



SGA2-NZC

Gap Analysis Report and Detailed Workplan – Part 2

Deliverable D1.20

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Abbreviations and acronyms

| Acronym | Description |
|--------------------------|---|
| Adaptation Mission | EU Mission for Adaptation to Climate Change |
| CapaCITIES | EU-funded project that supports national authorities in developing national platforms for climate-neutral cities |
| (EU) Cities Mission | EU Mission on 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 |
| CCC | Climate City Contract |
| Covenant of Mayors (CoM) | The EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy |
| Mission Cities | 112 cities selected for the Mission on 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030 |
| NZC | NetZeroCities |
| National platforms | Multi-actor national ecosystems supporting the implementation of the EU Cities Mission |
| NECPlatform | EU-funded project focusing the establishing of multi-level dialogues for the development of the National Energy and Climate Plans |
| NECPs | National Energy and Climate Plans, that EU Member States must develop as part of the Energy Union governance process |
| RES | Renewable Energy Sources |
| SECAPs | Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans |
| SGA2 | Specific Grant Agreement 2 |
| UPM | Universidad Politécnica de Madrid |

Summary

The development of multi-actor national ecosystems (also called “national platforms”) is a crucial component in advancing the objectives of the EU Cities Mission, supporting 100 cities to achieve climate neutrality by 2030 and ensuring that these cities act as experimentation and innovation hubs to enable all European cities to follow by 2050. Fostering collaboration between cities within the same national framework, involving different stakeholders and primarily engaging national and regional governments is essential for cities to effectively develop and implement their decarbonisation plans.

Part 1 of the deliverable *D1.20 Gap Analysis Report and Detailed Workplan* of SGA2-NZC analysed the support that cities and local authorities receive from their national or regional authorities to achieve climate neutrality, and how multi-actor national ecosystems linked with the Cities Mission are developing. This report, being part 2 of the deliverable *D1.20 Gap Analysis Report and Detailed Workplan*, defines an intervention logic for partners of task T1.6 of SGA2-NZC to address the identified gaps in the different EU countries via the creation and reinforcement of collaboration spaces for cities and with regional and national stakeholders. In addition, objectives and main actions per country of clusters 2, 3, 4 and 5 are presented. These workplans will be further refined during the implementation of the support.

Task T1.6 of SGA2-NZC will support the organisation of annual in-person events in 28 countries will be supported for three years (countries in clusters 3, 4 and 5). Mentoring and advice services will be provided to countries in cluster 2. Tailored support in the format of technical assistance, co-design with national and local stakeholders, will be provided on an annual basis to the countries of clusters 3 and 4. These countries of clusters 3 and 4 have been identified to receive the most substantial support. This choice is based on a dual rationale: firstly, the national support program for other cities than the Mission ones has not yet been developed there, meaning that Mission Cities and other cities do not currently meet regularly at the national or regional level. Secondly, there is a strong interest from several key actors to structure a support offer, suggesting that with targeted assistance, a significant impact can be achieved.

Keywords

Climate neutrality, local authorities, multi-level governance, NetZeroCities, EU Mission on 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030

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Introduction

The development of multi-actor national ecosystems (also called “national platforms”) is a crucial component in advancing the objectives of the EU Cities Mission, supporting 100 cities to achieve climate neutrality by 2030 and ensuring that these cities act as experimentation and innovation hubs to enable all European cities to follow by 2050. Fostering collaboration between cities within the same national framework, involving different stakeholders and primarily engaging national and regional governments is essential for cities to effectively develop and implement their decarbonisation plans.

Part 1 of the deliverable *D1.20 Gap Analysis Report and Detailed Workplan* analyses the support that cities and local authorities receive from their national or regional authorities to achieve climate neutrality, and how multi-actor national ecosystems linked with the Cities Mission are developing; it also identifies the related gaps compared to what is needed to achieve the EU Mission objectives. The main outcome is the clustering of countries based on the support provided to local authorities by national ecosystems, and their needs to further support them based on the EU Mission approach, as described in Table 1 below.

| Cluster | Countries | Current support provided according to a Mission-driven approach | General gaps and needs to providing support to cities (including Mission cities) |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1 - Advanced program | Spain, iSweden | Existing multi-stakeholder platform providing concrete support in terms of development of climate city contract processes and implementation of innovative portfolios, already involving Mission cities and other interested cities. | Increase of funding for implementation of actions and engagement of additional interested cities |
| 2 - Rising National Ecosystems | Romania, Portugal, Netherlands, Austria, Finland | Recently established multi-stakeholder platform having dedicated resources to support cities, already involving any interested cities (except the Netherlands) | Structuration and extension of services offered to cities Long-term funding for the services' delivery of the national platforms Involvement of more interested cities |
| 3 - Developing National Ecosystems | France, Germany, Poland, Greece | Support program for cities aligned with the Mission approach not yet developed, despite interest from national authorities and several key actors (city networks, national agencies, research centres...) to structure a support offer | Seed-funding to structure the activities Development of support services Setup of governance structure |
| 4 - Emerging National Ecosystems | Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Ireland, Slovenia, Italy, Czech Republic, Norway, Turkey | No structured support offered, but strong interest to develop a national support offer from different national actors, based on emerging or existing multi-level dialogues with Mission and other Cities | Seed-funding to structure the activities Creation of a roadmap for the platform development |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
| | | | Engagement of key partners Design of first services |
| 5 – Other national ecosystems | Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Cyprus, Slovakia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Israel, Montenegro, United Kingdom | No collective support proposed, very early stage for the development of support at national level even for Mission Cities | Engagement of key stakeholders, including national authorities, to develop a Mission approach |

Table 1: Overview of national support per country provided according to a Mission-driven approach

Based on this approach, this report, being part 2 of the deliverable *D1.20 Gap Analysis Report and Detailed Workplan*, defines an intervention logic for partners of task T1.6 of NZC-SGA2 to address the identified gaps in the different EU countries via the creation and reinforcement of collaboration spaces for cities and with regional and national stakeholders. In addition, objectives and main actions per country of clusters 2, 3, 4 and 5 are presented. These workplans will be further refined during the implementation of the support.

1 Logic Intervention from NetZeroCities

1.1 Differentiated support per cluster

To support the different national ecosystems to engage additional cities and further increase their support to local authorities, NZC plans to deliver different levels of support according to the clustering proposed in Table 1. Due to limited resources available for this support, it is compulsory to prioritise the support offered.

Cluster 1 consists of countries that have already established robust national platforms with a medium to long-standing history. Given their advanced state, no specific support is planned for these countries. Instead, the focus is on extracting a replicable model to benefit other clusters. This involves identifying the critical factors that contribute to the functioning of communities of practice in these contexts, including the engagement of cities beyond the Mission cities, and utilising these insights to support the development of less advanced ecosystems.

For **Cluster 2**, which includes countries demonstrating a relatively high degree of progress and maturity in the establishment of national ecosystems and receiving funding for these purposes, light support, coaching, and mentoring have been planned. This support will be facilitated by partners from NetZeroCities, specifically those who are integral to the national platforms in Cluster 1.

Clusters 3 and 4 have been identified to receive the most substantial support. This selection is based on a dual rationale: firstly, the national support program for other cities than the Mission ones has not yet been developed there, meaning that Mission Cities and other cities do not currently meet regularly at the national or regional level. Secondly, there is a strong interest from several key actors to structure a support offer, suggesting that with targeted assistance, a significant impact can be achieved.

As a result, it is planned to dedicate technical assistance from specialists to enable the collaboration between Mission Cities, other interested cities, national authorities, and private stakeholders, and to provide training and capacity-building activities. Additionally, one in-person national event per year will be organised in the next three years to enhance radical collaboration and co-implementation of projects. These events are designed to allow Mission Cities and other cities to share progress on implementing their CCC as an innovation in governance, among other purposes. This support will be provided by NetZeroCities partners, according to their capacities, or national specialists from third-party organisations.

For **Cluster 5**, which consists of countries at a very early stage in developing support structures aligned with the Mission approach, the planned support focuses on organising one annual in-person national event in the next three years. These events aim to gather stakeholders interested in developing a national platform based on the Mission approach. The events will showcase the progress of Mission cities, involve interested cities, and mainly reinforce a national community of stakeholders. This initiative will provide a crucial opportunity for these stakeholders to engage in dialogue and foster collaborations that support the development of their national ecosystems.

