

NEWSLETTER



Word of the editor

Dear readers,

Welcome to the fifth edition of the HARMONMISSIONS Newsletter!

In this edition, we highlight a diverse range of projects, events, and achievements from Danube Region countries that are making significant strides in climate action under Horizon Europe's Mission 1 and Mission 4. These initiatives, which focus on climate adaptation and the pursuit of climate neutrality, offer valuable inspiration.

As part of our ongoing coverage of climate change adaptation, we continue to provide updates on the HARMONMISSIONS project. Additionally, we examine the Danube Region's progress towards climate neutrality, spotlighting the efforts of cities and regions to drive change. This issue features a variety of impactful projects, including the use of nature-based solutions in urban areas in Romania, the transformation of climate adaptation practices in Ukrainian Danube region communities, capacity-building initiatives for Mission 1 and Mission 4 in Bulgaria, and the ground-breaking NetZeroCities project.

We also draw attention to the upcoming European Climate Change Adaptation Conference (ECCA2025), which will take place from June 16-18, 2025, in Rimini, Italy. Furthermore, we invite you to join the EU Missions 1 & 4 Workshop and Brokerage event, scheduled for June 11-13, 2025, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and online.

ARC Fund

● Announcements

EU Missions 1 & 4 Workshop and Brokerage event

11-13 June 2025, Ljubljana (Slovenia) / Online

We are excited for creating opportunities to connect European experts on key topics such as Adaptation to Climate Change and Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities. Our simple yet powerful goal is to strengthen the engagement of EU Missions by collaborating with strong international partners who share the same values and are committed to overcoming any obstacles. The event focuses on connecting the EU Missions-related participants from various institutions, with the aim to provide a unique place designed for these participants, introduce the actual open calls and help them create a powerful project consortium.

The event will be organised in a hybrid format, while more information, agenda and registration details can be found at the following link:

<https://www.b2match.com/e/eu-missions-brokerage-harmonmissions>

UPCOMING EVENTS

The 7th biennial European Climate Change Adaptation Conference (ECCA2025) will be held from June 16-18, 2025, in Rimini, Italy.

This conference will serve as a vibrant platform for showcasing cutting-edge research and innovative solutions, sharing knowledge and best practices and fostering collaboration towards a climate-resilient society. It will bring together researchers, decision-makers, practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders to exchange research findings, innovative policy developments and solutions, and practical implementation experiences.

Conference agenda and registration:

<https://www.ecca2025.eu/>

Author: Adriana Šebešová, City of Košice

City of Košice awarded the EU Mission Label at the annual EU Climate and Smart Cities Mission Conference in Vilnius

Mission Label has already 92 cities.

The Mission Label is a recognition awarded by the European Commission to cities that are part of the EU Mission "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030" and that have developed a clear, credible, and ambitious Climate City Contract (CCC). It is a practical tool that empowers cities to take decisive climate action, attract resources, and lead the transition toward a sustainable urban future.

An additional 39 cities, including the project partner Košice City, participating in the EU Mission received the Mission Label at the conference held in Vilnius from May 6 to 8, 2025.

It was a significant event organized by the European Commission, bringing together city representatives, policymakers, and stakeholders to discuss strategies for achieving climate neutrality and to recognize cities making substantial progress in this endeavor.

This label serves as a mark of excellence and has several key purposes:

- **Credibility and Trust:**

It demonstrates that a city's strategy toward achieving climate neutrality by 2030 has been reviewed and validated by independent experts and the European Commission.

- **Facilitates Access to Funding:**

Cities with the Mission Label are more attractive to public and private investors, as the label shows the city has a well-developed plan and strong political commitment. This can help unlock funding from EU programs, national sources, or private finance.

- **Accelerates Implementation:**

The label acts as a catalyst for cities to move faster in their green and digital transformation by providing greater visibility and support within the EU innovation ecosystem.

- **Strengthens Partnerships:**

Cities with the label are better positioned to build partnerships with businesses, research institutions, and civil society thanks to the formal recognition of their leadership role.

