

MISSION 4

FEBRUARY 2025

NEWSLETTER



Word of the editor

Dear Climate Community,

In our second newsletter, we continue to bring you updates on the HARMONMISSIONS project, which is dedicated to **Climate-oriented EU Missions in the Danube Region**. Through our activities and the recently launched platforms, we aim to create new opportunities, share best practices, and provide valuable insights for all stakeholders.

Our newsletters will regularly inform you about the **HARMONMISSIONS** project's progress, upcoming events, and collaborations. Additionally, you will find news on other climate-focused initiatives that support the European Green Deal goals. We will continue to publish articles on the latest developments in **Climate EU Missions 1 and 4**, highlighting innovative projects and key achievements.

This second edition of the newsletter focuses on **EU Mission 4: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities**, showcasing the transformative efforts of cities across Europe as they work towards climate neutrality. We hope the information shared in this issue inspires in your sustainability efforts.

Slovak organization for research and development activities

● Announcements

Cities Mission Conference 2025

The fourth edition of the Cities Mission Conference 2025 will take place in Vilnius, Lithuania, from **6-8 May 2025**, with the theme "Harnessing City Successes: Advancing Climate Action for 2030"

The event will showcase the progress and ambitions of Mission Cities and their partners as they work towards climate neutrality by 2030. Organized by the European Commission and the Mission Platform, it will bring together political representatives and practitioners from 112 Mission Cities to celebrate three years of progress, share achievements, and inspire continued efforts toward a sustainable future.

Conference details: <https://netzerocities.eu/cities-mission-conference-2025/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

The EU Missions for Climate Resilience and Smart Cities online workshop will take place **on March 27, 2025 (9:30 – 12:00 CET, Zoom)**. Organized as part of the **HARMONMISSIONS project**, the event will focus on EU Missions "Adaptation to Climate Change" and "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities", exploring their role in sustainable development in the Danube Region. Experts will share insights on climate resilience, urban sustainability, and collaborative strategies under the Quadruple-Helix Approach. More info at www.harmonmissions.eu

Conference agenda and registration:

Register by March 14, 2025: <https://form.jotform.com/250483208198360>

Author: Applied Research and Communications Fund

Evolution of the 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 Mission and its Cumulative Impact on European Cities

The fourth Mission of the European Union, 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030, seeks to achieve climate mitigation through a holistic transformation of Europe's urban areas. A frequently-cited assertion supporting this Mission is that cities "take up only 4% of the EU's land area, but they are home to 75% of EU citizens, consume over 65% of the world's energy and account for more than 70% of global CO₂ emissions[1] ." It is perhaps for this reason that the fourth Mission leaves much room for discussion and analysis.

The Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, frequently referred to as the Cities Mission, began as an ambitious initiative to transform Europe's governance, infrastructure and lifestyle in the face of climate change. Yet despite the challenges in executing a plan of this magnitude, its effects appeared to exceed all expectations. Upon the mission's conception, 112 cities were selected to participate in it; to pave the way for a clean, safe, and sustainable Europe. Within a few months, a total of 377 cities had applied, the majority of which were found eligible. As of 2024, approximately half of the participating EU cities had already received a Label for achieving significant milestones.

Densely populated and heavily polluted, European cities are the ideal candidates for piloting the energy transition. The Mission's initial goal was to provide tangible results within those 112 cities by 2030, allowing the rest of Europe to follow suit by the mid-century. Only a few years after its conception, however, the cities' evolution is already noticeable. Therein lies the success of the Mission - it relies not on incremental change, but on rapid, dynamic transformation. Urban mobility, energy efficiency, freight transport, financing schemes, collaborative governance, and green infrastructure were discussed not as distant plans, but as urgent projects.

Mechanisms such as the Climate City Contract, the Climate City Capital Hub and the Twinning Learning Programme both bind cities to their goals for 2030, and ensure that any step taken in the right direction reflects a collaborative spirit with other countries facing similar challenges. Thus, the Mission becomes a ubiquitous effort for sustainability, which continues to be shared by all of the EU member states.

This, too, is what renders the Mission an impactful initiative: the learning opportunities, discussions, study visits, city surveys, and other available resources allow interested cities to lay a solid foundation on which their transition will be built. Climate governance is a "learning-by-doing process" (Shtjefni et al., 2024), and participating cities are called to continuously adapt their measures. Sharing the ever-changing process of achieving climate-neutrality can thus help other cities in their transformation.

The Cities Mission has evolved significantly since its conception, now encompassing an assessment phase and the design of policy recommendations, while projects devised under the mission - such as NetZeroCities [2] and CapaCITIES[3] - strive to maximise its impact through their informative and collaborative functions.

