

Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2023

A state of cities report through
the voices of mayors



Table of Contents

Foreword	4
Highlights	6
Executive summary	8
Taking the pulse of European mayors	11
Top challenges in 2022 for European mayors	12
Top Priorities for Mayors for 2023	15
European mayors working with the EU level	18
Mayors' financial needs in key policy areas	22
Mayors' expectations from EU funding	24
Impact of inflation on cities	26
Mayors engaging in city diplomacy	28
Cities making a difference	32
Cities action for Ukraine	33
Cities taking on the energy crisis	38



Dario Nardella

2020-2023
President of
Eurocities and
Mayor of Florence

The voice and power of cities in Europe has continued to grow this year. As we leave the pandemic behind us, it is clear that cities were hit hardest, and that it is in cities where the recovery efforts must be focused. Already facing new crises, cities have stepped up in response to an unprovoked Russian war in Europe.

Right across Europe, and especially in the East, cities opened their doors this year to the millions of Ukrainians forced to flee their homeland. Doing so meant setting up emergency shelters and registration points, welcoming millions of children to our schools, and helping adults into work – a process eased thanks to the flexibility the EU added to its asylum rules in response to an unprecedented situation.

At the same time, cities have been active in the relief efforts, sending much needed aid and medical supplies to sister cities in Ukraine. We have been politically active too. In August, I led a delegation of mayors to Kyiv to meet with President Zelenskyy, where we discussed the crucial role that cities must play in planning for and implementing Ukraine's sustainable rebuilding efforts.

In October, I met with Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, who confirmed that urban voices are a central part of this discussion.

To react to the destruction of Ukrainian electricity infrastructure, in coordination with Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, I launched the 'Generators of Hope' campaign, sending electricity generators and high voltage electrical equipment to Ukrainian cities last winter.

Meanwhile, we have been planning for a green post-Covid recovery and working with our local populations to manage the energy and cost of living crises by introducing measures to help those in energy poverty and ensure that no one is left behind in the green and digital transformation.

The launch of the 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission by the European Commission demonstrates a new attention at European level to the role of cities in achieving this, and a new partnership between cities and the EU.

This first edition of the Eurocities Pulse explores all of these topics, and more, to share a snapshot of current urban trends in 2023.

As you read on, it should become as clear to you as it is to me that the future of Europe will depend on the strength of its cities.



Burkhard Jung
2023-2025
President of
Eurocities and
Mayor of Leipzig

This year, through our Sustainable Rebuilding of Ukraine project, we will work alongside 10 Ukrainian cities to discover their needs and develop a blueprint guided by climate neutrality and sustainable development to put Ukraine back on its feet.

We know what it takes to build a city, to ensure an inclusive approach from the ground up, and to build for a greener future. By listening to the needs of our partner cities in Ukraine and sharing our knowledge with other partners, we will ensure that, when the time comes, we will play our part in the next chapter for Ukraine.

In our own cities, listening to and including people in decision making is an ongoing effort. We must constantly innovate and adopt new tools in e-governance, and make sure that all voices, including those of our young people, are listened to.

We must take the threat of climate change seriously and invest in a green future. Cities are already leading efforts in the much-needed energy transition, through democratising energy production and its use. And this forward-looking approach must also extend to our labour market.

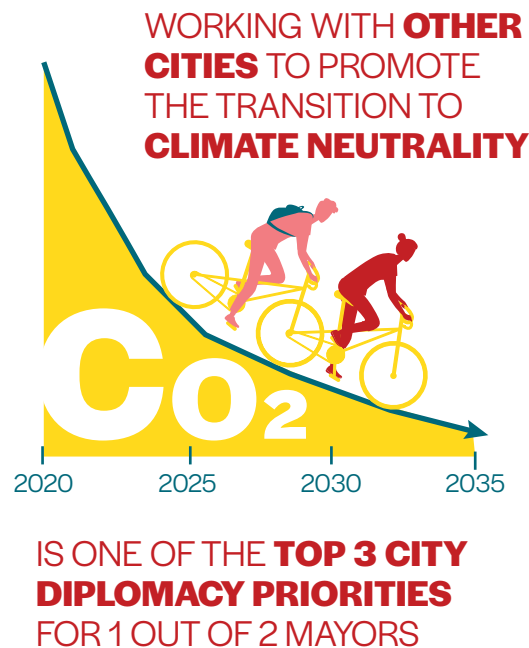
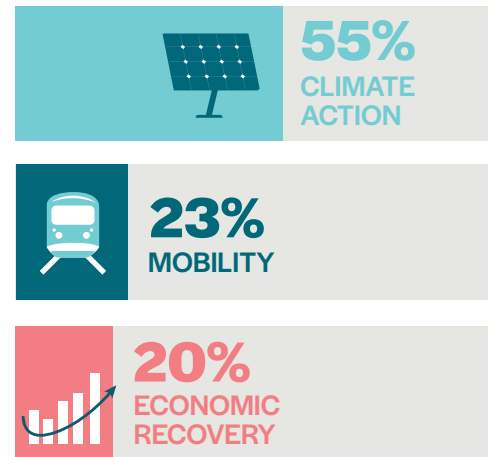
The sustainable transformation requires new skills to make sure we have the knowledge to install solar cells, manage our own energy production and keep ahead of future crises. As recognised by the European Year of Skills, this is one of the areas our cities must target to make ourselves fit for the future.

Looking ahead, the European elections next year will mark another pivotal moment. Now is the time to raise our collective voice to make sure that the people across our cities are heard and can be put at the heart of EU decision making.

That's why we have put together this very first Eurocities Pulse, which includes a survey answered by 92 mayors from 26 countries. Our mayors will continue their work to ensure that European democracy is a two-way process, exploring new ways to strengthen the interaction between cities and the EU.

In 2023 Eurocities ran a survey collecting answers from almost 100 mayors. The analysis of this survey painted the picture of their work ahead and what they need to reach their goals.

TOP PRIORITIES FOR MAYORS IN 2023



HOW DO MAYORS EXPECT THE EU TO SUPPORT THEM?



DIRECT DIALOGUE



BETTER ACCESS TO FUNDING



NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL SOLUTION TO EU POLICIES



45% OF MAYORS HAVE ENCOUNTERED SITUATIONS WHERE CURRENT **EU RULES AND POLICIES PREVENTED** THEM FROM ACHIEVING **THEIR GOALS**

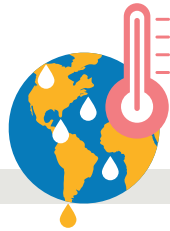
MOST **MAYORS** WILL HAVE **DIFFICULTY** HAVING SUFFICIENT OR PARTIAL **RESOURCES TO MATCH THEIR NEEDS** IN:

38%
HOUSING



37%

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY TRANSITION



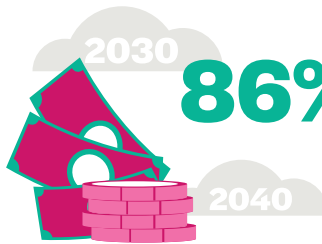
32%

URBAN POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION



AND **LESS THAN 10%** EXPECT TO HAVE **ENOUGH RESOURCES** TO COVER ALL THEIR **NEEDS**

TOP AREAS WHERE EU MAYORS **EXPECT EU FUNDING** TO MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE TO THEIR **POLICY OBJECTIVES**:



86%

OF MAYORS SAY THE **CURRENT HIGH-LEVEL OF INFLATION AFFECTS** THEIR ABILITY TO MAKE STRATEGIC **LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS**.

CURRENT **REDUCTION OR POSTPONED INVESTMENT** MOSTLY **AFFECTS THREE KEY AREAS**:



27%

CULTURE



25%

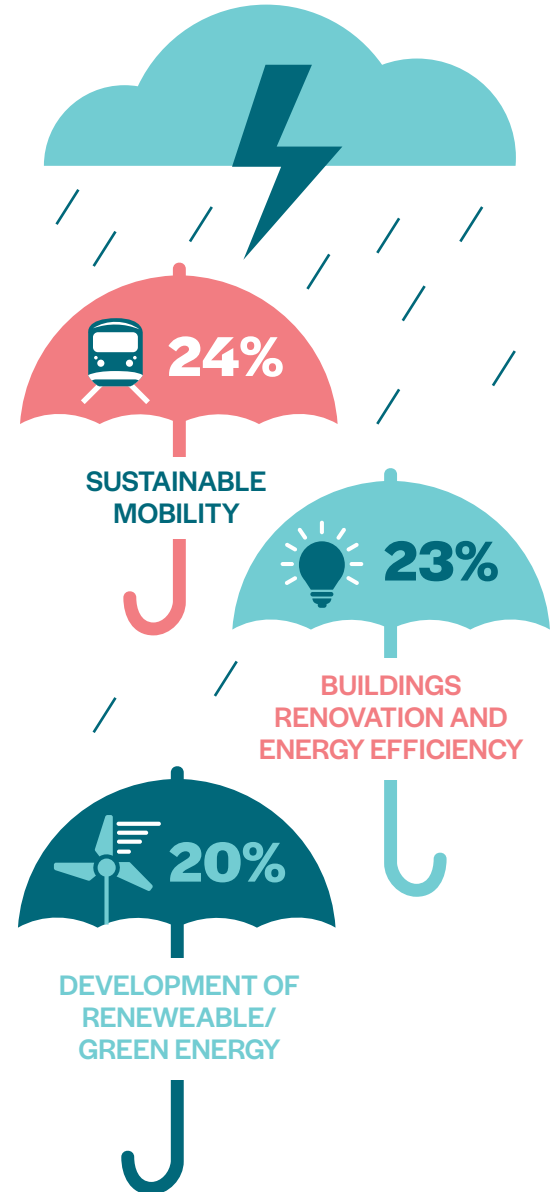
MOBILITY



18%

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

TOP INVESTMENT PRIORITIES FOR MAYORS TO **FIGHT THE ENERGY CRISIS**



Executive summary

One year ahead of the European parliamentary elections, Eurocities decided to ‘take the pulse’ of European mayors and uncover the major challenges, priorities and trends that shape urban affairs in 2023. The Eurocities Pulse is a major element of the Eurocities Monitor, which presents all the most interesting data and insights gathered throughout the year by Eurocities’ Brussels-based staff, and via input from our network of more than 6,000 city officials from all over Europe.

This first edition of the Eurocities Pulse survey is based on research conducted among mayors from the 210 member cities of the Eurocities network. Between January and March 2023, the mayors were invited to reply to an online survey. The survey consisted of 24 open-ended and closed questions, available in the annex. For the closed questions, the results are presented at an aggregated level with no further manipulation. For some of the questions, such as top challenges and top priorities for 2023, we used open-ended questions to allow mayors to respond freely without predetermining their response.

To make sense of these responses, we further analysed them, categorised, and ranked them accordingly. The survey was complemented by a focus group of city leaders from our Executive Committee that helped us discuss and validate some of the assumptions and the results. We received 92 responses from mayors of large cities across 28 European countries. The responses thus offer a good representative sample of the political voice of mayors from major European cities on key issues.

What you will read in these pages is a selection of the main findings of the Eurocities Pulse. With the support of our research partners, we will further analyse our data and combine it with other sources to develop more detailed insights and thematic analyses on urban trends. Mayors are increasingly at the centre of politics at all levels of governance. It is only with mayors on board, ensuring a proper implementation of policy in our cities, that the twin digital and green transformations can be enacted, and broader societal and international goals achieved.

Among the top challenges shared by mayors via the Eurocities Pulse survey, the energy crisis and climate change feature strongly. Other challenges, such as managing the post Covid-19 economic recovery and the response to Russia’s War in Ukraine reflect challenges faced equally by leaders at national and European levels of governance.

More locally, top challenges mayors reported in 2022 include the state of their public budget, and housing, which has been a perennial and growing issue in cities over recent years.

As well as their top challenges, mayors shared their top priorities. Climate action is by far the top priority for mayors in 2023, with more than half of mayors selecting it as one of their top three responses – more than double any other category.

While the results of the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2023 show that over 80% of mayors feel that they are contributing to EU policy priorities and processes; more than half of mayors within the EU consider that the EU institutions and policies tend not to take account of the specific needs and potential of cities.

**Almost 100 mayors
across Europe
responded to the
Eurocities Pulse survey**



Moreover, a similar number of EU-based mayors have encountered situations where current EU rules and policies prevent them from achieving their goals. For example, mayors report on EU rules for social housing often being too strict for a city to invest effectively.

When it comes to their expectations of being able to fund different priorities and where the greatest gaps exist in their projections for the next five years, mayors clearly highlight that current resources are not enough. Looking at these results in relation to mayors' needs to finance their priorities, it is clear that EU funding is helping mayors to somewhat cover the huge financial gaps for climate and energy investments. Nevertheless, more investment is still needed. Meanwhile, it is also clear that mayors do not feel that they are receiving comparable EU support for other mayoral priorities where resources will be insufficient to match needs, such as housing and the inclusion of refugees, migrants, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

Other headwinds clearly effect mayors' ability to steer a clear course. For example, at city level, over 86% of mayors said the current high level of inflation had affected their ability to make strategic long-term investments. At the same time, the data suggests that mayors are particularly wary of reducing municipal support or postponing planned investments in areas that are crucial for the functioning of the city, such as public health, policing and security, as well as the provision and support to essential public goods.

