

## CCC HIGHLIGHTS

### DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE JUSTICE

#### SUMMARY

As of September 2024, the EU Mission Label has been awarded to 33 cities, with 10 cities receiving the Label in October 2023 and an additional 23 in March 2024. The Label recognises each city's commitment to achieving climate neutrality by 2030, as set out in their respective Climate City Contracts (CCCs). This factsheet, as part of a wider series titled “CCC Highlights”, explores **how justice considerations are being addressed within the CCCs, focusing on the diversity of perspectives, the links between different dimensions, the roles municipalities play, and the extent to which structural inequalities are acknowledged and addressed.**

#### The analysed CCCs show:

- **Cities are incorporating justice considerations into their climate neutrality plans**, with a strong emphasis on **shared responsibilities** and **inclusive decision-making processes**. CCCs underline cities' goals to promote **shared ownership** of planned actions across the local ecosystem of actors and to ensure the **legitimacy** of the transition through participatory processes.
- **Recognition of structural inequalities as a foundation for a just transition remains limited**. Sønderborg stands out as an exception, systematically applying socio-economic data to inform its overall strategy, from the guiding principles to specific climate measures, demonstrating how **recognition of different starting points and impacts of climate change to different communities** can be integrated into climate action planning.
- **To ensure a just transition, municipalities are adopting a communication and education role**, working to foster a culture of sustainability and encourage behavioural change. At the same time, many cities describe how they are institutionalising consultative practices in both planning and implementation to embed different perspectives into their climate neutrality journey.



WHAT IS THE MISSION LABEL?

The Mission Label is the European Commission's recognition of cities' successful development of their CCCs, which outline the overall vision for climate neutrality and contain an action plan and investment strategy.

First Cohort of Mission Label Cities (Label awarded in October 2023)	Second Cohort of Mission Label Cities (Label awarded in March 2024)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sønderborg</li><li>• Cluj-Napoca</li><li>• Klagenfurt</li><li>• Mannheim</li><li>• Valladolid</li><li>• Vitoria-Gasteiz</li><li>• Madrid</li><li>• Stockholm</li><li>• Valencia</li><li>• Zaragoza</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ioannina</li><li>• Kalamata</li><li>• Kozani</li><li>• Thessaloniki</li><li>• Heidelberg</li><li>• Leuven</li><li>• Espoo</li><li>• Lahti</li><li>• Lappeenranta</li><li>• Tampere</li><li>• Turku</li><li>• Barcelona</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seville</li><li>• Pecs</li><li>• Malmö</li><li>• Guimaraes</li><li>• Lisbon</li><li>• Florence</li><li>• Parma</li><li>• Marseille</li><li>• Lyon</li><li>• Limassol</li><li>• Izmir</li></ul>

FIVE DIMENSIONS OF JUSTICE

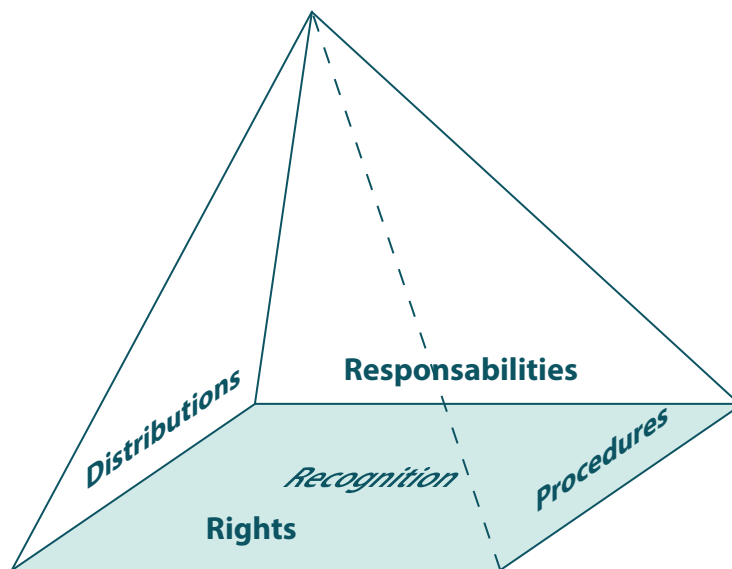
The following analysis draws on the climate justice framework developed by Bulkeley and colleagues<sup>1</sup>, which offers a practical, three-dimensional approach to understanding how justice is framed in climate policies. It **moves beyond** the traditional two-dimensional focus on **rights**—such as who has the right to emit greenhouse gases or to be protected from potential damage—and **responsibilities**—who is expected to act on climate change—with **distributive** (who benefits and who bears the costs) or **procedural** (who participates in decision-making and how) perspectives. The new proposed analytical framework **recognises** that within cities, there are significant differences in how the burdens and benefits of climate action are distributed, and where responsibilities could lie. Climate change is not just happening to cities; climate impacts are shaped through urban processes, reinforcing or challenging existing inequalities. To reflect this complexity,

