



The European Green Deal

Delivering results for citizens with Europe's cities

February 2020



Key messages

1. Europe's cities are crucial actors of the transition towards a climate neutral society. Many have already committed to the 2050 goal. Achieving it is a collective challenge. The European Green Deal is a unique opportunity to align goals, efforts and policies across level of government to deliver results for the citizens of today and tomorrow.
2. The European Green Deal must empower cities in their transformation towards climate neutrality. Policies on climate, energy, buildings, zero pollution, circular economy, biodiversity, mobility, food, and digital transformation must increasingly be shaped by local intelligence to be effective. The Green Deal must be backed by financial resources that support all cities and people in achieving a fair and inclusive transition.
3. We need new and more effective ways of involving city leaders, city authorities and citizens in the EU. Deeply transformative policies must also be accompanied by new ways of working together with cities and citizens to achieve the necessary objectives, such as climate neutrality. This includes an institutional political dialogue with mayors, a systematic approach to harnessing local intelligence for better policies and exploring civic dialogue at EU level in collaboration with cities.

The opportunity of the European Green Deal

The promise of a European Green Deal has brought a new and much needed impetus to the climate debate. The ambition to make Europe climate neutral by 2050 is extremely challenging but very necessary. Europe's cities and their capacity to manage societal transformations will greatly influence the future of the EU¹. Cities must support and manage energy transition, digital transformation, climate mitigation and adaptation, re- and upskilling the workforce, pollution reduction, sustainable urban mobility and food systems, circular economy, strategic use of public spending to drive transformation while sustaining social cohesion.

Many cities are taking the lead in tackling climate challenges and have already committed to climate neutrality by 2050 or earlier². Together, we are fully committed to work towards a just transition in our cities to make the European Green Deal a reality in collaboration with all levels of government, surrounding sub-urban and rural areas, citizens and other stakeholders.

¹ EURO CITIES City Leaders' Agenda: <https://bit.ly/20mbQog>

² EURO CITIES survey on climate action and EURO CITIES' climate pledges: <https://bit.ly/2G0hQ4P>

Empowering cities to deliver

In EUROCITIES, we are committed to working together to develop and share effective solutions and building capacity to tackle our common challenges. The Green Deal has the potential to empower cities to tackle challenges locally, when policies in the relevant areas are shaped in partnership with cities, implementing EU legislation on the ground. This include:

- **Climate:** 64% of EUROCITIES members have already committed to climate-neutrality by 2050³, ahead of the forthcoming climate law. The upwards adjustment of the target for GHG emissions for 2030 is necessary but must be backed by adequate support for capacity building at local level. A climate pact should place cities in the centre as facilitators for local stakeholders and citizens, who come together around a shared climate goal. This pact must allow for local differences in format and implementation. On adaptation strategies, cities must be actively involved in negotiating and developing policies, given the vital role of the local level in developing transition and effective resilient cities strategies.
- **Energy:** Cities are indispensable partners to accelerate and scale up the energy transition. Initiatives at city level to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy are essential to achieving the objectives of the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). But despite the obligation in the Governance of the Energy Union regulation, local efforts are often overlooked when member states develop NECPs.⁴ This significantly undermines the potential for vital complementary actions between local and national governments. The European Commission should ensure that city authorities are fully involved in the revision of the NECPs before their approval at EU level.
- **Buildings:** Cutting carbon emissions of buildings is crucial to addressing climate change as, on average, one third to half of the energy in cities is spent on heating. Given the volume of old residential and other buildings in cities, renovation rates need to increase by three to five times their current levels to get closer to the 1.5 degrees scenario⁵. The European Commission should support renovation rates and energy efficiency in housing in cities. Renovation policies at national and local level must consider potentially adverse social side effects and ensure that the most vulnerable groups in cities are not negatively affected. Energy poverty has risen in the last years and has a gender dimension that must be fully considered in policy design⁶. The Commission should require the involvement of cities in the development of National Long-Term Renovation strategies to achieve better implementation of the Energy Performance of Building Directive
- **Circular Economy:** Cities play a key role in delivering circularity on their territories, as facilitators, legislators, policy and market makers⁷. Cities are where the promotion and adoption of circular economy business models should reduce consumption-based emissions and contribute to climate neutrality. Joint targeted action at EU level helps create the right preconditions for a successful circular transition, including for example ecofriendly production processes and sustainable packaging. This includes legislation to develop markets for secondary materials to avoid the loss of resources from the economy through waste. It also involves developing common indicators for the circular economy and sharing

³ EUROCITIES survey on climate action in cities: <https://bit.ly/2G0hQ4P>

⁴ Idem

⁵ IPCC SR 1.5 report <https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/SPM-for-cities.pdf>

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/content/introduction-5>

⁷ EUROCITIES statement Towards Circular Cities, 2018: <https://bit.ly/36NLYrG>

the cost of waste management e.g. by strengthening Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). The EU should also widen the scope of the single use plastics directive to include a greater range of plastic products and set reuse targets for multi-use packaging. Cities are committing to curbing polluting plastic use and developing strategies to significantly reduce plastic waste by 2021 through the recent EUROCITIES declaration on plastics⁸.