[1] European Commission (n.d.) EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities. Available at https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/climate-neutral-and-smart-cities_en

[2]<https://netzerocities.eu/latest-news/>

[3]<https://dutpartnership.eu/capacities/>

What these continuous effects of the Mission suggest is that European cities have the capacity to develop and to improve, even beyond the Horizon framework and the 2030 deadline. The NetZeroCities platform showcases a variety of success stories across the European Union, with each city overcoming its own challenges to cultivate a safe and sustainable environment. Limassol combines citizen engagement and renewable energy to counteract ever-rising temperatures[4] , while the traditionally coal-mining city of Velenje is using its participation in Mission 4 to advance decarbonisation[5] . Each city draws on the benefits of the Mission to overcome the barriers of its geographical location, its history, and the climate consequences it faces.

If the ever-increasing impact of the Cities Mission project can be summarised, its key message is the following: It proves that European cities - regardless of their obstacles - do have the capacity to incite transformative, rapid change. The alliances, knowledge exchange, cross-sectoral collaboration, and continuous learning promoted within the framework of the Mission influence an increasing number of countries - both participating and observing ones - and the positive effects these practices bring will likely remain visible in European cities long after the programme's lifecycle.

However, climate neutrality cannot rely on technological advancements alone. A smart, climate-neutral city requires governance that is open to the public; an interdisciplinary approach to prevalent issues, social innovation, and an unwavering focus on people's needs.



A view of Limassol.

Photo retrieved from Friends of the Earth Cyprus website
<https://www.foecyprus.org/lc3-lemesos-city-cooling-challenge>

[4]<https://netzerocities.eu/2024/11/26/changing-attitudes-to-beat-the-heat-in-limassol/>
[5]<https://netzerocities.eu/2024/11/14/coal-roots-green-shoots-how-velenje-is-balancing-an-industrial-past-with-a-clean-future/>

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Author: Ukrainian Institute for International Politics

EU Mission 4 in Horizon Europe: Expert Opinions on the Mission

The fourth mission of the European Union – 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 – is one of two missions centered on climate neutrality and its achievement. Cities are crucial to reaching climate neutrality by 2050, a key goal of the European Green Deal. At the same time, the European Union is facing numerous challenges trying to reshape the way such complex, often densely populated, energy-consuming and climate-unfriendly systems work.

First devised in 2019, the implementation of the 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 mission is enabled by amplifying the efforts of European cities to reach carbon neutrality and green transformation through Climate City Contracts – an overarching plan through all sectors of city's economic and social system. This way cities shall serve both as innovation hubs and perfect role models for the rest of European urban areas and municipalities. The implementation is characterized by a demand-led and cross-sectoral approach that elaborates on the existing relevant needs of pioneering cities.

Expert opinion regarding the performance of the Mission 4 remains favorable. Initially, 112 Mission Cities from EU member states and associated countries were selected out of 377 applicants and now – with the help of Twinning Learning Programme – additional 184 European cities are following their route. The latter cities strive to systemically introduce innovative approaches demonstrated by the Pilot Cities' activities on the journey to climate neutrality. Mission 4's success factors are attributed to significant level of political trust and, consequently, support of the initiative on local, regional and national levels. They stem from the European Commission's commitment to helping European cities transform their development methodologies through R&I and scalable investment fundings. Other positive factors are transparent and inclusive selection process, understandable mission design process as well as clear added value created by the introduction of holistic solutions and novel policy instruments.

Overall, Horizon Europe Mission 4 allows for European cities to test and introduce pioneering cross-sectoral approach to citizen engagement, stakeholder management, and internal governance to reach climate neutrality faster and efficiently.

Sources:

1. Kaufmann, P., Wieser, H., Kofler, J., Harding, R. (2023). Study supporting the assessment of EU Missions and the review of mission areas: Mission Climate-neutral and smart cities. European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation.
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2. EURAXESS. (2024). Mission roundup: Climate neutral and smart cities, "Smart, clean cities are a foretaste of Europe's green and digital 'twin' ambitions".
<https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/news-2024-12/EWW%20cities%20mission%2C%20December%202024.pdf>
3. Maestosi, P. C., Andreucci, M. B., Civiero, P. (2021). Sustainable Urban Areas for 2030 in a Post-COVID-19 Scenario: Focus on Innovative Research and Funding Frameworks to Boost Transition towards 100 Positive Energy Districts and 100 Climate-Neutral Cities. *Energies* 2021, 14, 216.
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Building Capacities for the Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission

funded from the European Union's Horizon Europe Programme



Cities take up only 4 % of the EU's land area. However, they are home to three quarters of EU citizens and account for more than 70 % of global CO2 emissions. Without a doubt, climate-neutral cities are vital in achieving the goals of the European Green Deal and making European cities sustainable and inclusive. In this context, the EU-funded CapaCITIES project is supporting national authorities in improving their measures and conditions for cities to become climate neutral. With its consortium involved European countries committed to implementing national change processes, CapaCITIES will empower public authorities to exchange knowledge with, learn from and inspire each other in the transition towards climate-neutral cities.

