



The European Multilevel Governance Story:

Evidence on CHAMP-aligned
Implementation in Practice



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Introduction

The European Union (EU) has a strong track-record of enabling EU-wide policies, structures, dedicated initiatives together with funding to support national and subnational climate action, which is key to achieving the block's climate and energy goals.

This briefing highlights how the EU enables effective multilevel climate action. It presents key elements of the EU's framework and selected national experiences that demonstrate how coordination across different levels of government - EU, national and local - can support the implementation of climate policies and accelerate climate action on the ground. These experiences may offer valuable insights for countries participating in the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP).

The [Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships \(CHAMP\)](#) is an initiative launched by the COP28 Presidency in partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies at COP28. It aims to accelerate ambitious climate action through collaboration and partnerships between national and subnational governments in climate policy and finance. [Seventy-seven national governments](#) and [the EU](#) have endorsed CHAMP to date, committing to strengthen cooperation with subnational actors in the design and implementation of key national climate strategies.

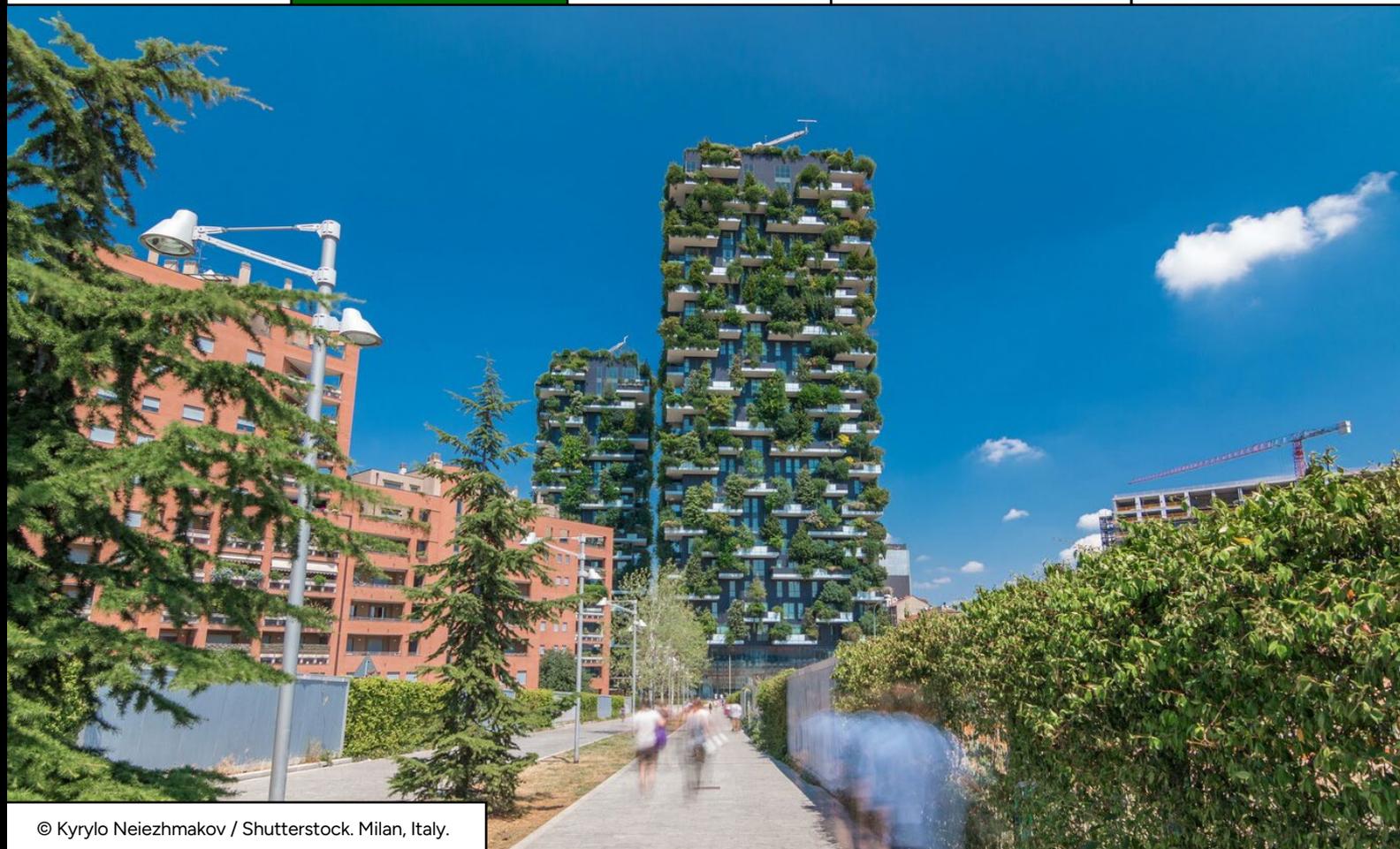
The initial focus of CHAMP was the preparation of the [third round of the National Determined Contributions 3.0](#), which were to be submitted ahead of COP30 in 2025, as part of the process requiring countries to present their NDCs every five years, ratcheting up their climate ambition over time. Now, the CHAMP endorsers will focus on implementing their NDCs and delivering results on their pledge to support subnational climate action.

