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## climate leaders

# Guidebook for EU Policy Makers on Empowering Local Leadership

Policy Brief 1

Remarkable Consortium  
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2	Regionalna energetska-klimatska agencija Sjeverozapadne Hrvatske	REGEA	HR
3	Energiesparverband Oberosterreich	ESV	AU
4	Inovacijsko-razvojni institut Univerze v Ljubljani	IRI UL	SI
5	Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes Energie Environnement	AURA-EE	FR
6	Energikontor Norr Ab	EKNorr	SE
7	Tipperary Energy Agency Limited	TEA	IE
8	Escan Sl	ESCAN	ES
9	Energetska Agencija Za Podravje Zavod Za Trajnostno Rabo Energije Energy Agency Of Podravje Institution For Sustainable Energy Use	ENERGAP	SI
10	Federation Europeenne Des Agences Et Des Regions Pour L'energie Et L'environnement	FEDARENE	BE

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## Executive summary

The "Guidebook for EU Policy Makers on Empowering Local Leadership" provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing the role of local leaders in achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Local leadership is essential in translating broad EU climate goals into actionable community strategies. The REMARKABLE Climate Leaders project highlights the critical role of these leaders, emphasizing their unique combination of vision, strategic thinking, and inspirational qualities. These leaders are essential in bridging the gap between high-level climate objectives and practical local implementations, but they face significant challenges, including resource constraints and the complexities of stakeholder engagement.

Effective local leadership requires clear strategic vision and the ability to inspire and mobilize diverse stakeholders. However, many local leaders struggle with aligning local actions to EU-wide climate goals due to limited resources and difficulties in maintaining stakeholder involvement. To address these issues, the guidebook recommends several strategies. It advocates for targeted training programmes such as the Climate Leadership Programme (CLP), the development of Climate Neutrality Roadmaps to provide clear, actionable steps, and the establishment of support networks like the REMARKABLE Leaders Circle to foster ongoing collaboration and experience sharing among leaders.

In designing guidelines and recommendations, the guidebook stresses the importance of aligning local climate actions with broader EU strategic goals, engaging a wide range of stakeholders, and providing tailored capacity-building opportunities. Effective guidelines should include clear objectives, promote innovation, prioritize equity and inclusion, and support continuous learning and adaptation. Robust monitoring and evaluation systems are also crucial for tracking progress and making necessary adjustments.

Insights from the REMARKABLE Climate Leaders Podcast further inform these recommendations by highlighting the importance of local strategic vision, community engagement, innovation support, resilience, cross-sectoral collaboration, evidence-based decision-making, and leading by example. These elements are essential for creating a supportive environment that empowers local leaders to drive impactful climate action.

Overall, the guidebook offers a roadmap for EU policymakers to enhance local leadership, thereby accelerating progress towards climate neutrality and ensuring that the transition to a sustainable future is both effective and inclusive.

## Introduction

As Europe advances towards its ambitious goal of climate neutrality by 2050, the role of local leadership has become increasingly crucial. The journey towards this objective is not solely defined by overarching EU policies but is deeply reliant on the efforts of local leaders who bridge the gap between high-level targets and tangible community actions. This guidebook emerges from the REMARKABLE Climate Leaders project, which highlights the indispensable role that local leaders play in driving climate initiatives within their regions with the support of energy agencies.

Local leadership is essential in translating broad EU climate ambitions into practical, actionable strategies that resonate with and benefit local communities. These leaders face challenges, including aligning local policies with EU climate goals, overcoming resource and time constraints, and engaging diverse stakeholders. Despite these challenges, effective local leaders exhibit a blend of vision, strategic acumen, and the ability to inspire collective action towards climate neutrality.

This guidebook explores the insights from ethnographic studies and experiences under the REMARKABLE Climate Leaders project, providing a comprehensive understanding of local leadership dynamics. It delves into the characteristics of successful local leaders, the obstacles they encounter, and the strategies that can be employed to empower them. Through targeted training programmes, practical tools like Climate Neutrality Roadmaps, and robust support networks, the guidebook offers actionable recommendations to bolster climate leadership.

Additionally, insights from the REMARKABLE Climate Leaders Podcast provide a valuable perspective. Featuring conversations with climate leaders across Europe, the podcast highlights real-world examples of strategic vision, community engagement, innovation, and resilience. By integrating these podcast insights, the guidebook not only outlines strategies for empowering local leaders but also showcases successful practices and personal stories that illustrate how local leadership can drive meaningful climate action.

By investing in the development and support of climate leaders, the EU can enhance the implementation of its climate goals and ensure that the transition to a sustainable future is both effective and inclusive. This guidebook serves as a resource for EU policymakers seeking to foster and support local leadership in the pursuit of climate neutrality.



