



Covenant of Mayors  
for Climate & Energy

#### What is Cities Race to Zero (RtZ)?

RtZ is a global campaign launched in the lead-up to the upcoming UNFCCC COP26. RtZ addresses local authorities, businesses, universities and investors with the aim of accelerating science-based climate action to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2040, or 2050 at the latest.

Like any race, Race to Zero has different tracks for different stakeholders. *Cities Race to Zero is the official track for cities.* It is designed to help them meet the Race's criteria and access the best available expertise along the way. The [Cities Race to Zero](#) is organised by C40 Cities, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM), ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), CDP, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the World Resources Institute (WRI). It is an official partner and the city track of the COP26 Race to Zero, designed to help cities meet the Race's commitment criteria using the best available tools and expertise.

Cities Race to Zero is a campaign for cities by cities to inspire commitments and action from their peers around the world and to channel the best available tools and expertise to help them stay on track with 1.5°C. The objective of Cities Race to Zero is to recruit 1000 cities by COP26.

Find out more on the [Cities Race to Zero](#).

#### What is Race to Resilience (RtR)?

The sibling campaign to the City Race to Zero, Race to Resilience will bring together a number of initiatives working to build resilience and adaptation amongst the communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This includes but is not limited to those communities facing extreme heat, drought, flooding, and sea level rise, in urban, rural and coastal areas. The objective of the campaign is to increase the sensitivity of local actors to the importance of preparing communities for climate change upheaval.

Find out more on the [Race to Resilience](#).

#### Race to Zero and Race to Resilience are global campaigns - how do they align with the ambition and targets of the EU?

The European Union has committed to the goal of Climate Neutrality by 2050 via the adoption of an European Green Deal. This entails radical transformation in all sectors of our society and economy. The EU has recently renewed its long-term mitigation and adaptation objectives inside the broader framework of the Green Deal. The European Commission has committed to deliver on effective Climate Action via four main channels: the [Climate Law](#), which will, for the first time, enshrine the 2050 climate neutrality objective into EU law; the European Climate Pact, to engage citizens and all parts of society in climate action; the 2030 Climate Target Plan, to further reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030; and the new EU Strategy on Climate Adaptation, to make Europe a climate-resilient society by 2050.

In line with this long term objective, the European Commission proposed to raise its intermediate target to 55% GHG reduction by 2030 and approved a new adaptation strategy.

The *Covenant of Mayors for a fairer, climate-neutral Europe* is the new, revised commitment of the Covenant of Mayors - Europe. It supports the European Union's 2050 target, aiming to secure decarbonised and resilient cities with access to affordable, secure and sustainable energy by 2050. In alignment with EU policy, RtZ and RtR

campaigns share the same objective of accelerating climate action to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 at the latest, and to strengthen the resilience of communities toward effects of climate change.

### **How do Race to Zero and Race to Resilience connect with the Covenant of Mayors - Europe?**

In line with the EU's target to become climate neutral by 2050, in April 2021, the Covenant - Europe encourages new and current signatories to sign up to the *“Stepping up action for a fairer, climate-neutral Europe”* commitment. By signing the new commitment document, European cities and towns will:

- **Commit** to make climate action their priority and to set up mid and long term climate targets to reach climate neutrality by 2050;
- **Engage** citizens, businesses, and respective National governments in the implementation of Climate Action;
- **Act** drafting, implementing, monitoring their action plans (SECAP) to reach the targets;
- **Network** with fellow cities, to get inspiration and learn from each other.

By joining the Covenant - Europe, cities are already on the path to engage and deliver in the Race to Zero - as they share the common vision to accelerate action to reach climate neutrality (Covenant of Mayors Europe) and net-zero (Cities Race to Zero) by 2050 at the latest. As such, the Covenant - Europe supports any European signatory to also join the RtZ and RtR Campaigns, based on their ambition.

Find out more in the FAQ:

[How to join as an individual signatory?](#)

### **I am already committed to the Covenant of Mayors - Europe, should I also join the Cities Race to Zero?**

As signatory of the Covenant of Mayors - Europe your city is already working toward decarbonising your economy, making your territory more resilient to the effects of climate change and providing sustainable and affordable energy to your community. By signing the revised Covenant - Europe [commitment document](#) *“Stepping up action for a fairer, climate-neutral Europe”* your city publicly states its intention to scale-up ambition and reach climate-neutrality no later than 2050, in line with European targets.

