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Pathways to climate-smart governance

5th Newsletter

Published: 9/2026

Climate change is already affecting Europe in various ways. Rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, more frequent extreme weather events such as heatwaves, droughts, floods and storms pose significant risks to the environment, infrastructure, and human well-being across the continent. Thus, there is a need to better adapt to the situation. National, regional and local level governance that leads to actions play a crucial role here. Therefore, it is important that climate actions to increase resilience must be understood better by administration and decisionmakers, so that they can be implemented in practice, at local level in cities and regions.

ClimateGO addresses the urgent need for regions and cities to take proactive action against climate change. It emphasizes the importance of implementing laws and strategies to achieve climate targets while considering implications for society and nature. Beyond the evident focus on mitigation efforts, there is a need to emphasize the urgency of climate change adaptation and preparedness. Proactive adaptation enables larger benefits than reactive action, as both the avoidance of losses and the exploitation of opportunities are more effective. The ClimateGO project partners share a joint aim to ensure that anticipatory understanding of climate change is a central part of future decision-making.

Project Partners

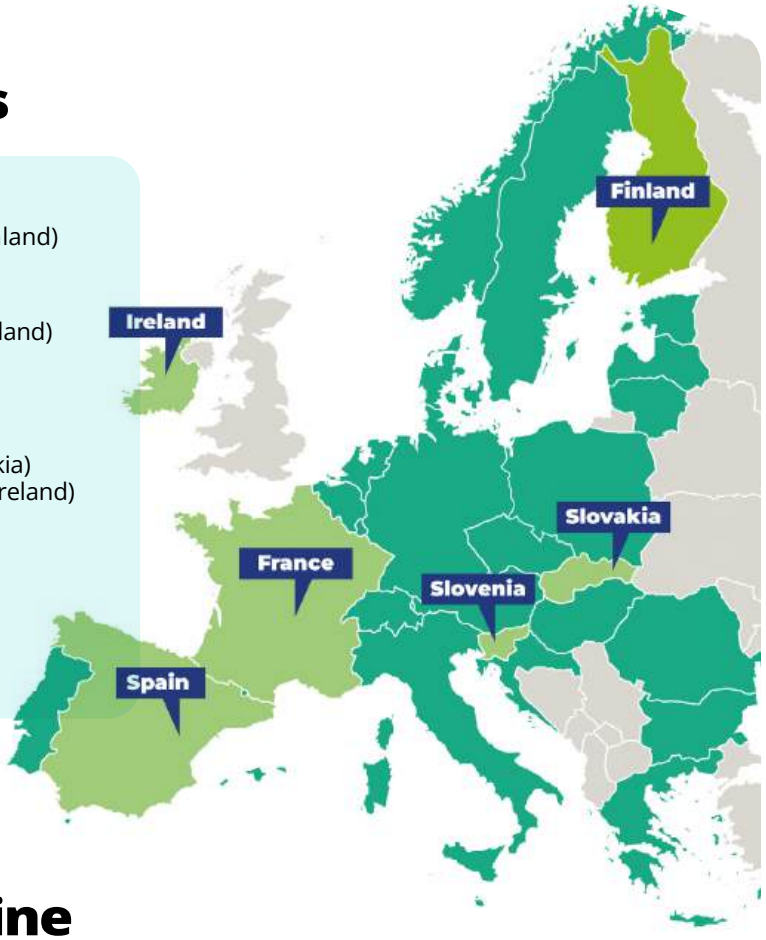
Lead partner:
LAB University of Applied Sciences (Finland)

Collaborating with:

- Regional Council of Päijät-Häme (Finland)
- Alzira City Council (Spain)
- City of Grenoble (France)
- Regional development agency for Podravje - Maribor (Slovenia)
- Košice Self-Governing Region (Slovakia)
- Waterford City and County Council (Ireland)