A guest essay by LSE Cities highlights how important it is to directly engage cities to deliver on cross-border and global challenges. This is a sentiment closely shared by mayors responding to the Eurocities Pulse, a majority of whom would like to focus on working with other cities to promote the transition to climate neutrality, among other challenges and priorities.

In this first edition of the Eurocities Pulse, two special sections are dedicated to current affairs: the Russian war in Ukraine and the energy crisis. Guest essays by Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, and Kadri Simson, European Commissioner for Energy, help to set the scene for each section respectively. In her essay, President Metsola outlines the good work of cities across Europe in sending hundreds of power generators to Ukraine this winter via the 'Generators of Hope' campaign initiated jointly by the European Parliament and Eurocities.

City-to-city cooperation has taken on new meaning following Russia's illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Long-established twinnings, cooperation through networks such as Eurocities, and friendships between mayors have provided a basis for cities to demonstrate their ability to be diplomatic actors – all of which is explored in more detail.

Sharing her thoughts, Kadri Simson, European Commissioner for Energy, writes a guest essay that takes the Russian war in Ukraine as a starting point to look at recent actions to accelerate the EU's clean energy transition, which was decisively aided by stalwart action by local governments.

In their responses to the Eurocities Pulse survey, captured in the final section on the energy crisis, mayors share that their top three challenges when looking at ways to speed up the energy transition in their cities are access to finance, considering how to best make buildings energy efficient, and dealing with a lack of administrative capacity locally.

Whether the more recent or the long-standing challenges and priorities discussed in these pages, all of them are covered by working groups and projects within Eurocities, the network of major European cities.

Taking the pulse of European Mayors

The Eurocities Pulse Survey is the flagship annual survey carried out across the broad membership of Eurocities, which brings together most of the major European cities, representing over 150 million people all over Europe. Drawing on 92 responses from leaders among Eurocities' 210 member cities across Europe, this first edition aims to offer an overview of key urban trends, including the top challenges and priorities facing mayors one year ahead of the European elections.

What you will read here is the result of a selection of the main findings of the Pulse, with further analysis of the data to follow.

92
RESPONSES
FROM **28**
COUNTRIES

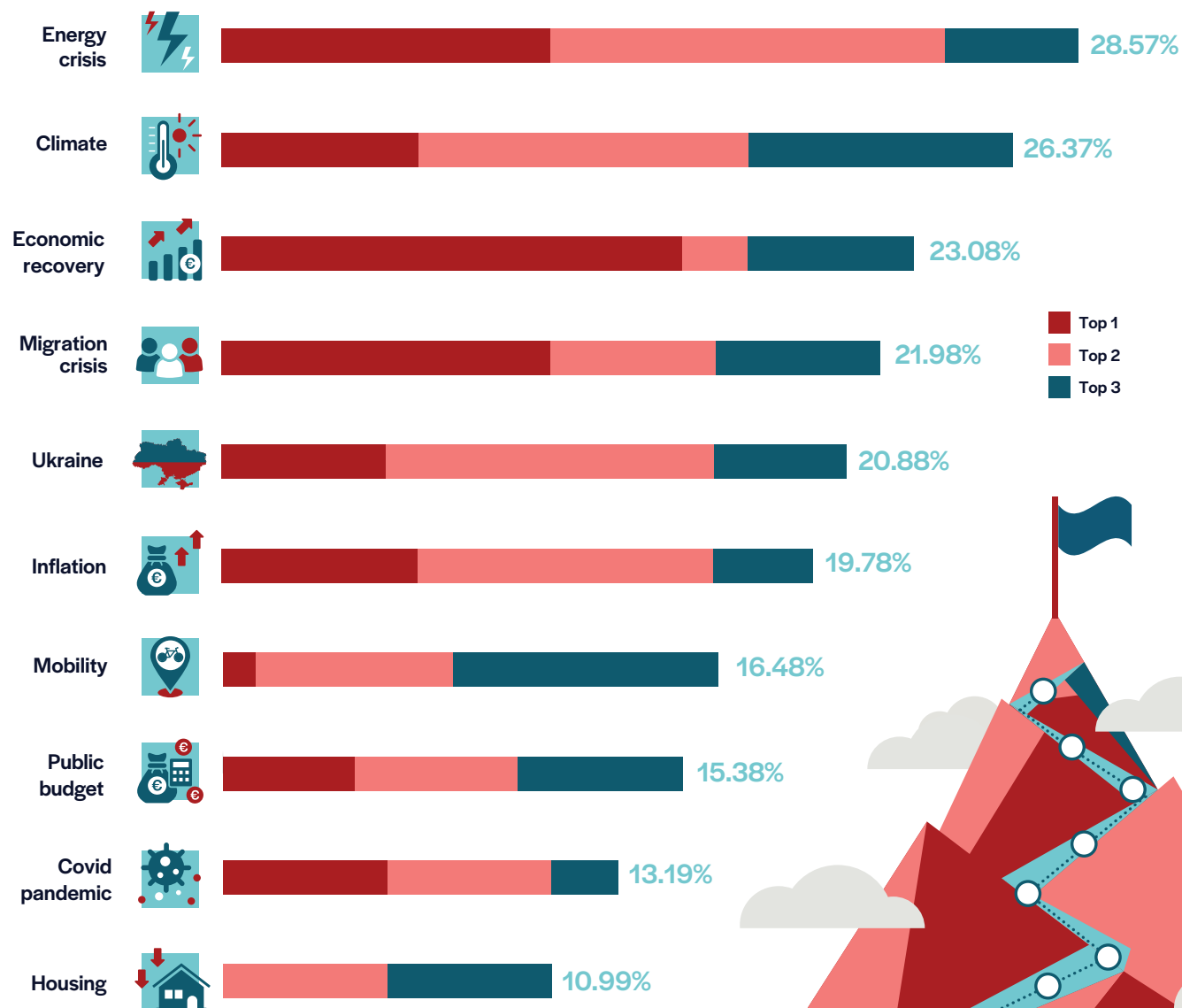
A SAMPLE FROM A
MEMBERSHIP
REPRESENTING OVER
150 MILLION
EUROPEAN CITIZENS

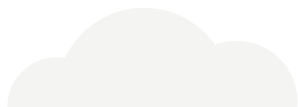


Top challenges in 2022 for European mayors

For European mayors from large cities, the top challenge in 2022 was the energy crisis, followed by climate change and the economic recovery. Overall, most of the top 10 challenges shared by European mayors reflect challenges that cropped up in the last three years and that have been faced by all levels of government across Europe, such as dealing with impacts of the Russian war in Ukraine, the effects of inflation or the ongoing recovery from Covid-19. Several other top challenges that mayors face reflect longer-term, ongoing challenges, that have crept up to the top of mayors' agendas over successive years, such as the Europe-wide housing crisis, mobility and the constraints on local budgets. Whether the more recent or the long-standing challenges, all of them are covered by working groups and projects within Eurocities.

Mayors' top 10 challenges in 2022





28.57% of European mayors mentioned the **energy crisis** among the top three challenges they faced in 2022, putting it as their overall top challenge. This chimes with a decision by Eurocities to make the energy crisis the top priority for 2023, covered across the network's working structures, as well as a topic for this year's focus section of the Eurocities Monitor. Rising energy prices have spurred mayors to speed up energy transition actions and promote local supply of renewable energies, as well as taking steps to protect the most vulnerable from energy poverty. The crisis has also led mayors to implement quick solutions to save energy and reduce costs, such as replacing street lighting with LED bulbs, or reducing the average temperatures public buildings are heated to.

Similarly, while **inflation** registers as a lower challenge overall, mayors noted it for its effects on the most vulnerable sectors of society, who have already been hard hit by the pandemic, and for its squeezing effect on **public budgets**, with implications for public service delivery.

Mayors highlight that next to measures to minimise the impact of the cost of living crisis on the most vulnerable households, they also had to quickly develop schemes to support local businesses. The impact of inflation in cities is discussed in more detail further down.

Climate change, referred to by many mayors as the climate crisis, was mentioned by 26.37% of all mayors as a top three challenge in 2022. It has been rising to the top of political agendas for years and is one of the key areas of expertise, developed through projects and policy focus, of Eurocities. 2022 was a year of extreme weather: droughts, heat waves, floods and heavy snowfall. Mayors shared the challenges of dealing with a new normal. For mayors, this can mean finding ways to adapt to new realities – Athens has a Chief Heat

Officer, while Paris and Gothenburg are adapting local infrastructure and amenities to deal with excess rain – and ways to mitigate the worst effects of climate change in order to keep up with their ambitious climate neutrality objectives. For example, many are implementing local energy communities, or Climate City Contracts to reduce overall energy demands. At the same time, mayors noted that preparing and implementing their ambitious climate neutrality plans last year was not easy, and they were particularly concerned about the best ways to bring local people on board.

The **economic recovery** is the third highest-rated challenge by mayors, with 23.08% noting it as one of their top three challenges. However, with 15.38% of mayors choosing this in the no.1 position, it is by far the top challenge when looked at this way. The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns had a huge effect on the economic and social development of our cities, with many retail businesses, food services, hotel industries and tourism-linked businesses going bankrupt, and local social services often being overwhelmed by new needs and requests.

Some mayors noted the challenge of accessing recovery funding schemes, both EU and national, attracting private investments and targeting this support towards often complicated projects to speed up the green and digital transformations.

For mayors, managing the economic recovery can also mean making sense of new scenarios, such as finding ways to encourage people back to public transport, which suffered a drop in passenger numbers, or putting more resources into speeding up the digital transition, offering more e-government services to reflect changing habits, or building better public spaces, bringing more green to the city. Overall, mayors highlight their sense of responsibility to avoid economic stagnation and to use the crisis as an opportunity to build back better.

At the same time, and to a lesser extent, some mayors still found themselves having to implement pandemic measures such as physical distancing in 2022, which is why Covid-19 is noted as a separate challenge to the recovery (position nine, at 13.19%).

Migration ranks fourth in the top challenges reported by mayors, but is connected very closely to number five, **Russia's war in Ukraine**, given that the current migration flows are particularly linked to the huge numbers of Ukrainian

refugees as a consequence of this Russian war in Europe. With around seven million Ukrainians leaving their country in a very short space of time, the natural destination for most was big European cities, with cities in Eastern Europe bearing the greatest responsibility for integrating and providing

services to new populations.

For example, Warsaw, which became host to around 300,000 refugees the first three months of the war, also swelled by 15% overall. The war is further considered by mayors to be the cause of other challenges they face, such as the growth in the overall cost of living. Moreover, for some Eastern European mayors in particular, one challenge was dealing with social tensions with Russian speaking minorities and the removal of Soviet era monuments.

Under the leadership of Dario Nardella, President of Eurocities, the network was particularly active in supporting Ukraine, both in the short term via knowledge exchange on how to welcome refugees, and in the long term via the preparation of a sustainable reconstruction of Ukrainian cities. This is explored in greater detail in the special section on Ukraine.

The state of **public finances**, in terms of local budgets, was considered a top challenge by one in six mayors. Beyond inflation, the Covid-19 pandemic required unprecedented public spending to support businesses and local people during turbulent times, while it also resulted in

lower tax revenues. In a similar vein, the green and digital transition need huge investments. While the European Union has offered important investments, in particular via the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and its RepowerEU initiative, it wasn't guaranteed that cities were involved in the distribution of these funds, and several national governments made it difficult for larger cities to access them.

It is unsurprising to see **housing** in the top 10 challenges reflected by mayors, as the housing crisis has been evident for many years in urban areas. There is urgent need not only to provide far more affordable housing units in our cities, but to also keep in mind environmental targets. The topic continues to be an important strand of Eurocities activities.

