



**NET
ZERO
CITIES**

Final infographic on city interaction

Deliverable D13.5

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Abbreviations and acronyms

Acronym	Description
WP	Work Package
SNAP	Support Needs Assessment Process
EOI	Expression of Interest
NZC	NetZeroCities
CCC	Climate City Contract
CA	Climate-Neutral Cities Advisor; City Advisor
CS	City Specialist
CSO	City Support Officer
CSG(s)	City Support Group(s)
CESF	City Expert Support Facility
DWG	Domain Working Groups
PCP	Pilot City Programme
CKIC	EIT Climate KIC
FTE	Full time equivalent



Summary

Deliverable D13.5 “**Final infographic on city interaction**” showcases how NetZeroCities and its City Advisors (formerly known as City Guides) are supporting Mission Cities on their journey toward climate neutrality. Through four visually presented infographics, the report captures the different dimensions: from local leadership and collaborative action to knowledge exchange and tangible transformation on the ground.

The four infographics provide a structured overview:

- Infographic 1 - Local leadership, shared mission, one climate-neutral Europe
- Infographic 2 - Joining forces: Cities Leading the Climate Transition
- Infographic 3 - Connecting people, knowledge and cities
- Infographic 4 - How cities are transforming for climate neutrality

City Advisors are at the centre of these stories. City Advisors adapt their support to match each city's pace and priorities: from guiding the preparation of Climate City Contracts to assessing support needs, building capacities, and responding to specific challenges. This flexible, cyclical approach ensures that every city can find its own pathway while benefiting from the collective strength of the programme.

Together, the infographics and accompanying text provide a concise but comprehensive snapshot of the impact achieved so far—showing how shared ambition, local leadership, and tailored support are bringing the goal of a climate-neutral Europe closer to reality

Keywords

NetZeroCities NZC, Climate-neutral Europe, City Advisor, Mission cities, Mission Platform, CCC, Support Needs Assessment, peer-to-peer, workshops, city support, Green Deal, Horizon 2020



1 Introduction

In 2025, NetZeroCities is shifting from plans to implementation and progress. Mission Cities have now submitted their City Climate Contracts (CCCs), and the first tangible results of this continent-wide transformation are coming into view. From Guimarães hosting its first Green Week as European Green Capital, to cities in Spain and France joining national climate platforms, from creating new spaces for dialogue with the private sector to supporting Turkish municipalities at a decisive moment — coordinated action is driving change.

At the centre of this effort are the City Advisors: the human link between the Mission and the cities it serves. These professionals connect municipalities with expertise, foster peer learning, and help design tailored solutions. What began in 2021 with just two city advisors has grown into a network of 17 experts, spread across multiple countries and guiding 111 cities on their journey to carbon neutrality.

Launched in October 2021, NetZeroCities provides the Mission Platform for the EU's "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030" initiative. Initially designed to support 30 cities at a time, the programme expanded following the Mission Implementation Plan to encompass all 100 EU Mission Cities; plus 12 from non-EU countries.

The model rests on clear principles: fostering collaboration across borders, allocating support by language and regional expertise, building on existing relationships, and forming multidisciplinary teams to address complex challenges.

This report brings together data, stories, and visual evidence to show the progress so far. From the pivotal role of City Advisors in accelerating the climate transition, to the networks that connect people, knowledge, and solutions, it offers an up-to-date snapshot of how Europe is building a sustainable future, one city at a time.