National events organised in countries of clusters 3, 4 and 5 will most probably be organised in the framework of existing events, and in any case in partnership with national stakeholders, to reinforce national ecosystems, and not create parallel workstreams.

To reinforce existing national dynamics and other EU initiatives having the same objectives, the following stakeholders will be informed and involved whenever possible in the activities developed to support national ecosystems of clusters 3, 4 and 5:

- National and regional authorities, in collaboration with CapaCITIES.
- the Committee of the Regions, and its members from the different countries.

- The members of the Mission Board.
- the EU Covenant of Mayors Community, including the Signatories, the National Coordinators, and the Supporters.
- the cities involved in the NetZeroCities Pilot program and Twinning program.
- the national and regional associations of cities.
- Relevant partners and ad-hoc experts from on-going EU-funded projects related to the EU Cities Mission.

1.2 Tailored support for countries of clusters 3 and 4

The workplan in each country from clusters 3 and 4 is tailored made according to the specific needs of each country, and co-design with national and regional stakeholders, and with cities. However, based on the analysis made, the following activities, in the mid-term and long-term perspectives, are perceived as key to supporting national ecosystems:

- **Supporting the formalisation of the governance structure of the national platforms:** in collaboration with CapaCITIES, and based on the works already developed by NetZeroCities, model of governance will be discussed with national stakeholders.
- **Animating a community of practices:** animation of the community of practices allowing effective collaboration between cities, and other stakeholders (academics, private sector, civil society), development of collective innovation projects to ensure implementation of decarbonisation action portfolios. In addition, an action plan should be developed to ensure that the support received by NetZeroCities act as seed funding and that fundraising and other actions are undertaken to secure new resources from the national ecosystem to ensure the continuity of the actions initiated through this support.
- **Engagement of cities beyond the Mission Cities, and technical assistance:** the following technical assistance can be delivered to interested cities: training on the CCC approach, assistance for stakeholders in effectively utilising the tools and resources available on the NetZeroCities portal, technical expertise on topics identified as priority for the implementation of climate-neutrality pathways, peer-to-peer sessions to transfer learnings from Mission Cities towards other cities.
- **Alignment of the CCCs and national frameworks:** support to integrate elements of the Mission approach, especially the CCC as a governance innovation, into the national frameworks. The analysis of the CCCs of the Mission Cities from the same country will be key to understand commonalities, novelties and added value of the CCC versus existing strategies developed in their national contexts. It will also be instrumental in identifying key impact pathways to focus on.
- **Unlocking funding for cities:** analysis of the investment plans of Mission Cities is require to identify country-specific needs and contribution from national funding sources to bridge the funding gap. Support can be provided to engage national stakeholders in investment roundtables or adapt the Climate Investment Tool developed by NetZeroCities with national assumptions.
- **Bring national regulatory barriers to the attention of national authorities:** in cooperation with CapaCITIES, support can be provided to identify national regulatory barriers for unlocking city actions, based on the analysis of the CCCs, and to engage national authorities. Policy Labs, based on the methodology developed by NetZeroCities, can be organised to tackle country-specific barriers.

Due to limited resources, on the short-term, all these activities can't be developed without a strong involvement of the national ecosystems. A yearly workplan per country will be agreed to detail the activities developed in the next year.

The **following requirements** are expected for the organisations providing the support mentioned above, especially from external parties from the NetZeroCities consortium:

Minimum Requirements:

- Fluency in the native language.
- Knowledge of local authorities' competencies and national regulatory frameworks.
- Connection with national and local stakeholders.
- Ability to engage with local elected representatives, drive cooperation between local authorities of different sizes and apply the Mission-approach.
- A neutral role to ensure the ability to build trust among actors from different political spaces, both at the local and between other levels of government.

Desirable Criteria:

- Good understanding of policies and regulations at the intersection of climate/environment and urban development.
- Good understanding of governance systems and competencies relevant to climate neutrality across different levels of governance.
- Good understanding of cities' challenges in achieving climate neutrality by 2030; direct connection to cities.
- Good embeddedness into national structures; direct connection to critical national institutions and penholders, including financial ecosystem players.
- Enabler of cooperation with other stakeholders (private companies, third sector, etc.).
- Ability to coordinate the involvement of the national government, the European Commission and finance institutions (national banks, regional / municipalities public banks, etc).
- Good connection with NetZeroCities to enable the national platform to effectively amplify all the actions at the country level.

2 Workplan and Objectives Per Country

Based on the analysis of each country produced in Part 1 of the deliverable *D1.20 Gap Analysis Report and Detailed Workplan*, the logic intervention described above and the discussions with national stakeholders, the following objectives and actions are defined as priorities to be supported by NetZeroCities on the short term. Discussions with different key stakeholders in each country are still ongoing to define short-term action plans, which need the establishment of trust and the alignment on the overall objectives. The workplan and objectives per country will be refined in the next months (September and October 2024) into detailed action plans.

2.1 Cluster 2 – Mentoring and Advising

As countries under cluster 2 are relatively advanced, light support in the form of mentoring and advising is proposed to national ecosystems of these countries, delivered by the organisations from NetZeroCities consortium being at the heart of the advanced programs developed in Spain and Sweden, namely Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM) and Viable Cities.

2.1.1 Austria

The development of the Austrian Climate-Neutral City Mission was a 10+ years process that created lots of coordination and alignment not only across the BMK departments (leading ministry), but also

among state funding, research, environmental agencies, cities and other supporting entities. Austria created its own strong and effective model for a national platform, which was met with the interest of other countries, such as Germany or the Czech Republic. The Austrian approach should be acknowledged as a sound national model for multi-level and multi-stakeholder collaboration for climate-neutral cities. Knowledge sharing and pathways for replication in interested countries should be considered.

The Austrian national platform representatives already collaborate on a regular basis with Viable Cities. The proposal is to continue this collaboration in the framework of NetZeroCities, in a form of bilateral exchange focused on tackling key challenges. There are three thematic areas, where Viable Cities might support the Austrian mission with its expertise and practical knowledge:

1. Challenging the R&I-based set-up of the platform and shifting focus towards implementation
2. Collaboration with the private sector and mobilising private capital
3. Economic model for cities.

This support will benefit the different cities engaged in Austria (and not only the unique Mission City Klagenfurt).

2.1.2 Finland

Finland is well-positioned to establish a national Cities Mission platform, building on its strong foundation of collaboration between the national and the local level, the private sector, and academia. To fully realize the potential of this platform, it would be beneficial to explore ways to formalize governance structures, allocate sufficient resources for facilitation, and enhance support for cities in the practical implementation of the Mission. By focusing on these areas, Finland can create an even more structured and supportive environment. Therefore, the key objectives are:

1. Formalized governance structure
 - Bilateral collaboration between Viable Cities and the Finnish actors.
 - Increase exchange with other national support structures (e.g. via CapaCITIES and its continuation) to learn about success factors from other National Platforms.
2. Branding and communication
 - Build coherence and a unified identity for the Cities Mission in Finland.
3. Designing and resourcing activities
 - Identify and allocate the necessary resources to ensure continuity and effectiveness of activities.
 - Ensure that the allocation of resources maximises benefits for cities and other stakeholders through well-planned and thematically relevant activities.
 - Explore how to create synergies with the Climate Adaptation Mission and the national undertakings within climate adaptation.
4. Funding and finance for implementation
 - Increase the efficiency of the support for cities as they embark on their implementation journeys.

In Finland, key stakeholders are already involved either directly in the network or through other collaborations. An important actor to further explore collaboration with is the Climate Leadership Coalition.

2.1.3 Netherlands

The National Support Structure (NSS) and its partners will receive coaching and mentoring services from Viable Cities. These should be tailored to the Dutch context and build on current activities. If NSS succeeds in obtaining a grant for their activities, mentoring could prepare them to scale up their work in 2025. At the moment we have prepared two proposals, which take different angles. However, the final curriculum should be agreed with the stakeholders involved.

The first proposal is to **mentor city-to-city exchange process** between the Mission Cities and other interested cities and support the transfer of knowledge. The Mission Cities are beneficiaries of support services developed in NetZeroCities and the National Support Structure. Unfortunately, they do not have the time and capacity to properly document their learnings and share them with other cities. Viable Cities is very experienced with the city-to-city format and could share their methodology with the National Support Structure, including such aspects as how to structure the process, how to reach out to a wider group of cities and engage them in the process, what cities must already have prepared to enter the process, and many others. The objective is to build an alliance of cities interested in learning from the Mission in the Netherlands, learn from one another, test innovative solutions and produce concrete outputs to be implemented and scaled up, with the support of national authorities.