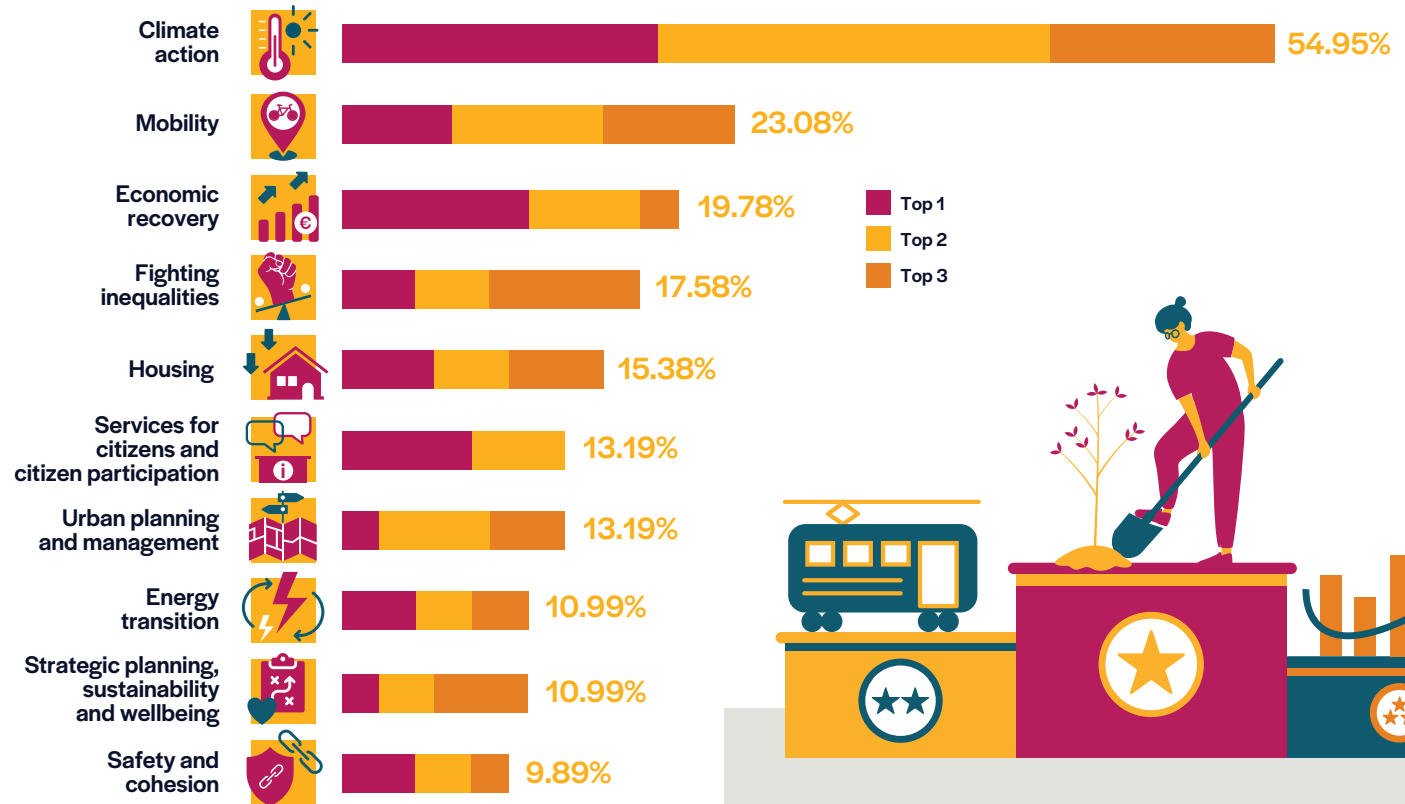
Over the longer term, it will be interesting to see which topical challenges stay high on mayors' agendas, with the energy crisis and impacts of inflation both threatening to yield longer-lasting pain. This is why we will repeat the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey on an annual basis and include it in each edition of the Eurocities Monitor.



Top Priorities for mayors for 2023

Climate action is by far the top priority for 2023, with more than half of mayors selecting it – more than double any other category. Given that many mayors have committed their city to climate neutrality targets, climate action at local level is more than a response to climate needs, but about inspiring and implementing a whole-of-society approach, by bringing local people, businesses and others on board in a combined effort. In their reflections, mayors mention concrete measures, such as developing low emission zones; steps to protect the environment, such as adding more greenery in the city or tackling air pollution; and promoting the circular economy and more sustainable practices throughout the city and in the city services. Climate action is strongly linked with **mobility**, which is the second highest priority, and the **energy transition**, another of the top 10 priorities for mayors.

Mayors' top 10 priorities in 2023



The focus on **sustainable mobility** scores comparatively much higher among mayors' priorities than it did as a challenge, and it is closely linked to the first goal to reduce carbon emissions. Many mayors will continue implementing the infrastructure projects that in some cases were already set up and financed in 2022, under the post-Covid recovery funding. There is a recurrent focus on developing and expanding metro and tram lines, renewing

green bus fleets, developing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and improving traffic management.

One out of five mayors put implementing the **economic recovery** as a top priority. Specifically, for many mayors this means implementing the ambitious and transformative recovery plans that were set up to respond to the pandemic. This entails finding ways to manage large investment

portfolios that need to be implemented quickly across often complex projects that promote more sustainability, resilience and inclusive economic growth. For example, Riga plans to create a new metro line, and better connections between the railway and urban transport system, made accessible through a single ticketing system.

There is a clear difference between the themes of the challenges mayors face and the priorities they are engaged with. For example, mayors' reflections on priorities are much more tied to improving urban liveability, such as by **fighting growing inequalities**, which was the fourth-highest priority, and focussing on **services for citizens and citizen participation** than on the structural demands of the job. For example, many mayors mentioned plans to involve more, and more diverse, voices in decision making processes, by setting up more citizens' dialogues, or finding ways to gather inputs from young people. In their comments on climate, many mention the need for a just transition, and when talking about sustainable urban mobility, many mayors highlighted how they will promote it as part of the culture of the city, and as a key enabler for a better quality of life.

With more people at risk of poverty as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and inflation, mayors point to growing social divides in their cities. Consequently, mayors are implementing targeted measures to help the most in need. This includes dedicated support and new social services to tackle new forms of poverty (such as energy poverty), and more targeted support to children, youth, the elderly and migrants.

Linked to inequalities, many mayors also prioritise **housing** (fifth-highest priority) with a focus on increasing the housing stock for more affordable and social housing, as well as supporting local people's access to decent housing with a minimum standard of living.

Improving urban planning and urban management is a priority that is often linked to the top two, i.e. climate action and mobility, but covers many other actions ranging from greening the city and making it more walkable, to developing plans to reactivate or reimagine how to use different areas of the urban space. Many mayors highlighted their concern to make such changes in consort with their local populations, and therefore plan to use evaluation systems to monitor public uses and satisfaction. Mayors are eager to leverage the power of good planning to improve the quality of life in the city.

The mayors also highlight how they aim to prioritise and **implement new frameworks for strategic planning, sustainability and wellbeing**. This can mean launching long-term and holistic strategies and action plans – linked for example to the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals or city net zero plans – and that link to the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability. Additionally, some mayors talk about integrating concepts such as the 15-minute city into their operations.

Rounding out the top 10 mayors' priorities for 2023 is **safety and cohesion**, which translates into promoting a sense of security in the city as well as promoting tolerance.



Working with the EU to promote local priorities

When asked how they expect the EU to support them with these priorities going forwards, the European mayors responded on the need for a more direct dialogue between cities and the EU, and on the need to simplify and make more direct all sources of EU funding for cities.

When it comes to establishing a direct dialogue between cities and the EU, there are many existing structures, narratives and examples to draw on that shape local policy today and that are strongly supported by Eurocities. The Urban Agenda for the EU, via its partnerships between city authorities, national ministries and the European Commission, is unique in bringing together all these collaborators to work on specific aspects of urban affairs. Some highlight how this way of working should be strengthened with more political ownership and structural support. The implementation last year of the 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission offers a broad approach towards climate neutrality by taking into account how cities work in practice.

Mayors highlight that the EU could support their economic recovery efforts by simplifying procedures for the absorption of EU funds and making sure that EU funds can flexibly be adapted to ongoing and future crises such as with the refugees, energy, and economic shocks. They further point out that EU funding schemes could help them more if they would provide direct support or, more generally, if they would be deployed by taking the local needs into account and by empowering them in their implementation.

In relation to the priority of climate action, mayors point to the need to reduce paperwork and bureaucracy for EU funds, while also developing more targeted legislation that can empower them and help them in delivering realistic targets aligned with local needs. Mayors highlight that financial tools for cross-border projects and international collaboration would help them develop and scale-up impactful climate solutions.

When it comes to implementing their priorities, mayors commented that EU regulation and policies can play both a positive role to accelerate change, or a negative one by ignoring local priorities. For example, in relation to their housing priority, mayors highlight that current EU rules do not allow them to implement the necessary changes and they would view positively an EU regulation that regulates real estate, promotes public housing and restrains housing price increases in cities.

Non-EU mayors point to the need for new policies and funding options for local administrations of candidate countries, which could be administered through city-specific approaches or by supporting cross-border actions between cities, both within and outside of the EU.

How do mayors expect the EU to support them with their priorities?

1

A more direct dialogue between cities and the EU on joint challenges and to improve the design of EU policies impacting cities

2

Simplification of procedures for the absorption (and direct funding) of EU funding to react to ongoing and future crises (including refugees, energy, economic)

3

Direct EU funding to empower cities to better reach joint EU targets

4

EU to develop new policies and fund options for local administrations of candidate countries through city-specific approaches

5

Less bureaucratic funding programmes and more targeted legislation to support cities' climate neutrality objectives

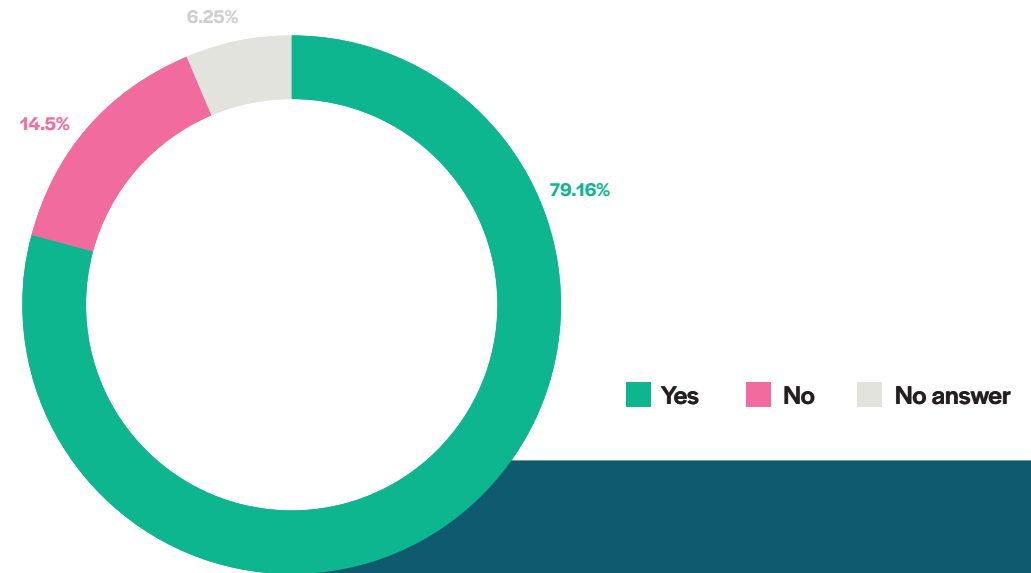
European mayors working with the EU level

European mayors have a very clear understanding that their action is dependent on the EU and that the EU is dependent on them. To mayors, the idea that one can tackle the most difficult problems of today without cooperation across levels of government is something that belongs to the past. This is very clear and undoubtedly part of the reason why almost 80% of our sample of 92 mayors (which rises to 92% when non-EU mayors are excluded), feel that they are contributing to EU policy priorities and processes.

The mayors are very aware of their active role in implementing a vast array of EU policy, such as via the European Pillar of Social Rights, or territorial investments earmarked through the EU's Cohesion Policy (amounting to around €20 billion to be directly managed in the current EU budget) or EU recovery plan; and in their active participation through other fora, such as the 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 Mission, as well as more generally on helping to deliver the goals of the European Green Deal. Mayors further reiterate their key role for EU institutions to coordinate and tackle multiple crises. Mayors were at the forefront of the Covid-19 and refugee crises, where the constant interaction between mayors and the EU level demarcates two clear examples of this growing relationship.

In their examples, mayors also highlight how they are not just implementing EU priorities on the ground, but many are increasingly personally involved in the EU political and legislative processes to ensure that the EU rules and funds support the real needs of city dwellers.

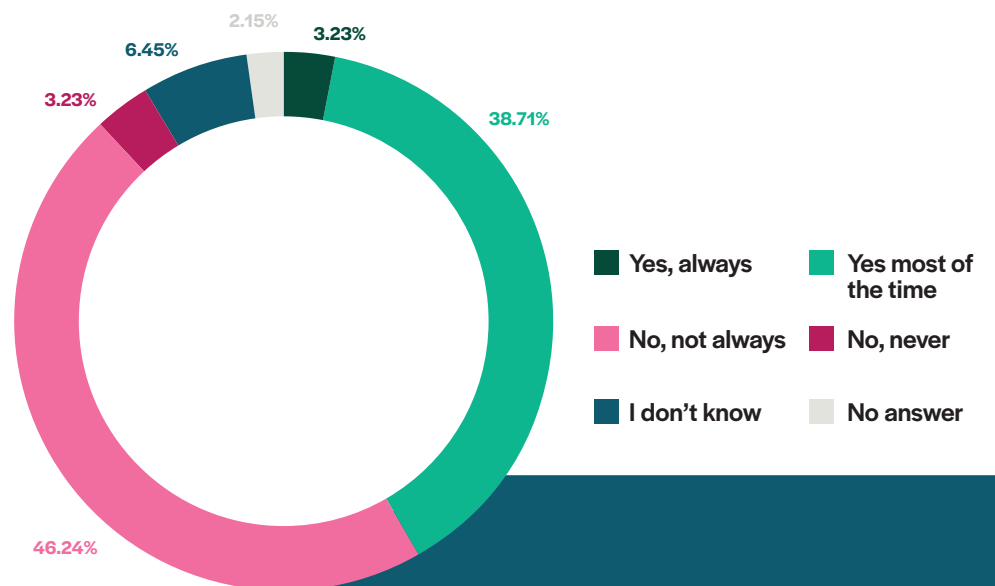
As a mayor from a European city, do you feel that you are contributing to EU policy priorities and processes?