Budget
1,491,245 €

Duration
1st Apr 2024 – 30th Jun 2028



Project Timeline

4/2024

4/2024 **Sem 1:**
1.4.2024 – 30.9.2024

Theme:
"Current state of climate policy and governance in the region."
1st Interregional meeting in Lahti, Finland

10/2024 **Sem 2:**
1.10.2024 – 31.3.2025

Theme:
"Climate policy implementation in practice."
2nd Interregional meeting in Košice, Slovakia

4/2025 **Sem 3:**
1.4.2025 – 30.9.2025

Theme:
"Raising awareness and engaging decision-makers to achieve climate-smart governance."
3rd Interregional meeting in Grenoble, France

10/2025 **Sem 4:**
1.10.2025 – 31.3.2026

Theme:
"Stakeholder co-operation in climate-smart governence."
4th Interregional meeting in Alzira, Spain

4/2026 **Sem 5:**
1.4.2026 – 30.9.2026

Theme:
"Lessons learned for designing effective climate-smart policy and governance."
5th Interregional meeting in Waterford, Ireland

10/2026 **Sem 6:**
1.10.2026 – 31.3.2027
Theme:
"Lessons learnd from supporting implementation of climate-smart governance in practice."
6th Interregional meeting in Maribor, Slovenia

Follow up

4/2027 **Sem 7:**
1.4.2027 – 30.9.2027
Follow-up on policy development and policy changes

10/2027 **Sem 8:**
1.10.2027 – 30.6.2028
Follow-up on policy development and policy changes

6/2028

Interregional Meeting

Energy efficiency efforts in Waterford Ireland's Oldest City



Picture: XXXXXXX

The 5th ClimateGO Interregional Meeting took place in Waterford, Ireland, on 26–27 May. Waterford is working to become Ireland's first carbon-neutral city by 2040 and has committed to improving energy efficiency by 50% by 2030. Progress to date includes the retrofit of more than 400 social homes and the upgrade of 10,000 public streetlights to smart LED technology.

The meeting opened with a presentation from the Climate Action Team, outlining national climate legislation and its implementation at local government level. The Economic Development Team then showcased two flagship projects: the **Sustainable Transport Bridge** and **Waterford North Quays Project**, which will create a sustainable, low-carbon urban quarter supported by public transport and active travel infrastructure, and the **Thrive Project**, which promotes heritage-led regeneration through the reuse of existing buildings, reducing emissions and construction waste. The Climate Action Team also presented the **Pathfinder Project**, which aims to retrofit council buildings to achieve a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030.

Each presentation was complemented by site visits, providing participants with the opportunity to see the projects firsthand and gain a deeper understanding of their implementation and impact.

The meeting concluded with a visit to **the 46 km Waterford Greenway**, a former railway line transformed into a sustainable tourism and active travel corridor that enhances regional connectivity, public health, and biodiversity, and serves as a national model for active travel infrastructure.

On the second day, the delegations began with a Climate Walk through the city, showcasing local council and community initiatives that support Waterford's journey towards carbon neutrality. One of the key stops was **Renew Enterprises**, a Waterford-based social enterprise that promotes environmental sustainability through workforce training and circular economy services while supporting individuals facing barriers to employment.

The group then visited the Central Library, where staff presented a range of climate action initiatives. A standout project was the knitting group, which brings together local women and displaced Ukrainian women. Working in partnership with Waterford's Climate Action Team and the Library, the group has created visual displays illustrating rising global temperatures and biodiversity loss.

The Climate Walk concluded at Dooley's Hotel, a participant in the Business Pledge Scheme. The hotel's Sustainability Manager outlined the organisation's environmental initiatives and explained how the scheme has supported their sustainability efforts.

The final item on the agenda was a presentation and **site visit to GIY** (Grow It Yourself), a not-for-profit social enterprise founded in 2008. GIY promotes environmental sustainability, climate action, and "food empathy" by encouraging people to grow, cook, and consume seasonal, sustainable food.

Waterford County Council and the Climate Action Team thank all the presenters, delegations, and partners who participated in the visit.