The second proposal is for Viable Cities to **mentor the National Support Structure to strengthen governance at the national level** and reflect on how ministries, state agencies and other relevant actors can create more enabling conditions for climate-neutral cities in the Netherlands. This work would include showcasing the Swedish model, in which state agencies sign the Climate City Contracts of Swedish cities, commit to concrete actions, incl. changes in policy and regulation, harmonize different funding programmes for cities, and many more.

The risk identified in the implementation of mentoring is the current political climate, which took a sharp right turn after the last national elections. This might potentially hinder efforts to involve more cities in the Mission process or to organise more tangible support for climate-neutral cities by the national authorities.

Proposed timeline:

- June-July 2024 – Viable Cities prepares more detailed proposals for the National Support Structure based on interviews with relevant actors.
- Sept 2024 – detailed proposals are presented to the National Support Structure for review. National Support Structure decides what form of mentoring and coaching services they could best benefit from.
- Nov-Dec 2024 – delivery of first mentoring services by Viable Cities.
- Jan 2025 – review of provided services with National Support Structure and introduce adjustments to the curriculum if needed.
- April 2025 – delivery of the second round of mentoring services by Viable Cities.

2.1.4 Portugal

Considering the current stage of the Portuguese platform and the close, learning, and inspiring process with the Spanish national platform to date, the proposal aims to deepen this exchange of knowledge through regular and sustained collaboration with UPM, the Technical University of Madrid, providing coaching and mentoring services. To achieve this, the work plan proposes bi-weekly meetings starting in September to support and advise the facilitation team. These meetings will include the NetZeroCities city advisor to provide coordinated support.

Based on the emerging needs identified during these meetings, additional learning sessions on specific topics will be scheduled as necessary. To date, the two most critical areas of support identified are:

- **Consolidation of the Current Process and Community of Practice of Cities:** a significant number of other interested cities are already part of the national platform and its working groups. The most pressing need is to consolidate the communities of practice within these cities to enhance the level of collaboration and accelerate peer-to-peer learning processes. The support and services provided will focus on this critical aspect.
- **Securing Funds for 2025 for the Facilitation Role:** Although the designated facilitator of the platform IN+ has secured funding for the current year, it is essential to ensure its continuity. A national conference is planned for September-October, featuring participation from key ministry representatives. The objective is to demonstrate progress and highlight the crucial role of national platforms in supporting cities. They have expressed the need for support in this

endeavour, where a presentation showcasing the progress of the Spanish platform could be instrumental in reinforcing the importance of national platforms and contributing to ensuring the continuity of funding.

2.1.5 Romania

Considering the strong national framework of the Romanian national platform and the platform's upcoming initiatives, coaching and mentoring services will potentially encompass:

- Participation in the international jury for the *'Call for 10 Romanian cities that will be selected in the M100 Mirror Mission.'* This participation has already been confirmed and UPM will be involved in the evaluation of applications to select the new interested cities.
- Guidance can be provided in developing criteria for project selection, considering the significant funding secured to support cities in implementing various projects. This approach could leverage knowledge from multi-city projects already developed in other national contexts. These multi-city projects provide an ideal setting to strengthen the community of practice among cities within the national platform, enhance the learning process, identify shared barriers, collaboratively work on solutions, and facilitate scaling up actions.
- Considering the future steps of the national platform, e.g., supporting in enhancing the transition arena, ensuring collaboration spaces with the private sector, academia, and the social sector to bolster the cities' efforts and the implementation of their projects.

2.2 Clusters 3 and 4 – Tailored support

2.2.1 Belgium

While the legislative frameworks and actors are different in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels Region Capital, there are existing multi-level governance processes focusing on the support of local climate and energy policies in the three Regions. In addition, the main challenges and solutions faced by local authorities are often very similar.

The main challenge is to transform these multi-level governance processes into multi-stakeholders' processes involving different types of actors from different sectors to unlock the financial, regulatory, governance and technical barriers to implementing decarbonisation solutions at scale. Thus, the key objectives of this activity will be to:

- establish cooperation between Mission cities, other interested cities, professional organisations from different sectors, investors and the financial sector, and federal and regional authorities.
- support other Belgium cities in developing investment portfolios.

The main activities will be:

- establishment of priority areas of cooperation for the implementation of investment plans
- presentation of barriers to private actors and regional and federal authorities
- organisations of working groups with investors and private companies
- development of working groups on the transposition of the Mission approach into regional contexts (including tools and methodologies) with regional stakeholders engaged in the existing multi-level governance.

The main risks in achieving the objectives are related to the fragmented governance and legislative differences between the Regions. The focus on the development of investment plans and the engagement of economic actors should allow for the reduction of this barrier, as many economic actors operate in different Regions. In addition, the engagement of replicating actors at the regional level, such

VVSG and the Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia, Brulocalis, the Platform for Walloon Cities, or the Flemish Cities Knowledge Centre would allow more cities to be engaged in the Mission approach.

2.2.2 Bulgaria

Even though the professional network in Bulgaria is rather active in the energy and climate sector, the involvement of the national government to support Bulgarian cities in their climate action is still lacking. Moreover, awareness about the EU Cities Mission is still low in Bulgaria, both within Bulgarian cities in general (apart from the Mission cities), as well as at the national level. Engagement with other Bulgarian cities will, therefore, be crucial, allowing for a community of practice and enabling strengthened collaboration amongst cities interested in climate action. Through strengthened collaboration and involvement of other key actors, such as the national government and the private sector, the emerging Bulgarian national platform could also support stronger regulatory and financial frameworks which Bulgarian municipalities require to reach their climate objectives.

Therefore, the following activities could be foreseen:

1. Amplifying and boosting the visibility of the EU Cities Mission with the Bulgarian national government

NetZeroCities could use important national events (such as the annual EcoEnergy Conference, Mayors Talk forum, or the Smart Energy Financing Roundtable, among others) to engage in strategic conversations with the national government, showcasing the importance and benefits of multi-level and multi-stakeholder structures for Bulgarian municipalities to advance in their climate and energy transition efforts. Teaming up with other strategic initiatives, such as the Covenant of Mayors, would also be key, given the strong national approach embedded in the Covenant of Mayors, which in Bulgaria translates into several CoM signatories, a regional coordinator as well as several supporters which would be important to engage with. Showcasing existing national platform examples in the region, such as the M100 platform in Romania, could serve as a means of inspiration and would ensure a degree of relatability given the shared similarities in both countries. Lastly, ensuring that there is synergy and alignment with the Climate Adaptation Mission is also important.

The following Ministries and agencies would be important to engage with to advance the EU Cities Mission work in Bulgaria: the Ministry of Energy and the Sustainable Energy Development Agency, the Ministry of Environment and Water as well as the Ministry for Regional Development and Public Works.

2. The need to support a facilitator to lay out the groundwork and consolidate all the important work that is already being undertaken by the Bulgarian civil sector

The professional civil society and social sector is quite advanced in Bulgaria and already delivers a lot of support to the different levels of government when it comes to energy planning, energy audit and energy efficiency measures, to mention a few. However, there is a need to bring the network closer together by consolidating different projects and initiatives as well as ensuring that more Bulgarian cities benefit from this support and join forces.

Examples of different NGOs and organisations providing important services to municipalities in Bulgaria include EnEffect and EcoEnergy, the Centre for the Study of Democracy and Cleantech Bulgaria (which is a signatory to the Climate Adaptation Mission).

However, it is important to trust the coordination of an emerging platform to a neutral or non-affiliated organisation that can bring different stakeholders on board. The facilitation role could be undertaken by several networks and NGOs, such as EnEffect, which already enjoys close links with the Mission City of Gabrovo, as well as Green Sofia, a structure setup by the Mission City of Sofia to provide support in the planning and implementation of green projects. A strong partnership already exists between EnEffect and the Green Sofia, which could bring both Mission cities to work closer together on climate and energy topics. Moreover, Sofia University, in particular the Faculty of Economy, is also well positioned on several related topics and could serve as a good contact point for the EU Cities Mission, bringing on board a multi-disciplinary mix of stakeholders thanks to its institutional authority.

