

Development Declaration for the Cities Mission: *Upscaling the EU Cities Mission – European cities and platforms joining hands*

Executive Summary

The European Cities Mission, aiming at 112 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030, is an absolutely vital instrument to support the priorities of the European Union and contribute to the objectives of the European Green Deal, within the framework of the Paris Agreement. Mission Cities are courageous cities that have decided to take a step forward by accelerating their climate ambition. Therefore, they must be supported and resourced to ensure their short-term successes, because the long-term success of climate neutrality in all European cities and territories depends on it. At the same time, it is important to amplify the work through national Mission platforms and other upscaling mechanisms.

The seven Spanish and seven Swedish cities that have been selected among the 112 EU Mission Cities have formed a joint Development Declaration for the Cities Mission, with support from the Swedish national platform Viable Cities and the Spanish national platform citiES2030. The Declaration is also supported by the Romanian Mission Platform M100.

Firstly, we would like to stress the need for a common strategy on “scaling as the new normal”:

- Scaling out through replication and mechanisms to engage more cities
- Scaling up through policy change
- Scaling deep through change of mindset

Secondly, we suggest twelve aspects to continue advancing the EU Cities Mission and support cities in the process of continuous learning and accelerating climate transition:

- Leadership and political commitment within the European Commission
- Strategic multi-year financial framework for the Cities Mission to 2030
- Private financing
- Human resources dedicated to the Mission
- Fair transition
- Integration between mitigation and adaptation
- Knowledge tools and open source



- Monitoring, Mission Tracking Indicators
- Regulatory changes and administrative streamlining
- Breaking of silos. Inter-administrative collaboration.
- Partnerships for Mission
- Mission as a preliminary step to scope 3.

We now invite other cities and national platforms to join the movement and support the Declaration and further development of the EU Cities Mission.

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Introduction

The European Cities Mission, aiming at 112 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030, is an absolutely vital instrument to support the priorities of the European Union and contribute to the objectives of the European Green Deal, within the framework of the international Paris Agreement.

Mission Cities are courageous cities that have decided to take a step forward by accelerating their climate ambition. Due to their demonstrative nature, they need to be treated as exceptional, as the development of the Mission entails risks that must be shared. Mission Cities are the space in which to demonstrate the validity of European public policies on climate change. Therefore, they must be supported and resourced to ensure their short-term successes, because the long-term success of climate neutrality in all European cities and territories depends on it. At the same time, it is important to amplify the work through national Mission platforms and other upscaling mechanisms.

The seven Swedish and seven Spanish cities that have been selected among the 112 EU Mission Cities have formed a joint Development Declaration for the Cities Mission, with support from the Swedish national platform Viable Cities and the Spanish national platform citiES2030. The Declaration builds upon the Spanish Mission Cities vision for the EU Cities Mission that was presented in late 2023. Since then, three key aspects on scaling have been added to the Declaration, which was first presented at the 1st Swedish Cities Mission Forum in Umeå, Sweden, May 29, 2024. The Declaration is also supported by the Romanian Mission Platform M100.

We now invite other cities and national platforms to join the movement and support the Declaration.

Firstly, the Spanish and Swedish Mission Cities would like to stress the need for a common strategy on “scaling as the new normal”. Three key aspects on how this can be done are described below. The aim is to influence and accelerate the continued development of and work with the EU Cities Mission, as well as speed up the transition to climate-neutral cities.

Secondly, the Spanish and Swedish Mission Cities suggest twelve points to continue advancing the Cities Mission and support cities in the process of continuous learning and accelerated transition.

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Three key aspects of scaling as the new normal

1. Scaling out through replication and mechanisms to engage more cities

The importance of frontrunners, leading the way, cannot be understated. However, cooperation – not competition – between cities, national governments and the EU remains essential to reach our joint goal: climate neutrality. The transition needs to be addressed at all levels – local, regional, national, EU – and the efforts need to be coordinated to support the Mission.

To scale the impact of the EU Cities Mission from 112 to eventually engaging all European cities and beyond, we need to find mechanisms like national platforms to invite and engage more cities, while still challenging and supporting the existing forerunner EU Mission Cities.