1. Bulkeley, H., Edwards, G. A. S., & Fuller, S. (2014). Contesting climate justice in the city: Examining politics and practice in urban climate change experiments. *Global Environmental Change*, 25, 31–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2014.01.009>. The same framework was used by Beretta and Bracchi to analyse the three documents published by the European Commission in the run up to the launch of the EU Commission Mission 10 “Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030”. More here: Beretta, I., & Bracchi, C. (2023). Climate-neutral and Smart Cities: A critical review through the lens of environmental justice. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1175592>



the framework conceptualises climate justice as a **pyramid**: the four triangular faces represent **distribution, procedure, rights, and responsibilities**, while **recognition**—acknowledging existing inequalities, different identities, and experiences, as well as the structural disadvantages of people and communities—forms the foundational base.

Using the framework presented above and the definitions in Table 1, the Commitment Documents of the **33 labelled CCCs were analysed through a climate justice lens to explore how Mission Cities are grounding their journey toward climate neutrality within justice dimensions**. To contextualise the analysis, additional codes were applied to identify whether each element of justice related to: (1) a **general statement** made in the introduction or within the guiding principles of the Commitment Document; (2) the description of the **planning phase** that led to the publication of the CCC; (3) the description of a **planned future climate action**. Furthermore, following an inductive approach, the Commitment Documents were also analysed to assess **the role of the municipality** in actively pursuing a just transition to climate neutrality. This comprehensive analysis coded a total of 1,598 text extracts.



*Figure 1: Analytical framework by Bulkeley et al.*

## LIMITS OF THE ANALYSIS

This analysis focuses exclusively on the justice narratives presented in the Commitment Documents of the 33 labelled Climate City Contracts (CCCs), and does not assess the accompanying Action Plans or Investment Plans. As such, it does not address the specific design or implementation of planned measures toward achieving climate neutrality. While acknowledging that the Commitments Document offers only a partial view and cannot fully capture what is happening on the ground, the analysis focuses on justice narratives as indicators of how solutions are being framed. This approach is based on the understanding that the way issues are defined shapes what is made intelligible, what is considered relevant, and ultimately, which solutions are seen as feasible.



Code	Definition
<b>Distribution</b>	How the benefits and burdens of climate action are shared.
<b>Procedure</b>	Who participates in decision-making and how legitimacy is secured.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Who is expected to act on climate change and in what ways.
<b>Right</b>	Who has the right to emit greenhouse gases or to be protected from potential damage.
<b>Recognition</b>	Acknowledgment of structural inequalities and diverse intersecting identities.

*Table 1: Five dimensions of justice*

## RESULTS

### DIFFERENT JUSTICE NARRATIVES

Overall, an **average of 14% of each Commitment Document was coded as containing at least one dimension of climate justice – distribution, procedure, responsibility, right, recognition**. However, the extent to which justice was addressed varied significantly across cities. Some, such as Heidelberg, Guimarães, and Kalamata, stood out for dedicating a larger share of their Commitment Document to justice-related content.

When examining the distribution of individual dimensions, **responsibilities** emerged as the most frequently referenced, accounting for 50% of all coded segments (Figure 2). These typically emphasised the role of various actors across the urban ecosystem in contributing to climate neutrality and the need for citizen's behavioural change.

*"Climate transition is not a task for a select few; it's a responsibility we all share. Each one of us can make a difference, whether we're individuals, families, local businesses, or community organisations. It's not just about what our city government can do; it's about what we can achieve together." (Pécs, p. 3)*

