

Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2024

A state of cities report through
the voices of mayors



Table of Contents

Foreword	4
Highlights	6
Executive summary	8
Taking the pulse of European mayors	11
Top priorities for mayors for 2024	12
Top challenges for mayors in 2023	17
Mayors' opinion on key policies and EU support	20
Mayors' priorities for next elections and support expected	31
Cities making a difference	38
Climate adaptation	39
Government innovation	46



Burkhard Jung

President of
Eurocities and Mayor
of Leipzig

The European elections this year mark a good moment to reflect on how cities' voices have been heard in Europe these past five years. Meanwhile, it presents an opportunity to look to the future and decide where we would like to be by 2030.

Over the past five years, the power and influence of cities have made a leap forward. During the Covid pandemic, the Russian war in Ukraine, and the energy and cost-of-living crisis, we proved that strong city responses are possible to the most central issues of the day. Moreover, there is a growing recognition of this critical role of cities at both European and international levels.

As Eurocities, we have seen many successes. To name a few: the creation of the European Commissions' Mission for 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030, our first-ever meeting with a European Commission President and our campaign for Ukraine with the President of the European Parliament.

At the same time, we have closely followed developments at European level on the European Green Deal and other key policy files, setting the case for cities.

As the place where most people live, cities must also be bastions of good governance. We must offer good quality public services, while working hand-in-hand with our surrounding peri-urban and rural areas. Our innovation capacity is essential to Europe's ability to weather and mitigate the many storms it must deal with.

With this in mind, we need to push for a strong European Union that defends respect for the rule of law, fundamental rights and democratic values. A Union that can respond to the threats of the current perma-crisis, while pursuing the long-term goal of a sustainable and inclusive future. In turn, an empowered EU must be encouraged to work ever more closely with its member states, regions and cities.

That is why, in our 'A better Europe starts in cities' manifesto for the European elections 2024, we laid out a series of key demands. These include ensuring a strong delivery of the European Green Deal, making the European Pillar of Social Rights a powerful motor for the just transition, and creating an urban envoy in the European Commission, who would have a mandate to oversee and coordinate all EU policies and initiatives for cities and urban areas.

As we have demonstrated in the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey, finding the solutions to climate change must be a priority, which is essential when thinking about the long term. But we need to also consider ways to make life easier for people today, which is something cities are very experienced at.



André Sobczak
Secretary General,
Eurocities

I agree with the message of President Jung that we should be proud of our successes and look forward to what cities can achieve in the coming years. While we face a more complex environment than ever before, cities are the level of government that is the closest to citizens and are the most trusted by them. They have the potential to imagine and implement new solutions.

As the major network of large European cities, it is our responsibility to identify these challenges and solutions to disseminate this knowledge and integrate it into our advocacy activities. This is why, in addition to the permanent discussions with our members, we launched in 2023 an annual survey to take the pulse of the mayors of European cities.

This second edition of the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey is based on the replies of 92 mayors from 28 countries who I warmly thank for their commitment. While climate change remains the top priority for European mayors in 2024, they also pay much more attention to social inclusion and housing than last year. This underlines that, unlike many populist politicians, mayors do not oppose ecological and social needs and rather aim to work simultaneously on both challenges to develop a just transition where no one is left behind. The survey also highlights very strongly that cities must further increase their administrative capacity and get additional financial support from the EU and national governments to successfully manage these challenges.

This year's Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey is launched just ahead of the elections for the European Parliament and only a few months before the appointment of the next European Commission. It thus constitutes an excellent resource for the next Members of the European Parliament and European Commissioners who want to make sure their policies are in line with the needs and expectations of European city leaders and their citizens. This is also particularly true for the next seven-year EU budget.

Together with the whole Eurocities team, I will do my best to disseminate the results of this Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey to show that our advocacy is based on clear evidence. With this aim, we will organise several events in the coming weeks and months and work together with academics who would like to further analyse the data we collected. I encourage you to look at the results already presented in these pages, along with our guest essays. Through our mayors, we will continue to work for a Europe that better represents its people.

In 2024 Eurocities ran a survey collecting answers from almost 100 mayors.

The analysis of this survey painted the picture of their work ahead and what they need to reach their goals.

TOP PRIORITIES FOR MAYORS IN 2024



MAYORS MOST IMPORTANT STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THEIR PRIORITIES:

85%



SOURCING ADDITIONAL CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OR EU FUNDING FOR MY CITY

61%



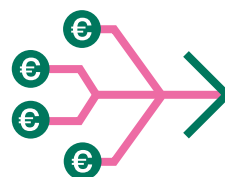
FOCUS ON INNOVATION CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT NEW, CUTTING-EDGE SOLUTIONS

49%



ESTABLISH BETTER WAYS TO COOPERATE WITH THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT (AND EU IF RELEVANT)

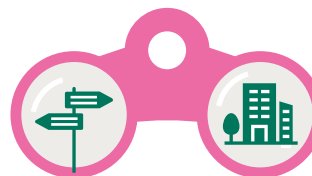
MAYORS NEED THE EU TO:



STREAMLINE FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR URBAN INITIATIVES



STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



INCORPORATE URBAN PERSPECTIVES INTO EU POLICY MAKING

MAYORS LACK SUFFICIENT TOOLS AND CAPACITY TO:

54%

MEET THE CURRENT HOUSING NEEDS OF THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE



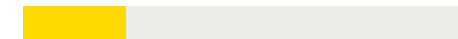
49%

MEET THEIR CLIMATE COMMITMENTS AND TARGETS

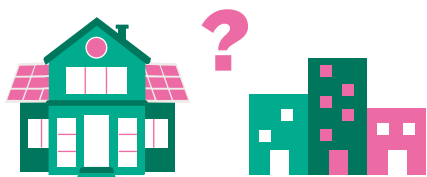


23%

PROMOTE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION WITH A FOCUS ON DIGITAL INCLUSION



79% OF MAYORS BELIEVE THEY NEED TO **MAKE COMPROMISES** BETWEEN DELIVERING **HIGH QUALITY** AND **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**, ENSURING **GOOD ENERGY STANDARDS** AND **INCREASING THE QUANTITY** OF HOUSING



7 OUT OF 10 MAYORS AGREE THAT THE MAJORITY OF THEIR CONSTITUENCY PRIORITISES AND DEMANDS **ACTION ON DECARBONISATION** POLICIES,



HOWEVER **ONE OUT OF TWO MAYORS** IS CONCERNED ABOUT LOCAL **BACKLASH** AGAINST THEIR CLIMATE POLICIES

WHAT SHOULD THE **TOP PRIORITIES** OF THE NEXT **EUROPEAN COMMISSION** BE, ACCORDING TO MAYORS?



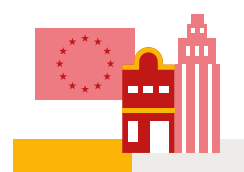
55%

MORE INVESTMENT INTO SUSTAINABLE URBAN MOBILITY



54%

MAKE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING A EUROPEAN PRIORITY



49%

A LONG-TERM STRATEGY AND VISION FOR THE EU AND CITIES TO WORK BETTER TOGETHER

TOP AREAS WHERE MAYORS WOULD LIKE THE **NEXT EU BUDGET** TO SUPPORT THEM



CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY TRANSITION

72%

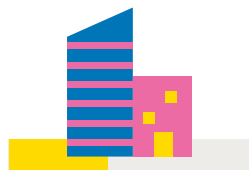
SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

49%

ACCESS TO HOUSING

48%

TOP THREE SECTORS PERCEIVED AS THE MOST LIKELY TO BE **IMPACTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE**



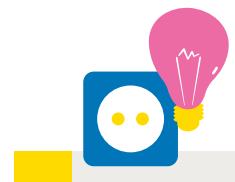
41%

BUILDINGS



31%

TRANSPORTATION



24%

ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE

85% OF **MAYORS** BELIEVE THAT GOVERNMENT **INNOVATION** IS **ESSENTIAL**

TOP INNOVATION ACTIVITIES THAT **BENEFIT CITIES**



72%

DATA-DRIVEN ANALYTICS AND EVIDENCED-BASED POLICY MAKING



60%

DEVELOPING NEW SERVICES AND SOLUTIONS BASED ON DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES



57%

HUMAN-CENTRED DESIGN OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS

Executive summary

As we head full throttle into the European elections season, this second edition of the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey aims to ‘take the pulse’ of mayors at a crucial moment for our continent. The survey is based on research conducted among mayors from the 204 member cities of the Eurocities network. Between December 2023 and February 2024 mayors were invited to reply to an online survey. This consisted of six open-ended and nine closed questions.

For the closed questions, the results are presented either at an aggregate level or in the specified disaggregated way, for example by region, and without further manipulation. For some of the questions, such as top challenges and top priorities for 2024, we used open-ended questions to allow mayors to respond freely without predetermining their response.

To make sense of these responses, we further analysed, then categorised, and ranked them accordingly. For each part of the survey, we gave mayors space to leave additional comments, in order to further validate some of the assumptions we might otherwise have made from the results. In addition, we have received further input from other research partners on best practice.

New this year, we also experimented with asking mayors to rank certain phrases to determine how well they resonated with each of them; the results of which are made clear later in the analysis. In total we received 92 responses from mayors of large cities across 28 European countries. The responses thus offer a good representative sample of the political voice of mayors from major European cities on key issues.

What you will read in these pages is a selection of the main findings of the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2024. Along with our research partners, we plan to further analyse many of these data points in order to find new insights, and ways to present our findings, over the course of this year.

Mayors are increasingly at the centre of politics at all levels of government. It is only with mayors on board, ensuring a proper implementation of policy in our cities, that the twin digital and green transformations can be enacted without leaving anyone behind, and broader societal and international goals achieved.

In their top priorities for 2024 more than half of mayors selected climate action for the second year running; more than double any other category. In their reflections, mayors highlight the co-benefits of the climate transition to other sectors, and the central role of cities in leading the way in actions as diverse as building renovations and reaching out to citizens.

Despite this, one major reflection shared by mayors is the lack of financial resources and local-level capacity to actually deliver on their climate ambitions and commitments.

The provision of fair and affordable housing, as well as more priority given to promoting social inclusion, are two areas that have noticeably gained priority for mayors this year. While house building may have fallen off the agenda in recent years, rental and housing costs are now a key voter concern as we head into different elections this year, and it could be a strong factor in determining outcomes. Although housing is not an EU competence, it's clear that from a city point of view tackling EU-level barriers for making affordable housing accessible locally should be a priority.

**Almost 100 mayors
across Europe
responded to the
Eurocities Pulse survey**



Overall, most of the 10 top challenges shared by mayors reflect global current affairs, in one way or another, showing how interlinked the local political level is with other levels of government. While both the impacts of the Russian war in Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic have dropped out of the top 10, they are still mentioned prominently by mayors in their reflections.

Meanwhile, 29% of mayors highlight issues such as access to water, the effects of extreme heat, the challenge of promoting climate adaptation measures, as well as advancing on decarbonisation and climate neutrality goals as the number one challenge they faced in 2023.

2024 sees new faces filling both the hemicycle of the European Parliament and the European Commission's college of commissioners. With this in mind, the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2024 includes a section asking mayors their opinions on key policy areas that will impact cities and should be placed high on the EU agenda.

When asked about their current ability to match the needs of their city, 49% said they lack sufficient tools and capacity to meet their climate commitments and targets, and 54% will struggle to meet the current housing needs of the most vulnerable people.

When it comes to housing, one of the top three priorities of mayors this year, the vast majority of mayors (79%) believe they need to make compromises between delivering high quality and affordable housing, ensuring good energy standards and increasing the quantity of housing.

When it comes to funding priorities, mayors from the EU believe the top areas for EU investment should be climate change and energy; sustainable mobility, and access to housing; confirming several long-term trends.

A guest essay by Agustí Fernández de Losada, Director of the Global Cities Programme at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, highlights the potential impact of new political formations at the European level, which could jeopardise urban priorities such as climate action.

This is mirrored by Themis Christophidou, Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy, who emphasises the importance of sustainable urban development in Europe, highlighting the role of cities in achieving green, inclusive, and resilient environments. In doing so she stresses multi-level governance and community involvement in shaping urban policies, and the critical support of Cohesion Policy in assisting cities to transition towards sustainability and tackle regional disparities.

In the first of two special sections, which included more targeted questions in this year's Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey, we look at climate adaptation. This is a pressing concern for mayors, as highlighted by Ambroise Fayolle, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank, in a guest essay that emphasises the importance of private sector engagement and social equity. The approach Fayolle describes aims to fortify cities against climate change while ensuring a just transition for vulnerable communities.

In the second special section, which focusses on government innovation, we learn that over 85% of respondents to the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey revealed that without innovation, their cities will not have sufficient resources to deliver on local priorities.

A guest essay from Philipp Rode of LSE Cities discusses the importance of government innovation in city governance, emphasising the need for proactive strategies to tackle societal challenges like climate change, housing, and internal governance issues, with nearly 90% of cities confident in their capacity to innovate, according to the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey.

Whether the more recent or long-standing trends, priorities and challenges discussed in these pages, all of them are covered by working groups and projects within Eurocities, the network of major European cities.

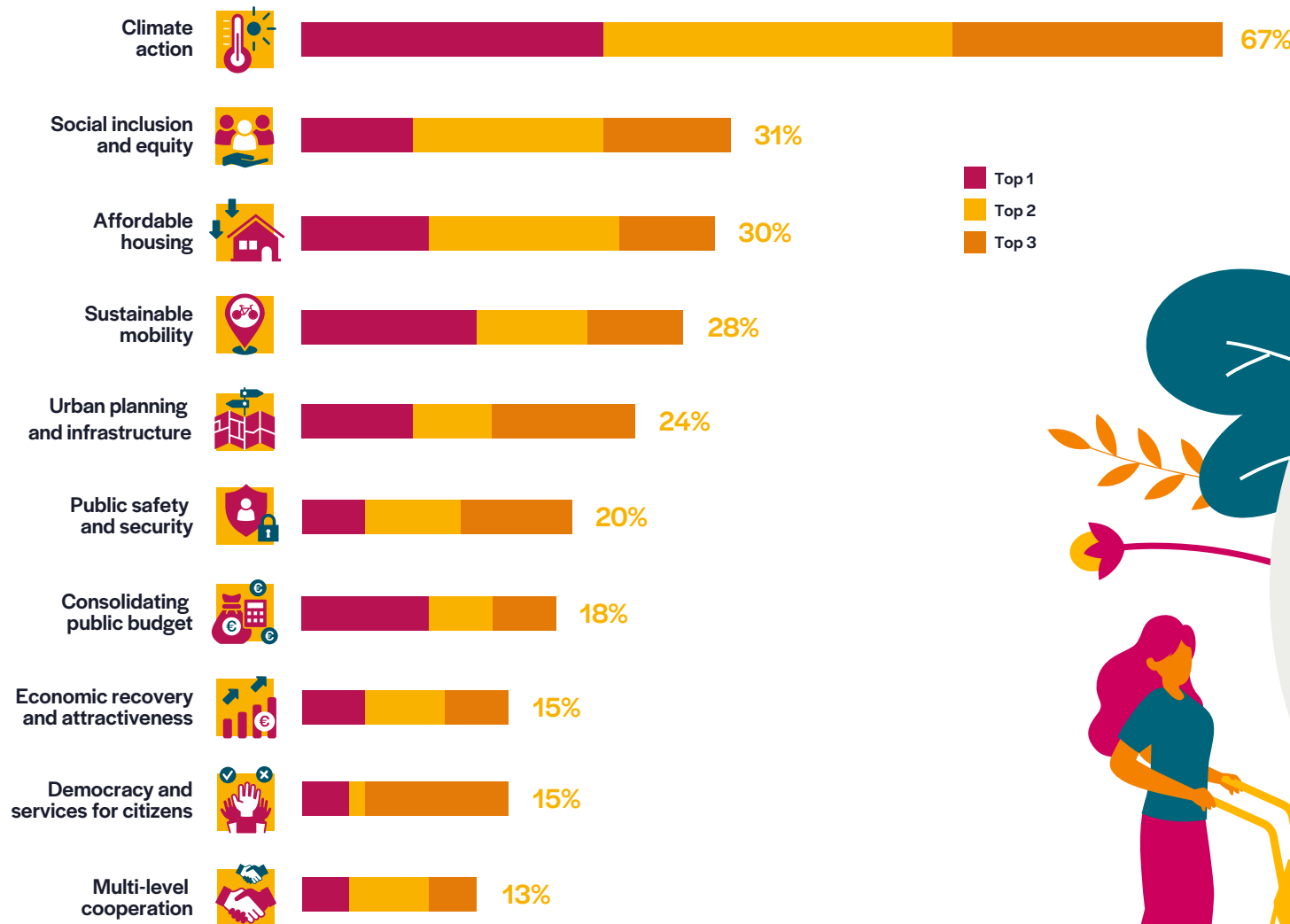
Taking the pulse of European mayors



Looking forward: top priorities for mayors for 2024

Climate action is by far the top priority for 2024, with more than half of mayors selecting it for the second year running; more than double any other category. Climate action brings together two main areas: actions to mitigate climate change, and actions promoting climate adaptation and resilience. In their reflections, mayors highlight the co-benefits of the climate transition for other sectors, and the central role of cities in leading the way in actions as diverse as building renovations and reaching out to citizens. Despite this, one major reflection shared by mayors on climate action is the lack of financial resources and local level capacity to actually deliver on this.

Top 10 priorities for 2024





Jumping up two positions this year, and coming in second, actions promoting social inclusion and equity have noticeably risen in mayors' priorities, with close to one out of three mayors highlighting it as one of their top three priorities. Linked to the cost-of-living crisis and given mayors' close connection to residents in their city, they are keenly aware that increasing numbers of people are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. As put forward in Eurocities' European elections manifesto, 'A better Europe starts in cities,' mayors also expect to be more involved in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. They want to act as a link with the EU in protecting people's social rights in the green and digital transformations, and to build municipal capacity in this area to face the increased pressure on essential social services generated by multiple crises.

In this context it is not surprising to see affordable housing making it to the top three of mayors' priorities for 2024 (top five in 2023). While house building may have fallen off the agenda in recent years, rental and housing costs are now a key voter

concern as we head into different elections this year, and it could be a strong factor in determining outcomes. Although housing is not an EU competence, it's clear that, from a city point of view, tackling EU-level barriers for making affordable housing accessible locally should be a priority. Some cities like Vienna, where around one quarter of all housing is social housing, have a long tradition in providing high-quality affordable housing to all citizens. However, for many others, especially where housing needs are more of a state level competence, such as in France, without further support these needs will not be met.

