

41  
NOVEMBER  
2022

## BOOSTING EURO-MEDITERRANEAN URBAN CLIMATE ACTION

**Ricardo Martinez**, Senior Research Fellow, Global Cities Programme, CIDOB  
**Alicia Perez-Porro**, Scientific Coordinator, CREAM

*On 27th October 2022, experts and practitioners of city networks and intergovernmental organizations gathered in Barcelona for a workshop in preparation of COP 27, taking place on 6-18 November 2022 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. The event, organized by CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs) in partnership with CREAM (Centre for Ecological Research and Forestry Applications) and the support of Barcelona City Council, discussed ways to promote collective urban climate action in the specific context of the Euro-Mediterranean region.*



**W**arming 20% faster than the global average, the Mediterranean region is a hotspot of the climate emergency. If untamed, this trajectory can turn into a serious stability risk. More than ever, the region needs strong transnational collaboration and cooperation on science and policies for a sustainable development that can mitigate climate and environmental risks, and promote adaptation solutions.

With around 70% of the Mediterranean population residing in urban areas, collective urban climate action will be central to this endeavor. The Conference of the Parties (COP) 27, which is to take place in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, on 6-18 November 2022, represents a unique opportunity to promote joined-up Mediterranean urban climate action. The conference's prioritization of adaptation and finance for adaptation are particularly relevant for cities in the South and East Mediterranean which face greater risks from climate and environmental changes and damages.

### 1. A changing climate in an expanding urban Mediterranean region

Despite its relatively low share (6%) in global greenhouse (GHG) emissions, the Mediterranean basin is critically affected by the climate emergency. The region is a 'climate change hotspot', with forecasts consistently projecting that the region will experience sustained sea level rise, higher

temperatures, and decreased precipitation (Ali et al., 2022). With a high concentration of the 500 million inhabitants in the region living in cities close to sea level, the Mediterranean basin presents high exposure (i.e. the presence of population and infrastructure that could be affected) and vulnerability to climate change. From flooding, erosion, and seawater acidification to wildfires, heat waves, water scarcity, and droughts, climate change will increasingly impact upon human health, security, and key economic sectors in the region such as agriculture, fisheries, and tourism.

The core dimension of the impact of climate change in the Mediterranean basin is that approximately one-third of the population lives in coastal areas that are often experiencing urban growth. This is particularly the case for Northern Africa and Middle East, where the population is expected to double during the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the intersection of climate hazards and socio-economic vulnerability, the number of people exposed to sea level rise and coastal hazards will increase in the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores, where 66% of the total population is already living in cities, accounting for 313 million urban dwellers. As climate change will intensify during the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the development of adaptive capacity can no longer be postponed.

Furthermore, the imperative of developing the limited adaptive capacity of coastal cities through collective action against climate change transcends the immediate

impact of rising sea levels on growing urban population, infrastructure, and assets. For there is a fundamental linkage between climate risks and security in the Mediterranean basin. Decreasing rain-fed crops yields and increasing water shortages will cause rising demand for water for irrigation and an expanding population, ultimately exacerbating competition for resources and food insecurity, particularly in Northern Africa and Middle East. For instance, three of the most water-scarce countries of the world are located in the southern and eastern rims of the Mediterranean, which offers us a clue of the security risks we might encounter in the coming decades in a business-as-usual policy landscape. As inequality and poverty lead the most vulnerable people to be disproportionately affected by land degradation and food insecurity, climate change might fuel the socio-economic and political factors underpinning migration flows and conflicts.

Moreover, the interdependencies of a globalized world come here into full swing. With sub-Saharan Africa being the fastest growing region of the world and one of the most

Yet, in light of financial constraints and against the complexity and urgency of the challenge ahead, debates within the domain of urban climate action have often shaped around the tension between adaptation and mitigation in terms of prioritization of policy objectives (Castán Broto, 2017). For decades, urban climate action has globally prioritized mitigation, often with large cities from the global North playing a predominant role. To be sure, as nation-states are not delivering the necessary measures to keep the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, as indicated by the Paris Agreement, the mitigating efforts of cities, which currently account for 67-72% of the global share of GHG emissions, are highly necessary (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2022). However, change is underway as adaptation and resilience are gaining relevance in urban climate action, which is of vital importance for cities in the global South, as they face the intertwined challenge of tackling their higher vulnerability to climate hazards while accommodating an expanding urban population. This North/South

## From economic instability to social unrest and political upheavals, the impact of climate change in Mediterranean cities will also be a matter of security.

affected by climate change, the role of the Mediterranean Sea as the obligatory, and very dangerous, passage point for many emigrants from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe will gain further centrality. From economic instability to social unrest and political upheavals, the impact of climate change in Mediterranean cities will also be a matter of security.

