



EU MISSIONS

ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Position Paper – Gaps and Opportunities for Better Integrating Mitigation and Adaptation

SWG Integrating Mitigation and Adaptation –
MIP4Adapt

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1. INTRODUCTION

As the climate crisis intensifies, cities and regions face the dual challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and adapting to the inevitable impacts of climate change (adaptation). Despite the clear interconnections between these two approaches, policy frameworks, funding structures, and governance mechanisms often treat them as separate, sometimes even competing, priorities. The European Union's two flagship initiatives - namely the Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities ("Cities Mission") and the Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change ("Adaptation Mission") – offer a key opportunity to bridge this divide. By fostering synergies and integrated action, the Missions can support a holistic approach that advances both mitigation and adaptation efforts across European cities and regions.

The Thematic Working Group (TWG) on Integrating Mitigation and Adaptation has sought to address this gap by fostering dialogue, knowledge exchange, and collaboration among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. Through a series of internal and external workshops held between May 2024 and March 2025—particularly in collaboration with Adaptation and Cities Mission projects—the TWG has identified key gaps and opportunities for integrating these two essential aspects of climate action.

A total of three workshops were conducted as part of this initiative. The first workshop took place virtually on May 28, 2024, setting the stage by providing foundational content and inspiration. This initial session paved the way for the second workshop, held on June 26, 2024, at the European Urban Resilience Forum (EURESFO2024, titled *"Our Common Mission: Collaboration for a Resilient and Climate-Neutral Future."* The third workshop was conducted virtually on March 10, 2025. Beyond these three official workshops, the TWG Facilitator regularly engaged with various stakeholders from the Adaptation and Cities Mission. These ongoing discussions, such as document sharing and other collaborative efforts such as bilateral and group calls, contributed significantly to the development of this initial snapshot.

One of the key challenges in advancing integrated climate action is the limited availability of research and literature on effectively bridging mitigation and adaptation efforts. Acknowledging this gap, the TWG made an early commitment to be a hub for knowledge aggregation and dissemination. This collaborative effort has culminated in the present (draft) position paper, which synthesizes insights gained from participatory discussions, case studies, and shared experiences.

This resource addresses a critical knowledge deficit in the field and provides valuable feedback to help orient the future direction of this TWG and the overall and better integration of the Cities and Adaptation Missions at the EU level. As such, this position paper is particularly valuable to Adaptation and Cities Missions stakeholder ecosystems, notably cities, regions, relevant national government agencies, relevant EU-level policy-makers, private sector stakeholders, and more broadly to all practitioners and academics working on adaptation and mitigation to climate change.

2. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTEGRATING MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION

Key to this integration is acknowledging that mitigation and adaptation are not always distinct, isolated processes but rather synergistic, and can be linked at multiple scales. A clear example of this is adaptation efforts designed to support mitigation objectives. Consider the example of the implementation of a mangrove restoration project against coastal flooding. While it provides adaptation benefits to communities, unlike standalone sea walls, it also acts as a carbon sink, which supports climate change mitigation efforts.

Without strategic coordination, these efforts risk not only missing valuable opportunities for a faster, cost-effective, and more inclusive and systemic process but also promoting maladaptation, ultimately exacerbating vulnerabilities, and undermining long-term climate resilience. If we take a similar example, the construction of sea walls, even if effective in the short term, might provide a false sense of security, and incentivize construction activities that generate emissions (negative impact on mitigation) in areas that could otherwise be covered in nature-based solutions that also suck up carbon (positive impact on mitigation).

Box 1: Interactions between Adaptation and Mitigation Efforts

1. *Positive interaction from coordinated action*

An example of positive interactions is adaptation efforts designed to support mitigation objectives. For instance, a mangrove restoration project against coastal flooding has an adaptation benefit to communities, but unlike standalone sea walls, it also acts as a carbon sink, which supports mitigation efforts.