Sustainable mobility remains a critical priority for 2024; despite a shift in the ranking around the same percentage of mayors (27.5%) consider it a top priority. In their reflections, mayors highlight actions aimed at the provision of services and infrastructure to facilitate the movement of people and goods. Mayors emphasise the importance of safety, affordability and efficiency, all while minimising harmful emissions and impacts on the environment. Some specifically highlight their efforts

in making public transportation the main form of transportation in the city. Compared to other priorities, this priority is geographically predominant in Southern European cities.

Urban planning and infrastructure closes the top five of mayors' priorities, with a slight increase from last year (at 24.1% overall). In the post-Covid city more attention is placed on the power of urban planning, recognised as a strategic tool to promote more compact living that can boost environmental and healthy living objectives while enhancing public life. Through their reflections, mayors highlight how they are seeking to transform urban spaces through the effective and adapted layout of buildings and functional spaces. For example, in Tbilisi there is a considerable need to replace aging infrastructure to meet the requirements of urban redevelopment and expansion. Meanwhile, cities like Florence aim to create new participatory processes to keep the public's interest high in longer-term projects to redesign the public space.

Public safety and security scores highly, at number six (up from tenth place in 2023). Mayors highlight the importance of promoting public safety and creating safe living conditions for community residents, as well as responding to crises such as the Russian war in Ukraine. Others also highlight their efforts to prevent youth crimes, with some mayors particularly highlighting their commitment to tackle drug criminality and their networks.

Consolidating public budgets is considered a top priority by 18.4% mayors, and is a new entry in the top 10. This doesn't mean reducing public expenditure, but rather securing sustainable urban finances and a balanced budget that can promote a strong urban economy. At the same time, mayors highlight their efforts to address financial difficulties without cutting social services, for example by fostering reforms that will bring efficiency and productivity gains.

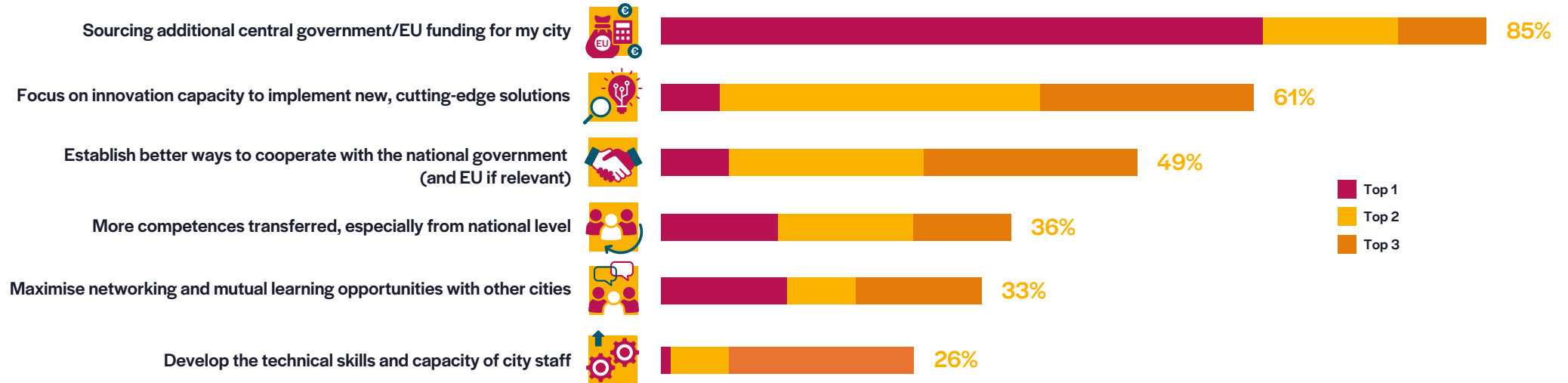
Economic recovery and attractiveness, a top three priority last year, is now ranked eighth by mayors. With the immediacy of concerns brought on by the pandemic, it is interesting to see that mayors' priorities in this area have shifted more towards making their economies and territories attractive to investors to attain long-term prosperity. This can mean putting emphasis on strategies such as city branding and economic diplomacy, as mayors explain in their reflections.

Democracy and services for citizens, which comes in ninth, is broadly aligned with last year's position. In their reflections this year, mayors put particular emphasis on the importance of defending democratic and fundamental values, not only at home but also globally, especially in the context of the European elections. When it comes to promoting democracy at city level, mayors highlight their continued efforts to promote participation in public life.

Closing the top 10 priorities, and another new entry, is the request to improve multi-level governance. This means working on strengthening the collaboration between different levels of government (supra-national, national, regional, local) as well as non-governmental entities, forming new partnerships and new channels for resources, as well as governance models. For example, some mayors highlight the importance of strengthening local city governance, including with surrounding municipalities, while others emphasised the need for a more structured long-term partnership between the EU and cities. While this can be understood simply as a means to achieve many of the mayors' other top priorities (as later explained), it is interesting to see that some mayors also frame multi-level cooperation as a priority in its own right.

Other lower ranking priorities include developing capacity around labour and skills shortages, culture and heritage, and greater focus on the energy transition.

What are the most important strategies for mayors to achieve their priorities?



As already indicated in some of the above analysis, when asked about the main strategies they would wish to employ to achieve their priorities, mayors ranked sourcing additional funding from central governments and the EU level in first place overall (with 85% selecting it as their top choice overall). This suggests the need for new mechanisms to empower cities to develop sustainable and reliable investment strategies and will be discussed more in section three of this analysis.

The second most important strategy identified by mayors is to focus on innovation to implement new and cutting-edge solutions. As the special section on government innovation will discuss in more detail, mayors perceive government innovation to be an important tool that allows them to solve complex challenges and deliver transformative policy agendas.

The third most important strategy is again related to multi-level governance, and it is about finding better ways to cooperate with

the national and EU level. When looking at top priorities like climate action and housing, it is very clear that the existence of national frameworks supporting cities in a concerted way can make the difference in the long term (more analysis in section three).

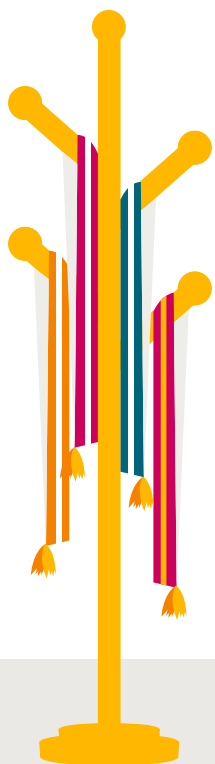
Other lower ranking strategies include sourcing more competences transferred from the central government and EU level, developing the technical skills and capacity of city staff, and maximising networking with other cities.

“We need close cooperation and support from the Commission.”

Hanna Zdanowska, Mayor of Lodz

Mayors corner

When asked to further expand on their top strategies, mayors noted that urban voices should be listened to at all levels of decision making, that European funding should be allocated directly to cities, and that more collaboration is necessary both between cities and across levels of government. In short, they suggested the need for:



1

Streamlined funding and support for urban initiatives:

In their responses, mayors are advocating for a financial framework that is both stable and easy to navigate, aiming to eliminate the common hurdles faced by cities due to staffing limitations in managing funding. The focus is on establishing European funding mechanisms that cities can readily access and utilise, particularly for projects that support the green transition and major infrastructure developments, including public transport and renewable energy sources. This includes direct EU funding access for cities, reducing red tape, and bolstering financial backing for initiatives that are crucial for sustainable urban growth.

2

Strengthened partnerships for sustainable development:

There is a strong emphasis on fostering better cooperation among cities, national governments, and European Union bodies to tackle essential issues like water management, housing, and sustainable mobility. This push for collaboration is in response to emerging challenges such as climate-induced droughts. Mayors see the need for a collective approach, exemplified by cities like Malaga, which conducts mayoral forums to address regional concerns in a transparent and effective manner, aiming to find shared solutions to pressing environmental and social issues.

3

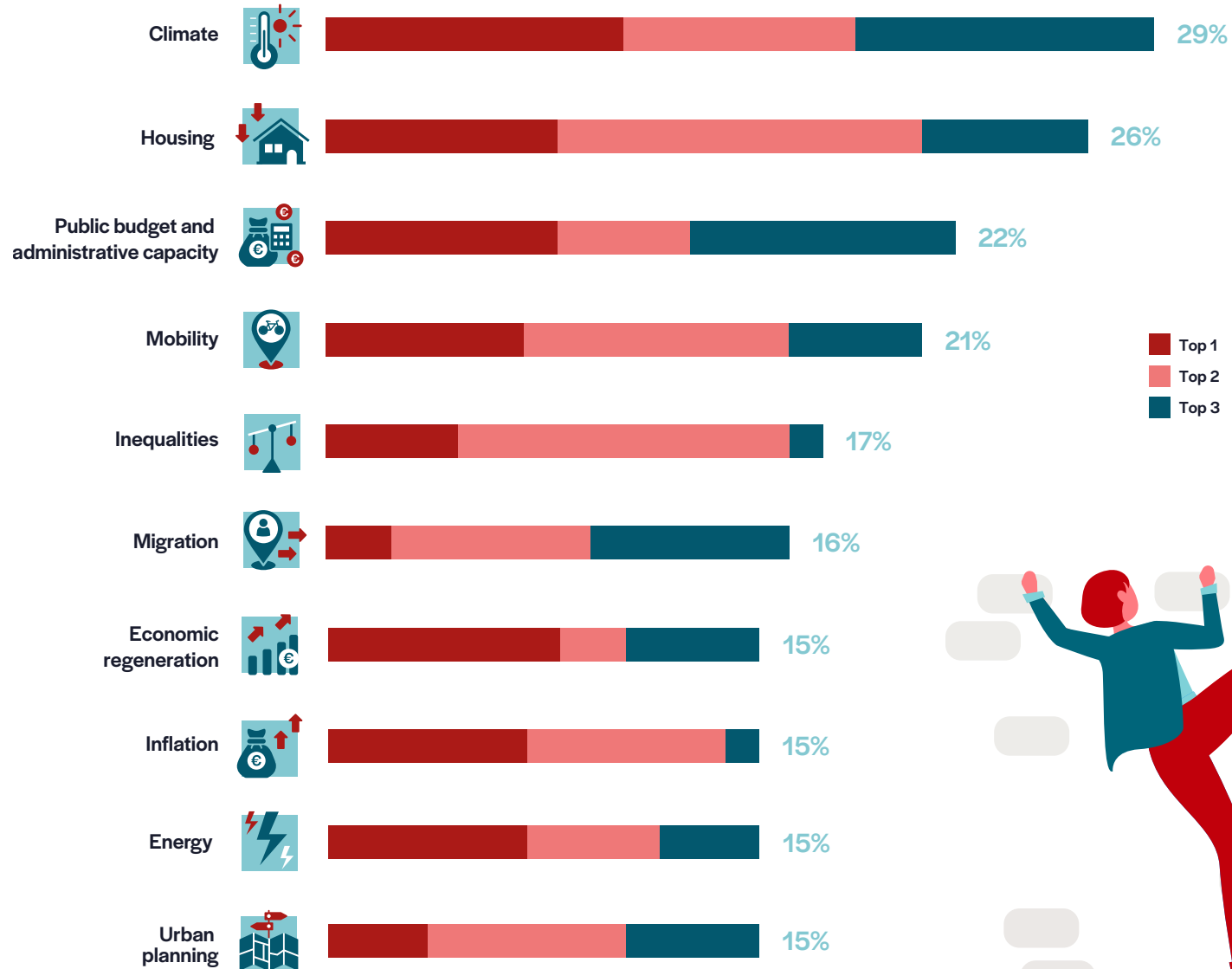
Incorporating urban perspectives into EU policy making:

Mayors highlighted the unique challenges cities encounter, including workforce shortages and the risks of social fragmentation. They argue for the necessity of acknowledging these urban-specific issues in national and EU-level decision-making processes. The experiences during the pandemic have further illustrated cities' critical roles in confronting challenges and devising innovative solutions. Thus, there is a push for a more robust role for cities at EU level, ensuring cities' interests receive more attention in EU legislation, and involving cities in the legislative process before laws are adopted to ensure that urban areas have the necessary resources and support to manage their unique challenges effectively.

Looking back: top challenges in 2023 for mayors

For the 92 European mayors from large European cities who responded to this year's Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey, climate change was their overall top challenge in 2023, with 28.7% choosing it as one of their top three. Other top challenges reflect the changing realities in cities. In a sign of the times, housing, public budgets and inequalities have all grown more prominent in mayors' assessments compared to one year earlier. Inflation, energy concerns and the economic recovery have dropped in the rankings, though they evidently still register highly on mayors' radars of challenges that impact their ability to improve people's everyday lives. In its own working structures, Eurocities addresses all of these top concerns with its member cities, and brings them to the attention of European and national decision makers.

Top 10 challenges in 2023



Overall, most of the 10 top challenges shared by mayors reflect global current affairs, in one way or another, showing how interlinked the local political level is with other levels of government.

While the impacts of both the Russian war in Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic have dropped out of the top 10, they are still mentioned by mayors in their reflections. In particular, many mayors are still very vocal on their steadfast support for Ukraine, with a handful selecting it as their top challenge.

While the top 10 challenges remain broadly similar overall to last year, the appearance of urban planning in position 10 and inequalities jumping in at position five both demonstrate that several long-term challenges for mayors are becoming more acute.

The energy crisis, the top challenge overall in 2022, is now placed tied seventh, with 14.9% of mayors placing it as a top challenge overall. With the cost of energy and immediate concerns for cost-of-living having abated, following successful shifts in EU policies, including in energy supply, the

impact on the most vulnerable groups was still highlighted as an ongoing concern by mayors all over Europe, from North to South.

Meanwhile, 28.7% of mayors highlight issues such as access to water, the effects of extreme heat, the challenge of promoting climate adaptation measures as well as advancing on decarbonisation and climate neutrality goals as their number one challenge overall in 2023, reinforcing this long-term trend.

Housing, which achieved only tenth position in 2022 is now indicated a top challenge by 26.4% of mayors, coming in second overall. As Eurostat data confirms, the average cost of a house in the EU was nearly 50% higher in mid-2023 than at the same time in 2010. Mayors highlight that providing access to affordable housing to low-income as well as middle-income workers is increasingly difficult, with homelessness also becoming a growing challenge. This is clearly associated with the ongoing effects of inflation in the economy: despite inflation decreasing as a standalone challenge in mayors' estimations, it is no surprise that it remains in the top 10 again this year, and is

of particular concern in Central and Eastern European countries such as Hungary and Czechia.

The effects of inflation and slowly rising or stagnating salaries, are contributing to what has been defined as a real cost-of-living crisis in cities; it is no surprise therefore that inequalities are a top challenge for 17.2% of mayors, with a significant shift compared to last year, making its first entry in the top 10 list. When elaborating on this challenge, mayors highlight the challenges of growing social inequalities and exclusion in cities, pointing to their efforts to promote social and climate justice while facing increasing polarisation and demonstrations. Addressing urban poverty and inequality in the current context is a key concern.

The long-term effects of inflation, coupled with a shift in prevailing monetary policy and higher interest rates, has a noticeable effect on public budgets and financing, and was listed as a top three challenge by 14.9% of mayors overall. In some cases, such as in the UK, mayors highlight how there is a turn back to austerity policies (often imposed by higher levels of government as

explained in section three of this analysis), with significant budget cuts and difficulties in the provision of public services often due to lack of human resources. Others focus on the challenges of accessing private capital, as well as a general difficulty in attracting and retaining investments. This challenge is equally linked with the economic crisis, something that was highlighted by those mayors whose national economies are facing recession, such as in Germany and Turkey.

Similarly, the challenges of accessing economic recovery resources and implementing recovery projects have decreased significantly from top three to top seven, with a renewed focus on regeneration rather than recovery. Mayors highlight the challenges of keeping the economic ecosystem vibrant, innovative, attractive and competitive amidst a changing global landscape. In addition, the need for industrial decarbonisation while continuing to promote growth that is both socially and economically sustainable is an added consideration of many mayors commenting in this category.

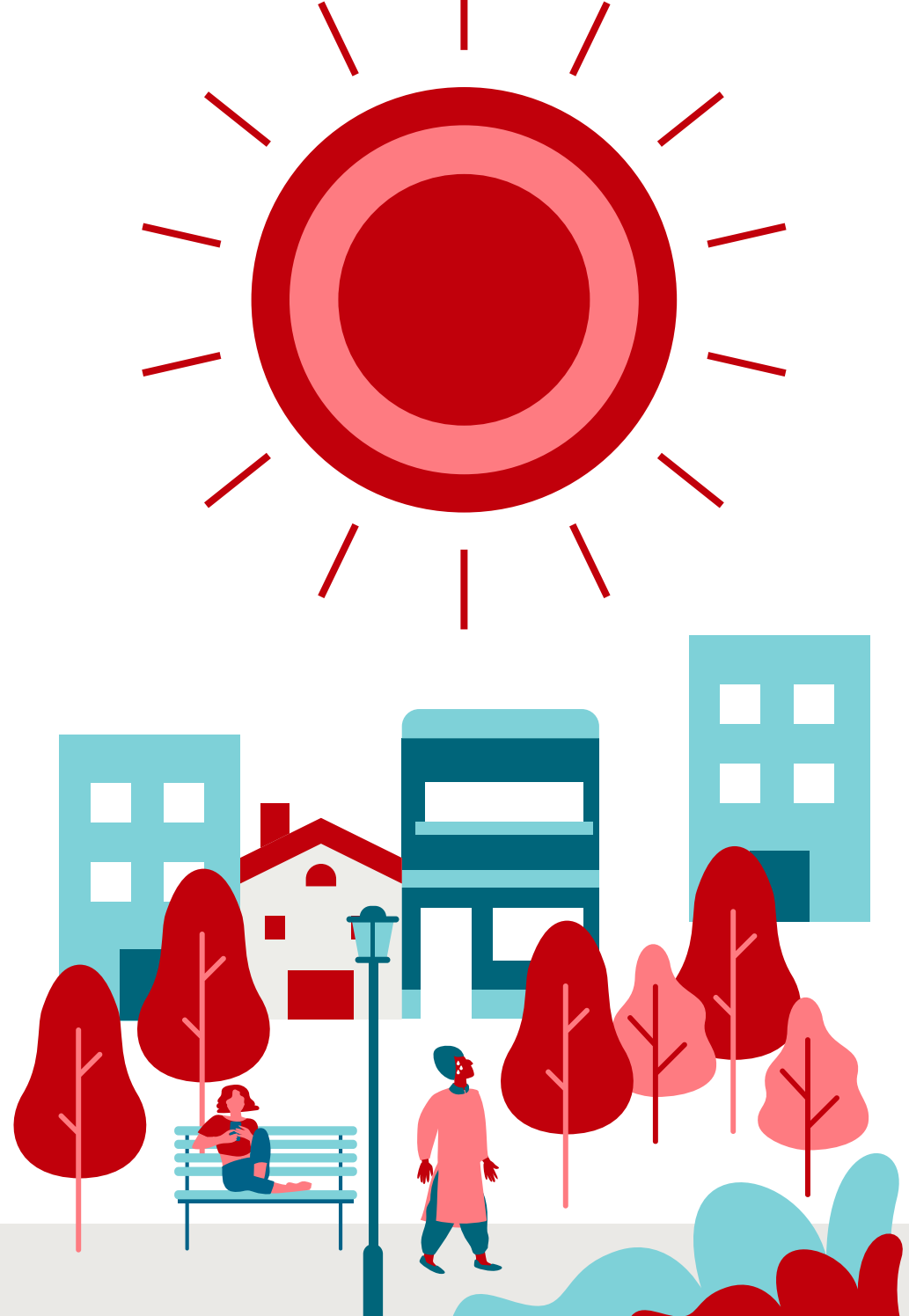
Nonetheless, implementing economic regeneration projects remains a major challenge for a significant number of cities, particularly amongst recipients of EU recovery resources, as shown in the data. This relates to the challenges of implementing big regeneration and infrastructure projects, which need buy-in from the public as well as from private actors, and strongly relates to ongoing shifts in the urban planning environment (challenge 10).

