EU climate leadership: 60% emission reduction by 2030

Paving the way to 2050 climate neutrality

Key messages:

- The EU 2030 emission reduction target should be revised upwards to at least 60% by 2030. The Commission should intensify collaboration with, and support for, cities undertaking major efforts to reach an even higher reduction target for 2030.
- Action at all levels of government and across all sectors is needed to achieve the goals of GHG emission reduction by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050. Cities are committed to showing the way forward. The Commission must capitalise on local expertise to develop the EU framework by working more with city authorities and their European network organisations.
- Reinforced financial support to the local level from the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the Recovery and Resilience Facility will be essential to sustain the transformation process in cities and meeting more ambitious EU GHG reduction targets by 2030. Also, greater flexibility in the stability and growth pact is needed to ensure better conditions for long term, local infrastructure investments. This is especially critical as the post-corona recession will increase pressure on city budgets.
- The COVID-19 pandemic, with its social and economic ramifications, has accentuated the link between climate, social and economic sustainability. All levels of government must reinforce efforts to ensure that no one is left behind in the green transition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant socio-economic disruption to Europe's cities with some cities still recovering from the last financial crisis. And the climate crisis is looming around the corner.

Cities are being hit by a changing climate and delaying further any action would have a disproportionate negative impact on the most vulnerable in our societies. A green recovery would not only benefit the environment and the climate but also create more jobs, provide higher short-term returns, and increase long-term savings when compared to traditional stimulus programs. The EU now has a unique opportunity to embrace a more ambitious climate agenda and to lay the groundwork for a just and inclusive recovery across Europe.

EUROCITIES

December 2020

EU 2030 emission reduction targets

For the EU, achieving the Paris Agreement commitments by 2050 means reducing emissions far beyond the current target set for 2030. The 2019 UNEP emissions gap report stated that global emissions should fall by 7.6% per year between 2020 and 2030 just to keep the temperature rise to 1.5°C.[1] Every day we delay, the steeper and more difficult the cuts become. By 2025 the reduction would need to be 15.5% per year, making the 1.5°C target almost impossible to reach by 2050.[2]

As cities, we are committed to the 1.5°C goal and understand the specific urban responsibility to lead the way. However, the framework at national and EU level must provide the right financial and legislative enabling conditions. We call for a reduction target of at least 60% for 2030, binding at EU level and supported by a reduction target of least 55% at member states level to ensure commitment across Europe. The European Commission must strengthen direct collaboration with and support for leading cities that can show Europe the way to climate neutrality by aiming for an even higher reduction target – or climate neutrality - by 2030. The revised 2030 emission reduction target should be included in the post-2020 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to be submitted by EU member states by the end of the year.

Setting a science-based EU carbon budget should also be an essential part of an EU strategy to contribute to the Paris Agreement and to identify the policy measures required to meet the budget. Integrated sectoral policies will be crucial, and everyone must act together to ensure a just and inclusive transition.

An independent European Climate Council should be established at European level, to regularly assess and monitor how the EU and its member states are fulfilling their climate objectives. The Climate Council should also help identify gaps and provide recommendations on how to address them. Cities should be closely involved in the development of such recommendations to ensure that opportunities and challenges on the ground are fully taken into account.

We support the Council of the EU's partial general approach on the EU Climate Law asking the European Commission to propose an intermediate target for 2040 to anchor the Union in the 2050 climate-neutral trajectory.[3]

Finally, setting the objective of reaching climate-neutrality by 2050 in the EU Climate Law is a step in the right direction. But to comply with the Paris Agreement, all member states must ensure that they reach net-zero emissions individually by 2050 at the latest. The EU should also reinforce its research efforts on net negative emissions post-2050 and assess the need for potential net negative emission targets once more science-based evidence is available.

EU 2030 sectoral objectives

We need concerted action at all levels of government to drastically reverse the emissions trend, and significantly cut emissions in less than a decade, ending fossil fuel use and indirect subsidies, significantly reducing the amount of energy used in buildings, transport and industry, producing more renewable energy, improving circularity, and developing urban carbon sinks.