Good Practices

Inspiring and tested policy solutions identified by Interreg Europe cooperation projects

During the project implementation time all ClimateGO project partners will identify and publish tested policy solutions from their own regions and cities.

The main idea is that these tested solutions can be transferred to other European regions and cities. Learning from each other and making use of already tested methods and solutions will help different European regions to develop further and more efficient.



Definition of ClimateGO Good Practices:

- → proved to be successful
- → transferable
- → scope on city or region level
- → sustainable (ecological, economic and social)
- → related to climate change mitigation or adaptation
- → systemic (changes in processes, structures and practices)
- → increases regional resilience to climate change

Newest Good Practices



Read more

ClimateGO Articles & Publications

Climate Action Has a Clear Direction in Alzira and Waterford -article

Read more about climate actions in Alzira and Waterford

Read more

https://www.interregeurope.eu/climatego/news-and-events/news/climate-action-has-clear-direction-in-alzira-waterford

Guidelines for Decision Makers to Achieve Climate Smart Governance -publication

Read more about the quidelines from the publication

Read more

https://www.interregeurope.eu/sites/default/files/2026-06/Guide%20for%20decision%20makers%20to%20achieve%20climate%20smart%20governance.pdf

New video!

ClimateGO: Guidelines for decision makers to achieve Climate smart Governance -video now available!

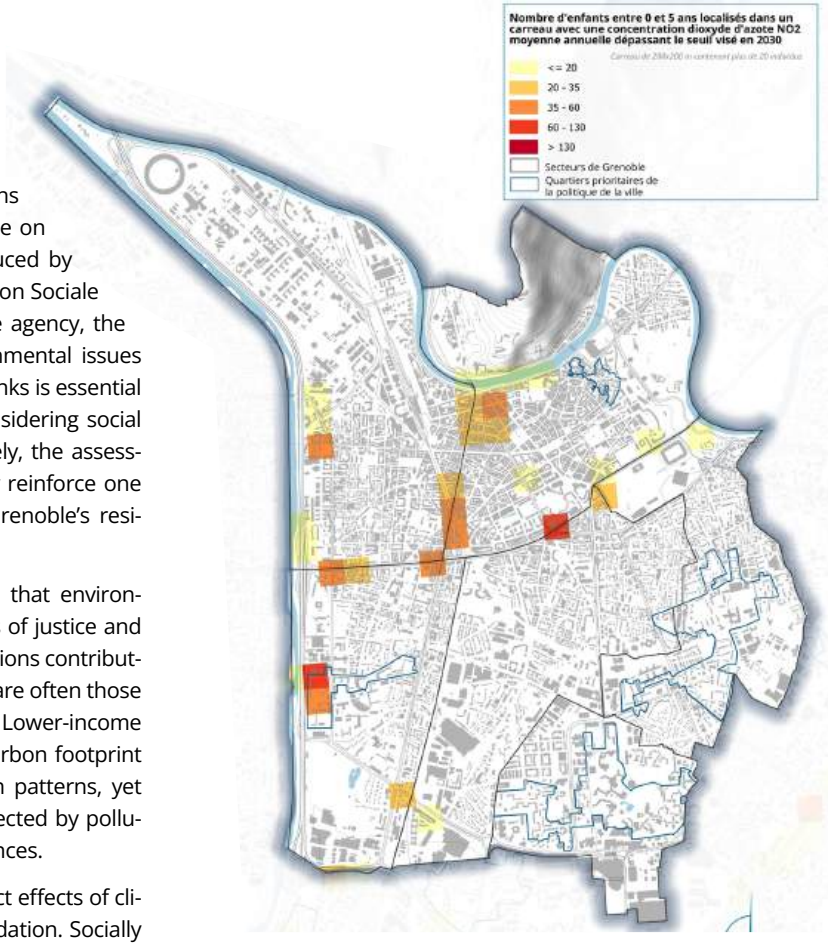


Watch on YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnG9U8riuV8

FRANCE

Understanding Socio-Environmental Inequalities for Climate-Smart Governance



The 2025 edition of Grenoble's Social Needs Assessment (Analyse des Besoins Sociaux – ABS) focuses for the first time on socio-environmental inequalities. Produced by the City and its Centre Communal d'Action Sociale (CCAS), the municipality's social welfare agency, the study explores how social and environmental issues interact and why understanding these links is essential for local public action. Rather than considering social and environmental challenges separately, the assessment highlights the ways in which they reinforce one another and affect the daily lives of Grenoble's residents.

