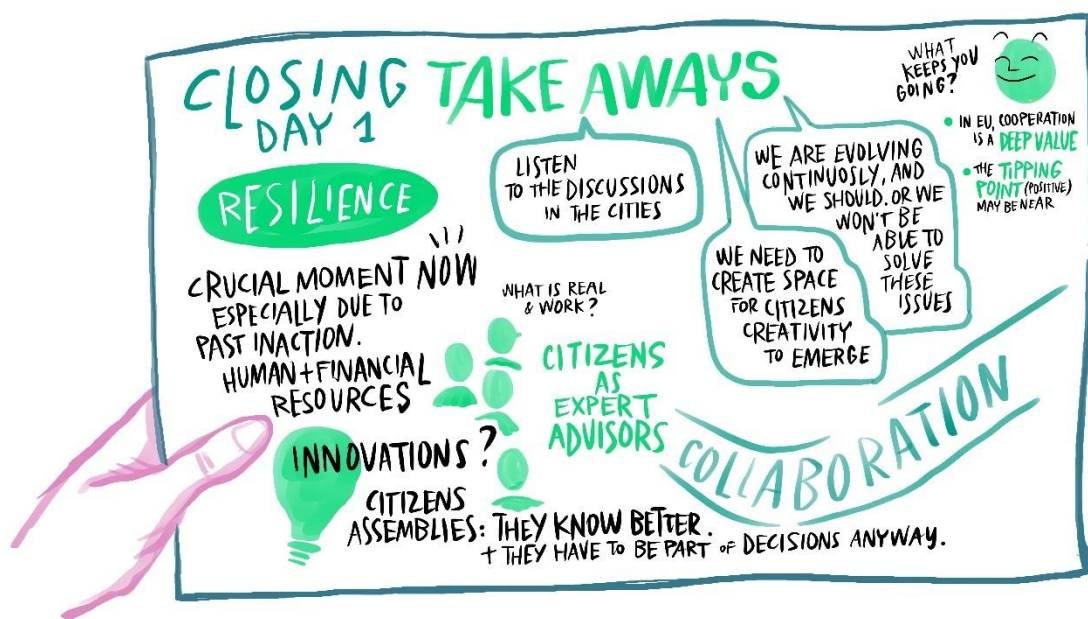


Figure 21 Visual summary of key conference takeaways

Appendices

Appendix 1: Conference Agenda

The full programme is available at: <https://eurocities.idloom.events/cities-mission-conference-2024/pages/programme>

Appendix 2: Participant Statistics

- 489 registered participants for the Cities Mission Conference
- Over 750 attendees present on Day 2
- Representation from 94 of the 112 Mission Cities
- Participants included mayors, city practitioners, national government representatives, EU institutions, investors, and civil society actors.

Appendix 3: Photos and Media

Photos from the conference are available on the NetZeroCities EU flickr <https://www.flickr.com/photos/195877900@N06/sets/72177720318402024/>

Key moments were shared under #CitiesMission and #ValenciaClimateWeek.

Appendix 4: Valencia Green Charter

Presented during the closing plenary, the Valencia Green Charter represents a shared commitment from Mission Cities to accelerate their climate-neutrality efforts.

Appendix 5: Marketplace stands

Programme and initiatives which participated in the marketplace of Valencia Cities Climate Week

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 8. Pathways2Resilience | 23. CARDIMED |
| 9. RescueME | 24. MULTISOURCE |
| 10. Regions4Climate and RESIST | 25. RethinkAction |
| 11. AGORA | 26. EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change |
| 12. CDP | 27. 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission |
| 13. Covenant of Mayors – Europe | 28. DUT + CapaCITIES |
| 14. Smart Cities Marketplace | 29. Urban Transition Mission |
| 15. Google EIE | 30. Energy Cities |
| 16. ESRI | 31. European City Facility |
| 17. ICLEI Europe | 32. EU CITY CALC |
| 18. EEA | 33. WELL BASED + POWER UP |
| 19. EIB | 34. ERRIN |
| 20. Resilient Cities Network | 35. metaCCAIZE |
| 21. LOCALISED | 36. URBREATH |
| 22. REGILIENCE | |

37. JUST STREETS

38. CLIMABOROUGH

39. UP2030

40. Re-Value

41. CrAFt

42. NEUTRALPATH

43. ASCEND

44. ExPEDite

45. TIPS4PED

46. SPINE

47. UPPER

48. European Climate Pact

49. Ukrainian Cities

50. MCR2030 (UNDRR)

51. City of Valencia

52. EU Urban Initiative

53. DG ENV

AWAITING APPROVAL BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Appendix 6: Day 2 breakout agenda