European Commission awards the EU Mission Label to 39 new cities

(<https://netzerocities.eu/2025/05/07/european-commission-awards-the-eu-mission-label-to-39-new-cities/>)

Cities Mission Conference 2025: Harnessing City Successes - Vilnius

(<https://netzerocities.eu/cities-mission-conference/>)



Author: Mykhailo Omelchenko, UIIP

Transformation of climate adaptation sector in Ukrainian Danube region communities in accordance with EU Mission 1 and EU accession requirements

Sustainable, climate-friendly reconstruction of Ukrainian communities in the Danube region does not wait for the end of the war. Undoubtedly, devastating war brings about significant climate challenges for every Ukrainian region, whether it is severe environmental damage from the military actions in regions closer to the frontline or rapid influx of millions of internally displaced persons in safer Western regions. To be able to sustain post-war recovery under 'build back better' principle and at the same time succeed in the challenging process of EU accession, Ukraine's climate adaptation strategy must adhere to the EU Mission 1 priorities with commitments to reduce CO₂ emissions and create better adaptation framework on regional and local levels. Therefore, in this article we present a brief overview of Ukrainian regional and local climate adaptation efforts aligned with EU Missions priorities and the ongoing EU accession process.

EU-funded projects supporting climate adaptation strategies in Ukraine

Currently, there are two EU-funded projects that help build up climate adaptation framework in Ukraine on national and regional levels.

RESIST project (Regions for Climate Change Resilience through Innovation, Science and Technology) is a five-year initiative (2023–2027) funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe program, with a total budget of €26.6 million. It is coordinated by the independent foundation SINTEF (Norway), the project brings together 56 partners from 15 countries, including Ukraine's Odesa I.I. Mechnikov National University (Odesa region is part of the Ukrainian Danube region territories), to enhance climate resilience across 12 vulnerable European regions. RESIST employs a quintuple helix model, fostering collaboration among (academia, industry, government, civil society, environmental stakeholders) and ensuring that solutions are co-created, context-specific, and sustainable. The project emphasizes the use of nature-based solutions (NBS) and digital twin technologies to simulate and assess the effectiveness of adaptation strategies. Ukrainian Odesa region benefits from the transfer of knowledge, methodologies, and technologies developed in the four main demonstration regions (Finland, Denmark, Portugal, and Spain).

APENA3 (Strengthening the capacity of regional and local administrations for implementation and enforcement of EU environmental and climate change legislation and development of infrastructure projects) is an EU-funded project. It helps Ukrainian authorities at the local and the regional level in the development and implementation of key reforms arising from the Association Agreement, including the ability to carry out the process of approximation of legislation with the EU in the areas of environmental impact assessment, strategic environmental assessment, waste management, and climate change adaptation. It is a much-needed assistance considering that regional climate change risk assessments and adaptation strategies, originally scheduled to developing in 2022, were thwarted by the full-scale Russian invasion. Ivano-Frankivsk region (part of Ukrainian Danube region territories) is one of 3 pilot regions that has received such an assessment along with regional waste management plan. Overall, thanks to close cooperation between Ukrainian and European scientists and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine, 158 measures with the total cost of EUR 152.7 mln Euro were recommended for the region specifically. A list of funds that Ukrainian regions and communities work with the most includes NEFCO (Northern ecological financial corporation), UNDP, IFC (International financial corporation), EBRD, WB, E5P - Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environmental Partnership.

Ukrainian regional and local climate adaptation efforts in the Danube region

Considering that Ukrainian communities will be one of the most important driving forces behind green reconstruction and transformation (as they are, after all, places where people in need of reconstruction live), we are also providing a brief overview of the climate change mitigation efforts implemented by selected Ukrainian communities that are part of the Danube region (from Ukrainian regions of Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi and Odesa). Main institutional and legal framework for combating negative climate change effects in Ukrainian communities is a European initiative “Covenant of Mayors” and its practical dimension of sustainable energy & climate action plan. SECAPs are instrumental in mitigating climate change on local level as well as coping with negative wartime effects on Ukrainian communities thus preparing them for post-war reconstruction.