The study builds on the observation that environmental issues inevitably raise questions of justice and equity. Research shows that the populations contributing least to environmental degradation are often those most exposed to its consequences. Lower-income households generally have a smaller carbon footprint because of more modest consumption patterns, yet they are more likely to live in areas affected by pollution, heat or other environmental nuisances.

The assessment examines the indirect effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Socially vulnerable populations are often more affected because of their age, health conditions or economic situation. In addition, not everyone has the same capacity to adapt. Access to housing renovation, green spaces or financial resources differs greatly from one household to another, creating unequal opportunities to cope with environmental risks. The report highlights that climate transition policies themselves may generate new inequalities if they disproportionately affect households with limited resources, for example through increased transport or energy costs. The research also raises new questions for social work in a changing climate: how can social workers effectively support vulnerable people with healthcare or administrative procedures when their basic needs -such as access to cool spaces, water and adequate sleep- are not being met?

To improve understanding of these issues, the ABS combines multiple sources of information, including official statistics, environmental data, municipal datasets and qualitative interviews with both professionals and local households. It also introduces new mapping methods to identify neighbourhoods where social and environmental vulnerabilities accumulate. This work provides a first shared knowledge base that will support future observation and research on socio-environmental inequalities in Grenoble.

Beyond documenting existing inequalities, the ABS provides a shared evidence base for the City of Grenoble, the CCAS and their partners. It encourages the continued development of socio-environmental observation while supporting more integrated public policies that bring together environmental and social objectives.

FINLAND

Lessons learned for designing effective climate-smart policies and governance in Päijät-Häme region

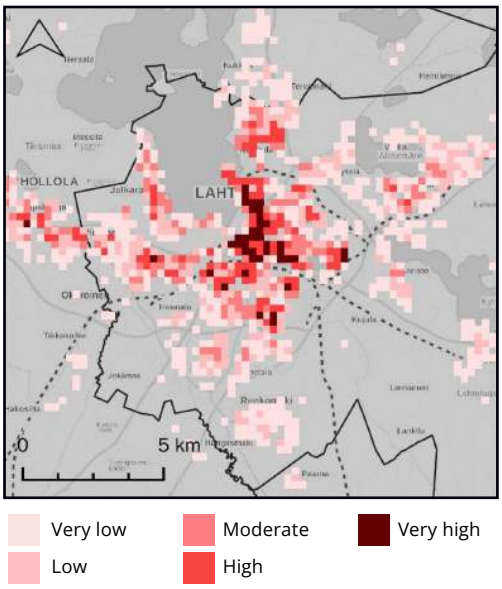
The past six months have been a period of active learning for the ClimateGO team and stakeholders from political decision-making bodies, municipalities, and local organizations. Meetings in Alzira, Spain, and Waterford, Ireland, have provided valuable insights into ambitious climate policies, while the Guide for Decision-makers offers practical principles for effective climate action. At the same time, ongoing regional projects are accelerating climate change adaptation efforts, and a local regional portrait developed through the Doughnut Economics framework provides a comprehensive overview of the region's environmental and social sustainability.

Insights gained from project partners

The visits to Alzira and Waterford highlighted the importance of decisive leadership, clear direction, and strong commitment in advancing climate action. Both cities demonstrated how strategic planning, cross-sectoral collaboration, and targeted investments can accelerate implementation and unlock funding opportunities. For Päijät-Häme, the key lesson is the need to translate climate strategies into concrete actions through bold experiments and scalable solutions in areas such as circular economy, sustainable mobility, and community-based initiatives.