3. Engagement with and onboarding other interested municipalities

Through the various activities of NetZeroCities, the two Bulgarian Mission cities had the opportunity to get to know each other and participate in several joint sessions. The two Mission Cities have both expressed interest in collaborating. However, this could be strengthened thanks to a national ecosystem where both cities have adequate space and support structures to work together and learn from each other. This invitation should also be extended to other Bulgarian cities to enable a wider community of practice, and to provide an opportunity for the Mission Cities to share their perspectives and learnings from their CCC. The emerging national platform in Bulgaria could, in the medium term, engage with Bulgarian municipalities that show interest or champion climate action, have developed strong climate and energy plans (such as SECAPs) or else are spearheading important climate projects or initiatives. As a starting point, the following municipalities could be engaged: Burgas, Dobrich, Smolyan, Kyustendil, Kostinbrod, Vidin, Sliven, Ruse, Yambol and Panagyurishte.

4. Working on the evolution of the national framework will be crucial. The aspect of financing is especially important.

In terms of needs, Bulgarian municipalities need better access to harmonised and detailed data from the regional and national levels to help them in effective energy planning, and to fulfil their climate obligations. There is also a need for more technical guidance, as well as dedicated investment in human resources so that Bulgarian municipalities can boost their internal capacities and capabilities. Regulatory barriers still exist, where Bulgarian municipalities often lack the necessary mandate to implement obligations on the private sector. Municipalities also require regulatory and technical support when it comes to energy savings, energy audits and ESCO contracts. Lastly, on financing, more advocacy is still required so that cities can have better access to national financial instruments, and for Bulgarian cities to start moving away from grant dependency.

As a starting point, the emerging national platform could help shape the National Decarbonisation Fund, ensuring quality assurance, the involvement of different actors (especially the private sector) to invest in the fund and ensure that communication about this new financial instrument is engaging and able to attract Bulgarian local authorities.

Building upon the work that has already been undertaken in the NECPlatform project, this emerging national platform could also advocate for a more ambitious national plan which factors in the needs and asks of Bulgarian local authorities. The climate and energy dialogues which have been initiated by the NECPlatform project should become embedded in the services and approach of the emerging national platform in Bulgaria.

The achievements of this goal will highly depend on the political context, which is complex due to government instability, recent elections and predictions that the subsequent Bulgarian government might not be highly climate-oriented.

2.2.3 Croatia

Despite the strong interest of different stakeholders, including different national ministries, for the dialogues implemented by the NECPlatform project, many challenges remain to transform these dialogues set up to contribute to the Croatian NECP, into an innovative, long-lasting multi-level governance platform to support local authorities in achieving climate neutrality. In this context, the main objectives are:

1. Define a governance structure and secure national funding

To ensure a long-term engagement of actors, it is necessary to formalise the governance of the multi-stakeholders' process, including the roles of the different actors, as well as the role of the facilitator. Until now, REGEA has been the initiator of the process, mostly funded by EU subsidies. The Ministry for Finance has established a new forum for sustainable finance, which doesn't formally include local authorities. Both initiatives will need to stay strongly connected to ensure funding to local authorities. Formal engagement from the different actors involved will be sought, to monitor the implementation of

the NECP and remove legislative barriers. In addition, national funding will be key to ensure the scale-up of the national platform.

2. Support Croatian cities to unlock systemic change

The development of SECAPs remains voluntary for local authorities. A large potential exists to build capacities of Croatian local authorities in the development of multi-stakeholders' local engagement process and investment plans. A collaboration and learning space will be created with voluntary Croatian cities to develop investment plans and collectively work on their implementation. Zagreb, the only Mission City in Croatia will be a leader in this process. This workstream will build on the existing collaboration of the four biggest cities of Croatia (Split, Rijeka, and Osijek, in addition of Zagreb). Other interested cities in using the Climate Transition Map developed by NetZeroCities, will be involved.

3. Reinforce the involvement of private companies and civil society

The multi-stakeholders' governance should be reinforced with the involvement of additional actors from the civil society and the private sector. These are key actors in ensuring the co-development and the implementation of climate city contracts of cities. They will be involved in the analysis of barriers and the development of solutions (legislative propositions, development of tools and methodologies, etc.).

2.2.4 Czech Republic

Even though there is a clear emergence of a national platform in the Czech Republic, and a strong commitment by the national government, especially the Ministry for Regional Development to drive this forward, coordinated engagement with Czech cities is still lacking. Moreover, even though the commitment is present, the support and services that this emerging national platform could provide is still to be determined and, in fact, could be a key area of development in the months to come. Therefore, the following steps could be envisioned for NetZeroCities to continue supporting the development of this emerging platform:

1. Supporting the emerging Czech national platform, boosting its visibility to bring other Czech cities on board:

The Ministry for Regional Development already has plans to establish the Czech national platform around the EU Cities Mission by the beginning of 2025. In fact, the Ministry has already identified the first wave of cities to bring on board (as described in the gap analysis). However, in the short to medium term, it will also be important for the Czech national platform to engage with additional Czech cities that already have demonstrated climate commitments and efforts, such as Prague (Prague Climate Plan 2030), Brno and Litoměřice (Fund for energy savings and renewables). In fact, the yearly EU Cities Mission event which will be organised in the Czech Republic, should be seen as a key moment to attract other Czech cities to the emerging national platform.

The objective is to work towards a community of practice amongst Czech cities to strengthen their collaboration on climate efforts. Through this platform, the Mission City of Liberec can share its CCC learnings and key takeaways which could inspire other Czech cities to follow suit and adopt key learnings or insights which are applicable to their ongoing work and efforts. However, through a community of practice, Czech cities could support one another through exchange, knowledge sharing or expertise that they have developed on certain key topics of particular interest to Czech cities such as energy communities. This will not only serve as a key source of support and inspiration for the Czech cities involved in the platform, but it will also be instrumental for the Mission City of Liberec as it moves towards the implementation phase of its CCC, where this networking and community of practice with other Czech cities can be a key source of backing and support.

For the community of practice, the national platform could leverage on the work of [Prospect +](#), where a number of Czech cities are already involved in knowledge sharing (through a mentor - mentee approach) on various cross-sectoral topics related to financing of climate and energy actions (including for instance energy communities, energy management in buildings and street lighting).

In the medium to long term, this community of practice could also serve as a space where multi-city projects could be developed among Czech cities. This could be a key and attractive service that the Czech national platform could offer, as it could improve chances for Czech cities to finance existing plans or else planned projects.

2. Providing support for the facilitation of the platform through a bottom-up approach:

Through the CapaCITIES project, the Ministry for Regional Development and the Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic has been working on the development of the Czech national platform. However, so far, the involvement and mobilisation of Czech cities with demonstrated interest in this process, has been challenging.

NetZeroCities could work together with the CapaCITIES project to support the platform development in the Czech Republic from both a top-down and a bottom-up perspective. For instance, CapaCITIES could continue providing the necessary support to the Ministry for Regional Development to properly set-up the governance structure of the platform, as well as learn from other interesting best-practices which could be most relevant to the Czech context, such as the Austrian model. Moreover, even though the Ministry for Regional Development already enjoys a strong link and coordination with other Ministries (through the smart cities working group for example), focusing on securing stronger involvement from the Ministry for Environment would be key, especially in the short term.

Linking with the first point, NetZeroCities could provide the necessary resources to local organisations to shape the Czech national platform through a more bottom-up approach. This could support the Ministry for Regional Development's work on the governance structure, ensuring the required engagement and mobilisation in bringing Czech cities on board. Here it would be important build upon and involve the work that existing organisations are already undertaking with Czech cities, such as Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic, EIT Urban Mobility Innovation Hub East as well as SEMMO.

These local facilitators could work directly with the Czech cities and with the national Ministries to identify and map out the concrete needs and the kind of support which is required: 1) for the city of Liberec to work and implement its CCC 2) for other Czech cities to follow suit and embark on a climate neutrality trajectory. This work will not only feed into the design of concrete support measures which the Czech national platform could provide, but it could also be beneficial for the set-up of thematic working groups on key topics identified from the needs assessment.

3. Working on the concrete support measures: both technical and financial

In the medium-term, it is important for the national platform to design the required support framework for Czech cities. This could range from: guidance in the national language on EU funding opportunities which exist, but also financial support for Czech cities to hire the required human resources. Further technical support is also needed for Czech cities to carry out adequate energy planning and management.

With regards to financing, apart from better communication and awareness raising on EU funding opportunities, the emerging national platform should also develop national financing instruments to complement existing EU funds and to help address the gaps and needs established in the needs assessment (see previous point). Here, the emerging platform could explore synergies or joint workshops with the [TurnaroundMoney II project](#), which has planned activities with the Mission city of Liberec.