# 1 Understanding Local Leadership

Local leadership plays an instrumental role in addressing the complex and multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. In the European context, the drive towards achieving climate neutrality by 2050 has placed unprecedented responsibility on local leaders. These leaders, operating at the municipal and regional levels, are tasked with translating broad EU climate goals into actionable strategies that can be implemented within their communities. The REMARKABLE Climate Leaders project<sup>1</sup> underscores the importance of local leadership, highlighting it as a critical factor in the transition from energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives to comprehensive strategies aimed at climate neutrality.

The REMARKABLE Climate Leaders project is committed to empowering local leaders across Europe, recognizing that they are central to the success of climate neutrality efforts. This chapter delves into the ethnographic studies<sup>2</sup> developed under the project, more concretely the nature of local leadership, exploring its defining characteristics, the challenges local leaders face, and the strategies that can be employed to empower them in their crucial roles.

## 1.1 Characteristics of Effective Local Leaders

Effective local leadership is characterized by a unique combination of vision, strategic thinking, and the ability to inspire others. Local leaders who are successful in driving their communities towards climate neutrality possess a clear and ambitious vision that extends beyond short-term goals. While energy efficiency and renewable energy are important components of their strategies, these leaders focus on the broader objective of climate neutrality. This requires a deep understanding of the systemic changes needed to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions and the ability to integrate these changes into local policies and actions.

In addition to strategic vision, effective local leaders are distinguished by their capacity to inspire and mobilize others. They are not merely administrators but are seen as champions of change who can galvanize public support and foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders. This inspirational quality is crucial in building the momentum needed to achieve long-term climate goals, particularly in the face of resistance or apathy. The ethnographic study<sup>3</sup> conducted under the REMARKABLE project identifies this ability to inspire as a key characteristic of climate leaders, emphasizing its importance in the leadership landscape.

## 1.2 Challenges Faced by Local Leaders

Local leaders face a range of challenges that complicate their efforts to achieve climate neutrality. One of the primary challenges is the complexity of aligning local actions with the overarching climate goals set by the European Union. Climate neutrality by 2050 requires not only the implementation of specific policies but also the transformation of local economies and infrastructures. This transformation is a daunting task, particularly for leaders operating in regions with limited resources.

Resource constraints are another significant challenge. Many local leaders work within tight budgets and lack access to the financial, human, and technical resources needed to implement ambitious climate strategies. This scarcity of resources can hinder the development and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://climateleaders.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://climateleaders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/REMARKABLE\\_D2.1\\_Ethnographic-Study-Results\\_FIN.pdf](https://climateleaders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/REMARKABLE_D2.1_Ethnographic-Study-Results_FIN.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://climateleaders.eu/understanding\\_ethnography/](https://climateleaders.eu/understanding_ethnography/)





execution of effective climate action plans, creating a gap between aspirations and practical achievements.

Furthermore, engaging and maintaining the involvement of various stakeholders is a persistent challenge for local leaders. Achieving climate neutrality requires the collaboration of a wide array of actors, including government agencies, businesses, and civil society. However, fostering this collaboration is often difficult, as different stakeholders may have conflicting interests or priorities. The ethnographic research highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement in the leadership process, noting that effective leaders must navigate these complexities to build consensus and drive collective action.

### 1.3 Strategies for Empowering Local Leadership

Empowering local leadership involves providing leaders with the tools, knowledge, and support they need to overcome these challenges and succeed in their roles. One of the key strategies identified in the REMARKABLE project is the Climate Leadership Programme (CLP). This innovative training programme is designed to build the capacity of local leaders by equipping them with the skills and knowledge required to realize ambitious climate neutrality goals. The CLP is tailored to address the specific needs of municipal leaders, offering both training and co-creation opportunities that foster collaboration and shared learning.

Another critical strategy is the development of Climate Neutrality Roadmaps. These roadmaps serve as practical, step-by-step guides that help local leaders translate their strategic visions into concrete actions. By outlining the policies, stakeholders, and resources needed to achieve climate neutrality, these roadmaps provide a clear pathway for leaders to follow. The REMARKABLE project emphasizes the importance of these roadmaps in bridging the gap between high-level goals and on-the-ground implementation.

Support networks also play a vital role in empowering local leadership. The REMARKABLE Leaders Circle<sup>4</sup>, for example, is designed to provide ongoing support to climate leaders by fostering engagement among climate leaders. This network allows leaders to share experiences, exchange best practices, and seek advice from peers and experts. The support provided by such networks is essential in sustaining the momentum of climate action and ensuring that leaders do not feel isolated in their efforts.