Since 2018, Viable Cities has piloted a national program to support scaling out, now supporting 23 Swedish cities including the seven Mission Cities, together making up around 40 % of the Swedish population. In 2024, a further scaling is planned to expand the EU Cities mission in Sweden, inviting additional cities that have committed themselves to accelerating the transition and being role models to join the national platform, and potentially connect to the EU Cities Mission.

Similar nationally adapted approaches are now being tested in Spain, Romania, Austria and elsewhere, and could be a powerful movement to eventually support all cities towards the EU Cities Mission.

We propose a powerful multi-level governance approach to strengthen the link between cities, and national and EU Mission platforms such as NetZeroCities – while at the same time supporting forerunner cities in their efforts. As such, we strongly support the development of structures to facilitate scaling through replication of successful methods, policies, and activities. These include the Swedish “System Demonstrators”, the Spanish “Multi-city Programs”, the Pilot- and Twinning Programs, and the development of NetZeroCities Policy Labs. These initiatives have the potential to be important levers in the systemic, mission-driven approach to achieving climate neutrality, emphasizing the importance of policy alignment and collaboration.

2. Scaling up through policy change

As cities, we see that the Mission must involve and engage different sectoral areas of our city administrations, as well as at the regional, national and EU level. Furthermore, there is a need to elevate political commitment across national ministries and relevant parts of the European Commission services, as well as improving the coordination work that European and national Mission platforms are developing for the benefit of cities.

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An early promising example in this regard is the work of six Swedish national government agencies, from different ministries. These have undertaken the task of mapping their joint funding sources and policy support to create an understanding for cities' needs and stronger support for the local transition.

We propose that the next phase should focus on strengthening collaboration and multi-level governance to facilitate smart policy development and regulatory innovation across critical sectors of the climate transition. This includes addressing aspects such as, but not limited to, redirecting financial resources, as well as effectively implementing and scaling up pilot programs and tools that can foster multi-dimensional changes concurrently. The aim is to transition from the pilot stage to establishing new norms, thereby moving away from a fragmented approach, “projectification”, towards a more integrated and sustainable model.

3. Scaling deep through change of mindset

A sustainable future can only be achieved through the collective effort of many – on all levels of society. This calls for both political courage and strategic, mission-driven development work to align resources effectively, but also to reimagine the current framework and foster a holistic view on sustainability.

Scaling deep is about creating a new accepted “normal” at the societal level, for example by efforts to redefine norms, values and behavioral patterns. Such changes are necessary to achieve a lasting transition to climate-neutral and sustainable cities. Deep transformation requires citizens, organizations and decision-makers to rethink their fundamental assumptions and act according to these new principles.

A just transition is a prerequisite for the Cities Mission to be viable and should have clear goals not only for avoiding exacerbating existing inequalities, but also to combat them. Therefore, the perspectives of diversity, just transition, equity and equality need to be embedded in all actions of the transition portfolio, evaluation and analysis. This requires constant reflecting on who has the room to speak, and to continuously work to facilitate shared and distributed power. It is about co-creating new narratives and using a language that is inclusive and close to people's every-day-life. Building and engaging inclusive local transition arenas and teams with a strong mandate also carries the possibilities of co-benefits in terms of building trust in institutions and democratic processes.

Transformative change will require not only technological solutions, but changes in individual and collective behavior and a rethinking of how institutions and systems can effectively enable this. Understanding the global implications of climate neutrality – i.e. looking at human needs, supply chains, how policy and finance enables the system as well as considering consumption-based emissions – will also support the creation of more just cities, as it covers demographic,

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spatial, interspecies and temporal equity. This demands that we on all levels understand, and act, on our own global footprint – a common “glocal” work.

We propose to have an open and inclusive conversation across the EU Cities Mission that considers all different aspects of the transition, including its impact. The Mission can make sure that a just transition is never avoided, even though it may be politically charged. Furthermore, the Mission should strive towards a common understanding of what a just transition implies, and act accordingly. In this context, there is an opportunity for the Cities Mission to take on board more clearly the New European Bauhaus’s principles of sustainability, inclusiveness, and aesthetics.

Finally, cities' contributions to a more just and social Europe deserve a broad recognition and require visibility to generate positive impacts beyond the local level!