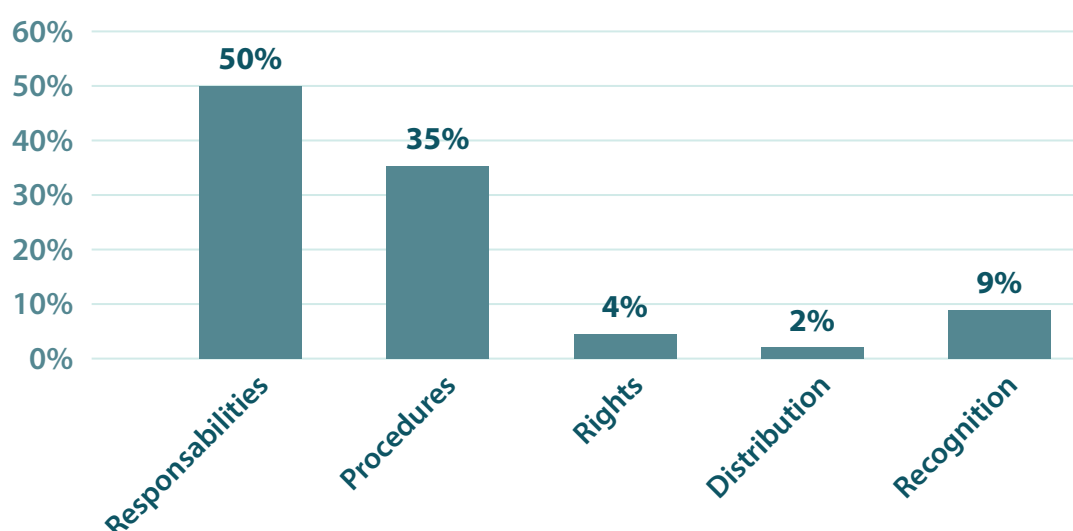


*"Lisbon needs everyone: The impact of each citizen, of each organisation per se, on the city's total emissions may be limited, but as a whole it can have consequences and limit or accelerate Lisbon's climate transformation. Therefore, to achieve the Mission's goals, everyone must commit to a joint, comprehensive climate action, involving partners, public and private entities, universities, research centres, non-governmental organisations, and citizens." (Lisbon, p. 10)*

**Procedural justice** followed, representing 35% of the coded extracts, highlighting the need to improve decision-making processes to enhance legitimacy and inclusion. Key words from these extracts are "consult", "participate", "co-design". The analysis of CCCs referring to procedural justice reveals a number of participatory, co-design or consultative experiences in cities such as the Agora Lyon 2030 project or the Citizens' Assembly of the Future in Marseille.

*"In this sense, Zaragoza has developed structural processes that aim to involve citizens in decision-making and in the implementation of public policies in order to achieve a fairer and more sustainable city. In the area of citizen participation, Zaragoza has promoted the creation of various mechanisms for consultation and dialogue with citizens, through the creation of sectoral councils and the holding of popular consultations." (Zaragoza, p. 19)*

References to **rights** (4%) and **distributional justice** (2%) were notably limited. Moreover, only 9% of the extracts coded under procedure, distribution, or rights also addressed **recognition**—that is, the acknowledgement of underlying structural inequalities that lead to uneven climate impacts. The prominence of responsibilities was consistent across most cities, although some exceptions, such as Limassol and Mannheim, placed greater emphasis on procedural justice.



*Figure 2: Share of extracts coded by dimension of justice*



While the analysis of justice dimensions offers insight into the thematic focus of each city's CCC, examining the **context** in which justice is referenced sheds light on how deeply these concepts are embedded in the cities' climate neutrality journey. Across all cities, references to justice when describing the **planning and development phase** of the CCC were relatively consistent, often linked to the design of inclusive and participatory processes. However, cities diverged when it came to **general statements** and the **description of future planned actions**. Some cities, such as Tampere, Pécs, Heidelberg, and Marseille tended to include broad, high-level commitments, using phrases like: *"the city commits itself to deliver bold climate action, that will enable it to achieve this goal on time, by ensuring a fair and just climate neutrality transition and by not leaving anyone behind."* In contrast, cities like Kozani, Kalamata, Vitoria-Gasteiz, and Barcelona went further, explicitly integrating various dimensions of justice into the specific actions planned to achieve climate neutrality. As expected, references to justice during the **planning phase** were predominantly linked to **procedural justice**, reflecting efforts to design participatory and inclusive processes. Meanwhile, references to justice within **planned actions** mostly related to **redistributing responsibilities**, highlighting the need for collective ownership of the transition across the urban ecosystem.