Additionally, they see an important role for themselves in raising awareness to the general public about the EU and EU agendas, and in feeding back to the EU on how policy works in practice – much of which is boosted through collaboration in networks like Eurocities. Another feature that many mayors were keen to talk about was the further role of city networks like Eurocities to foster policy-learning through exchanges of best practices and other means.

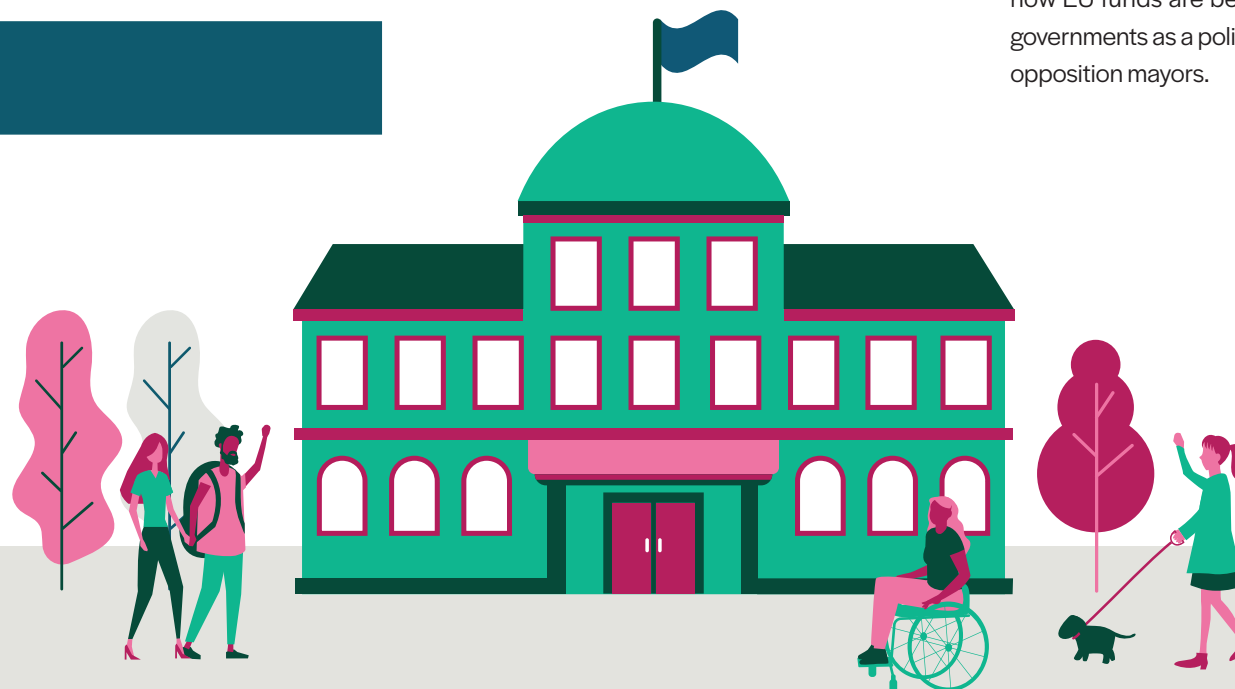
The few mayors that do not feel they are contributing to EU policies are mostly from candidate-countries or the UK. Among the EU mayors who feel they are not contributing to EU priorities, most explain that this is not due to lack of interest from their side but rather due to their feeling that, despite their efforts, they are not really setting the EU agenda as they wished, with their inputs provided via official consultations too often being overlooked, which links to the next point.

Do you feel that the EU institutions and policies take into account the specific needs and potential of cities effectively?



Almost 50% of mayors feel that the EU institutions and policies tend not to take into account their specific needs and the potential that cities offer. When limited to only EU based mayors, this number is somewhat more positive – with 50% answering “No, not always”, and 40.7% saying “Yes, most of the time”. This means that 52.6% of mayors from cities within the EU consider that the EU institutions and policies do not or not sufficiently take into account the specific needs and potential of cities. There is thus a huge potential for the EU institutions to work better with cities, a potential that Eurocities wants to develop with concrete proposals for the upcoming European elections.

A big factor in some of the negative sentiment shared by mayors was linked to expectations for a greater role for cities, rather than EU member states, in managing and using the post-Covid-19 recovery funding under the EU’s Recovery and Resilience Facility, as well as in the current Cohesion Policy programmes. The experience shared by many cities throughout the pandemic was one of being at the forefront of a crisis in which urban centres were hardest hit, and which has implications for future urban planning. Against this background, mayors lament a worrying centralisation trend in EU funds, a sentiment felt particularly strongly among Eastern European mayors who highlight how EU funds are being used by national governments as a political weapon against opposition mayors.



Another factor often cited concerns a perceived lack of a strong connection between city needs and EU action, with mayors saying that they do not consider they have adequate, direct, contact with the European Commission. Rather, there exists a fragmented landscape of many EU initiatives, and no horizontal coordination over urban matters at EU level, such as could be better managed via a European Commissioner for Urban Affairs.

Given the growing role of cities in achieving EU objectives, mayors see the need for a preferential mechanism for engaging cities and their elected representatives in EU decision-making, both regarding the preparation and the implementation of EU policies and legislation.

Many mayors cited that there is not enough support to develop green infrastructure and promote a just transition locally, nor enough attention given to the needs of cities when it comes to the renovation wave or climate mitigation policies. For example, the current EU proposal for a new Nature Restoration Law does not take into account the starting points of different cities, especially those with plentiful green spaces.

The same is often true regarding the misalignment of EU funding priorities and the real needs of cities, which are changing rapidly in response to many of the challenges already listed above. In relation to this, some mayors point to the lack of human resources available within their city administrations. This means that they do not have the necessary person-power to use the full potential of financing instruments available for cities. They therefore call for more focus on capacity building and administrative capacity.

On the other hand, roughly 42% of mayors do think their needs are taken into account, which rises to almost 45% when limited to mayors of cities in the EU. When asked to give a positive example, highlights included the earmarked budget for urban investments under the EU's Cohesion Policy, which opens up new possibilities for urban transformation; and a greater flexibility to combine different EU funds to focus on integrated urban development and promote metropolitan thinking.

For example, in Italy, the PON METRO, the national operational programme for metropolitan cities, directly made available funds for over €800 million to Italy's 14 major metropolitan cities, which was later supplemented by €1.2 billion through REACT-EU, an exceptional additional programme launched by the European Commission to help respond to and recover from the pandemic. In the next programming period the regular allocation will rise to €3 billion and will be extended to mid-size cities in Southern Italy.

Additionally, the existence of several programmes with dedicated financing, such as via the European Social Fund Plus, is highly appreciated as it helps to tackle specific urban needs around poverty, immigration and other areas.

Moreover, as mentioned above, the creation of many new tools and frameworks, as well as the 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, helps to put new attention on cities as the main drivers localising the European Green Deal, and Europe's transformation.

Around 45% of the mayors surveyed suggest that they have encountered situations where current EU rules and policies prevent them from achieving their goals - this rises to more than 50% when only EU mayors are considered. Given the growing importance of the EU for cities and vice versa, this is not surprising, but does highlight some areas for improvement.

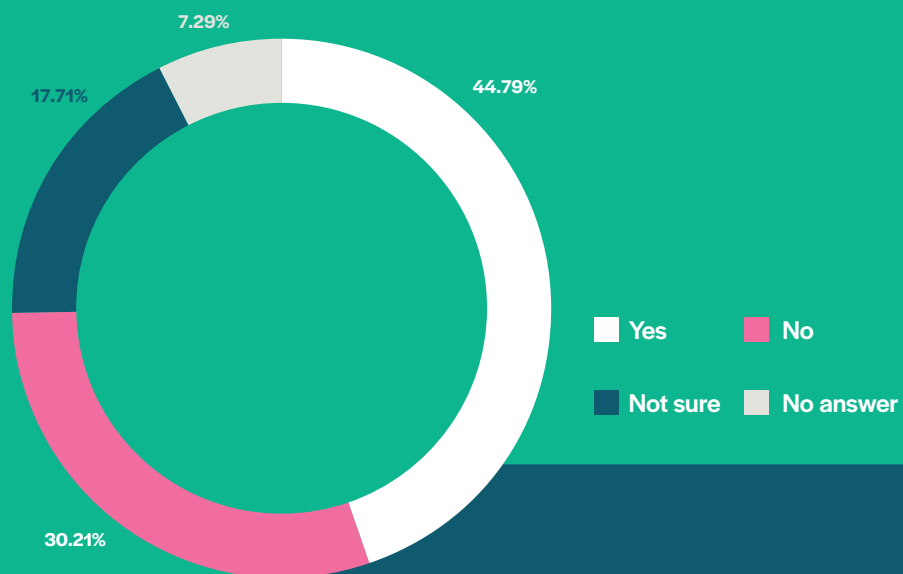
For example, mayors report on EU rules for social housing often being too strict for a city to invest effectively; the EU rules on state aid not allowing them to support their municipal companies, SMEs and start-ups as they would like; and the EU budget rules undermining the ability of cities to choose their public spending strategies and promote public investments.

Another gripe commonly shared among mayors concerns EU public procurement rules, which are focused on promoting the EU's single market and competitiveness and negate the possibility for local authorities to include environmental and social criteria in their contract conditions that would ensure, among others, living wages and fair work conditions.

Furthermore, EU data rules are not effectively supporting cities in their efforts to manage the impact of short-term holiday rentals, and, more generally, data management in the public interest.

When it comes to EU climate legislation, mayors appreciate the ambition at EU level, but as in the case of the Nature Restoration Law already mentioned above, they highlight the importance of working with cities to take into account specific local conditions and avoid one-size-fits-all solutions.

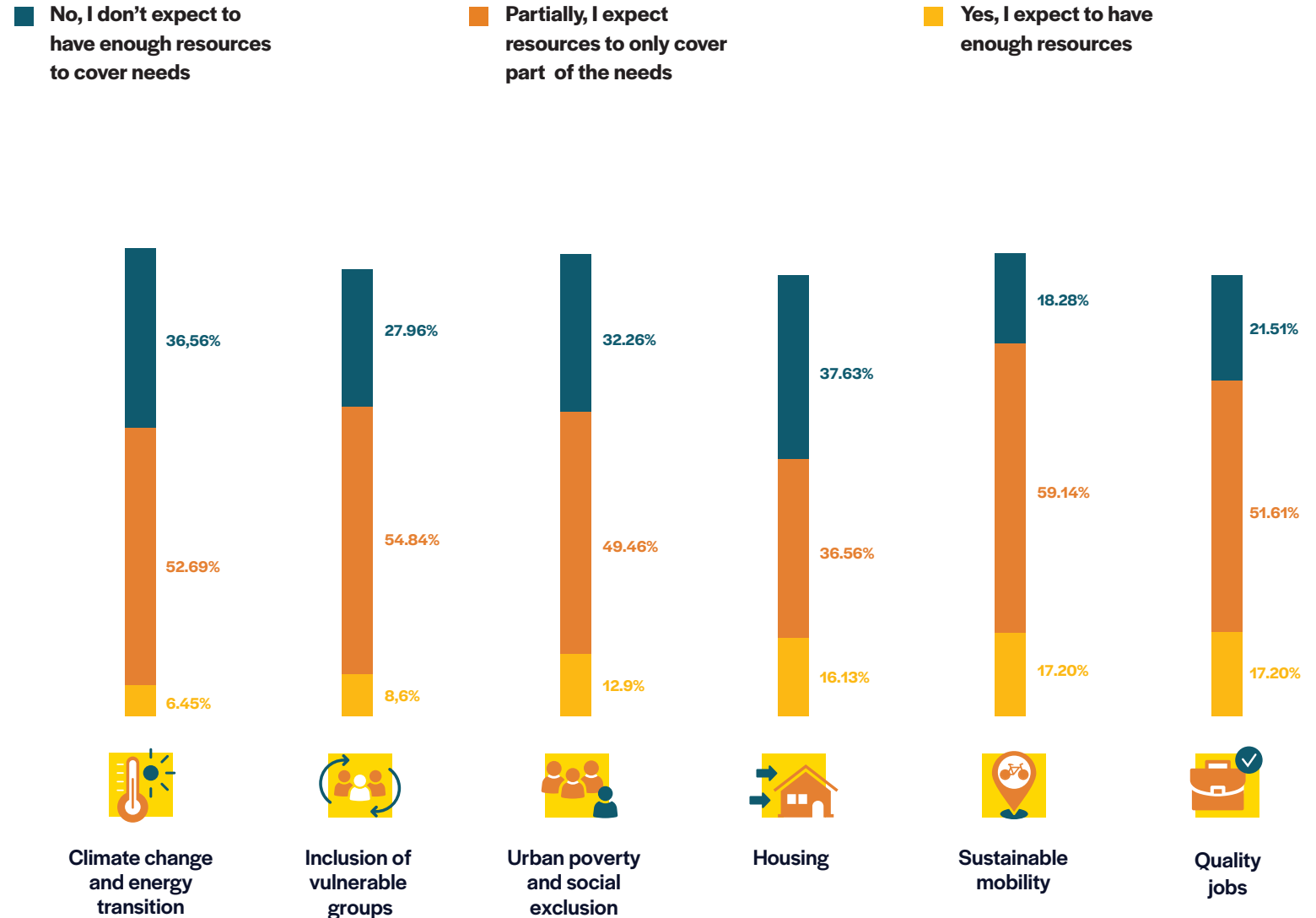
Have you encountered situations where current EU rules and policies prevent you from achieving your goals at the local level?