Understanding local leadership is fundamental to the success of climate neutrality initiatives across Europe. Effective local leaders are characterized by their strategic vision, inspirational qualities, and ability to navigate complex challenges. However, they often face significant obstacles, including resource constraints and the difficulty of stakeholder engagement. To empower these leaders, it is crucial to provide them with targeted training, practical tools like Climate Neutrality Roadmaps, and robust support networks. As the REMARKABLE project demonstrates, by investing in local leadership, the EU can accelerate progress towards its climate goals and ensure that the transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral future is both inclusive and effective.

## 2 Designing guidelines and recommendations

The development of guidelines and recommendations for empowering local leadership in climate action is a critical task that requires careful consideration of both strategic goals and practical implementation. The REMARKABLE project, informed by comprehensive research and practical experiences, offers a framework to guide local authorities in achieving climate neutrality by 2050. This chapter outlines the key elements in designing effective guidelines and recommendations<sup>5</sup>, drawing on insights from the climate leadership trainings<sup>6</sup>.

### 2.1 Foundations of Effective Guidelines for Climate Leadership

To craft impactful guidelines for climate leadership, it is essential to start with a clear alignment with broader strategic goals such as the European Green Deal and the Paris Agreement. Effective guidelines go beyond merely setting environmental targets; they foster a cultural shift within local authorities that prioritizes sustainability and proactive climate action as core elements of governance.

A critical foundation for these guidelines is comprehensive stakeholder engagement. Involving a wide range of stakeholders—including public officials, local communities, and private sector partners—ensures that the guidelines are relevant, actionable, and supported by those who will implement and benefit from them. Engaging these stakeholders early and continuously helps to build consensus and commitment, which are vital for the success of climate initiatives.

Capacity building and training are also essential components. Empowering local leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge is crucial for the effective implementation of climate strategies. Training programmes that focus on both technical competencies and leadership abilities enable local authorities to address the multifaceted challenges of climate action. Such programmes should be tailored to the specific needs and contexts of different regions to maximize their effectiveness.

Furthermore, guidelines must include clear and actionable objectives. These objectives should translate high-level climate goals into specific steps that local leaders can implement within their communities. Setting measurable milestones and performance indicators is essential for tracking progress and ensuring that efforts remain on course toward achieving climate neutrality.

### 2.2 Key Recommendations for Empowering Local Leadership

Empowering local leadership to drive climate action involves several strategic recommendations:

1. **Integrating Climate Leadership into Local Governance:** Embedding climate leadership within the core functions of local governance is vital. This integration means that climate objectives should be reflected in strategic planning, budgeting, policy

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<sup>5</sup> [https://climateleaders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/REMARKABLE\\_D2.2\\_CLP-design-guidelines-and-recommendations\\_FINAL.pdf](https://climateleaders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/REMARKABLE_D2.2_CLP-design-guidelines-and-recommendations_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://climateleaders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/REMARKABLE-D3.1-Climate-Leader-Best-Practice-Final.pdf>



development, and service delivery. Shifting from a siloed approach to a more integrated, cross-departmental strategy ensures that climate action is a fundamental aspect of local governance.

2. **Fostering Innovation and Collaboration:** Encouraging innovation and collaboration is essential for advancing climate action. Local authorities should create environments that support experimentation with new technologies, policy approaches, and collaborative frameworks. By piloting innovative solutions and sharing best practices, climate leaders can accelerate the adoption of effective climate strategies and learn from the experiences of others.
3. **Prioritising Equity and Inclusion:** Climate leadership must be inclusive, ensuring that all members of the community, especially those who are vulnerable or marginalized, are involved in the decision-making process. Inclusive approaches not only promote social equity but also enhance the overall resilience of communities to climate impacts. Guidelines should incorporate mechanisms for engaging diverse groups and ensuring that their voices are heard in climate action planning.
4. **Promoting Continuous Learning and Adaptation:** The dynamic nature of climate challenges requires a framework for continuous learning and adaptation. Climate leadership programmes and initiatives should be designed to evolve in response to new information, changing conditions, and lessons learned from past experiences. This adaptability is crucial for maintaining the effectiveness of local leadership in the face of emerging climate risks.
5. **Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation:** Robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are critical for assessing the impact of climate actions and making necessary adjustments. Guidelines should include clear criteria and methodologies for M&E, enabling local authorities to measure the effectiveness of their initiatives and report on their progress toward climate neutrality.