In 4 Ukrainian regions that are part of the EU Strategy for the Danube region there has been a gradual increase in SECAP adoption and implementation since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion. Obviously, one of the main reasons explaining this trend is the need to secure funding opportunities for postwar recovery. Without fixed obligations of the community in the form of climate risk assessment and adaptation strategy, international funding institutions will have less confidence that their projects will be most useful to residents of a certain community. Moreover, a constant increase of summer temperatures and subsequent overload of energy system in Ukraine presents a significant risk for security of the country and basic infrastructure considering significant damage to energy generation from the Russian strikes. Ukrainian Danube region territories for the last 3 years have accommodated hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons as well as relocated businesses. Whereas such developments have had positive impact on regional economy, overpopulation has brought serious pressure on infrastructure, thus posing significant risks for climate and energy sectors. Thus, situation demanded quick and sustainable response from the local decision makers.

Chornomorsk and Chernivtsi based their climate assessment on Urban Adaptation Support Tool methodology while Dolyna community supplemented it additionally with APENA 3 approach designed specifically for Ivano-Frankivsk region. Main climate risks for those Danube region communities are extreme heat and cold, floods (river and sea), extreme precipitation, droughts and water deficit, landslides, forest fires, water-related diseases that threaten a wide array of local resident groups. List of activities aimed at adapting to climate change risks are also similar in all 3 cases: increasing energy efficiency of living areas and communal buildings, modernization of public transport (considering overpopulation and overload of transport infrastructure), street lightning modernization.

Currently, the most successful case of adaptation to climate change is Dolyna, which is the only Ukrainian community to receive European Energy Efficiency Management Certificate. Since 2015, Dolyna has steadily thermomodernized all communal building and more than 30% of housing stock, it got rid of ineffective central heating system and has had over 60% of boiler plants switched to alternative fuel types. Moreover, Dolyna is working on an innovative cellular energy system that will allow the community to operate as an energy island, in case of being disconnected from the Ukrainian grid for several days. Lastly, Dolyna also receives APENA 3 expert support focused on developing a local waste management plan fully aligned with the regional one for Ivano-Frankivsk region (developed earlier). Other Ukrainian communities from the Danube region are also implementing their action plans with varying degree of success due to limiting factors.

A unique case that we really should cover is a Ukrainian community that despite being only 100 km close to the frontline continues to push the climate neutrality is Zlatopil city (Kharkiv region). Of course, the community is part of the Covenant of Mayors with a carefully designed SECAP. However, what really stands out is that leadership of this relatively small city of 30 thousand residents supplements their SECAP by participating already in 2 climate-related interregional policy improvement projects that are in line with EU climate agenda. Specifically, in 2025 Zlatopil is a project partner in Interreg Europe project CHARGE that aims to bring the parties closer to low-carbon circular economy by introducing innovative, safe and sustainable development, production, reuse and recycling of batteries in line with recently adopted EU Batteries Regulation. In previous year, Zlatopil also became a part of the FutureECOS project that promotes future-proofing, sustainable and environmentally friendly living spaces through integrated development strategies developed through cooperation of public and private actors and citizens in accordance with New European Bauhaus principles.

The main issues identified by experts for better implementation of SECAPs in Ukraine are low institutional capacity meaning lack of skilled energy managers (especially for smaller cities and village communities), lack of cooperation between different communal agencies, and lack of motivation on local political level (i.e., getting involved in international climate protection projects with co-financing).

To sum up, this article presents a brief overview of current climate adaptation efforts in Ukraine on regional and local level that align with the priorities of EU Mission 1 as well as EU accession process requirements. We have presented two international projects that help Ukrainian regional and local authorities with capacity building in climate adaptation implementation – RESIST and APENA3. Additionally, we have also presented climate adaptation efforts of selected Ukrainian communities from the Danube region and beyond.

