



NEWSLETTER



Word of the editor

Dear readers,

Cities and regions play a central role in advancing the green transition under Horizon Mission 4. Achieving climate neutrality requires more than technology—it calls for a balanced approach that connects digital innovation with integrated planning, effective governance, and active citizen engagement, all adapted to local contexts. EU funding remains a key enabler in turning these ambitions into concrete actions and scalable solutions.

In this edition, we look at what truly defines a climate-neutral smart city, explore opportunities for financing innovative ideas, and present the GRIP project as a practical example of advancing sustainable procurement. We invite you to be part of this journey through collaboration, knowledge exchange, and shared commitment to a more sustainable future.

**Public Institution for the Development of
Međimurje County REDEA**



ANNOUNCEMENT

On **April 8th, 2026**, the Student Academy on AI-Driven Engineering for Sustainable Mobility was successfully held at the Science-Technology Park of Montenegro. Organized within the **INTEC** project, part of the **Erasmus+** programme, the event brought together students to explore AI applications and develop innovative solutions for sustainable mobility. <https://intec.fh-joanneum.at/>

Author: LIR

EU funding for innovative cities and regions

The European Union is rolling out 6 calls in 2026 that will bring together innovation, sustainability and urban transformation under programmes designed to strengthen local ecosystems, accelerate climate adaptation, and turn cities into climate-neutral, inclusive and attractive places to live.

The **European Urban Initiative (EUI)**, a €60 million budget program, strengthens the capacity of EU cities to design and implement innovative, sustainable and integrated urban solutions. It promotes knowledge sharing, experimentation and territorial cooperation.

The **Interregional Innovation Investments** support interregional investment projects in innovation aimed at market uptake and the development of European value chains with €47 million in funding.

The **European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)** initiative aims to build stronger and better-connected innovation environments across Europe, with €5 million in funding. It promotes collaboration between businesses, research centres, investors and public authorities to accelerate the development and scaling-up of new technologies and services.

The **EU Mission for Adaptation to Climate Change** helps regions and communities to anticipate and adapt to the impacts of climate change through innovative and resilient solutions, with €226 million in funding. It funds pilot projects and promotes knowledge exchange to develop strategies addressing floods, droughts and heatwaves.

The **EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities** supports 100 European cities in their transition towards climate neutrality and digitalisation by 2030, with €220 million in funding. It provides a framework for innovation, investment and citizen participation to transform urban systems in energy, mobility and digital services.

The **New European Bauhaus (NEB)** initiative combines sustainability, aesthetics and inclusion to transform European spaces and lifestyles, connecting science, art and culture with the green transition. It supports projects that bring together environmental innovation, social value and design excellence with €360 million in funding.

Author: Karolina Kosjek, Digital Innovation Hub Slovenia

What Makes a Smart City Truly Climate Neutral?

A smart city is often imagined as a place where advanced technologies, such as sensors, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms, optimize urban life. However, when it comes to climate neutrality, technology alone is not enough. A truly climate-neutral smart city emerges from a complex interaction between technological innovation, governance capacity, citizen engagement, and local environmental conditions. Climate neutrality typically means reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% and offsetting the remaining emissions, but achieving this goal requires far more than simply installing smart systems.



At the core of climate-neutral cities lies the integration of digital technologies into urban systems. Information and communication technologies, including the Internet of Things, big data, and artificial intelligence, enable cities to monitor and optimize energy use, transportation, and infrastructure in real time. These technologies can significantly reduce emissions by improving efficiency. For example, smart grids balance energy demand and supply, while smart meters help households reduce consumption. Research suggests that ICT solutions alone could contribute to a substantial share of global emissions reductions.

Despite their importance, technological solutions are only one part of the equation. The effectiveness of smart technologies depends on how well they are integrated across sectors such as energy, transport, and buildings. For instance, renewable energy systems must be combined with energy-efficient buildings and electrified transport networks to achieve meaningful reductions. Cities like Barcelona and Vienna demonstrate this integrated approach and have achieved significant emissions reductions through coordinated systems such as district heating, smart mobility, and energy optimization.

Urban planning also plays a crucial role in climate neutrality. Concepts such as the “15-minute city” aim to reduce reliance on cars by ensuring that essential services are accessible within a short walk or bike ride. This approach not only lowers emissions but also improves quality of life. However, planning strategies must balance competing demands. High-density urban areas support efficient public transport and proximity-based living, yet they may limit space for renewable energy generation. This highlights the importance of tailoring solutions to each city’s unique characteristics rather than applying one-size-fits-all models.

