

# National and regional city collaboration and multi-level governance report

Deliverable D5.10

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

| Acronym            | Description                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CCC                | Climate City Contract, strategic document and process engaging local stakeholders towards climate neutrality in one city     |
| Cities Mission     | EU mission on 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030                                                                   |
| City Advisor       | Person from NetZeroCities being the main contact point of the Cities Mission                                                 |
| Covenant of Mayors | The Covenant of Mayors for Energy and Climate Initiative, led by the European Commission                                     |
| EU                 | European Union                                                                                                               |
| Mission Cities     | Cities selected to participate in EU Cities Mission “100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030”                           |
| SECAPs             | Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans, framework developed by the Covenant of Mayors for Energy and Climate Initiative |
| WP                 | Work Package                                                                                                                 |

## Executive summary

This report presents key insights and outcomes from activities designed to strengthen collaboration among cities and enhance multi-level governance structures across Europe and Associated Countries, in support of the [‘EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities’](#). Led by EU Cities Mission Platform, currently managed by NetZeroCities, the work focused on countries where national and regional coordination for climate action remains limited, aiming to improve knowledge-sharing, stakeholder engagement, and coordination between cities and other levels of government on climate action.

Building on an earlier mapping of climate collaboration efforts, the project identified an initial group of 13 countries. Ultimately, due to resource constraints and varying levels of readiness, work was carried out in 9 countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Montenegro.

Cities were engaged through surveys, webinars, and in-person events. National multipliers such as city networks and local climate organizations were essential partners in tailoring activities to each country's context. Emphasis was placed on creating trust, responding to local priorities, and aligning with existing initiatives where possible.

### Country highlights and lessons

In the **Western Balkans**, initial plans for a regional collaboration platform evolved into more localized efforts after limited city engagement. **Montenegro** held a successful national workshop addressing sustainable mobility and energy efficiency, while future engagement is planned in **Albania** via local NGOs.

In **Bulgaria**, peer learning sessions highlighted best practices in citizen engagement, with strong interest in practical tools and participatory approaches. **Croatia** focused on decarbonizing mobility and energy in public spaces, supported by national partners like REGEA.

In the **Czech Republic**, collaboration with national ministries and networks resulted in well-attended workshops on climate strategy and funding. Cities like Liberec and Kladno shared their experiences in climate planning and stakeholder engagement, while new collaboration are being developed to support further collaboration.

**Hungary** faced political and structural challenges, but a webinar on climate leadership demonstrated how local champions and accessible communication can inspire climate action, particularly in smaller municipalities.

**Latvia** held its first NetZeroCities national event, with strong participation from regions and cities. Challenges highlighted included emissions tracking, cross-sector collaboration, and access to funding. Success stories from Riga and Liepaja were shared to inspire other municipalities.

In **Luxembourg**, despite well-established support systems and sufficient financial resources, the primary challenge remains limited human capacity within small municipalities. Activities emphasized the importance of complementing national tools with targeted external support.

### Cross-cutting insights

Several common themes emerged across countries:

- Localized engagement and working in national languages significantly improved city participation.
- Strong national partners and pre-existing networks were critical to mobilizing interest and trust.
- Peer learning and relatable examples, especially from similar local contexts, were highly valued.
- Concrete, project-based collaboration proved more effective than abstract policy dialogue.

- Multi-level coordination remains a key barrier and opportunity, especially where cities lack national support.

## **Conclusions**

In this task, NetZeroCities has established good relationships, and trust with many stakeholders and local authorities in different countries, as well as deeper understanding of national contexts. These will be of great help for the further development of the various services proposed by NetZeroCities in the next months, and to strengthen and steer enabling national ecosystems for all local authorities to reach climate neutrality. Strong collaboration between local authorities is a key lever for a better multilevel governance.

## **Keywords**

NetZeroCities; Cities Mission; Multi-level governance; Climate city collaboration; Climate change mitigation; Climate neutrality; Climate City Contracts; Replication; Scale-up

## Introduction

The aim of task 5.4.2 (NZN WP5) is to facilitate collaboration among cities in selected EU Member States and Associated Countries, where collaboration on climate objectives is lacking and where opportunities for better synergies exist. Stronger city climate collaboration on the regional and national level will help identify opportunities for knowledge transfer and joint activities to overcome innovation, replication, and scale-up challenges.

Through the activities of T5.4.2, NetZeroCities facilitated learning and information sharing among cities - both Mission Cities and others, at the regional and national levels to strengthen cities' capacity and capabilities to achieve climate neutrality. A crucial aspect involves Mission Cities sharing their experiences and insights with other cities that have the same national context and experience similar challenges in their transition efforts. Furthermore, NetZeroCities assisted cities in defining their support needs towards the other levels of government (regional and national) and bringing these needs to their attention, thus strengthening the national frame to support cities' climate neutrality work and boost replication and scale-up of successful actions.

The work of Task 5.4.2 built on the conclusions drawn from *D5.9: Mapping of national and regional city collaboration*, which was developed as part of the first sub-task (T5.4.1). The mapping conducted in D5.9 regarding initiatives for climate collaboration between cities revealed variations in the extent of such collaboration across different countries. Building upon these findings, the task partners chose to concentrate the efforts of T5.4.2 on the following countries identified as most interested in receiving support from NetZeroCities, for national collaboration support, from a dedicated survey launched with cities in spring 2023: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, and Romania. However, task partners decided to take out four countries. The main reason was the need to reduce the number of supported countries because the process of engaging and creating trust with national multiplier organisations was more time-intensive than expected. Due to limited resources, engaged partners decided to concentrate their efforts on less countries than originally envisaged as explained in the methodology section below.

This deliverable provides a summary of the activities conducted in the supported countries, along with key lessons learnt that are valuable for cities willing to achieve climate neutrality. Moreover, the report outlines the methodology and approach followed.

The outcomes of this report are important for informing and supporting activities carried out in Work Package 1 of Specific Grant Agreement 2 (SGA2) signed with the NetZeroCities Consortium, which focuses on engaging cities beyond the 112 Mission Cities in NetZeroCities' activities, support collaboration among cities on the national level, and engage other levels of government in actions supporting cities' climate neutrality efforts.

## Methodology and approach

This section gives an overview of the overall approach and preparatory activities undertaken by the task partners: the process for selecting the focus countries, the development of the offer to the cities, awareness raising activities, and the coordination of work between the task partners.

### Selection of countries

As part of the first sub-task (T5.4.1), task partners performed a mapping of collaboration initiatives between cities on climate action, both on the national and regional level, in the 27 EU Member States and eight Associated Countries involved in the EU Mission on 112 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 (Cities Mission). The findings of the mapping are available in [D5.9: Mapping of national and regional city collaboration](#).

The mapping results revealed that collaboration among cities on climate action is more limited in some countries than in others. Based on the results of this report and discussions with NetZeroCities City Advisors, the task partners decided to focus on the following countries as part of the activities of T5.4.2: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, and Romania.

### Developing an offer to the cities

After finalising the selection of focus countries, the task partners developed a short survey with the goal of gauging cities' interests to participate in collaborative activities with other cities regarding climate neutrality issues. The survey also aimed to collect input on the scope and scale of the activities to be organised. The survey was disseminated via email to both Mission Cities and cities that had expressed interest in the Cities Mission in the aforementioned countries in spring 2023.

The project received 13 responses to the survey from the following Mission Cities: Tartu (Estonia), Vilnius (Lithuania), Cluj-Napoca (Romania), Riga (Latvia), Liberec (Czech Republic), Elbasan (Albania), Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Differdange (Luxembourg). A few cities that previously had expressed their interest in the Cities Mission also responded to the survey: Vratsa, Burgas and Varna (Bulgaria), Križevci (Croatia), and Ramnicu Valcea (Romania).

Utilising the feedback from the survey, the task partners formulated a set of proposed activities that they could suggest to the cities and help facilitate. The following activities were formulated:

- **Mission Portal**

Task partner would support cities in using existing groups or creating new ones on the Mission Portal to foster sharing of information and exchanges between cities. Additionally, partners would organise a presentation of the portal's offer to cities and how they best can use the resources and functionalities.

- **Peer learning sessions**

Task partners would facilitate the organisation of peer learning sessions around specific topics or challenges related to climate neutrality that the cities are tackling. This would foster the sharing of experiences and best practices, while also provide an opportunity to explore future joint activities and projects.

- **Multi-level governance**

When feasible, task partners would facilitate the creation of dialogues with the regional or national levels to communicate cities' challenges and support needs.