One city that has dealt effectively with these challenges is Bologna, which will receive around €1 billion from the EU. The city will focus projects it selected not just as a response to the impact of Covid-19 but that reflected the city's long-term vision for growth. The first area of focus contributes to building the new green infrastructure that supports the goal of becoming a carbon-neutral city, the second invests in the regeneration of urban areas, and the third deals with constructing two new tramway lines, which are part of the sustainable metropolitan mobility strategy.

Mobility, which can also entail large infrastructural projects, such as new metro lines and tramways, remains a critical challenge for many mayors, and is listed as a top four challenge this year. Mayors mentioned their efforts to promote sustainable mobility with integrated approaches to public transport systems. Interestingly, many of the mayors mentioning this challenge are from Southern European cities (mainly Italy, Spain and Portugal).

Lastly, the integration of migrants remains a significant challenge for many mayors, although it is perceived less as a crisis currently than was the case during the first months of the Russian war in Ukraine (challenge four and five in 2022).

Not listed in the top 10, but also highlighted by several mayors, were challenges such as public safety and security, the impacts of natural disasters and global crises.



Mayors' opinion on key policies and EU support

2024 sees new faces filling both the hemicycle of the European Parliament and the European Commission's college of commissioners. With this in mind, the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2024 includes a section asking mayors their opinions on key policy areas that will impact cities and should be placed high on the EU agenda: climate policy, housing, industry and innovation, and fiscal and administrative capacity.

“I expect the EU to get to grips with the priorities of the ecological transition.”

Jeanne Barseghian, Mayor of Strasbourg

Climate policies: are mayors confident about citizens' support and local capacity to deliver climate action?

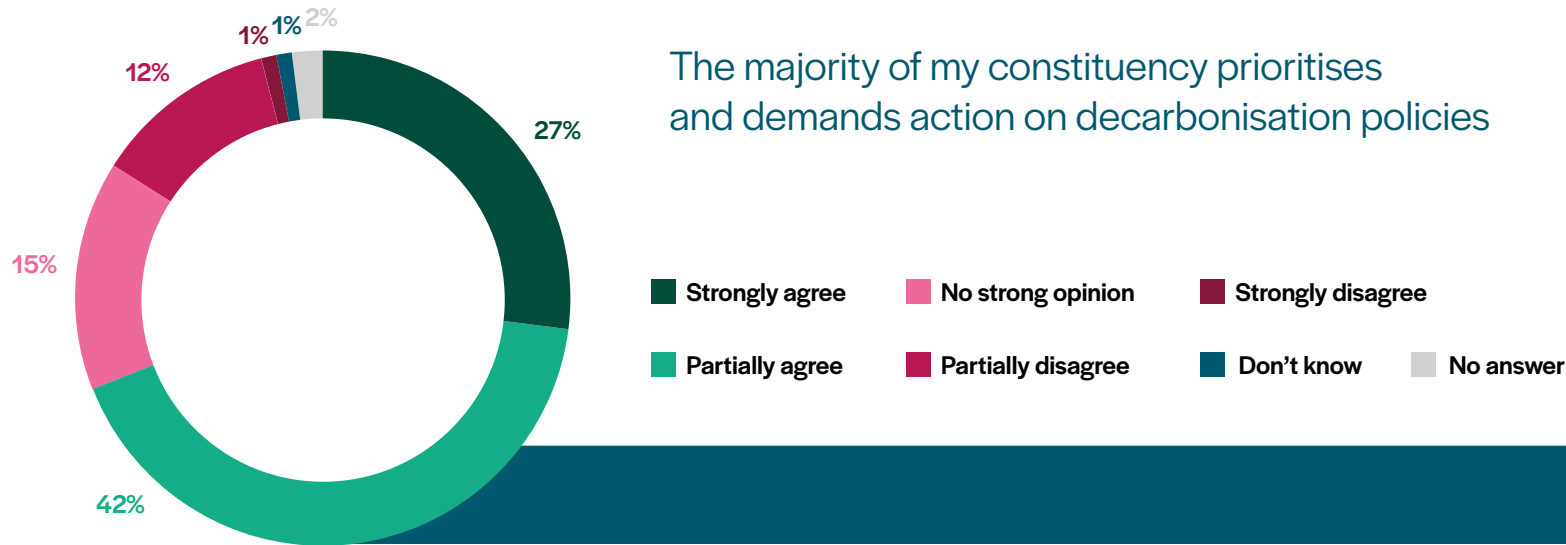
While around 40% of mayors answered positively when being asked whether they were concerned about current backlash from citizens against their climate policies – a priority for mayors as indicated in the previous section – about the same number were less concerned. Although a possibly confusing stat at first, it can be qualified by other data, and following conversations with some mayors. Moreover, the chart on the right reveals, the vast majority of mayors (70%) believe the majority of local residents support and prioritise decarbonisation policies.

Given that mayors are the closest level of government to citizens, with whom they regularly interact, and are essential ambassadors both to encourage the necessary behaviour change and implement policy at local level, including through building alliances with industry, and to coordinate at national and EU levels on shared commitments to climate neutrality, they have a unique perspective on the current state of play on such matters. And, to further qualify the reaction to the chart on the right, several mayors explained that, while they are nonetheless concerned

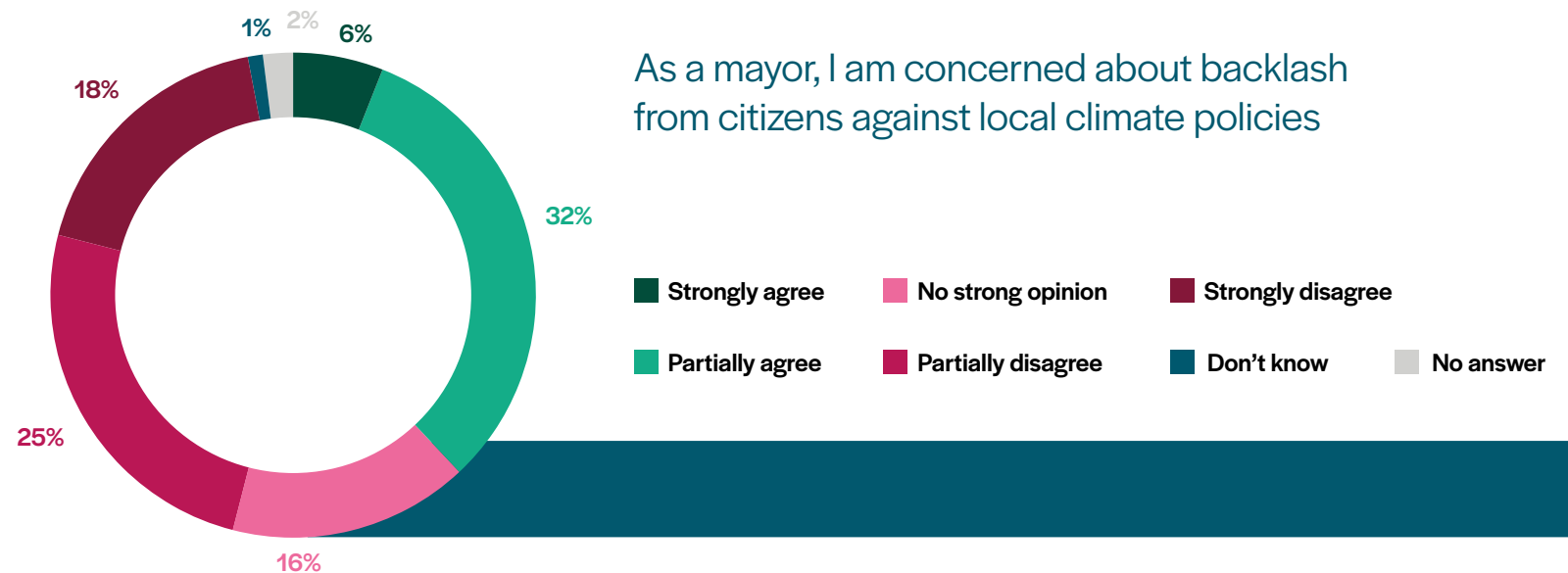
about a potential backlash from a minority of residents, they are still focussed on the 2050 climate targets. This emphasises the importance of not only communicating better about their climate policies, but also the need to ensure that their climate policies promote a just transition, while also addressing other critical needs.



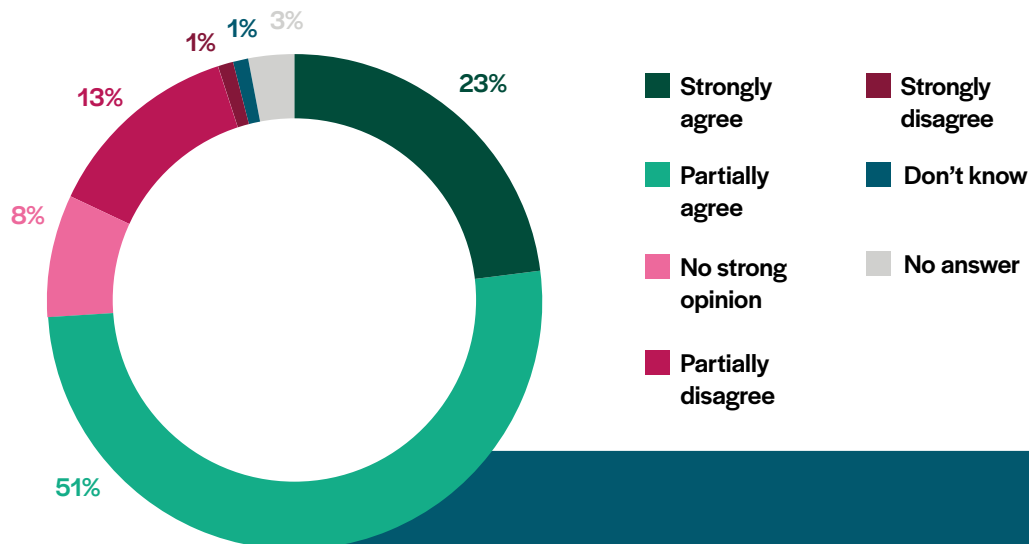
The majority of my constituency prioritises and demands action on decarbonisation policies



As a mayor, I am concerned about backlash from citizens against local climate policies



European climate policies match the needs of my city's decarbonisation objectives

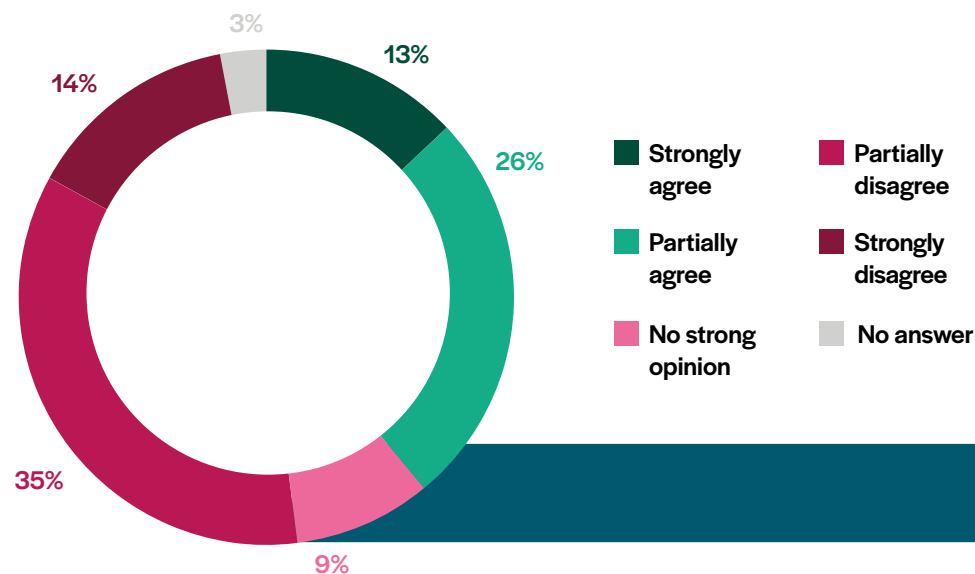


When asked if EU climate policies match the needs of their city's decarbonisation objectives, mayors suggest relatively strong alignment with close to two out of every 10 Mayors disagreeing. However, with more than one out of two only partially agreeing with the statement, there would seem to be significant room for improvement in EU climate policies, according to mayors' estimations. This is further explored a little

further down, in their list of priorities for the next European Commission (for example through better financing and clearer multi-level alignment to deliver timely and impactful results).

Clearly, one of the barriers to delivering on climate commitments and targets is the lack of sufficient tools and local capacity as suggested by mayors response to the

My city has enough tools and capacity to meet our climate commitments and targets



last question on climate policy : only one out of 10 Mayors strongly agrees that they have enough tools and capacity to meet their current climate commitments, with the majority actually highlighting a lack of resources and know-how to deliver on the challenges ahead. This is particularly concerning, as climate action is not only the top priority, but implementing coherent climate policy is also the top challenge

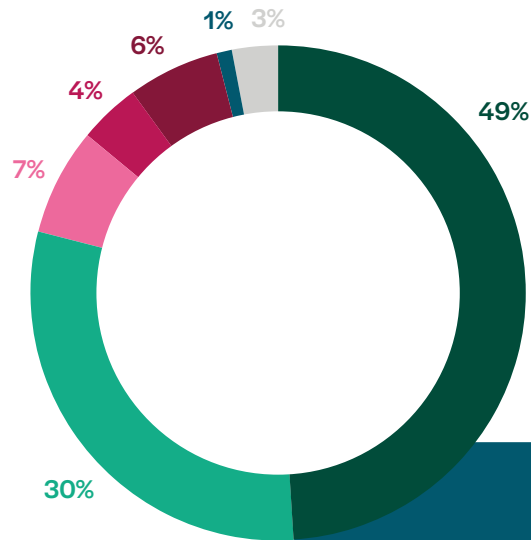
indicated by mayors this year. Going into the next EU cycle, now that most of the EU Green Deal legislation has been finalised, the emphasis will be on implementation and making workable plans, and it will be crucial for mayors to be involved in these plans.

Housing: what levels of support do cities need?

When it comes to housing, one of the top three priorities of mayors this year, the vast majority of mayors (79%) believe they need to make compromises between delivering high quality and affordable housing, ensuring good energy standards and increasing the quantity of housing. Interestingly, among the few who disagree with this statement (less than 15%), the majority are Nordic cities.

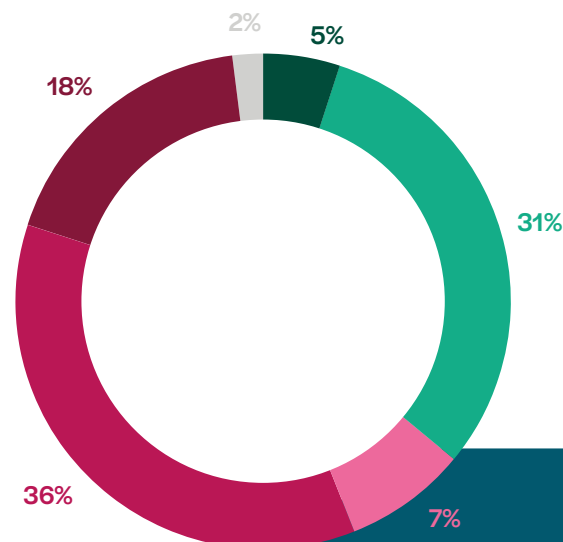
To compound this, one out of two mayors also clearly highlight that they don't have enough tools and capacity to meet the current housing needs of the most vulnerable. Worryingly, only 5% of mayors strongly agree that they have enough tools and resources. Again, it is Nordic cities that are most confident about their resources.

The shortage of housing supply is a key contributor to the housing affordability crisis. In recent years, housing affordability has become a growing concern for local authorities as housing costs outpace income growth. Vulnerable groups are among those who face the greatest challenges in accessing affordable housing. Moreover, low-income households, single-parent families, migrants and people with disabilities face a higher risk of experiencing energy poverty due to a structural lack of adequate housing.