The project's latest publication, the **Guide for Decision-makers**, was released in May 2026, and a Finnish summary was distributed to local municipal and well-being services county decision-makers. The guide provides a practical set of core principles to support the integration of climate-smart governance into regional decision-making and development.

One of the key principles is the use of evidence-based knowledge to support decision-making. A good example of this is the heat vulnerability assessment released by HELLE project. The report examines how heatwaves affect the wellbeing, daily lives, and living environments of residents in Lahti and the wider Päijät-Häme region. It identifies the population groups and circumstances most vulnerable to heat-related risks and provides valuable information to help municipalities and regional stakeholders strengthen preparedness and planning while taking the needs of different resident groups into account. The assessment is particularly timely, as both population ageing and the progression of climate change are increasing the need for preparedness across Finland.



↑ Population Vulnerability to Heatwaves in the Lahti Region
Picture: Kimi Toivola, City of Lahti

Regional cooperation brings added value

On 8 June, the ClimateGO project co-organised the "***New Opportunities for Food Security in Päijät-Häme***" stakeholder event in Lahti. The event brought together regional stakeholders to discuss the current state of food security, future challenges, and new opportunities for collaboration. The discussions were active and constructive, generating valuable insights into strengthening the regional food system. As a result of the event, it was decided to establish new working groups to support regional food production and improve self-sufficiency.

From a decision-making perspective, the key takeaways were that producers and advocates of local and decentralized food systems should articulate a clear vision - why it is needed and why alternative production models must complement mass production. This is not about replacing one with the other, but about recognising that both are essential. In addition, defining a regional self-sufficiency balance would provide decision-makers with a concrete way to assess whether current policies and actions are steering the region in the right direction.



↑ New Opportunities for Food Security in Päijät-Häme" event brought together regional stakeholders to discuss the current state of food security, future challenges, and new opportunities for collaboration. Picture: Hanna Suutari

Adapting a project partner's good practice to inform decision-making

The interregional visit to Grenoble, France in previous semester, raised interest in implementing Doughnut Economics model at the regional level in Päijät-Häme. As a result, a regional portrait of Päijät-Häme has been developed using the Doughnut Economics framework to provide an overview of the region's current state and pathways towards a more sustainable future. The analysis shows that while social sustainability is generally strong, several local challenges remain, including health inequalities, social exclusion, food insecurity, and unemployment.

At the same time, the region exceeds sustainable consumption limits in areas such as land use, carbon emissions, and nitrogen loading. The results highlight the need to reduce resource consumption, strengthen the circular economy, and ensure that regional development and procurement practices also take global social justice into account.

By combining international learning, evidence-based decision-making, regional cooperation, and innovative tools such as Doughnut Economics, Päijät-Häme can strengthen its capacity to design and implement effective climate-smart policies for the future.

SLOVENIA

Climate Change Adaptation: From Strategies to Action

Effective climate policy is not created by strategies alone. It depends on how well institutions cooperate, how consistently climate objectives are integrated into development decisions, and how successfully knowledge is translated into measures that can be implemented on the ground. This is one of the key lessons emerging from the ClimateGO project and an increasingly important principle for the Podravje region in Slovenia.

Throughout the project, ClimateGO partners have compared approaches to climate governance, exchanged good practices and discussed the challenges that cities and regions face when moving from ambitious climate targets to practical implementation. Despite differences in administrative systems and regional contexts, several common messages stand out: climate policies need clear political ownership, cooperation across sectors and levels of government, stable implementation structures, access to relevant data and expertise, and meaningful involvement of stakeholders. Above all, mitigation and adaptation should not be treated as separate policy areas, but as mutually reinforcing parts of regional development.

For Podravje, these lessons are particularly relevant as the region strengthens its approach to climate adaptation and resilience. Climate risks are already influencing decisions related to spatial planning, water management, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, public health and economic development. Addressing these challenges requires more than individual projects. It calls for a governance model that connects municipalities, public institutions, experts, development organisations, businesses and communities around shared priorities and enables them to act in a coordinated way.