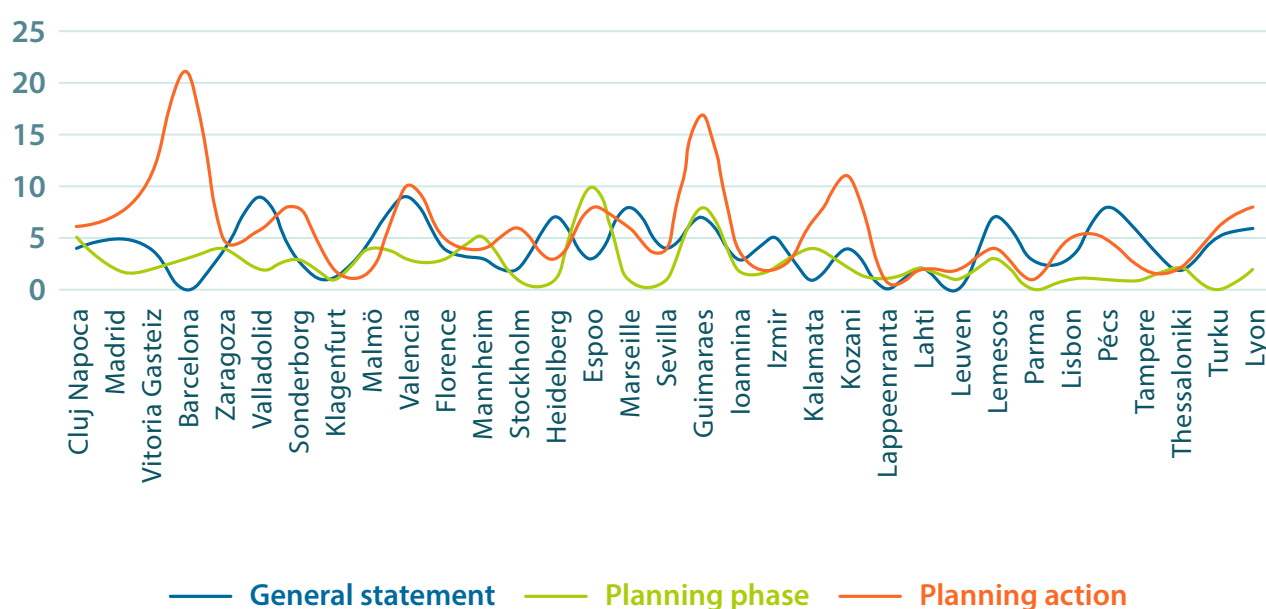
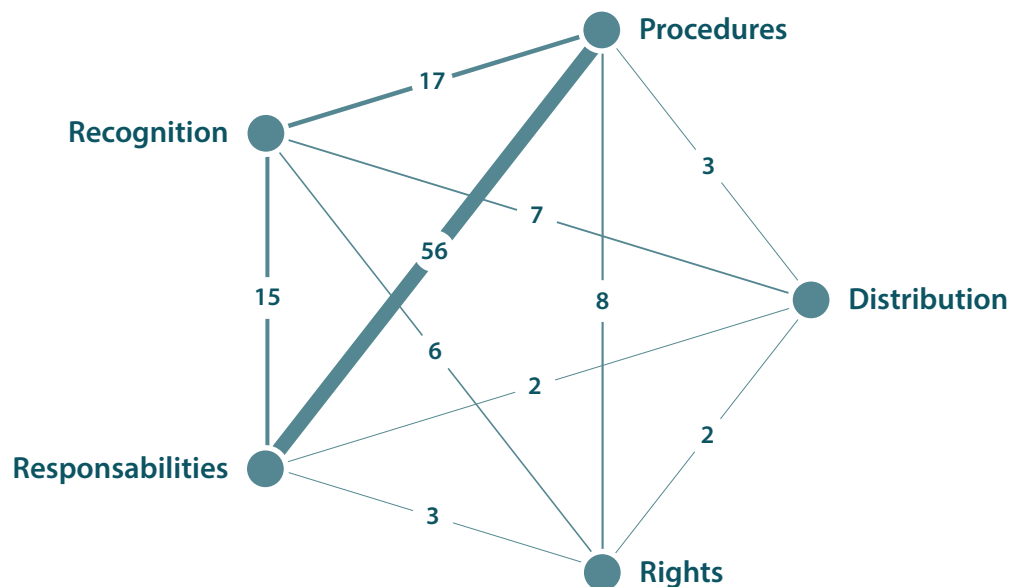


Figure 3: Justice dimensions by CCC context and city

## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN JUSTICE DIMENSIONS

One of the key strengths of the analytical framework used in this study lies in its ability to uncover **connections between references to justice dimensions—responsibilities, procedures, rights, and distribution—and the recognition of structural inequalities** that shape how different communities experience climate impacts. As illustrated in Figure 4, the most frequent overlap, represented in 56 coded extracts, was found between **responsibilities and procedures**. These instances highlight how many cities see a direct link between establishing inclusive processes and fostering shared ownership of climate action.