Sources:

- 1.First climate change adaptation strategies presented in Ukraine - EU NEIGHBOURS east (<https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/first-climate-change-adaptation-strategies-presented-in-ukraine/>)
- 2.Regions for climate change resilience through Innovation, Science and Technology (<https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/metadata/projects/regions-for-climate-change-resilience-through-innovation-science-and-technology>)
- 3.With the EU support first climate change adaptation strategies in Ukraine were presented | EEAS (https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/eu-support-first-climate-change-adaptation-strategies-ukraine-were-presented_en)



Author: Myrto Ispyridou, ARC Fund

In-person Training on Horizon Europe and EU Mission 1 and Mission 4

Sofia, 23-24 April, 2025

The implementation of the Horizon Europe Mission 1 - Adaptation to Climate Change, and Mission 4 - Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, although pivotal to Europe's capacity to combat the effects of climate change, cannot be an isolated effort. The success of such ambitious initiatives relies on the inclusion of the entire European Union and a widespread readiness to contribute to their realisation. Hence, as part of the HARMONMISSIONS project, on 23 - 24 April 2025, the Applied Research and Communications Fund hosted an in-person training focused on project development and participation in the two Missions in Sofia, Bulgaria.

With 36 participants representing public authorities, civil society organisations, research institutes and universities, as well as innovative companies, the training provided a comprehensive foundation for increasing Bulgaria's involvement in promoting, upholding and implementing the climate-related Missions and, by extension, empowering the Danube Region and likewise enhancing its participation therein. This ambitious objective was achieved through the four distinct training modules and one practical exercise, thereby fusing individual learning with collaboration and exchange.

In the first module, participants were introduced to the HARMONMISSIONS project, and as well were familiarised with the two foundational concepts of the training: the Horizon Europe programme, on one hand, and the EU Missions, on the other. For this purpose, they were provided information on Mission-driven research and innovation - a concept at the heart of Mission initiatives, founded on interdisciplinarity, long-term vision, and broad stakeholder engagement.

This introduction served as a solid foundation for the next step of the training: project proposal development in Horizon Europe, with a focus on climate-related challenges, intended to empower participants to become involved in Mission initiatives themselves. This module provided those present with all the necessary tools to undertake a project - from concept development to consortium building and registering a proposal in the Funding and Tenders Portal of the EU.

The information imparted within the first two sections of the training was complemented by an overview of two ongoing projects under the two Missions, presented by contributors to the projects themselves, allowing participants to understand the practical application of the concepts introduced prior. The importance, impact and processes of Mission 1: Adaptation to Climate Change, were put into perspective through the demonstration of the MountResilience project - particularly through the research activities, strategies, practical implementation, and communication of the regional demonstrator partner, the city of Gabrovo. Participants likewise enhanced their understanding of the Missions through the presentation of Commit2Green - a project funded under a joint call of Missions 1 and 4 - encompassing its objectives, results, interventions and main touchpoints.

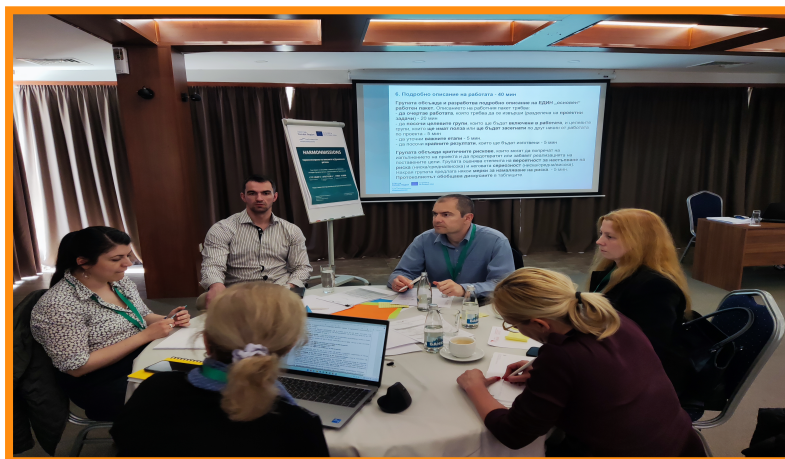
Armed with sufficient information and theoretical knowledge, the training programme's participants were subsequently guided through an attempt to conceptualise a project proposal based on a case study addressing drought-related challenges in Bulgaria's Burgas region. Divided into four working groups, they collaborated to address each section of the application form of Horizon Europe, beginning with specific challenges and core objectives under the Excellence part, and continuing their exercise through addressing the Impact and Implementation parts.