As a coalition of like-minded ambitious countries, CHAMP can be a place of knowledge and best-practice sharing to inspire and catalyse the implementation of national climate plans, as far as multilevel governance (i.e., effective coordination and cooperation between local, regional and central entities) is concerned, highlighting the importance of subnational actors in embracing a clean and resilient transition.

CHAMP can incentivise meaningful and pragmatic discussions on implementation barriers and cooperation opportunities for climate action at - and between - the national and subnational level as well as reinforce cooperation among countries. This is extremely relevant for advancing progress both in the implementation of NDCs 2.0 and 3.0. It could enable a valuable and timely contribution to climate action on the ground, helping address the identified mitigation gap to keep climate change under control, in line with science and with the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement, ahead of the next Global Stocktake.

For the EU, this means continuing investing in making multilevel governance more effective, keeping it central to the EU's climate policy and clean and just transition. This includes continuing to support, map and share the transformative experience of cities, regions, and national Local Government Associations (LGAs) to harness local climate action and leadership, which is crucial not only for the implementation of the 2030 policies, but also for the post-2030 implementation phase, both on mitigation and resilience.

Within CHAMP, the EU and its Member States can bring valuable experience on multilevel climate action and share their expertise with those that may seek guidance on how to strengthen multilevel climate action nationally, including regarding raising ambition, facilitating implementation, increasing local access to climate finance and building resilience.



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The EU context as an enabler for subnational climate action



1. Global climate leadership

As the effects of climate change intensify, the world requires bold climate cooperation across countries. This is particularly relevant for the EU, as a global actor with a longstanding track record of climate political leadership. For years, the EU has promoted ambitious climate policymaking and largely driven the conversation on climate internationally. As the world's fastest warming continent, at approximately **twice** the global average rate, Europe has an imperative to take decisive, climate action. Maintaining climate leadership is integral to the EU's role internationally, promoting economic competitiveness, long-term investment signals, environmental conservation and resilience and the health of its citizens.



2. Comprehensive policy frameworks

The EU has one of the most comprehensive climate and energy policy frameworks, providing a strong legal basis for climate action. The [European Green Deal \(EGD\)](#), agreed politically in 2019, shaped much of the EU's recent climate and environment policy. It created the overarching policy framework for the EU's goal of climate neutrality by 2050, with a 2030 target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by at least 55% compared to 1990 levels. This target was legally enshrined in the [European Climate Law](#) and operationalised through the [Fit for 55](#) package, a set of laws, consisting of new and updated existing policy instruments. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the consequent disruption of energy supply, the implementation of the EGD was complemented with the development of the REPowerEU plan. Additionally, the European Climate Law outlined a process for setting a 2040 climate target. After the European Parliament elections in 2024, the European Commission launched the [Clean Industrial Deal](#), which reiterated the commitment to proposing a 2040 climate target, as well as to the green and digital transition, with the aim to boost competitiveness and industrial policy, including to support decarbonisation. In July 2025, the European Commission proposed an amendment to the European Climate Law, introducing a 2040 target of 90% reduction in net GHG emissions compared to 1990 levels. This proposal was discussed by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, and the 2040 climate target in accordance with the ordinary legislation procedure has now been endorsed by the European institutions.