These activities were conducted both online and in-person, to maximise impacts while minimising costs, depending on the different opportunities to be associated with existing events.

### Raising awareness and interest

In September 2023, a webinar was organised to introduce the offer to cities across the identified countries. Invitations were extended to both survey respondents and Mission Cities in the 13 focus countries. The webinar featured inspiring presentations by the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities Climate Network and the CitiES2023 platform, aimed at emphasising the advantages of city collaboration on climate matters and offering insights into various activities and collaboration formats. Additionally, the webinar showcased the proposed activities that NetZeroCities could facilitate in the selected countries and allowed for opportunities for discussions. The webinar had 12 participants from cities across the focus countries.

### Coordination among task partners

Following the webinar, the task partners decided to allocate the selected countries among themselves. This decision aimed to enable each partner to concentrate on a specific group of countries and collaborate with the cities within them to develop activities jointly. The allocation of countries among the

partners was determined by their interests, memberships, and prior connections in these countries or cities.

Task partners established contacts with key stakeholders in the countries, met cities to fine-tune the assessment of their needs, identified key experts to engage, organised events, and the communication around it, animate exchanges afterwards. Below is a table summarising which partners worked on which countries.

| Countries                                   | Task partners in charge                                 |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro | Eurocities, supported by ERRIN and UITP                 |
| Bulgaria                                    | Energy Cities                                           |
| Croatia                                     | Energy Cities, supported by UITP and EIT Urban Mobility |
| Czech Republic                              | Energy Cities                                           |
| Estonia                                     | UITP, supported by ERRIN                                |
| Hungary                                     | Climate Alliance                                        |
| Latvia                                      | ERRIN                                                   |
| Lithuania                                   | Eurocities                                              |
| Luxembourg                                  | Climate Alliance                                        |
| Malta                                       | ERRIN, supported by Energy Cities                       |
| Romania                                     | Eurocities                                              |

Figure 1. Distribution of Countries Across Task Partners

At some point, task partners decided to reduce the number of supported countries because the process of engaging and creating trust with national multiplier organisations was more time-intensive than expected. Four countries – Estonia, Lithuania, Malta and Romania – were removed from the list of priority countries. This choice of Romania was based on information emerging in a new NetZeroCities report ([D1.7: National/regional CCC engagement cluster situation report](#)), which highlighted the development of a national platform in Romania. The purpose of this national platform is to unite Romanian cities interested in advancing their efforts toward climate neutrality through collective activities, which intersects with the purpose of the activities in Task 5.4.2.

In Estonia and Lithuania, the contacted cities expressed the view that there exist established forums for climate collaboration among cities, and the current focus of Mission Cities was the development of the CCCs. Likewise, the Gozo (only Mission City in Malta) needed to prioritise the CCC development, and due to limited connections with other cities in Malta, the task partners found it challenging to continue the work, combined with the fact that local authorities in Malta are small administrative units with few competencies.

## Delivered and ongoing support in different countries

### Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro – Macro-regional platform

#### Approach and activities

The work done with Elbasan, Podgorica, and Sarajevo was originally conceptualised in the form of the creation of a macro-regional collaboration platform. The reasoning behind it was the fact that the



Western Balkan associated countries share similar challenges when it comes to governance structures, access to funding programmes, and climatic conditions.

Therefore, Eurocities and UITP also explored the potential expansion of this collaboration to other municipalities in neighbouring countries. The idea was welcomed by the City Advisors of the Mission Cities concerned (Podgorica, Sarajevo, Elbasan), who highlighted the fact that there are no other selected mission cities in their respective countries. Therefore, according to the City Advisors consulted on 22 January 2024, these cities find it difficult to identify clear peers among other Mission Cities, with matching needs and levers of change, to share information and lessons learnt with. These cities had, according to their City Advisors, shared interest in learning from other cities in Western Balkans-associated countries and other cities in neighbouring countries like Cluj Napoca, Istanbul, and Izmir due to geographical proximity and shared challenges (such as the accession to the EU for Turkish cities, for instance).

The main goal was therefore to enhance the creation of collaborative relations between the above-mentioned cities at macro-regional level. According to the plan we initially drafted, throughout the course of two years, we aimed to organise four knowledge-sharing webinars and create a discussion group on the platform to foster informal exchanges among the cities and ease our communication with them.

While the initial participants of this space would have been the three cities previously mentioned, other cities interested in climate neutrality belonging to the same countries, together with Istanbul and Izmir and other cities from Turkey, would have slowly been incorporated in the discussions and the webinars in line with the kick off of the work to support all cities through SGA2.

One potential objective of this group would have been building partnership and exploring the submission of a joint application for a project on climate action. We intended to dive into the possibility for the main three cities to apply together for a project publicly funded or to seek financing from private institutions that work with a focus on the Western Balkans region.

However, when it was time to organise the first kick-off meeting, and after having had several calls with the City Advisors to fully understand the availabilities of these countries, due to lack of responsiveness and interest received from the Elbasan and Podgorica, task partners shifted the support to each city individually, rather than at macro-regional level. One of the main reasons was the dedication of Mission Cities to the development of their Climate City Contract, and the lack of time to engage in additional activities.

## Lessons learnt

The context in Mission Cities from Associated Countries are different from those located within the EU Member States. This is because of their political situation, as well as the weak support of their national governments. Overall, this has complicated the creation of a smooth collaboration between NetZeroCities and the Mission Cities. Nevertheless, the desire for a national and multi-level governance platforms and enhanced collaboration between cities within Albania and Montenegro is very high. Similarly, there is the same desire for the creation of a regional platform for Western Balkan cities to share knowledge with each other. The challenge is advocating the importance of supporting such structures with the national government, with adequate resources and capacity towards maintaining such platforms.



## Montenegro

### Approach and activities

For the development of activities with Montenegrin cities, Eurocities partnered with the national association of Montenegrin municipalities “Union of Municipalities of Montenegro” (UoM), and the Covenant of Mayors Western Balkans, led by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

UoM has been working on the creation of a multilevel governance platform in collaboration with the Covenant of Mayors Western Balkans since March 2021. Several of the Montenegrin cities are currently working on the development of their SECAPs, and the National Government is drafting the NECP. This gave NetZeroCities the perfect framework to start a conversation with Montenegrin cities on multi-level governance towards climate neutrality. The event took place on 26 February 2025, in Hotel Podgorica and it brought together seven municipalities (Tivat, Kolasin, Pljevlja, Podgorica, Berane, Kotor and Bard) and two representatives of the national government’s Ministry of Energy to discuss several topics:

- The recently drafted National Energy and Climate Plan of Montenegro
- The status of the preparation of the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan
- NetZeroCities’s approach to the climate transition and opportunities for all Cities
- Connecting SECAPs and Climate City Contracts

After the presentations of these different topics, we proceeded to hold the discussions with the cities.

### Lessons learnt

As an initial lesson learnt, it is important to highlight the work the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro has been doing to give a voice to local authorities within the country, and to represent them before the national government. This collaboration has still not materialised despite the efforts made by GIZ and Union of Municipalities of Montenegro. There is a need for NZC to continue the legacy of the Covenant of Mayors Western Balkans to maintain a two-way dialogue between local and national governments.

Based on the discussions held within the first workshop, Eurocities and UITP gathered insights on the main areas Montenegrin cities are working on, the challenges they are facing, and the steps they want to take next.

**Sustainable mobility** is the area Montenegrin cities are focusing on the most. According to some statements shared during the workshop, families in the country tend to have one vehicle per member. This leads to families having up to five vehicles. Public transport currently makes up 1% of the total share of passenger transport. While Montenegrin cities are working hard on introducing sustainable mobility options, there is work to be done with citizens themselves and behavioural change. Some initiatives shared during the conversations were the promotion of electric bikes, the development of cycling paths, the intention to purchase electric buses and running them from the municipality to promote public transport use, and the creation of a solar energy fuelled boat for commuters and sustainable tourism. In some instances, while bike lanes have been developed, some have been removed over the years to give space to road traffic.

However, common challenges were highlighted such as growing tourism in areas posing a huge issue on congestion from private vehicles and demand for parking space. City representatives also called for further guidance and support with effective stakeholder engagement and managing citizen fatigue with participation in planning processes. Representatives asked for support specifically on advocating the importance of sustainable mobility and communicating to different stakeholders how changes will benefit them.

