

CONTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPEAN CLIMATE PACT CONSULTATION

Established in 2001, ERRIN promotes the regional and local dimension in European research and innovation policies and programmes. The network gathers over 120 members who primarily collaborate through 13 Working Groups, covering both thematic areas and overarching policy issues. ERRIN supports project development and knowledge exchange between members to enhance regional and local research and innovation capacities, with the aim to foster sustainable and inclusive growth in all regions.

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Europe's recovery should be green

[ERRIN, the European Regions Research and Innovation Network](#), is aware that the ongoing outbreak of the COVID-19 and its economic and societal impacts require us to rethink what kind of economy we wish to recover. A different paradigm is needed that allows us to turn this outbreak into an opportunity for a greener and a more just society. As highlighted by the Commission President “By using the European Green Deal as our compass, we can turn the crisis of this pandemic into an opportunity to rebuild our economies differently and make them more resilient”. This guiding principle has been since confirmed in the Next Generation EU and the EU Recovery Plan.

Achieving the ambitious climate objectives requires engagement of all relevant government levels, as well as the local society, most notably citizens. All key actors (administration, private sector, knowledge providers, citizens) should be mobilised to work together towards decarbonisation. Such an ecosystem approach is essential to ensure local ownership and that all the actors are working towards the same, ambitious goal. The European Climate Pact, as a part of the European Green Deal, offers a great opportunity to strengthen this collaboration and accelerate the green transition embracing this ecosystem approach.

ERRIN aims to fundamentally change the way local and regional actors work together within a quadruple helix approach focusing on the wider regional development agenda and ecosystem thinking. The objectives of the European Climate Pact are well in line with our mission and the aim to foster cooperation between different actors (national, regional and local authorities, businesses, civil society organisations, education organisations, consumer groups, research and innovation organisations, as well as individual citizens), and to develop and implement joint actions to fulfil the overarching goal of reaching carbon neutrality and green transition.

European Climate Pact – umbrella initiative with impacts

The European Climate Pact aims to become the umbrella initiative gathering the different local and regional actions to tackle climate change. There is still a strong need to further map, connect and in some cases also reinforce existing climate related initiatives. Having a clear overview of the different initiatives taking place all over Europe will allow to recognise their complementarities, reinforce synergy effects and to identify potential gaps in support.

ERRIN has identified several local pacts already existing in European cities and regions which could serve as a foundation for building a pan-European pact:

- Brussels Region (BE) is contributing to the country's long-term strategy to reduce greenhouse gases, setting the goal to achieve the same level of ambition for indirect emissions by 2050 as for direct emissions by 2030 and neutralise its carbon footprint by the end of 2050. This relates to both direct and indirect emissions from the Brussels Region. In 2020 the region started a wide-reach dialogue with citizens and economic, social and institutional bodies to develop a “low carbon” vision for Brussels through transition initiatives and with the support of local authorities.
- Extremadura (ES): the region developed a green and circular economy strategy that puts the accent on innovation, creativity, the respectful production of goods and services, the creation of green business initiatives and the enhancement of our natural resources. Citizens (with the support of businesses, universities, unions and other stakeholders) are at the core of the

strategy, which is conceived as a model of citizen participation where both the projects to be carried out and the activities are in permanent evolution and have contributions from the society of Extremadura.

- Ile de France (FR): the region has put in place a far-reaching, inclusive plan to accelerate the green transition in the next four years, calling citizens to action and providing incentives to small businesses to support the transition. Envisaged actions include measures such as increasing surface and facilitating access to green areas, improving biodiversity, air quality, use of renewables and the general better-being of citizens, as well as sustainable urban planning and energy-efficient buildings, with financial support granted to innovative projects that contribute to sustainable mobility, provide housing, and support wider efforts of sustainable energy transition. The plan focuses also on accelerating the adoption of sustainable energy sources to reduce carbon footprint and improve air quality. This includes investments to maximise the use of solar panels in public buildings and private households, with the goal of reaching 1-million users at the end of 2021.
- Northern Netherlands (NL): climate-related strategies and cooperative actions are currently being developed both at regional and local level: Leeuwarden (capital of the Province of Friesland) is developing strategies with regards to energy, climate adaptation and circular economy, while the Province sees the creation of bottom-up initiatives on topics such as: the creation of a fossil-free society, circular economy, Sustainable Development Goals and reducing the weight of economic indicators in favor of innovative and more realistic indicators as measure of success. The Groningen-Assen region has developed a Regional Energy Strategy (RES).
- Turku-Southwest Finland (FI): set up a climate strategy 2029 which is being developed in a continuous dialogue with all societal stakeholders. Businesses and organisations can make voluntary pledges to reduce emissions either directly or indirectly, and they are encouraged to follow the principles of responsibility, boosting sustainable innovation and business activity and engaging citizens. Citizens are encouraged to reflect on how they can reduce their carbon footprint thanks to information provided by the “Climate Team”. The goal of the pact is to reach climate neutrality in 2029, the 800th anniversary of the city. Southwest Finland is currently developing a climate roadmap 2030, coordinated by a “climate responsibility division” which has representatives from the regional authorities, municipalities, local business organisations, interest groups and knowledge and education institutions.
- West Finland (FI): municipalities are committed to work towards carbon neutrality via a National network of carbon-neutral municipalities and regions. The goal is to decrease GHG emission 80% by 2030 ([from 2007 baseline](#)). The municipalities benefit from the support of research institutes, businesses, and experts to design innovative and effective solutions, especially aimed at reducing emissions in mobility, housing and energy sectors.