## 2.3 Applying Best Practices in Climate Leadership

Best practices identified through the REMARKABLE project highlight several successful approaches that can inform the development of guidelines and recommendations. Case studies of successful climate leadership demonstrate practical applications of leadership principles across various contexts, providing valuable insights that can be adapted to other regions and communities.

The analysis of training programmes shows the importance of tailored education that meets the specific needs of climate leaders. Programmes that combine technical expertise with leadership development are particularly effective in equipping leaders to drive climate action. Additionally, best practices emphasize the need to consider local context when designing and implementing climate actions. Guidelines should be flexible enough to allow for adaptation to the unique characteristics of different regions and communities.

Designing effective guidelines and recommendations for local climate leadership involves a multifaceted approach that integrates strategic alignment, stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and continuous adaptation. By applying best practices and tailoring guidelines to the specific needs of local authorities, policymakers can empower leaders to drive meaningful and sustained progress toward climate neutrality.



## 3 Key elements from the REMARKABLE Climate Leaders Podcast

In the quest to empower local leadership, the REMARKABLE Climate Leaders Podcast<sup>7</sup> offers critical perspectives from climate leaders across Europe. This chapter synthesizes lessons from conversations with climate leaders including Niklas Hökfors, Gordana Lalić, Mariia Alipatova, Gearóid Fitzgibbon, Ricardo Gonzalez Mantero, Xénia Vall, Uroš Rozman, and Seamus Hoyne, aligning their experiences with practical strategies for EU policymakers.

### 3.1 Strategic Vision and Commitment to Local Implementation

The importance of a well-defined local strategy for achieving climate goals is underscored by Niklas and Gordana. Gordana's leadership in Poreč, Croatia, exemplifies how municipalities can align with EU climate objectives through strategic planning and early adoption of initiatives like the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. For EU policymakers, the key takeaway is the necessity of fostering strong local leadership with a clear strategic vision to ensure that ambitious EU targets are effectively implemented at the local level.

### 3.2 Community Engagement and Capacity Building

Community involvement is crucial in driving climate action, as highlighted by Gordana's establishment of the "Sunny Office" in Poreč and Niklas's emphasis on educating citizens about the benefits of climate initiatives. Xenia also reinforces the significance of inclusivity in urban sustainability efforts. For policymakers, creating frameworks that support active citizen participation and providing resources for local governments to engage their communities are essential for driving successful climate actions.

### 3.3 Innovation and Entrepreneurial Support

Mariia's entrepreneurial journey in the climate tech sector illustrates the impact of innovation on addressing local challenges. Her experience with SolarOptic and networks like Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs highlights the role of supporting young innovators. Similarly, Ricardo's emphasis on vision and innovation demonstrates the need for fostering environments where new ideas and technologies can thrive. Policymakers should consider expanding programmes that support innovative solutions and provide necessary funding and mentorship.

### 3.4 Resilience and Adaptability

The ability to adapt to changing conditions is a common theme across the podcast. Gearoid's work in Ireland and the general emphasis on resilience reflect the necessity for local leaders to be prepared for unexpected challenges. Seamus's focus on evidence-based decision-making also ties into this, suggesting that resilient strategies are those informed by robust data and adaptable to new information. Policymakers should support the development of flexible climate strategies and resources for continuous learning to enhance local resilience.

<sup>7</sup> <https://climateleaders.eu/>



### 3.5 Cross-Sectoral Collaboration and Networking

The importance of collaboration across various levels and sectors is highlighted by Gordana, Mariia, and Uros. Gordana's success in integrating efforts across different governance levels and Uros's approach to cross-border cooperation emphasize the need for fostering connections and shared practices. For policymakers, promoting frameworks that facilitate collaboration among municipalities, regional agencies, and other stakeholders can amplify the impact of local climate initiatives.

### 3.6 Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Seamus's focus on making informed decisions based on data underscores the need for robust, evidence-based approaches in climate planning. Developing comprehensive climate neutrality roadmaps that utilize best practices and data is crucial for effective local leadership. Policymakers should promote the use of data-driven methods and support climate leaders in integrating evidence into their strategic decisions.

### 3.7 Role of Example and Leadership by Action

The podcast underscores the power of leading by example, as demonstrated by all featured leaders. Their personal commitment and innovative actions serve as inspiration for others. Policymakers should recognize and promote role models within the local leadership community, providing platforms for leaders to share their experiences and showcase successful initiatives.