A second area Montenegrin cities are working on is the increase of energy efficiency and the development of **sustainable energy solutions**. Some of the projects these municipalities are working on include the refurbishment of buildings through thermal insulation, the implementation of thermal

pipelines in cooperation with utilities companies, the optimisation of public lighting, and the development of renewable energies through solar panels.

Through the work done in collaboration with GIZ and the Covenant of Mayors Western Balkans, 19 SECAPs have been developed of which 11 have been adopted. Capacity building and training sessions have been held with municipalities and further support has been offered towards project implementation and funding proposals.

While advancing towards their decarbonisation goals, most of these cities are interested in being part of a bigger network of cities that will allow them to gather inspiration and learn how to further progress in their climate neutrality goals. They understand that they share common challenges with other cities and are open to learning good practices.

The collaboration between Covenant of Mayors Western Balkans (GIZ) and Union of Municipalities of Montenegro (UoM) is coming to an end at the end of 2025. This means that UoM will not have any further support to continue to build the informal national platform of cities. Therefore, NZC would be a relevant partner to contribute to the work the UoM is doing on the ground and to also offer Montenegrin cities the chance to interact with other municipalities to advance towards their climate goals.

## Albania

### Approach and activities

Similar to the process followed with Montenegro, because the initial collaboration and response from Elbasan was not successful, due to the decision of Elbasan to focus on their CCC development, Eurocities looked for allies within the country. The City Advisor of Elbasan enabled Eurocities to liaise with local organisations working with Albanian cities towards decarbonisation. These two organisations were **AL-Green** and **Build Green Albania**. Throughout 2024, efforts were made to find opportunities to organise an event with one of the above-mentioned organisations.

The opportunity arose when, having reached out to the network B40, Eurocities spotted the chance to organise a session with Albanian cities during the B40 Summit. The Summit was initially taking place in Sarajevo, but for internal reasons it was decided to be held in Sofia instead. During the months of September 2024 until the beginning of February 2025, Eurocities and UITP exchanged emails and concept notes to clearly communicate the different sessions NZC partners were planning on organising in the event (one plenary session, and two targeted sessions for Bosnian and Albanian cities). B40 showed a lot of interest in collaborating from the beginning. However, due to internal complications the collaboration did not fully formalise, and Eurocities' and UITP's efforts did not materialise. Nevertheless, because of the several attempts to establish a collaboration with B40, the Deputy Mayor of Sofia got in touch with Thomas Osdoba and extended an invitation to participate in one of the panels of the summit.

### Lessons learnt

Moving on, a clear collaboration should be established with **Build Green Albania**. The organisation actively works with Albanian cities to develop and implement projects to help municipalities grow greener and is also trying to enhance the voices of Albanian local authorities to have more say at a national level.

## Bulgaria

### Approach and activities

For activities with Bulgarian cities, Energy Cities partnered with [EnEffect](#), to leverage their expertise in supporting municipalities with sustainable energy policies in Bulgaria. EnEffect, a leader in energy efficiency, coordinates the Municipal Energy Efficiency Network (EcoEnergy) and the [NECPlatform](#) project, which facilitates national discussions on energy and climate policies. NZC T5.4 aimed to complement EnEffect's work by strengthening experience-sharing among Bulgarian cities on topics such as stakeholder engagement, private sector involvement, GHG inventories, and climate neutrality roadmaps.

Engagement with Bulgarian Mission Cities began in summer 2023. Gabrovo responded positively and expressed interest in joint activities with Sofia, particularly in knowledge-sharing on the CCC process. However, follow-up efforts stalled due to delayed response and the anticipated October 2023 local elections, which later led to administrative changes, especially in Sofia.

Energy Cities continued to engage with the City Support Group for Bulgarian Mission Cities, monitoring developments and identifying relevant opportunities. A key finding was the need for greater citizen engagement in Climate City Contract (CCC) development, which was confirmed during a February 2024 visit to Sofia and Gabrovo by the city support team. This presented an opportunity for joint efforts on participatory approaches and stakeholder engagement.

In fact, to address these needs, Energy Cities organised a workshop on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2024 on the topic of citizen and stakeholder engagement, leveraging existing tools, resources and examples from NetZeroCities but also other relevant projects. The aim of this workshop was to showcase practical tools and enable a discussion with other Mission Cities who have a track record on enabling effective citizen participation, in order to inspire the Bulgarian Mission Cities to consider these examples in the development of their CCCs and beyond. For this workshop, Energy Cities used material developed in the NZC, such as the [building blocks](#) for enabling urban stakeholder engagement processes and practical toolkits developed in the [Cities of Tomorrow project](#) such as the Co-Creation Canvas template and the Transition legitimacy tool. The workshop also featured an intervention from the city of Valencia which shared their experience on co-designing actions with stakeholders through *Valencia Change for Climate* initiative and gathering inputs from citizens to align city strategies depending on citizens' needs such through the *Valencia My Neighbourhood* initiative. The workshop was open and invitation extended to other interested cities in Bulgaria, however only the Bulgarian Mission Cities (Sofia and Gabrovo) participated in this workshop, despite EnEffect's communication to other cities. The urgency to deliver the workshop to support Bulgarian Mission Cities in their CCC's development reduced the time to communicate towards other Bulgarian cities.

The following are some key takeaways which came out of the workshop:

#### Insights from Sofia:

- Sofia has recently established a new department for sustainable development, marking a step forward in institutionalising and mainstreaming climate and sustainability efforts in the city administration.
- While the city has implemented some sustainability-related actions, these have not been directly linked to the CCC, and no structured citizen stakeholder engagement activities have taken place until then specifically in regard to the CCC process.
- A key challenge for the city administration remains internal coordination, as some municipal departments are not fully on board with prioritising citizen engagement efforts, which may hinder a more inclusive and participatory approach to sustainability initiatives.

#### Insights from Gabrovo

- Gabrovo has been exploring various avenues to effectively engage citizens in climate efforts. The city has embarked on a systematic approach to engaging young children with year-round activities related to ecology and sustainability. This method helps foster openness to change from an early age.
- Gabrovo has taken a gradual and continuous approach to engagement, working closely with the city council and incorporating various municipal departments into the process. Up until the date of the workshop, Gabrovo was still in the process of formalising a transition team to align efforts across different sectors and departments, including the citizen engagement aspect.
- Gabrovo acknowledges that citizen and stakeholder engagement is a layered and long-term process, requiring ongoing dialogue and institutional alignment.
- One of the main barriers that Gabrovo found when engaging citizens was sustaining public interest over time. In comparison, city stakeholders generally find ways to remain engaged over time.

### Insights from Valencia

- Valencia presented various examples of multi-stakeholder governance, such as **Valencia's Energy Transition Roundtable** which included over 30 working sessions involving 45 people coming from 30 entities over two years with the objective of work together on a fair and inclusive energy transition strategy. From these efforts, what emerged has been a set of broader citizen engagement efforts. Due to the pandemic, 90% of the working sessions were held online, which reduced costs but also presented challenges in maintaining engagement.
- When it comes to citizen engagement, Valencia's approach focused on bringing people together to discuss specific projects, as they found from experience that citizens are generally more interested in concrete, short-term topics rather than broad policy discussions.
- A pilot initiative called '**Neighbourhood in Transition**' was launched to test participatory methods at the local level, in order for Valencia to be able to communicate the Climate City Contract to citizens, but to also obtain feedback, priorities and contributions to the CCC. Some other objectives of this initiative were to assess how non-engaged citizens would perceive the EU Cities Mission and at the same time to try and motivate direct action and behavioural change in people.
- To build trust and foster engagement, initial sessions dedicated time for participants to get to know each other through icebreakers before moving on to substantive discussions. A lot of these sessions happened on a Saturday morning in a nice park where activities including food and entertainment for children were also organised. To make this happen, the city collaborated with students, universities, district associations' networks and ensured that citizens are organised in small groups so everyone could share their views.
- Valencia used three key questions to guide discussions:
  - What would you like the municipality to do?
  - What would you like others (private sector, other entities) to do?
  - What could you do? *(However, responses to this question were often lacking, with participants focusing more on civic behaviour)*
- Many citizens wanted immediate, tangible and niche/specific results, such as changes to public transport routes, which did not necessarily coincide or align with CCC priorities.
- In some cases, citizens requested actions that were already in place, highlighting the need for better communication and raise awareness on existing efforts.