An upwardly revised EU GHG reduction target by 2030 should be accompanied by a significant and coherent revision of the 2030 climate, energy and transport frameworks, such as the Renewable Energy Directive, the

[1] The policy scenario considers all the policies now in place, but assumes that no additional measures are undertaken (ref year: 2005)
[2] https://www.unenvironment.org/interactive/emissions-gap-report/2019/
[3] Agreed on Friday 23 October, more information here

Energy Efficiency Directive, the ETS Directive and the forthcoming Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, in line with the overall ambition.

- **Renewable Energy**

In the last 10 years, progress has been made in transforming Europe's electricity production. The global expansion of renewable energy led to massive cost decreases, particularly in solar and on- and off-shore wind energy production. The energy transition is already most visible at local level.

The Covenant of Mayors' Action Plans are being implemented, and cities are introducing more and more renewable energy in their energy mix, developing local small-scale installations, fostering modern district heating and cooling systems, and supporting citizens and local energy communities to produce their own renewable energy, alongside large-scale projects. According to the Commission's strategic long-term vision, by 2050 more than 80% of electricity will be coming from renewable energy sources.[4] The current EU renewable energy target of at least 32% of the EU's total energy final energy consumption by 2030 is not in line with the 2050 ambitions and should thus be revised together with the EU 2030 emission reduction target.

- **Energy Efficiency**

The 'Energy Efficiency first' principle inherited from the previous Commission and reiterated in the European Green Deal and the Climate Law should remain at the top of the energy and climate architecture: the most sustainable energy is the one we don't use. However, the assessment of the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) in 2019 showed that EU member states fell short on achieving their energy efficiency targets for 2020. The European Commission should step up efforts to ensure implementation and enforcement at member state level of existing energy efficiency legislation and, in parallel, put in place new legally binding measures to increase the energy efficiency ambition for 2030.

- **Buildings**

Buildings will need to be net-zero to achieve a climate-neutral Europe. Since most of the buildings that will be occupied in 2050 have already been built, the main challenge is to renovate these existing buildings to make them more efficient. The new Renovation Wave Strategy, published by the Commission in October 2020, is a step in the right direction.[5] This initiative can help trigger new investments to restart the economy after the COVID-19 crisis, create local jobs, and deliver a just and inclusive transition for European citizens. The objective to at least double the annual energy renovation rate of residential and non-residential buildings by 2030 and to foster deep energy renovations is crucial, as well as the increased public and private investment capacity, technical assistance, addressing barriers to renovation of worst performing buildings and energy poor households, and the strong emphasis on the role of cities.[6]

However, on an integrated, participatory, and neighbourhood-based approach, the participation of citizens should not only be considered as users of the buildings and energy consumers. Citizens and local communities should be involved in decision making concerning neighbourhood approaches and multi-apartment buildings. In addition, the lack of participatory models for the design and implementation of renovation programmes

[4] European Commission, A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy (2018) https://bit.ly/2M1fpia

[5] European Commission, Renovation Wave: doubling the renovation rate to cut emissions, boost recovery and reduce energy poverty (2020) https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1835

[6] Eurocities policy statement on the Renovation Wave (2020) https://eurocities.eu/latest/renovate-to-innovate-europes-green-ambitions/

limits the potential of reinforcing the affordability and security of tenure. Cities and citizens are key to delivering the renovation wave, but they cannot do it alone. It is indeed crucial that member states put in place appropriate regulatory frameworks.

- **Carbon sinks**

All scenarios that keep global temperature increase well below 2°C or even below 1.5°C include some emissions removal from the atmosphere.[7] If removing CO_2 emissions from the atmosphere remains a residual solution, it could help with offsetting of surplus emissions from sectors where decarbonisation is the most challenging, such as agriculture and industrial processes. Currently, the EU has no target on removing CO_2 and a coherent strategy to strengthen carbon sinks should be developed to address this gap.