2. *Negative interaction from uncoordinated action*

The construction of sea walls, even if effective in the short term, might provide a false sense of security, and incentivize construction activities that generate emissions (negative impact on mitigation) in areas that could otherwise be covered in nature-based solutions that also suck up carbon (positive impact on mitigation).

At the EU Missions level, a critical challenge in unlocking further mitigation and adaptation synergistic outcomes lies in the way the Cities and Adaptation Missions are currently organized. While the Cities and Adaptation Missions have been an innovative step forward, especially from local and regional governments' perspective, these Missions are presented to them too much as separate initiatives. These come with clearly distinct ecosystems, governance, funding structures, and processes, making it time-consuming and resource-intensive for local governments to develop climate strategies that integrate adaptation and mitigation.

Recognizing this gap, some local and regional governments have started taking action to improve integration at their levels. For instance, through the **Valencia 2030 Climate Mission**, Valencia has developed a governance model designed to maximize synergies between climate adaptation and mitigation. To manage this process, the city has created a collaboration space

that fosters multi-level governance and joint decision-making – the **Valencian Collaboration Space**. This initiative emerged from a unique opportunity, thanks to the city's and region's involvement in both the Cities and Adaptation Missions. The collaboration space enables structured interactions between the Valencia City Council, the Regional Government of Valencia, and affiliated institutions, facilitating an integrated and cohesive approach to climate governance. Within this framework, the Valencia Climate Mission and its coordination teams actively identify and leverage synergies between mitigation and adaptation. Examples include:

- Integrating **Urban Greening Projects** into **Mobility Decarbonization Initiatives**
- Integrating **Energy Communities, Building Rehabilitation, and Public Space Greening**
- Creating **Climate Shelters** and **Comfortable Walking Routes**
- Promoting **Circularity** and **Using Waste as a Renewable Energy Source**
- Implementing **Water Management** and **Sustainability in the Tourism Sector**
- Supporting **Sustainable, Local Agriculture**

Another key outcome of the Valencian Collaboration Space's work is the inclusion of adaptation elements in Valencia's 2023 Climate City Contract¹.

Local and regional governments are not the only actors taking measures to better integrate mitigation and adaptation. An interesting example is **Viable Cities' integration of adaptation into Sweden's Climate City Contracts**, which until 2021 had been fully focused on mitigation. Sweden, which has been the pioneer of the national Climate City Contract framework, currently has 48 cities as signatories to the contract. Originally focused on mitigation, the framework has evolved in response to calls from participating cities to incorporate adaptation considerations. In 2021, all 23 cities that were signatories at the time requested integrating adaptation into the Climate City Contracts, having also voiced concerns that funding was largely dedicated to mitigation actions only. The Swedish model offers a valuable example of how existing national platforms can evolve to support integrated, forward-thinking approaches that incorporate both mitigation and adaptation.

On the one hand, it is essential to recognise the importance of having two programmes allocating tailored resources and support to both adaptation and mitigation issues and supporting climate resilience and neutrality action at different governmental scales. On the other side, to maximize impact, the Cities and Adaptation Missions could be more closely aligned, fostering an integrated approach that allows local and regional governments to understand the

¹ Climate City Contracts are formal agreements that cities create as part of efforts like the European Union's Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities. These contracts represent a city's commitment to achieve climate neutrality by 2030 and include a Climate Action Plan, an Investment Plan and a Governance and Participation Plan.

potential of combining mitigation and adaptation efforts and foster collaboration on climate issues across government levels.

Figure 1: Graphic developed as part of a TWG workshop in June 2024 in Valencia, stressing the need to better integrate adaptation and mitigation.



In this direction, a *Development Declaration* for the Cities Mission, titled the *Valencia Green Charter*, led by the seven Spanish Mission cities and the seven Swedish Mission cities, and supported by their respective national platforms, CitiES and Viable Cities, and signed in total by an additional 34 Mission cities and the national platforms of Romania, Germany, Greece and Portugal, puts the integration between mitigation and adaptation as one of the twelve key points to continue advancing the EU Cities Mission going forward. The members of this TWG also stressed the important role of national platforms, such as the Adaptation Hubs, in enabling further integration of adaptation and mitigation, with the City Climate Capital Hub, a project preparation and finance facility for Mission Cities, being the first truly integrated platform.

