



## **Key takeaways from the first day of the conference “Green Transition Drives European Cities” – Zagreb 2024.**

### **Citizens' Assembly - local dialogue between citizens and their elected representatives in the City Assembly of the City of Zagreb**

#### **Background:**

The interest of citizens in the dialogue with their elected representatives in the City Assembly on the topic of energy transition and climate change was high – 161 citizens registered for the discussion in the City Assembly, slightly fewer showed up in the hall, and 360 participated in the dialogue online. Such great interest of citizens indicates their strong interest in these issues that directly affect the quality of their lives.

The aim of the local dialogue was to involve citizens in reflecting on the energy transition and climate change and to raise awareness of the importance of these issues for the quality of everyday life; to encourage a sense of responsibility and understanding of how their individual behaviour affects the achievement of energy and climate policy goals; to raise citizens' awareness of the seriousness of the situation and the future consequences of today's inaction or slowing down of the green transition, i.e. the abandonment of the European Green Deal (EGD); to raise awareness of the importance of actively involving citizens, as an indispensable partner, in the energy transition and climate change management for the successful implementation of the green transition; to provide citizens with all relevant information about the EGD and the policies of the City of Zagreb in this area; to obtain citizens' opinion on the green policies of the City of Zagreb and the EGD, and through this, citizens' guidelines for the future policies of the City of Zagreb.

Introductory presentations and a panel attended by representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions, the Youth Council of the City of Zagreb, and NGOs gave a framework and impetus to the discussion with a wealth of information on the EGD and the views of young people and civil society on the green transition and policies of the City of Zagreb.

## **I. Conclusions from the dialogue with the citizens**

### **Overall rating:**

Citizens find the political processes of adopting European policies and their translation into everyday actions, projects, and activities at the national and local level rather hard to understand. Therefore, citizens want a greater presence of green transition in their lives through concrete projects that directly impact the quality of their lives and their living and working environment, and less through policy-making processes, both at the European and national level and at the local level.

### **Citizens are looking for:**

- Continuous dialogue around the green transition and the related range of different policies, as well as public debate on key green transition projects.
- Coherence of all European, national, and local policies that affect the green transition, since they do not see the green transition as an isolated project but as a systematic transformation of society in economic, social and climate terms.
- To put citizens' health at the heart of climate and energy policies and the green transition in general. This approach should lead to the need for less investment in the health system (due to the potentially lower number of patients) and more investment in policies that produce effects that impair the health of citizens, in order to reduce this negative impact (e.g. agricultural policy).

### **Regarding individual areas of green transition, citizens concluded the following:**

#### **RENEWABLES AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY**

- Citizens demand a stronger commitment of the City of Zagreb, to increase of renewable energy in the local energy mix and expediting the transition from fossil fuels to renewables. For example, they expressed the interest and support for the increase of exploitation and better utilization of geothermal and solar potentials of the city of Zagreb, as well as reduction in fossil fuel usage for heating and cooling.
- Citizens recognize the importance and give full support to energy efficiency policies and projects, especially in terms of energy renovations of urban and private properties, which directly contributes to energy savings and reducing energy poverty.
- Citizens want the financial incentives of the City of Zagreb and an effective and conducive legal framework for the development of energy communities, especially the simplification of the entire process, as well as a solution for multi-residential buildings on which it is currently not possible to install solar panels in the context of the energy community due to an inadequate legal framework. Due to this legal situation in the Republic of Croatia, almost all attempts to establish energy communities are stuck on administrative issues, which has resulted in Croatia having only one energy community while EU members in the neighbourhood have hundreds of them.

## TRAFFIC

- The citizens recognize the efforts of the City of Zagreb to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through an accelerated transition of public transport to renewable energy sources and an increase in the capacity of cycling infrastructure. At the same time, citizens have expressed their concerns about unequally developed cycling infrastructure in all parts of the city, especially in the suburban neighbourhoods.
- Citizens insist on increasing the share of renewable energy in public transport (electric vehicles and vehicles using biofuels).
- In the context of sustainable urban transport, citizens express strong interest in strengthening the interconnectivity of urban transport network (buses, trams, trains).

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

- Citizens have expressed concerns about possible decrease of urban green infrastructure.
- Citizens demand a stronger commitment of the City of Zagreb in protecting existing and expanding new green infrastructure in the process of urban planning.

## II. Conclusions from the panel discussion: Climate Changes and Energy Transition

The panel pointed out that according to the latest Eurobarometer data, a vast majority of European citizens are concerned about climate change and its consequences on citizens' everyday lives. The European Commission shares the concerns of European citizens about climate change and has therefore increased the European climate targets. The EU adopted the EGD in 2020 as a cornerstone policy for achieving climate goals. The EGD has committed the EU and its Member States to become climate neutral by 2050 by reducing emissions and energy consumption and increase energy efficiency and production of energy from renewable energy sources.

The panellists' messages were the following:

- The EGD is set to increase European competitiveness and boost sustainable economic development. Fostering inclusiveness and promoting equal participation and representation of all European citizens, especially vulnerable ones, is an important component of it. The new EGD is the best alternative to further development.
- Through its Cohesion and Common Agricultural Policy, the EU will continue to support the agricultural sector and reduce development gaps between different areas and regions.
- European citizens have the key role in the green transition which is why the European Commission has established the European Climate Pact and appointed climate ambassadors. Climate ambassadors have the most important role of bringing European policies to local and regional level by promoting active citizens' participation in green transition.
- The largest volume of regulations passed by the previous EU Parliament focused on energy transition and climate change. This will not change, regardless of the new setup.
- In 2019, the European Parliament declared climate emergency in Europe and urged all Members States to commit to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 which was followed by the European Commission's legislative proposals with the aim of making the EU "Fit for 55". One of the most important instances of the new legislation policies is the establishment of the Social Climate Fund. The Fund should ensure just transition for all European citizens.

- In the following European Parliament elections, the European citizens have the opportunity to commit the EU to even more ambitious climate policies and actions. That is why it is important to vote.
- By increasing knowledge on green transition and climate policies and building implementation capacities, civil society has a pivotal role in raising awareness of citizens and their involvement in green transition policies on local and regional levels and thus ensuring inclusive and just transition.
- When considering the future labour market, as well as education, health, and social policies, the inclusive and just transition should emphasize a stronger gender dimension and better recognize women's roles in implementing climate mitigation and adaptation policies.
- The European youth already has the transformative role and actively participates in shaping the European policies. They have a strong stand on climate change and their voice should be represented and acknowledged in decades to come.
- Young people are climate conscious, afraid for their future existence. They see the green transition as an opportunity for development of new skills and jobs.
- In implementation of European policies, regional and local cooperation should be even stronger. European regions should learn from each other by creating communities of practice and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experts. Such a cooperation will actively contribute to even more cohesive and competitive EU. The European Committee of the Regions and initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors play an important role in fostering cooperation at the regional and local levels.
- Cities should be involved in policy development and planning from the early stages. Multi-level governance models need to be more efficient.