Afforestation and restoration of degraded forest lands and other ecosystems can further increase absorption of CO_2 while benefiting biodiversity, soil, and water resources. Restoring green areas in cities and bringing nature to the built environment can also contribute to increasing local resilience if coupled with adaptation measures. This is why natural carbon sinks with nature-based solutions (e.g. green and blue infrastructures, vertical gardens, green roofs) should remain the priority. But given the enormity of the task, the EU should also intensify its efforts in developing carbon capture and storage technologies. Additional EU funds should be made available to finance carbon absorption demonstration projects in cities and identify potential regulatory barriers. That said, we want to reiterate that carbon removal can only be a viable solution if combined with drastic emission reductions.

- **Transport**

Achieving climate neutrality means a 90% reduction in transport emissions by 2050.[8] Such a drastic emission reduction will not happen overnight. The Commission should implement measures to ensure the EU transport sector is compliant with 2050 net-zero carbon emission pathways in its 'Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy' and ensure that the milestones in the Strategy for 2030 are in line with the EU objectives. Improving local and regional public transit infrastructure will help achieve this goal, especially if there is a focus on last-mile passenger and freight transport.

Emission standards should be compliant with the climate goals. Strengthening more active travel modes and cycling should also be part of the transport sector's contribution to the 2030 targets. Strong EU targets are necessary to create the right national framework conditions in support of sustainable urban mobility. As a result, adapting behaviour to these conditions can generate more demand for urban solutions such as reallocation of public space and infrastructure for active mobility. Cities can then implement these solutions together with citizens to significantly increase the effectiveness of actions. The alignment of measures at the local, national and EU level can leverage impact and achieve greater effectiveness than otherwise would be possible from city authorities alone. Finally, measures should also reshape transport between our cities, to ensure that a greater proportion of intra-EU flights are replaced by international trains or other sustainable modes.[9]

Cities leading the way

Achieving the goals of GHG emission reduction by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050 will be challenging for all. But in this fight to mitigate global warming and adapt to climate change, many European cities are showing

[7] A Clean Planet for all A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy COM/2018/773 final https://bit.ly/3d3zK1T
[8] Communication on the European Green Deal (2019)
[9] Eurocities policy statement on the Path to Sustainable Urban Mobility (November 2019): https://bit.ly/2X1ppOq

the way: 64% of Eurocities members have already committed to becoming climate neutral by 2050.[10] Among them, twelve have even committed to become climate-neutral by 2040.

Cities are an integral part of the solution: the main challenges are in cities, but it is also where there is a wealth of expertise and experience that are hugely beneficial to developing plans and strategies, policies and regulations. The European Commission should capitalise on local insights by working with the European network organisations of cities as well as with city authorities directly. As facilitators for local stakeholders and citizens, their leading role, and the tools they have at their disposal to ensure a broad societal engagement in the transition towards a climate-neutral society are essential.[11]

The Multi-Annual Financial Framework and the Recovery and Resilience Facility will be crucial to sustaining the transformation process in cities towards 2030, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. Cities also need greater flexibility in the Stability and Growth Pact to be able to respond to a growing need for major infrastructure investments.[12] The role of Horizon Europe will be instrumental in the transition, but additional funds and financial products that leverage sustainable private investments will be even more important. The EU mission for 100 climate neutral cities by 2030, including its governance tools and financing models, will show the way for many more local authorities.[13]

As cities, we are fully committed to working with the European Commission, and with all levels of government, to tackle the challenge of climate change in a socially and economically sustainable way, to drastically reduce GHG emissions by 2030, to reach climate neutrality by mid-century and to work towards a future where all people benefit from a healthy, resilient and safe environment.

[10] Cities leading the way on climate action, EUROCITIES publication, 2019, https://bit.ly/3d6ArHO
[11] Eurocities policy statement on the European Climate Pact (April 2020) https://bit.ly/2Xz1yEU
[12] Eurocities policy statement on Unlocking long term investments in European cities (March 2020) http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Approved_Unlocking_long_term_investment_in_European_cities_.pdf
[13] https://bit.ly/2TBtKWr