Mayors' financial needs in key policy areas

When it comes to their expectations of being able to fund different priorities and where the greatest gaps exist in their projections for the next five years, mayors clearly highlight that current resources are not enough. This is particularly true for **climate action** and the **energy transition**, two top priorities, for which only 6.45% expect to have enough resources to meet needs. For the majority of the top priorities for 2023, including **migration, urban poverty, housing,** and **sustainable mobility** less than one out of five mayors expect to have enough resources.

Do you anticipate that you will have sufficient resources to match the needs of your city in each of the selected policy areas in the next five years?

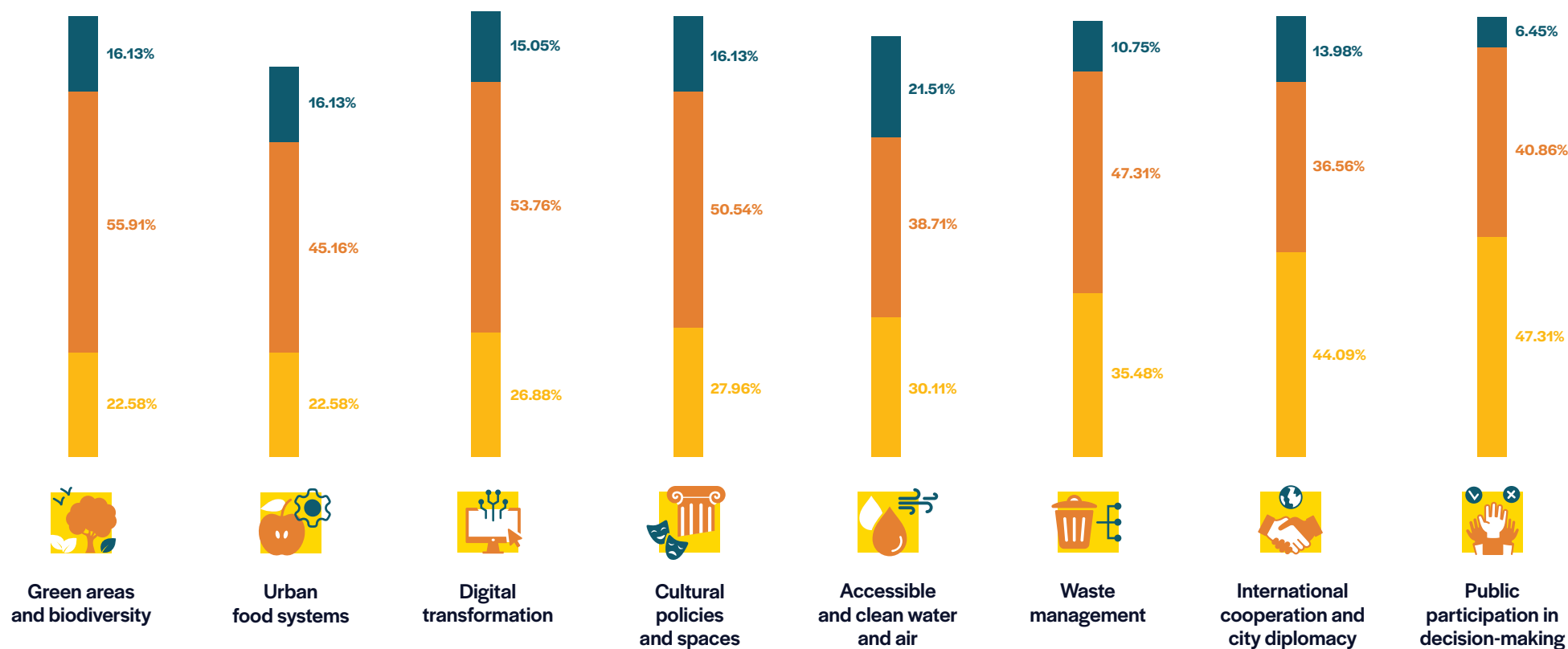


While it's clear that most mayors report they will not be able to fully fund urban needs in each of these areas, the majority (50-80%) do believe they will have enough resources to sufficiently match these needs. Still, this means that for priorities like housing, climate and the energy transition, there are still 37.63% and 36.56% of mayors respectively who do not expect to have enough resources, with 32.26% also saying they will not be able to sufficiently cover challenges around urban poverty and social exclusion.

The fact that financial gaps at city level exist in these fields is not new, but given the unprecedented resources made available around Europe for the post-Covid recovery, some of those numbers could still appear to be unexpected. This would point to the fact that those recovery investments do not always reach cities and that they are not always aligned with cities' needs.

On the other hand, for some mayoral priorities, such as public participation in decision making, waste management, and city diplomacy the situation is more positive, with respectively only 6.45%, 10.75% and 13.98% of mayors not expecting to have enough resources.

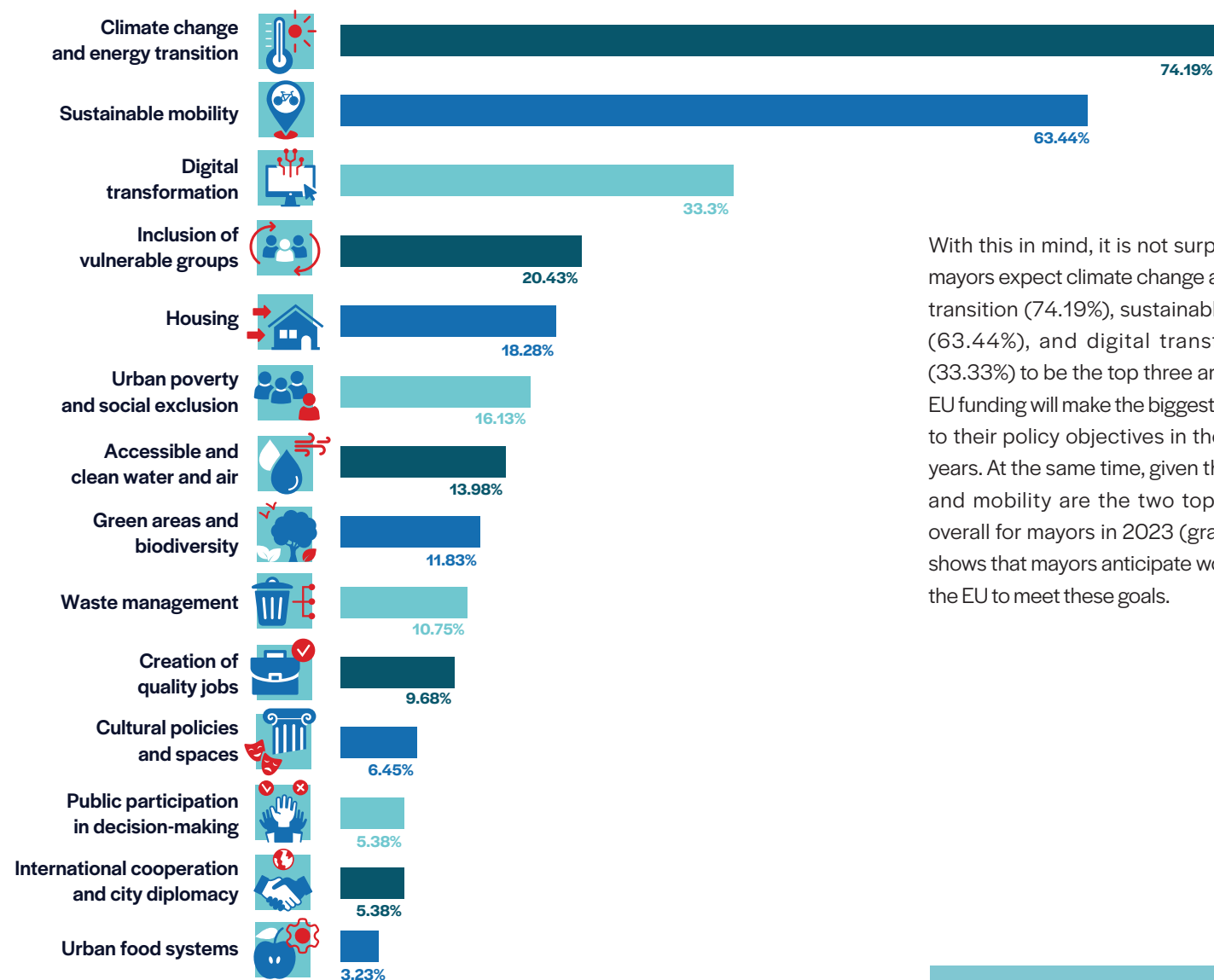
Regarding sustainable mobility, which registered as mayors' second top priority, only 18.28% do not expect to have enough resources, as opposed to 17.2% who do. One other area where it is anticipated for many more resources to be needed in the coming years is the digital transformation, in which many cities are already well ahead of the game, but where only 26.88% of mayors expect to have sufficient resources.



Mayors' expectations from EU funding

As highlighted by mayors responding to the Eurocities Pulse Survey 2023, EU funding is an essential support for cities. In the coming five years, an unprecedented amount of EU funds will be invested in cities, and in some cases these funds will be implemented directly by cities. These funds are naturally deployed to support EU priorities and objectives, especially investment into the twin transformations. For example, the EU Recovery plan has earmarked a minimum of 37% spending on climate and biodiversity and 20% to digital measures, while for the current EU budget period, 2021-27, EU Cohesion Funds earmark a minimum of 30% for climate action and put a strong emphasis on investments in sustainable mobility and infrastructure.

According to you, which are the three main areas where EU funding makes the biggest difference to your policy objectives in the next five years?



With this in mind, it is not surprising that mayors expect climate change and energy transition (74.19%), sustainable mobility (63.44%), and digital transformation (33.33%) to be the top three areas where EU funding will make the biggest difference to their policy objectives in the next five years. At the same time, given that climate and mobility are the two top priorities overall for mayors in 2023 (graph 2), this shows that mayors anticipate working with the EU to meet these goals.

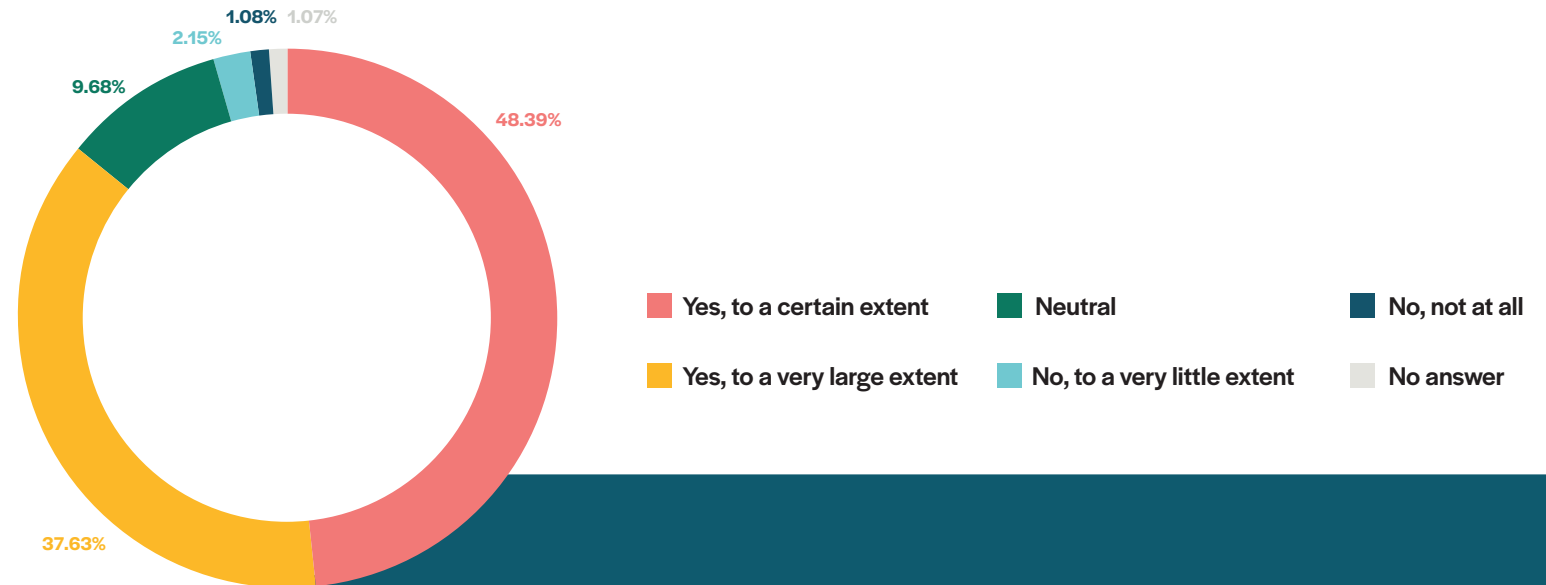
Looking at these results in relation to mayors' financial needs for their priorities, it is clear that EU funding is helping mayors to somewhat cover the huge financial gaps for climate and energy investments, while more investment is still needed. Meanwhile, it is also clear that such alignment is not perceived by mayors for other priorities where resources will be insufficient to match needs, such as housing and the inclusion of refugees, migrants, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. EU funding therefore does not seem to be a major force contributing to closing the financial gap in these areas, at least when compared to the other top areas highlighted above.