Participants had the opportunity to present their work and receive real-time feedback from the organisers, while their progress, challenges and results were tracked throughout the entire workshop by their respective group moderator. The moderators' individual assessment of the group work was linked with participants' suggestions for improving the exercise – a coordinated effort to both ensure its success and guarantee the effectiveness of future in-person trainings within the HARMONMISSIONS project.

Finally, marking the end of the training, the organisers provided crucial suggestions that would facilitate participants' ability to undertake a Horizon Europe project; this module included information on budgeting, risk management, intellectual property rights, ethical issues, data management, and stakeholder engagement, among other considerations. Additionally, participants were advised on challenges surrounding the identification of suitable partners and the potential negotiations that would arise thereafter, as well as on managing the collaboration specificities inherent to every Horizon Europe project. Shortly after the training, participants were received a variety of information - all of which was likewise compiled by the organisers in great detail in the Training Handbook they were provided.

Responding to a feedback questionnaire at the end of the training programme, participants reported having acquired significant knowledge in the time span of these two days, and having found the workshop in particular exceptionally useful. In fact, the workshop served not only to allow participants to undertake a practical exercise similar to that of a real Horizon Europe project proposal, but also to view one another as potential future partners.

In conclusion, the training served as a diverse and highly informative event with the capacity to help propel at minimum one country in the Danube Region to the forefront of participation in the Horizon Europe Mission 1 and Mission 4. Striving for empowerment, acquisition and exchange of knowledge, and collaboration, the training programme supported participants in becoming valuable contributors to the implementation of the European Union's climate objectives and the equal participation of all European countries therein.



Author: Alina Bahna, UEFISCDI

Nature-Based Solutions in Cities, from Dialogue to Scalable Climate Action

Urban areas are increasingly looking to nature as part of the solution to pressing environmental, social, and health challenges. This approach was the focus of the second episode of the **M100 Dialogues** podcast, where **Dan Bărbulescu**, executive director of the **Văcărești Natural Park Association**, shared the story behind the transformation of Văcărești — a once-abandoned site in Bucharest, Romania, now recognized as a protected natural area and model for urban ecological integration. The discussion focused on how such projects emerge, the partnerships they require, and the role of public involvement in shifting perceptions about nature in cities. These themes connect directly with the goals of HARMONMISSIONS project, which supports climate neutrality and climate resilience in urban settings.

Applying nature-based solutions in urban environments

Nature-based solutions are practical measures that use natural systems—wetlands, vegetation, soil, and water—to address common problems in urban areas. They respond to issues such as heat stress, poor air quality, flooding, and a lack of public green space.

Three commonly used measures include:

- **Urban forestry** – converting paved, non-porous areas such as parking lots or squares into green zones with trees helps lower surface temperatures, reduce air pollution, and improve thermal comfort.
- **Connected green and blue spaces** - joining together parks, campuses, and riverbanks by removing barriers creates healthier corridors for people and wildlife. These spaces support natural cooling and promote walking and cycling.
- **Public involvement through education** - when children and families engage with nature directly—by observing wildlife or participating in outdoor activities—they often gain a deeper respect for natural areas. This can lead to stronger support for protecting and maintaining them.

These measures do not depend on high levels of technology or complex systems. They rely on accessible materials, institutional coordination, and long-term public interest. Any city can apply them with commitment and clear planning.

Văcărești Nature Park: example from Bucharest, Romania

Located in the southern part of Bucharest, Văcărești Nature Park covers 183 hectares. Once an unfinished hydrotechnical project, the area remained unused for decades. Over time, it developed its own wetland ecosystem. Today, it supports more than 170 animal species and a wide variety of plants. This park reduces urban heat, captures excess water, filters the air, and offers space for people to relax and learn about local nature. Beyond its environmental role, the park shows how unused urban land can serve the city and its residents in new ways.