The REMARKABLE Climate Leaders Podcast provides valuable guidance for EU policymakers aiming to empower local leadership in climate action. By supporting strategic vision, community engagement, innovation, resilience, collaboration, evidence-based decision-making, and leadership by example, the EU can foster a robust local climate leadership network capable of driving the European Green Deal and beyond. These insights offer a roadmap for creating an enabling environment that nurtures and supports effective local leadership.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the REMARKABLE Climate Leaders project underscores the vital role of local leadership in advancing Europe's climate neutrality goals by 2050. Local leaders, whose vision and strategic thinking are essential in translating broad EU climate targets into actionable community-level strategies, face substantial challenges, including resource constraints and the need for effective stakeholder engagement. To overcome these obstacles, it is crucial to empower these leaders through targeted training programmes like the Climate Leadership Programme (CLP), the development of practical tools such as Climate Neutrality Roadmaps, and the creation of support networks like the REMARKABLE Leaders Circle.

The project highlights that effective local leadership integrates climate action into governance, fosters innovation, prioritises equity and inclusion, and adapts continuously to emerging challenges. It also emphasizes the importance of comprehensive stakeholder engagement and evidence-based decision-making. Best practices derived from the REMARKABLE Climate Leaders Podcast reinforce the need for a well-defined local strategy, active community involvement, support for innovation, and resilient, adaptable approaches to climate challenges.

By adopting these strategies and guidelines, EU policymakers can enhance the capacity of local leaders to drive climate action, ensuring that Europe's transition to a climate-neutral future is both inclusive and effective. Investing in local leadership not only accelerates progress toward climate goals but also builds a foundation for sustained, impactful climate action at the community level.

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## climate leaders

# Climate Leadership across Europe

Policy Brief 2

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## Executive summary - Climate Leadership across Europe

The REMARKABLE Climate Leaders project has demonstrated significant advances in capacity building, engagement, and resource allocation, thereby advancing climate neutrality at the local level. The project's focus on enhancing local decision-makers' skills and knowledge has yielded notable results in several regions.

Capacity-building efforts have empowered local leaders by providing them with technical guidance, financial support, and leadership training. Workshops and programmes have addressed key areas such as climate neutrality pathways for biomethane and solar energy, effective climate communication, and the development of climate action roadmaps. By integrating EU-wide best practices and regional expertise, these initiatives have improved decision-makers' ability to advocate for and implement local climate projects. Moreover, specific training sessions on identifying climate leaders, strategic engagement, and creating detailed climate roadmaps have further supported municipal efforts towards climate neutrality.

Engagement and collaboration have been central to the project's success. Interactive workshops and peer-learning activities have facilitated the exchange of solutions and strategies among leaders, fostering a collaborative environment. Initiatives like the "Elus pour Agir" network have connected thousands of elected representatives, enhancing knowledge sharing and cooperative action across regions. The project's emphasis on citizen involvement and strategic engagement has strengthened local climate actions and supported municipal climate planning.

Access to resources and funding has been streamlined through the establishment of one-stop shops and tailored support services. These initiatives have provided municipalities with comprehensive assistance in accessing funding, strategic planning, and project implementation. Sustained financial support from EU and national funds has been crucial, with an emphasis on developing private funding models and aligning local actions with broader climate goals.

Ethnographic research within the project highlights the importance of comprehensive support for local leaders. This includes specialized training, enhanced media skills, and a supportive environment that bridges grassroots actions with higher-level policies. Engaging influential local figures and addressing gaps in municipal climate action are essential for driving effective climate leadership.

In summary, the REMARKABLE project underscores the need for robust capacity-building frameworks, increased visibility of local initiatives, and strategic collaboration to advance climate action. Continued support for tailored training programmes, resource access, and participatory governance will be vital for achieving climate neutrality and enhancing local decision-making capabilities.



## Introduction

This policy brief is developed under the Remarkable Climate Leaders<sup>8</sup> initiative, a Horizon 2020 project designed to build the first European Leadership Programme aimed at achieving Climate Neutrality (CN) by 2050. The initiative integrates insights and lessons learned from regions across seven European countries—Austria, Croatia, France, Ireland, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden—where the Climate Leadership Programme has been implemented. Additionally, the brief incorporates findings from an ethnographic study to craft a detailed framework for supporting local decision-makers in their climate neutrality efforts.

The REMARKABLE Climate Leaders project has been instrumental in facilitating collaboration between local authorities, stakeholders, and the public, ensuring that bottom-up climate actions are effectively aligned with national and EU-level policies. The project has also fostered knowledge exchange across European Member States, enabling climate leaders to share best practices and innovative solutions. By promoting cross-border cooperation and creating networks for collaboration, REMARKABLE has enhanced the ability of municipalities to tackle climate challenges collectively and creatively.