4. Leverage on the work already ongoing for smart solutions to bring the private sector on board

As highlighted in the gap assessment, the Czech Republic has an active inter-ministerial working group on the Smart Cities concept. There is also a Smart City Cluster which tries to establish closer ties between the private sector, national government, local authorities, research institutes and citizens. Establishing a closer link with this work will be important for the emerging platform since it could be a way to bring the private sector on board. The emerging national platform could also leverage and use existing national events such as URBIS to link up with entrepreneurs, businesses and technical universities, and bring them closer to the climate work cities are undertaking.

2.2.5 France

The key objectives are to support the *Groupe Miroir Villes* (acting as the French national platform), to:

1. Increase funding and remove barriers to structural funding for local authorities

On the short-term, a working group should address the following aspects:

- Analyse the investment plans of the Mission Cities, identifying needs and gaps. A deep analysis of the level of funding to be provided by national authorities thanks to the funds included in the existing contracts between local authorities and the French government for the success of the ecological transition (CRTE) is required. A review of all national funding received by Mission Cities would be useful, including their leverage effect.
- Involvement of national funding agencies and banks in the design and the development of the Climate City Capital Hub.
- Facilitated access to national funding for French cities having received the Mission Label.

On the mid-term, it would be key to:

- Analyse available public funding, especially sources of local authorities' funding, to increase their cashflows.
- Remove barriers to the development and actions of local investment companies.
- Propose evolutions of public funding rules, such as the development of new taxation schemes for local authorities, or minimum co-funding from national authorities, to ensure increase of cashflows, and long-term visibility.
- Develop a secure socio-economic environment for investments of local authorities (such as modification of tax incentives, minimum and maximum of prices for some goods largely impacting cities' budget, such as energy).

2. Formalise the governance of the French platform and sustain it

Based on the *Groupe Miroir Villes*, an official mandate from the French government to support the Mission Cities is required to scale up the support provided by the national platform. Additional organisations should be included and the roles of each of them should be clarified. A clear governance, with decision-making bodies, and a commonly defined work program, would allow effective support and enlargement of the number of stakeholders. For instance, local authorities, as challenge owners, should be represented in this national platform, they need to be committed to collaborate between them, and co-develop solutions with other stakeholders. The engagement of regional authorities is also required to align regional policies and funding. National funding should be provided to finance the animation of this platform, this role should be attributed to one or several organisations clearly identified.

NetZeroCities can support the *Groupe Miroir Villes* in the definition of the governance, based on examples in different countries, and in highlighting the value of the Mission approach, and its benefits.

3. Provide regulatory and technical support

Multi-stakeholder working groups should be set up to develop collective solutions to common barriers faced by local authorities. These working groups should:

- At least involve the relevant services of the national ministries and agencies, and research institutions.
- Analyse regulatory barriers and organise policy labs to identify solutions.
- Propose evolution of legislation.
- Analyse existing national innovation and research programs tackling the identified challenges, and their results.
- Provide training to local authorities and technical.
- Propose and launch the development of specific multi-city innovation programs when new bottlenecks for implementation are identified.

4. Increase the number of French cities engaged in the platform and integrate relevant aspects of the Mission approach into the French frameworks

The national platform is the key structure which should:

- Analyses the most relevant aspects of the Mission approach and propose evolutions of the French frameworks (PCAETs, CRTE, national programs, reporting tools and methods) to include them.
- Supports additional French cities in developing climate-action portfolios and investment plans, starting with the 14 applicant cities which haven't been selected by the European Commission.
- Organise an annual event, highlighting the progress of the EU Cities Mission, the learnings and progress made in France thanks to the national collaboration, and the support provided to engage local authorities.

2.2.6 Germany

The federal government in Germany is currently looking into different ways of establishing an efficient national support structure for the implementation of the EU Cities Mission in the country context. NetZeroCities, and especially ICLEI, will support this process through resources under the NZC-SGA2, in collaboration with other Germany-based institutions. The key objectives and envisioned activities are as follows:

1. Incorporating more cities into the Mission and aligning national programmes

NetZeroCities will organise one event per year to mobilise the national ecosystem for climate neutral cities and incorporate more cities in the Mission. It will present different support services from across NetZeroCities and CapaCITIES as well as facilitate learning space for municipalities to benefit from the experience of the Mission Cities in Germany. ICLEI is engaged in different national-level initiatives in Germany, like the German Smart Cities Network, and national finance workshops *Turnaround Money*. Building better alignment across them could not only create better opportunities for cities, but also foster coordination between different ministries or ministerial departments. It could also help engage more German cities in the Mission. NetZeroCities will also discuss the leading ministry's current plans and brainstorm the way forward. All activities will be outlined in close collaboration with the ministry and the alliance of the German Mission Cities *stronGER*.

2. Creating better understanding of the EU Cities Mission amongst national and regional authorities in Germany and better defining its governance

NetZeroCities, in collaboration with CapaCITIES, will ensure that relevant authorities, both at the national and regional level, have a good understanding of the EU Cities Mission, including its objectives, mission approach, methodologies, and services. It will help the authorities determine what governance structure could work best for the national platform in Germany and what type of support services the platform could deliver to cities, both Mission and other interested cities. To support the definition of the governance, NetZeroCities will arrange meetings with representatives of national platforms from different countries, facilitate knowledge sharing and help outline the national process for Germany. In the case of Germany, the Austrian national platform can be a great ally and mentor. Bilateral meetings between ministries, national agencies and other involved partners could enable authorities in Germany to 'mirror and adjust' the Austrian model to the specificities of the German context.

3. Strengthening foundations for the future national platform in Germany

NetZeroCities will analyse current framework conditions for climate-neutral cities in Germany, including policy and regulation, funding and financing landscape, cities' specific needs, potential for multi-city collaboration projects, potential to include private sector actors and others. NetZeroCities will also arrange bilateral interviews with relevant national and regional institutions to capture barriers preventing multi-level collaboration with climate-neutral cities in Germany and brainstorm solutions.

The key stakeholders that should be included in the outlined activities are Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, Federal Ministry for Digital and Transport, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, Federal Ministry of Interior and Community, Federal states, Alliance of German Mission cities stronGER Cities, National City Network (Deutscher Städtetag), Projektträger Jülich, German Smart Cities Network, German Organisation for International Cooperation (GIZ), German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu), German Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt), Klimabündnis, IFEU Heidelberg.

2.2.7 Greece

After meeting with several Greek mission cities and discussing how NetZeroCities can support them at the national level, three (3) structured workstreams are suggested to facilitate the acceleration of decarbonization processes in Greek cities. Further consultation is needed to refine these activities.

1. Identify commonalities in City Climate Contracts (CCCs) and advocate for national support

The goal is to identify shared priorities among the CCCs of the six Greek mission cities and advocate for the creation of national programs that address these common areas. The main activities foreseen are to:

- Collect the City Climate Contracts (CCCs) from the six Greek mission cities and conduct a detailed comparative analysis to identify common goals, challenges, and strategies.
- Organise workshops with political representatives from each city to discuss findings and refine common areas.
- Gather feedback from city representatives to ensure alignment and consensus.
- Draft a set of specific requests where national government intervention and funding are needed.
- Develop a proposal for a national program that channels funding to address these common areas.
- Work with local representatives and engage in lobbying efforts to present the findings and the proposal to relevant national government bodies.

2. Support the ClimaNet Platform in the definition of services and its governance

The goal is to enhance the ClimaNet platform's capacity to support Greek mission cities by incorporating best practices from other European platforms. The main activities foreseen are to:

- Research and document successful strategies from other European platforms supporting mission cities and develop case studies showcasing effective operational models.
- Organize training sessions for ClimaNet staff based on the identified best practices.
- Create resources and guides to assist ClimaNet in adopting these practices.
- Provide ongoing advisory support to ClimaNet as it implements these changes.
- Facilitate periodic reviews and updates to ensure continuous improvement.

3. Develop an enabling environment through annual events

The goal is to foster a collaborative environment for climate neutrality efforts through annual events that exchange best practices, build capacity, and mobilize funding. The main activities foreseen are to:

- Develop a comprehensive strategy for the annual event series over the next three years.
- Set clear agendas focusing on good practices, capacity building, and private sector engagement.
- Identify potential partners, including international organizations, private sector entities, and academic institutions.