Impact of inflation on cities

Part of these calculations on financing needs is made on the basis of high inflation across Europe, with the jump in prices impacting cities' supply lines as well as public consumption patterns. At city level, over 86% of mayors said the current high-level of inflation had affected their ability to make strategic long-term investments. And although the areas targeted by the resulting budgetary cuts were quite diverse, over 25% cut their budgets for cultural policies and spaces, including sports facilities, with almost one quarter making similar cuts in investments into their budgets for public and sustainable transport and road maintenance.

Is the current high level of inflation affecting mayors' ability to make strategic long-term investments?

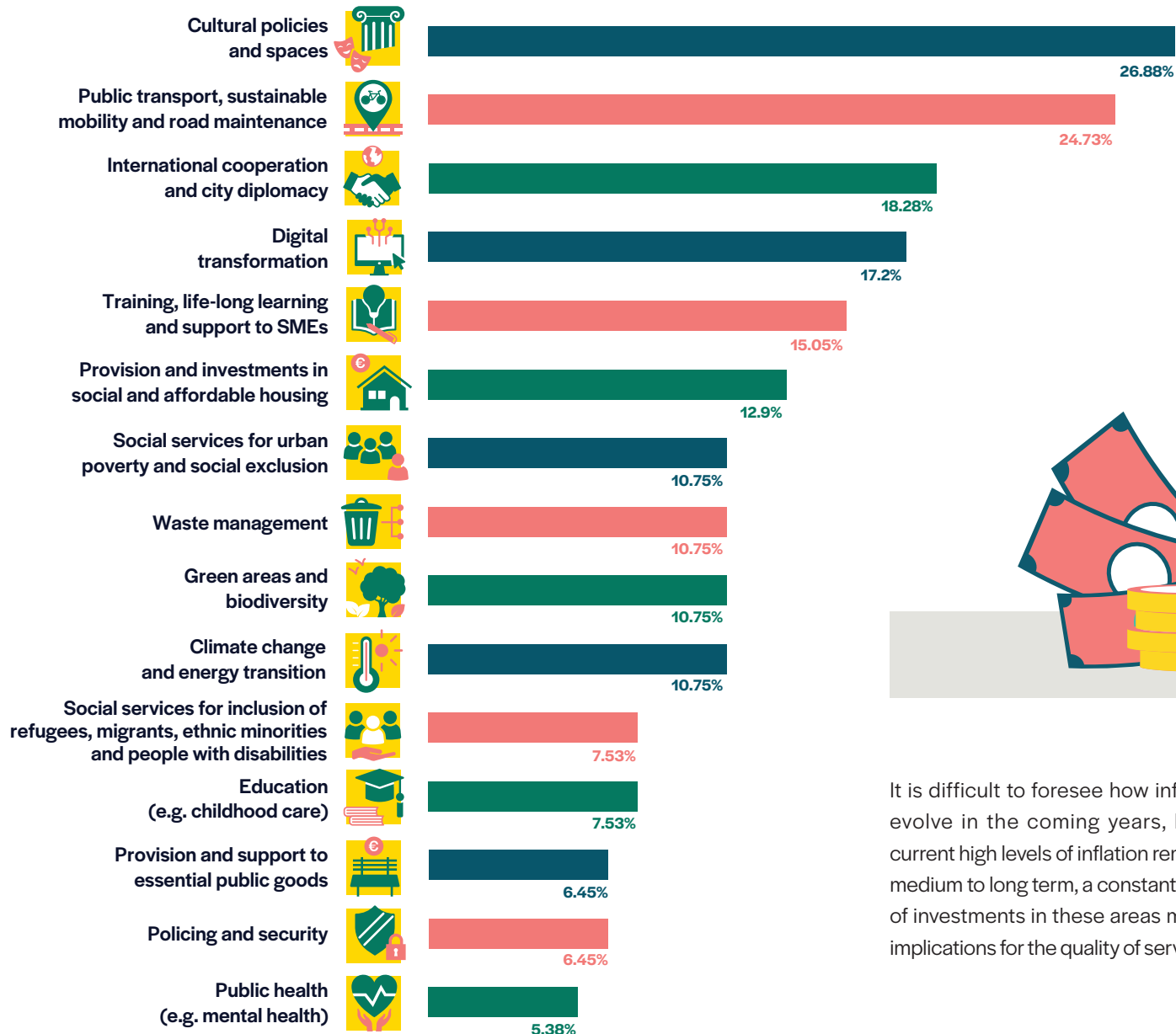


During the pandemic years, these have perhaps been two of the most obvious areas to cut, given that many cultural institutions were closed during the lockdowns, and because passenger numbers on public transport dropped as people stayed away from city centres. However, now such considerations must be made in a different context.

Mayors are trying so far as possible to avoid cuts to important public services, but as they have no choice in the current setup, they are often forced to reduce support or investments - which doesn't necessarily mean cutting services and activities - in areas that are more sensitive to inflation, such as cultural spaces and sports facilities, public transport,

sustainable mobility and road maintenance, international cooperation and city diplomacy.

Given the current inflation and energy crises, have you already, or do you plan to reduce either your city's support or postpone planned investment in the following public services?



It is difficult to foresee how inflation will evolve in the coming years, but if the current high levels of inflation remain in the medium to long term, a constant reduction of investments in these areas might have implications for the quality of services.

At the same time, the data suggests that mayors are particularly wary of reducing municipal support or postponing planned investments in areas that are crucial for the functioning of the city, such as public health, policing and security, as well as the provision and support to essential public goods (e.g. water).

Mayors engaging in city diplomacy

Mayors are increasingly engaged in matters concerning international affairs, both in their direct interactions with other levels of government, and in their outreach to and coordination with other cities, including through city networks like Eurocities. Mayors understand that if they want to stand a chance to solve local challenges they need to win the support of and cooperate with all levels of governments, including supranational ones. At the same time, supranational institutions and actors are very much aware of how important it is to directly engage cities to deliver on cross-border and global challenges, as highlighted in the guest essay by LSE Cities.

At city level, this represents a growing ability to project urban needs, and have this better reflected in policy and initiatives of all kinds. Given the continued urbanisation of European populations, understanding this power dynamic, and better profiling the voice of mayors, will lead to better policy that is more able to reflect real needs of people on the ground by offering practical solutions that ultimately work towards global and international goals.

Mayors' top ambition (52.69%) in the area of city diplomacy closely matches their top priority of climate action, given that a majority would like to focus on working with other cities to promote the transition to climate neutrality. This work is already happening, for example through the Mission, but it is important to expand

and upscale all work in this area, to share lessons as widely as possible, as cities lead the way towards a climate neutral Europe. This can also help strengthen the basis for the recognition of cities in global and climate agendas.

Another two areas of high importance are strengthening engagement in city networks (44.09%) and engaging in city-to-city partnerships (51.61%). For cities, these relationships can be crucial multipliers for positive effects, and are especially important for cities' ability to project their growing power in other domains, such as working with sister cities in Ukraine, or finding ways to offer humanitarian and emergency assistance, as many Eurocities member cities have been able to do for their sister cities in Turkey in recent months.

One third of mayors listed humanitarian, emergency assistance, and security, in their top areas for city diplomacy, with many mayors expecting to further engage in activities to support Ukraine's resistance and reconstruction. When it comes to climate action, mayors are not only eager to work with each other to scale up solutions, but they also have an ambition to shape global sustainability and climate agendas. One third of mayors put their engagement in UN activities such as COP27 or the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as a top priority. Unsurprisingly, a similar amount also view influencing and contributing to EU priorities, projects, and processes as a top priority.



Which are the top three areas for you to engage in city diplomacy activities?





Cities in the eye of the storm

Ben Rogers, Bloomberg Distinguished Fellow in Government Innovation and Director of the European Cities Programme at LSE Cities

How can we make sense of the context in which Europe's city leaders operate?

We could borrow an analogy from geology of different strata of government, laid down across time. Most European cities date back to medieval times, often the days of Ancient Greece and Rome. And many European city governments can trace their origins to freedoms won or charters granted in the 12th or 13th centuries, when cities were very much the most important force in the lives of their citizens. But the 16th to the 19th century development of nation states introduced a very powerful layer. Many big innovations in government – from professional armies, to national banks and currencies, or new national services including post, rail and road networks – were creations of the nation state, as were the wars that ravished Europe's cities in the first half of the 20th century. More recently, Europe's nation states have been overlaid by international organisations of the post-war period.

Geological metaphors, however, are not sufficiently dynamic to describe reality on the ground. Europe's city leaders are more like sailors, with currents, tides and wind interacting in unpredictable ways. Despite the advent of powerful national and international governments, cities have continued to supply vital services and develop new ones for their citizens. In the 19th and early 20th century, Europe's cities often led the way in pioneering social and infrastructural services (public transport, sanitation, policing and lighting) later adopted by nation states. Today, European cities retain their own municipal institutions, civic cultures and political ambitions.

Urban, national and international governments sometimes align, sometimes oppose. National governments provide most public funding, but with this comes dependency and restraint, often resented by urban leaders. Despite its directly elected parliament, the EU is meant to answer first and foremost to its member states. For most of its existence, the great part of its budget went to rural areas.

More recently, however, the EU has developed an active regional and cities agenda, funding economic development, social inclusion and climate. Still more recently, the EU and cities have started making common cause against the populism and democratic backsliding of some national governments. All the while, governments at all scales find themselves subject to atmospheric pressures of technological disruption, globalisation and shifting geo-politics.

The job of leading Europe's cities is exciting and highly challenging, being so close to people and places that tend to be rich in history, culture, community and public life, often liberal and forward-looking in spirit and increasingly well connected with other city governments, thanks to networks like Eurocities.

European cities are not as evidently dominant in the world's economy or politics as in the age of European empires, but they have retained and perhaps augmented their soft power. Many are experimenting with radical new approaches to development, inclusion and climate action. Some commentators argue that 19th century Europe is a model for the 21st: dense, mixed activity and car-free – albeit with electric bikes and scooters substituting for horses and carts. Forward to the past!

The challenges come from the severely limited funding and powers at cities' disposal. Despite all the policy talk from institutions like the EU, OECD and UN about empowering cities, Europe's urban governments have gained few new powers, and in some countries, particularly those with populist regimes, have actually lost them. At the same time, European city leaders face growing pressures: rising inequalities, climate change and ecological breakdown, pandemics, disruptive technologies, war and mass migration, populism and nativism. If we are entering the age of the permacrisis, cities are in the eye of the storm.

The Eurocities Pulse survey gives us a fascinating snapshot of the current concerns of urban Europe as seen by its leaders. The first thing worth underscoring is how fast-moving political developments are. Over one generation, cities in Eastern Europe have gone from building post-Soviet political and economic systems to grappling with energy prices, carbon emissions, refugee integration, inflation and housing— all exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. In Western Europe, preoccupations with post-war reconstruction, and de-industrialisation have had to make room for ecological and social imperatives.

Second, urban priorities have a distinctive character. How many national leaders would rank mobility, citizen participation and new frameworks of wellbeing – or even housing – among their top priorities? Yet these loom large in the Eurocities Pulse survey. City voters have distinctive concerns stemming, in part perhaps, from their backgrounds (often younger, more highly educated, and recent migrants) and in part from the pressures of crowded city life.

Third, city leaders are struggling to address the strategic challenges, in the press of urgent, short-term ones. According to the Eurocities Pulse survey, while most mayors' current priorities fall into the 'immediate and urgent' category, they are looking forward to turning to the 'long-term and important' ones next year!

All this points to the essential role of organisations devoted to supporting European city governments. Eurocities has grown over the last few decades into a leading network, connecting city leaders, encouraging peer learning and collaboration and amplifying local administrations' voice on national, continental, and international platforms. The European Cities Programme at LSE Cities, funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, was only set up in 2021. But we have become increasingly convinced of the potential for an academic centre devoted to researching European cities and building the capacity of city governments and the skills of current and future European city leaders.

Cities making a difference: Ukraine and the energy crisis



Cities action for Ukraine

City-to-city cooperation has taken on new meaning following Russia's illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Long established twinnings, cooperation through networks such as Eurocities, and friendships between mayors have provided a basis for cities to demonstrate their ability to be diplomatic actors.

Millions of Ukrainian refugees have found food, shelter, kinship, schooling and jobs in Europe's cities. Emergency support has been disbursed to provide people in Ukraine with everyday items and medical equipment.

As the Russian attacks increasingly targeted Ukrainian cities – including the Eurocities member cities of Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lviv and Odesa – mayors from West and East undertook innumerable solidarity actions and held many calls, including with Vitali Klitschko, Mayor of Kyiv, and President of the Association of Ukrainian Cities, to understand what actions would be the most useful, including at political level.

In March 2022, within three weeks of the outbreak of war, thousands of people took to public squares across Europe to show solidarity with Ukraine. In total more than 150 European cities participated in the #CitiesWithUkraine initiative launched by Eurocities.

Local leaders and demonstrators gathered to call for peace in Ukraine and to oppose Russia's assault on democracy and freedom. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy strengthened those messages in a live address to a 35,000-strong crowd in Florence, which was broadcast to the other cities around Europe.