Find out how to renew your commitments to the Covenant of Mayors – Europe [here](#).

The Cities Race to Zero campaign offers a new, voluntary opportunity for raising your city's current ambition, setting science-based targets and to showcase ambitious action at global level, and in the run up to COP26.

There is of course no obligation for Covenant Signatories to join the Race to Zero.

Join the [Cities Race to Zero](#).

### **How do commitments to Race to zero and race to Resilience align with the Covenant - Europe?**

By being part of the new Covenant - Europe, cities are already on the path to engage and deliver in the Race to Zero - as they share a common vision to accelerate action to reach climate neutrality (Covenant of Mayors Europe) and net-zero (RtZ) by 2050 at the latest.

Signatories of the Covenant - Europe interested in joining RtZ, need to set, or revise, their medium-term commitments (e.g. 55%+ greenhouse gas emission reduction target by 2030) by setting a Science-Based Target (SBT) and report annually on their progress (vs bi-annually to Covenant of Mayors Europe)-.

It is not necessary to have the mid-term SBT already set or identified at the moment of joining Race to Zero: cities joining will have access to guidance on methodologies to use, and support on how to set their SBTs, according to the latest science. [A new guide](#) for science-based climate targets for cities has been developed by the Science Based

Targets Network's core 'cities' partners – namely CDP, C40, GCoM, ICLEI, WRI, and WWF to advise cities on which methodology to use and how to use the methodologies to determine interim and net zero targets.

### **How do “action pledges” under the Race to zero align with actions and Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) under the Covenant - Europe?**

Race to Zero does not require the development of action plans. However, cities joining RtZ are required to identify and submit one or more specific action commitments, and to provide a yearly report on their progress.

Cities can select “action pledges” among a list of pre-identified measures, available on the registration form, or may add their own specific “action pledge” in the same form. It will be possible for cities to edit and change “action pledges” made during registration, as needed.

Covenant - Europe signatories can identify one or more actions listed in their SECAP as their “action pledges” to be submitted for RtZ. The action can be included in the open field available in the registration form.

Cities commit to begin implementation of their “action pledges” no later than 2022.

Find out more on the [pledge form](#).

### **How does reporting the Race to zero align with reporting under the Covenant - Europe?**

Cities joining RtZ commit to report yearly on their progress to implement the identified “action pledges”. To streamline and limit cities` efforts, reporting on “action pledges” will be closely aligned with the requirements already in place for the Covenant of Mayors - Europe.

Find out what are the Covenant – Europe reporting requirements [here](#).

As part of RtZ cities commit to report yearly on progress on the implementation of their “action pledges”. After making the “action pledge” on the Cities Race to Zero website, signatories of the Covenant of Mayors - Europe will be able to report on their yearly progress through either of the officially recognized platforms of the Global Covenant of Mayors - CDP-ICLEI Unified Reporting System or MyCovenant.

Reporting submitted as part of the Covenant - Europe (required **at least every two years**) will be automatically considered valid also for the purpose of Race to Zero, for the year of submission.

RtZ reporting starts at the latest by 2022, and for cities who report **annually** to CDP-ICLEI Unified Reporting System or MyCovenant, there is no additional reporting requirement.

### **Are the Covenant of Mayors - Europe and the Race to Zero interchangeable? Should I commit to both?**

No, they are not interchangeable, but rather work together to accelerate action towards a common objective. Signatories of the Covenant - Europe are on track to engage and deliver in the Race to Zero - as they share a common vision

The Covenant of Mayors - Europe is a movement of cities and towns committed to support Europe's journey to climate-neutrality. The Covenant - Europe is a long lasting and ground breaking *initiative* - not a campaign. It serves and supports local governments through an Office and Helpdesk. The Covenant - Europe is backed by a Political Board (composed by 11 local and regional political representatives), and hundreds of supporters and partners. It is based on a fully-fledged inventory, planning and monitoring process and related services and trainings and is an element in the European Union Green Deal strategy.