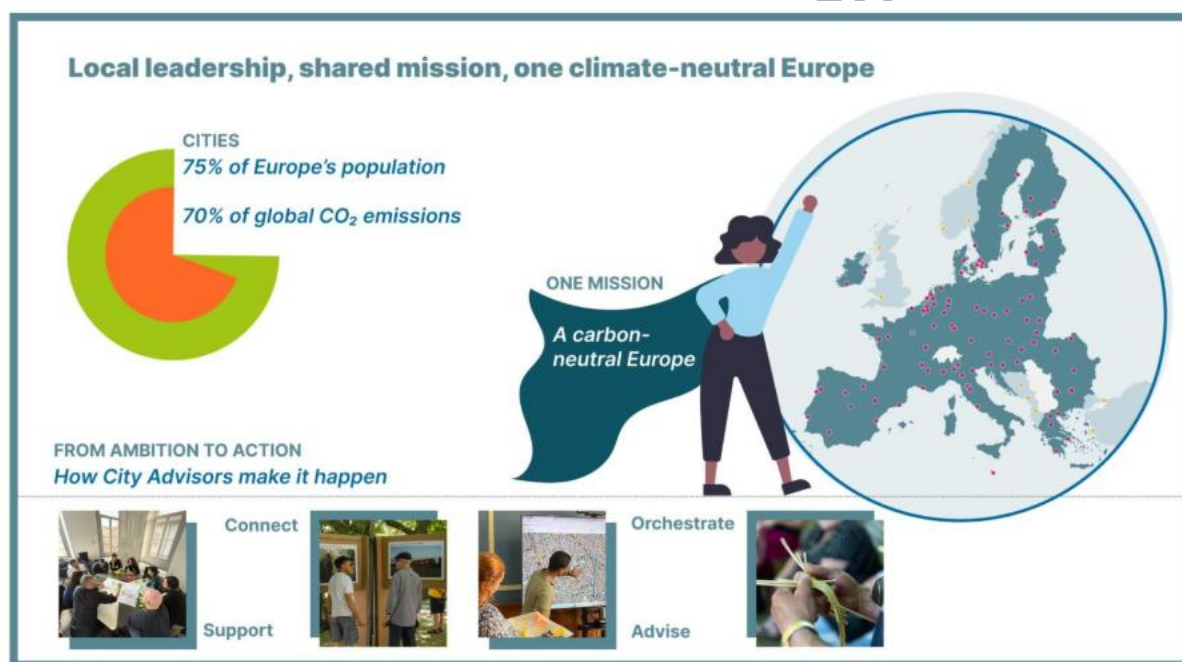


2 Local leadership, shared mission, one climate-neutral Europe

Across Europe, cities are on the front line of the climate crisis. Home to 75% of Europeans and responsible for more than 70% of global CO₂ emissions, they have the potential to lead the European Union's journey towards a carbon-free future. But reaching climate neutrality, and doing so in a way that is fair and inclusive, will require profound, systemic changes in how cities are governed, built, and lived in.

The EU has set ambitious goals: cutting emissions by 55% by 2030 and achieving full climate neutrality by 2050. Initiatives like the European Green Deal, Horizon 2020, and Horizon Europe are driving Member States toward these targets. In this framework, cities are not only expected to meet deadlines, but some are also expected to reach them earlier, showing that deep decarbonisation can be achieved while enhancing quality of life and promoting economic development.

But bold targets require coordinated action. Government leadership must align with efforts from other levels of government, industry, academia, and civil society, ensuring policies, governance, and investments pull in the same direction. That's where the City Advisor (CA) comes in — a crucial, behind-the-scenes role in Europe's climate mission.



Infographic 1: Local leadership, shared mission, one climate-neutral Europe

City Advisors are the main link between participating cities and the EU's NetZeroCities programme, which supports municipalities in designing strategies tailored to their unique local contexts. Acting as guides, connectors, CAs work side by side with city teams to:

- **Support** them in their climate-neutrality journey
- **Scope their needs** to understand priorities, gaps, and opportunities
- **Connect** them with other cities, experts, and resources
- Advise on Climate City Contract (CCC) iteration, GHG monitoring and reporting, and implementation planning.
- **Orchestrate** deep dives into key thematic areas and collaborative sprints.

Through these four pillars, City Advisors help cities navigate complex EU frameworks, access tools via the programme's one-stop-shop platform and stay on track when challenges arise. In short, they make

sure that Europe's climate mission doesn't remain an abstract ambition, but becomes a shared, practical reality.

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3 Behind the scenes: How NZC is shaping the climate neutrality journey

When the 111 European cities joined the EU's NetZeroCities mission, they stepped into an ambitious, multi-year journey; one that takes them from mapping their challenges to delivering tangible climate solutions on the ground. The mission's phased approach ensures that cities can build the knowledge, tools, and governance they need to become climate neutral faster, while inspiring others to follow.

What began as an undefined process four years ago has now become standard practice.

The first year was about understanding the landscape. Cities assessed their local needs, identified gaps, and mapped the challenges that could stand in the way of decarbonisation. This groundwork relied heavily on engaging internal and external stakeholders, from local governments to residents, and laying the foundations for future climate action.

Once the foundations were set, cities moved into a period of experimentation and innovation. They developed new methodologies and tools tailored to their specific contexts, while breaking down silos between departments. Dedicated teams and governance structures took shape, providing a framework for sustained action. Clear plans, concrete goals, and realistic timelines were defined, turning ambition into a practical roadmap.