- Handle logistics, including venue selection, invitations, and coordination.
- Develop and finalize the event programs, including keynote speakers, workshops, and networking sessions.
- Conduct workshops and training sessions on climate neutrality for municipal staff.
- Facilitate sessions for sharing best practices among Greek cities and with international counterparts.
- Highlight and connect cities with potential funding opportunities from the private sector and international donors (connected to the Mission Capital Hub)
- Organize pitch sessions where cities can present their projects to potential investors.

By following this high-level workplan, the aim is to create a synergistic collaboration between Greek cities and the national government, effectively accelerating the decarbonization process.

2.2.8 Ireland

Ireland, given the recent advancements, is in a good position to make significant progress in its national platform established around the Mission. To make the most of this potential, the following key gaps and areas needing consolidation have been identified:

1. Facilitation Role

There is an identified need for additional resources to support a facilitating role within this national ecosystem, which will be crucial for strengthening collaboration between different levels of government, fostering trust (meet formally and informally with the key stakeholders), consolidating the community of practice among all interested cities, and monitoring and supporting their progress.

2. Building Trust

Deepening the involvement of local governments within the national platform framework necessitates fostering trust between local and national actors. Because there is a perceived concern that participating in a national ecosystem will affect local autonomy and generate possible top-down mandates. This is why establishing mutual trust is a crucial step for effective cooperation.

3. Consolidating the Community of Practice

Strengthening the collaboration between cities is seen as essential. For this purpose, emphasising the value and positive impact of this collaborative work is fundamental, and gaining insight of the experiences of other national contexts can be highly beneficial. Additionally, there is a need to broaden the participation of other interested cities, many of which have expressed great interest but have not had a regular and sustained workspace for collaboration. Therefore, it is vital to consolidate this space, ensure frequent meetings, and expand both participation and impact.

4. Increasing Capacities

There is a need for more climate governance structures for effective and strategic coordination with the local and national structures. Work is often done in silos, which must be addressed in an integrated manner, as climate change poses a challenge to the business-as-usual operations of government at both national and local levels. Irish cities have continuously expressed that they lack the resources or capacity to address these challenges adequately. Expert support is thus valuable to assist many cities with specific issues and barriers.

2.2.9 Italy

In Italy, an informal multi-level dialogue on the Cities Mission between Italian cities, national ministries, and other national agencies started already in 2021, but due to a series of external and internal factors this did not develop in a linear way and did not turn into a formal coordination mechanism. In 2022, the first Memorandum of Understanding between the Italian Mission cities and the government was signed by President Draghi's Ministry of infrastructures, but it never really got to the implementation phase due to the change of national government. In addition, the competence on climate neutrality moved, in 2023, to the Ministry for the Environment and Energy Security MASE (Ministero per l'Ambiente e la Sicurezza Energetica). Also, it needs to be recalled that because the Cities Mission is funded by Horizon Europe the Minister of University and Research of Draghi's government did try to play a role while the current one hasn't got to it yet. As described, there is a clear need to raise awareness about the EU Cities Mission towards Italian ministries and highlight the added value of the initiative.

The launch of the Cities Mission and the selection of 9 Italian cities has provided an initial opportunity for a diverse range of stakeholders to come together, discuss the Mission and explore collaboration opportunities, in different ways. The 9 cities have, since 2022, started dialogues with local stakeholders that, in many cases, are actors and players of the larger regional and national ecosystem. Those dialogues are reflected in the CCC's of the Italian cities and are helping to explore methods, support formats and specific needs from local to national level.

The main objectives for the development of a national supportive multi-stakeholder platform and the uptake of the Mission approach in the Italian context are to:

1. Establish regular and structured exchanges between the 9 cities and the central government, especially in terms of legislative, policy and funding coordination enabling cities to achieve climate neutrality by 2030.
2. Design a strategy for scaling an Italian Cities mission platform together with a plan for its financial sustainability.
3. Support the other Italian cities that replied to the Mission expression of interest in 2021 to get involved in the platform and process of learning and best practices exchange.
4. Support the cities from Italian southern regions to become active members of the platform.

Supported by Politecnico di Milano (through NetZeroCities platform), Politecnico di Torino and the University of Bologna (through the LET'SGOV pilot project funded by the Pilot Program of NetZeroCities), the 9 cities coordinated by the city of Bologna will aim to achieve these overarching objectives in the next two years. The key stakeholders to engage are the Ministry for the Environment and Energy Security MASE, and the Ministry for Universities and Research, Regions, national agencies and other key players in energy, infrastructures and finance sectors (such as ENEA, the National Agency for new technologies, energy and sustainable economic development, which is the Chair of the Covenant board in Italy), and cities' representatives.

Short-term activities to be implemented in the next 12 months are:

- Analysis of the 9 CCC with the view of collecting the innovative aspects and instruments that could be replicated and support activities of mutual learning and capacity building.
- Organisation regular meetings between the 9 cities (or representative of their group) and national ministries to promote the Cities Mission and the 9 cities' achievements so far.
- Set up of thematic meetings of the 9 cities with the government - in particular with MASE, but also other ministries and implementation agencies - on specific policy and legislative topics (NECP, Social Climate Plan, etc.).
- Running a national event open to national ministries and agencies, and cities to promote the Cities mission and the cities' achievements so far across Italy.
- Set up of a national working group for the design of the national platform's governance and objectives.
- Defining the technical and financial support needed for the platform.
- Engaging a network of national, regional and local stakeholders (starting from those engaged in each of the Italian CCC) to support the platform implementation.

The envisaged next steps will be to:

- Implement the platform infrastructure.
- Implement a programme of exchange between cities at the national level.
- Co-develop, together with the national and regional policymakers, regulatory solutions to allow experimentation in the cities.
- Collect data and disseminate at the national level.

2.2.10 Norway

The multi-level dialogues between Norwegian cities, national ministries, and other national actors regarding the Cities Mission have only just begun, with the first Norwegian Cities Mission Forum taking place in May 2024. This event provided an initial opportunity for a diverse range of stakeholders to come together to discuss the Mission and explore collaboration opportunities. The stakeholders are currently in an exploratory phase, examining the involvement of various stakeholders, working methods, support formats, and specific needs.

Norwegian actors recognise that achieving the Cities Mission objectives within Norway requires extensive capacity building across several dimensions. An ongoing initial dialogue has highlighted the need for a Norwegian national support structure for the Cities Mission. This dialogue has identified existing support structures in Norway and areas where increased collaboration and joint learning are needed, based on the NetZeroCities Climate Transition Map. The four suggested focus areas for capacity building are multi-level governance, implementation (including private/public collaboration), innovation capacity, and Mission-based working methods.

In collaboration with Design and Architecture Norway (DOGA), which is leading the work on establishing a national platform, the following focus areas have been identified to advance the establishment of a Norwegian national platform:

1. Establishing the structure for a national platform

Further discussions are needed to define what a Norwegian national platform could look like and to determine its governance structure. Additionally, various working methods involving all levels of government around different impact pathways need to be tested.

2. Collaboration across governance levels

Improved multi-level dialogues, strengthened buy-in, and mutual commitment around focus areas and needs affected by various governance levels are essential, as these issues cannot be resolved locally alone. This requires the alignment of different perspectives, goals, and narratives across various levels. Additionally, shared problem-solving on highlighted and prioritised topics, along with need-based and enabling policy development, are necessary steps.

Some proposed activities include experimenting with new co-creation processes that enable cities to collaborate with ministries on regulatory, policy, and governance-related issues; co-developing mutual statements from both the Mission and other cities, highlighting areas where a focus on multi-level governance is necessary; and connecting the regional authorities for the Mission Cities to the dialogue.

3. Defining support provided by the national platform

The concrete support provided by the platform should be clearly outlined. While cities have identified some early needs, further discussions are necessary to elaborate on these. The identified needs include capacity-building, holistic approaches to climate neutrality, ecosystem thinking, development of financing portfolios, and collaboration with the private sector.

4. Involvement of other cities

Exploration is needed to determine how other interested cities, such as Drammen participating in the Pilot Program of NetZeroCities, can participate in knowledge exchange and collaboration with the Mission Cities within the national platform.

The yearly national event organised by NetZeroCities will help bring together the national ecosystem supporting cities to achieve climate neutrality. This event will include cities not part of the Cities Mission but interested in accelerating their climate efforts. It will provide an opportunity for cities to learn from the experiences, work, and achievements of the three Mission Cities.

