

Brussels, 4 December 2025  
(OR. en)

16130/25

ENV 1301  
CLIMA 568

#### NOTE

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| From:    | General Secretariat of the Council                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| To:      | Delegations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Subject: | AOB for the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 16 December 2025<br>Update on the Progress of the EU Missions on Climate-neutral and Smart<br>Cities and on Adaptation to Climate Change under Horizon Europe<br>– Information from the Commission |

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#### Context

The recurring extreme weather events that struck Europe in 2025 have made it clear that no region or city is safe from the growing impacts of climate change. European **regions and cities** are at the heart of the climate crisis, facing growing impacts that threaten the health, jobs, and economic security of communities across both rural and urban areas. Yet, these same **regions and cities have pivotal role to realising EU's ambitions for climate neutrality and resilience by 2050**. While many are politically committed to these objectives and even aspiring to achieve them ahead of the rest of Europe, they frequently encounter limitations in capacity, resources and regulatory clarity. In some cases, unclear mandates and overlapping responsibilities across governance levels further delay or undermine local action.

In this context, stepping up our joint effort to cut emissions, enhance resilience and preparedness, and empower key players to fulfil their roles is more urgent than ever.

## State of Play

**EU Missions were launched in 2021 under the Horizon Europe Programme** to deliver support that ranges from the development of new governance structures and active citizens' engagement to mobilising both public and private actors to create tangible, lasting impact. Missions have already shown their value in channelling research and innovation to drive systemic change, and in aligning the efforts of EU Member States, regional and local authorities, research institutes, enterprises and citizens, all while accelerating the societal uptake of groundbreaking solutions.

Now at their midpoint, the Missions are delivering tangible results with **significant impact across European territories**, illustrating a strong foundation for **future growth and progress**. Missions serve as powerful and **recognisable tool to support regions and cities**, particularly those tackling complex emission reduction challenges or grappling with climate risk assessment and developing resilience strategies for their territories.

The **EU Missions on Climate-neutral and Smart Cities and on Adaptation to Climate Change** are instrumental in achieving both emissions reduction and resilience targets for every Member State not only directly, supporting pioneering local actors, but also indirectly, via wider dissemination and uptake, of practical knowledge and replication of success stories, also through other established networks such as the Covenant of Mayors.

## Results

Under the **Climate-neutral and Smart Cities Mission**, 103 of the 112 cities have now finalised their Climate City Contracts, which offer comprehensive frameworks for action towards climate neutrality. Those Climate City Contracts, developed through collaborative processes that involve local authorities, the private sector and citizens, have been assessed positively by the European Commission and experts from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC). These 103 cities have received an **EU Mission Label**, thus exceeding the Mission core objective of supporting 100 cities to become climate neutral by 2030. The Mission Label is expected to **facilitate cities' access to EU, national, and regional funding and financing sources, in particular private investment**, helping to unlock the 650EUR billion investments needed to implement the plans of those pioneer cities. The EIB has already earmarked a **2 billion EUR lending envelope** to Mission Cities that have received the Mission Label.

Moreover, a **growing cooperation with Ukraine** pairs 12 Ukrainian flagship municipalities with Mission Cities, thus facilitating climate-aligned recovery strategies in Ukrainian cities. For the first time, pioneer cities in the Western Balkans have also developed Climate City Contracts, marking an important step in expanding the Missions work in EU candidate countries.

For the **Adaptation to Climate Change Mission**, over **325 regions and local authorities**—representing around 40% of the EU population—have committed to the Mission Charter or are deeply engaged in **pilots** and receiving **technical support** under Horizon Europe in an effort to accelerate preparedness for the impacts of climate change and to protect their people and businesses.

Through this Mission, they receive support in providing **responses to the most pressing vulnerabilities they face and will be facing in the future**. So far, the Mission has helped more than 50 regional and local authorities develop detailed climate risks assessments; supported over 150 authorities in designing specific plans to improve preparedness and resilience; and assisted more than 100 authorities in testing and deploying solutions on the ground to strengthen resilience. Adopting a **systemic approach**, the Mission’s solutions address critical infrastructure, land use and food systems, water management, and health and wellbeing, with a strong emphasis on nature-based solutions.

The Mission fosters the exchange of best practices, facilitates peer learning and disseminates approaches and solutions from pilot European demonstration sites, enabling their replication and scaling up across Europe. With the establishment of the **Mission National Hubs**, now available in each Member State, these exchanges will be strengthened also at the national level and conducted in national languages.

To set in motion a mindset shift towards **proactive resilience investments** crowding in private investors, the Mission is supporting pilot actions with the insurance and the banking sectors, including with the EIB and through the creation of intermediate lending mechanisms for the National Promotional Banks.

In addition, the **Climate City Capital Hub** specifically **supports cities participating in both Missions** by providing **financial advice**, in cooperation with advisory services of the European Investment Bank. It helps cities structure their financial needs and connect projects with a range of capital providers, including public and private lenders and investors. To date, the Hub is supporting 40 projects across 18 countries primarily through technical assistance and capital facilitation.

With the involvement of EU, national, regional and local actors, progress will be showcased at the **annual Cities Mission Conference** scheduled for 28 and 29 May 2026 in Turin, and the **5<sup>th</sup> Mission Adaptation Annual Forum**, scheduled for 27 and 28 May 2026 in Nicosia and co-hosted by the EU Presidency as part of the formal calendar of Presidency events.

### Way forward

The pioneering efforts of regional and local action through the Mission will also serve as anchoring to on-the-ground experience within the development of the **EU Integrated Framework for Climate Resilience** (planned for adoption in Q4 2026). This framework will aim to scale up the **competitiveness** of innovative climate resilience solutions.

The success of EU Missions relies on close and effective collaboration between local, regional, national, and European actors. Only with strong coordinated support at the national level the Missions can achieve their full potential. The Commission **therefore calls on Member States to actively engage with the Missions** and to support their cities and regions in their pioneering efforts, notably by supporting their efforts with targeted financial and regulatory means, such as re-allocation of shared management funds and by refocusing new programmes already in the pipeline for the next programming period.

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