Furthermore, the [Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action \(the Governance Regulation\)](#), adopted in 2018, establishes the overarching governance framework for EU climate and energy policy.

The Governance Regulation provides a structured process for planning, reporting, monitoring, and review, ensuring coherence between EU level climate objectives and national policy implementation. It requires Member States to prepare and regularly update integrated National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). It also mandates Member States under its Article 11 to involve subnational governments, when preparing and implementing their NECPs. The same applies for the National Social Climate Plans, required under the [second Emission Trading Scheme \(transport and buildings\) and its Social Climate Fund](#), which need to show how countries will support vulnerable people and small businesses affected by rising energy and transport costs as Europe moves towards climate neutrality.

This framework is supported by a wide range of EU funding instruments that complement national sources of finance (e.g., local taxes, national budgets and funds) and help cities and regions implement climate action. Cohesion policy and the Recovery and Resilience Facility have provided essential resources for local investments. Other important EU funding sources (e.g., ETS revenues channelled to Member States budgets, Just Transition Fund, Horizon Europe, the LIFE programme) have contributed by supporting innovation, skills development, social measures and a fair transition.

European energy and climate laws are a bedrock to climate measures undertaken by cities across the EU, providing the basis for subnational governments to take bold local climate action: such as the establishment of low emission zones (LEZs), the acceleration of electric vehicle (EV) adoption, the promotion of urban green infrastructure, and the support for energy-efficient building retrofitting.



3. Role of subnational governments

The EU has for long been deploying funding and programmes aimed at fostering territorial cohesion and regional development, including for cities, illustrating the fact that local and regional authorities play a critical role in delivering and implementing strategic EU priorities and objectives, consistent with national circumstances and [the subsidiarity principle](#). Furthermore, in December 2025, the European Commission launched the [EU Agenda for Cities](#), a renewed strategic framework for sustainable integrated urban development, which has the potential to further empower cities. Cities and regions implement [70%](#) of all EU legislation, [70%](#) of climate mitigation measures, and [90%](#) of climate adaptation policies.