Central to the Climate Leadership Programme are the climate leaders. Several leaders have been highlighted in the REMARKABLE Climate Leaders podcast<sup>9</sup>, showcasing their crucial role in driving local climate action and exemplifying the project's success in advancing climate leadership across Europe. This policy brief outlines strategies to further connect bottom-up initiatives with top-down directives and provides recommendations for EU policymakers to support effective implementation of climate change strategies.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://climateleaders.eu/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://climateleaders.eu/podcast/>



# 1 Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing

## REMARKABLE Results:

Capacity-building workshops for local decision-makers, offered by Tipperary Energy Agency (TEA) in Ireland, provided communities and community leaders with technical guidance, financial support, and leadership skills. The workshops focused on key actions in their region in Ireland such as climate neutrality (CN) pathways for biomethane and solar energy, as well as effective climate communication - a service developed during the REMARKABLE project. The **technical guidance** facilitated access to local energy expertise through the energy agency, helping decision-makers understand various pathways to CN, engage with regional stakeholders, and develop CN roadmaps. Additionally, the workshops enabled participants to benefit from **EU-wide best practices**, enhancing their ability to advocate for local investment projects by referencing successful examples.

The Climate Leadership Programme in Sweden advanced municipal climate neutrality by emphasizing the importance of political backing and organisational support. North Sweden Energy Agency (EKNorr) provided four key **training sessions**: the first focused on identifying and cultivating climate leaders, enabling participants to recognize their own and others' **leadership qualities**; the second addressed effective **engagement and communication** strategies to build the brand, the attractiveness and recognition for both the climate leader and the organisation; and the final two sessions developed detailed **roadmaps for achieving climate goals**.

The REMARKABLE project in Spain led by ESCAN filmed educative videos<sup>10</sup> to support climate leaders in building their skills for climate neutrality. Bilateral meetings, national workshops and exchanges at the European level facilitated knowledge exchange and peer learning among leaders. Climate leaders in Spain invested time and effort towards achieving climate neutrality in their municipalities, often motivated by **personal satisfaction** rather than financial compensation. They were keenly interested in learning from others' experiences and strategies, especially those that achieve **results with limited resources**.

**The Energy and Climate Check** developed by Upper Austria Regional Energy Agency (ESV) enabled municipalities to identify key challenges in achieving climate neutrality. Through interactive workshops and data-driven approaches, municipalities gained insights into the total **GHG emissions** of each municipality (divided by the residential, services/manufacturing, mobility sectors). For the first time, the local decision-makers were able to see and understand in which sectors the key challenges lie in achieving climate neutrality. Climate neutrality requires **considering CO2 emissions**, not just energy units, which is a new concept for many energy experts and necessitates a learning process. Collaborating with local companies on climate neutrality and the energy transition is novel even for advanced municipalities, and while initial progress has been made, a more comprehensive approach is needed.

In France, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Regional Energy Environment Agency (AURA-EE) developed strategic roadmaps illustrating the local trajectory in accordance with regional and European

<sup>10</sup> <https://climateleaders.eu/educative-videos-about-climate-neutrality/>



objectives. By leveraging the TerriSTORY® tool<sup>11</sup>, AURA-EE empowered decision-makers to evaluate the impact of their actions on these roadmaps and demonstrated how local efforts contribute to a **higher level of governance**. This approach has **enhanced decision-making** and ensured alignment with higher-level sustainability targets.

### Policy Recommendations:

1. Establish a comprehensive **framework for leadership programmes** to enhance local decision-makers' capacity to address climate challenges, supported by increased EU funding for tailored training, workshops, and advisory services. Foster **resilience** through regional, national, and EU-level **peer engagement** to connect leaders with a broader community (TEA). Provide support for capacity building, strategic document assistance, and guidance on **climate action integration**, with access to the latest research, technological innovations, and best practices (REGEA). Invest in training and capacity-building to address the **shortage of qualified staff** and resources in small municipalities (ENERGAP). Support municipalities with populations under 5,000 by **targeted assistance** in addressing their resource constraints through **active involvement** in climate neutrality strategy development, minimizing data collection efforts by using public statistics and estimates, and utilizing interactive workshops to engage municipal leaders and energy service providers (ESV).
2. Promote visibility for local initiatives and showcase **good practices** to demonstrate that the path to climate neutrality is achievable (AURA-EE). Promote **cross-border cooperation** and collaboration initiatives to leverage the collective expertise and resources of EU regions in advancing climate action agendas.
3. Engage municipalities in strategic initiatives using a balanced approach between **standardisation and flexibility**. While flexibility is necessary to accommodate the diverse needs and interests of different municipalities, standardisation can save time and provide clarity for both the energy agency and municipalities. Additionally, **timing is critical**; municipalities are more likely to participate in such initiatives during less busy periods and in the earlier phases of election cycles, rather than in the final 1-2 years before an election. (ESV)

## 2 Engagement and Collaboration

### REMARKABLE Results:

Climate leaders in Croatia emphasized the importance of engaging citizens in a dialogue as **active participants** in the energy transition. Capacity-building workshops and advisory services facilitated by North-West Croatia Regional Energy Agency (REGEA) empowered citizens to contribute to local climate actions, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration. REGEA integrated **climate change mitigation measures into spatial plans**.

