

remarkable.

climate leaders

Climate Leadership across Europe

Policy Brief 2

Remarkable Consortium
August 2024

15



Remarkable Climate Leaders has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101024972



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 Leaders⁸ 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 podcast⁹, 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.

⁸ <https://climateleaders.eu/>

⁹ <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 videos¹⁰ 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

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



objectives. By leveraging the TerriSTORY® tool¹¹, 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") network¹² 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).

¹² <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.