In August, led by the Mayor of Florence, an international delegation of mayors from the rest of Europe undertook a mission to Kyiv to speak with President Zelenskyy and sign a Memorandum of Understanding to support the sustainable rebuilding of Ukrainian cities. The agreement, which outlines plans to match rebuilding needs in Ukraine with capabilities of other European cities, put many mayors in direct contact with one another and adds to the mix of other city-to-city collaborations, such as the Sustainable rebuilding of Ukrainian cities pilot project, outlined below.

This speed of action, and ability to act on the ground, is something that European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen remarked on in her meeting with several mayors from the Eurocities network in October 2022: cities are practical actors, able to quickly put in place workable solutions, which is something very much needed at the current moment.

For example, the cities of Gdansk and Riga sent buses to Lviv and Kyiv respectively because the Ukrainian cities lost several during the Russian attacks. And, following a request from Borodyanka saying that the water supply had been affected, Gdansk was able to send material aid to help repair the damage.

The early activation of the EU's Temporary Protection Directive granted Ukrainians safe access to education, employment and public services in EU member states for a period of three years. While this relieves pressures on the asylum system, it increases pressures elsewhere at city level. For example, in Warsaw, where around three million people transited in the first six months of the war, over 20,000 Ukrainian children are now also attending school.

Elsewhere, such as in Utrecht, employing Ukrainian professionals 'in exile' in European cities is an initiative that, if replicated in other cities, has great potential to facilitate knowledge sharing, train the municipal workforce and promote political buy-in for a sustainable reconstruction.



Generating hope

‘Generators of hope’ – a campaign launched jointly by Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, and Dario Nardella, President of Eurocities in Autumn 2022 – brings practical aid to the people of Ukraine by delivering a massive supply of power generators at a time of urgent need.

Following months of missile bombardments and drone attacks by Russia on the critical civilian infrastructure of Ukraine, in violation of international humanitarian law, more than 40% of Ukraine’s power stations have been damaged or destroyed, leaving millions of Ukrainians without electricity.

Cities assembled to send more than 500 power generators and thousands of items of electrical equipment and heaters to help Ukrainians deal with the lack of electricity and heating throughout the cold winter months. Turku, Leipzig and Florence were among the first cities to commit generators to Ukrainian cities as part of the Generators of Hope campaign.

For Leipzig, which had an active city twinning with Kyiv from before the war, the existing relationship was massively intensified. As a result, over €100,000 worth of aid was quickly mobilised, even before the winter set in, to send

generators that can be used in schools, public buildings, mobile heat centres or as power supply for water pumps. And, in cooperation with Munich, the city is investigating the possibility of ongoing joint support in the reconstruction efforts.

Towards a sustainable rebuilding

In the medium to long term, the interactions between city authorities and relations built up between mayors are likely to be essential in setting the course for reconstruction efforts in Ukraine.

Already, a Eurocities initiative for the Sustainable rebuilding of Ukrainian cities has set up a pilot project between 36 Eurocities member cities and 10 Ukrainian cities and agglomeration areas to run a series of capacity-building workshops towards this end. The project is being run in close collaboration with the Association of Ukrainian Cities, and takes as a starting point understanding the state of needs of the Ukrainian cities. Focused on green reconstruction, the pilot will test working methods and identify tools to assist Ukrainian cities in initiating reconstruction projects.

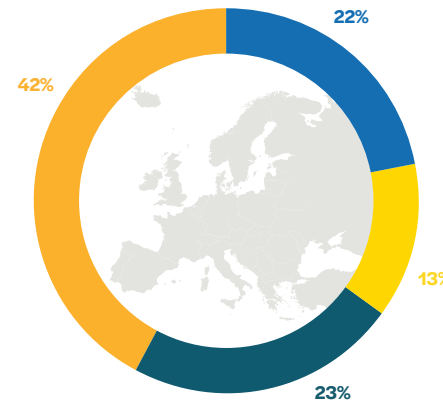
The initiative seeks to produce a reconstruction blueprint based on principles of sustainable development, which can inform wider efforts, such as the EU’s RebuildUkraine initiative and the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine.

In research carried out involving 115 Eurocities member cities across 37 countries in October and November 2022, 64% already had a cooperation

partnership with a Ukrainian municipality, and 19% were starting or actively looking for one.

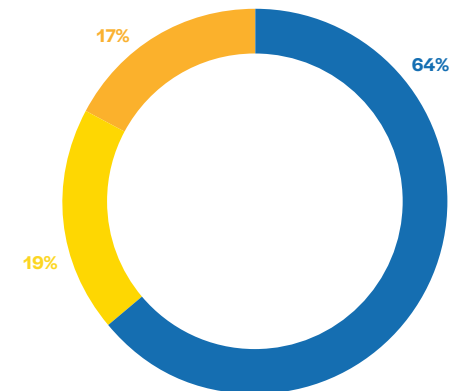
Of these, Poland and Germany have the highest numbers of established or intended partnerships with Ukraine, with German cities also representing the largest share of new partnerships (37%). Moreover, almost half of all partnerships are established with Ukraine’s largest three cities: Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa.

Geographic overview of participating cities



- Central and Eastern Europe
- Northern Europe
- Southern Europe
- Western Europe

Does your city have a partnership with a Ukrainian city?

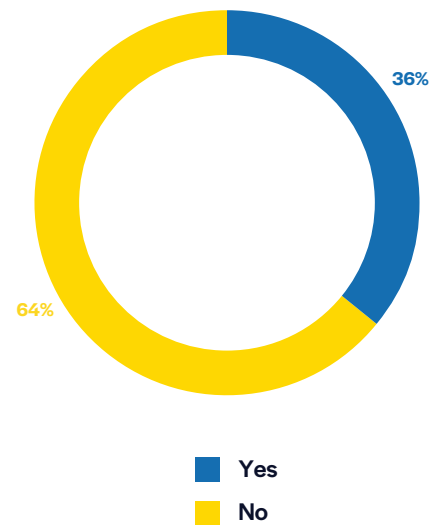


- Yes
- Not yet, but starting or looking for a partnership
- No



The objective of the project is to closely mirror the European Green Deal and the principles of the New European Bauhaus, in order to prepare for a sustainable and climate neutral rebuilding. Thus, it is further interesting to note that sustainability and sustainable urban development are in the scope of only 36% of the established or intended partnerships between Eurocities members and Ukrainian cities – and that 51% of these are with a partner city from Western Europe, while 25% are from Northern Europe.

Does your partnership focus on environmental sustainability and sustainable urban development?



GENERATORS OF HOPE



Going forwards, many old, or dormant city-to-city agreements must now be updated to expand the scope of these partnerships and to include considerations for future reconstruction needs.

One such sustainable partnership is between Munich and Kyiv, which previously collaborated in the field of energy efficiency. The aim was to increase energy efficiency in Ukraine in general in order to improve the security of energy supply, reduce dependence on fluctuating energy imports and, at the same time, increase local added value through investments.

Furthermore, between 2015-2020, Kyiv participated in the European project ‘Smarter Together’ as an observer city. In this project, Munich and other European partners tested and exchanged information on new technologies in urban development.

Kyiv was thus able to develop its know-how on energy efficiency and renewable energies and to discuss climate protection measures and projects with its partner city, in much the same way as is now hoped for via the Sustainable Rebuilding of Ukrainian Cities pilot project.

Given that there are many initiatives seeking to support Ukraine that are running in parallel, one of the top challenges for initiatives run at city level is to avoid duplications. This means that maintaining good communication between cities is crucial to ensure that such efforts are coordinated with Ukrainian cities.

Another challenge will be to enlarge the scope of cooperation beyond the largest urban centres to mid-size and smaller cities to support territorially just reconstruction efforts.



More than words, generators

Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament

The European Parliament is standing with the brave people of Ukraine. We have done this since the first day of this brutal and illegal Russian war. We stand in support of an independent and free Ukraine. We stand with a future member of the European Union.

As the Russian aggression shows no sign of abating, we will continue our firm, strong and principled support to Ukraine. We do this politically - and with financial, humanitarian and military aid. Because Ukraine must win. Freedom must win and democracy and the rules-based world order must win.

Since the beginning of the war, missile and drone attacks by Russia have destroyed or damaged a terrifyingly large number of Ukraine's power stations, leaving millions of Ukrainians without electricity. Figures point to over 40% of Ukraine's energy system being hit or damaged.

Further to political declarations and resource commitments on a European and national level, which remain indispensable, actions can also be taken on a local level by addressing Ukrainians' everyday needs. This is the idea behind our campaign 'Generators of Hope,' which the European Parliament launched last November with Dario Nardella, Mayor of Florence and President of Eurocities. We call on all cities across the European Union to donate power generators to Ukraine, aiding Ukrainians to get through energy and infrastructure shortages. Something that will make a tangible difference in their lives.

These generators will help to keep essential facilities in the country running, providing energy to hospitals, schools, water supply facilities, relief centres, shelters and phone masts. By doing so, we are significantly alleviating living conditions for our Ukrainian friends.

History always teaches us something - and the construction of the European Union has been built on common responses. This donation campaign has become an exercise of concrete EU solidarity in action, from north to south, from public to private sectors, from collective to individual donors. Ghent, in Belgium, sent 14 high voltage generators, Hannover, in Germany, deployed 10 generators. Tallinn, in Estonia, 10 generators. Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, in Finland, just collected nearly 120 generators, power units, heaters and other devices in support of Ukraine, from 70 different donors. Lisbon, in Portugal, Vienna in Austria, Timisoara in Romania just announced they were joining the campaign. I know others will follow. There is no end date to this campaign. Your donation will always be welcomed.

A few weeks ago when I visited Lviv, I had a chance to speak to the Speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada), Ruslan Stefanchuk, who personally expressed his gratitude for all the much-needed donations.

Our priority is to end the war in Ukraine – while Moscow wants us to start looking away, to lose our focus, to wear us out. Every day Ukrainians continue to fight for European values as well. Our support must remain unwavering. Let us join efforts and make a difference every morning, every cold day, in every village in Ukraine. Let us keep providing generators and hope.

We must continue our steadfast practical, tangible support to Ukraine. We have an obligation to support their daily fights and struggles. With more than words, with generators. We have, literally, the power to make it happen.



Cities at the forefront of the fight against the Energy Crisis

Kadri Simson, European Commissioner for Energy

As we emerge from the worst energy crisis in a generation, it is a timely opportunity to look back on our collective achievements over the past year. 2022 was an extraordinarily difficult one – driven primarily by Russia's unprovoked war on Ukraine and the deliberate attempt to turn energy into a political weapon.

With REPowerEU, the European Union came out with a decisive plan to respond to the energy challenges and to accelerate the EU's clean energy transition. There is no doubt that the energy transition we see at Union level could not have been achieved without the commitment of cities and the contribution of citizens at local level.

This year, the focus is on moving from crisis response to actions which improve each citizen's life in the longer term. This will be achieved if the EU, national and local levels concentrate efforts on creating a clean, secure and affordable energy system.

Our REPowerEU plan builds the fundament for this transition. Already last year, we made some incredible progress: Measures taken under the plan have helped us to significantly reduce our dependence on Russian fossil fuels. And it has shielded our citizens from the worst of the market volatility.

Through all of this, the local authorities and citizens of our cities and towns have played an indispensable role. Last year, we replaced a large share of gas with an additional 50 GW of renewable power generation and households were one of the main achievers of this. Europeans have demonstrated remarkable initiative and leadership on renewables in recent years, installing millions of solar photovoltaic panels on their roofs, putting heat pumps in their homes and turning to electric vehicles. Local authorities and citizens have once again proven their readiness and resilience.

On top of delivering ambitious local climate solutions, cities have put in place immediate low-cost actions to reduce energy demand in public facilities, while supporting the most vulnerable households and local business. The Covenant of Mayors' *Cities Energy Saving Sprint*, for instance, implemented in over 50 cities, offers a prime example of how local authorities mobilised themselves with energy saving tips on heating, lighting and mobility.

Despite the achievements, all players need to cement this direction of travel. The Commission is determined to be bolder on this front.

Our REPowerEU plan aims to more than double the total renewable electricity generation capacity by 2030, compared to 2021. Measures such as the EU Commission's proposed reform of the electricity market design will support cities in achieving this heightened level of ambition and empower and protect consumers. New rules will ensure that all consumers benefit from the low costs of renewables directly in their energy bills, but crucially for cities, towns and villages, the reform will empower citizens to share clean, renewable energy directly within their local communities.

When it comes to energy efficiency, municipalities each manage a large portfolio of building stock (both public and commercial), and have competences in urban planning, built infrastructure, public lighting and transport. They are therefore best placed to be drivers of reform in achieving our ambitious new targets for 2030 and 2050 set by the recently enhanced Energy Efficiency Directive.

I know that energy and climate remain high on the agenda for towns and cities across Europe. It's essential that we consolidate our achievements of the past year and move towards long-term structural solutions. As the closest level of government to our citizens, I am confident that local authorities will continue to play a vital role in this regard. Our energy security depends on it.

Cities taking on the energy crisis

Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 triggered shock waves in global energy markets, leading to price volatility, supply shortages, security issues and economic uncertainty. It compounded the need for fundamental policy changes to end our reliance on fossil fuels, made more acute in Europe due to its reliance on Russian supplies. At city level, it spurred rapid actions over the last year to counteract the rising cost of living and to support people and businesses alike.