Several interactive strategy workshops were held in which the Austrian leaders with Upper Austria Regional Energy Agency (ESV) exchanged their key challenges and possible solutions. In many cases, when difficult issues were discussed, one or two of the leaders had already found a solution (**swarm intelligence**) which was then shared with the others (e.g. local guidelines for agri-PV, consideration of sustainable energy in local zoning, selecting the right electricity tariff model). This was not only of high practical value, but also very motivating for everyone ("there is a solution for even most difficult issues").

Through peer-learning activities, the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Regional Energy Environment Agency (AURA-EE) engaged **elected representatives** across the region. This led to the launch of the "Elus pour Agir" ("Elected to Act") network<sup>12</sup> by the **REMARKABLE Observer** - the National Energy Transition Agency (ADEME). The network of elected representatives across France aims to foster collaboration and peer learning, with the ambitious goal of connecting 10,000 representatives by the end of 2024. Regional REMARKABLE leaders have played an instrumental role in sharing their experiences and best practices, underscoring the project's success in advancing leadership and cooperation in the energy transition.

### Policy Recommendations:

1. Foster **multilevel governance collaboration** among climate leaders, policymakers, and community stakeholders to align bottom-up actions with broader climate objectives at regional, national, and EU levels. Reinforce EU legislative framework with the revision of the Energy Governance Regulation ART 11. Establish a clear **"no fossil fuels" target** for climate neutrality which creates a unifying connection across all levels of governance. Projects like REMARKABLE should be supported and expanded, as they offer tailored assistance that addresses the specific needs of each region and municipality. (ESV)
2. Allocate resources to deploy **specialised profiles**, such as **climate facilitators** to assist municipalities in effectively implementing climate initiatives. These facilitators should provide technical guidance, support strategic planning, and facilitate knowledge exchange among local leaders. Additionally, enforce systematic **citizen consultation** during the assessment phase of energy projects, again employing facilitators, often from energy agencies, to actively involve citizens in the energy transition. Facilitators should educate and engage citizens, ensuring they are informed participants in the process, and aid municipalities in understanding, planning, selecting appropriate measures, identifying financing sources, and translating theoretical approaches into practical applications (REGEA, ENERGAP).

<sup>12</sup> <https://agirpoulatransition.ademe.fr/collectivites/elus-mandat-agir>



3. Ensure **strong political support** and a well-organized municipal structure: Designate a **full-time staff member** responsible for the local energy transition, supported by a dedicated team of staff, decision-makers, and/or politicians to facilitate swift progress. Implementing a yearly evaluation report, similar to Sweden's "aktualiseringsärende," is essential for **monitoring progress** and maintaining momentum. (EKNORR)
4. Developing robust **communication skills** adaptable to diverse stakeholders, including citizen groups, political entities, and local NGOs. It is crucial to convey technical information compellingly and employ **storytelling techniques** to highlight positive local climate actions. (TEA)



## 3 Access to Resources and Funding

### REMARKABLE Results:

The establishment of a **One-Stop Shop** for implementing climate neutrality actions in public organisations within Energy and Climate Agency of Podravje (ENERGAP) in Slovenia provided municipalities in the Podravje region with comprehensive support for accessing **funding, strategic planning, and project implementation**. Municipalities received information, assistance, and support regarding regulations, energy and climate data, strategic and operational planning, financial planning, the use of various financial mechanisms, preparation of investment documentation, implementation processes, and monitoring results. This centralised service **streamlined the process** and ensured the effective utilisation of available resources.

Decision-makers in Ireland emphasize the importance of sustained financial support from **EU funding programmes**, such as LIFE and Interreg, as well as national funds. Additionally, accessing private funding will be vital over the next six years, especially for substantial investments in retrofitting and mitigation efforts. Therefore, capacity-building initiatives to develop effective private funding models at the local level should be prioritized to support these investments.