### Practical considerations which came out during the workshop:

- Broad engagement on an overarching policies and strategies such as the CCC may not be the most effective approach when engaging with citizens. Instead, engagement efforts should focus on specific projects and actions that allow for more meaningful participation and immediate impact.

- Focusing on specific projects and actions may be more effective than seeking broad citizen input on the CCC itself. A key question is whether citizen participation is intended to shape policy or simply to build legitimacy – transparency in this approach is crucial.
- Communication should be clear, accessible, and focused on tangible projects that directly impact people's lives. In fact, language plays a critical role in engagement. Working with specialists who understand how to communicate complex topics in an accessible way is highly valuable.
- To effectively engage citizens, it is essential to meet them where they are, taking time to listen to their concerns before introducing specific topics. Citizens are more likely to engage in discussions around practical, everyday issues such as green spaces, public transport, bicycles, and the impact of heatwaves on housing.

## Lessons learnt

As mentioned above, there are several areas where potential collaboration amongst Bulgarian cities on climate objectives would be desired and welcomed. However, one key insight was aligning our activities as a service for the Mission cities to use in the development of their CCCs, by providing a space where both Mission cities could work closely together especially on common challenges. Even though the Bulgarian Mission Cities have different city-sizes (one being a larger city and the capital), and the other a much smaller city in size, there could still be potential where they can both draw learnings from each other and work on common solutions together, especially in trying to engage their residents in their CCC process. The extension of support at national level via future NetZeroCities activities and the extension of the CapaCITIES project to Bulgaria will allow to gradually encompass additional Bulgarian cities beyond the current Mission Cities. The goal is to broaden and involve collaboration across all dedicated and interested cities at the national level.

## Croatia

### Approach and activities

Energy Cities, the Task 5.4 partner responsible for coordinating activities in Croatia, has been working closely with REGEA, to pinpoint areas and climate topics of interest where further collaboration could be beneficial and strengthened amongst Croatian cities. REGEA is a key partner in Croatia in terms of support to local authorities, being one of the coordinators of the [national energy and climate dialogue](#), being in charge of the Croatian Regional Innovation Scheme Hub of the EIT Urban Mobility Initiative and being a coordinator of the [EU Covenant of Mayors for Energy and Climate](#). After several exchanges with REGEA and the City Advisor for Zagreb in Q4 of 2023, the approach agreed upon was a series of online webinars to identify priority topics with Croatian cities themselves and start collaboration around them. The idea behind these activities was for them to build upon one another whereby, topics identified in the first activities would serve as the basis for continued discussion in future webinars and workshops.

The primary goal was to also involve the Mission City of Zagreb within these activities, so that the city could share its experience and learnings of the CCC process to inspire other Croatian cities. However, given that Zagreb was gearing up towards its CCC submission in September 2024 and working on its pilot action, it was not a timely period to secure the city's involvement within these activities. This did not hinder planned activities with other Croatian cities, with the intention of involving Zagreb after the submission of its CCC.

These activities were launched through a first webinar with Croatian cities, organised on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024 by Energy Cities, REGEA and EIT Urban Mobility Foundation. This initial webinar focused on sharing what the NetZeroCities project can offer and provided key updates on upcoming EU



obligations for cities which could serve as opportunities for Croatian cities to strengthen their collaboration on climate topics. A large part of the webinar was dedicated to open discussion, so Croatian cities could share and hear from each other first hand.

In total, seven Croatian municipalities participated in this webinar: Dugo Selo, Križevci, Zadar, Ivanic-grad, Dubrovnik, Osijek, Belisce, all being represented by different municipal departments which included the climate, urban planning, innovation as well as the financial departments. One key topic which emerged was the question of decarbonising mobility, a clear difficulty for medium- and small-sized municipalities, which is the case of most Croatian cities.

Thus, a second webinar was organised on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024, with REGEA, and [Odraz](#), a civil society organisation supporting sustainable development, and in charge of the urban mobility network [CIVINET Croatia-Slovenia-CEE](#). This webinar focused on “*Driving behavioural change in mobility through public space design*” and was attended by 25 people. It included the interventions of REGEA about mobility drivers, indicators and decarbonisation solutions, of UITP on European best practices of public space design, of the cities of Križevci about closing streets (Living Streets project) and of city of Karlovac about new mobility infrastructure and bus shelters (the Citiwalk2.0 project).

## Lessons learnt

### Cities a key partner for the implementation of the Fit-For-55 Package

The first webinar revealed that some of the key topics that attending Croatian cities worked on at this moment included climate resilience, climate proofing, increasing renewable energies, green infrastructure and financing. Moreover, the majority stated that they already have collaboration ongoing with other municipalities on the following topics: geothermal energy, energy efficiency, climate change adaptation as well as mitigation. Lastly, through another poll, all participating cities expressed interest in the CCC approach and stated the following reasons: improvement of climate policy, exploring financing opportunities, meeting climate objectives and being able to learn from other cities and sharing experiences.

When it comes to new EU policy updates and obligations for cities, these focused primarily on new obligations in the field of energy and transport as well as new funding instruments which could support cities, with key examples provided including the following:

- the new Energy Efficiency Directive published in September 2023 where municipalities with over 45,000 inhabitants must prepare local heating and cooling plans.
- An opportunity (rather than an obligation) that the Social Climate Fund (SCF) presents: a funding instrument which will finance mobility, energy efficiency and building renovation projects to alleviate energy poverty.
- Urban nodes will have to adopt sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMP) by 2027 that among others, facilitate intermodal transport, promote zero-emission mobility, zero-emission urban logistics, active mobility and reduce air and noise pollution.

A comprehensive overview of the new obligations for local authorities related to the adopted legislations from the Fit-for-55 Package can be found in [this publication](#). Presentation supports can be found on the [group for Croatian cities](#) on the NetZeroCities portal (in the “file” section).

The second part of the webinar provided an open space for discussion, where participants were able to share their views on the upcoming EU obligations and if they can be addressed through collaborative projects. Enhanced public transport and PV installation on heritage buildings and large sites emerged as key areas of interest.

After the webinar, Energy Cities shared the following case studies and resources:

- [The Transition team playbook](#) which explores different models of how to bring different actors working together with the clear goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2030. Transition teams

can also be set internally within a municipality by bringing different departments together, enabling a culture of collaboration which gets everyone on board around a common vision (such as climate neutrality).

- **Building Integrated PVs** can serve as a potential solution to blend PVs into historical building structures. An interesting project working on this concept is [PoCityf Project](#) where BIPV solutions will be implemented in Évora's historical centre (Portugal). These BIPV are designed to blend into the existing aesthetics and structure of the buildings using an 'invisible solar' solution (PV solar cells are integrated in a polymer compound that can be designed to appear like stone, wood, concrete, or brick). Other solutions include amorphous-silicon photovoltaic glass, which will be used to replace skylights and windows.
- There are also some resources on [Zero-Emissions Buses](#) on the NetZeroCities Portal, highlighting some examples from existing projects as well.

### Public space design: a not-to-forget lever to reduce mobility emissions

The second webinar focused on the design of public space as a lever to reduce mobility emissions. Partners involved in the organisation aimed to build the capacities of cities on this topic, which is still an issue they need to grasp for most middle-sized and small-sized local authorities.

The first point before starting a redesign of public space to reduce individual use of cars in mobility schemes is to understand the set of choices individuals make regarding their travel patterns and modes of transportation. For this, key indicators are modal shares of different transport means and understanding the reasons (work, home, shopping, etc.) for which people go to different locations. Developing travel behaviour models (integrating external factors, such as spatial characteristics and personal factors such as gender, income, education) greatly helps to provide more reliable insights to planners and local governments. Changing travel behaviour is a long-term process requiring the deployment of a combination of solutions, such as discouraging private cars' use via urban planning policies and behavioural nudges, and incentivising public transport use via education, and digital technologies.

Data shows that cars use a lot of public space and thus are inefficient compared to other transport modes. And increasing alternative public modes is clearly related with public space design. For instance, attractive walking environments can triple the amount of potential public transport users. Experience shows that the following elements in public space encourage sustainable mobility: parks, plazas, green and open spaces, wide-pavements, tree-lined streets, continuous and safe cycling lines, secured bike parks, clear indications on where to park and safe intersections. Car-free zones and traffic calming infrastructures can be very effective. To encourage multi-modality, having a dense network of mobility hubs offering different options is also key to make alternative transport modes more competitive and accessible. Finally, developing services and activities closed to people is the way to reduce the need to travel, and thus the mobility emissions.