An important step in this process is the international climate conference "***Climate Change Adaptation: From Strategies to Action***" organised by the Regional Development Agency for Podravje – Maribor on 7–8 October 2026 in Maribor. The conference brings together decision-makers, practitioners, researchers and other stakeholders to discuss how regions can move from climate strategies to effective action. Particular attention will be given to adaptation to climate change, practical examples from Slovenia and abroad, and approaches that strengthen cooperation between different levels of governance. The programme will combine plenary discussions, thematic workshops and field visits, creating space not only for presenting



solutions, but also for exchanging experience on what makes those solutions transferable and effective.

The conference is closely linked to a wider regional process. Podravje is preparing for efficient regional climate change adaptation aimed at providing a stronger common framework for identifying vulnerabilities, setting priorities and developing concrete measures. The ClimateGO experience can support this process by drawing on lessons from partner regions and reinforcing an important governance principle: successful climate policy needs to be embedded in regular development planning, budgeting, and investment decisions rather than treated as an additional environmental task.

Perhaps the most valuable lesson is that climate-smart governance is not a fixed model that can be copied from one region to another. It is a continuous process of learning, cooperation and adjustment. Good practices become truly useful only when they are translated into the institutional, financial and social realities of a specific territory. For Podravje, the next phase is therefore about turning knowledge into shared regional capacity – creating stronger links between policy, expertise and implementation, and ensuring that climate resilience becomes an integral part of how the region plans its future.

Through the climate conference and the ongoing work within ClimateGO, Podravje aims to contribute to this transition: from individual climate initiatives towards a more connected, practical and resilient system of regional governance.

IRELAND

Lessons learnt for designing effective climate smart policies and governance



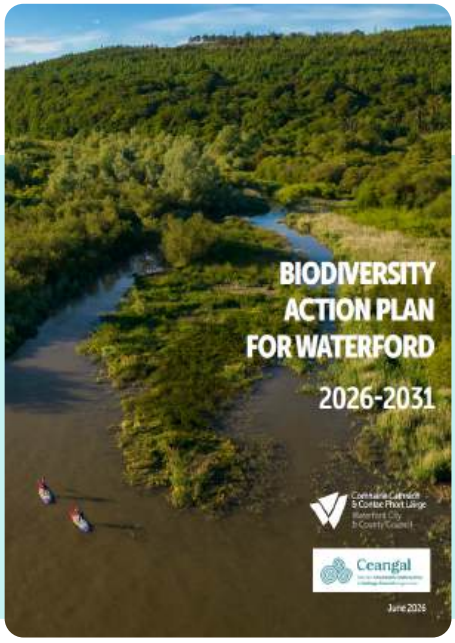


Waterford City and County Council outlines Climate Action Progress

At the April 2026 Plenary Council Meeting, Waterford City and County Council's Director of Services for Environmental services presented the Year 2 progress report on the **Climate Action Plan 2024–2029**. The review emphasised structural milestones such as social housing retrofits, public lighting upgrades, circular economy initiatives, and Biodiversity Plan implementation. Within the framework of climate-smart governance, this annual reporting process is a vital policy instrument. It delivers the empirical data required for robust institutional scrutiny, enabling decision-makers to assess tangible progress toward the 2040 climate-neutrality goal. Ultimately, this feedback loop supports dynamic governance, empowering policymakers to refine strategies, reallocate resources, and scale impactful interventions based on measurable carbon-reduction results.

Waterford's Biodiversity Action Plan 2026-2031

Waterford City and County Council's draft Biodiversity Action Plan 2026–2031 is now open for public consultation. The plan demonstrates a key principle of climate-smart governance: effective policy is grounded in structured public integration. By inviting public input on this five-year strategy, the Council fosters inclusive governance, weaving local knowledge and community insights directly into its environmental framework. This participatory approach ensures that climate resilience policies remain transparent, socially equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of the community.





