Local governments in Europe play a crucial role in achieving climate neutrality

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CommitClimate project partners meeting

Alina Safronova at the Institute of Energy Systems and Environment, Riga Technical University, examines how local governments in Europe are one of the most important driving forces on the path to climate neutrality

Local governments in Europe are one of the most important driving forces on the path to climate neutrality. They set strategic directions for improving energy efficiency, developing renewable energy, and reducing local greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Local governments also play a crucial role in engaging the public and local stakeholders – without changing their citizens' habits and behaviour, sustainable change is impossible. However, in practice, the potential of local governments often remains untapped. It is limited by a lack of skills, insufficient tools, and difficulties in calculating emissions and developing future scenarios.

This is where the contribution of the CommitClimate project begins. The project aims to strengthen local governments' capacity to address the challenges of the energy transition and climate neutrality by providing modern, data-driven tools and knowledge support. The project is funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme and implemented in cooperation with partners from Latvia, Estonia, Sweden and Poland.

Local government needs and challenges

The three biggest obstacles to effective climate action by local governments were identified at the beginning of the project:

- There is a need to develop policies that promote the decarbonisation of the energy supply.
- Limited knowledge on how to renew and modernise existing energy and climate plans to meet climate neutrality goals.
- Lack of tools to support the implementation of energy-efficient solutions and the assessment of the impact of different policies.

These challenges illustrate the contradiction: local governments have a great responsibility to achieve climate goals, but often lack the appropriate tools to perform this task qualitatively.

CommitClimate CO_2 simulator for municipalities

The most important result of the project is the municipal CO_2 simulator – a tool that allows:

- To determine the municipal emission baseline.
- To analyse the distribution of emissions by sector (transport, buildings, energy production, waste, etc.).
- To model different policy and technological scenarios.
- To assess how specific measures can affect emission reduction in the future.

The tool is being developed and tested with partners and pilot municipalities across five territories. They represent both large cities and smaller, rural territories. For example, Riga in the project symbolises the challenges of larger cities, while Jokkmokk, located in the north, is characterised by very low population density, large territories, and industrial development plans.

The model is also designed to be useful for smaller municipalities, which often lack a complete database. Therefore, to get started, a minimum of information is sufficient:

- Number of inhabitants.
- Municipal transport fleet.
- Total building area.
- Public lighting units (LED / non-LED).
- Transport demand indicators.

If the municipality lacks detailed data, the model uses national averages to determine general trends. However, if possible, the tool can be filled with more precise data to achieve higher-quality modelling. In each sector, policy switches are available to users, allowing them to adjust various parameters and see how different measures – for example, building renovations, public transport improvements, or increased renewable energy – affect future emission reductions.

Read about the CommitClimate Simulator, here.

Household CO_2 calculator: A dialogue with residents

Since residents' actions directly affect the municipality's total emissions balance, the project has also developed a second tool – the CommitClimate Household CO_2 Simulator. It helps citizens:

- Calculate their personal CO_2 footprint.
- Understand how daily habits (mobility, energy consumption, food choices, waste management, etc.) contribute to emissions.
- Compare individual results with the national average.
- See how specific choices and changes can reduce emissions.

For municipalities, it is a powerful tool in communicating with citizens. It allows not only to explain the importance of climate policy but also to discuss common solutions. The calculator often serves as a starting point for a conversation, where you can discuss mobility, energy-saving, lifestyle habits, and how individual decisions shape the overall result.

Read about The CommitClimate Household CO_2 Simulator here.

Platform: A single tool for knowledge, data, and decision-making

Both the municipal CO_2 simulator and the household calculator are available on a single online platform. It contains:

- Detailed information about the project.
- A resource library with guidelines, studies, and materials.
- A training module for municipal specialists.
- Examples of good practices in reducing emissions in different sectors.
- Self-assessment tests to strengthen understanding.

This platform helps municipalities to work with emissions issues systematically – not only by calculating emissions, but also by creating a strategic vision based on data and comparable scenarios.

Citizen involvement: An essential component of the project

Throughout the project, great attention was paid to communication with citizens. Workshops, discussions, and meetings were organised both at the municipal and national levels. The partners involved in the project regularly shared the tools and results at various events. A large-

scale study was also conducted in four countries – in Sweden and Poland in the partner municipalities, and in Latvia and Estonia at the national level. A total of 1,150 citizens were surveyed.

The survey covered:

- Mobility habits.
- Energy consumption.
- Waste management.
- Lifestyle habits and understanding of climate issues and
- Citizens' assessment of municipal services and initiatives.

The results help to understand which solutions are acceptable to the public, where more clarification is needed, and in which directions municipalities should focus their resources.

Read the survey results, here.

In conclusion

The CommitClimate project combines modelling, knowledge, and public engagement into a single system that helps municipalities not only calculate emissions, but also understand their causes, assess the impact of policies, and create thoughtful, effective development scenarios. Both the municipal simulator, the household calculator, and the extensive resource and training platform make the project an essential tool for climate planning in the Baltic Sea Region.
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