Today, cities are applying what they've built. Tailored climate solutions are being implemented on the ground, progress is being monitored through measurable milestones, and lessons learned are being shared across borders, while continuously engaging with local stakeholders. This exchange of best practices not only accelerates the green transition within individual cities but also strengthens Europe's collective path toward climate neutrality.

From exploration to innovation and now targeted action, these cities are proving that local leadership, supported by shared expertise and coordinated investment, can make Europe's climate goals a reality.

The following chart shows the evolution of cities since joining NetZeroCities: from exploration to active implementation and purposeful finance.



Infographic 2: Joining forces: Cities Leading the Climate Transition



4 Inside the CSGs: connecting people, knowledge and cities

Today's challenges demand fresh approaches, or at least, a rethinking of how we address them. This is at the heart of NetZeroCities: driving focused efforts to tackle some of our greatest collective challenges, such as climate change.

Supporting the EU's Mission Cities requires more than generic advice. It calls for a deep understanding of each city's unique and evolving needs, and a structured, city-centered approach to delivering tailored assistance. This is where the City Support Groups (CSGs) come in.

At the core of the NetZeroCities support model, CSGs ensure every Mission City receives the guidance, resources, and connections needed to implement its climate strategies. Their expertise spans six key areas:

- Urban governance & policy alignment
- Climate innovation & clean technology
- Sustainable finance
- Community engagement & participatory democracy

Beyond one-on-one support, CSGs coordinate the broader ecosystem of assistance by integrating contributions from second-line experts, consortium partners, external expertise contractors, and pilot initiatives. This ensures coherence across all activities and enables lessons from diverse interventions to strengthen the collective mission.





Infographic 3: Connecting people, knowledge and cities

CSGs also work proactively to unlock opportunities for cities, linking them to peer-learning platforms, policy dialogues, and thematic networks. In doing so, they open the door to the full spectrum of knowledge and resources within the NetZeroCities consortium of 33 partners.

At the heart of this mission, the cities themselves remain the central agents of change. Recognising their diversity and complexity, NetZeroCities has developed a city-centric framework to coordinate and reinforce support through shared spaces of collaboration. This framework rests on three pillars:

- Coordination among actors to streamline engagement and minimise fragmentation.
- Strengthening support structures to ensure timely, responsive, and city-led interventions.
- Shared spaces that encourage dialogue, peer exchange, and the integration of thematic expertise.

A dedicated coordination mechanism serves as the operational bridge between Mission Cities and the programme. It aligns City Advisors, technical experts, and programme leaders in real time. This ensures that cities can express needs, share progress, and access targeted guidance in a timely fashion. The insights gathered here shape support design, surface cross-cutting needs, and keep the mission responsive to the realities on the ground.

By connecting people, knowledge, and cities, this coordinated model turns climate ambition into tangible, city-led action, ensuring no city navigates the path to climate neutrality alone.



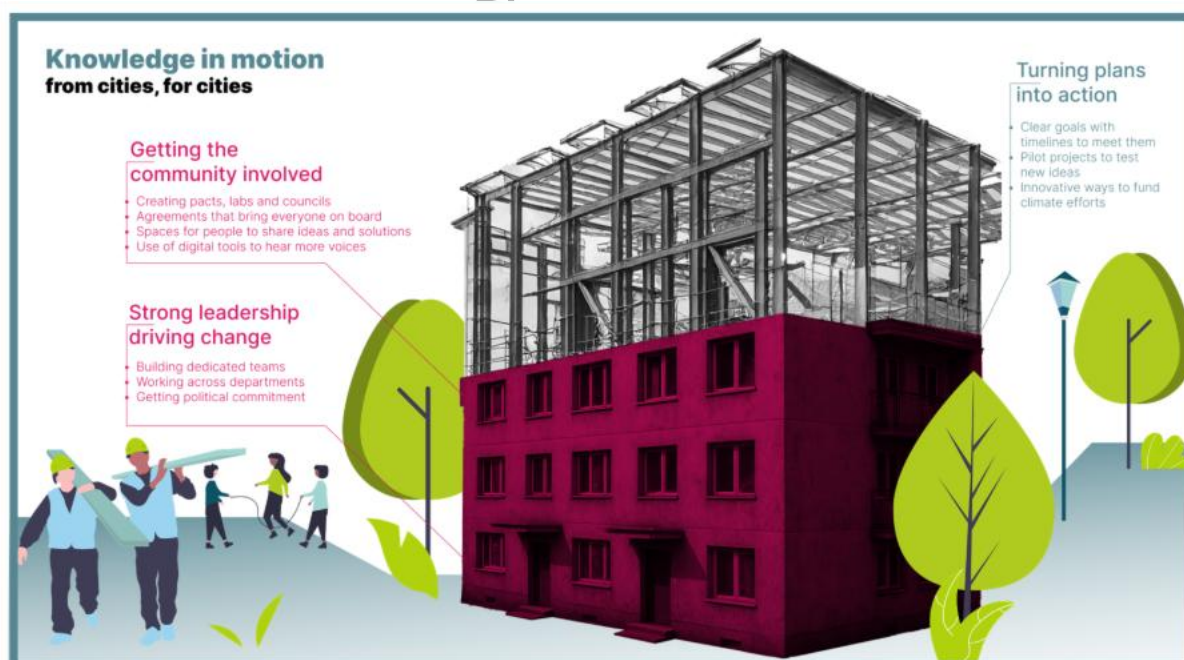
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5 Knowledge in motion: from cities, for cities