Find out more on the [Covenant of Mayors – Europe Office & Helpdesk](#).

RtZ and RtR are *campaigns* launched by the UN Climate Champions to urge cities to commit to positive climate action They bring together the private sector, academia and industry as well as cities under the common banner of

reaching a net-zero target by 2040, latest by 2050, by providing access to an international pool of experts and peers.

Cities can join Race to Zero by November 2021. Mayors, council leaders or equivalent individuals at the head of their city or local government can sign the pledge. No council decision is required.

Signatories of the Covenant of Mayors - Europe can autonomously decide to join the Race to Zero and Race to Resilience campaigns. The Covenant - Europe supports and encourages any European signatory interested in raising ambition and scaling up international presence to also join the RtZ and RtR Campaigns.

### **I am a Covenant - Europe Signatory, but I also want to join Race to Zero - how do I join?**

Cities can join the Race to Zero via the [Cities Race to Zero portal](#) at any time before COP26. You can join Cities Race to Zero via the online portal at: [www.citiesracetozero.org](http://www.citiesracetozero.org). Your mayor, council leader (or equivalent) will be asked to sign the Cities Race to Zero pledge and follow the step-by-step process to completing your Cities Race to Zero commitment.

The Cities Race to Zero pledge is fully aligned with the [criteria](#) of the Race to Zero and specifically designed to speak to cities and direct them to the most impactful climate actions for the community.

You will be invited to compile the Cities Race to Zero pledge through a secured online form. Once you have submitted your pledge, you will be directed to the next relevant step for your city: target setting, action planning or reporting. The portal will point you to the relevant resources along the way. These steps align with the process you already follow as a signatory to the Covenant of Mayors

The Cities Race to Zero pledge requires cities to sign to be a part of the Race; it is fully aligned with the required [minimum criteria](#) of the Race to Zero. Cities should sign it online at [www.citiesracetozero.org](http://www.citiesracetozero.org)

### **I have joined Cities Race to Zero - What is next?**

By this point, your mayor, council leader or equivalent has committed by filling in the [Pledge Form](#) and committing to immediately proceed to planning at least one inclusive and equitable climate action. Next steps include:

**Plan:** Cities need to ensure their mid-term target reflects a fair share of the 50% global reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> by 2030. Cities RtZ partners can support cities with guidance in setting and revising their mid-term target according to recognized SBTs methodologies.

**Proceed:** Take immediate action toward achieving net zero, consistent with delivering the specified interim targets, by starting implementation of the identified “action pledges” no later than 2022.

**Report:** Report progress annually, beginning no later than 2022, using your usual Covenant Europe reporting platform, or the recommended reporting platform.

The RtZ team and the global partners part of Cities RtZ will support cities joining the campaign by providing access to a range of [tools and resources](#) to set SBT targets, identify the type, scale and pace of action needed.

More resources and capacity building opportunities on target-setting, action prioritization, and implementation will be shared on a regular basis.

### **Why do we need Carbon and Climate Neutrality?**

In general terms, *carbon neutrality* refers to reaching a state of net zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, by reducing the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted as much as possible, and offsetting the rest via carbon sequestration. *Climate neutrality* is a similar concept, which refers to reaching net zero overall climate impacts from greenhouse gas emissions ([IASS Potsdam, 2015](#)). For more details, see the next FAQ question (below).

According to the Paris Agreement, it is envisaged to reach Climate Neutrality at the latest by 2050 to avoid massive changes to our ecosystem. Achieving carbon neutrality (net zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions) is a prerequisite to reaching climate neutrality. If we are carbon neutral by 2050, we can reach climate neutrality by 2067; while achieving climate neutrality before 2050, can largely reduce the foreseen negative effects of climate change.

To stick to this timeline, we need: a consistent reduction of emissions through to 2030; a reduction across all sectors of the economy, even if to different degrees (see the Commission's plan titled [A Clean Planet for All](#)); stringent action in all parts of the globe.

