

Making Europe future-proof: an inclusive pathway to implement a low-carbon and resilient future for the EU

ICLEI-position on the Strategy for long-term EU greenhouse gas emissions reductions (as of 9 October 2018)

Ambitious commitments at the EU level are crucial to the establishment of a smart, sustainable, and inclusive long-term Strategy for Europe. Local and regional governments are instrumental to this goal and ready to engage.

According to an analysis by UN Environment, current national commitments to the Paris Agreement cover only one-third of the emissions reductions needed to keep the global temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius, while the available global carbon budget for the 1.5-degree scenario will be depleted by 2030. Local governments, as the closest level to citizens and the most affected by climate change, have a key role to play.

Local governments around the world have committed to complement national action through their ambition: 1,019 local and regional governments reporting to ICLEI, have collectively committed to reduce their emissions by 26.8 gigatons by 2050. Meanwhile, the aggregate impact of the 7,494 cities and local governments committed to the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy could collectively reduce emissions by 15.64 gigatons between 2010 and 2030.

A multi-level approach is key to implement a low carbon and resilient Europe.

Cities across Europe can become carbon neutral by 2050 by developing sound long-term policies and engaging their community.

Local and sub-national governments are frontrunners in developing, implementing and monitoring climate and energy action, but they need both recognition and resources by the European Union and its Member States, in order to support an ambitious sustainable energy roll-out.

The urgency of tackling climate change and its effects asks for much more prompt and effective sustainable climate action, to be jointly implemented by all level level of government.

Local and sub-national governments are committed to offer their know-how and engage with both the European and Member States level strongly. For instance, they are prepared to take on new responsibilities and challenges, provided sufficient and permanent resourcing. The support needed is not only financial. Local authorities need clear and empowered mandates, free access to local and regional energy data, and appropriate capacity development for technical staff, to fully benefit from bottom-up contributions, both on mitigation and on adaptation.

With a defined mandate and adequate resources the local and regional level will be able to unlock their full sustainable energy potential.

While the goal of carbon neutrality can be made possible from a technological point of view (this can be scientifically proven sectors such as heating and cooling), the main barriers to reaching this objective are related to policy and regulations.

Local and regional authorities with their investments and purchasing power can play a key role to introduce innovative solutions and new technologies into the market by providing a substantial demand. New ways of innovation procurement can support this process. Ensure that local governments and civil society are included in a permanent dialogue on different scenarios envisaged for energy and climate policies, including for the long term, and review progress for the development of both National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and Long Term Strategies (LTS).

The pathway to a sustainable Europe goes through co-creation and inclusiveness.

A low to no emission Europe can be achieved by shifting to 100 percent Renewable Energy starting from government operations and infrastructures, and by engaging directly consumers in direct production and distribution of renewable energy.

Renewable Energy is not yet fully accepted by the many communities across Europe. In particular technologies such as wind energy are still seen suspiciously or their infrastructures not welcomed on the territory of the community.

The key to achieve a low carbon resilient economy is a combination of a supportive multi-level governance policy framework, the realization of a fully integrated internal energy market able to secure a stable and favorable framework for investments and opportunities for citizens to become prosumers.

The increase of RES could be obtained by the revision of planning regulations to include specific percentages dedicated to installation of RES. In addition regulatory measures such as introduction of labeling systems outlining fair and socially inclusive criteria for the allocation of permits to a variety of developers, including primarily community-led initiatives, would foster inclusion and local ownership of the transition.

Active participation of citizens and communities will allow to increase acceptance of RES through a more inclusive co-created planning, as well as a more fair distribution of both the

costs and the benefits of the energy transition, by securing opportunities for citizens to become active part of the energy market.

Ambitious local climate action, supported by sustainable public procurement, and by sound divestment plans from fossil fuel and unsustainable practices that can free up resources for sustainable investments.

European and national directives in support of renewables should deliberately encourage local small-scale community energy projects in order to boost and speed up the process through inclusion of bottom-up initiatives.

Only through Integrated, systematic, cross-sectoral planning the benefits of innovation and technologies can be reaped.

Cities and regions can play a crucial role to ensure these challenges are faced in an integrated manner through multi-sectoral approaches when guaranteed appropriate mandates and resources.

The long-term strategy as well as short-term actions need to address the energy system in an integrated, holistic manner in order to anticipate and steer the energy system interactions locally, nationally and on a European level.