- **Sustainable and smart mobility:** Decarbonisation and digitalisation of transport should be priorities for the European Green Deal to achieve climate neutrality, together with investing in public transport and promoting active modes of transport such as walking and cycling. The EU should engage with cities to harness digitalisation as an enabling framework for the decarbonisation of transport and the management of demand. The transport sector should be compliant with 2050 net-zero carbon emission pathways, but we must expand and strengthen efforts to shift mobility demand. A modal shift towards clean, connected and shared modes of urban transport require substantial investment in new and improved urban infrastructure. Promoting active modes of transport through stronger integration with public transport has the obvious positive side effects of also reducing congestion, reducing air pollution and improving health outcomes⁹.
- **Fair and healthy food systems:** EU's forthcoming Farm to Fork strategy should fully consider the potential in cities for innovation, and their actions to create sustainable food systems. Over 200 cities, the majority of which are European, have signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, committing to develop sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse, and that minimise waste and conserve biodiversity while adapting to and mitigating impacts of climate change¹⁰. As cities, we use our purchasing power to move towards shorter supply chains that support consumption of local and seasonal products. We raise citizens awareness for healthier diets and decrease the impact of food waste through consumer-friendly food waste prevention action¹¹.
- **Biodiversity:** Cities have a leading role in reaching the EU and global biodiversity goals. We integrate biodiversity into urban planning, assess and report on the status of biodiversity on the ground and raise awareness of the vital role of nature. A renewed long-term strategy should focus on results-orientated targets that clearly define how the overall objectives of the strategy are to be achieved, on improved implementation of existing legislation, mainstreaming biodiversity into existing legislation, better coordination across levels of governance and sectors as well as ensuring that biodiversity is part of a future 2050 climate vision¹².
- **Zero pollution:** A stronger EU environmental noise directive is essential, recognising the significant disease burden caused by noise pollution. On air quality, the Green Deal should implement the recommendations of the fitness check on the Ambient Air Quality Directive and align the EU's goals to the latest scientific evidence. It should also ensure coherence between climate and environmental policy, particularly policies on energy transition, vehicle emissions, air quality and noise. Delivering on the zero-pollution ambition, the new Green City Accord will engage cities in improving their environmental performances on waste, water, air, noise and biodiversity. It will support implementation of EU environmental regulations at city level and gather intelligence about local environmental challenges for better EU policies¹³.

⁸ EUROCITIES Plastics Declaration, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2SenMJJ>

⁹ EUROCITIES policy paper on the Path to sustainable urban mobility, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2u5B0pf>

¹⁰ <http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/>

¹¹ EUROCITIES report on Urban Food Matters, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2RW89ld>

¹² EUROCITIES statement on the EU Biodiversity Strategy, 2019: <https://bit.ly/36UnixQ>

¹³ The Green City Accord: <https://bit.ly/2PG5JM1>

- **Digital transformation:** Digital technologies must serve people and support the objective of making our cities more resource efficient¹⁴. Digitalisation should serve as a lever for increased greening. This concerns, for example, information services that facilitate ecological action, sustainable procurement, the environmentally friendly use of raw materials, the resource-saving operation of ICT systems and the sensible use of sharing services. With our initiative on boosting a sustainable digital transformation in Europe's cities and communities¹⁵, city leaders agree on common principles and commit to a new multi-level collaboration for cities to become smarter and more sustainable, better places for people to live and work in. We need the EU to support the initiative and the upscaling of digital solutions through a substantial Digital Europe Programme.
- **Social sustainability and gender equality:** The EU should recognise the role of the cultural and creative sector as drivers of economic growth and social inclusion. In addition, non-formal learning providers play an important role in raising awareness and engaging citizens to co-create climate neutral European cities and regions. A gender equal approach is vital, which must be underpinned by gender-disaggregated data. The EU should capitalise on the capacity of cultural professionals and institutions in achieving public participation and bringing the diversity of the people of Europe together to tackle climate challenges. Cities in general, in particular the cultural and creative sector, have a vast knowledge of participatory methods to foster dialogue, co-create new solutions and engage citizens.

A just transition

We need sustainable financial resources to enable a fair economic transition to a low-carbon society. The Commission's proposal for a Sustainable Europe Investment Plan is a step in the right direction, mobilising investment from the public and private sector. It must have a strong focus on unlocking cities' potential for sustainable investment at local level. Funding must be complementary to the funding available for ERDF and the cohesion fund to truly add value.