On Local Environmental Action Fund Launched for Communities in Waterford County

The fund, supported by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and administered by the Council, provides essential financial assistance to community groups, resident associations, and voluntary organizations for projects that drive environmental sustainability and climate action. This initiative strengthens climate governance by boosting public engagement and fostering local accountability. By directly involving residents in policy-making decisions, the program ensures communities co-design local solutions and experience the tangible benefits of climate action firsthand.

Breakfast Briefing event Climate Action for Local Business

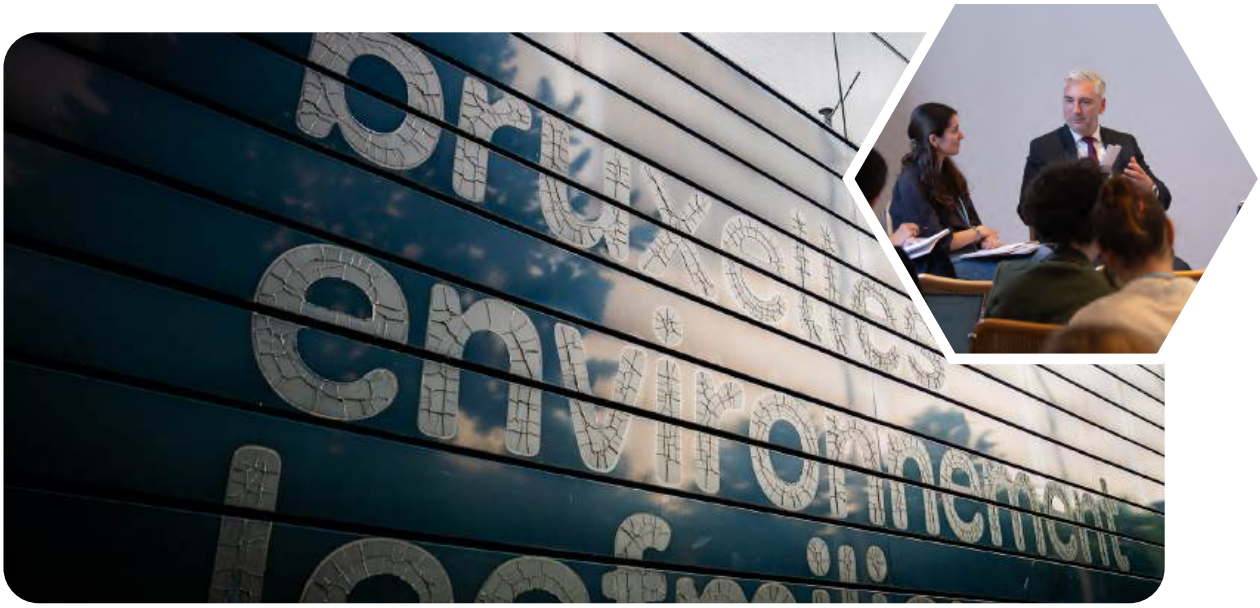
On August 26th, the Climate Action Team hosted the Breakfast Briefing event, "***Climate Action for Local Business.***" The primary purpose of the event was to highlight local organizations—including LEO, the Chamber of Commerce, SETU, and SEEA—that support businesses on their journey toward sustainability. The event also featured a panel of SMEs and hospitality businesses that have been awarded the Business Pledge scheme. These panelists shared their sustainability journeys and offered guidance on how other businesses can follow suit. Events like this are essential for connecting businesses with the tools they need to become sustainable, especially when operating on limited budgets.





SLOVAKIA

Climate Chance Europe 2026 Summit



On 3 and 4 June 2026, the **Climate Chance Europe 2026 Summit** took place in Brussels, focusing on climate change adaptation as a tool for strengthening Europe's resilience and prosperity. On the second day of the Summit, Rastislav Trnka, President of the Košice Self-governing Region, took part in a panel discussion addressing whether Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) are sufficiently integrated into European strategies for biodiversity restoration and climate resilience. The discussion was held at Maison de la Poste in Brussels.