I need to make compromises between delivering high quality and affordable housing, ensuring good energy standards and increasing the quantity of housing

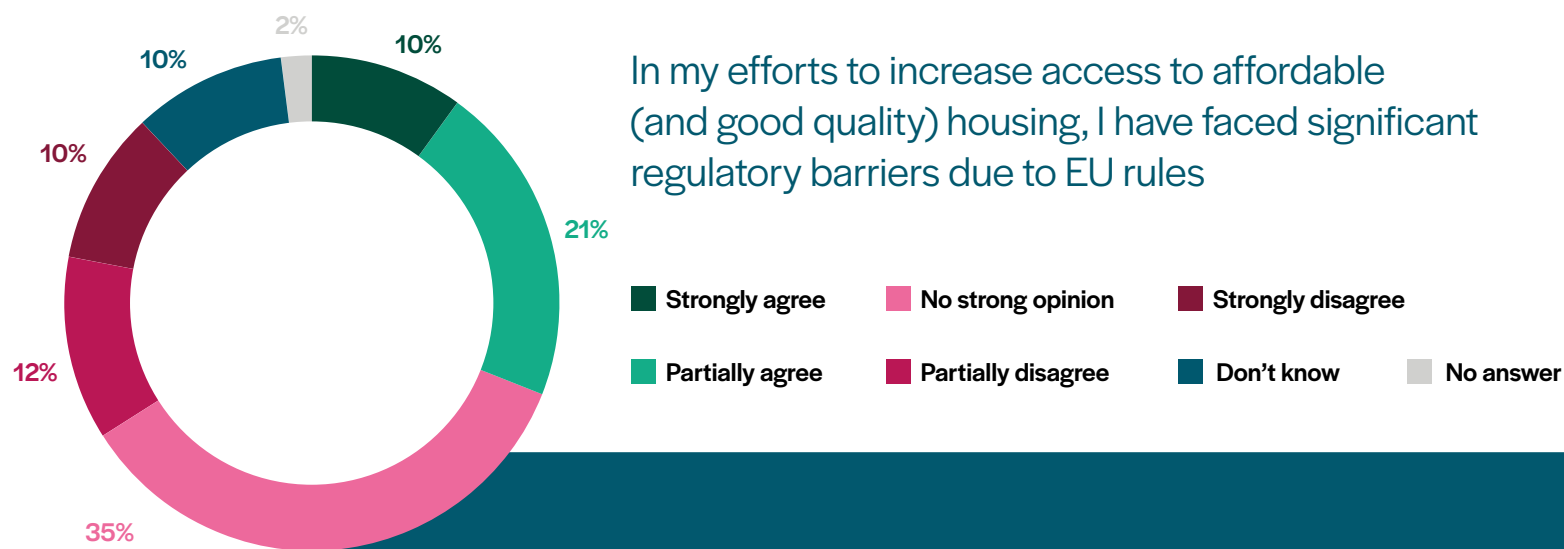
Strongly agree
No strong opinion
Strongly disagree
Partially agree
Partially disagree
Don't know
No answer



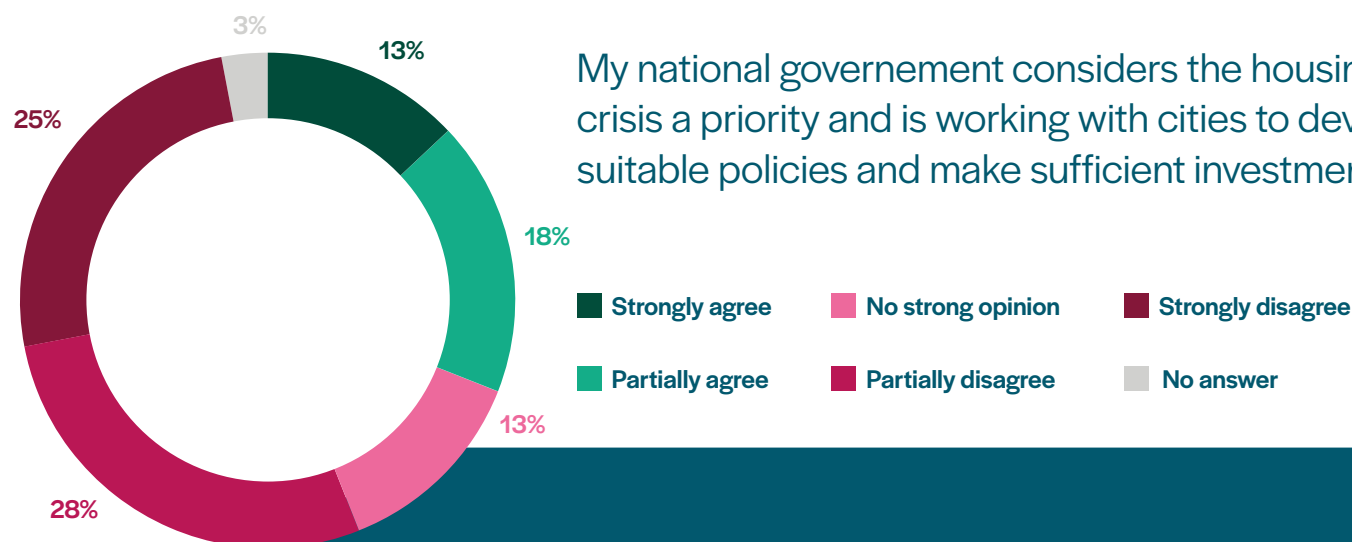
My city has enough tools and capacity to meet the current housing needs of the most vulnerable people

Strongly agree
No strong opinion
Strongly disagree
Partially agree
Partially disagree
No answer

In my efforts to increase access to affordable (and good quality) housing, I have faced significant regulatory barriers due to EU rules



My national government considers the housing crisis a priority and is working with cities to develop suitable policies and make sufficient investments



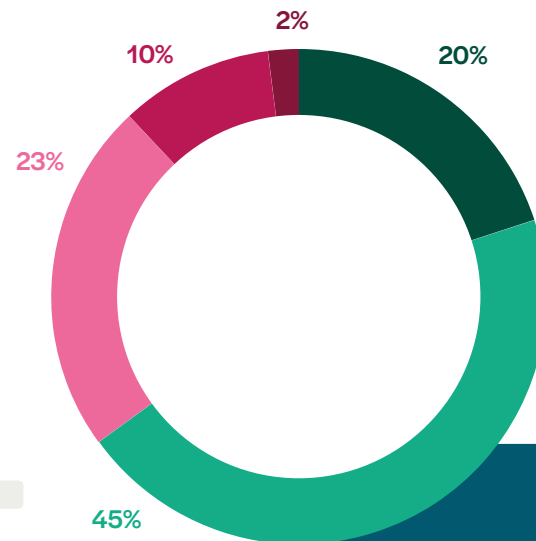
At the EU level, cities are playing an important role in making housing an EU-wide priority (as recognised in the recent EU Council Presidency declaration on housing, among others) and moving forward they expect housing to be put at the top of the agenda (see section four).

Given that local authorities play a central role in delivering housing support, and it is not a direct competence of the EU, it is striking that one third of mayors highlight the challenges they have faced to increase access to affordable (and good quality) housing due to regulatory barriers at the EU level. With this in mind, it is crucial for European and national governments to support cities in tackling the housing crisis by encouraging investment in sustainable social and affordable housing and by removing barriers such as restrictive state aid rules for services of general economic interest.

When asked if their national government considers the housing crisis a priority and is working with cities to develop suitable policies and make sufficient investments, more than half of mayors disagree.

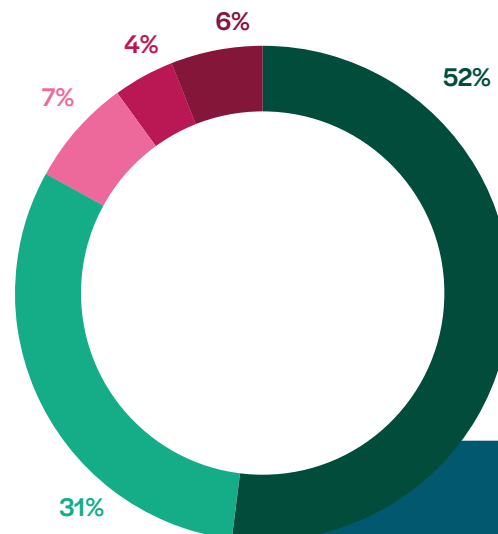
Innovation in cities driving industrial transformation: how do mayors expect to move forward?

EU climate policies positively impact my city's collaboration with local industry



Strongly agree No strong opinion Strongly disagree
 Partially agree Partially disagree Don't know

My city has a stake in local utility companies that are strategic partners in driving climate neutrality at the local level



Strongly agree No strong opinion Strongly disagree
 Partially agree Partially disagree



Reading into the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and other sources, it is clear that combatting the climate crisis and moving forward on decarbonisation requires a whole of society approach. This is what inspires and drives the 112 cities working towards climate neutrality by 2030 in the context of the EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, using tools such as the Climate City Contract to bring together local actors to drive change. Beyond the mission, EU climate policies are increasingly incentivising and providing resources to turn societal support for the transition into reality with initiatives such as the EU's Green Deal Industrial Plan and the Net Zero Industry Act. Against this background, it is not surprising that more than two out of three mayors agree that EU climate policy positively impacts their city's collaboration with local industry and drives innovation, helping them for example to develop new technologies and accelerate the transformation.

Historically, cities have been at the heart of past waves of industrial revolutions. With the imperative of the green transition calling again for a transformation of the economy, local innovation ecosystems and supply value chains are key to both develop

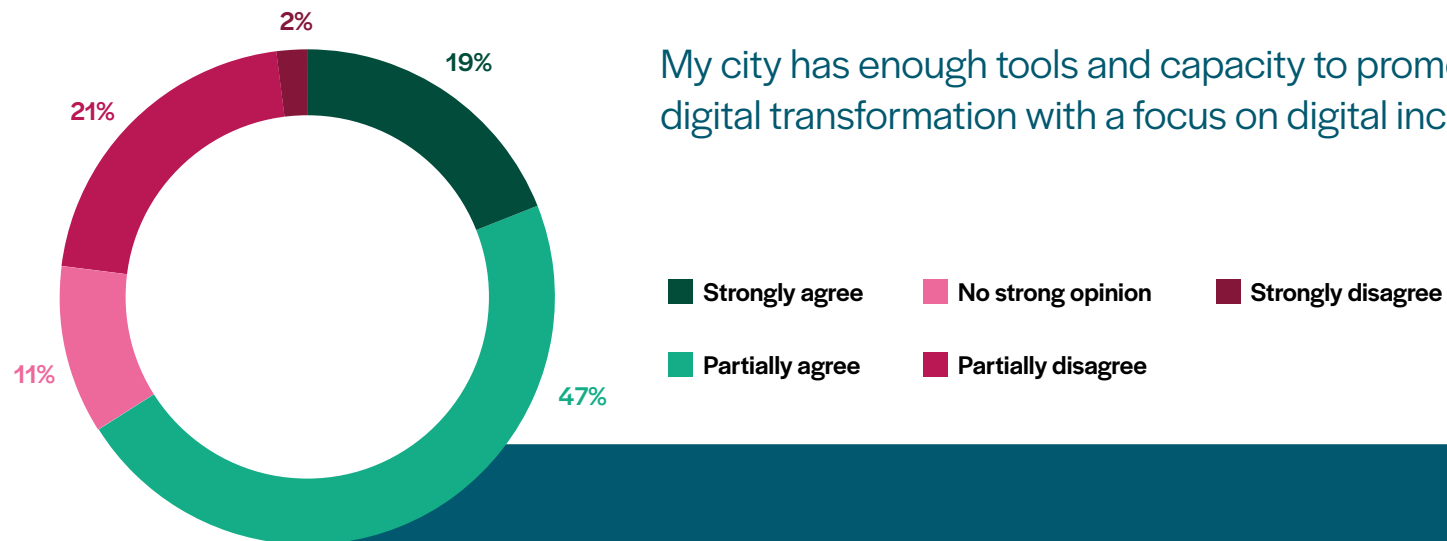
new solutions as well as to scale them up in integrated value chains. While city administrations have a key role in providing an enabling framework for innovation and industry to flourish, they are sometimes underestimated as actors directly driving innovation in key sectors for the transition and in industrial value chains.

As this year's Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey highlights, the vast majority of mayors (eight out of 10) agree that their city has a stake in local utility companies, which are strategic partners in driving climate neutrality. As further elaborated by some mayors, this can mean holding significant power regarding public procurement, which can be used to update industrial processes with social and ecological objectives in mind. From fully controlling the local mobility company to holding a majority stake in the local energy company or a multi-utility company (often bringing together broad portfolios of companies for waste management, water, energy, urban planning, etc.) there are many ways in which mayors can use their power to directly accelerate change and support the objectives of the Green Deal Industrial Plan.

“If the same rules apply to all European cities, the market will adapt much faster and drive innovation in zero-emission transport.”

Eva Oosters, Deputy Mayor of Utrecht

While innovation is dealt with in a separate section, including via a guest essay from Philipp Rode from LSE Cities, it's clear that city governments have many means by which to innovate. One of these can be through digital transformation, which city administrations tend to focus on, ensuring inclusivity, for example through e-governance services, but also through targeted actions to bridge the digital divide. When asked if they think their city has enough tools and capacity to promote



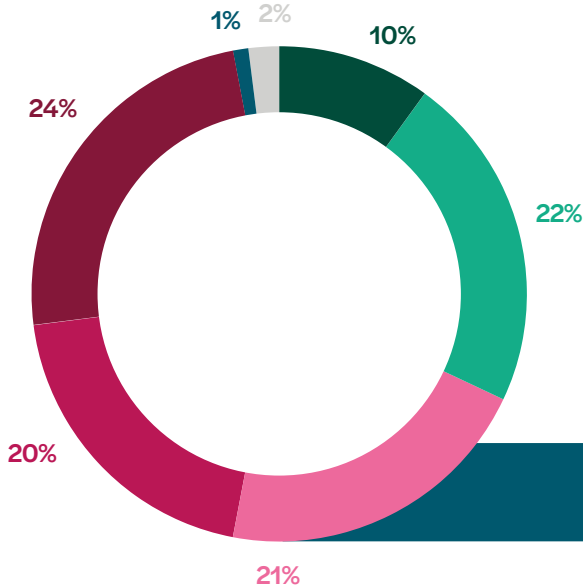
digital transformation with a focus on digital inclusion around 65% of mayors partially or strongly agree. This suggests that mayors' perception of their capacity to drive digital transformation – albeit with a more specific focus on digital inclusion – is higher than their perception of their capacity to drive climate action.

In the last edition of the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey, mayors confirmed digital transformation to be one of the top priorities for mayors, necessitating EU resources to achieve policy objectives. They emphasised in particular the need for capacity building in city administrations and noted that, while the vision for digital innovation is present, capacities still need development. Ahead of the upcoming European elections, Eurocities is calling for a comprehensive approach to ensure sustainable, inclusive and people-centred digitalisation. This could take the form, for

instance, of introducing a comprehensive framework that guides and supports policymakers in upholding fundamental human rights in digital spaces. It would support cities in accessing the necessary tools to effectively protect citizens' digital rights. Capacity building should extend to include government innovation, digital and data skills for all citizens, and practices for citizen participation.

Local competences and finances: do mayors consider they have the capacity and capabilities to deliver on the challenges ahead?

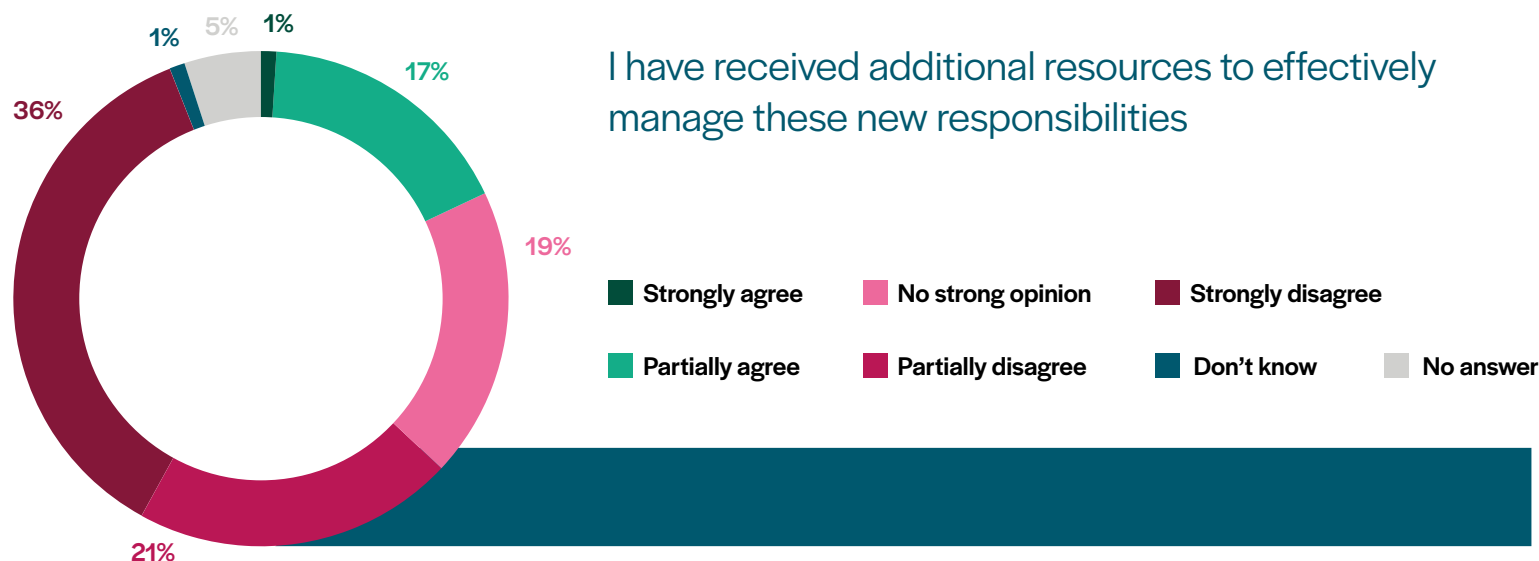
Cities have a significant capacity to take action to tackle the major global challenges. During the Covid pandemic, the Russian war in Ukraine and the energy and cost-of-living crisis, city leaders demonstrated determination in combatting challenges locally, responding to residents' immediate needs, and advising other government levels on the next steps. This innovation capacity in cities is essential to Europe's resilience in times of crisis today and in the future.



To drive the climate and digital transformation my national government has transferred new responsibilities to my city

- Strongly agree
- No strong opinion
- Strongly disagree
- Partially agree
- Partially disagree
- Don't know
- No answer





Clearly, cities can play a central role in dealing with complex challenges, and the same is true for how cities collectively manage the social, green and digital transformations. For this, mayors need new resources, with often the transfer of specific competences from the national level. However, when asked if they have received such additional resources, a strong majority of mayors disagrees (57%). In some cases, as was often the case in the previously

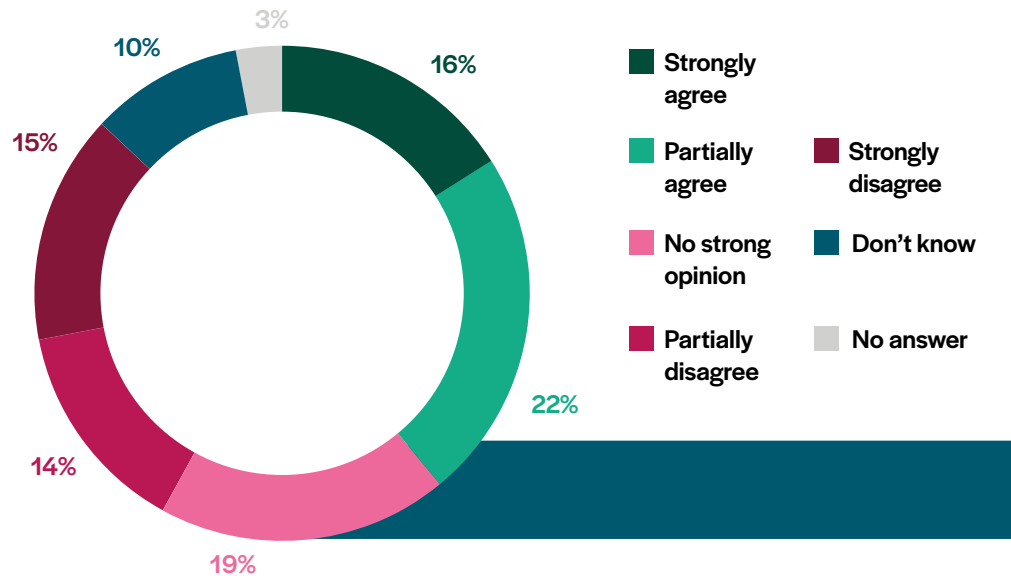
mentioned scenarios, mayors have simply had to step up to fulfil a local need that is not being catered for by central governments, regardless of current capacities.