Equally important is governance. Strong institutional capacity is essential for coordinating policies, managing data, and implementing long-term strategies. Cities often face challenges such as fragmented data systems, limited administrative capacity, and lack of coordination between departments. Overcoming these barriers requires integrated governance structures that enable collaboration across sectors and levels of government. Without effective governance, even the most advanced technologies may fail to deliver meaningful climate outcomes.

Another key factor is citizen engagement. Climate neutrality is not only a technical challenge but also a social one. Behavioral changes, such as using public transport, reducing energy consumption, and supporting local production, are essential for reducing emissions. However, these changes require public awareness, participation, and trust. Engaging citizens in decision-making processes and encouraging sustainable lifestyles are therefore critical components of any successful smart city strategy.

In addition, the local context significantly influences the success of climate-neutral strategies. Geographic and climatic conditions determine the feasibility of renewable energy solutions. For example, solar energy systems are more effective in southern Europe than in northern regions due to differences in sunlight availability. Similarly, population density, economic conditions, and existing infrastructure all shape the pathways available to each city. This means that climate neutrality cannot be achieved through standardized solutions but must be adapted to local circumstances.

Finally, achieving climate neutrality requires time and long-term commitment. Many interventions, such as urban greening or infrastructure transformation, take years or even decades to produce measurable results. Cities must therefore adopt long-term strategies

and realistic timelines, recognizing that immediate results are unlikely. At the same time, the urgency of climate change demands accelerated action, creating a challenging balance between speed and sustainability.

In conclusion, a truly climate-neutral smart city is defined not by technology alone but by the alignment of multiple dimensions: digital innovation, integrated planning, effective governance, citizen participation, and context-aware implementation. The EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities provides a comprehensive framework to support this transformation, while projects like HARMONMISSIONS help ensure coherence and scalability across Europe. Together, they illustrate that achieving climate neutrality is not a single solution, but a coordinated and collective effort toward a sustainable urban future.

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Green Responsible Innovative Procurement, Acronym: GRIP

PROGRAM: NetZeroCities Programme to Enabling City Transformation (2024)



Co-funded by the
European Union



Project coordinator: City of Oslo

Project partners: SINTEF AS; City of Aachen, City of Košice, Creative Industry
Košice, n.o.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE: The GRIP project aims to build capacity between cities to use public procurement as a tool for climate action.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Through capacity building, research, knowledge sharing and exchange of experience between partners, the GRIP project will:

- support the cities of Aachen and Košice in the implementation of sustainable procurement
- develop and validate a practical 'toolbox' with customisable methods for cities of all sizes and capacities that can be used after the end of the project;
- engage other cities under EU Mission 4 to adopt green procurement as a tool to fight climate change and strengthen a greener EU market through a joint declaration.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The project activities will be implemented through 6 work packages (WPs):

WP1 Strengthening the use of scientific research by cities: This work package will provide research-based documentation on urban public procurement as a tool for climate protection.

WP2 GRIP Aachen Pilot Project: This work package will support pilot interventions, research and innovation actions in Aachen.

WP3 GRIP pilot project in Košice: This work package will support pilot projects, research and innovation activities in Košice.

WP4 Capacity Development: This work package includes capacity development activities and technical support for scaling up public procurement as a climate protection tool.

WP5 Stakeholder engagement and communication: This work package will support knowledge sharing within NetZeroCities and capacity development through the development of a Green Public Procurement toolbox, market-stakeholder dialogue, communication activities and the development of a policy statement.

WP6 Basic support: This work package will ensure sound management throughout the project lifetime, including contractual and financial management, project documentation, monitoring and reporting. It also includes system transformation management, monitoring, assessment, and learning (MEL).

PROJECT OUTPUTS

- GRIP Green Innovative Public Procurement Toolkit
- Political statement among NetZeroCities members
- GRIP Pilot Košice
 - Handbook on how to approach and implement environmentally responsible innovative procurement in Košice;
 - A feasibility study on green procurement, which presents the long-term economic case for environmentally responsible procurement in Eastern Europe;
 - Roadmap of the transition to green procurement in Košice.

- GRIP Pilot Aachen
- Capacity building

START OF IMPLEMENTATION	03/2025
COMPLETION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION	09/2026
PROJECT TYPE	Non-investment
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	In implementation

This project is co-financed by the European Union in the amount of 100%

Link: [Green Responsible Innovative Procurement \(GRIP\) - NetZeroCities \(https://netzerocities.eu/green-responsive-innovate-procurement-grip/\)](https://netzerocities.eu/green-responsive-innovate-procurement-grip/)

Source: Unit of Strategic Development, Department of Strategic Development, City of Košice