The main objective of the Summit was to provide a platform for exchanging experiences, good practices and tools in the fields of climate adaptation, innovation and sustainable development. Particular attention was paid to how European climate and environmental objectives can be translated into concrete actions.

In his intervention, the President of the Košice Self-governing Region presented the region's approach to Nature-Based Solutions as part of regional development, spatial planning and investment decision-making. He emphasized that these solutions should not be seen as separate "green projects", but as an essential infrastructure for climate resilience. On behalf of the Košice Region, he presented in particular the experience from the **Košice Region Landscape Restoration Programme**, the **functioning of Water Councils**, as well as examples of measures in forest, urban and educational environments, including the **KlimaPark Kysak project** and activities focused on water retention, biodiversity restoration and improving the local microclimate.

Participation in the Summit was also important in terms of involving the Košice Region in the European debate on climate adaptation. Regions play a key role in translating European objectives into practice, as concrete measures, projects and partnerships are developed at the territorial level. **The key message of the Košice Region's contribution** was that, if Europe is to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change, ambitious European policies need to be more strongly connected with the real needs of regions, municipalities and communities.



SPAIN

From reaction to prevention Building coordinated climate governance in Alzira

One of the main lessons learned by Alzira is that effective climate policy cannot be based solely on responding to emergencies once they have already occurred. Cities need to anticipate risks by combining preventive infrastructure, clear emergency procedures, institutional coordination and continuous learning.

Alzira is particularly exposed to flooding, wildfires, strong winds, heatwaves and other climate-related risks. Over the years, the municipality has invested in preventive measures such as the Interceptor Canal, which diverts runoff towards the Casella ravine and helps reduce flood risk in the urban area.

However, physical infrastructure alone is not enough. Effective climate governance also requires all municipal departments and emergency services to understand their responsibilities and work within a shared coordination structure.

In Alzira, the **Municipal Operational Coordination Centre** (CECOPAL) brings together political representatives, municipal technical staff, the Local Police, emergency services, volunteers and other relevant actors during emergencies.

The experience of recent extreme weather events, particularly the severe storm of October 2024, confirmed the importance of preparedness, coordination and rapid information-sharing. It also showed that climate resilience must be understood as a continuous process. After each emergency, local authorities need to assess what worked, identify weaknesses and update their plans, procedures and investments.

Another major lesson learned by Alzira has been the need to adapt the municipal structure itself to new climate challenges. The management of adaptation and resilience could no longer be limited to the traditional functions of an environmental department.

For this reason, the City Council created the Climate Emergency, Resilience, Urban Agenda and Strategic Projects Area, designed to promote a broader vision and work across all municipal departments. This structure connects climate policy with urban planning, public works and infrastructure, civil protection, social services, agriculture, education and strategic planning.

Through ClimateGO, Alzira has also been able to compare its approach with those of other European cities and regions. This interregional learning helps the municipality identify new solutions and adapt good practices to its own local context.

For Alzira, climate-smart governance means moving from isolated actions to a preventive and coordinated model in which infrastructure, planning, cooperation and institutional learning reinforce one another.



Technical visit to Alzira's Interceptor Canal, a preventive infrastructure that diverts runoff towards the Casella ravine and helps reduce flood risk in the urban area. ↑



Municipal coordination meeting in Alzira, involving political representatives, technical staff, the Local Police and different services responsible for emergency management. →

ClimateGO
organizes webinars

on themes related to climate change mitigation and adaptation from a governance perspective.

For more information, please visit our website

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https://interregeurope.eu/climatego





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Alzira City Council
Spain – Comunitat Valenciana

City of Grenoble
France – Rhône-Alpes

Waterford City and County Council
Ireland – Southern

Košice Self-Governing Region
Slovakia – Východné Slovensko

Regional development agency for Podravje - Maribor (RDAPM)
Slovenia– Vzhodna Slovenija