However, this can lead to longer-term difficulties, given that city governments are particularly dependent on central government to secure financial resources that can drive their priorities. As the OECD's Fiscal Decentralisation Database shows,

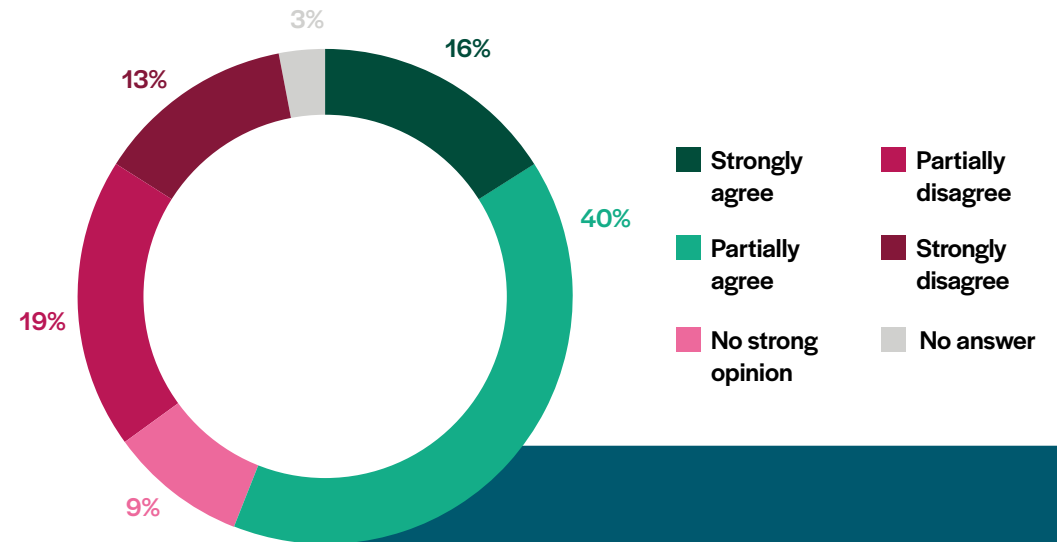
the level of fiscal devolution is particularly low in Central Eastern European countries. Similarly, data from the OECD shows that the alignment with EU budgetary rules of many EU national governments has been achieved in parallel with diminishing public investments at the local and regional level. Against this background, we asked the 92 mayors who responded to this year's Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey whether their national government has imposed

fiscal consolidation on lower levels of government with an adverse impact on their city's fiscal capacity. With only 29% of respondents disagreeing with this statement, either partially or strongly, it is clear that this is a challenge for many cities.

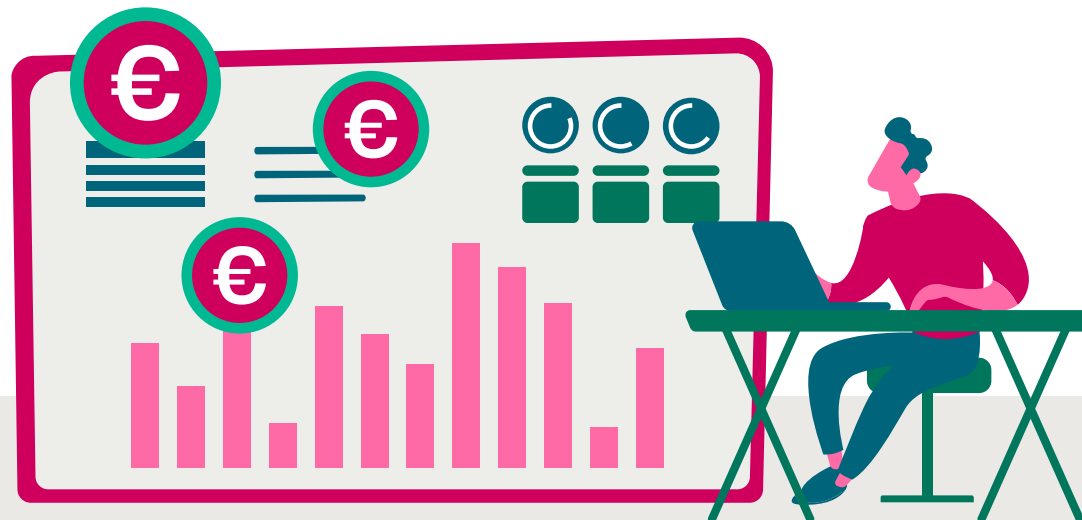
My national government has imposed fiscal consolidation on lower levels of government which has adversely impacted the fiscal capacity of my city



In my city, the main barrier to hiring new staff and building competences across key policy areas is insufficient budget



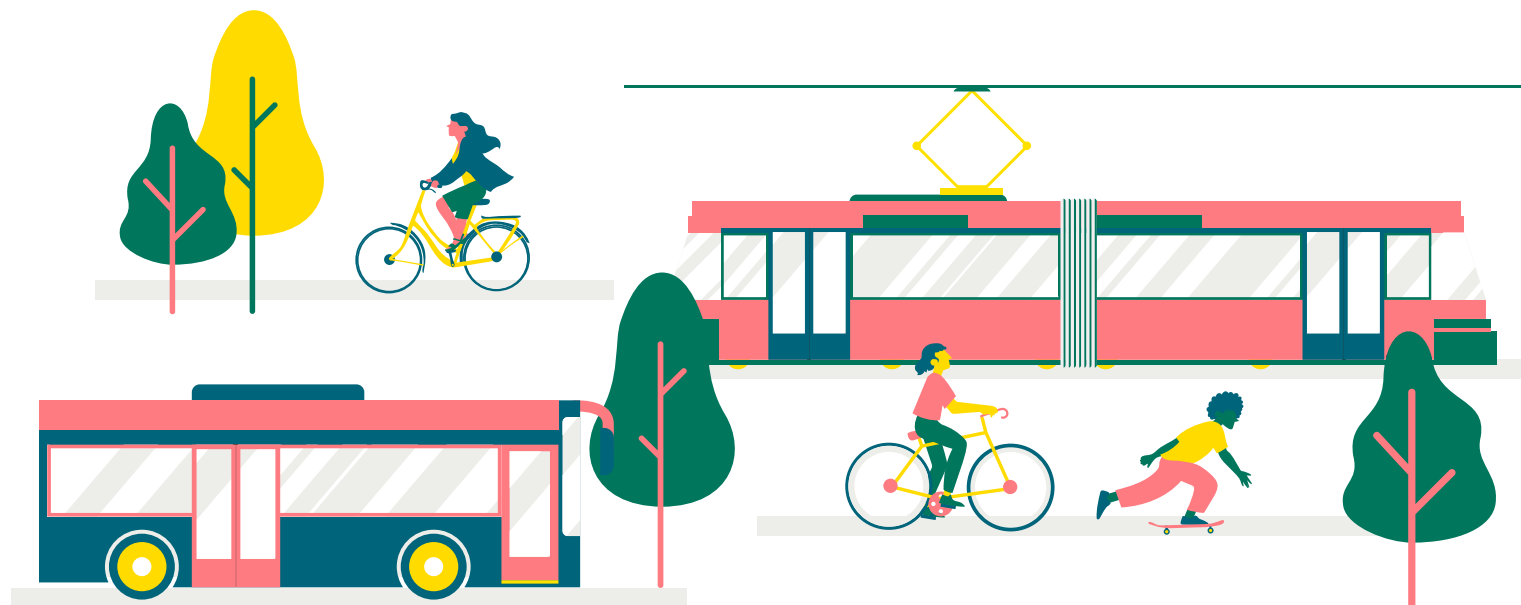
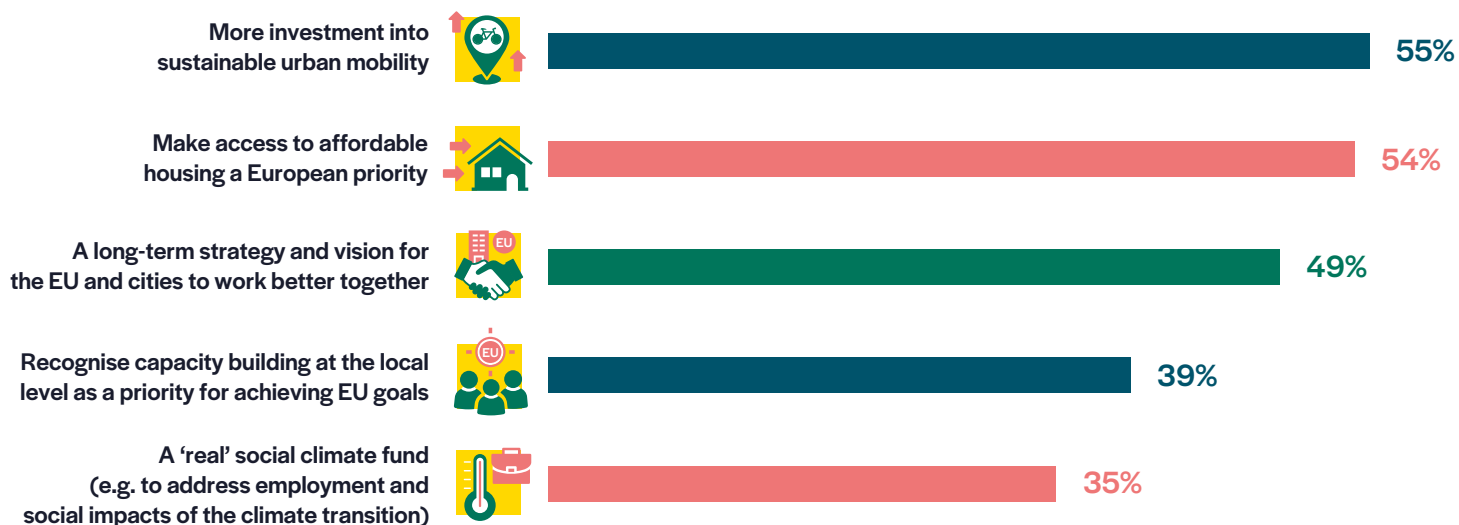
Given this state of affairs, it is difficult to understand how local administrations can be expected to build their administrative capacity in order to deliver on new priorities. When asked to confirm whether or not the main barrier to hiring new staff and building competences across key policy areas is insufficient budget, more than 50% of mayors agreed with the statement.



Priorities for the next elections and support expected by mayors

With the 2024 European elections almost upon us, we asked our mayors their opinion on the top three priorities on the EU agenda when it comes to advancing cities' needs. We provided them with a list of 12 urgent actions for impact that we pre-identified and validated in consultation with our network of experts from each of Eurocities' member cities, which also formed the basis of the calls to action in the Eurocities European elections manifesto, while also leaving the possibility for mayors to highlight additional actions.

Top five priorities for next European Commission



The top priority overall, chosen by 55% of mayors, is also the only one that explicitly highlights a transfer of resources to help cities deliver on one of their priorities. Moreover, unlike housing, which is second on the list, investment into sustainable urban mobility is typically an area where the EU has supported local investment, principally through its Cohesion Policy programmes. Given EU emissions reduction targets, however, and while transport still accounts for one quarter of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions, it is no surprise that mayors urge the European Commission to provide them with additional resources to deliver concrete actions in their ongoing efforts towards decarbonisation of the transport sector.

Having 54% of mayors opting for housing to become a European priority demonstrates that it is a top local priority in 2024, continuing a clear trend from responses in the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey. In addition to a request to update current state aid rules that undermine city actions to give access to social housing to all people in need, the request is equally about prioritising housing issues in EU funding and fostering a joint European response to the current continent-wide crisis.

Closing out the top three, we find the call for a long-term strategy and vision for the EU and cities to work better together. As highlighted in Eurocities' policy paper 'How the EU can work better with cities,' there are still many shortcomings when it comes to the relationship between cities and the EU. Mayors have long called for the development of a coherent European vision for the future of cities that provides them with a clear role and participation in shaping EU developments, including a regular dialogue between EU and city leaders.

Based on the Urban Agenda for the EU and the New Leipzig Charter on the transformative power of cities for the common good, a strategy for urban policies must outline how to work better with cities and their role and participation in shaping EU developments alongside member states and regions. In its European elections manifesto, 'A better Europe starts in cities,' Eurocities also makes the call for the creation of an Urban Envoy, centrally placed in the European Commission, with a mandate to oversee and coordinate all EU policies and initiatives for cities and urban areas, ensuring a positive impact and political attention on the potential and needs of cities.

Recognising capacity building at the local level as a priority for achieving EU goals comes fourth, with more than one out of three mayors selecting it as a top priority overall. As explained by mayors, city administrations lack the capacity to deliver on important priorities, most notably climate action. While the EU generally recognises local authorities as drivers of EU objectives such as the European Green Deal, it has not really recognised building local capacity as a resource intensive priority requiring a significant financial envelope.

In fifth place, 35% of mayors call for a real social climate fund to address the employment and social impacts of the climate transition. From a city point of view, the European Green Deal must be first and foremost about people – ensuring a fair transition whereby social inclusion and climate neutrality go hand in hand means taking particular consideration of the impacts of the transition on the most vulnerable. Via its Fit for 55 climate package, the European Commission has already acknowledged and shown a clear ambition to strengthen the social and distributional impacts of the European Green Deal, and this could be further boosted by a specific

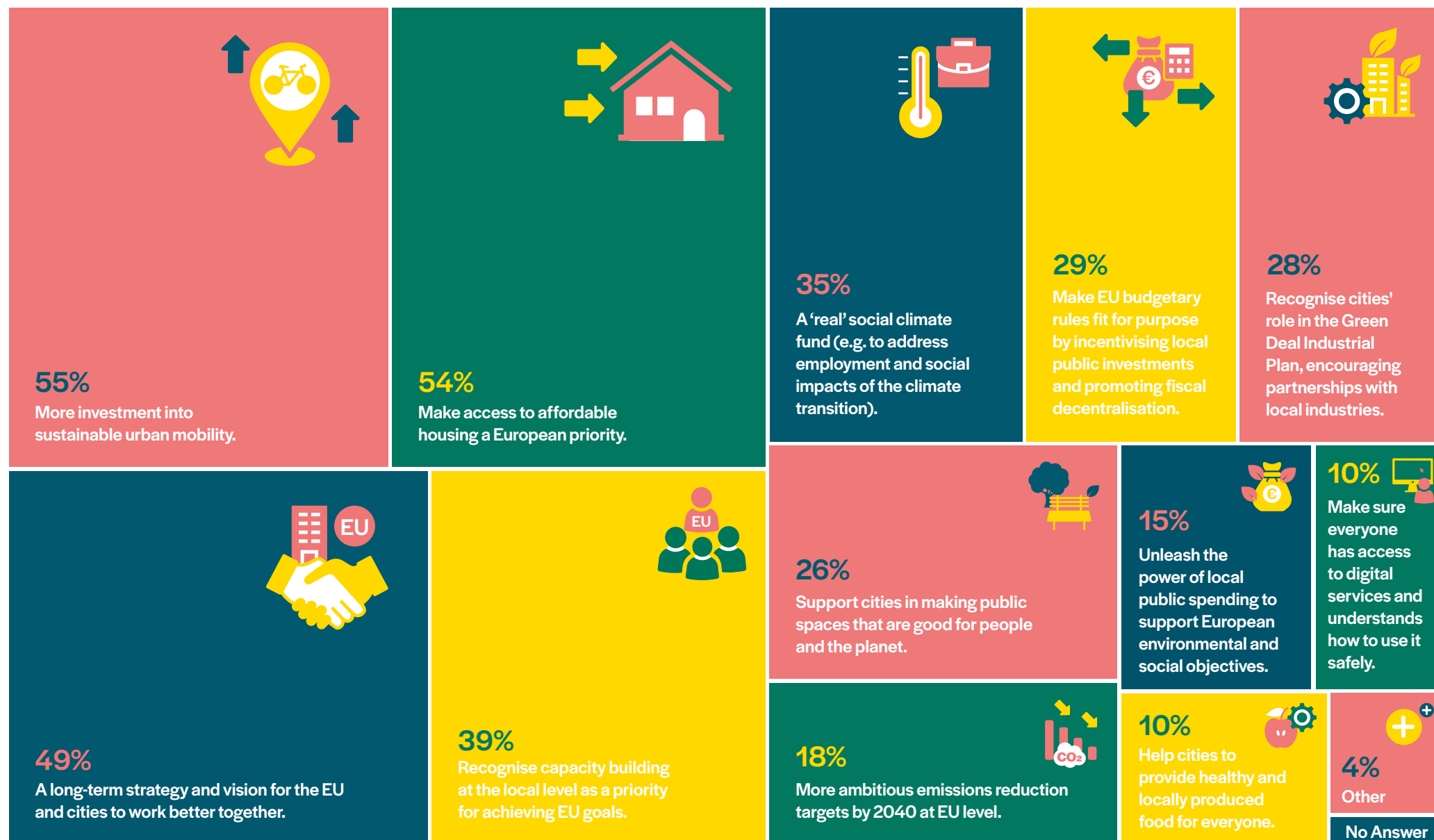
fund. This could include, for instance, targeted income support measures and investments in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights poverty reduction target, to which all EU member states have committed, which aims to lift 15 million Europeans out of poverty by 2030.

Other lower ranking actions include making EU budgetary rules fit for purpose by incentivising local public investments and promoting fiscal decentralisation, recognising cities' role in the Green Deal Industrial Plan by encouraging partnerships with local industries, and supporting cities in making public spaces that are good for people and the planet.

“The EU must empower us and boost our capacity to act.”

Johanna Rolland, Mayor of Nantes

Top priorities for the next European Commission



Where do EU mayors expect investments from the next EU budget?