The Just Transition Mechanism and Fund can help mitigate the impact of transition on those most affected and vulnerable, addressing skills gaps and energy poverty¹⁶. A just transition that leaves no one behind requires adequate investment in education, life-long learning and skills to support people of all ages to adapt to the requirements of a climate neutral economy. Cities also need large scale investment in urban infrastructures to be able to cope with rising temperatures, climate change and population increase.

New lending mechanisms must be accompanied by an urgent review of EU rules for public budget deficits, to improve access for local authorities. The European rules regarding the permissible Maastricht deficit, debt ceiling, spending freeze and debt ratio adjustment currently make the investment into and implementation of large-scale and carbon neutral projects increasingly complicated.

We urgently need a strong commitment from all member states to step up to the challenge, to fully back the ambition of a climate neutral Europe by 2050 and to work with their cities to achieve this. A European semester process aligned with the SDGs needs to consider subnational data and involve city authorities in the elaboration of the just transition plans for an adequate assessment of the social, environmental and economic challenges and needs.

Taxation policies will be essential to facilitating and enhancing a low carbon economy. We support the European Commission's view that the Green Deal will create an incentive for tax reforms in

¹⁴ EUROCITIES statement on Smart Cities in the Age of Digital Revolution, 2019: http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Smart_Cities_statement_2019.pdf

¹⁵ Join, boost, sustain declaration, 2019: <https://bit.ly/3b34Vdb>

¹⁶ EUROCITIES statement on long term investment (forthcoming)

EU member states to remove subsidies for fossil fuels, shift the tax burden from labour to pollution and the use of raw material, while considering social implications.

A new way of working for Europe

A Green Deal can achieve the greatest impact by using existing initiatives, networks and governance structures to reach out, harness expertise, multiply capacity building and share knowledge. EUROCITIES, the Covenant of Mayors, the Urban Agenda for the EU¹⁷, the Green City Accord, the network of European Green Capital Cities, EUROPEANMOBILITYWEEK local campaigners, and the mission for 100 climate neutral and smart cities, among others, have the potential to support the successful delivery of the forthcoming initiatives.

Still, deeply transformative policies for Europe must be matched by radical new ways of working between policy sectors, levels of government, and with citizens to achieve the necessary impact. We need a much more effective way of working with city leaders, city authorities and citizens in the EU. We propose developing the following three complementary strands as a way forward:

- Determining the way forward for a European civic dialogue, in close collaboration with city authorities. City authorities are the closest level of government to people. Locally, there is a wealth of experience around co-creating policy solutions, citizens' assemblies, civic dialogues and participatory budgeting¹⁸. Local experiences form a solid basis for inspiration on how to engage people directly in formulating and achieving European goals. They are essential to the Commission's ambition of enabling European citizens to play a leading and active part in a Europe that is closer to citizens. The current EU citizens' dialogues, which are also highlighted in the Commission Communication on the Future of Europe, are positive but not ambitious enough in listening to and engaging citizens directly in EU policy design.
- Developing a systematic and ongoing exchanges between policy makers at city, national and EU level. The objective is to improve EU policy making and implementation by ensuring they are informed by local needs, challenges and opportunities while delivering on shared European objectives. Existing examples of such work processes at EU level, including the partnerships of the urban agenda for the EU, should be reviewed, strengthened and mainstreamed¹⁹. Also, is necessary to break the silos between policy sectors at all levels of government to ensure greater effectiveness of policies. A strong common goal for climate neutrality by 2050 can a powerful lever when backed by funding instruments and joined up policies that facilitate rather than obstruct integrated approaches at local level.
- Establishing a solid mechanism to strengthen political dialogue between mayors and EU leaders. An annual political dialogue between city and EU leaders would establish shared priorities and set the basis for a new approach to sharing power between the different levels of governance in the EU. It should recognise the importance of harnessing local intelligence for better EU policy making and ensure joint responsibility for shared urban and European challenges. The EU can work with existing infrastructures, i.e. city networks such as EUROCITIES, as an engaged partner to achieve this.

¹⁷ The Urban Agenda partnerships, involving policy makers from cities, members states and the European Commission, have delivered a set of actions and recommendations for better legislation, funding and financing and knowledge related to the Green Deal. Due attention is needed to notably the action plans of the partnerships on air quality, circular economy, climate adaptation, energy transition, sustainable land use and nature-based solutions, housing and urban mobility and their proposals in those areas.

¹⁸ See 'Cities4Europe, Europe for citizens' campaign website for examples <http://cities4europe.eurocities.eu>

¹⁹ For example, the Urban agenda for the EU and its partnership approach involving all levels of government to achieve better regulation, better funding and better knowledge sharing.