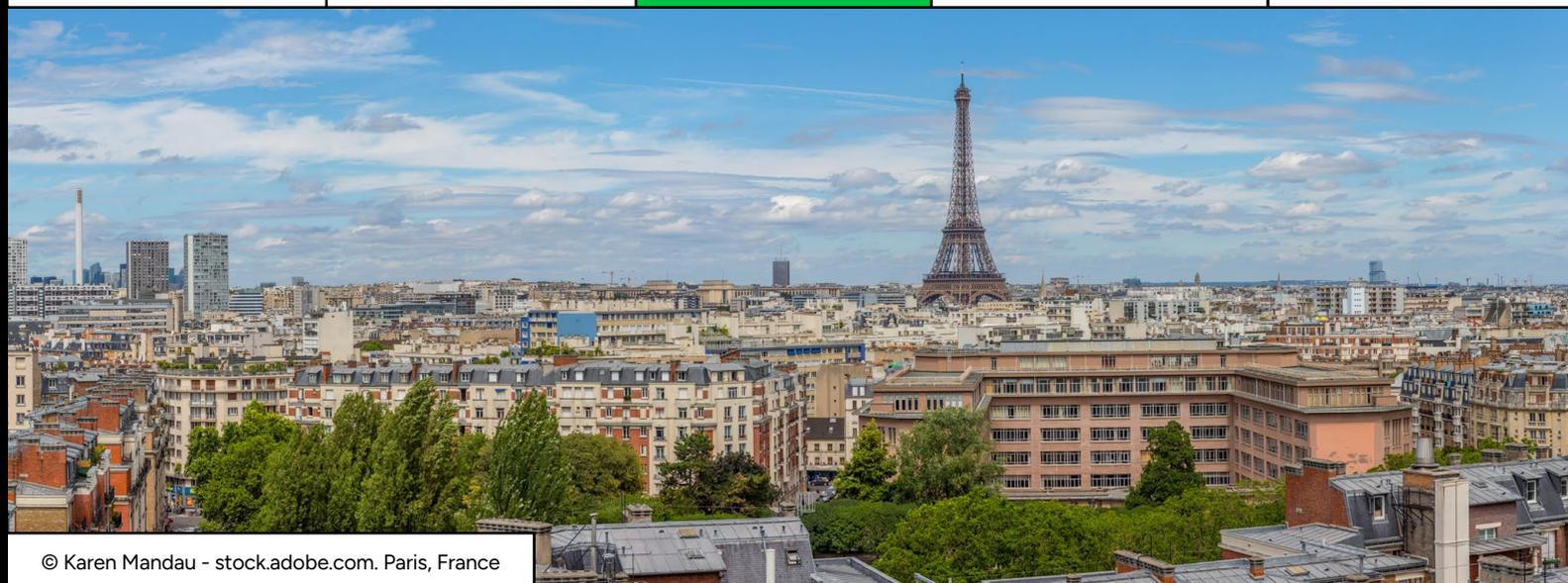


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An inspiring experience on multilevel governance and subnational climate action

European Committee of the Regions (CoR)

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) serves as a key EU advisory body, providing a formal voice for 329 locally and regionally elected representatives from the 27 EU Member States. From a global perspective, the CoR is regarded as **the most advanced institutional mechanism** formally representing the interests of cities and regions in international policymaking bodies. Based on the core principles of multilevel governance, subsidiarity, and local democracy, the CoR's opinion is mandatory for EU policymaking in areas such as climate change. The CoR's work involves critical advocacy on EU climate policy, including providing input on the proposed 2040 EU climate target and the Multiannual Financial Framework. It also advocates in global forums like the UNFCCC for enhanced multilevel governance. Beyond advocacy, the CoR directly supports implementation, notably through initiatives like the Green Deal Going Local, which aims to empower cities and regions as essential actors in the EU's transition to climate neutrality.



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Covenant of Mayors - Europe (EU Covenant)

Established in 2008 by the European Commission, it is the largest and longest-standing initiative pursuing the European Green Deal's goal at the local level, with over 10,700 **signatories** voluntarily committing to reducing GHG emissions, increasing climate resilience, and reducing energy poverty. The EU Covenant is **a key consolidated component of EU multilevel work on climate action**. Its mission relies on robust capacity building and a sound governance and operational framework. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) provides guidance to the EU Covenant signatories for developing their **Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs)**. These are the key actions local governments intend to undertake, monitor, and report to translate their formal commitment into concrete measures. Different EU Covenant campaigns such as the **Energy Savings Sprint**, the **Cities Heat Detox** and the **Cities Hit REFRESH** rally European cities together, showcasing how local action aligns with European and national climate and energy priorities. EU Covenant is a prime example of a successful **multilevel cooperative model** rooted in a bottom-up and integrated approach. The collective commitment of EU Covenant signatories is assessed to be **55.2%** GHG emissions reduction by 2030, in full alignment with the EU target.

Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM)

The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM), supported by the European Commission and Bloomberg Philanthropies, is the world's largest alliance for city climate leadership, uniting over 13,800 local governments across 147 countries and representing over 13% of the world's population. It was established in 2016, bringing together the European Union's Covenant of Mayors and the Compact of Mayors— the world's two primary initiatives of cities and local governments and is co-chaired by UN Special Envoy on Climate Ambition and Solutions Michael Bloomberg and European Commission Executive Vice-President Teresa Ribera. GCoM's long-term vision is to support voluntary climate action toward a resilient, low-emission society. It mobilises and supports ambitious, measurable climate and energy action by working with city/ region networks, national governments, and partners. Collectively, GCoM cities could reduce global emissions by the equivalent of **4.2 GtCO₂** annually by 2050, including **with 75% of the cities** aiming to exceed their current national climate targets. The alliance is supported by a decentralized organization with 14 GCoM National/Regional Covenants overseeing its mission worldwide. Catalysing multilevel governance and collaboration is a key priority for GCoM (**Playbook 2021**, **Playbook 2022**, **Guide 2023**).

EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities ([EU Cities Mission](#))

Launched in 2021, under Horizon Europe, the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation, the EU Cities Mission supports 112 cities to achieve climate neutrality by 2030, acting as innovation hubs. Each city must develop a Climate City Contract (CCC), a collaborative roadmap for a climate transition, based on a multilevel approach and broad local stakeholder engagement. Upon successful completion, the city is then able to receive the EU Mission Label, which serves as a way of recognition and allows easier access to funding. Cities receive hands-on support through the projects [CapaCITIES](#), which assists with improving national multilevel governance structures and [NetZeroCities](#), the EU Cities Mission's operational structure, which helps cities with their CCCs, through technical and financial support, pilot projects, and twinning programmes. The EU Mission Label cities have access to the [Climate City Capital Hub](#), which in cooperation with the European Investment Bank (EIB) provides tailored advice to help cities develop bankable projects and unlock financing. Additionally, the EIB has put in place a lending envelope of EUR 2bn specifically designated as a source of co-financing for EU Mission Label cities. A concrete example is the [Barcelona Resilient and Sustainable City II](#) framework loan of EUR 275m from the EIB.

[EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change](#)

Also launched in 2021, the objective of EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change is to support the adaptation efforts of at least 150 local and regional governments to reach climate resilience by 2030 through innovation, knowledge exchange, and [pilot research projects](#). To date, 333 regions, cities and local authorities from 25 EU Member States and 8 associated countries have signed the Mission Charter, committing to boost their climate adaptation efforts to strengthen climate resilience. The signatories have access to a "[Community of Practice](#)" to share knowledge, exchange on experiences and identify potential opportunities of collaboration as well as to research and innovation funding opportunities to join large innovation actions and pilot projects. They also benefit from advice and guidance from the Mission Implementation Platform [MIP4Adapt](#).



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A few examples of national-level good practices from EU countries

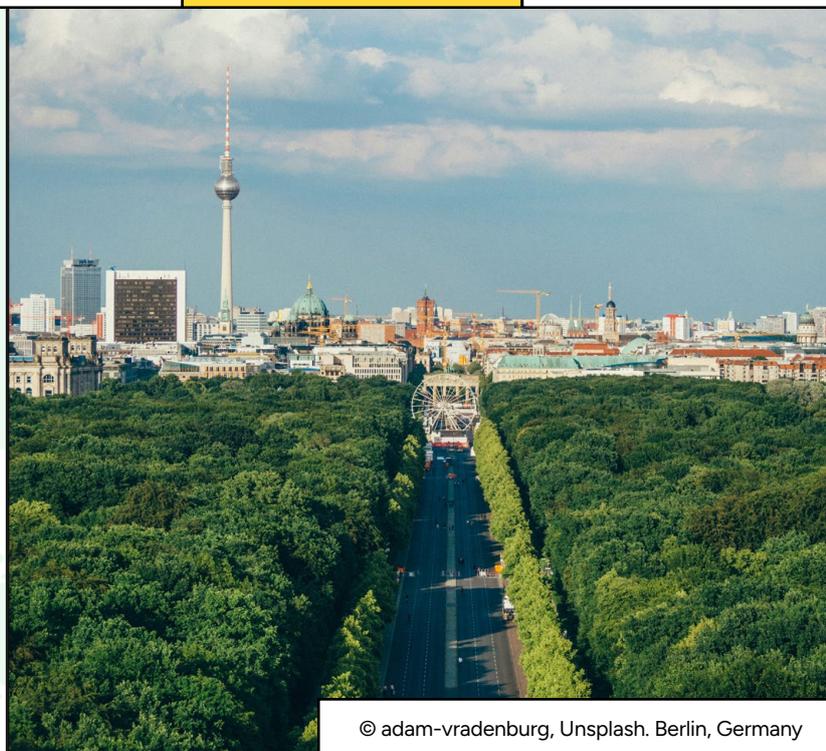
National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogues

NECPs are ten-year integrated blueprints the EU Member States have to prepare under the EU Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action. The NECPs are the main tool for aligning national and energy climate policy with the European 2030 climate and energy policy framework, and reporting progress. The most recent update of the NECPs took place in 2024. The EU Governance Regulation mandates Member States to involve subnational governments in the development of the NECPs, through multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogues. The EU-funded [NECPlatform project](#) (2022 - 2025) supported six EU Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Italy, Portugal, and Romania) in setting up permanent multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogues.