As highlighted by mayors responding to last year's Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey, EU funding is an essential support for cities. In the coming five years, an unprecedented amount of EU funds will be invested in cities, and in some cases these funds will be implemented directly by cities. These funds are naturally deployed to support EU priorities and objectives, especially investment into the twin transformations. For example, the EU Recovery plan has earmarked a minimum of 37% spending on climate and biodiversity and 20% to digital measures, while for the current EU budget period, 2021-27, EU Cohesion Funds earmark a minimum of 30% for climate action and put a strong emphasis on investments in sustainable mobility and infrastructure.

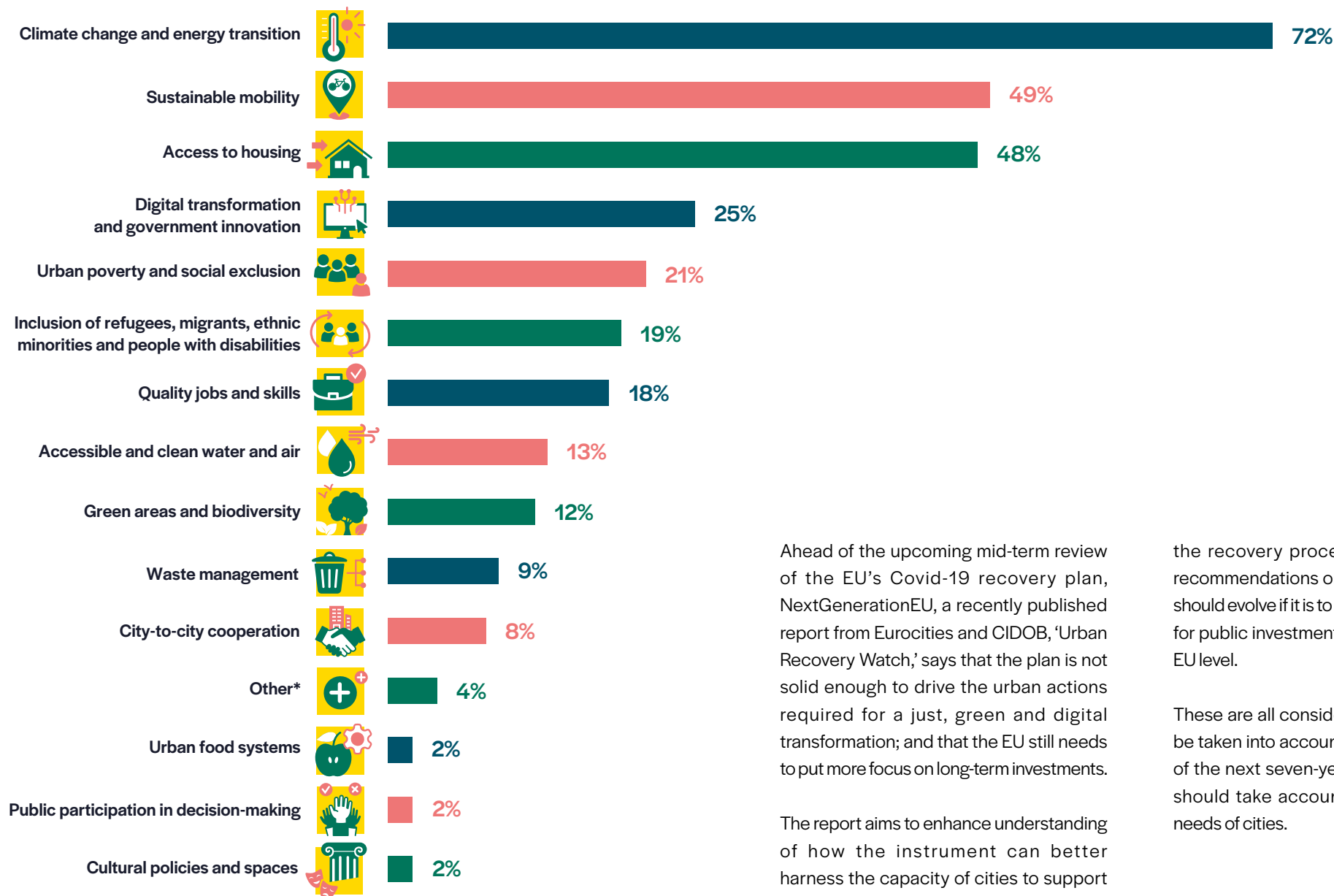
With this in mind, it is not surprising that mayors from within the EU expect funding for climate change and energy transition to make the biggest difference in their ability to achieve their policy priorities.

When asked this year what they would like to see in the next EU budget, there are two noticeable differences: the added prominence of housing and the creation of quality jobs and skills. Moreover, the distribution of areas of focus for the next EU budget show a more balanced approach overall in terms of top areas to support.

Beyond expressing their opinion about areas to prioritise, in their responses many mayors highlighted the need to promote strong participation and multi-level governance in EU funding decisions, to consider new approaches to provide direct funding to cities, and expressed their worries about the ongoing centralisation trend, which has been the case in the Covid-19 recovery plan through the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility.



Top areas where mayors would like the next EU budget to support them



Ahead of the upcoming mid-term review of the EU's Covid-19 recovery plan, NextGenerationEU, a recently published report from Eurocities and CIDOB, 'Urban Recovery Watch,' says that the plan is not solid enough to drive the urban actions required for a just, green and digital transformation; and that the EU still needs to put more focus on long-term investments.

The report aims to enhance understanding of how the instrument can better harness the capacity of cities to support

the recovery process. It also provides recommendations on how the instrument should evolve if it is to become a benchmark for public investment support schemes at EU level.

These are all considerations that need to be taken into account in the development of the next seven-year EU budget, which should take account of the voices and needs of cities.



2024 EU elections, what is at stake for cities?

Agustí Fernández de Losada, Director, Global Cities Programme,
Barcelona Centre for International Affairs

The upcoming elections for the European Parliament to be held in June 2024 could put climate ambition and other urban priorities at stake. Challenges and priorities identified by European mayors and collected in the 2024 Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey will depend on the configuration of the new political scenario in Brussels. The appointment of the new EU institutions, mainly the new European Commission, will be crucial to understand the way Europe will address key files in the years to come. Negotiations to define the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the future of the European Green Deal and the EU Cohesion Policy, or the way the EU will tackle migration, the digital transition, and the Russian war in Ukraine will shape without any reasonable doubt urban realities.

Climate action is by far the top priority for European Mayors. In recent years, European cities have shown a clear commitment to achieve climate neutrality. Mayors have led their communities, including citizens and businesses, to implement ambitious initiatives to reduce emissions, decarbonise buildings, improve the environment and promote the circular economy. They have combined efforts in key areas under municipal competences such as mobility, public space, and economic development to deliver tangible results aligning with European and global commitments. However, a hypothetical step back in the European Green Deal and EU climate regulations, as is proposed by several political forces across the continent, could undermine the efforts made so far.

The future of the Cohesion Policy and the reconfiguration of the recovery strategies will be central to the negotiations of the new MFF and another major concern for cities. As stated in the Urban Recovery Watch, a joint piece of research by CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs) and Eurocities, the recovery process has led to a certain recentralisation of investments and reforms. As some experts are already arguing, this could consolidate a concerning trend that could undermine the capacity of local governments to take an active role in the definition of the investments behind the EU's Structural Funds. Aligning EU financial instruments with the effective needs and interests of communities is key for mayors to address the challenges that cities are currently facing.

Indeed, the new budget, as well as the EU's regulatory capacity, will be decisive for cities to address some of the main challenges and priorities highlighted by mayors in the Eurocities Pulse. Providing local responses to tackle housing, the digital transition, migration, or the urban-rural divide, to put some critical examples, requires an enabling regulatory framework that depends heavily on Brussels. Yet, if the recentralisation trends observed in the recovery years are confirmed, mainstreaming urban interests within the EU policy-making process will prove to be even more challenging than is the case today.

All this plays out against a background profoundly shaped by the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the growing commitment among EU members to reinforce their defence capacities through a joint EU action. This will certainly condition future policy and budgetary developments after the EU Parliament election and could undermine the partnership that the EU has been forging with cities over successive years to address common interests and priorities. Moreover, the current geopolitical tensions have gained centrality in urban concerns — issues from inflation, to the energy crisis or the reception of refugees all have a relevant urban dimension. And the growing centrality of defence in the European mindset will contribute to the above-mentioned recentralisation patterns.

Setbacks in policy areas such as climate change, the temptation to recentralise powers and budgets, together with the new centrality that defence and security are gaining in the European context could put urban priorities at stake. The urban and cohesion agendas are losing weight in the European political debate and risk to be sent to the outskirts of the European project if certain political configurations are endorsed by European voters this June. The current scenario should mobilise mayors and the municipal movement, with an otherwise complex scenario on the horizon for cities. New alliances should be formed to preserve the ambition, commitment, and resolution showed by mayors to address urban priorities and the European project. Lessons learnt by cities in Europe that have already suffered backlashes in the past years might provide inspiration and a path to follow. That's why understanding the views of the more than 90 mayors who responded to this year's Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey should be top of the agenda for researchers and urban practitioners as they anticipate what is at stake for cities this year.



2024 EU elections, what is at stake for cities?

Themis Christophidou, Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission

Sustainable urban development is one of the keys to the future of Europe. Our cities must be inclusive, green and resilient adapting to new challenges and to unprecedented shocks and crises. The priorities identified by mayors in this survey confirm the diversity of solutions to integrate and invest in local policies and strategies, joining in with regional and national levels' actions. This is welcome given that the recently published 9th Cohesion report shows that in recent years there are positive trends in social inclusion and poverty reduction. However, it also points to the need to pay close attention to regional disparities, and social and economic impacts of transitions in all territories.

Cohesion Policy supports cities in their green, digital and just transitions, and cities are key allies to ensure these are successfully delivered. Many cities are engaging in ambitious actions to become climate neutral, to accelerate sustainable mobility, to support biodiversity in urban spaces, digitalisation and technology deployment, and more. Cohesion Policy has played a key role over the years in supporting public investment, contributing to strengthening the European growth model, spurring economic growth in line with key policy priorities from the twin transition, to innovation, business and skills, from childcare, education and health to protection from natural disasters. The support is available to cities of all sizes, territories and local communities, with investments targeted to the specific needs of urban and peri-urban areas, without forgetting crucial linkages with surrounding territories.

For these transitions to be successful, it remains important to involve the economic and social partners, civil society and citizens in the planning processes and implementation. Responses at local level, with a strong involvement of local actors, contribute to territorial and social cohesion and helps exploit wider regions' untapped potential and increase the coherence and effectiveness of policies. Through our action and support, the Commission has put the emphasis on two factors that are essential for the sustainable and resilient development of cities in Europe. Firstly, it is important to follow the principle of multi-level governance and participation, working together with cities, the metropolitan areas, regions, member states and all stakeholders. Secondly, it is key to empower cities by investing in integrated sustainable urban development strategies.

The 9th Cohesion report also highlights the significance of skills, capacities and administrative resources to plan and implement these developments and ensure good governance. The European Urban Initiative invests in capacity building and is dedicated to urban stakeholders and policymakers. A mix of activities and tools, easy to apply for and fast to implement, are available for any interested EU city willing to develop its skills in the area of sustainable urban development, strategic planning, urban connectivity, urban-rural linkages and associated themes.

Calls are also made for more effective multi-level governance both at EU and national level, for the early involvement of local authorities in discussions on new legislation. Working together across different levels of governance is of key importance for bringing in positive change to the lives of people in European cities. To this end, the Urban Agenda for the EU, through which the European Commission collaborates with member states, cities, regions and other stakeholders, brings opportunities to support the mainstreaming of the urban dimension in various policy areas and processes. The Urban Agenda for the EU represents a common frame of action and instrument for this purpose, stimulating co-creation, and triggering consultation processes. It also seeks to activate multi-level governance cooperation on a number of issues such as greening cities, equality in cities, and urban food systems.

The continued support to the multi-level governance approach is critical to implement collectively the principles agreed in the New Leipzig Charter, which continue to echo current challenges and priorities for European cities, such as affordable and sustainable housing, ensuring the provision of local services and connectivity.

Finally, I would like to highlight the importance of cities in building a greener, just and more competitive Europe, and congratulate cities for their active engagement in this process. There are still challenges ahead and we should continue working together for a better European future.

Cities making a difference



Climate adaptation

Cities actions on climate adaptation

The effects of climate change are making themselves felt across Europe's cities. Indeed, as set out in the main survey analysis, close to 30% of mayors highlighted issues such as access to water, the effects of extreme heat, the challenge of promoting climate adaptation measures as well as advancing on decarbonisation and climate neutrality goals as their number one challenge overall in 2023, reinforcing this long-term trend.

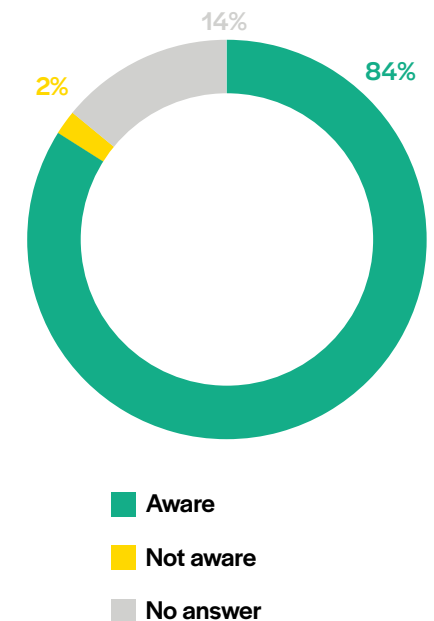
The Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey further found that the number one climate change induced hazard that mayors feel threatens their cities, according to 65% of the mayors who reported specific hazards, is extreme heat.

Heatwaves and other extreme weather events have beset Europe's cities with more frequency and ferocity. 2023 was the hottest year ever recorded. London has engaged its local councils and made use of its strong ties with the voluntary sector to protect rough sleepers from dangerous summer heatwaves by repurposing its

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, initially developed for freezing winters, to switch from providing heat blankets to sunscreen. Meanwhile, Athens has created the innovative position of Chief Heat Officer. One of the most effective solutions to reducing urban temperatures is to have more plants and water features. Trees and bushes, rivers and canals all have a cooling effect that cities like Budapest are exploiting to the full.

Flooding, the second-most highlighted climate hazard (mentioned by 55% of those who shared their hazards), is emblematic of the diversity and universality of the perils that climate change has in store for Europe's cities. Given their geographic distinction, the types of flooding that cities face are diverse, including burst riverbanks, flash-flooding from rainfall, and coastal floods. Spectacular flooding events, such as those faced by German, Belgian and Dutch cities in 2021, and Italian cities in May 2023, have been punctuated by numerous smaller-scale but nonetheless devastating floods across the continent, a trend set to increase in the coming years.

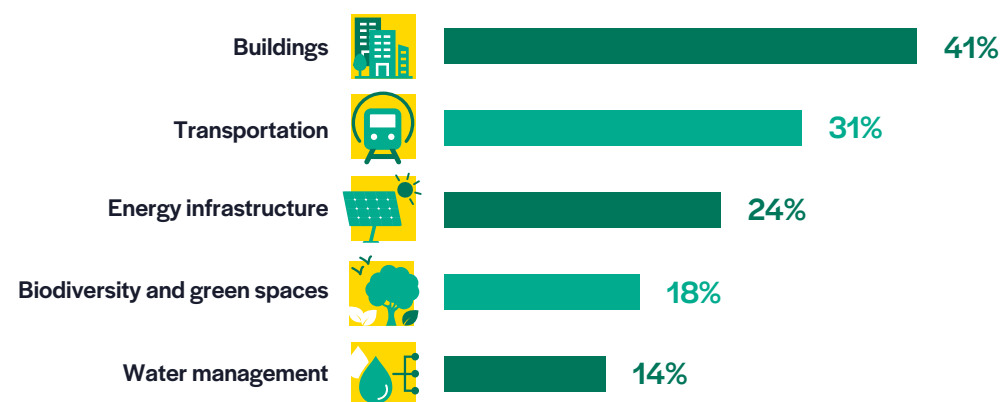
Mayors' awareness in terms of climate hazards



Cities across Europe have been steeling themselves against this threat with an array of measures, often employing nature-based solutions that have knock-on benefits for local communities. Copenhagen's Cloudburst initiative involves creating new public spaces, such as skateparks or playing fields, designed to sequester excess water during heavy rainfall. Braga's community ownership approach facilitates schools and other organisations wishing to 'adopt' sections of its river, which they clean and maintain while using for educational and other purposes. To protect residents from flooding, the 'Turin, City of Water' initiative is reinforcing four riverbanks while creating green areas for recreation, as well as mobility options for walkers and cyclists.

Flooding, extreme heat, and other climate hazards put many municipal sectors at risk. Mayors are almost universally aware (84%) of the at-risk sectors in their territories, that they perceive to have the greatest vulnerabilities and are bracing themselves for severe impacts from these hazards across all municipal sectors. Namely, buildings (41%), transportation (31%) and energy infrastructure (24%), were considered most at risk, while mayors also expressed concern related to biodiversity and green spaces (17.5%), water management (14%) and health (14%).