5. Involvement of the private sector

Strategies need to be explored for involving the private sector in discussions about supporting cities in accelerating their transition to climate neutrality. This is tied to the identified need for building cities' implementation capacity, which involves financing and implementing the actions necessary for the cities' transition through a collaborative effort between public and private actors.

6. Learning from other national support structures

Norwegian actors, led by DOGA, aim to learn from other national support structures, especially via their engagement in the activities proposed by CapaCITIES, to exchange experiences with other national platforms, participate in capacity-building activities, and access resources that can support their work at the national level.

The key actors already identified for the development of the achievement of these goals are:

- the three Mission Cities: Oslo, Trondheim and Stavanger. The cities are currently collaborating through various NetZeroCities activities and have regular meetings with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and DOGA.
- the Pilot City Drammen. The city is currently involved through participation in the Norwegian Cities Mission Forum.
- the cities that applied to be part of the Cities Mission: Ålesund, Bergen, Bodø, and Tromsø. The cities are currently involved through participation in the Norwegian Cities Mission Forum.
- other cities: Cities connected to the New European Bauhaus initiative or to other initiatives linked to the Cities Mission, such as the Covenant of Mayors.
- National ministries: Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Ministry of Climate and Environment, and Ministry of Digitalisation and Public Governance + others involved in the steering committee for the Cities Mission.
- Other national actors: Innovation Norway, Research Council of Norway, the Norwegian Environment Agency, Enova, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO), the Norwegian Smart City Network and the Metropolitan Network, both coordinated by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, leading universities and research actors - including NTNU and SINTEF, the smart city innovation cluster Nordic Edge, and the business-for-climate networks of Skift and Klimapartnere.
- Organisation in charge of developing the national platform: Design and Architecture Norway (DOGA).

2.2.11 Poland

The latest developments in Poland, including regular meetings between Mission Cities and key national ministries and agencies and the establishment of the Partnership "Environment for Development", create a strong foundation for the further development of the national platform for climate-neutral cities. To benefit from the momentum, NetZeroCities will support the advancement of the following activities:

1. Promoting the Mission approach and mobilisation of the national ecosystem for climate-neutral cities

Even though the key national actors are involved in the process, there is no joint understanding of the urgency, scale and complexity of the task that is in front of the Mission Cities, which is to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. The existing national support for local climate action is still fragmented and mostly

project-based and will not be sufficient for cities to reach their climate objectives. It is necessary to build a common understanding of the Cities Mission across all levels of government as well as across different types of stakeholders and develop appropriate implementation strategies.

2. Resourcing the national platform and embedding into existing structures

To reach its full potential, the national platform should be properly resourced from the national funds and embedded into the existing national structures. Some level of formalisation must be achieved in order to secure the platform's long-term sustainability and operations. The current 'ad-hoc' meetings should be turned into regular meetings included in the agendas of key stakeholders.

3. Including more cities in the Mission

More Polish cities should be able to benefit from the learnings and experience of the 5 Polish Mission Cities. To this end, learning spaces and opportunities for cross-city exchange should be implemented. Annual national events shall be used for this purpose and promote city-facing resources and tools delivered by the Mission.

2.2.12 Slovenia

The establishment of a Slovenian National Platform is slowly emerging and there are already several key actors engaged and supporting the municipalities as well as actively pushing for a national platform to be established. To further support the development of this platform, the following next steps are foreseen:

1. Establishing better synergies and connections amongst the different levels of government (as well as stakeholders)

There is still a disconnect between the national, regional and local level, and there is a need as well as potential for all these different levels to come together. This should be a one of the first tasks and support that NetZeroCities could provide as it could greatly assist the set-up of a national platform in Slovenia.

There is a need to focus on some government levels more than others since, for instance, the connection between the local and the regional level, thanks to some of the activities led by IPoP, is already present. Therefore, the focus would primarily be on engaging the national level, especially bringing certain key Ministries on board, such as the Ministry of Environment, Climate and Energy, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Space and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation. This would be especially important to 1) advocate for and secure the right financial support for the Slovenian Mission and other interested cities and 2) establish solid cooperation, especially in the preparation of key strategic documents by the national government. Slovenian cities still lack clarity on which Ministry prepares these documents, resulting in local authorities not being informed or involved during the planning phase.

NetZeroCities's role in this work would be to facilitate initial meetings with these Ministries to promote and provide better exposure to the EU Cities Mission and provide best-practise examples from already established national platforms.

2. Animating a community of practices, bringing the different stakeholders together

As outlined in the gap analysis, there are already several stakeholders who are working closely with Slovenian cities. However, one or some of these stakeholders could assume the role of facilitator to kick-start and coordinate the work of a Slovenian national platform to create a real community of practice. Given the kind of work they already undertake with Slovenian cities, EIT Climate-KIC Slovenia and/or the Institute for Spatial Policies could assume the facilitation role. The idea, vision and activities of what should a Slovenian national platform entail are already well defined and developed. A facilitator could be instrumental in activating these plans into action.

3. Focusing on the legal framework

Thanks to their ambitious commitments, the Slovenian Mission Cities want to move faster regarding the transposition of EU legislation into the national legislative framework, as they considered themselves inhibited by the unfavourable regulatory framework at the national level. The different government levels are on different levels of speed when it comes to climate ambition and action. NetZeroCities can support the Slovenian national platform on the development of ambitious national regulations and the harmonisation of different policies (EU, national and local), ensuring that the right enabling conditions are in place for the climate neutrality commitment to be reached.

4. Bringing other stakeholders and cities on board

The Slovenian national platform should eventually include and onboard other key stakeholders within the ecosystem, such as the Josef Stefan Institute, which was instrumental during the initial phases of the EU Cities Mission to disseminate the call with Slovenian cities. Bringing other interested cities would also be key, first focusing on cities that already demonstrate interest and are implementing interesting climate projects, such as the cities of Maribor, Celje and Koper.

2.2.13 Turkey

The short-term objectives of the support of NetZeroCities will be to:

1. Establishing a governance model for the emerging national platform

Turkish national authorities are already included in the process of building the national support structures for climate-neutral cities, especially the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change and the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK). However, this engagement has not materialised yet into a concrete vision and strategy for the Turkish national platform. To keep up the momentum, Turkish authorities should receive support in designing a governance model tailored to the context and needs of Turkish cities.

2. Engaging Mission Cities in the 'national mission' and integrating more cities

National authorities are following the work of Turkish Mission Cities, e.g. the Climate City Contract process. However, this collaboration has not reached its full potential yet and could benefit more from exchange formats between the local and national levels and a local need assessment. TÜBİTAK also collaborates with Turkish national city networks to promote the EU Cities Mission across municipalities. This could create good opportunities for learning spaces for both Mission Cities and other municipalities, e.g. on the CCC process.

The leading organisation is a national agency - the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK), which communicates with national ministries to engage them in the Mission, including the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure. TÜBİTAK works together with relevant sub-groups from the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change to develop a suitable governance model for the Turkish national platform.

2.3 Cluster 5 – Gathering national ecosystems via national events

The support provided by NetZeroCities in the framework of task 1.6 of NZC-SGA2 will consist in the organisation of one annual in-person event during the next three years. These events aim to gather stakeholders interested in developing a national platform based on the Mission approach, they will showcase the progress of Mission cities, involve other interested cities, and mainly reinforce a national community of stakeholders. They will most probably be co-organised in the framework of existing events, and in any case in partnership with national stakeholders, to reinforce national ecosystems, and not create parallel workstreams.