*Action led by Cities, and based on science-based targets, is a pillar to reach the ambitious target of carbon and climate neutrality. Without the right ambition at the local level, it would be impossible for policymakers to enact the change in our society needed to avoid the severe impacts of climate change.*

## **Zero-net, Carbon neutrality, climate neutrality, science-based targets - what is what?**

Whilst often used interchangeably, zero-net, climate neutrality and carbon neutrality have different meaning:

- **Net-Zero** → or Zero Net. The [IPCC](#) defines net zero as reaching a state where a balance is achieved between the amount of greenhouse gases humans emit, and the amount removed from the atmosphere. Referring to the world as a whole, the IPCC defines net zero as: when anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere are balanced by anthropogenic removals over a specified period - achieving a balance between the amount of a GHG emissions produced by human activities and the amount removed from the atmosphere.

In other words, reaching a net-zero target means reaching a point where an actor (i.e. a city or even the EU as a whole) reduces their emissions as much as possible, and offsets the remainder.

This phrase can be used to refer to net-zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (also known as *carbon neutrality*), or to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions (also known as *climate neutrality*).

Race to Zero considers individual actors to have reached a state of net-zero when: "An actor reduces its emissions to the extent feasible, with any remaining GHG emissions attributable to that actor being fully neutralised by like-for-like removals (e.g., permanent removals for fossil carbon emissions) exclusively claimed by that actor, either within the value chain or through purchase of valid offset credits."

- **Carbon Neutrality**

→ The [IPCC](#) defines carbon neutrality as net-zero, with respect only to CO<sub>2</sub> and not other greenhouse gas emissions. Carbon neutrality means reaching a state where a balance is achieved between the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> humans emit, and the amount removed from the atmosphere.

Race to Zero considers individual actors to be carbon neutral when: "CO<sub>2</sub> emissions attributable to an actor are fully compensated by CO<sub>2</sub> reductions or removals exclusively claimed by the actor, such that the actor's net contribution to global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is zero, irrespective of the time period or the relative magnitude of emissions and removals involved."

- **Climate Neutrality** → The [IPCC](#) defines climate neutrality as net-zero with respect to all greenhouse gas emissions. Climate neutrality is a state in which human activities result in no net effect on the climate system. This requires reducing emissions as much as possible, balancing residual emissions, and accounting for knock-on effects of human activities, which don't directly emit greenhouse gases, but indirectly lead to climatic changes. A common example of the latter of those points is the 'albedo effect', which leads the climate to warm as a result of reducing snow and ice cover at the world's poles.

A climate neutrality target in the context of local and regional governments is [defined as](#) aiming to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and GHG avoidance – both in a government's own operations and across the community in all sectors – to an absolute net-zero emission level at the latest by 2050. In parallel, it is considered critical to adapt to climate change and enhance climate resilience across all sectors, in all systems and processes. To achieve climate neutrality, local and regional governments should set a clear

goal and advance rapidly toward that net zero goal following a holistic and integrated approach that leads to a wide range of co-benefits for sustainable development, such as creating socio-economic opportunities, reducing poverty and inequality, and improving the health of people and nature.

In Article 4 of the Paris Agreement, climate neutrality aims to reduce global temperature rise so that it does not surpass 1.5°C with respect to the last century, offsetting the negative impact that carbon emissions have had in the last decades. The path to achieve this goal is steep, requiring us to plan for *negative CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in certain sectors with respect to 1990s levels*.

Race to Zero considers individual actors to be climate neutral when: “GHG emissions attributable to an actor are fully compensated by GHG reductions or removals exclusively claimed by the actor, such that the actor’s net contribution to global GHG emissions is zero, irrespective of the time period or the relative magnitude of emissions and removals involved.”

- **Science-based targets** → These are a set of goals that your city can develop and commit to, which aim at reducing GHG emissions in line with the research- and science-based Paris Agreement target to limit global temperature rise to no more than 1.5°C. To reach net-zero, governments, cities and businesses need to gear up their action around the development of science-based targets. Targets that are science-based support the goals of the Paris Agreement by defining a clear pathway to curb GHG emissions. Learn more about how your city can set up science-based targets via the [Science Based Targets Network](#) (SBTN).

#### Useful Resources:

- <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/race-to-zero-campaign>
- <https://racetozero.unfccc.int/>
- <https://racetozero.unfccc.int/race-to-resilience/>
- [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2030\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2030_en)
- [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2050\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2050_en)