[Experience](#) from some of these countries indicates:

- **Croatia:** The multilevel dialogues successfully engaged a diverse range of stakeholders, including academia, civil society, and the private sector, fostering broad ownership of the development and implementation of the NECP. They further focused on the growing relevance of climate-compatible projects to attract public and private investment, with the Croatian ministry of finance agreeing to open a newly created platform to finance local action plans.
- **France:** A comprehensive mapping of national-level consultations helped reveal gaps in stakeholder engagement and develop recommendations for more inclusive, transparent and effective processes. This built on the need to use existing institutional mechanisms instead of creating new ones. The approach was tested on issues such as the financing of the ecological transition together with relevant national-local contractual arrangements and the role of Regional Conferences of the Parties, which aim to localise national climate objectives.
- **Portugal:** The dialogues were decentralised at the regional level, fostering stronger engagement of local governments and stakeholders, and feeding diverse geographical perspectives into national policy discussions. Their input revolved around climate finance, policy coherence between levels of government, and clear monitoring and implementation mechanisms. The latter also expanded to capacity building activities that were held to help local governments familiarise themselves with the logic and intricacies of the NECPs.





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Denmark ([DK2020](#) and [the Climate Alliance](#))

Denmark is the first country where all local governments will soon have climate plans aligned with the ambition of the Paris Agreement. Ninety-seven out of 98 municipalities developed a plan aligned with C40's Climate Action Planning Framework (CAPF), supported by the DK2020 project (a partnership between Realdania, Local Government Denmark, and five Danish regions, with CONCITO and C40 Cities assisting as knowledge partners). Adding together their emission reduction targets, the Danish local governments [aim to help cut Denmark's total emissions by 76% by 2030](#), exceeding the national target of 70%. To help municipalities move from planning to climate action, the partners have formed the Climate Alliance to support all municipalities to implement and revise the plans.

Germany (National Climate Initiative - NKI)

The NKI is Germany's chief federal funding instrument, accelerating local climate action. Since 2008, it has allocated approximately EUR 2.2bn across over 60,000 projects, mobilising more than three times its value in additional resources (total investments of EUR 6.9bn). The [Municipal Guidelines \(Kommunalrichtlinie\)](#) are a central pillar, providing climate finance for diverse local purposes. Germany is also the first co-chair of CHAMP together with Brazil, as announced in November 2025.

