

# Non-state and subnational climate actors should not operate in a policy vacuum

**Civil society, cities and regions call for targeted support for their vital contribution to implementation of the Paris Agreement**

Despite an unprecedented mobilisation of non-state and subnational actors in the fight against climate change since the historic COP21 summit in Paris, a lack of comprehensive and aligned policy framework for their actions is seriously thwarting their valuable work, it was revealed at the conference "[Boosting cooperation between all actors to implement the Paris Agreement](#)", co-hosted by the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**.

The conference was held as a side event at the UNFCCC COP23 in Bonn on 15 November by the **International Climate Governance Coalition (ICGC)**. Apart from the EESC, the coalition's co-pilots are the **European Committee of the Regions (CoR)**, the **OECD** and **Comité 21**.

Opening the conference, president of the EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) **Brenda King** said: "*Civil society actors currently face significant obstacles when they wish to initiate and implement measures to counteract climate change. This is mainly due to the fact that the policy-makers are unaware of how much potential civil society action has in terms of protecting the climate.*"

With GHG emissions concentrations in the atmosphere rising and extreme weather events becoming more dramatic and frequent, the implementation of the COP21 commitments is more urgent than ever. Initiatives and measures taken by non-state and subnational actors are vital to accelerating global climate-resilient and low-carbon pathways set out by the Paris Agreement.

At COP23 it has become even clearer that the ownership of the climate agenda is moving from the climate negotiators to the actors on the ground. It is they who initiate and implement the solutions to climate challenges.

*"Despite the growing importance of the non-state and subnational climate actors, they are still disconnected from the international climate agenda,"* said **Eamon O'Hara**, executive director of ECOLISE (European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability). *"These actors often feel they operate in a policy vacuum and the need for a supportive framework is stronger than ever."*

**Marco Dus**, the CoR rapporteur on financing climate action, stressed the urgency of developing innovative financing schemes to facilitate access to funding for regions and cities.

Presenting the findings of the Coalition's mapping study, **Mr Dus** emphasised

that political commitment was a key to making public funds available. He also noted: *“It is absolutely vital to have clear legal frameworks that reduce uncertainty and build trust between partners, adaptive and flexible management approaches and continued work on public awareness and community involvement.”*

**Tadashi Matsumoto**, OECD coordinator for National Urban Policy, Climate Change and Green Growth, pointed to the importance of framework conditions, which may enable or hinder subnational action, as well as to the urgent need to assess countries’ governance structures for effective climate investment.

*“In many cases national policies are designed separately and not aligned to support climate actions of cities and regions,”* he noted.

The ICGC was set up in 2016 to facilitate dialogue and multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to work toward removing obstacles encountered by civil society actors in combating climate change, as well as toward designing a comprehensive framework to secure alignment between state and other actors in climate change over the long term.

The coalition’s current climate-related work focuses on enabling bottom-up action via multi-stakeholder approaches and multi-level governance, with the aim of securing a swift and effective implementation of the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) commitments.

**Ms King** said that the EESC had joined the coalition following the adoption of its opinion [“Building a coalition of civil society and subnational authorities to deliver the commitments of the Paris Agreement”](#). This opinion, adopted last year, pinpointed difficulties encountered by civil society actors in tackling climate change.

**Elina Bardram**, head of the European Commission’s negotiating team at COP23, said that the EU was advocating full participation of non-state actors in the Talanoa dialogue, promoted by the Fijian COP presidency in the lead-up to COP24. *“These actors are best placed to tell the stories about solutions that exist on the ground,”* she said.

**Bettina Laville**, chairwoman of Comité 21, closed the side event by setting out the main focus of the coalition’s work for the next year, namely delivering a useful and practical document supporting multi-stakeholder climate projects before the California Summit of non-state actors in September 2018.

The EESC will continue working with its coalition partners to propose elements for an enabling framework for bottom-up climate action and will advocate the need for this to decision-makers at all levels.