### **2. Urban climate actions and transnational collaborations in a divided Mediterranean**

At the intermediary level between the international commitments of nation-states and individual action, cities as governmental actors play a fundamental role in both adapting to and mitigating the impacts of a changing climate. The crux of cities' role in global climate governance is that local climate action plans are simultaneously local and global. They can protect and nurture their local population, infrastructure, and assets, and contribute to the overarching goal of returning within planetary boundaries. This is the ultimate understanding of the inseparability of adaptation and mitigation. In fact, local action plans with a transformational impact are those that integrate adaptation and mitigation measures, with specific co-benefits emerging from the synergy between the two in multiple areas of local policy-making such as building regulation, green infrastructure, energy systems, legislative and regulatory frameworks, transportation measures, urban design and land use planning, water governance, and waste management (Sharifi, 2021).

divide is at the center of the landscape of urban climate action in the Mediterranean basin.

This regional divide can be tackled through the operations of the three largest global city networks that are thematically focused on climate action and environmental governance, and which play a fundamental role in upscaling successful local initiatives through knowledge exchange and normative frameworks in order to contribute to global challenges. Cities have embarked in collaborative endeavors to address climate change, the paradigmatic example of a transnational challenge that has outflanked the capacity of nation-states to engage in coordinated, bold action. Aware of the value of sharing knowledge among peers facing similar challenges and engaging towards common objectives, cities have joined forces through networking organizations (i.e. transnational city networks) that prove the strength that derives from collective efforts and where yet so much is still to be done. Cities require enabling governance systems, knowledge and capacity building, and financial and technological resources in order to take the necessary adaptive and mitigating actions to tackle climate change at the local level. As transnational city networks are key in assisting their members through learning platforms, reporting systems, technical expertise, and brokerage to partners, they should play an even bolder role in supporting cities from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, while bolstering their cooperation with peer cities in the northern rim.

The city network ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is active in more than 2,500 cities and regions across the world through a plethora of supporting initiatives that range from low emission models and the circular economy to nature-based solutions and resilience. Similarly, the members of C40 Cities, a global network of nearly 100 large cities, seek to halve their emissions within a decade and drop from over 5 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per capita today to around 2.9 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per capita by 2030, in order to stay within the 1.5 °C target of the Paris Agreement. Complementarily, Resilient Cities Networks (R-Cities) is a network that comprises almost 100 large cities as members, most of which count with dedicated Chief Resilience Officers (CROs), who are top-level officials formally appointed by the cities' mayors to develop local resilience strategies.

Whilescores of cities in the Northern rim, from the European Union (EU) countries and Turkey, are actively engaged in the largest global climate-oriented city networks, the only members from the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean are Amman, Byblos, Chefchaouen,

## The urban climate agenda has still little momentum in the Mediterranean basin and the COP 27 in Egypt offers a unique opportunity to call for bolder and highly necessary engagements.

Ramallah, and Tel Aviv-Yafo. This degree of engagement transcends these specific networks and echoes in the wider set of transnational relations through which cities develop their local climate action plans. There are only 127 cities from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean among the over 12,000 cities from 142 countries that have signed up to the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM), which is currently the largest global alliance on urban climate action. Similarly, there are no cities from this part of the Mediterranean basin among the top-scorer cities identified by the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) over the last years, which yet counts with cities such as Athens, Barcelona, and Florence among its top-scorers from the northern rim in 2021.

In short, within the global compelling case for collective urban climate action and the key role deployed by transnational city networks and their partners in sharing knowledge, pooling resources, and fostering engagement, there is a clear North-South divide that cuts across the Mediterranean basin. The adaptative and mitigating measures urgently required at the local level provide the opportunity to revamp the cross-border collaboration among cities facing the Mediterranean Sea, building on the longstanding ties of international development cooperation and solidarity around the shared Mediterranean space. The urban climate agenda has still little momentum in the Mediterranean basin and the COP 27 in Egypt offers a unique opportunity

to call for bolder and highly necessary engagements. In line with the commitment enshrined in the European Green Deal (EGD) to transform Europe in the first climate-neutral continent by mid-century,<sup>1</sup> cities from the different shores of the Mediterranean should lead by example and join the global ambition towards net-zero GHG emissions by 2050.