In 2021, the city of Križevci in Croatia tested to close streets from five residential blocks to provide citizens with space for socialising ([LivingStreets](#) project). In each block, for two weekends, activities have been co-created with residents and raising-awareness activities on healthy living and sustainable mobility were proposed. These activities helped to create stronger relationships among residents, but also helped the local authorities to better understand their needs and wishes, such as more facilities (benches, tables, playgrounds...) in green spaces to encourage socialisation, and infrastructures. Since then, the city deployed a public bike system, built different bicycle lines, closed some streets, introduced a 30 km/h limitation in the city and launched a public transport system with two electric buses.

Another engaged city in Croatia is Karlovac which focuses on urban street design to reduce mobility emissions thanks to the [CityWalk2.0](#) project. In this framework, the city launched an experimentation to transform bus shelters into sustainable mobility and climate (info) points. These new bus shelters should become significant elements of the public space, attract people, and provide information able to push citizens towards cycling, walking and public transport. Functionalities could integrate real-time information on traffic and public transport, green roofs, bike car parks, etc. Co-design of these bus shelters with citizens started in 2024. This experimentation will reinforce the city transport policies towards sustainable mobility (bike-sharing, public transport, mobility week, etc.)



## Improving multi-level governance and collaboration among Croatian cities

The focus of the activities was the reinforcement of the community of cities, especially the engagement of smaller cities. REGEA led the NECPlatform project in Croatia, which allowed to renew the dialogue between the national government and local authorities. Several dialogues were organised with local authorities' representatives, however one key issue is that stronger multi-level governance requires a strong community of engaged cities. It is why the activities proposed by NetZeroCities, in collaboration with REGEA, was to raise awareness to cities and focus on capacity building activities, allowing to reinforce this community and increase its size. Another key point is the engagement of several ministries and the reinforcement of cross-collaboration between Ministries to have a more meaningful multi-level cooperation between national and local authorities. Indeed, addressing climate change requires a systemic approach and thus breaking silos in the governance also at national level, like cities do during the development and implementation of their CCC when establishing Transition teams.

## Czech Republic

### Approach and activities

For the activities in the Czech Republic, Energy Cities, the task partner responsible, opted for a similar approach to Bulgaria and Croatia. Initially, Energy Cities sought collaboration with a national Czech partner, in this case, Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic. This was also strategic to enable synergies with the existing work organised by Healthy Cities as part of the CapaCITIES project. Despite different exchanges, and the identification of topic of particular interest for Czech cities (i.e. the development of energy communities and energy sharing), Healthy Cities was not able to further engage in jointly developing activities on the topic, due to lack of human resources.

Energy Cities also had a number of exchanges with the City Advisor of Liberec to discuss how to engage the Mission City of Liberec in activities with other Czech cities, and on what particular topics. However, at the end of 2023, and beginning of 2024, Liberec was heavily focused on their CCC's development.

It was decided to start the activities at the URBIS Smart Cities meetup event in June 2024 held in Brno together with the Liberec's city support group. This event served as a good platform for NZC to engage with Czech cities on the NetZeroCities' offer. Two separate activities were held on two separate days, one being a panel discussion outlining how Czech Cities could get on board and participate in the EU Cities Mission, and a more hands-on workshop showcasing insights, tools and best practises from NetZeroCities which could support Czech cities in their climate neutrality efforts. Both events secured good participation from various Czech cities and organisations including Brno, Kladno and EIT Urban Mobility Hub in the Czech Republic.

Thanks to these strong connections established from URBIS, NetZeroCities partners managed to engage key national partners in the reflection of establishing a national platform around the Cities Mission to support cities, and to bring other interesting Czech examples to NZC. This led to the organisation of a follow-up online workshop on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025 organised with the Regional Ministry, the Ministry for Industry and Trade, the Ministry for Environment as well as the EU Covenant of Mayors. The workshop with the title of '**Inspiring Local Climate Action from Czech cities**' aimed to showcase how cities in Czechia are using local climate action to become healthier and more sustainable communities. This workshop featured examples from two Czech cities: Kladno and Liberec, as well as examples from a Mission City outside Czechia, Cluj Napoca. Thanks to this webinar Czech cities could also learn how the EU Covenant of Mayors and the EU Cities Mission provide important frameworks for cities to activate their climate action, as well as funding and collaboration opportunities. The workshop registered a high turnout with 78 registrants and over 65 participants representing various municipalities, regional authorities as well as other relevant organisations in the Czech Republic.

**Below are some key insights from the panel and workshop at the URBIS Smart City Meetup (4 - 6 June, Brno, Czech Republic):**

**Panel:** *'Exploring How Czech Cities Can Get on Board & Participate in the EU Mission: Climate-Neutral & Smart Cities'*

City Advisor for the city of Liberec represented NetZeroCities on a panel discussion on the barriers cities face in their climate neutrality journey, including behavioural change, resource constraints, and political alignment. Key takeaways and messages included:

- Securing political buy-in in Czech cities even though challenging, can be strengthened by emphasising future prosperity and intergenerational responsibility.
- Effective communication with citizens is essential and this can be achieved by emphasizing more the local and personal impact of climate change; impacts which residents could relate to more.
- The co-benefits obtained through climate action are key to secure citizen and political buy-in. This can range from effectively communicating and showcasing how, for instance, the reduction of urban heat islands and improved liveability could be direct result of climate action measures.
- Multi-level collaboration is vital in a city's trajectory towards climate neutrality, and this required stronger engagement with and from regional and national authorities.

**Workshop:** *'NetZeroCities: Supporting Cities' Climate Transition Efforts'*

NetZeroCities led a workshop with Czech cities, focusing on climate strategy development, identifying needs, and fostering collaboration. Discussions reinforced several critical points:

- Strengthening multi-level collaboration and ecosystem-wide cooperation is essential for aligning efforts and building trust among stakeholders.
- Understanding citizen needs is key to securing political commitment – placing people at the centre of climate action ensures long-term engagement.
- Cities must foster stronger partnerships with entrepreneurs, leveraging urban spaces as innovation hubs for climate solutions.

**Below are some key takeaways from the online workshop organised on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025:**

- **The Covenant of Mayors EU Office** and the **Czech Ministry for Environment**, as the national coordinator of the initiative presented an overview of the initiative, which has mobilised European municipalities for over 15 years to take climate and energy action. The Ministry for Environment confirmed that funding for SECAP development is available, with a new call for applications to be announced soon. Examples of SECAPs implemented in Czech municipalities were also shared as reference points.
- **Kladno** is undergoing a process of revitalisation through Climate Action. Kladno's presentation showcased how strategic documents, including SECAPs and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP), are shaping the city's transformation from an industrial centre into a more attractive place to live and work.
- **EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities** outlined the NetZeroCities platform, especially showcasing new tools and peer-learning possibilities available to all interested cities.
- **Liberec** presented how it is advancing its climate ambition through the EU Cities Mission. Various activities and aspects derived from its work on the CCC were presented such as the expansion of solar energy infrastructures, the decarbonisation of its heating systems, improvement on interdepartmental collaboration within the municipal administration, increasing engagement with young people and the private sector not only to raise climate awareness, but contributions.
- **Cluj Napoca: a Model for Green, Digital, and Resilient Cities.** Cluj Napoca presented its integrated approach to climate neutrality, which prioritises both environmental and social resilience.

- **CapaCITIES:** The Czech Ministry for Regional Development introduced the CapaCITIES project. The first phase of the project (2022–2025) has focused on knowledge exchange and breaking down siloed approaches to climate policy. Looking ahead, the Ministry announced that CapaCITIES 2.0 plans to:
  - Establish a team of experts to provide tailored support to Czech cities.
  - Strengthen institutional capacity within local governments.
  - Collaborate with NetZeroCities to onboard more Czech cities onto the climate neutrality pathway.