Below a list of relevant stakeholders to engage in these events is presented, as well as relevant existing events to partner with. The definition of the exact format and dates of these events are under discussion with the identified stakeholders.

| Country | Relevant stakeholders | Relevant events |
|---------|--|--|
| Denmark | <p>Cities & regions: Local Government Denmark, Danish regions (North Denmark, Central Denmark, South Denmark, Zealand and the Capital Region), cities that applied for the Cities Mission, cities that have signed the Mission Adaptation Charter, cities that are signatories of the Covenant of Mayors, Members of the Committee of the Regions</p> <p>National agencies & ministries: Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science, Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Finance</p> <p>Other actors: CONCITO, Realdania</p> | 10th Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns (Aalborg, 1-3 October 2024), The Climate Alliance meetings |
| Estonia | <p>Cities: Cities that applied for the Cities Mission, cities that have signed the Mission Adaptation Charter, cities that are signatories of the Covenant of Mayors, cities part of the R-Club, Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities, members of the Committee of the Regions</p> <p>National ministries: Ministry of Climate, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education and Research</p> <p>Other actors: Environmental Investment Centre (KIK), Tartu Regional Energy Agency</p> | Impact Day (Tallinn, 10-12 October 2024) |
| Hungary | <p>Cities & regions: Cities that applied for the Cities Mission, cities that have signed the Mission Adaptation Charter, cities that are signatories of the Covenant of Mayors, Climate Friendly Communities Association, members of the Committee of the Regions</p> <p>National ministries: Ministry of Energy, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Construction and Transport, Ministry of Finance</p> <p>Other actors: National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NKFIH), Non-Profit Limited Liability Company for Quality Control and Innovation in Building (EMI)</p> | Budapest Climate Summit (Budapest, 2 December 2024); Hungarian Battery Week (Budapest, 6-8 November 2024) |
| Latvia | <p>Cities & regions: Cities that applied for the Cities Mission, cities that are signatories of the Covenant of Mayors, Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, Latvian Association of Large Cities, Latvian Planning Regions (Kurzeme Planning Region, Latgale Planning Region, Riga Planning Region, Vidzeme Planning Region and Zemgale Planning Region), members of the Committee of the Regions</p> <p>National ministries: Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Economics, Ministry of Climate and Energy, Ministry of Education and Science, and Ministry of Regional Development and Environmental Protection</p> <p>Other actors: Riga Energy Agency, Latvian Environmental Investment Fund</p> <p>Mission Board member: Matīss Paegle</p> | Meetings of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments |

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| Lithuania | <p>Cities: Cities that applied for the Cities Mission, cities that have signed the Adaptation Mission Charter, cities that are signatories of the Covenant of Mayors, Lithuanian Green Municipalities Network, Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania, members of the Committee of the Regions</p> <p>National ministries: Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Economy and Innovation, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Finance</p> <p>Other actors: Lithuanian Energy Agency</p> <p>Mission Board Member: Gabriela Kuštan</p> | <p>Energy Forum 2025 (Dates TBC);</p> <p>Cities Mission Conference 2025</p> |
| Luxembourg | <p>Cities: 40 municipalities part of Climate Alliance</p> <p>National Ministries and agencies: Ministry of the Economy, Ministry of the Environment and the Nature and Forestry Administration, Ministry of Spatial Planning, Ministry of Mobility, Klima-Agence,</p> <p>Other actors: partners of the KlimaPakt (CELL, EBL, IMS), Oekozynter Pafendall, NGO "Mouvement Ecologique" (Méco). Regional Pools of municipalities and syndicates: SYVICOL and ProSUD. Environmental and climate protection syndicates: Nature Park Our, Uewersauer, Mëllerdall and SIAS.</p> | <p>Klimapakt-Tag (June)</p> |
| Malta | <p>Cities: Signatories of the Covenant of Mayors</p> <p>National Ministries and agencies: Ministry for Gozo and Planning, Ministry for the Environment, Energy and the Regeneration of the Grand Harbour, Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Public Works, Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade (EU Coordination Division), Office of the Prime Minister (EU funds portfolio), Ministry for the National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government, Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation and the Ministry for Finance</p> <p>Xjenza Malta and the Energy & Water Agency</p> <p>Other actors: Local Councils Association, EIT Urban Mobility, Green Transition Hub Malta, University of Malta. NGOs: Dawra Madwarna, ROTA, Moviment Graffiti. Private sector: the Malta Chamber, Ecostack Innovation, APS Bank.</p> | <p>Malta Sustainability Forum organised by APS bank (attracts interest of all stakeholders);</p> <p>ClimateOn Conference, the National Energy Conference, Science and the City (attracts interest of all stakeholders and includes a strong citizen engagement component) and Xjenza Malta events on the EU Missions</p> |
| Cyprus | <p>Cities: Limassol (Mission City), Strovolos, Paphos and Aradippou.</p> <p>National ministries: Ministry for Agriculture, rural development and the environment (Department of Environment)</p> | <p>International Conference on Environment and Life Science (EUCELS);</p> <p>Connect Cyprus cities to Greek annual forum on Climate Neutrality.</p> |
| Slovakia | <p>Cities & regions: Cities that applied for the Cities Mission, cities that are signatories of the Covenant of Mayors, regions and cities that have signed the Mission Adaptation Charter, Union of Towns and Cities, members of the Committee of the Regions</p> <p>National ministries: Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic</p> <p>Other actors: Climate Coalition, Interest Association of Cities and Municipalities for Sustainable Energy Efficiency, University of Žilina</p> | <p>Workshops and events organised by CapaCITIES's partner University of Žilina</p> |

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| Albania | <p>Cities: AL-Green (alliance of 17 cities)</p> <p>National ministries: Minister for Local Governance; National Economic Council</p> | Workshops organised by AL-Green |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | <p>Cities: Cities that are signatories of the Covenant of Mayors, Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Association of Towns and Municipalities of the Republic of Srpska</p> <p>Ministries of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Federal Ministry of Finance, Federal Ministry of Energy, Mining and Industry, Federal Ministry of Transport and Communication</p> <p>Ministries of Republika Srpska: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mining, Ministry of Transport and Communication</p> <p>Other actors: Center for Energy, Environment and Resources (CENER 21)</p> | Conferences organised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Energy Summit 2025 (TBC) |
| Iceland | <p>Cities: Association of Municipalities in the Capital Region, Association of Icelandic Municipalities</p> <p>National ministries: Ministry of the Environment, Energy, and Climate, Ministry of Universities, Industry, and Innovation, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, Ministry of Infrastructure</p> <p>Other actors: Icelandic Climate Council</p> | 2024 Arctic Circle Assembly (Reykjavik, 17-19 October 2024); The 17th International Green Energy Conference & the 6th International Conference on Energy and AI & the 6th Arctic Energy Forum (Reykjavik, 12-15 October 2025) |
| Israel | <p>Cities: Tel Aviv, Haifa, Jerusalem</p> <p>National ministries: the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of the Economy and the Ministry of the Environment and the Innovation Agency</p> <p>Other actors: EU-Israel Horizon Europe Joint Research and Innovation Committee.</p> | Renewable Energy Conference (December 2025) |
| Montenegro | <p>Cities: Signatories of the Covenant of Mayors</p> <p>Other actors: Union of Municipalities of Montenegro, GiZ, UNDP</p> | Events organised by the EU4ET project and the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro |
| United Kingdom | <p>Cities: Core Cities UK</p> <p>National Ministries and agencies: Cities Commission for Climate Investment, Scottish directorate for Energy and Climate Change</p> | C3i meetings & events & Core Cities meetings, The Cities Climate action summit |

Table 2: List of relevant stakeholders and events to organise Cities Mission events at national event

Conclusion

Because national ecosystems present various situations regarding the support they provide to local authorities to achieve the EU Cities Mission objectives and that NZC have limited resources in the framework of Task T1.6 of NZC-SGA2, differentiated support will be provided to the different national ecosystems. It will focus on establishing and reinforcing national platforms as a multi-actor community of practices supporting local authorities in achieving climate neutrality.

In detail, the organisation of annual in-person events in 28 countries will be supported for three years (countries in clusters 3, 4 and 5). Mentoring and advice services will be provided to countries in cluster 2. Tailored support in the format of technical assistance and co-design with national and local stakeholders will be provided on an annual basis to the countries of clusters 3 and 4. These countries of clusters 3 and 4 have been identified to receive the most substantial support. This choice is based on a dual rationale: firstly, the national support program for other cities than the Mission ones has not yet been developed there, meaning that Mission Cities and other cities do not currently meet regularly at the national or regional level. Secondly, there is a strong interest from several key actors to structure a support offer, suggesting that with targeted assistance, a significant impact can be achieved.

Due to the focus on these countries where multi-actor ecosystems aligned on the EU Mission approach are developing or emerging, there is a need to support them in their development pathways (especially in terms of governance, engagement of key partners, design of services, securing resources) to create meaningful collaborating spaces for local authorities. This support will especially focus on:

- Supporting the formalisation of the governance structure of the national platforms.
- Animating a community of practices.
- Engagement of cities beyond the Mission Cities, and technical assistance.
- Alignment of the CCCs and national frameworks.
- Unlocking funding for cities.
- Bringing national regulatory barriers to the attention of national authorities.

The evolution of the dynamics of each national ecosystem and the impacts of the support will be analysed on an annual basis and adjusted according to the evolution of the different countries between the different clusters.