

## Local authorities and citizens on the front line of climate change challenges

*On April 26, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities organised the webinar Let's talk local: cities and citizens in the fight against climate change in the framework of the World Democracy Forum (WDF). Elected officials and representatives of citizen initiatives stressed the need for cities to cooperate and forge alliances: with citizens, by promoting co-decision and citizen participation, and with other communities and international bodies for undertaking joint actions.*

Municipalities and citizens are the first to face the upheavals caused by climate change. That is why the Congress has included policies to combat global warming in its priorities for the period 2021-2026, stressed its President Leendert Verbeek, insisting on the principle of subsidiarity in sustainable development: it is up to municipalities to propose innovative green policies, close to citizens, without leaving aside the fight against social exclusion.

In this sense, the Mayor of Strasbourg Jeanne Barseghian recalled that the ecological transition requires an economic and democratic transition in order to avoid various forms of social and political discrimination feared by citizens. By declaring the climate emergency in July 2020, the city of Strasbourg has committed to take into account the ecological impact of all decisions involving the municipality. The Climate Alliance, open to all citizens, has invited local economic actors to sign the pact for a sustainable economy, which entails significant public and private investment for the green economy. Julia Dumay, the city councillor of Strasbourg and the French member of the Congress (SOC/V/DP), highlighted that the city has currently set up an online ecological forum with a bus circulating in the neighbourhoods for raising awareness among the population, but also for collecting everyone's opinions on the climate issue.

The mobilisation of all stakeholders at the local and regional level, including civil society, appears to be one of the keys to success in this respect. The moderator of the first panel discussion, Gerhard Ermischer, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges of the Conference of International NGOs of the Council of Europe, stressed that regional and local governments alone will not be able to overcome this crisis. Therefore, he underlined that the support of civil society is becoming indispensable, as it also shown by the examples presented during the webinar.

Jérôme Lhote, facilitator of the "Climate Mandate", stressed that beyond the involvement of citizens the awareness of decision-makers is a key prerequisite in the implementation of the proposals. This workshop proposed by the association the Climate Collage aims to deepen the knowledge of local elected officials who often do not realise the scope and gravity of the climate crisis. The aim is to ensure that they understand the levers of the territories in areas such as building, transport or food-producing, and that they act accordingly.

Saara Ilvessalo (SOC/V/DP), the Turku city councillor and Finnish member of the Congress, shared the experience of her municipality, which has implemented more ambitious green policies than those proposed at the national level, clearly showing that for successful implementation of sustainable

development strategies the involvement of partners from various social and economic backgrounds, such as businesses, universities, youth associations and ordinary citizens who could be considered as potential "climate agents", is needed.

In the United Kingdom the establishment of the citizens' jury on the climate as a result of the recruitment process by the Leeds City Municipality enabled the representation of diverse interests of population. According to Siobhan Leese, one of the jury members, the jury's twelve recommendations have already been incorporated into the city's priorities focused on the reduction of the city's carbon impact by 50% by 2025.

The issue of "sustainable financing" of initiatives to combat global warming was raised by Mohamed Daoudi (the Mayor of Guesser, Morocco) and two youth delegates to the Congress. Saara Ilvessalo mentioned the possibility for young people in Turku to finance their green initiatives through participation in the Municipal Youth Parliament and the Youth Climate Forum, as well as different grants and financial assistance offered by the European Union.

However, many municipalities do not have the same easy access to funding, which makes it difficult to enforce certain decisions taken at national or international level. Even large municipalities, such as Athens, have to mobilise significant resources to combat poverty in the context of the green transition. According to the regional councillor of Attica and member of the Congress Eirini Dourou (Greece, SOC/V/DP), energy poverty is one of the major challenges showing the necessity to negotiate on a new economic and democratic model.

- [Congress Participation to the WFD "12 Months, 1 Question" campaign \(coe.int\)](#)
- [Programme of the round table event of 26 April 2021](#)
- [Leaflet of the round table event of 26 April 2021](#)

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