European cities warn: without more support, urban climate resilience plans risk collapse

PUBLISHED NOV 6, 2025
BY EUROCITIES

A new Eurocities Pulse survey of 54 cities from 17 European countries reveals that cities face growing climate threats, but limited funding, staffing shortages, and fragmented governance are holding back their ability to adapt.

Heatwaves, flooding and drought top the list of urban climate risks, with heatwaves identified as the most pressing threat. Yet despite clear recognition of the dangers, many cities say they lack the resources and regulatory tools to keep up.

While 81% of cities have or are developing regulations for new building developments focused on resilience (including design requirements that address needs related to floods, storms and heatwaves), fewer (57%) are developing equivalent regulations for the retrofitting of existing buildings. Cities say this is partly due to a lack of clear policy signals in current EU legislation.

> Europe’s cities are working to protect people and infrastructure, but they cannot do it alone,” says Haris Doukas, Eurocities Shadow Commissioner for Climate Resilience, and Mayor of Athens. “They urgently need stronger and long-term national and EU support, especially funding and capacity building, to ensure that all their operations, assets, and spaces are resilient to realistic climate scenarios, safeguarding cities and citizens against the escalating threats of climate change.

Cities face mounting barriers to action

When asked about their biggest barriers to collecting or accessing climate data, cities cited limited staff, insufficient funding, and gaps in data quality. These challenges echo throughout every stage of climate adaptation, from planning to implementation.

Although 80% of cities have or are developing emergency response plans, many still face serious obstacles. Cities top three challenges when it comes to strengthening emergency planning are human resources, funding, and coordination between agencies.

Financing the future: local revenue not enough

While most cities rely on municipal revenue (87%) and EU funding (83%) for climate adaptation, only around 50% have or are developing a dedicated financing strategy. Alarmingly, 28% said national or local regulations prevent them from accessing certain types of funding.

A clear message emerges: 80% of cities want dedicated funding for climate adaptation at local and national levels included in future EU plans. The priorities and structure of the future seven-year EU budget will be crucial in ensuring that cities get direct access to the resources needed to respond effectively.

This is why cities are calling for:

- A mandatory urban chapter in national investment plans, ensuring that the contribution of cities is clearly recognised and strategically planned;

- Dedicated earmarking of resources for cities, so that local authorities can directly access the EU funding needed to achieve the Union's goals, in particular, the European Green Deal, of which 75% must be implemented locally;

- A clear budget for city-related activities under the proposed EU Facility, providing opportunities to finance the EU's urban ambition and help cities build up the capacity required to deliver it, including for climate adaptation and resilience.

Building capacity – the missing link

Cities identified lack of funding, low political prioritisation, and poor coordination across departments as the main barriers to strengthening climate adaptation capacity. To build resilience, they most need:

- Support to find and access funding for adaptation

- Guidance on governing adaptation across departments

- Tools to quantify co-benefits of adaptation and mitigation policies (and to link indicators to targets)

- Technical support to develop climate hazard models and assess vulnerabilities

What cities need from the EU

With the European Commission preparing a new EU Climate Resilience and Risk Management Framework, cities are calling for closer cooperation with the European Environment Agency and stronger support for:

- City staff capacity building

- Risk and vulnerability assessments

> Urban resilience isn't just about surviving the next flood or heatwave; it's about ensuring cities remain liveable, equitable, and sustainable for future generations," states Doukas. "Local governments are always the first line, but they need the tools and resources to match their ambition.

1. The data is drawn from a 2025 Eurocities Pulse survey on climate resilience in cities, conducted among 54 cities across 17 European countries, assessing urban adaptation measures, financing strategies, and capacity-building needs. Respondents to this survey match the profile of Chief Resilience Officer or Adaptation expert within each city administration.

2. An infographic sharing these results and more can be accessed here: https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Eurocities-Pu...

3. Eurocities Pulse is a Eurocities brand: Eurocities Pulse surveys are organised by Eurocities on a regular basis, across different topics. This Eurocities Pulse on climate resilience was inspired by the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey, which has positioned climate action as the top priority for mayors for three years in a row

4. A more detailed report, further analysing the results of the Eurocities Pulse survey on climate resilience in cities, and showcasing what they mean in terms of urban policy, will be published by

Eurocities and CIDOB in 2026.

5. Eurocities wants to make cities places where everyone can enjoy a good quality of life, is able to move around safely, access quality and inclusive public services and benefit from a healthy environment. We do this by networking more than 200 larger European cities, which together represent some 150 million people across 38 countries, and by gathering evidence of how policy making impacts on people to inspire other cities and EU decision makers. Connect with us at https://eurocities.eu/ or by following our BlueSky, and YouTube accounts.

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Press release distributed by Wire Association on behalf of Eurocities, on Nov 6, 2025. For more information subscribe and follow us.

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