

Race to Zero, Race to Resilience, and new Covenant Europe commitments:

FAQ DOCUMENT TO GUIDE CITIES



This April, the [Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy - Europe](#) launched new ambitions, encouraging current signatories to recommit – and inviting new signatories to commit – to become climate neutral by 2050. This recommitment process broadly coincides, both in timing and general aims, with the launch of the global [Race to Zero](#) campaign. As such, the following FAQ document helps cities to distinguish between these two opportunities, and lays out all the ways that these opportunities are complementary, supporting cities to meet the ambitious climate targets needed to ensure a sustainable future for all.

Click on the following links to jump to specific questions:

- [What is the new commitment of the Covenant of Mayors - Europe, and why has the Covenant Europe revised the commitment?](#)
- [What is Cities Race to Zero \(RtZ\)?](#)
- [What is Race to Resilience \(RtR\)?](#)
- [Race to Zero and Race to Resilience are global campaigns – how do they align with the ambition and targets of the EU?](#)
- [How do Race to Zero and Race to Resilience connect with the Covenant of Mayors - Europe?](#)
- [I am already committed to the Covenant of Mayors - Europe, should I also join the Cities Race to Zero?](#)
- [How do commitments to Race to Zero and Race to Resilience align with the Covenant Europe?](#)
- [How do action pledges under the Race to Zero align with actions and Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans \(SECAPs\) under the Covenant Europe?](#)
- [How does reporting the Race to Zero align with reporting under the Covenant Europe?](#)
- [Are the Covenant of Mayors - Europe and the Race to Zero interchangeable? Should I commit to both?](#)
- [I am a Covenant Europe Signatory, but I also want to join Race to Zero - how do I join?](#)
- [I have joined Cities Race to Zero - What is next?](#)
- [Why do we need carbon and climate neutrality?](#)
- [Net-zero, carbon neutrality, climate neutrality, science-based targets - what is what?](#)
- [Additional useful links](#)

What is the new commitment of the Covenant of Mayors - Europe, and why has the Covenant Europe revised the commitment?

The Covenant Europe has revised its commitment to be in line with the European Union's aim to make Europe the first climate neutral continent, reaching net zero GHG emissions by 2050. The revised commitment states the need for climate and environment to become an overarching priority, integrated in all societal aspects, as the path toward decarbonisation brings deep economic and social implications that must be considered. Acknowledging the collective responsibilities to reach carbon neutrality, the new commitment stresses the importance of a fair, inclusive and respectful energy transition that leaves no one and no place behind.

From April 2021, cities and towns across Europe are invited to become signatories to the revised political commitment of the Covenant of Mayors - Europe, which steps up energy and climate ambition. By signing, Mayors agree to *commit, engage, act and network* to make their cities and towns more resilient, decarbonised and energy secure, affordable and sustainable for their citizens by 2050.

Click [here](#) to learn how to become a signatory to the Covenant Europe.

What is Cities Race to Zero (RtZ)?

RtZ is a global campaign launched in the lead-up to the upcoming United Nations' 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. [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 Wildlife Fund ([WWF](#)) and the World Resources Institute ([WRI](#)). It is designed to help cities meet the Race to Zero's commitment criteria using the best available tools and expertise.

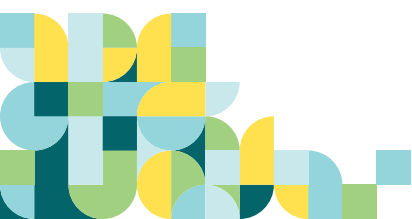
Cities Race to Zero is a campaign for cities, by cities to inspire commitments and action from peers around the world and to channel the best available tools and expertise to help them stay on track to limit global temperature rise to no more than 1.5°C. The objective of Cities Race to Zero is to recruit 1000 cities by COP26.

Click [here](#) to learn more about 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.

Click [here](#) to learn more about 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, within the broader framework of the Green Deal. The European Commission has committed to deliver on effective Climate Action via four main channels: (1) the [Climate Law](#), which will, for the first time, enshrine the 2050 climate neutrality objective into EU law; (2) the [European Climate Pact](#), to engage citizens and all parts of society in climate action; (3) the [2030 Climate Target Plan](#), to further reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030; and (4) the new [EU Strategy on Climate Adaptation](#) to make Europe a climate-resilient society by 2050.