### 3. Reinvigorating the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership around urban climate action

Cities from across the world, particularly through the collaborative efforts channeled through climate-oriented city networks and their partners, have gone into great lengths to tackle climate change at the local level. Decisions such as the alliance between ICLEI and CDP to establish the largest unified reporting system of measurable local climate actions are central to prompt other cities to join this global ambition, while increasing public accountability both vis-à-vis other tiers of governance and their own citizens. Likewise, 83% of

GCoM signatories are targeting lower per capita emissions that are more ambitious than their respective country's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which are the national climate actions plans required under the Paris Agreement (GCoM, 2021). While these efforts are highly necessary in the context of the climate emergency, there is a compelling case for a more equal distribution of financial resources both in geographical and operational terms, which is that at the heart of the North-South divide that depicts the Mediterranean basin. For, according to the 2021 State of Cities Climate Finance Report, within an estimated total annual amount of 384 US\$ billion invested on average in urban climate finance in 2017-2018, the largest portion was invested in China and in developed economies, including the northern shore of the Mediterranean, with only 9% of total investments targeting adaptation (Negreiros et al., 2021).

Since Egypt, which holds the Presidency of COP 27, is particularly vulnerable to climate change and following the call by the COP 26 Glasgow Climate Pact to double adaptation financing, climate adaptation and finance for adaptation are expected be at the center of the discussions in Sharm El Sheikh. One of the great

---

1. In order to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, the European Commission (EC) has set the intermediate target to reduce GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

unknowns about adaptation is if ‘loss and damage’ - a term referred to the consequences of climate change that go beyond what people can adapt to, or when the options exist but the community does not have the resources to access them - is even going to make it to the final agenda. From an urban perspective, the centrality of climate adaptation is in line with the call from cities of the global South to prioritize adaptation over mitigation (Abdullah, 2021). Adaptation can play a decisive role in the governance of cities in the global South through a myriad of different local initiatives, from building resilient infrastructure and upgrading housing to establishing early-warning and emergency protocols for extreme events. Knowledge exchanges with peers with more expertise in the northern rim can help cities in the southern and eastern shores around adaptation policy areas where capacity-building is urgently required, such as strengthening healthcare services and developing monitoring frameworks to construct robust data on climate impacts and risks.

## Adaptation can play a decisive role in the governance of cities in the global South through a myriad of different local initiatives.

Yet the inseparability of adaptation and mitigation, as well as of the environmental and social impacts of climate change, should remain a core element in the advocacy of cities at COP 27. Mediterranean cities are both disproportionately affected by climate change impacts and uniquely positioned to drive climate action. The concentration of populations, infrastructure, and assets in the region’s cities, and their clustering in coastal areas makes them highly vulnerable to more frequent and intense extreme weather events, which will have enormous impacts on human health and well-being. In turn, with urban areas being major polluters and emitters, city-level climate action is vital for the achievement of the 2030 and 2050 climate targets. In Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, climate actions should target both the largest cities, where much of the urban growth will occur in absolute terms, and the smaller ones, where there will be faster growth in relative terms (World Bank, 2021). It is in this region, where rapid urban growth is causing unsustainable development trends that aggravate environmental degradation and adversely affect cities’ climate resilience (including weak land use regulation, energy, water and waste management inefficiency, and a lack of low-carbon mobility modes), and where policies boosting local mitigation and adaptation are urgently needed.

In order to untap the enormous, and equally necessary, potential of cities in a highly vulnerable and divided urban region such as the Mediterranean, concrete advancements should be pursued. These policy objectives refer to both an internal dimension, across the relationships forged

among cities often through transnational city networks, and an external one, through the recognition and provision of resources by key partners in the public realm, at national and particularly international level, as well as in the private sector.

As per the internal dimension, the essential networking role deployed by transnational city networks should not be covered solely by highly efficient climate-oriented organizations, but by a broader set of city networks that, even without the thematic expertise, could support cities particularly in the Southern and East Mediterranean. While the relevance of reporting systems and brokering to partners are instrumental to provide cities with the incentives and resources to join the global race towards climate neutrality or at least a low-carbon model, global and regional city networks without a longstanding thematic focus on climate action and environmental governance can also contribute to collective urban climate action. This is in particular to complement influential city networks that rely on private sector funding, by ensuring that public funding

and ownership contribute on the ground to such a shared challenge such as urban climate action. This contribution may unleash through city networks with a different financial and operational capacity from the most influential climate-oriented networks mentioned above, harnessing embedded on-the-ground existing institutional capital, as is the case of MedCities, which builds on a longstanding collaboration among cities from all the shores of the Mediterranean since the 1990s.