The story shared during the M100 podcast includes both the technical and human sides of this transformation. Many people living nearby were initially uncertain or critical. Over time, through open events and school activities, they became involved and supported the project. These changes demonstrate how urban nature can shift from being overlooked to being valued and protected.

NetZeroCities



PROJECT DURATION: 1 Oct 2021 - 30 Sep 2025

OVERALL BUDGET: €52 996 600

FUNDING RATE: 100% co-financed by the European Union

FUNDING PROGRAMME: Horizon 2020

CONSORTIUM: 13 Associations and Networks; 5 Companies and Consultancies; 8 Research organisations; 3 Think-tanks; 4 Universities

COORDINATOR: EIT Climate-KIC

BENEFICIARIES: 112 EU Mission cities (100 EU cities + 12 cities from countries associated to Horizon Europe)

PROJECT WEBSITE: <https://netzerocities.eu/>

Project Objective

NetZeroCities is a project supporting the EU Mission "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030", launched as part of the Horizon Europe programme, by seeking to scale the activities of this project across more than 100 cities, and to tackle the unprecedented capital investments needed to make such a transformation possible. Its goal is to help cities overcome systemic, structural, and institutional barriers to achieving climate neutrality. Through tailored assistance, innovation missions, and targeted funding, NetZeroCities equips cities with the tools and capabilities they need to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

Project Description

NetZeroCities provides cities with a layered support system that includes technical assistance, peer-learning opportunities, access to digital tools, and financial support through its Pilot Cities Programme. The project enables over 100 cities to test and scale up innovative climate actions addressing areas such as energy, mobility, urban planning, and social inclusion.

Framework

The project is built on principles of equity, inclusivity, transparency, and citizen engagement. Its framework combines systems thinking, mission-oriented innovation, participatory governance, and cross-sectoral collaboration to ensure the transition to climate neutrality is just and inclusive.

Project Activities

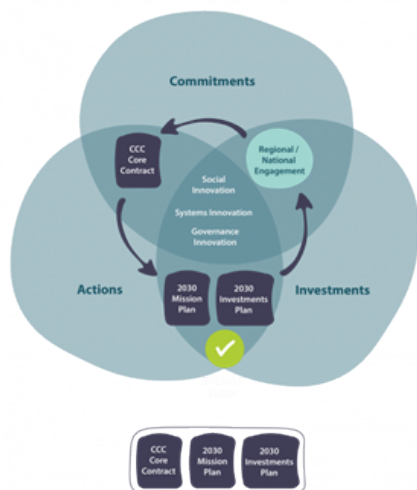
- Support for the development and implementation of Climate City Contracts
- City-specific mentoring and capacity-building
- Piloting innovative climate actions in Mission Cities
- Peer-learning and knowledge exchange between cities
- Integration of digital platforms for data monitoring and impact assessment
- Deep engagement of citizens and local stakeholders

Project Outputs

Each participating city will deliver a Climate City Contract that outlines a strategic roadmap to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. Additional outputs include tested transformation models, scalable policy recommendations, and replicable governance tools that can be applied across other cities and regions.

Climate City Contract Overview

A ROADMAP TO ACCELERATE CITIES' JOURNEY TOWARDS CLIMATE NEUTRALITY



The Climate City Contract is at the heart of the NetZeroCities approach, serving as a strategic and operational roadmap for cities aiming to reach climate neutrality by 2030. The diagram visualizes the core components of this process:

- **Commitments:** The CCC Core Contract outlines the city's high-level vision, political commitment, and climate-neutrality targets.
- **Actions:** These are detailed in the 2030 Mission Plan, which includes specific measures, governance models, and systemic innovations.
- **Investments:** Financial and infrastructure needs are articulated in the 2030 Investments Plan.

This dynamic cycle is reinforced through continuous regional and national engagement and driven by social, systems, and governance innovation. Cities that successfully complete this integrated package become eligible for the Mission Label, recognizing their alignment with the EU's climate-neutral cities objective.