When the EU's Mission Cities initiative began, many municipalities were stepping into uncharted territory. The ambition was clear — achieve climate neutrality faster and more inclusively — but the pathway was anything but straightforward.

Early on, city teams grappled with fundamental questions: Where should we begin? How do we set our first priorities? Do we have the political will and internal backing to get started? How do we coordinate the work? Without a clear roadmap, planning felt uncertain. In some cases, climate efforts were scattered across departments or stakeholders, creating silos that slowed progress.



Infographic 4: How cities are transforming for climate neutrality

Over the duration of only a few years, cities have started finding answers to some of those questions. Across Europe, Mission Cities have built momentum, moving from fragmented efforts to coordinated, citywide action. Strong leadership has emerged, driving change at the highest political levels. Dedicated,

cross-departmental teams are now in place, supported by active community and stakeholder engagement. New mechanisms, from climate pacts to urban innovation labs and citizen councils, represent structured spaces for collaboration, while digital tools are amplifying residents' voices and ideas.

The next stage is about turning vision into results. Cities are shifting from strategy to delivery, finalising pilot projects to test innovative solutions and finding ways to finance their replication and scale-up. Clear priorities, backed by timelines, are guiding decision-making, and inclusive participation remains at the heart of the process.

From the first tentative "Where do we begin?" to a confident "Here's how we make it happen", Mission Cities are proving that with leadership, collaboration, and innovation, climate neutrality is not just possible, but it's already underway.

6 Conclusion

The NetZeroCities initiative has proven to be a cornerstone in Europe's journey toward climate neutrality, demonstrating that systemic transformation is achievable when ambition, tailored support, and collaborative networks converge. Through the dedicated work of City Advisors and the structured engagement of City Support Groups, Mission Cities have been equipped not only with strategies and resources but also with the confidence and capacity to translate commitments into tangible actions.

The four infographics presented in this report provide a clear and accessible narrative of this progress: from local leadership and shared ambition to collaborative networks, knowledge sharing, and concrete transformations on the ground. They illustrate how cities are no longer working in isolation but advancing collectively, drawing strength from shared experiences and diverse expertise.

Some key insights and takeaways stand out:

- **City Advisors as catalysts:** Their close, flexible engagement has been critical in guiding cities from ambition to action, and suggesting changes in the NetZeroCities support offer, ensuring tailored solutions and trusted relationships.
- **From planning to implementation:** Mission Cities have moved decisively from drafting Climate City Contracts to piloting, delivering, financing, and scaling transformative solutions.
- **Collaboration is the engine:** Structured peer-to-peer support mechanisms and shared learning platforms have accelerated knowledge exchange, breaking silos and uniting stakeholders.
- **Finance and capacity matter:** New financial instruments, investment readiness training, and systemic capacity-building have empowered cities to unlock resources for climate action.

What has emerged is more than a support programme: it is an already dynamic ecosystem where trust, flexibility, and innovation drive systemic change. Mission Cities are already demonstrating measurable progress, securing finance, mobilising communities, piloting solutions, and embedding climate action across governance structures. These achievements mark an important shift from planning to implementation, showing that Europe's urban centres can be powerful engines of the green transition.

As cities continue their work through 2030, the foundation laid so far provides strong momentum. The lessons learned and solutions tested will not only accelerate progress for Mission Cities but also serve as a blueprint for urban transformation across Europe and beyond. In this shared effort, every city's progress contributes to the collective goal of a climate-neutral Europe.



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