As per the external dimension, it should first be recalled that transnational city networks are proactively supporting cities in their joint commitment, design, implementation, and reporting of climate targets, yet their actual power to influence the global climate policy-making bodies is still marginal. The Local Governments and Municipal Authority (LGMA) constituency, acting as the official channel of sub-national governments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since the first COP of 1995, is still rooted in the understanding of city governments as non-state actors. Cities do integrate the overwhelming majority of the governmental systems of the UN member states, in addition to the fact that it is not possible to seek to strengthen the contribution of non-state actors to enhance the effectiveness of multilateralism while protecting the prerogatives of national sovereignty (Graute, 2016). As the on-the-ground commitments of cities to fight climate change in an urban world are more ambitious than their national counterparts, so should be their formal role in the global climate policy-making bodies. For the same

token, access to public financing and direct investment should be eased in order to allow cities to unlock their transformative actions in terms of mitigation and, for cities in the global South, adaptation. This claim will be central to the discussions in Sharm El Sheikh, as this edition of the conference has been informally called the 'Africa COP', with the African national leaders seeking to put climate finance top on the agenda by recalling the unmet pledge of the 100 US\$ billion yearly climate funding by developed countries agreed at the COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009. Complementarily, the growing interest in facilitating investment by the private sector in rapidly expanding urban regions is a positive sign. Specific policy frameworks will need to be put in place to broker between demand and offer, while protecting public interest particularly for cities in the global South.

The increase of financial flows is yet just one side of the cooperation for urban climate action. Cooperation among cities also relies on the longstanding tradition of knowledge exchange and capacity-building. In light of the need to

In light of the North-South divide that informs the vulnerability to climate change in the region, the EU should play a fundamental role to support collective urban climate action. These efforts should be guided by the overarching goal of not exacerbating social inequality and pursuing a fair share of the climate change burden, supported by ties of solidarity, development cooperation, and knowledge exchange. More than 25 years after the Barcelona Declaration, the EU's New Agenda for the Mediterranean should foster joint ownership across the Mediterranean by channeling financial resources towards cities in the southern and eastern shores specifically targeted to climate action. The EU's call to a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighborhood, in tandem with a more assertive role of cities in the action plan of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), could build on the longstanding ties of decentralized cooperation in the region to support and mobilize the expertise of cities along the shores of the Mediterranean.

## There is, thus, a compelling case for two-ways knowledge exchanges across peer cities with expertise along the shores of the Mediterranean basin.

promote multi-actor approaches against the complexity of the challenge ahead, such an exchange should also include the transfer of scientific knowledge and technology. Knowledge exchange will be particularly relevant in the decades ahead as it might contribute to overturning conventional models of North-to-South cooperation. For, in a changing climate scenario, cities in the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean will increasingly experience climate change impacts that, over time, will expand to the northern rim, hence the development of their adaptive capacity will be particularly insightful for cities in Southern Europe. There is, thus, a compelling case for two-ways knowledge exchanges across peer cities with expertise along the shores of the Mediterranean basin.

To drive and accelerate Mediterranean urban climate action, stronger cooperation between cities from the North, South and East is needed, as well as new platforms for multi-level Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and cooperation that address the regional climate emergency with a special focus on urban areas. With the most vulnerable group in terms of inequality and poverty disproportionately affected, climate change has a direct impact on security in our contemporary interconnected world, fueling the socio-economic and political factors underpinning migration flows and conflicts. Peace and stability in the Mediterranean no longer just depend on strong political, economic, and sociocultural ties, but increasingly also on environmental collaboration. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership urgently needs to add a fourth "basket" on environmental cooperation to its activities, and cities need to be central to this work.

### References

- Abdullah, H. (2022). "Becoming global climate governors: How cities are moving from climate ambition to coordinated action and delivery". *Notes Internacionals CIDOB*, Vol. 273, pp. 1–7.
- Ali, E., Cramer, W., Carnicer, J., Georgopoulou, E., Hilmi, N. J. M., Le Cozannet, G., and Lionello, P. (2022). "Cross-Chapter Paper 4: Mediterranean Region", in: H. -O. Pörtner, D. C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E. S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, and B. Rama (2022) *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Castán Broto, V. (2017). "Urban Governance and the Politics of Climate Change". *World Development*, Vol. 93, pp. 1–15.
- Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy. (2021). *Impact Report 2021*. Brussels: GCoM.
- Graute, U. (2016). "Local Authorities Acting Globally for Sustainable Development". *Regional Studies*, Vol. 50(11), pp. 1931-1942.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2022). "Summary for Policymakers", in: P. R. Shukla, J. Skea, R.

Slade, A. Al Khourdajie, R. van Diemen, D. McCollum, M. Pathak, S. Some, P. Vyas, R. Fradera, M. Belkacemi, A. Hasija, G. Lisboa, S. Luz, and J. Malley (2022) *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Negreiros, P., Furio, V., Falconer, A., Richmond, M., Yang, K., Jungman, L., Tonkonogy, B., Novikova, A., Pearson, M., and Skinner, I. (2021). *The State of Cities Climate Finance – Part 1: The Landscape of Urban Climate Finance*. San Francisco: Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance.

Sharifi, A. (2021). “Co-benefits and synergies between urban climate change mitigation and adaptation measures: A literature review”. *Science of the Total Environment*, Vol. 750(141642), pp. 1-17.