The main takeaways during the discussion part of the workshop were on the following themes:

- **Strengthening city collaboration:** There is a strong demand for closer cooperation between Czech cities, but systemic regulatory and legislative barriers often hinder these efforts. Liberec, for example, is eager to work more closely with other municipalities but faces challenges in doing so. There is a need for national-level support to facilitate and enable city partnerships.
- **Streamlining administrative processes:** Municipalities often struggle with overlapping funding calls and reporting requirements, leading to inefficiencies and missed opportunities. Better alignment and simplification of these processes would improve access to funding and reduce administrative burdens.
- **Prioritising citizen engagement:** Kladno's experience with implementing cycle lanes near the railway illustrated the importance of public buy-in. Despite strong overall support for the project, some citizens opposed it, highlighting the need for clear and proactive communication. Cities must engage residents from the outset, address concerns transparently, and demonstrate tangible benefits to ensure public acceptance of major projects.
- **Establishing dedicated municipal teams:** The experiences of Kladno, Liberec, and Cluj Napoca demonstrated that having a dedicated city department responsible for climate initiatives is crucial. Climate action often spans multiple municipal departments, and effective coordination is key to achieving long-term goals.
- **Embedding participation as a long-term practice:** Cluj Napoca's structured approach to citizen engagement serves as a strong example of how cities can foster a culture of participation. Effective communication on climate policies should emphasise direct benefits, such as cleaner air, lower energy costs, and improved public health, to encourage greater public support.
- **Engaging the private sector:** While collaboration with businesses is essential for advancing sustainability goals, establishing effective partnerships can be challenging. Cities can benefit from sharing best practices, incentives, and successful approaches that have worked in similar contexts. This will be particularly important as businesses face new sustainability obligations under the upcoming Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

## Lessons learnt

Below are some important lessons learnt from the activities organised with Czech cities:

- A key lesson learnt has been **the importance of enabling activities in the national language and having a national partner as a co-organiser and main moderator during the activities (refer to second point)**. Enabling activities entirely in Czech and providing Czech translation for English-language interventions has considerably boosted participation and engagement from Czech municipalities. Moreover, it has also enhanced the legitimacy of activities and enabled a more specific theme and focus for the activities.
- **Engaging and involving national government bodies** in Czech activities has increased cities' participation and engagement, as seen with the involvement of the Ministry for Regional Development, the Ministry for Environment and the Ministry for Industry and Trade's involvement in the *Inspiring Local Climate Action from Czech Cities online workshop*. The Ministry for Regional Development actively promoted the webinar, which boosted visibility amongst concerned participants. Moreover, various announcements made by the Ministries during the event on prospective calls and activities enabled a lively Q&A and an active discussion during the workshop.

- **Showcasing examples from the same or similar country context has been incredibly beneficial.** It was also clear that cities want to hear examples from their own country-context or at least from a context relatable to their specific circumstance. In the *Inspiring Local Climate Action from Czech cities workshop*, the participating cities asked various direct questions to the three cities presenting (Kladno, Liberec and Cluj) to gain insights on how they dealt with specific situations or how they address specific challenges such as engaging with the private sector.

## Hungary

### Approach and activities

For the development of activities with Hungarian cities, Climate Alliance reached out to different stakeholders already engaged in the climate collaboration between local authorities. They first contacted the CapaCITIES project to get in touch with [EMI \(Építészeti Minőségellenőrző Innovációs Kft\)](#), one of the organisations responsible for implementing CapaCITIES in Hungary. EMI worked together with [The National Research, Development and Innovation Office \(NKFIH\)](#) over the past two years to set up a national platform dedicated to climate-neutral cities. Subsequently, Climate Alliance reached out to the Reflex Association, an association of NGOs engaged in environmental education and of municipalities committed to climate protection and climate adaptation, which is also part of the Climate Alliance network.

[Klimabarát](#), an alliance of climate-friendly municipalities (about 60 members including villages, small settlements, districts, and cities from Hungary and the Carpathian Basin) supporting the Covenant of Mayors and a permanent member of Hungary's National Sustainable Development, was also contacted but couldn't engage.

The first exchanges with Reflex and EMI occurred in March 2024. Discussions commenced on potential cooperation between Climate Alliance and EMI (and Reflex with Climate Alliance as a link between both) to organise a joint webinar in May or June 2024. Unfortunately, the organisations' schedules did not allow for a joint webinar before the municipal elections on 9 June 2024. These elections implied a change of people in charge of climate protection within the municipalities. Consequently, it was decided to wait after the elections' results to organise a joint event, as engaging with individuals from the cities who would no longer be in their positions post-elections seemed illogical.

Climate Alliance reestablished contact with both organisations at the end of 2024 as well as with the newly founded energy agency of Budapest. Budapest proposed to showcase during one webinar how they did set up the energy agency. However, a concern was raised regarding the project's replicability. Budapest, as the capital of Hungary, has a well-established structure for climate protection with knowledgeable staff who speak excellent English and can engage in European projects. In contrast, other Hungarian cities lack the sufficient capacity and resources to apply to European projects.

Another collaboration was also started with the Covenant of Mayors in Hungary through the European secretariat. EMI is one country coordinator for the Covenant of Mayors Initiative. The Covenant of Mayors Office provided a list of cities that they are supporting or in touch with regarding their Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) and mentioned that a lot of municipalities - especially the smaller ones - are struggling to fund the measures they determined in their SECAP and highlighted the work done by Alsómocsolád. They also mentioned the possibility of presenting some good examples or funding opportunities during a planned workshop in June 2025.

After several email exchanges with these different national actors, different topics were identified for the organisation of a joint webinar:

- Climate leadership: Energy transition ambassadors need to be identified to motivate people and inspire other cities.
- Effective and cost-effective climate protection measures: Climate protection measures should not be considered as stand-alone but should be included in all areas of municipal responsibility.
- Communicating climate protection: it's about acting locally, not about saving the world.

Finally, a webinar was organised by Reflex and Climate Alliance with the support of Energiekontor Norr and ÉMI, called “**Leading changes - Empowering Climate Leaders**”, on 3 April 2025. After a promotion phase via various channels, 42 people registered for the webinar, and 26 participated. Translation services were provided to reduce the language barriers. Positive feedback was received.

## Lessons learnt

The political situation in the country is highly complicated, impacting the activities of organisations and cities working on climate protection. It is crucial to consider that climate protection is not supported at national level when operating in the country. This raises questions about how to support cities and organisations in this context.

Thus, it is imperative to create exchange formats grounded in concrete projects rather than solely on climate neutrality.

The 4-hour workshop was split into two parts: the first involved a concise presentation of NetZeroCities Offers, followed by an overview of the Climate Leader programme “Remarkable”, coupled with an interview featuring the climate leader György Laki, Mayor of Kájárpéc and member of the European Cities Network Climate Alliance Executive Board. The second part was highly interactive and included several exercises alongside a discussion among participants. This session provided valuable insights into critical aspects of climate leadership. Numerous Hungarian climate leaders were referenced including academicians who inspire the participants. It was also an important reminder that anyone can take on this role. Participants also had the opportunity to reflect on their communication around environmental issues and consider ways to enhance their approach for greater effectiveness.

The workshop emphasised the importance of communicating about climate protection and climate change. It is essential to approach these issues from a different perspective, such as not discussing heat islands but illustrating the benefits of solutions like planting trees for shade and overall well-being. The focus should be on residents' health and well-being, rather than just climate protection. Additionally, the discussion included strategies for effectively communicating with different audience types (knowing your audience to tailor your message).

## Latvia

### Approach and activities

The two Latvian Mission Cities, Riga and Liepaja, are both active in the activities organised by the Mission Platform. Riga is part of the first cohort of Twin Cities as well as in the second cohort of Pilot Cities, while Liepaja was the first of the two cities to be awarded the Mission Label for its CCC in October 2024.

No other Latvian cities have, so far, participated in the activities which are open to cities beyond the 112 selected Mission Cities, namely the Twinning Learning Programme, the first cohort of the Pilot City Programme, or the activities organised in NZC-SGA2 directed towards other cities interested in advancing their climate neutrality work. However, the [list of applicant cities](#) show that three additional cities – Jūrmala, Ogre and Valmiera expressed their interest to be part of the Cities Mission in 2022. To date, Latvian cities have had limited involvement in the activities and services offered by the Mission Platform, making engagement efforts particularly challenging. In Latvia there is no national platform dedicated to climate issues, which could support cities in exchanging knowledge, good practices and solutions. Two important networks were identified: the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments and FinEst Centre for Smart Cities, which had established connections with several Latvian cities and planning regions.



A webinar for Latvian cities was held on 23 January 2025, bringing together 7 Latvian cities, 16 regional authorities and 3 planning regions. The webinar served as an opportunity to inform Latvian cities about NetZeroCities, and the various opportunities and services offered by the Mission Platform to cities beyond the 112 Mission Cities. It also highlighted the experiences of Riga and Liepaja as Mission Cities.