Scientific and technologically neutral decarbonisation scenarios show that the entire and interacting energy system can reduce (4.340 Mton or) 86% CO₂ emissions compared to 1990 using only known technologies that are available on the market.

Next to electricity and transport, a strategic focus on efficient and renewable heating and cooling is needed, as the sector represents 50% of the primary energy demand in Europe.

The development of smart electricity grids needs to be much closer aligned and financed together with the expansion of the thermal infrastructure. A low-carbon thermal infrastructure in Europe will be heavily relying on district heating and cooling in cities and heat pumps in rural areas. Both types of technologies need to be massively incentivised to reach our climate targets.

Effective instruments and appropriate legal and financial frameworks for scaling-up the establishment of intelligent and decentralised energy infrastructure instead of focusing on conventional, large-scale and centralised models is needed to leverage the potential of each territory and community across Europe.

An integrated energy system that optimizes the connection of both existing and new infrastructures across sectors, as well fully tapping the potential of decentralized energy, is key to reach this goal.

The potential of RES generated from material resources (such as biogas and bioenergy) should be evaluated carefully against strict sustainability criteria. These resources, as for example e-fuels, need to be linked systematically to sustainable mobility strategies.

Even where the potential for usage of biomass and bioenergy is really high, it is crucial to apply strict sustainability criteria to the use of these resources. These criteria include: origin of the material (i.e. exploitation of local resources), labor conditions, availability of alternative RES sources as well as show optimization of the integration of these resources within the energy system, respect of biodiversity and diversification in the use of land, food production should come first particularly in regions with limited food production potential.

The use of these resources should be evaluated according to a local and regional approach to ensure that a value-added chain can be developed rather than hindered.

The lack of public land available to implement sustainable infrastructures is a key challenge to the transition to a low carbon and resilient economy. Strategic planning and re-municipalization of both infrastructures and land can be an effective response to such a need.

Two sides of the same coin: reduce, improve & prevent

Cities and local governments in Europe are developing integrated climate adaptation management and plans.

The challenges posed by development of 2050 strategies require a multi-sectoral and integrated approach to climate mitigation and adaptation. Capacity development at all level should be supported to increase knowledge in regards to the challenges posed by climate adaptation, to which urban systems are particularly vulnerable, and the need for resilient infrastructures

Based on the identified vulnerabilities and priorities a systematic implementation of adaptation measures across sectors should be carried out to increase resilience locally, in particular in regards to the climate-proofing of critical infrastructures, to ensure operability in times of disasters.

Working together an investing in a future-proof Europe

Cooperation and sustainable management of resources is key for a more inclusive and sustainable economy in Europe.

Territorial cohesion and regional cooperation can provide a key opportunity to adjust socioeconomic systems to a low carbon and resilient economy, while providing an opportunity for a transition towards more sustainable and resource efficient economic structures if appropriate actions are taken, particularly in regards to the urban rural agenda.

For a fair distribution of both financial and social costs and benefits associated with Europe's sustainable energy transition. among all levels of government and market actors, including citizens. A fair distribution of the financial and social costs, as well as the emerging benefits, associated with Europe's sustainable energy transition between all levels of governments and market actors including citizens. Is necessary to guarantee a truly transformative pathway.

Ambitious local climate action should be supported by incentives to develop sound divestment plans from fossil fuel and unsustainable practices. This would free up resources for sustainable investments, while creating opportunities for development of new value added chains as well as new jobs, also in coal-intensive regions

In this process, local and regional governments are the key actors to enable and manage this transition effectively.

A sustainable energy transition in Europe will only be successful, if fostering energy security and social cohesion. Costs and benefits necessarily need to be fairly shared between all levels of governments and market actors including emerging initiatives of community owned energy production and supply.

Many local and regional governments are acting as facilitator of this transition through exchanging knowledge and providing organisational and institutional platforms, with a low threshold for stakeholders' financial engagement.

The energy transition cannot be only technology focused. It needs to support social cohesion within and between Member States, through financial and legislative support, as well as funding programmes that can foster awareness, build capacity and promote behavioural change.

For further details, please contact:

Giorgia Rambelli, ICLEI Europe (Brussels, Belgium)

Phone: +49-761 / 368 92-0

E-mail: giorgia.rambelli@iclei.org