

Open letter from the Covenant of Mayors – Europe Board

Accelerating the transition towards climate neutrality

The current COVID-19 crisis has confronted the global community with major challenges in a very short period of time. In addition to the health care system, the economy, the social systems as well as our lifestyles in general are greatly affected.

In this context, **local communities, cities and regions remain on the frontlines** of the response to the crisis. They have taken extraordinary and unprecedented measures with significant social and economic consequences, while reorganising their citizens' everyday life. They are thus making an important contribution to coping with the current COVID-19 pandemic **without losing sight of the climate emergency**.

As the pandemic progresses, we learn which mechanisms are useful for overcoming such global challenges. Certainly, there are valuable lessons from the approaches tested on the ground during times of great crisis, for instance:

- A **strong political leadership** – respecting the scientific evidence as well as the democratic principles – is crucial for taking relevant and timely action.
- **Cooperation and coordinated response** between States as well as between the different levels of governance have proven to be important elements for an effective response to such a crisis.
- **Solidarity and responsibility towards citizens** is essential for ensuring a just transition for all.

All levels of governments can boost resilience to crises and strengthen their economies by further leveraging local resources and acknowledging territorial circumstances – thus **moving from sectoral to territorial and from globalisation to localisation**, still uniting people across borders.

Those are some of the principles which already guide the actions undertaken by the more than 10.000 local authorities committed to the Covenant of Mayors initiative in Europe and worldwide¹. As agents of change, they are taking their responsibility seriously for local and global transformation. Above all, they are aware that any recovery plan must also take the planetary resource boundaries into account – for example:

- The City of Amsterdam (NL) decided to make use of the “[Doughnut-Model](#)”² they have worked on over the last 5 years to guide their recovering measures.
- The City of Ghent (BE) has installed a “[Relaunch taskforce](#)” to develop short- and long-term measures focusing on the most vulnerable, and has mobilized 25 million euro to overcome the corona crisis.
- The city of Milan (IT) announced an [ambitious scheme](#) to reduce car use after lockdown - transforming 35 km of streets over to cyclists and pedestrians.

Even though at the moment, the focus is on containment and protection measures, national governments and the EU are already preparing relief packages intended to put the economy back on track. To best support cities and regions in their recovery efforts while accelerating the energy and climate transition, these investments, should be channelled towards the transformation to a climate neutral society. Otherwise the consequences of climate change will lead to much more profound and long-term crises. A Green Recovery Strategy should therefore be strategically oriented towards the future challenges of the societal transformation. Every Euro spent on overcoming the crisis should be used to increase resilience to future crises. Putting an end to fossil fuel subsidies should be an additional step of the EU/national governments to redirect financial flows towards cities' climate action.

¹ <https://www.eumayors.eu/news-and-events/news/1773-covid19-crisis-a-selection-of-plaforms-to-support-cities-and-towns.html>

² Developed by Kate Raworth from Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute

Key messages from the Covenant of Mayors – Europe Board:

- This health crisis should not be misused as a pretext for delaying urgent climate action, but instead be used as an opportunity to shape systemic change.
- The European Green Deal should be at the core of the EU recovery efforts and should make cities better equipped to tackle the ongoing climate emergency.
- Strong multi-level cooperation between EU, national and local governments is essential to best coordinate our responses to the crisis and move together towards our shared goals for a climate neutral Europe by 2050.
- European solidarity is crucial at this juncture, not just to reach climate goals, but also maintain political stability at time of deep social and economic disruption. Only solidarity can ensure that we leave no one behind – especially those who are most vulnerable.
- Local governments and their administrations – who are on the frontline in managing the crisis on the ground – should see their recovery efforts well supported when they plan for their next actions and budget. The investment packages currently designed by Member States and the EU should contribute to the energy and climate transition already underway at the local level.
- All government bailouts of industry should be conditional on being used to immediately start the transition to decarbonise their operations and include a trajectory to reach climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest.

The Covenant of Mayors – Europe Board



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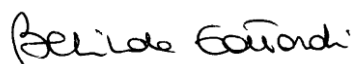
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