Additionally, the Climate and Energy Ministry provided an overview of Latvia's strategic approach towards achieving **climate neutrality by 2050** in line with the **European Green Deal**. It emphasized the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting energy efficiency, and increasing the use of renewable energy. Key policy documents include Latvia's **National Energy and Climate Plan**, **Climate Neutrality Strategy**, and **Adaptation Plan**.

Latvia supports local municipalities with tools and funding, including EU and national programs, to implement climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Investment priorities include renewable energy, centralized heating modernization, and biogas development. Support instruments like the Emission Quota Auctioning Instrument and Modernization Fund are active, with multiple public and private sector programs underway.

Challenges include the need to shift behaviour, improve data access, and strengthen long-term planning and competencies.

Representatives from Riga and Liepaja provided a concise overview of their progress as EU Mission Cities, highlighting their commitments and strategic actions toward achieving climate neutrality by 2030. They outlined the main emission sectors contributing to their carbon footprints – primarily transport, building energy use, district heating, and waste management – and presented key projects prioritized in their CCCs.

In **Riga**, priority areas include:

- Developing micromobility infrastructure and integrating renewable energy in public and municipal transport;
- Advancing building renovation and improving energy efficiency, especially in multi-apartment housing;
- Strengthening wastewater treatment systems and regulating decentralized sewage;
- Supporting socially vulnerable groups in the context of energy poverty.

In **Liepaja**, priority projects focus on:

- Achieving 100% renewable energy in district heating by 2030;
- Expanding a city-wide energy management system (Energodata);
- Implementing smart city solutions, such as digital twins, emission sensors, and adaptive traffic lights;
- Piloting low-emission zones and integrating CO<sub>2</sub> monitoring tools;
- Launching a bike-sharing system and improving public transport.

The cities also identified key challenges in reaching these ambitious goals, including:

- Limited human resources and technical capacity;
- Insufficient data quality and availability;
- The need for improved governance, interdepartmental collaboration, and stronger private sector involvement;
- Budgetary limitations that constrain innovation;
- A lack of alignment between funding mechanisms and climate priorities;
- And insufficient urgency or prioritization of climate goals within municipal systems.



A follow up discussion helped to collect feedback from cities on the emission domains presenting the greatest challenge for the cities in their efforts to achieve climate neutrality, as well as on the key barriers hindering cities from planning and implementing their climate agendas.

## Lessons learnt

Collaboration between Latvian cities does exist at the national level, but it is neither formalized nor structured and tends to happen on an ad-hoc basis. For many municipalities, climate issues are not seen as a top priority. Given Latvia's current geopolitical situation, other concerns often take precedence. Additionally, since many citizens do not feel directly impacted by climate change, this further influences local priorities. At the moment, the interest in establishing stronger and more regular cooperation among cities remains rather vague.

In terms of topics, across Latvian cities, the top sources of greenhouse gas emissions are urban transport and buildings, especially energy use for heating and cooling – a pattern echoed in both Riga and Liepaja. While energy generation and consumption are important, cities agree that reducing transport and building emissions should take priority. Other domains, such as land use, green infrastructure, and water treatment, are relevant but seen as less urgent for immediate action.

Discussions revealed a consistent set of barriers to climate action:

- Financial constraints and limited capacity to implement complex policies.
- Insufficient emissions data and lack of real-time monitoring tools.
- Fragmented governance and weak coordination across municipal departments and governance levels.
- Political hesitation and variable levels of public and private sector engagement.

These issues mirror the obstacles raised by Riga and Liepaja, including limited internal resources, restricted local budgets, and a need for stronger stakeholder involvement.

### Common lessons learned and emerging priorities

1. **Transport is the primary emission battleground.**  
All cities identified **vehicle-related emissions** as the top concern. This reinforces the value of Riga's micromobility and Liepaja's low-emission zone pilots as models for replication.
2. **Buildings need rapid energy transition.**  
Upgrading building stock for **energy efficiency** is a shared priority. Riga's support for energy-poor households and Liepaja's use of **online monitoring systems (Energodata)** offer useful approaches.
3. **Governance and coordination must improve.**  
Cities consistently struggle with **cross-sector collaboration** and internal alignment. Riga's co-creation workshops and Liepaja's platform-based governance model show how cities can build more integrated structures.
4. **Smart solutions are gaining traction.**  
From **digital twins** and **CO<sub>2</sub> sensors** in Liepaja to emissions tracking tools in Riga, cities are investing in data-driven decision-making, though capacity gaps remain.
5. **Political will and funding alignment are crucial.**  
Municipal budgets are often focused on basic services, leaving little room for innovation. The webinar highlighted a growing need for **new and better-aligned funding streams**, especially those supporting **urban mobility, climate data infrastructure, and capacity building**.

6. **Knowledge sharing is a powerful tool.**

Cities expressed interest in **practical case studies** from leaders like Riga and Liepaja. Future webinars and forums should focus on **scalable success stories** in climate-smart transport, EV infrastructure, green solutions, and municipal policy reform.

On the 23rd of April 2025 Liepaja organised a Covenant of Mayor's event about "**Existing and new funding programmes for the cities**" gathering Latvian cities, with the participation of the European Commission and Committee of Regions, EIT Urban Mobility and Latvian Science Council.

## Luxembourg

### Approach and activities

To develop activities for Luxembourg's municipalities, Climate Alliance first contacted its local office to understand the country's legislative framework, the collaborative events already planned between municipalities on climate protection and carbon neutrality, and to help identify other key players. Several interviews and exchanges of information took place in person and via e-mail to gain a clear understanding of the local situation. At least two key players in Luxembourg were identified: Climate Alliance Luxembourg and Klima-Agence.

Climate Alliance Luxembourg has 40 member municipalities, including Differdange, and is coordinated by the NGOs "Action Solidarité Tiers Monde" (ASTM) and "Mouvement Ecologique" (Méco) alongside the member municipalities.

Klima-Agence, the national structure for promoting a sustainable energy transition, has been commissioned by the Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity to support the Climate Pact ("Klimapakt"). Klima-Agence is responsible for managing the process and providing technical support, serving as the main point of contact for most procedures.

An essential tool to achieve Climate Neutrality in Luxembourg municipalities, under the Climate Pact, is the European Energy Award, a systematic and structured approach linked to effective and efficient measures in renewable energy production, sustainable mobility solutions, and other sectors impacting our environment.

Several discussions were held with these two organisations regarding the compatibility and added value of the NetZeroCities methodology and instruments for municipalities in Luxembourg.

Ultimately, NetZeroCities, Climate Alliance, Klima-Agence, and Differdange (Mission City) agreed to organize a joint webinar on May 20th, 2025, which lasted 1,5 hours and was attended by 15 participants. The webinar opened with a presentation on Differdange's activities in the EU project NetZeroCities. The presentation underlined the urgency of accelerating climate action to achieve climate neutrality by 2030 and highlighted the advantages of participating in a European network that enables cities to share knowledge and expertise. It also stressed the importance of engaging politicians, municipal departments, and the wider public in the process, and explained how the methodology proposed by NetZeroCities (Climate City Contract process, Transition Team, etc.) has been implemented by the city.

This was followed by an overview of the services offered by Climate Alliance in Luxembourg and across Europe, designed to support municipalities through networking and knowledge exchange. NetZeroCities presented the different tools and services proposed to all cities at EU-level. And the session concluded with insights from Klima-Agence on its updated approach to municipal greenhouse gas (GHG) accounting in Luxembourg.

## Lessons learnt

Luxembourg has structures in place to assist municipalities in moving towards climate neutrality. These structures and organisations are familiar to municipalities, and key actors (Climate Alliance Luxembourg, Klima-Agence and Cities like Differdange) already collaborate with each other. However, the resources of these organizations acting to support municipalities on their path to climate neutrality and their employees are too limited to go beyond their mandates and engage in cross-collaboration activities with European initiatives.

Statistically, Luxembourg comprises only one city (with more than 100,000 inhabitants), the city of Luxembourg (135,441 inhabitants). The territory of the Grand Duchy is divided into 100 communes, twelve of which have city status by law rather than by population. Differdange, the country's only Mission City, has approximately 24,000 inhabitants. Consequently, Luxembourg's municipalities are often too small to meet the participation criteria set by European projects and lack the necessary internal structures or resources to engage in such initiatives.