Rethinking Global and Local Approaches

Traditionally, mitigation has been perceived as a global responsibility, while adaptation has been framed as a localized issue. However, discussions within the TWG challenge this dichotomy. Participants emphasized that adaptation efforts in one region affect resilience in others. Take the example of the Netherlands, which invests heavily in advanced flood defenses to adapt to rising sea levels and heavier rainfall due to climate change. These efforts not only protect Dutch cities but also strengthen the resilience of neighboring countries like Belgium and Germany by preventing cross-border flood risks along the Rhine and Meuse rivers. At the same

time, mitigation policies at the local level contribute to national and global emissions reduction goals. To foster integration, there is a need to move away from rigid distinctions and foster collaboration across sectors and levels.

Aligning Policies and Programming Across Scales

A recurring theme in discussions was that many local governments struggle to integrate their mitigation and adaptation plans due to disjointed governance structures, inconsistent regulatory frameworks, and misaligned funding streams. It was identified that alignment between city-level, regional, national, and EU policies and programming remains a continuous priority. Many cities have a Climate Adaptation Plan to manage risks like heat waves and flooding, and separately, they also have a Mitigation Strategy to reduce carbon emissions. These two strategies are, in most cases, managed by different departments, funded by different programs (some from national sources, some from EU funds), and follow different timelines and reporting structures. Tangibly, this leads to problems such as failing to capture wider benefits. Take the example of urban cooling measures (like green roofs) being promoted under adaptation, but not being integrated with energy-efficiency retrofitting programs funded for mitigation. This results in a missed synergy, as it fails to capture the full potential of urban cooling, simultaneously cooling down temperatures, cutting emissions, and lowering energy demand. Furthermore, if green roofs and retrofits are done separately, construction costs and disruption to residents will likely increase.

3. KEY MESSAGES

This TWG calls on the European institutions to help support a closer integration between adaptation and mitigation in a coordinated and equitable way, ensuring the participation of relevant stakeholders and sustained discussion across sectors and levels of governance. To do so, there are opportunities to:

- **Increase awareness and build technical expertise on the synergies between adaptation and mitigation, with a special focus on local and regional governments.** The integration of mitigation and adaptation requires more coordinated governance frameworks and institutional support, yet many local and regional authorities lack the necessary awareness and capacity to implement holistic climate strategies. Platforms for mutual learning, such as TWG-led exchanges, should be expanded to facilitate knowledge transfer and the sharing of best practices. Documenting and disseminating case studies will allow other cities to learn from real-world experiences and adapt successful strategies to their unique contexts.
- **Develop sustained EU integrated programming through the establishment of long-term programmes, such as cross-Mission calls.** This would ensure that integrated adaptation and mitigation planning remain a priority beyond the traditional four to five years' long political cycles at the local levels.

- **Devise more targeted funds and finance, such as dedicated funding programmes, project preparation facilities, and financial mechanisms that foster cross-sectoral collaboration and alignment between mitigation and adaptation.** A great example of this is the City Climate Capital Hub, a project preparation facility that encourages cities to design plans and projects that address both climate mitigation and adaptation, fostering knowledge sharing and best practices among cities, allowing them to learn from each other's successes and challenges. Crucially, the Hub also connects cities with financial resources, such as private and public sector partnerships, green financing, and innovative solutions like climate bonds or sustainability-linked loans, unlocking funding for both mitigation and adaptation projects. This is critical in ensuring that integrated mitigation and adaptation projects can reach feasibility and implementation. Therefore, there is a need to build on and expand on the work of the City Climate Capital Hub. This includes exploring blended finance models, public-private partnerships, and outcome-based funding. Equally important is ensuring that funding is directed toward recruiting specialized local staff who can navigate the synergies between mitigation and adaptation, including supporting to unlocking finance for mitigation and adaptation.