Twelve points to continue advancing the EU Cities Mission

1. Leadership and political commitment within the EC

It is necessary to focus on the implementation of the actions from all stakeholders included in the Climate City Contracts, with visible political involvement and commitment. It is necessary to provide the Mission with political leadership appropriate to the importance that this initiative has for the achievement of the strategic objectives of the European Commission, and consequently, inspiring and facilitating political leadership at the different levels of governance.

In particular, the Mission must involve the different sectoral areas of the European Commission transversally and have a clear impetus at the highest level, as it constitutes a demonstrator of European policies. We therefore suggest stressing and elevating the political commitment at the multi-departmental group (owners’ group) and improving coordination with the work that European and National platforms are developing. The Mission is a way of “making Europe” and bringing Europe closer to its citizens.

2. Strategic multi-year financial framework for the Mission to 2030

The Cities Mission involves innovation policies and a wide range of sectoral policies that make sense in their articulation through the Urban Agenda. In that sense, it is structured around two sides of the same coin: courageous public investment policies and innovation policies to promote systemic transformation. In order to ensure the success of the Mission, it is necessary to articulate a clear financial framework for both policies, focused on mission-cities because of their demonstrative nature.

It is necessary to have a comprehensive and strategic financial framework for each of the Mission cities. Public funding for the Mission cannot be made conditional on access to funding

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through successive calls for projects, as this leads to excessive fragmentation of climate and urban transformation projects in general. There is, therefore, a need for an instrument such as a “Mission Fund” that avoids the work through calls and that could be developed, as an example, with the remaining Next Generation EU funds.

One of the advantages of the Missions approach is its measurable, assessable, time-bound, and impact-oriented nature. This would allow the articulation of a progressive financial framework linked to results, with partial milestones that allow new credit to be enabled for subsequent phases. A financial framework demanding with cities and with biennial review, so that short-term decarbonisation objectives are established, actions are financed and, if results are achieved, their financing is expanded.

The framework must be multi-stakeholder and multi-level, with flows of funds at different levels and commitments at European, Member State, regional and local level for the various actors. The commitment of the Member State is fundamental because the Mission is European and is articulated through them in the playing field of the cities.

Member States should not limit themselves to supporting the initiative as external observers to it but should have their own action and investment plans for Mission cities.

3. Private financing

According to the analyses carried out in the first City Climate Contracts, the role of private financing is crucial to achieve the objective of climate neutrality in 2030, implementing the portfolio of transformational projects that constitute the Climate Action Plans. A global view can contribute to making these projects more effective, by increasing the scale of work to all Mission cities, promoting the green economy based on sustainability and digitalization, with the consequent generation of jobs.

In this sense, the Cities Mission must contribute to contrast and establish forms of public-private collaboration, including new business models and profitable projects from the climate, social and economic point of view. Thus, the mission label should play a fundamental role in attracting high-impact investments, through a portfolio approach that combines different investment options.

4. Human resources dedicated to the Mission

If we want to accelerate the urban transition, we must strengthen the mission teams. According to a study published by Energy Cities, the main bottleneck in Europe for the energy transition of cities is the limitations in human resources of local public administrations. It is therefore necessary to understand the difficulties and logic of human resources at the local level; as well as the key role of Member States in supporting demonstration cities. There are formulas such as the figure of Local Innovation Agents promoted by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Government of Spain, designed with cities through the Innpulso Network and that can provide City Councils with specific profiles aimed at promoting innovation in municipalities.

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Other relevant examples are Local Climate Agents or Local Sustainability Agents. One of the major impacts of the Mission in terms of co-benefits is the generation of quality and qualified employment in the field of innovation and sustainability. The Mission must demonstrate this impact and create the necessary green and sustainable jobs.

In addition, integrated and holistic work must be promoted from the local level, taking advantage of the synergies that exist between the 2030 Agenda, the localization and monitoring of the SDGs, the circular economy, SECAPs, etc. Isolated actions should not be maintained, since in that case the Mission team could form another watertight unit that would enlarge the pre-existing problem, mainly for the purpose of coordinating the necessary initiatives aimed at the same end: the transformation of the city.

5. Fair transition

The ECM should incorporate the perspective of fair transition and consider the impacts on low-income sectors of the population and those especially vulnerable, such as people with disabilities, as well as transformations in the world of work. The Mission should be specifically geared towards reducing inequality and incorporating a gender perspective in its development and implementation. This would not happen without new instruments that disincentivize a focus only on bankable or “low-hanging fruit” actions.

