

Delivering Climate Transformation in the Danube Region: **Systematic Tracking, Knowledge Sharing and Societal Engagement for Climate Transformation**

Policy brief

Improving the awareness of public and the public's awareness and capacity building for climate resilience in the Danube Region



Key Messages

- National “Mission” platforms are a critical missing link between EU Missions and effective city-level implementation.
- The Romanian M100 hub shows that national coordination significantly increases cities' capacity to plan, finance, and deliver climate neutrality.
- Danube Region countries should establish national Mission platforms to accelerate Mission 4 delivery.
- A Danube-wide coordination alliance can amplify impact through transnational learning and alignment.

Policy Problem

Rising energy prices, increasingly fragile supply systems and climate change may contribute to increased climate action by citizens and local communities. The impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly noticeable and global geopolitical situation makes energy supply increasingly uncertain. Energy price increases are becoming a concrete challenge for more and more people, so there is potential for changing daily routines and lifestyles of more and more people. Increasingly, local communities have more options within their own sphere of influence to develop and implement climate measures.

Why Action is needed

More than 80 million people living in the Danube region depend on ecosystems, yet human-induced climate change represents a new and rapidly progressing challenge that society and the natural environment are not fully protected against. While public concern about climate change is growing, research consistently shows that concern alone does not translate into behavioural change. Most countries in the region are not on trajectories in which climate targets will be met by 2030, 2040 or 2050. A substantial constraint on governments' ability to accelerate climate action stems from lack of behavioural change and public acceptance of climate policies. This can lead to ineffective or misguided policies, and can also inflame opposition and conflict about climate goals, further delaying action.

While knowledge alone is insufficient, it remains a necessary precondition for effective engagement. Knowledge shapes climate change perceptions, which in turn moderates the willingness to support climate policies. Communities need to be made aware of the risks, acquire knowledge about available response options, and be empowered to take their own actions. The convergence of energy vulnerability and climate exposure creates both urgency and an opportunity: communities facing rising energy costs are more likely to be receptive to local climate action if they are supported with the right knowledge and capacity-building infrastructure. EU Mission 4: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission and Mission 1: Adaptation to Climate Change already provide a starting point for many local entities.

Evidence from the region

Despite growing activity, the region's own governance frameworks acknowledge structural deficiencies which need to be addressed from the top-down and horizontally. A number of support bodies have been created at the EU level to facilitate knowledge-sharing on energy and climate, including the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub and the Citizens' Energy Forum, providing platforms to collect expertise, gather stakeholders, and strengthen collaboration. However, comparable systematic mechanisms at the local community level in the Danube Region remain underdeveloped. Existing initiatives demonstrate proof of concept but lack scale.

Projects such as Be Ready, SpongeCity, and RESTORIVER focus on climate adaptation through co-designed pilot actions. These initiatives validate the approach but underscore the need for a systematic, region-wide framework to track progress, share outcomes, and engage the broader public. The Romanian M100 hub illustrates how nationally anchored platforms translate Mission objectives into concrete action and extend impact beyond the formally selected Mission cities.

Policy Recommendations for Danube Region

Policy 1: Establish a Danube region climate tracking and monitoring platform

Policy 2: Create a structured Danube region knowledge exchange network for local authorities

Policy 3: Launch integrated public awareness campaigns that bridge the awareness-action gap

Policy 4: Integrate climate resilience and energy literacy into national formal and non-formal education systems

Policy 5: Empower local communities as climate action hubs through dedicated funding and governance mandates



Conclusion

The Danube Region faces compounding climate impacts and energy insecurity impacting 14 countries and over 80 million people. Evidence clearly demonstrates that awareness alone is insufficient: effective climate transformation requires systematic tracking of progress, structured knowledge sharing, and deep societal engagement that empowers citizens and local communities to act. The five policy recommendations offer a coherent and mutually reinforcing framework that connects regional monitoring infrastructure to local action, bridging the gap between climate concern and meaningful behavioural change.