ADAPTATION AND WATER RESILIENCE

C40 CITIES

Context

The European Environment Agency warns that Europe is warming faster than anywhere else, leading to extreme weather events like heatwaves, droughts, and severe flooding becoming more frequent and severe. This has serious consequences for people across Europe, with heat-related deaths increasing by 30% in the last two decades and 60,000 people dying in heatwaves in 2022. Severe drought conditions affected 17% of Europe's territory in the winter of 2023-2024 due to abnormally high temperatures.

As most Europeans live in urban areas, cities play a vital role in protecting residents and enhancing resilience against climate impacts, which disproportionately affect urban areas. However, subnational governments often lack the necessary planning, technical, regulatory, and financial resources to effectively address adaptation. Coordinated adaptation policies at local, national, and EU levels, along with water strategies and nature-based solutions, are crucial to strengthen Europe's resilience to climate impacts.

Policy Asks

1. INVEST IN CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Cities need financial support from the European Union and national and regional sources to implement adaptation measures effectively. The European Commission should empower cities by providing direct funding and legislative frameworks, streamlining application processes, and reducing bureaucratic barriers for swift fund allocation. Additionally, policies should be updated beyond the 2021 Adaptation Strategy, incorporating recommendations from the European Environment Agency's climate risk assessment to integrate adaptation seamlessly across all governance levels and policies.

2. SAFEGUARD BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Green and blue infrastructure and spaces are vital for climate resilience, cooling urban areas, mitigating flood risks, and providing significant health benefits. Cities need financial support and increased capacity to preserve, maintain, restore, and expand these areas, their accessibility, and their biodiversity, which can be unlocked through EU-level programmes and incentives. Promoting policy design rules that prioritise climate adaptation through nature-based solutions is essential for creating liveable public spaces that reduce emissions and improve health and wellbeing.

3. ENHANCE WATER RESILIENCE

Enhancing water resilience is critical for urban adaptation amid escalating climate threats like drought and flooding. Europe's cities are leading in implementing water resilience solutions but need support to develop robust infrastructure for future water demands by improving shared water resource management and increasing circularity by using recycled wastewater for agricultural, landscaping, industrial, or domestic uses. This requires European Commission legislation, especially in areas where multiple countries share water

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resources or face events originating beyond city borders. Regulation and financing mechanisms are essential, particularly as water management often involves external agencies. Wastewater reuse, facilitated for non-potable uses by the Water Reuse Regulation, requires further awareness and regulatory harmonisation to support indirect and direct potable reuse solutions. The European Commission must also prioritise developing a comprehensive water resilience strategy, such as ReWaterEU, to safeguard Europe's future against climate risks.

4. PROTECT HEAT-VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Rising urban temperatures disproportionately affect vulnerable groups like older people living alone and those with health conditions. Cities need assistance for short-term measures to reduce heat-related illness and death through emergency response and outreach programmes, as well as long-term measures to reduce temperatures through urban planning and design. It is vital to implement cooling strategies serving vulnerable groups most at risk of serious heat-related illness and death.

City Action

PARIS is implementing a comprehensive heat plan, focusing on providing shade and increasing green spaces throughout the city. By investing in green and blue infrastructure, Paris aims to mitigate the impact of extreme heat events and enhance urban resilience.

COPENHAGEN has developed a citywide Cloudburst Management Plan to effectively manage heavy rainfall and improve urban spaces. This initiative not only addresses climate challenges but also enhances the livability of the city, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods.

BARCELONA has enacted a drought protocol in response to prolonged low precipitation, imposing water usage restrictions to ensure sustainable water management. Since 2006, the city has been recycling wastewater to restore flow into the Llobregat River, its source of drinking water.