THE CLIMATE CITY CONTRACT PROCESS: The Climate Transition Map – A NetZeroCities tool to accelerate the journey towards climate-neutrality



The Climate City Contract process should be guided by the Climate Transition Map. This interactive tool allows users to dig deeper into the different phases of the climate neutrality journey and navigate to resources in order to take action on the different phases.

The timeline and starting point of this journey is different for each city depending on their constraints and goals, past efforts and local dynamics. NetZeroCities and the City Advisors accompany cities to understand where they may be in the journey – in the map – and where they need to go next. But ultimately, each city's team is the lead explorer on this journey.

The journey should focus on building 7 core elements for the transition: a strong mandate, a good understanding of the system, a strong local ecosystem, a coherent portfolio, transformative action, learning and reflection, normalised 'net zero' practice.

The Pilot Cities Programme

The Pilot Cities Programme supports European cities to test and implement innovative approaches to rapid decarbonisation, working across thematic areas and functional silos in support of systemic transformation.

The Programme seeks to address all urban systems contributing to climate-neutrality, including mobility, energy systems and the built environment, material and resource flows, natural areas, cultural/social/financial/institutional systems, and accessible public spaces.

The Pilot Cities Programme has been implemented within the three cohorts involving 104 cities in total:

Cohort 1 (2022)

- 53 Pilot Cities
- 25 Pilot Activities
- 21 countries

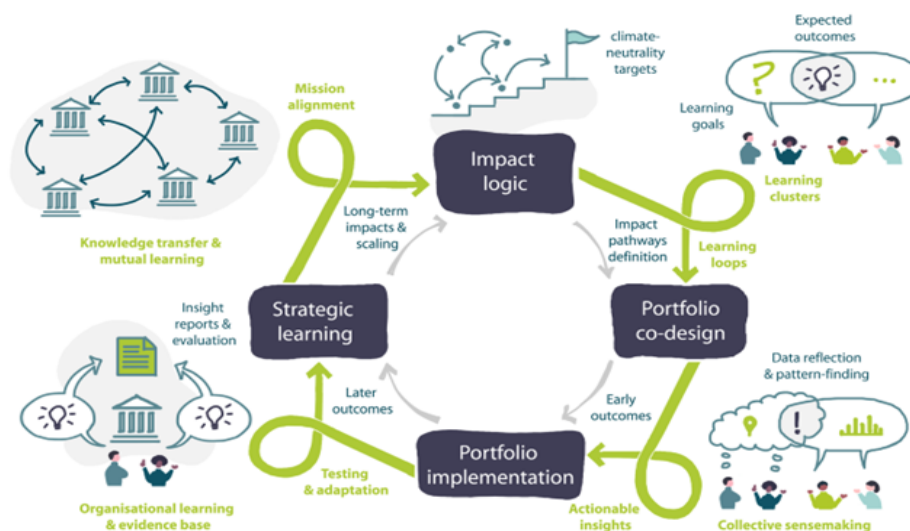
Cohort 2 (2023)

- 26 Pilot Cities
- 22 Pilot Activities
- 16 countries

Cohort 3 (2024)

- 25 Pilot Cities
- 21 Pilot Activities
- 12 countries

Strategic Learning Framework



This diagram illustrates the strategic learning cycle that underpins the NetZeroCities Pilot Cities Programme. The process supports mission alignment by linking impact goals with co-designed interventions and adaptive implementation.

Key elements include:

- **Impact Logic:** Outlines long-term climate neutrality goals and expected systemic impacts.
- **Portfolio Co-design:** Involves cities and stakeholders in defining impact pathways and shaping solution portfolios.
- **Portfolio Implementation:** Translates plans into real-world actions, generating early outcomes and actionable insights.
- **Strategic Learning:** Evaluates outcomes and feeds insights back into the cycle through learning clusters, reflection, and adaptation.

The framework emphasizes collective sensemaking, organizational learning, and knowledge transfer as cities iteratively improve their climate strategies through testing and scaling.