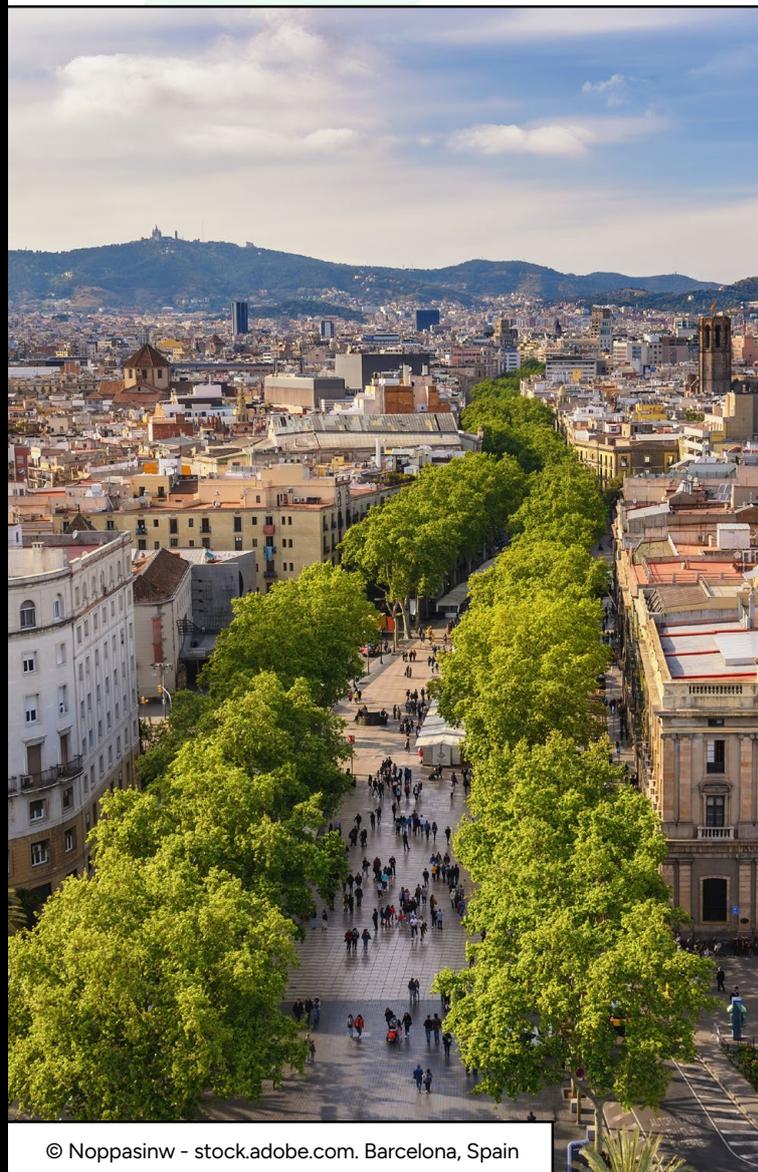
Italy ([regions as catalysers](#))

The National Covenant Coordination Board - established in 2021 and formed by EU Covenant, ENEA (National Energy Agency, National EU Covenant Coordinator), ISPRA (National Environmental Agency), and RENAEL (Network of Italian Energy Agencies) collaborates closely with Italian regional governments. The regions of Emilia Romagna and Apulia are noted for taking the lead in advancing climate action through large-scale support and funding for developing local energy and climate action plans (SECAPs), together with Sicily, Veneto and Piedmont, highlighting the power of regional intermediary roles in multilevel governance.



Spain (**CitiES2030**)

CitiES2030 is a multistakeholder platform, building on the 2030 Agenda, to accelerate Spanish cities' climate neutrality transition. It provides tailored services, promoting learning, collaboration, and project implementation, focusing on joint efforts by government, the private sector, civil society, and academia. CitiES2030 aligns with the EU Missions on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities and Adaptation to Climate Change, notably helping eight Spanish cities secure the EU Mission Label after their Climate City Contracts (CCCs) were approved. The signing of these CCCs by city mayors and the Spanish deputy prime minister underscores the vital role of multilevel governance in achieving local climate neutrality.



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Sweden (**Viable Cities**)

Viable Cities, a strategic innovation programme, collaborates with 48 cities and six government agencies to accelerate climate transition in cities. Funded jointly by three national agencies and coordinated by an academic institution, it builds capacity for financing and managing climate transitions in cities and promotes governance innovation and scalable solutions, aiming for climate neutrality by 2030. Closely linked to the EU Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, Viable Cities pioneered the concept of the Climate City Contract (CCC) in 2020. Drawing on the experience of using the CCC as a governance tool, insights are extensively shared, while new ways of working are tested and co-designed with peer EU cities and worldwide, with the aim of accelerating the climate transition, based on long-term commitment, multistakeholder collaboration, and multilevel governance.



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In brief

The EU's comprehensive policy framework, including legislation, indicates that a strong framework is key to incentivise multilevel governance and cooperation.

With its enabling climate and energy policies and dedicated financing instruments, alongside the engagement with relevant local and regional players at EU, national and local levels, the EU's established framework has been crucial for climate action and multilevel partnerships. This is valid in the EU as well as globally.

This range of experience is valuable to the CHAMP coalition, which can serve as a platform for knowledge sharing between countries and where needed, encourage dialogues between different tiers of government on addressing implementation gaps as well as local access to finance to harness the key contribution of subnational climate action, which can offer tangible implementation solutions for a clean, just and resilient transition.