In line with the long-term objective of climate neutrality by 2050, the European Commission has proposed raising its midterm target to 55% GHG reduction by 2030, and has 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 aim to accelerate climate action to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 at the latest, and to strengthen the resilience of communities toward the 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 began encouraging new and current signatories to sign up to its revised "*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** by drafting, implementing, and monitoring action plans (SECAPs) 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 with and deliver on the Race to Zero, as these opportunities 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.



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 in the run up to COP26 to raise your city’s current ambition, set science-based targets, and to showcase ambitious action at global level.

This campaign in no way contradicts or detracts from your Covenant Europe commitment. Rather, European cities are encouraged to join both initiatives, as they complement each other well, while offering unique opportunities.

There is of course no obligation for Covenant Signatories to join the Race to Zero. You can click [here](#) to join 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 these opportunities share a common vision to accelerate action to reach climate neutrality (Covenant Europe) and net-zero (RtZ) by 2050 at the latest.

Signatories of the Covenant Europe interested in joining RtZ may need to set, or revise, their mid-term commitment (e.g. to achieve 55% greenhouse gas emission reduction by 2030) by setting a Science-Based Target (SBT). Science-based midterm targets are required by RtZ; although they are not required by Covenant Europe, they in no way detract for your Covenant commitment. RtZ requires that committed cities report annually on their progress, while Covenant Europe requires reporting once every two years.

It is not necessary to have a 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 methodologies to use and how to use the methodologies to determine midterm 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 these “action pledges” among a list of pre-identified measures, available on the registration form, or may add their own action pledges in the same form. It will be possible for cities to edit and change action pledges made during registration, as needed. Cities commit to begin implementation of their action pledges no later than 2022.

Covenant Europe signatories can identify one or more actions listed in their SECAP as their action pledges to be submitted for RtZ.

Click [here](#) to learn more about action pledges.

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 their identified action pledges. To streamline and limit cities’ efforts, reporting on action pledges will be closely aligned with the requirements already in place for Covenant of Mayors – Europe reporting. Find out what the Covenant – Europe reporting requirements are [here](#).

As part of RtZ, cities commit to report yearly on progress on the implementation of their action pledges. After making an 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 recognised reporting platforms of the Global Covenant of Mayors – namely the 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 with and deliver on 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 of 11 local and regional political representatives), and hundreds of supporters and partners. It is based on an inventory, planning and monitoring process, as well as related services and trainings, and is an element of the European Green Deal strategy.

RtZ and RtR are *campaigns* launched by the [UN Climate Champions](#) to urge cities to commit to ambitious climate action. They bring together the private sector, academia and industry, as well as cities, under the common goal of reaching a net-zero target by 2040, or at the 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.

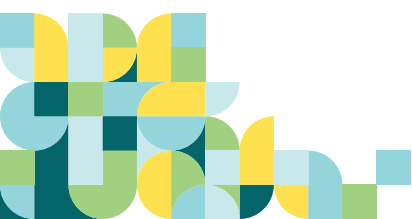
Signatories of the Covenant of Mayors - Europe can autonomously decide to join the Race to Zero and Race to Resilience campaigns. The Covenant Europe supports and encourages any European signatory interested in raising ambition and scaling-up international presence to also join the RtZ and RtR Campaigns.

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. 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 complete 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 their communities.

Signatories will be invited to compile Cities Race to Zero pledges through a secure 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 relevant resources along the way. These steps align with the process you already follow as a signatory to the Covenant of Mayors.



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 CO₂ needed by 2030. RtZ partners can support cities with guidance in setting and revising their mid-term targets according to recognised SBT 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 another 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, identifying the type, scale and pace of action needed.

More resources and capacity building opportunities on target-setting, action prioritisation, 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 CO₂ emissions, by reducing the amount of CO₂ 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 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 CO₂ 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](#)); and stringent action in all parts of the globe.

Action led by cities, and based on science-based targets, is a pillar necessary to reach the ambitious targets 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.



Net-zero, carbon neutrality, climate neutrality, science-based targets - what is what?

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

- 🔄 **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.

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 CO₂ 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 CO₂ and not to other greenhouse gas emissions. Carbon neutrality means reaching a state where a balance is achieved between the amount of CO₂ humans emit, and the amount removed from the atmosphere.

Race to Zero considers individual actors to be carbon neutral when: *“CO₂ emissions attributable to an actor are fully compensated by CO₂ reductions or removals exclusively claimed by the actor, such that the actor’s net contribution to global CO₂ 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 to pursue 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 is laid out as a path that 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 CO₂ 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](#).

Additional useful links

<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/2050_en

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