Top five sectors perceived as the most likely to be impacted by climate change



Central challenges

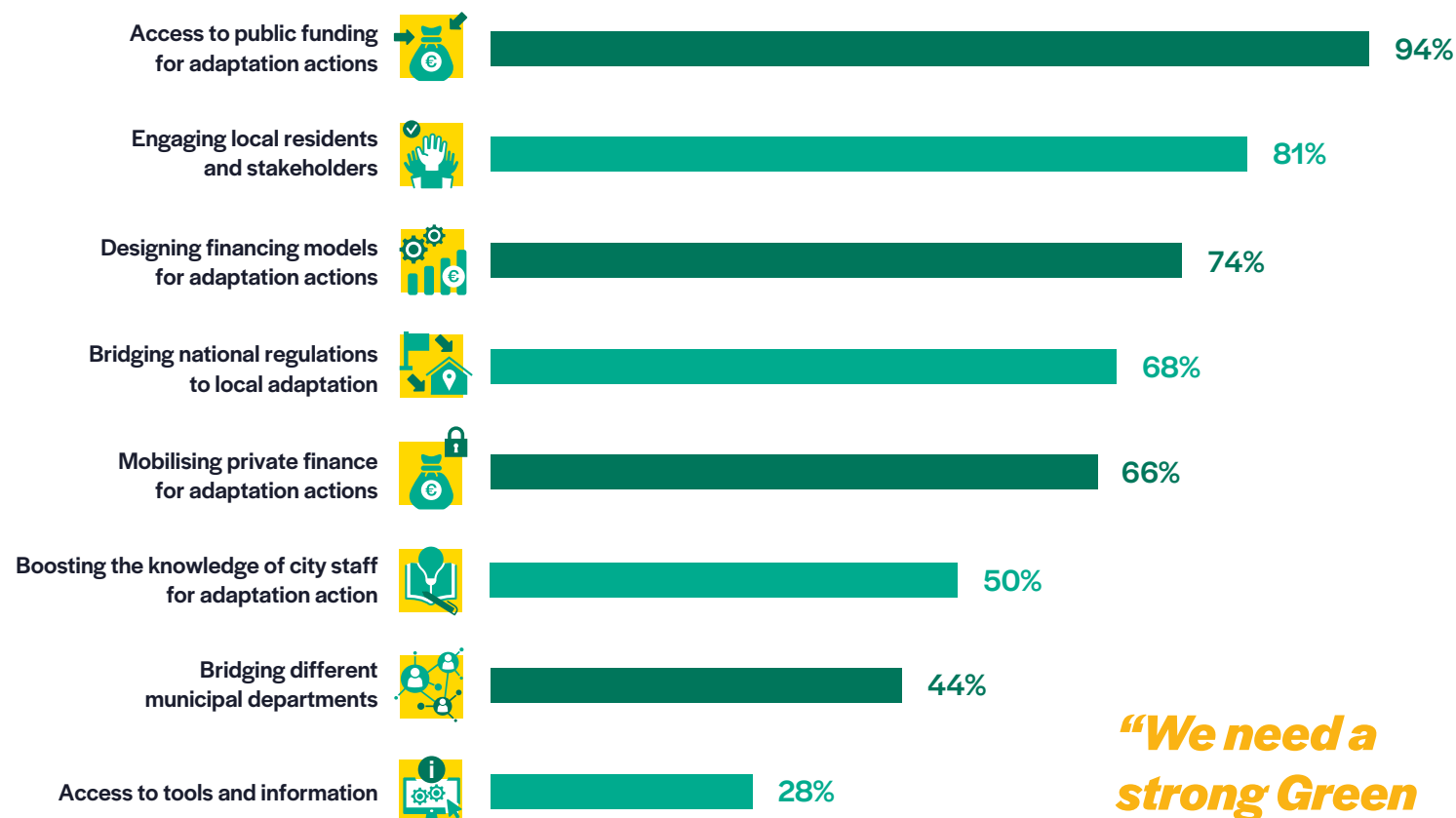
The recently released European Climate Risk Assessment notes that Europe is the fastest-warming continent, likely to face significant increases in temperatures, sea level, and heatwaves and droughts. Emphasising the need for urgent action, the report identifies 36 major climate risks, with 21 requiring immediate attention, and signals risks to health, economies, ecosystems, and infrastructure. Though no cities are spared, Southern Europe, low-lying coastal areas, and the outermost EU regions face the greatest risk.

The key challenge that mayors report to be hindering their adaptation actions is funding and financing, with 94% choosing this at their top challenge related to climate adaptation overall.

Available funding, however, is not sufficient for the scale of the challenge cities have to face, and recovery from climate impacts is very costly for cities. Given this, cities are working to design financing models for adaptation actions (the third greatest adaptation challenge at 74%), and to mobilise private finance for adaptation actions (the fifth most pressing adaptation challenge at 66%), as further explained in the guest essay from Ambroise Fayolle.

Globally, funding for climate adaptation measures lags far behind that for reducing emissions. According to the Climate Policy Initiative, 2021-22 saw €58.59 billion allocated for adaptation globally, just 5.5% of the €1,069.5 billion allocated to mitigation, while €47.43 billion was dedicated to activities that benefitted both. The EU is working to address this imbalance, but there remains a lot of catching up to do

Top challenges in implementing climate change adaptation measures



“We need a strong Green Deal for the next EU.”

Anna Lisa Boni,
Deputy Mayor of Bologna

The Paris Climate Bond, raised €300 million to fund climate adaptation and mitigation projects, including planting 20,000 trees and creating 30 hectares of new parks, offering 1.75% annual profit to investors prioritising sustainability. Hamburg incentivises green roofs with €3 million in funding from the Ministry for Environment and Energy and the Senate Office. The city then offers non-refundable subsidies for up to 60% of installation costs, and is aiming for 100 hectares of green roofs by 2029. Bratislava has secured over €2.4 million from European Economic Area and Norway grants, complemented by city funds, for greening and water retention projects, including a €50,000 grant scheme for small-scale sustainable drainage projects for private, NGO, and business applicants.

Climate mitigation projects have a more obvious pay-back for private investors, as they can reap the dividends from energy saving directly, while the economic benefit of adaptation is less tangible. Nonetheless, given that the EU incurred approximately €650 billion in damages between 1980 and 2022 from extreme weather events, there is a clear economic case for equipping local government with the necessary resources to mitigate and adapt. The potential economic damages from coastal floods alone in the EU could exceed €1 trillion every year by the century's end under a high emissions scenario.

Engaging local residents and stakeholders was the second most widely shared challenge overall (81%). As the examples from Braga, Copenhagen and Turin above demonstrate, adaptation action often involves transformation that has an immediate and tangible positive effect within cities. As it may represent major changes within urban space, engaging local residents and stakeholders is a must. However, it's also a way to harness local energy and great ideas, and to demonstrate all the benefits associated with climate action.

Sometimes, as with Debrecen's urban community gardens, local authorities tap into existing local impulses and facilitate their growth and reproduction. In other cases, such as Espoo's work on biodiversity with construction companies, the city can share its ambitions with local actors and invite them to invent ways of contributing. And often, as in the case of Cagliari's rejuvenation of its canal, the municipal government includes everyone in city-wide consultation and ensures that major infrastructural development creates opportunities for all sectors of society.

Other key adaptation challenges that mayors highlighted were bridging national regulations to local adaptation (68%), boosting the knowledge of city staff (50%), bridging different municipal departments (44%), and access to tools and information (28%). Climate adaptation is a shared competence between the EU and member states. However, despite the fact that there

are national adaptation strategies in place, in all but nine member states local adaptation is largely driven by cities and regions and not by the national level. This underscores the importance of local action, which often happens in spite of a lack of sufficient support for local policy coming from the national level.



Adaptation priorities

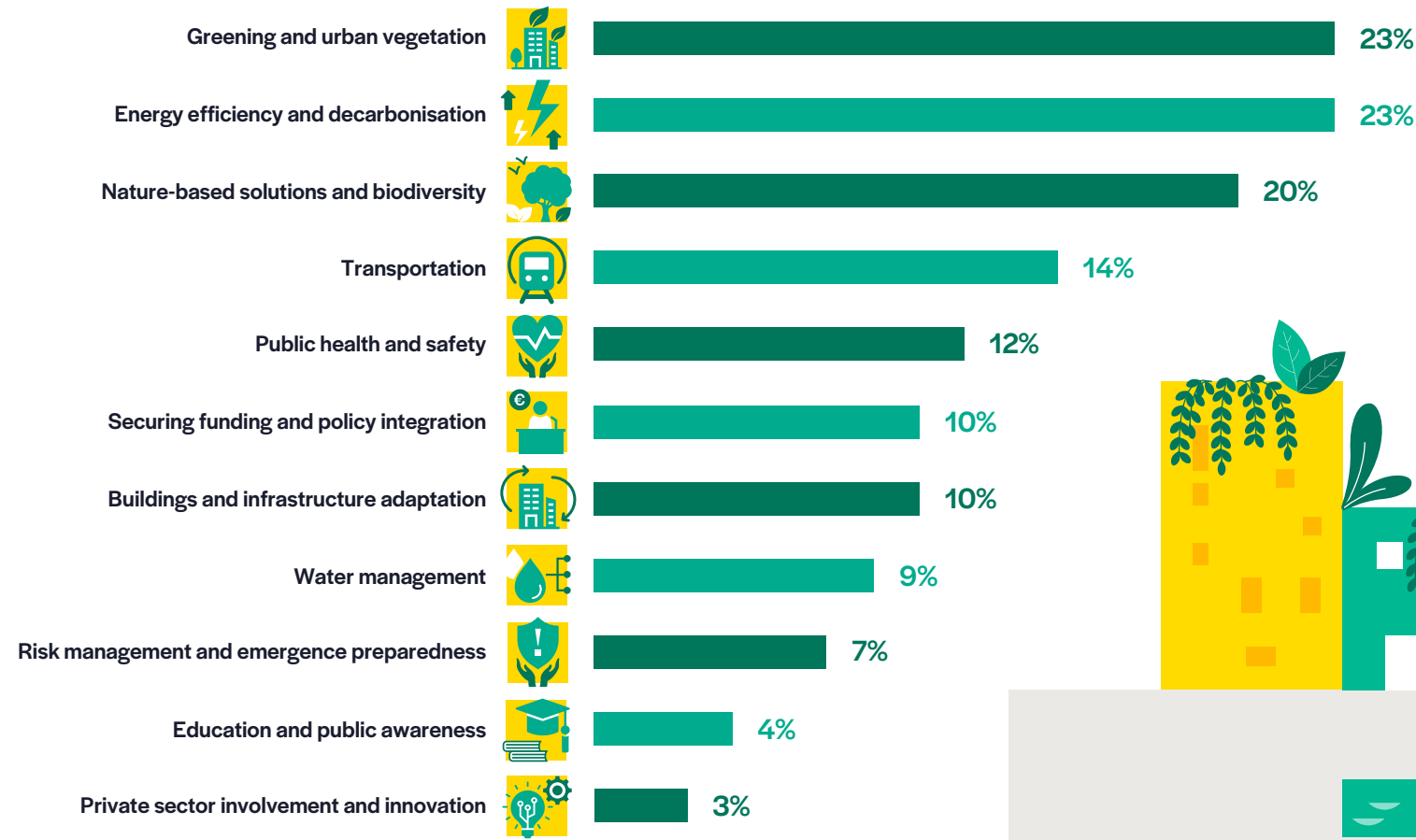
Asked about their priorities for climate adaptation, mayors listed greening and urban vegetation in joint first with energy efficiency and decarbonisation (23% each). This tied first choice demonstrates how conducive adaptation efforts are to unleashing co-benefits, that is to say, positive knock-on effects for other areas of local policy.

Green spaces, such as parks, green roofs, and trees act as natural cooling systems, reducing the urban heat island effect, improving air quality by filtering pollutants, and act to enhance biodiversity by providing habitats for various species. These green spaces are also vital for the mental and physical health of urban populations, offering environments for recreation and relaxation.

Such nature-based solutions, which was the third priority of mayors for climate adaptation, cited by 20% overall, are also often more economically attractive than traditional infrastructural solutions. Hamburg’s green roof programme, mentioned above, is far less expensive than a rehaul and expansion of sewer infrastructure for stormwater management would be.

There is also much crossover between adaptation, mitigation and energy efficiency-focused solutions. For example, energy-efficient refurbishment of buildings with better insulation and more effective heating and cooling technology can make residents more comfortable during heatwaves; trees and plants capture carbon from the air while acting against overheating and flooding; and less carbon-intensive transport options like cycling or electric buses also reduce congestion and pollution, which can exacerbate the urban heat-island effect.

Other priorities for mayors include transportation (14%), public health and safety (12%), adapting buildings and infrastructure (10%) and water management (9%).



EU response

The European Commission responded to the recent European Climate Risk Assessment with a Communication on Managing Climate Risks. This communication highlights a discrepancy between the ambitions and the actual implementation of climate adaptation policies among EU member states, emphasising the need for improved governance and resources at all levels. The Communication also points out the need for better coordination and resource allocation to address climate risks effectively. However, despite cities being key implementers of climate adaptation initiatives, Eurocities has pointed out that the Commission's response does not adequately recognise the role of local governments.

Nearly 90% of Eurocities members have adopted plans to protect their residents from the effects of climate change. As seen above, these strategies often include nature-based solutions to enhance resilience and address urban heat, drought, and flooding. The European Commission stresses the importance of nature-based solutions but acknowledges challenges in financing these initiatives over traditional infrastructural solutions.

The creative approaches of Europe's cities to tackling climate adaptation while bringing about co-benefits for local communities will be vital to ensuring the resilience of Europe as the hazards of climate change become more widely felt. Empowering local leaders to have a seat at the table of national and European policy making in this area is the only way to ensure that Europe is ready to adapt.



Financing urban adaptation

By Ambroise Fayolle, Vice President of the European Investment Bank

2023 marked the hottest year on record, with expectations for global temperatures to rise even more, intensifying climate change effects. The European Climate Risk Assessment highlights Europe as the fastest warming continent, outpacing the efforts of current policies and adaptation measures. Cities, bearing the brunt of extreme weather events and biodiversity loss, house nearly 340 million people in the EU and produce 85% of its GDP. To safeguard citizens, businesses, and critical infrastructure, while maintaining economic competitiveness, it's crucial to increase investment in making urban areas more climate resilient.

The good news is that adaptation is increasingly a priority for cities. According to a recent survey by the European Investment Bank of 744 municipalities, over 60% plan to increase their investment in climate change mitigation and adaptation over the next three years. Despite these efforts, as the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey confirms, access to funding and financing for adaptation actions is considered the top challenge for mayors seeking to move forward on climate adaptation. Modernisation and infrastructure adaptation remain the primary focus across all EU regions. For example, Portugal's National Climate Act envisages over 300 local climate action plans. This is supported by national and local-level resilience-oriented construction standards and requirements.

This March, the European Commission published a communication on managing climate risks - protecting people and prosperity. The Commission underlines that attracting and facilitating private investment is fundamental to successfully addressing climate risks and building climate resilience. The European Investment Bank is working closely with the Commission, as well as countries, cities and the private sector to finance adaptation measures. Last year, we devoted a record €2.7 billion to adaptation projects globally. We aim to do even more this year and in the years to come.

¹ EIB Municipalities Survey 2022-2023. The state of local infrastructure investment in Europe. Available online at: <https://www.eib.org/en/publications/20230043-eib-municipalities-survey-2022>

The Bank has several financial instruments and advisory services to support adaptation measures in cities. We are financing large infrastructure projects in areas such as climate change resilient urban transport and flood prevention across the EU. In addition, urban framework loans to municipalities are especially well-suited to support investments in adaptation.

Framework loans help cities to finance medium-to long-term capital investment programmes. They are useful because adaptation investments are typically needed across many sectors, such as water and transport infrastructure, and may comprise numerous small projects that would be difficult to finance individually. The European Investment Bank's framework loans also finance other objectives including clean energy, hospitals and schools. Moreover, the loans can be drawn down over several years, to match a city's project preparation capacity and the availability of other financing.

Recent examples include the EIB's framework loan to the City of Florence to support its Urban Development and Climate Strategies – including investments in river restoration, bio-diverse water retention basins, sustainable drainage solutions, and sustainable mobility. We also financed Krakow's City Adaptation Plan, which includes sustainable mobility, green spaces and public buildings such as schools and hospitals.

The EIB's ADAPT advisory platform, offers cities a range of advisory services to support their adaptation plans. For example, we have worked with the Lisbon Metropolitan Area on the project pipeline of its Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, helping to identify priority projects and additional adaptation measures. In the Italian city of Taranto, we are advising on the implementation of investments under the city's Green Belt strategy, which includes urban parks and green areas to restore degraded land. In addition, we are working with the region of Andalucia to integrate climate change considerations into its sustainable urban mobility planning.

Social considerations need to figure prominently in climate adaptation projects. This is because lower income and vulnerable citizens tend to be at greater risk, as they are both more likely to live in vulnerable locations and less able to relocate. They are also less able to invest in the resilience of their homes, or otherwise adapt to extreme weather events. There is a need to build a just resilience to the impacts of climate change, at the same time as there is a need for a just transition away from fossil fuels towards low-carbon technologies.

To cope with the inevitable consequences of climate change, cities need to invest much more in adaptation measures and their capacity to prepare and deliver them, which is a challenge for many with constrained budgets. To assist, the EIB is looking at innovative financing structures to unlock investments in adaptation, such as using revenue streams from mandatory or voluntary payments from businesses or citizens wishing to avoid future climate change-related damages.

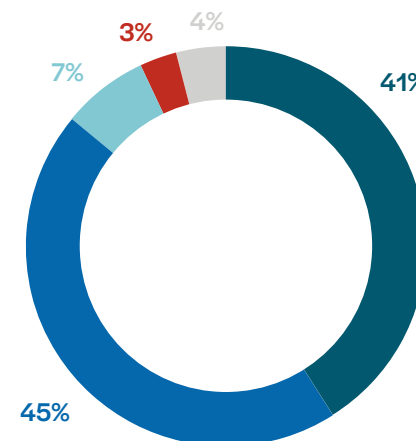
The EIB seeks to deepen its relationships with cities and urban areas across the EU. City networks like Eurocities have an important convening power that allow us to discuss investment barriers and adaptation priorities with cities and show potential solutions. We are here to help. Call us.

Government innovation

Cities efforts for government innovation

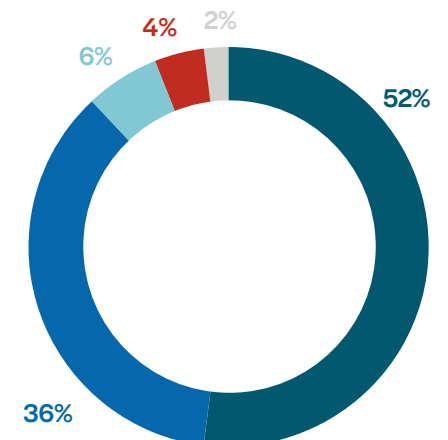
Government innovation holds the potential to solve many of the challenges facing cities, from climate change to social justice, and from ensuring smarter mobility options to speeding up the digital transformation. As explained by Philipp Rode of LSE Cities in his guest essay for this publication, given the growing prominence of mayors in politics at all levels, more fundamental questions are being asked of how the public sector can be at the forefront of such challenges. For city governments, as Rode explains, this form of innovation primarily focuses on strengthening local administrative capacity to act, distributing risks, and enhancing their ability to tackle pertinent local issues, all while efficiently meeting residents' needs.

My city will have to innovate because otherwise we will not have enough resources to deliver on our priorities



- Strongly agree
- Partially agree
- No strong opinion
- Partially disagree
- Strongly disagree

I am confident in my city's capacity to innovate to find the best way to tackle our challenges and deliver on our priorities



- Strongly agree
- Partially agree
- No strong opinion
- Partially disagree
- No answer

Cities often manage this via their local innovation ecosystems, by connecting diverse but complementary actors, such as universities and startups; curating the local policy and regulatory environment to enable innovators to do what they do best; providing financing for innovative local ideas, organisations and projects; and creating upskilling opportunities that empower local people to leverage cutting edge research and technology to solve local problems in new ways.