The project CapaCITIES supports European countries in creating national structures to support the European Cities Mission at the national level. The ongoing activities and respective knowledge of the national actors that are part of the CapaCITIES consortium are at the heart of the project. CapaCITIES is there to support, connect, empower and inspire national authorities, national ministries, funding agencies and agencies responsible for urban transitions in their efforts to build up the necessary national change processes. To this end, various measures are being taken:

- An alliance to showcase good practices so that they can be shared and learned from on a larger scale.
- Capacity building sessions based on the Core Countries' specific issues addressed at the self-assessment provided by ICLEI's expertise.
- Learning materials to deepen the understanding of the design and process behind national support structures, barriers and levers to implementation, good practices for engaging relevant stakeholders and supporting smaller cities and non-mission cities.
- Webinars and one-on-one workshops with the Core Countries to assist in the set-up of countries' Transition Labs to advance the national change processes.
- Communication efforts such as a website, a Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation Plan (C&D&E), a newsletter, and ambassadors in each country to disseminate and leverage results.

CAPACities Partnership

Building Capacities for the Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission | CapaCITIES | Project | Fact sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission

Coordinator:

UEFISCDI - Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (Romania)

Participants:

- AIT Austrian Institute Of Technology (Austria)
- Austrian Research Promotion Agency – FFG (Austria)
- SIR – Salzburger Institut für Raumordnung und Wohnen (Austria)
- UIV – Urban Innovation Vienna (Austria)
- HCCZ - Healthy Cities, Towns and Regions of the Czech Republic (Czechia)
- Ministry of the superior teaching and the scientific research (France)
- Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion (France)
- France Ville Durable (France)
- ICLEI European Secretariat (Germany)
- GSRI – General Secretariat for Research and Innovation (Greece)
- CERTH – The Centre for Research&Technology (Greece)
- National Research, Development and Innovation Office (Hungary)
- EMI – Non-profit limited liability Company for Quality Control and Innovation in Building (Hungary)
- CNR – National Research Council (Italy)
- ENEA - Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development (Italy)
- Ministry of University and Research (Italy)
- Climate-KIC BV (Netherlands)
- Dutch Research Council (Netherlands)
- Platform 31 (Netherlands)
- Institute of Environmental Protection – National Research Institute (Poland)
- Warsaw University of Technology (Poland)
- DGEg - Directorate-General for Energy and Geology (Poland)
- TECNALIA Research&Innovation (Spain)
- Technological Center CARTIF (Spain)
- UPV Technical University of Valencia (Spain)
- Superior Council of the Colleges of Architects of Spain (Spain)
- Swedish Energy Agency (Sweden)
- KTH Royal Institute of Technology (Sweden)
- University of Žilina (Slovakia)
- Union of Town and Cities of Slovakia (Slovakia)
- TÜBİTAK - Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (Turkey)

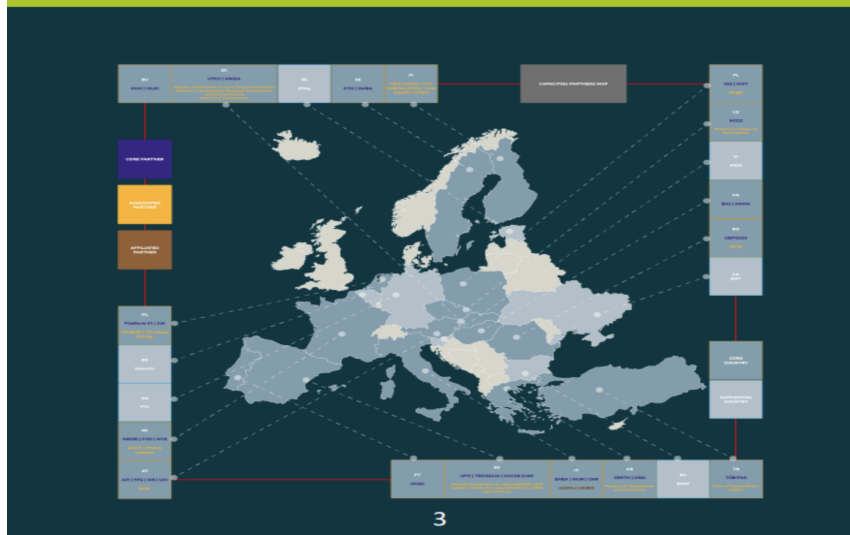
Project budget: 1 997 952,00 €

Project duration: 1.10.2022 – 31.3.2025

CapaCITIES Partners Map

15 Core Countries representing a country team, including ministries, policy agencies, R&I funding agencies, national networks and research organisations.

6 supporting countries following and learning from the activities of CapaCITIES.



CAPA/CITIES



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