EU MISSIONS

CLIMATE-NEUTRAL & SMART CITIES

Funded by
the European Union

CITIES MISSION CONFERENCE 2024

WEDNESDAY 26 JUNE

Cities Mission Conference

EURESFO

Energy Cities Annual Forum

Joint Plenaries

Breaks & Networking

<p>14:30 - 15:45 All hands on deck: how do national platforms help cities go climate neutral? - Patio de los Bambues Explore effective multi-level collaboration for climate-neutral cities, focusing on successful national platforms. Discuss key challenges, needs, and criteria for impactful national platforms. Foster understanding of how national platforms support cities in achieving climate neutrality targets and engaging stakeholders. Share case studies on innovative governance approaches. Confirmed speakers: • Ovidiu-Vasile Cimpean, State Secretary, Ministry of Investments and European Projects, Romania</p>	<p>14:30 - 15:45</p> <p>14:30 - 15:45 Dialogue with the Sector This session is upon...</p>	<p>14:30 - 15:45 Two Missions, A Common Vision: Collaboration for a Resilient and Climate Neutral Future - Sala Joaquín Rodrigo In a crucial moment for the EU Missions, when cities and regions are actively engaging with projects and activities and set their expectations, this session aims to reflect on the opportunities to maximise cross-Missions collaboration through analysing tools integration.</p>
<p>14:30 - 15:45 Financing for Adaptation and Neutrality - Sala Lucrecia In the session we recognise that addressing climate adaptation challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving both government and investor participation. While there are existing maturity assessment models for measuring public authorities capabilities in technical aspects of adaptation, there is a need for models that focus on funding and finance capabilities for adaptation. Furthermore, this session delves into the opportunities and barriers to financing climate adaptation actions in cities. It will feature financing experts that will present successful business cases which have attracted financial institutions' interest, and also city practitioners sharing their experiences in maturing projects to bankability level while ensuring resilience co-benefits.</p>	<p>14:30 - 15:45 Decarbonisation of Heating and Cooling - Sala Martín y Soler From the Mission's first Climate City Contract and Investment Plans, the decarbonisation of heating and cooling is one of the main challenges faced by Mission's cities. This session will show how your city can learn from other cities that have been frontrunners in this initiative. You will also learn about the regulatory framework required for decarbonisation.</p>	<p>14:30 - 15:45 Waste Management and Circularity - Sala de Exposiciones This session has been crafted to showcase exemplary practices in waste management strategies, aimed at equipping your city with practical insights from pioneering urban centers. The session will frame waste management through the concept of circularity, highlighting the interconnectedness of resources and emphasising the importance of fostering a closed-loop system that reduces environmental impact and enhances resource efficiency.</p>
<p>15:45 - 16:15 Coffee Break - Hall Naranjos</p>		
<p>16:15 - 17:30 Engaging Stakeholders: Innovations for Climate Action - Patio de los Bambues Dive into innovative approaches to stakeholder and citizen engagement in climate action and the implementation of Climate City Contracts. Discuss barriers, network power, and role of systemic engagement. Explore building distributed networks, inclusivity, prototyping culture, and dialogue.</p>	<p>16:15 - 17:30 Cities Mission Dialogues: Forward-looking Perspectives on finance, procurement, and policy needs to achieve 2030 climate neutrality (Cities Mission Conference Attendees only) - Sala Joaquín Rodrigo This session will provide an opportunity for cities to reflect on the future of the Mission in their cities. The session will focus on cities sharing their perspectives on key challenges and opportunities faced or anticipated within the overarching and interlinked topics of finance, procurement, and policy. The session will be structured as a collaborative dialogue to surface short- and long-term needs and recommendations for Mission support.</p>	<p>16:15 - 17:30 Multi-level Governance: Coordinating for Climate Adaptation - Sala de Ensayos This session will bring together resilience projects working on regional resilience to address questions including: how are we approaching the regional scale? What does climate resilience mean at regional level? What challenges have regions found in the different projects so far, in planning and implementing resilience interventions? What lessons learnt can be shared? What are knowledge gaps? How can regions be best supported?</p>

NET ZERO CITIES

EU MISSION PLATFORM | CLIMATE-NEUTRAL AND SMART CITIES

Appendix 7: Practical information package

Link to access conference practical information package:

https://netzerocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Information-Package-Valencia-Cities-Week.pdf?utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz-YKKOM6v8MDhsggxJauJq0Ttb9evhXn4as9xDdpiNdEaelQ2BQqfVUdZPoxHeluudLaylG

Appendix 8: Cities with speakers

The following cities were represented in speaker roles during the conference:

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 54. Amsterdam | 81. Vilnius |
| 55. Bologna | 82. Vitoria-Gasteiz |
| 56. Florence | 83. Zagreb |
| 57. Galway | |
| 58. Guimarães | |
| 59. Heidelberg | |
| 60. Istanbul | |
| 61. Lappeenranta | |
| 62. Leuven | |
| 63. Lisbon | |
| 64. Lund | |
| 65. Lyon | |
| 66. Mannheim | |
| 67. Marseille | |
| 68. Milan | |
| 69. Munich | |
| 70. Parma | |
| 71. Porto | |
| 72. Rom | |
| 73. Seville | |
| 74. Stockholm | |
| 75. Tallinn | |
| 76. Thessaloniki | |
| 77. Torino | |
| 78. Turku | |
| 79. Valencia | |
| 80. Valladolid | |