**Figure 4: Intersections between justice dimensions**

*"Guimaraes has a long tradition of involving citizens in the democratic process of co-designing the city they want to live in. Based on scientific literature and research, climate goals can be achieved through the active participation of citizens, working with local government, and co-creating systemic change, rather than through technological and policy measures alone. In this sense, the Municipality of Guimaraes is empowering its municipality to meet the 2030 Climate Neutrality Agenda by creating points of contact between citizens and local government actors, fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility for the climate." (Guimaraes, p.18)*

The intersection between justice elements and the **recognition of structural differences** is significantly less frequent. 17 intersections were identified linking **fair and inclusive procedures** with efforts to acknowledge and address inequality. These often included efforts to **segment the population** to better reach specific groups, as seen in Sønderborg or Mannheim.

*"The current hotspot structure (to a certain extent) has been created to secure such a differentiated approach by the sub-segmentation of citizens home approach – with the ambition of leaving no family behind." (Sønderborg, p.18)*



*“As a City of co-Creation (awarded as “Cooperative City” in 2022) our approach to citizen participation includes all groups of citizens, also with particular barriers to participation. For Example in the Horizon2020 project SONNET “Social Innovation in Energy Transition”, Mannheim has tested innovative formats to engage citizens in a deprived district of Mannheim, the Neckarstadt-West, where many families with low income, mostly with migration backgrounds, live.” (Mannheim, p. 25)*

Additionally, 15 extracts connected shared responsibilities with a recognition of social and economic inequalities. Sønderborg again stands out for its data-driven approach to identifying vulnerable groups and tailoring actions to meet their needs. Its CCC includes socio-economic indicators, such as income levels, access to energy, and risk of energy poverty, to design appropriate interventions. The city details how it works with elderly homeowners and young low-income families in rural areas to ensure access to no-cost energy-saving solutions, stating:

*“Together with the municipality, ProjectZero since 2009 will continue to address low-hanging climate action solutions, addressing no-cost energy-saving opportunities, as the learning is that families will progress their own actions based on a successful initial (climate) customer journey” (Sønderborg, p. 18)*

## THE ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES IN PURSUING A JUST TRANSITION TOWARDS CLIMATE NEUTRALITY

Given the vital role of responsibility that Climate City Contracts (CCCs) place on actors within the urban ecosystem and citizens, the following question naturally arises: What role do municipalities play in securing a just transition to climate neutrality? When explicitly mentioned, extracts coded with at least one dimension of justice were explored to answer this question. Using an inductive process, three categories were identified:

- **Promote, communicate, and educate**
- **Facilitate and enable**
- **Motivate by being an example**

The first two categories were the most frequently identified, with 47% and 46% of coded extracts, respectively.

When it comes to promotion and communication, cities often refer to the need to provide accessible data and ensure transparency. Alternatively, they plan educational or awareness programs aimed at generating a sustainability culture and fostering behavioural change.

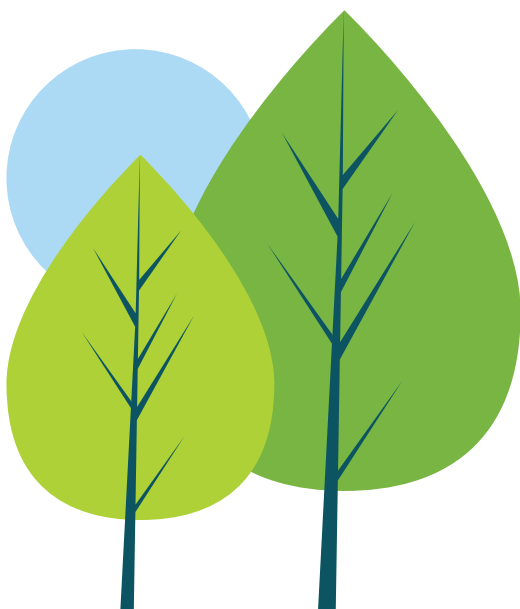




*"The CCCB must ensure access to climate information for the entire population, including information about the impacts of climate change (such as pollution episodes, extreme heat, droughts, or torrential rains) and information related to mitigation and adaptation policies (cost, outcomes, impacts). It will be essential to regularly update and report on the progress of greenhouse gas emissions. All relevant information will be published on the corresponding section of the municipal website, as well as in the statistics and open data sections." (Barcelona, p. 9)*

*"Generation of a new culture of citizens of the future through intervention in educational centres and zero-emission university campuses, which will attract talent and enable progress towards a society with greater knowledge and commitment in the face of this global challenge." (Madrid, p. 11)*

Beyond educating, municipalities envision a facilitation and enabling role to ensure justice is embedded in their journey toward climate neutrality. The enabling role varies across cities. It may involve developing infrastructure to facilitate behavioural change or institutionalising participatory and co-creation processes.



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