Mayors responding to this year's Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey voiced optimism in their city's capacity to innovate. As can be seen, 88% of the mayors responding to this question expressed either strong or partial confidence that their city can find the best way to tackle their challenges and deliver on their priorities, with only 4% signalling trepidation.

Meanwhile, a similar percentage of mayors (86%) either strongly or partially agree that their city will have to innovate to overcome a lack of resources to deliver on their priorities. A lack of resources was also highlighted in last year's Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey, where only around one in five mayors expected to have enough resources to match the needs of their city.

While mayors' focus is clearly on the day-to-day delivery of public services, in their reflections many also highlighted that innovation has a strong role in ensuring this. As already indicated in the main survey analysis, when asked about the main strategies they would wish to employ to achieve their priorities, mayors ranked sourcing additional funding from central governments and the EU level in first place.

At the same time, almost half of all respondents to the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2024 shared that their cities do struggle to develop innovative approaches to address their political priorities, highlighting the importance of capacity building in this domain.

What can innovation help mayors do better?

When asked 'what innovation can help your city do better,' the top response, selected by 45% of mayors overall, was to solve complex challenges and deliver on transformative policy agendas.

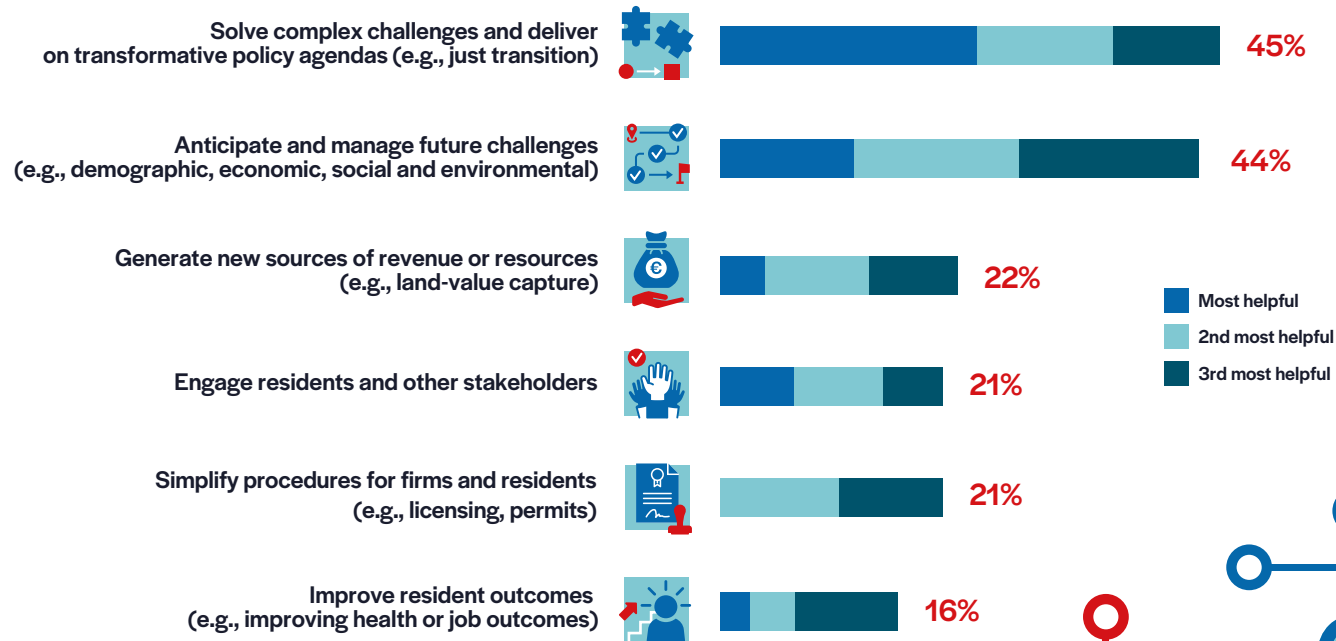
Cities face an array of complex challenges that increasingly require coordination and horizontal work across departments and in tandem with other actors. It therefore comes as no surprise that innovative approaches to managing challenges such as the just transition, which require huge efforts not only to decarbonise and shift behaviours, but also to ensure no one is left behind, are foremost on mayors' minds.

Through innovation, cities can transform their normal service provision while formulating coherent approaches to potentially divergent policy agendas, all while strengthening their collaboration with other players including local residents, academia, startups and other corporate and civic entities.

In Tallinn, the 'Tallinnovation' initiative engages companies to enhance local innovation, improve local service provision, grasp environmental goals and enhance urban living, including through an innovation competition, awarding prize money and providing opportunities for companies to test their products in urban settings.

A quintessential example of how this kind of collaborative innovation can be harnessed to solve complex challenges is the Climate City Contracts that Eurocities and its partners help cities deliver through NetZeroCities as part of the EU Mission for 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030. The city here acts as facilitator to develop a shared vision of climate neutrality, and shared commitments with other local players.

What can innovation help your city do better?



Second overall, with around 44% of mayors selecting it, is anticipating and managing future challenges.

Recent crises, most notably the Covid pandemic, have demonstrated how essential it is to have reliable foresight and resilience towards future challenges. At present, demographic shifts, economic volatility, and climatic uncertainties compel



cities to look into the future and prepare for its uncertainties. Conversely, innovative predictive models and adaptive strategies can better position cities to capitalise on upcoming opportunities.

Such thinking is in evidence in Aix-Marseille Provence where the metropolitan government uses innovation policy to foster links between local and African startups. With PwC's The World in 2050 Report indicating that emerging economies will be the driving force of global growth in the coming decades, with a relative slowdown in the EU, this approach serves at once to diversify the local economy and to create lasting bridges with African innovation ecosystems.

With more than 20% of mayors overall saying that generating new sources of revenue or resources is a key role that innovation can play, we again see the crucial need for effectively financing cities to meet all residents' needs.

At a similar threshold (20% overall), but with more selecting it in first place, engaging residents and stakeholders is clearly important to cities when it comes to developing their innovation strategies.

Cities are intent on unlocking the potential of innovation to engage residents and other local actors. Inclusive forms of innovation that bring diverse voices to the table are also more robust and sustainable.

With its participatory budget, Warsaw uses an innovative mode of governance to enable innovative ideas coming from the ground up. The initiative allows residents to decide on how a portion of the city's budget is allocated to selected projects, such as the creation of an ecological ice rink in Bielany and the installation of book vending machines.

Other areas that were highlighted were simplifying procedures for firms and residents; and directly improving the quality of life of residents, for example by improving health or job outcomes.

Boosting city capacity through innovation

Among the approaches to innovation that mayors indicated could enhance local operations the most, the top overall (72%) is data-driven analytics and evidence-based policy making.

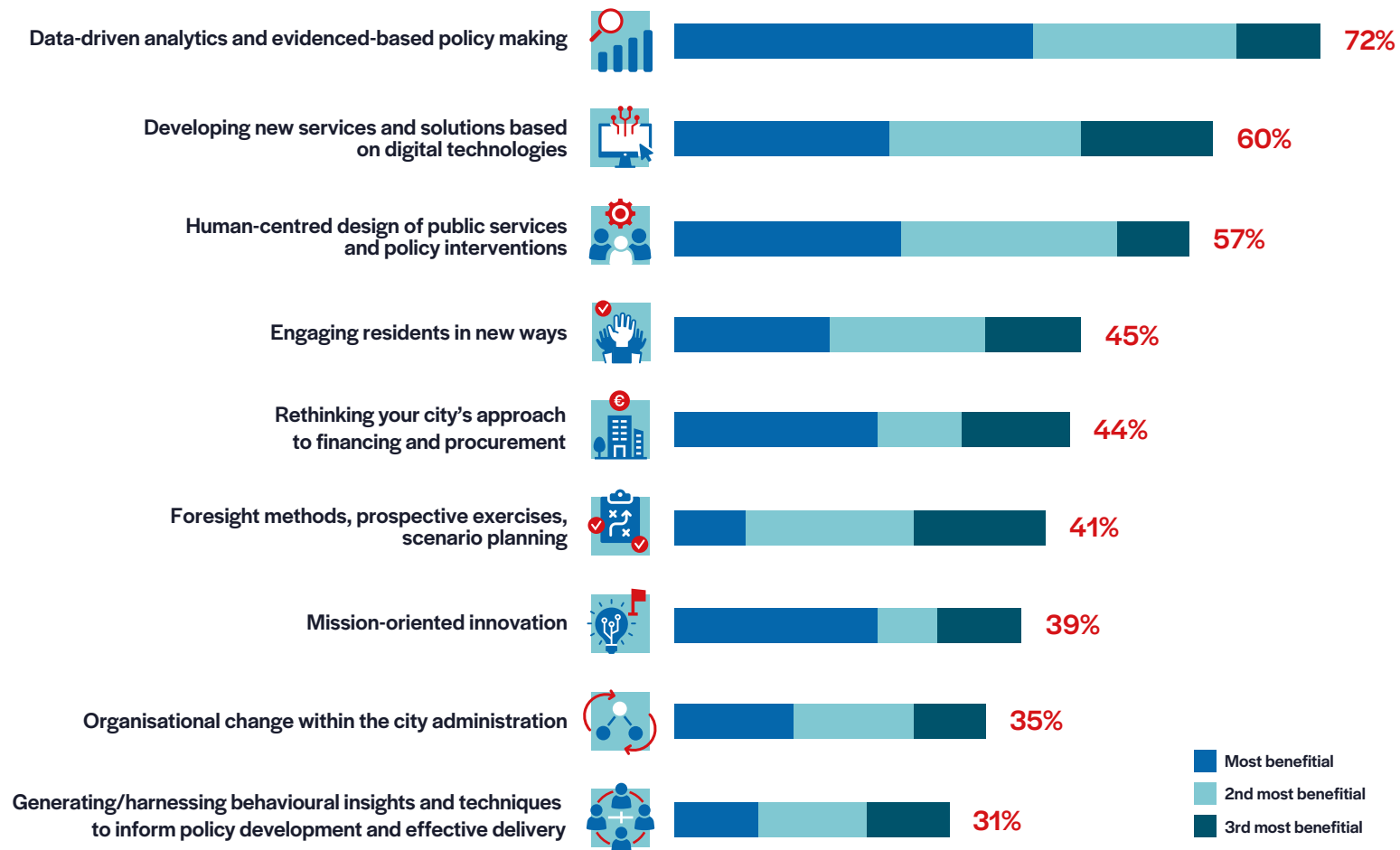
With ever-more vast quantities of data becoming available to cities, it may come as no surprise that innovative approaches to engage with this resource are a top priority for mayors. This data allows local leaders to make more informed decisions about their strategic direction and distil insights and inform decisions that are both responsive and anticipatory.

In Bologna, the city's data is fed into a digital twin, a 3D digital copy of the city that includes an array of urban processes. This innovative approach allows the city to observe and comprehend local data from above. By opening up the model, the city can enhance transparency and create opportunities for further innovation among companies and other local organisations.

Gathering this data, ensuring that it is of a high quality, and even using the collection to engage residents through citizen science presents its own challenges. Via pathways including Eurocities' EU-funded projects CitiMeasure and CitiObs, local governments are honing their data-gathering techniques.

Given the centrality of digitalisation and e-governance to cities' thinking on innovation, it is also important to note that this was an area that a significant percentage of mayors (26%) highlighted as one of the top areas where more EU funding is needed. Such approaches range from apps and online platforms for civic engagement in Rotterdam and London, to offering benefits like reduced school fees to residents proactively on the basis of data available to the city, as in Ghent – all finalists for the 2023 awards of Eurocities' EU-funded UserCentriCities project.

Which of the following innovation activities do you think your city would benefit from the most?



Second, developing new services and solutions based on digital technologies, was selected by 60% of mayors overall.

Mayors also see innovation as key to rethinking the municipal approach to financing and procurement. Innovative financing can help cities generate revenue, earmark portions of their budget, and capitalise on private finance. Eurocities works through the EU-funded Prospect+ project to create resources and mentoring opportunities for cities on innovative financing.

Ljubljana uses energy performance contracts to enable massive solar projects without drawing on the municipal budget. A local energy services company makes the initial investment, paying for and installing solar panels on the roofs of school buildings in cooperation with the city council. The company then recoups its investment over the coming years, by receiving the monetary amount from the savings produced by the use of solar energy.

Innovative public procurement is a way that cities can save money as well as gaining outsized benefits from planned spending. Typically, public procurement has awarded tenders to the provider charging the least. However, innovative procurement shifts the focus to getting the best value for money, meaning a more expensive option could be chosen if the eventual payback, whether in economic, social or environmental terms, is greater than other options. Eurocities works through the EU's Big Buyers initiative to enhance local capacity for innovative public procurement.

As big spenders, responsible for €6 out of every €10 of public spending, local and regional authorities also have the power to incentivise shifts in the market. For example, by signalling interest in the procurement of electric waste collection trucks, Gothenburg was able to entice Volvo into manufacturing an initial batch of such vehicles. In this way, the city was able to use the money it had earmarked to update its fleet while also meeting its sustainability and noise reduction goals, and contributing to the development of a solution that other cities can now use.

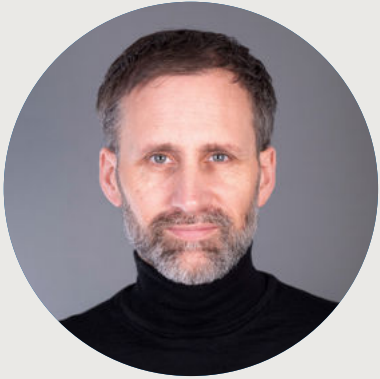
Third, human-centred design of public services and policy interventions, was selected by 57% of mayors overall.

Mayors also see potential for innovative human-centred design of public services and policy interventions, ensuring that they remain grounded in the lived experiences of residents.

In Donostia - San Sebastian, the SmartKalea project involves local shops, technology companies and residents in building a smart and sustainable urban environment. The provision of real-time data to local shopkeepers and the integration of this data on the SmartKalea website allows for better business and greater transparency, empowering locals through innovation and information.

Ghent's climate crowdfunding platform, developed in 2015, enables residents to propose and finance ideas for the city. This ensures that projects that are financed always have local buy in, literally. Funded projects include 'Lekker dichtbij!' which encourages urban farming on balconies of social housing, and 'the Edible Street,' which transforms stone facades into vertical gardens for local food production.

Besides these areas, mayors also considered innovation to carry potential for developing Mission-oriented innovation, such as through the 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission; engaging residents in new ways, such as through citizen dialogues; and rethinking local approaches to financing and procurement.



Government Innovation for European Cities

Philipp Rode, Executive Director, LSE Cities

Since LSE Cities' first convening of mayors from leading European cities in 2003, urban policy concerns have been both sticky – housing, transport or urban regeneration – and fundamentally shifting – climate, health or technology. Alongside the more profound shifts in priorities and sentiments has come a global recognition that a passive, or even an 'enabling' state can't rise to the scale of the challenges that we face. Instead, we need rapid and radical action, with a particular focus on inducing positive social tipping points. From this standpoint, it's right that Europe's cities, with their large economic and environmental footprints, forward-looking populations, and relatively agile, networked governments, should take a lead.

With a more proactive, shaping role for governments back on the agenda, fundamental questions of how the public sector works and solves problems have naturally re-emerged. Government innovation – the processes through which public administrations create new strategies, policies and services – represents a central field of inquiry. Whether requiring new cultures of innovation, leveraging digitalisation or co-creation approaches with citizens and the private sector, government innovation is about balancing risk taking, continuity, and responsible budgeting with the flexibility needed for experimentation and creative solutions.

For city governments, this type of innovation is mostly about empowering administrations, sharing risks and building the capacity to address critical local challenges while effectively responding to residents' needs. Three bundles of fundamental city challenges usually serve as a point of departure, once again confirmed in the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey. First, complex, society-wide challenges dominated by climate change but also involving social inequalities and economic performance. Second, domain specific challenges related to housing, mobility, energy and planning. Third, more internal governance challenges that might include budgets, financing and administrative capacities.

Government innovation by city halls can play a major role across any of these challenges and priorities. It is encouraging that close to 90% of cities in the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey believe that they have the capacity to innovate, tackle challenges and deliver on policy priorities. Above all, European cities consider innovation to be particularly important for addressing complex challenges through transformative agendas and the anticipation of future challenges. The Future Mentors programme follows this sentiment in an unusual way. Initiated by the City of Espoo for Eurocities and facilitated by the OECD, it reverses traditional mentorship and establishes a small group of young people mentoring a city decision-maker and has so far engaged 26 cities.

Additional opportunities cut across citizen engagement, accessing new revenues, developing new procedures, and improving outcomes for residents. The most easily identifiable innovation activities relate to data and evidence-based policy as well as data analytics. New digitally enabled services and solutions alongside human-centred design for public services are a second group, followed by more technical activities such as finance, procurement and foresight support. Examples include Tirana's Open Data Portal and One-Stop-Shop of online services or London's online community, Talk London, which engages citizens in discussions of some of the most pressing challenges and priorities facing the city.

Our forthcoming joint survey of 61 cities across Europe reveals further details on actual innovation practice, and by extension, where opportunities for targeted capacity building and training may be particularly helpful. This includes practices focusing on e-government, climate action, economic development and transport. For example, the City of Turku established a deliberative citizens' panel with over 170 randomly selected participants to inform transport developments for its city centre. This approach is built on experiences with citizens' assemblies which have become common for climate action (e.g. Bologna's climate assembly), as well as for innovating strategic planning

(e.g. Leuven 2020). Such approaches may also require novel city institutions. The Cluj Centre for Innovation and Civic Imagination is establishing new forms of collaboration with its residents including a youth advisory council.

Beyond these substantive issues, building capacities linked to crosscutting, whole-of-government approaches; anticipating and managing future challenges; engaging and collaborating with diverse stakeholders; and improving service delivery emerge as priorities. However, any support programmes would have to centrally acknowledge the diversity of European cities and their variable levels of experience in public sector innovation.

What the forthcoming Eurocities Pulse/LSE Cities survey on government innovation once again confirms is a considerable potential for closing the opportunity-practice gap of government innovation. The opportunity cuts across better data and data analytics for decision making, more effective public engagement and service improvements. Related practice will range from AI trials considering privacy, transparency and other risks to people-focused innovation of governance, management and local democracy. Any of this will require informed, confident, and willing leadership which should not be taken for granted. Instead, proactive leadership training, coaching and technical assistance is urgently needed.

To get there, universities will need to better combine their role as ‘anchor institutions’, with large workforces, land holdings and purchasing power, and knowledge bases by fully engaging with the urban government innovation cycle.



[Eurocities Pulse
Survey - List of
questions](#)



[More stories
from cities](#)