The European Climate Pact has the potential to connect and support the already existing local and regional “climate pacts”. ERRIN members expect the European Climate Pact to:

- provide networking opportunities and exchange between regions facing common challenges
- promote successful existing local and regional initiatives and pacts
- facilitate peer-to-peer learning (also for indicator monitoring)
- support sharing and scaling-up practices and solutions

- provide funding to support local and regional climate pacts and make the funds more accessible for smaller municipalities

In order to share the experiences and collect expectations towards the Climate Pact, an online platform should be created. The Pact should also inspire new actions and engage new actors to take action, providing inspiration for organisations, businesses and citizens to contribute to reaching climate targets and commit to the climate actions in their communities.

The existing pacts are operating on different terms and are managed on various governance levels. The European Climate Pact should serve as a bridge between the European, national, regional and local levels to create a transparent and coherent plan, understandable for all citizens. The Pact should also not only support the usual suspects but emphasise diversity and involve different actors of the ecosystem. There should be also connections and information flow between different ongoing initiatives and institutions responsible for those, e.g. the partnerships and the missions.

The research and innovation should be an overarching dimension for the activities of the Pact and transmitted to other policy areas. This would ensure better results and greater impact of the actions undertaken.

Mobilising stakeholders – the ecosystem approach

The Climate Pact aims to give citizens and stakeholders from all parts of society a voice and role in designing new climate actions, sharing information, and showcasing solutions that others can follow. The Climate Pact should be inclusive and engage organisations and individuals at all levels of society. Everyone, from private and public sector, should have a role in this long-term commitment. Regions and cities should be considered as key-partners and natural enablers of this process, as they can mobilise a whole range of stakeholders on their territory and facilitate common actions that can be further replicated and scaled-up all across Europe.

At the same time territorial authorities need to develop new skills in order to assume their role as facilitators between different stakeholders. A broad support base within society, citizens, NGO's, the knowledge providers, and the private sector must be ensured through continuous engagement. Civil society and citizen organisations are also taking on new roles - and both proposing and implementing new and innovative solutions. Support to community driven innovation requires not only social networks, but also in the longer term, the construction of networked local initiatives to accelerate change.

Thematic scope

The Commission has identified three thematic focuses for the Climate Pact: energy efficiency in buildings, low-carbon mobility in cities and green urban areas. All three areas are relevant, although we believe that it would be important to open the focus both to integrated approaches that cover all the mentioned thematic priorities as well as expand to circularity and wider resource efficiency beyond energy efficiency. For instance, in addition to energy efficiency of buildings their carbon footprint should be considered. The green urban areas should include the adaptation and nature-based solutions as they have a clear link to stakeholder engagement (e.g. in city planning process).

It is also important to underline the research and innovation perspective of those thematic areas and determine which role research and innovation plays in developing new green solutions. Synergies with

other current developments such as related mission areas on climate-neutral and smart cities and the adaptation to climate change should be considered. Also, the European Partnerships that are being developed under the Horizon Europe include a vast number of partnerships around the low carbon area. Those partnerships include very few local and regional stakeholders but have a great potential to become much broader and to develop new solutions together.

In addition, novel approaches to governance should be in the heart of the European Climate Pact. In fact, innovation in governance should be one of the key areas that the Climate Pact focuses on. Its essence should be to investigate how and with what conditions the various actors are working together towards achieving together the EU's decarbonisation efforts.

ERRIN's role in the Climate Pact

Over the last two decades, ERRIN has been striving to provide concrete input to European research and innovation policy based on local and regional experiences and expertise, underlining the involvement of all ecosystem actors.

Many ERRIN members are already working to put in place regional climate pacts and overarching strategies to increase sustainability and resilience in all sectors of their competence (energy efficiency in buildings, alternative mobility, wider use of natural resources, encouraging consumption of plant-based, local and seasonal products, expanding green areas and making them more accessible for everyone). ERRIN's goal is to make these examples accessible to a wide audience to inspire and provide support to other regions, while also creating collaboration between local/regional pacts and the EU Climate pact.

From its unique position, ERRIN can act as a connector of ecosystems and favour the multiplication and scale-up of pledges, collect and disseminate examples, providing data from regions for informed and inclusive policy-making at EU level, but also inspiring others to follow the example. Through all the above-mentioned actions supporting this European movement, ERRIN can accelerate the development of sustainable, innovative and socially inclusive Europe. The wide and diversified membership spread across all Europe can enable ERRIN to facilitate matchmaking and provide expertise to unlock funds for the realisation of the objectives of the EU Climate Pact through partnerships and projects.