6. Integration between mitigation and adaptation

The Mission is not just an initiative on reducing emissions, but it essentially affects the model of city we want: a city where people live better and healthier. In this sense, incorporating the perspective of adaptation is unavoidable to think about how the fight against climate change can contribute to making cities better. It is therefore necessary to consider the synergies and mutual benefits between the European Cities Mission and the European Adaptation Mission. In that regard, national platforms could play an important role.

7. Knowledge tools and open source

In keeping with the Mission's spirit of radical collaboration and continuous learning, it is essential to have tools that are easily interchangeable, subject to continuous improvement, including the economic models and emissions quantification tools used.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop and use knowledge and open-source tools; not only because they are tools developed with public funds, but also because, from a pragmatic point of view, the objective is the reuse and continuous improvement of them through processes of radical collaboration. Research and science on how to fine-tune solutions at the local and city-specific level needs open access to data, algorithms, and learning.

8. Monitoring, Mission Tracking Indicators

Monitoring the fulfillment of the objectives of the Mission is a fundamental aspect. A short set of reliable and comparable indicators should be agreed upon, ensuring that targets and progress



are monitored, and which should also be linked to the objectives of the European Green Deal. These indicators could be based on the use of innovative monitoring tools, such as some of the Earth observation products of the European Copernicus programme (Urban Atlas, for example), and aligned with the EU taxonomy for sustainable activities. In addition, the level of achievement in achieving objectives could be linked to the availability of funding and resources through the multiannual financial framework mentioned above.

9. Regulatory changes and administrative streamlining

According to the experience developed during this time, one of the fundamental aspects for the success of the mission is innovation within the Public Administration itself, to refine its orientation to impact and streamline procedures. In this sense, the development of regulatory sandboxes, climate living labs or innovative public procurement mechanisms oriented to the climate mission must be supported and promoted.

Likewise, according to the declarations of climate emergency in force, it would be necessary to consider the possibility that contracts with an impact on the Climate Mission could be processed through the emergency route, and that the decarbonization of the city could be declared as a public service. This would speed up and facilitate the promotion of high-impact projects for the Mission.

10. Breaking of silos. Inter-administrative collaboration.

Metropolitan Areas Inter-administrative collaboration Metropolitan Areas. As a global initiative, the Mission requires the encouragement of the formation of transversal teams that allow progress in the cultural change necessary for the development of integral city projects, with an interdisciplinary and multi-actor character.

In this regard, the mission should foster the creation of inter-administrative teams at the metropolitan level. The reality of cities is, in large part, metropolitan, and the solutions to be implemented for the Mission must assume this perspective.

11. Partnerships for Mission

The ECM requires bringing together all the relevant actors of the city in a common purpose, incorporating the perspective of the quintuple helix: 1) Public administrations, 2) private sector, 3) civil society, 4) academia, and 5) media and dissemination. In this sense, it is essential to promote and provide resources to promote the social communication of the Mission and the structuring of multi-stakeholder platforms at the city level (e.g. city alliances, or transition arenas) that allow integrating the specific commitments of the different actors in the City Climate Contracts.

12. Mission as a preliminary step to scope 3

The Mission does not end in 2030. This date marks only the end of the first stage on the road to the objectives defined by the European Green Deal. Work is needed now to prepare the



transformations needed to reduce scope 3 emissions, with an eye on 2040 and 2050. Far beyond the scope 2 emissions impact domains, the Mission relates to a city and society model, so cities will need to justify how the Mission's deployment is laying the groundwork for developing scope 3, considering the flows of urban metabolism. One option to incentivize such an approach is to consider Scope 3 emission reductions as one of the possible compensation mechanisms for 2030 Scope 1 and 2 residual emissions.

Supporting the Development Declaration

This Development Declaration is supported by:

- City of Gothenburg, City of Gävle, City of Helsingborg, City of Lund, City of Malmö, City of Stockholm, City of Umeå, in cooperation with Viable Cities, the national Cities Mission platform in Sweden
- City of Barcelona, City of Madrid, City of Seville, City of Valencia, City of Valladolid, City of Vitoria-Gasteiz, City of Zaragoza, in cooperation with citiES2030, the national Cities Mission platform in Spain
- Mirror Mission Cities Hub Romania

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