Cities responded rapidly, taking bold steps to reorganise services, reallocate budgets, and shield the most vulnerable groups of people through targeted social measures. Energy poverty, which before the war already affected around one in ten Europeans according to [Eurostat](#) figures, is now rising fast in many cities. The public transport sector, which was hard hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, is now facing significant increases in running costs. Similarly, inflation puts local SMEs in severe difficulties, and public facilities, such as cultural institutions and sports institutions were closed or only partially kept open as a step to save energy and reduce costs in short-term emergency measures.

With a further short and medium-term focus to reduce energy demand, which has been helped by higher prices; the long-term vision for the EU must be to achieve energy independence by accelerating the roll out of renewable energy systems and dramatically cutting energy consumption. Given that around 70% of total global CO2 emissions are produced in urban areas, cutting Europe's dependence on fossil fuels will not be possible without cities on board.



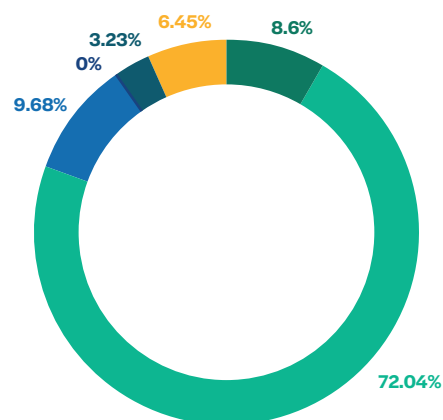
Multilevel challenges

The European Union responded to this energy crisis with a series of measures under the RePowerEU plan, aimed at putting Europe on a path to energy independence from Russia as soon as possible. It both boosts existing legislation, including new targets for renewable energy production, and sets out an ambition to double the EU's solar photovoltaic capacity by 2025 and install 600GW by 2030 by speeding up the permit process for certain renewable energy installations.

City authorities are at the forefront of efforts to support EU and national climate objectives by reducing consumption, scaling up renewable energy projects and democratising the provision of clean energy, but must be supported and empowered while they implement those policies. Many Eurocities member cities have already taken fast short-term measures to keep on track both in the ongoing context of the energy crisis, as well as in the broader ambitious climate framework of the EU. For example, Berlin quickly put an energy saving package in place, aiming to save at least 10% of public sector energy consumption, including in schools, universities, and court houses. This included a 17 degree policy in public buildings during evenings and night-time. The city also set up a Crisis Fund to support households through an energy relief package.

At the same time, at local level, city leaders must fulfil a double role: getting individuals and other local actors on board for the necessary and urgent changes required in changing behaviour and consumer choices; and working with other levels of government, especially nationally, to ensure that the implementation of energy transition measures is as smooth as possible.

Considering your local constraints, do you foresee you will be able to contribute to your national energy reduction efforts?

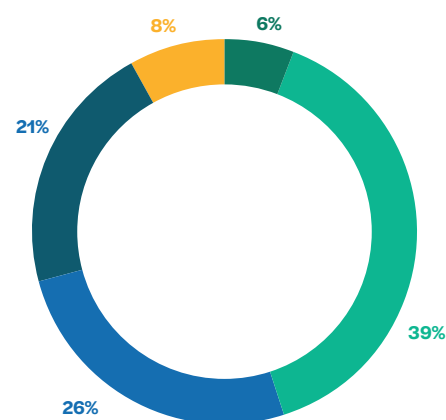


- Yes, to a very large extent
- Yes, to a certain extent
- No, only very marginally
- No, not at all
- Don't know
- No answer

Taking a look at the data from the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey shows that while most cities have only received some or not much direct support from their national government to deal with the increased municipal costs of energy, most (65%) are still confident they can contribute to their national energy reduction targets.

The revision of the National Energy and Climate Plans, currently under submission, should provide a clear roadmap for how those goals will be achieved in practice. However, they won't be successful unless cities are really involved in the design and the implementation of the actions.

Did your city receive financial support from your national government?



- Yes, we received a sizable support
- Yes, we received some support
- No, we didn't receive much support
- No, we didn't receive any support at all
- No Answer

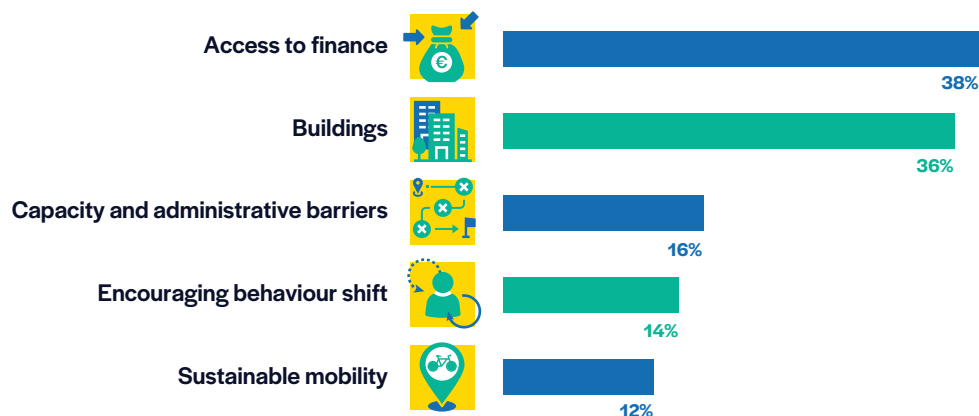
Despite this, the top three challenges mayors report being faced with when looking at ways to speed up the energy transition in their city are access to finance, considering how to best make buildings energy efficient, and dealing with a lack of administrative capacity locally. In all of these areas, some of the most common comments received from mayors are about developing the appropriate technical and financial frameworks at national and European levels to streamline the work done at local level.

When it comes to access to finance, the main challenge mentioned by mayors is a lack of financial resources or financing lines to address the high level of investments required for the energy transition. With less ability to raise the required sums locally, many cities find it necessary to look firstly to national schemes for support.

A proposed golden rule in the EU's fiscal framework would offer greater flexibility to long-term investment at the local level, by excluding investments into the green or digital transitions. In addition, with a focus on increasing the total amount of finance and investments from alternative sources, there is a strong need to scale up existing solutions from pioneering cities. This requires building the capacity of many local administrations to get them more comfortable with the way private investment is structured. For example, new skills may need to be brought in, or developed within a city administration.

Regarding the challenge of building renovations, while financing plays a huge part, mayors face many other issues. Notably, many of the older buildings that are most in need of renovation are privately owned, which requires incentivising owners to make the investments and facilitating participatory processes for collective renovation projects; and other buildings owned by the city may be important for cultural heritage, which can complicate tasks such as where or how to place solar panels so as to conserve the building from both an architectural, technical and aesthetic point of view.

Top challenges mayors face when looking at ways to speed up the energy transition



Energy performance of buildings

The revision of the EU's Energy Performance of Buildings Directive aims to update a 12-year old agreement in line with today's targets. Given that buildings account for 40% of final energy consumption in the Union and 36% of its energy-related greenhouse gas emissions, Eurocities, together with its member cities, successfully brought messages to ensure that the recast directive better matches cities' needs.

This has included setting clear Minimum Energy Performance Standards and renovation standards, ensuring that one-stop shops can make the right knowledge available locally, and working with local administrations to build energy capacity.

European cities face other challenges, such as an increased pressure on housing units. This is especially the case in Eastern European cities, where larger numbers of refugees are being accommodated. Looming large is also the recovery from two years of pandemic. Given the current pressures on city budgets and the increasingly complex challenges city authorities need to handle, a strong connection between the local and EU level, a swift and deep implementation of the Green Deal, and access to funding sources such as the National Recovery and Resilience Plans is more important than ever if cities are to contribute to international goals.



Investment priorities

In their responses to the Eurocities Pulse survey, mayors outlined three clear priorities when it comes to their planned investments to speed up the energy transition of their city: sustainable mobility, building renovations, and developing renewable or green energy sources. While sustainable mobility and building renovation matched almost evenly as mayors' top priority for the next five years, we also saw that building renovation is deemed to be a bigger challenge, suggesting that city administrations would benefit from more direct support, especially from the national level.

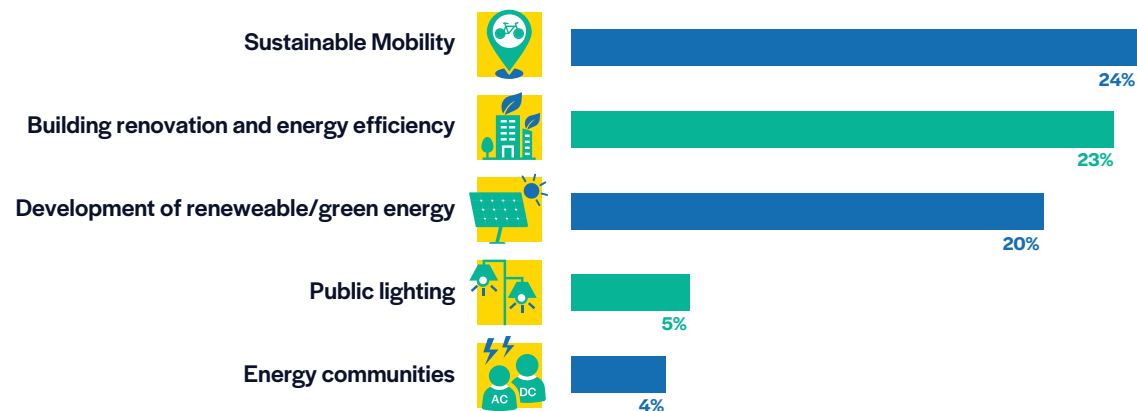
Accelerating the rollout of renewable energy and reducing the fossil fuel consumption in industry and transport have also been identified as key priorities within the National Recovery and Resilience Plans – the financial package levied by the EU to help member states enact their post Covid-19 recovery.

Given that most cities received only some or little support to deal with their increased municipal energy costs, according to data collected by the Eurocities Pulse survey, accessing other sources of financing like this is important. There is a strong need to better target existing loan facilities to the needs of cities with smaller loans and to set up advisory facilities to support business case development and project bundling.

For example, Rome, Naples and Milan received a joint tender under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan to encourage the use of public transport. In Milan this will include creating one digital platform to connect all operators offering shared bikes, cars, scooters and other means of travel in the city.

Two trends among cities, noted as the fourth and fifth investment priorities, are to replace public lighting with LEDs, thus saving energy, and to engage communities directly in the production of energy. The concept for local energy communities encourages energy production from smaller energy sources, such as via the installation of solar panels, that can then be sold back into the grid by a person or institution that produces more than needed. This surplus can be redistributed via the energy community of which different people or organisations may be a member.

Top priorities for cities to plan investments to speed up the energy transition



Energy poverty

75% of EU buildings are deemed energy inefficient, and up to one in four households in Europe cannot afford to adequately heat, cool, or light their homes. Against the backdrop of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, the rocketing energy prices put an even higher number of people at risk of energy poverty.

Energy poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, considered to be caused by a combination of low-income, high-energy expenses, and poor energy efficiency in buildings. Next to a huge impact on the financial situation of the household, the negative effects of energy poverty on a person's physical and mental health, wellbeing, and education can be severe and can lead to social exclusion.

The EU has been addressing this issue in various legislative and non-legislative initiatives, most recently in the context of its climate policies and energy transition. The Energy Efficiency Directive and the European Performance of Buildings Directive strengthened provisions to alleviate energy poverty alongside efficiency efforts. Moreover, the 'renovation wave' initiative under the European Green Deal aims to boost structural renovation in private and public buildings, while the Social Climate Fund includes households in energy poverty among its main beneficiaries.

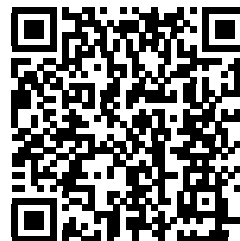
Cities are crucial actors to implement some of those measures – i.e. driving energy efficiency improvements, boosting energy communities, supporting local people through one-stop shops, or offering support to cover the energy expenditure of low-income households.

This is the case in Valencia's Energy Office, which works closely with the city's social services to ensure that those at greatest risk of energy poverty are not left out in the cold.

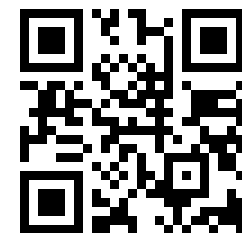
One-stop shops

Locally established one-stop shops are already vital to speed up EU building renovation rates. One-stop shops raise awareness and encourage residents to embark on building renovation plans while avoiding the time-consuming renovation process of bureaucracy and hidden costs. Most importantly, they provide free and trusted advice to vulnerable households, offering them an opportunity to renovate their houses while tackling energy poverty. However, to set up and run innovative local initiatives such as one-stop shops, especially to benefit more vulnerable and at-risk households, most cities still need access to technical assistance and means to increase their local capacities (particularly during the project development phase) from both the national and EU level.





[Eurocities Pulse
Survey - List of
questions](#)



[More stories
from cities](#)



Square de Meeûs, 1
B-1000 Bruxelles
tel +32-2-552.0888
info@eurocities.eu