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COLOGNE DECLARATION

Establishing sound financial and structural foundations for climate protection and adaptation in our municipalities

A declaration of the 2025 Climate Alliance General Assembly within the framework of the 2025 Climate Alliance International Conference in Cologne (DE)

As representatives of regions, cities, and towns across Europe, we are committed to advancing climate action at the local level. The climate catastrophe is a global challenge, but the solutions lie in the sum of countless local initiatives.

It is our municipalities that, together with their citizens, are driving the transformation – be it through upgrading heating networks, expanding renewable energy, allocating land for natural climate protection, or unsealing and greening urban areas.

These tasks are essential and decided upon at the global, European, and national levels. Yet all too often, municipalities are charged with their implementation without being granted the necessary funding, staffing, or structural support. This must change.

We call on national and international bodies to equip cities and towns with reliable and permanent access to the resources they need so that climate protection and adaptation can be carried out effectively, systematically, and as a priority at the local level.

Background

The impacts of the climate crisis are already measurable and tangible. This year, too, began with a grim milestone – the warmest January ever recorded. It is clear: climate action must be vigorously pursued to limit global heating. At the same time, the climate crisis is already demanding extensive adaptation measures – within our municipalities, along our rivers and coasts, across our fields, and in our forests.



This profound transformation can only succeed if climate protection and adaptation are treated as central and structurally embedded responsibilities at all levels. This requires the allocation of financial resources, the creation of adequate staffing capacities and the integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation as cross-cutting themes across all administrative areas.

Our unified European voice is crucial. In 2024, we adopted the Cascais Declaration in Portugal with a focus on building just resilience. Today, that declaration is more relevant than ever. In light of the resurgence of autocratic systems that exploit people and destroy nature, we position ourselves as a strong international alliance. A purposeful shift away from fossil fuels to renewable energy not only protects the climate and resilience of societies and democracies but also strengthens independency from imports and regional value creation and jobs. We stand for a just transformation that promotes social inclusion, protects the climate, and strengthens the resilience of our diverse societies.

We reaffirm the commitment we made in 2024 and emphasise the urgent need to create enabling structures for this transformation at every level.

What it comes down to

- **Climate action as a mandatory responsibility.** We advocate for the inclusion of climate protection and adaptation as constitutional responsibilities in European countries. This would make climate action a mandatory national duty – a major step forward in terms of legally anchoring climate action and ensuring its stable financial and structural implementation.
- **Climate action as a priority.** Time matters. The science tells us that every delay of action comes at the cost of irreversible changes in our global ecosystem, putting the foundation of our wellbeing at unpredictable risk. Many administrations have now established dedicated departments for climate protection and adaptation – a welcome development we strongly support. However, these departments often operate in isolation and are not systematically involved in all relevant decision-making processes. Climate protection and adaptation must become core functions of every administration, as they are vital to securing the livelihoods of people – both locally and globally. Climate action must thus be considered and prioritised in all planning and administrative processes.
- **Recognition of climate action's cross-cutting nature.** It is imperative to establish intersectoral coordination bodies or commissions within public administrations, composed of representatives from the respective sectorial departments, in order to ensure integrated and coherent policy planning and implementation.
- **Long-term financing.** Funding for climate protection and adaptation has improved in recent years through various European directives and national programmes, yet it is often reliant on short-term and project-based grants.



Instead of establishing long-term initiatives, cities and towns are forced to move from one funding application to the next. Sustainable and adequate financing for local-level climate action along with the necessary personnel for its long-term implementation must be permanently secured. Adequate technical assistance as well as the proper staff training must be ensured.

- **Sufficiency as a key strategy.** We call for the active promotion of sufficiency as a central pillar of climate action, alongside efficiency and consistency. This requires policy instruments that enable and encourage activities with lower resource and energy consumption – such as living in smaller spaces, reducing private car ownership, and fostering more plant-based diets. These measures are often more affordable and accessible than purely technological solutions while contributing to social equity.
- **Sustainability, energy and climate planning.** We urge the national and European levels to enact binding legislative instruments that require regional and local authorities to develop and implement sustainable energy and climate action planning, while ensuring the provision of adequate technical, financial, and administrative support mechanisms.
- **Interoperability of methodologies.** The interoperability of data systems and monitoring platforms should be promoted across local, regional, and European levels to foster transparent tracking of progress and evidence-based policy making. The development and harmonisation of methodologies, and digital tools – while consistently taking differences in local and regional situations and starting points into account – will support this endeavour.

THE CLIMATE ALLIANCE

For over 30 years, Climate Alliance member municipalities have been acting in partnership with indigenous rainforest peoples for the benefit of the global climate. With over 2,000 members spread across more than 25 countries, Climate Alliance is Europe's largest city network dedicated to comprehensive and equitable climate action. Recognising the impact our lifestyles can have on the world's most vulnerable people and places, Climate Alliance pairs local action with global responsibility. climatealliance.org