Unlike many European municipalities, Luxembourg's local authorities possess the financial resources to implement the necessary transformation towards climate neutrality, as well as an approved methodology. The main challenge lies in human resources. Due to a shortage of resources at this level due to regulatory barriers, they rely on external experts and advisors, whose costs are covered by the government. Unfortunately, this system does not encourage the embedding of knowledge within municipalities. A way out of this impasse is to think creatively, connect with others, and draw strength and inspiration from shared experiences: the involvement of Differdange in the Cities Mission is a great example of how it is possible to adopt new processes. Active knowledge transfer is needed to get these Mission approaches widely used. For overcoming the barriers that smaller municipalities face in meeting the criteria for European project participation, a solution could be to submit joint applications together with other municipalities.

## Building on the outcomes of the task in the future

### Western Balkans

As mentioned above, the desire to create a transnational platform on climate neutrality for cities across Western Balkans, is high. Key stakeholders in Montenegro and Albania have been identified, and the established collaboration should be continued to strengthen community of practices and enhanced multi-level collaboration. There is a large potential to engage stakeholders in the innovative practices proposed by NetZeroCities and developed with the Mission Cities. In addition, efforts started in enhancing the collaboration between local authorities respectively in Albania and in Montenegro offer opportunities to continue this work. Continuation of the collaboration with GIZ and the Covenant of Mayors in Western Balkans is the priority to support Albanian local authorities. With regards to Montenegro, the goal is to continue the collaboration with the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro, as well as with the people in the UNDP in charge of Montenegro. The question of sustainable mobility is the priority topic for innovation actions in this country.

### Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, there are opportunities to continue expanding on the topics addressed during this task's activities especially **on strengthening the national ecosystem supporting cities to achieve climate neutrality:**

- In future activities, a community of practise amongst Bulgarian cities should be established, not only bringing the Mission Cities close together, but also expanding its reach to involve other cities in Bulgaria working on climate neutrality efforts.
- Citizen engagement could be a priority topic for further deliberation and discussion amongst the community of practise of Bulgarian cities. Best practises and peer-exchange on the topic can be further explored.

- Further capacity building and training could be provided by national experts to the community of practise of Bulgarian cities on the topic of citizen engagement (but also other identified topics mentioned in the respective section above) addressing common areas of need or concern.

While there are a limited number of signatories of the Covenant of Mayors Initiative in Bulgaria, increasing the number of Bulgarian local authorities developing Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (or similar) is considered a first step to increase the literacy of local authorities on these topics, and facilitate a transfer of learnings between Mission cities, considered as true pioneers, and other cities.

### Croatia

The two webinars organised, supported by leading national organisations and partially organised in Croatian language, allowed to gather an interesting group of engaged local authorities and identified some of their pain points and to start address them, while offering a collaborative space for peer-learnings. There is an appetite from local authorities to continue this work and expand the group of experts engaged, including some national authorities' representatives. The development of sustainable mobility alternatives should remain a priority for local authorities. The collaboration with REGEA, leading the Climate and Energy Dialogue with national authorities, should be continued for further activities, as well as with Odraz, as a recognised organisation on the topic of mobility. An active collaboration with the Covenant of Mayors Initiative would also be an enabler to expand the number of cities engaged and better ensure a wide spread of the proposed tools and methodologies of NetZeroCities in the national framework.

### Czech Republic

In Czechia, there is a clear momentum to continue working with the national Ministries, especially the Ministry for Regional Development, the Ministry for Environment and the Ministry for Industry and Trade. Through CapaCITIES 2.0, the Ministry for Regional Development has plans to continue expanding support and to develop concrete support measures for a number of Czech cities working towards a climate-neutral trajectory. NetZeroCities can support by ensuring that more cities join the Community of Practise of cities that the Ministry is trying to bring together in Czechia. Although Czech cities are willing to collaborate on climate efforts, active cooperation remains limited. This gap presents an opportunity for NetZeroCities to enable stronger partnerships and coordinated action amongst Czech cities through different tasks and activities. For instance, NetZeroCities can explore targeted policy innovation activities amongst Czech cities to explore common policy barriers and levers at national level.

Here it is also important to build on what already exists, especially considering that there are already a number of Czech cities signatories to the Covenant of Mayors, with a SECAP in place. Therefore, in subsequent activities, it is important to keep this in mind and portray how the EU Cities Mission and the resources developed in NetZeroCities can accelerate climate neutrality efforts, or help cities focus on specific aspects such as enabling a strong governance model around climate neutrality work in the municipality or developing strong investment and financial plans to accompany climate action plans.

Moreover, there is a clear opportunity to leverage the work Liberec has already carried out on its CCC but also on its ongoing pilot in NetZeroCities. During the 'Inspiring Local Climate Action Workshop', participating cities were interested in Liberec's process to develop its CCC, asking important questions on private sector engagement for instance. Therefore, there could be an opportunity for additional sessions involving Liberec where Czech cities are able to delve deeper on specific topics and draw insights from Liberec's process. Moreover, Liberec's pilot, which focuses on community energy, can potentially be expanded into a multi-pilot initiative in Czechia, especially considering that this is a key topic of interest for most Czech cities.

### Hungary

NetZeroCities identified key stakeholders engaged in climate collaboration with and for local authorities in Hungary. For instance, the success of the activity was largely due to the participation of Reflex, as a key player. However, the limited capacities of these organisations call for strengthening the collaboration to join forces for further activities. Collaboration should especially be strengthened with the Covenant of

Mayors Initiative and the CapaCITIES project. The question of communication and stakeholders' engagement should remain priority topics of actions to support climate actions in a country where complementary narratives should be developed around climate actions.

### Latvia

There are several areas where collaboration between Latvian cities on climate goals would be both beneficial and encouraged. It is worth exploring the creation of a national or macro-regional (Baltic) platform to enhance collaboration and knowledge exchange between cities, fostering joint solutions to shared challenges. Liepāja frequently calls for cross-Baltic meetings to facilitate learning from one another, recognizing the many shared societal, financial, and regulatory challenges across the region. One of such meetings happened during Cities Conference in Vilnius (6 –8 May 2025) focusing on a regional finance model for energy efficiency and housing renovation in the Baltics (organised by NetZeroCities).

Based on the responses collected during the discussion, future events or webinars should **focus on practical solutions and successful case studies**, particularly from cities like Riga and Liepāja. Topics such as **reducing transport emissions, expanding electric vehicle infrastructure, and enhancing green urban solutions** should be prioritized. Discussions on improving municipal climate policies, cross-level coordination, and emissions data collection would also help cities implement more effective climate strategies.

## Conclusion

Enhancing climate collaboration among local authorities and other stakeholders requires important efforts, engagement of relevant stakeholders, tailoring activities to national contexts and priority topics, while being able to provide new approaches. In this task, NetZeroCities has established good relationships with many stakeholders and local authorities in different countries and looked for reinforcing national ecosystems supporting local authorities via mainstreaming the Mission approach. The focus on nine countries where climate collaboration was considered as lower than in others also explained the important efforts required to steer relevant activities. While the engagement of Mission Cities, which were developing their CCCs during this period, were unequal across countries, the finalisation of most CCCs and the focus on climate portfolios' implementation will offer an opportunity for better engaging Mission cities and other cities in common collaboration and demonstrate the Mission approach added value. The relationships, trust and understanding of national contexts developed in this task will be of great help for the further development of the various services proposed by NetZeroCities in the next months, and to strengthen and steer enabling national ecosystems for all local authorities to reach climate neutrality. Strong collaboration between local authorities is a key lever for a better multilevel governance.

Observations and suggestions based on the activities developed in this task include:

- National-level obstacles are frequent (political, economic or regulatory), and there is a need for the development of "institutional infrastructures" to support the transformation towards climate neutrality, which is rarely addressed as such.
- Institutional infrastructures should include multi-level governance processes which are formalised and continuous, including the steering, designing, and piloting of climate policies and programmes. Too often multi-level governance is reduced to political dialogues.
- Effective multi-level cooperation structures require inter-DG (Directorate-General) collaboration at EU-level and inter-ministries collaboration at national level. Indeed, addressing climate change requires a systemic approach and thus breaking silos in the governance at EU and national levels, like cities do during the development and implementation of their CCC when establishing Transition teams.
- The multi-level governance should lead to an alignment of national and local finances on the same priorities based on local needs, and to a clear repartition of the funding of climate levers between these two-levels.
- The development of research and innovation action programs to fund national cohorts of cities developing common collaborative projects would greatly benefit the scaling of local climate actions, by increasing mutual learning in a structured way. It would address the issues that cities often lack resources to engage in cross-city collaboration, or to promote the innovation they develop, which leads to the "reinvention of the wheel" in many cases.