### Policy Recommendation:

1. Support projects like Remarkable Climate Leaders that take the specific challenges of local decision-makers and works with them to address these challenges. Such initiatives provide **tailored expertise and support** that general leadership courses lack, **filling a critical gap** and significantly aiding climate leaders, especially in regions like Ireland where such support was previously unavailable (TEA). Leaders need specific support from the EU and national level to implement change effectively. This includes financial assistance through grants and funding programmes tailored to local climate projects, **technical guidance** to navigate the complex landscape of climate action, and **regulatory support** that aligns national laws with ambitious climate goals, as well as support to mainstream energy transition and climate change adaptation actions into everyday activities. (REGEA)
2. Advance participatory governance, where **community inputs** directly inform both local and national, as well as EU-level policies, bridging the gap between local initiatives and broader regulatory frameworks. Disruptive and innovative ways of thinking, planning and designing projects and actions will be crucial if we are to reach decarbonisation goals (REGEA). Strengthen the alignment between **bottom-up actions** and top-down strategies by improving **the assessment** of how local actions impact regional, national, and European trajectories (AURA-EE).
3. **Involve cities** more in policy discussions, recognizing their role as **innovators** and **testing grounds** for new ideas and approaches: Cities do not just comply with EU and national level standards, but in some cases are introducing new ones that go beyond. Pioneer cities are gathering a wide range of stakeholders through innovative approaches and fostering new economic models, making them real life testing agents of the European Green Deal approach. Cities can influence the pace and type of smart development by creating a regulatory environment that is conducive to private-sector development and promotes circularity. At the same time, private investors can better

support cities looking to implement technologies with high upfront costs. Meanwhile, public funding is required to incentivise citizen uptake of decarbonising technologies (REGEA).

4. Provide **legislative support** and incentives to encourage municipalities to adopt ambitious **climate targets** and implement effective mitigation and adaptation measures. In concrete terms, reinforce 2040 climate targets, reinforce NECPs and implementation monitoring, further monitoring of the CHAMP process, reopening and final vote of the Nature Restoration Law, support to CoMo and SECAPs implementation.



## 4 Results from Ethnographic Research

Based on the ethnographic study within the REMARKABLE project, it is essential to provide local decision-makers with comprehensive support to enhance their **leadership capabilities and effectiveness**. Local leaders require access to **specialised services or institutions** that can guide them in understanding and executing their roles more effectively. Such support should include training on leveraging their leadership positions to benefit their municipalities and citizens. Additionally, given the challenge many face with social media, a dedicated service that assists in improving **communication skills** through these platforms would be valuable. Enhancing **media skills** is crucial, and thus institutions that offer media training could significantly benefit climate leadership efforts. Understanding and analyzing local and regional comparisons also plays a crucial role, thus providing resources that help leaders interpret these comparisons meaningfully can drive more impactful decision-making.

To better connect grassroots actions with higher-level leadership, it is vital to engage influential local figures, or "fire souls," who can bridge **the gap between community actions and broader policies**. Smart legal obligations and policy support should be developed to address any gaps in municipal climate action. Creating a supportive environment where participants feel both comfortable and challenged is crucial for effective engagement. Using **high-profile topics** to garner interest and motivate participants can help maintain focus on essential issues. **Ritualizing key activities**, such as incorporating ceremonies or symbolic gestures, can enhance impact and engagement. It is also important to **bridge knowledge gaps** to align discussions and actions with participants' needs and expectations, ensuring that value is consistently created for all stakeholders involved.

Leaders need substantial support in **building their capacity** for climate action. This includes providing resources, time, and skills necessary for effective climate leadership. Specialised profiles, such as competent **facilitators** or knowledgeable participants, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of climate leadership programmes. By addressing these needs, the EU can help ensure that local leaders are well-equipped to drive meaningful climate action.



## Conclusion

This policy brief underscored the vital importance of empowering local decision-makers with the essential support, resources, and guidance needed to drive effective climate action at the grassroots level. The REMARKABLE Climate Leaders project, undertaken by various energy agencies across Europe, has highlighted the significant progress achieved through targeted capacity-building initiatives, tailored training programmes, and strategic engagement efforts. By connecting bottom-up initiatives with top-down directives and leveraging EU support mechanisms, Europe stands to accelerate its progress toward climate neutrality.

The project's findings reveal that local decision-makers benefit immensely from specialised support that addresses their unique challenges and contexts. Effective climate leadership requires a combination of technical expertise, political backing, and strategic planning, all of which can be enhanced through structured frameworks and collaborative efforts. By fostering visibility for local initiatives, promoting cross-border cooperation, and ensuring strategic alignment between municipal actions and broader sustainability goals, Europe can cultivate a culture of innovation, collaboration, and resilience.

Through these concerted efforts, European municipalities and regions can better navigate the complexities of climate action, ultimately contributing to a more cohesive and dynamic approach to achieving climate neutrality across the continent.