



# **Multi-Level Governance in (Climate) Action – Co-creating policy solutions to tackle climate change**

The **EU Covenant of Mayors Office** is responsible for the overall coordination of the initiative in Europe. It is composed of networks of local and regional authorities: Energy Cities, Climate Alliance, EUROCITIES, CEMR, FEDARENE and ICLEI Europe.

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# Why is **multi-level governance** important?

**Multi-Level Governance (MLG)** is an essential ingredient for modern, comprehensive policy-making<sup>1</sup> applicable at any level, from local up to EU policies (and, of course, even beyond Europe). It can strengthen a variety of processes, especially supporting and **accelerating climate change mitigation and adaptation**, as well as effectively tackling energy poverty, providing a coherent framework for the just transition and enhancing many other crucial issues. When addressing the scale and scope of solutions necessary to address the complex global challenge of climate change, effective MLG is a key asset to accelerate **cost-effective and socially inclusive actions**.

The *Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy in Europe* (Covenant Europe) not only represents an example of coordinated multi-level action itself, but also offers ideas, resources and opportunities to better **enable, scale up and mainstream MLG in climate and energy policies across Europe**. But what does MLG mean in practice? What role does it play in policy-making and in accelerating climate and energy action? Why is MLG considered to be such a key element of the Covenant Europe?

## What is meant by multi-level governance?

Effective MLG embodies a set of collaborative mechanisms to ensure that key stakeholders have a voice in those matters most relevant to them.

Though MLG is very suitable to enhance policy-making processes at all tiers of government, this document itself is intentionally taking mainly a national-level perspective. Therefore it aims to show that, rather than just a top-down approach, in which national representatives draft and decide on policies with which subnational actors must align, MLG builds on:

- **vertical integration** of other levels' insights (i.e. local and regional authorities) to enhance and align higher-level decisions with subnational needs, and;
- **horizontal integration** to engage peers at the same level from parallel ministries, relevant public agencies, etc. to ensure synergies and avoid misalignment.

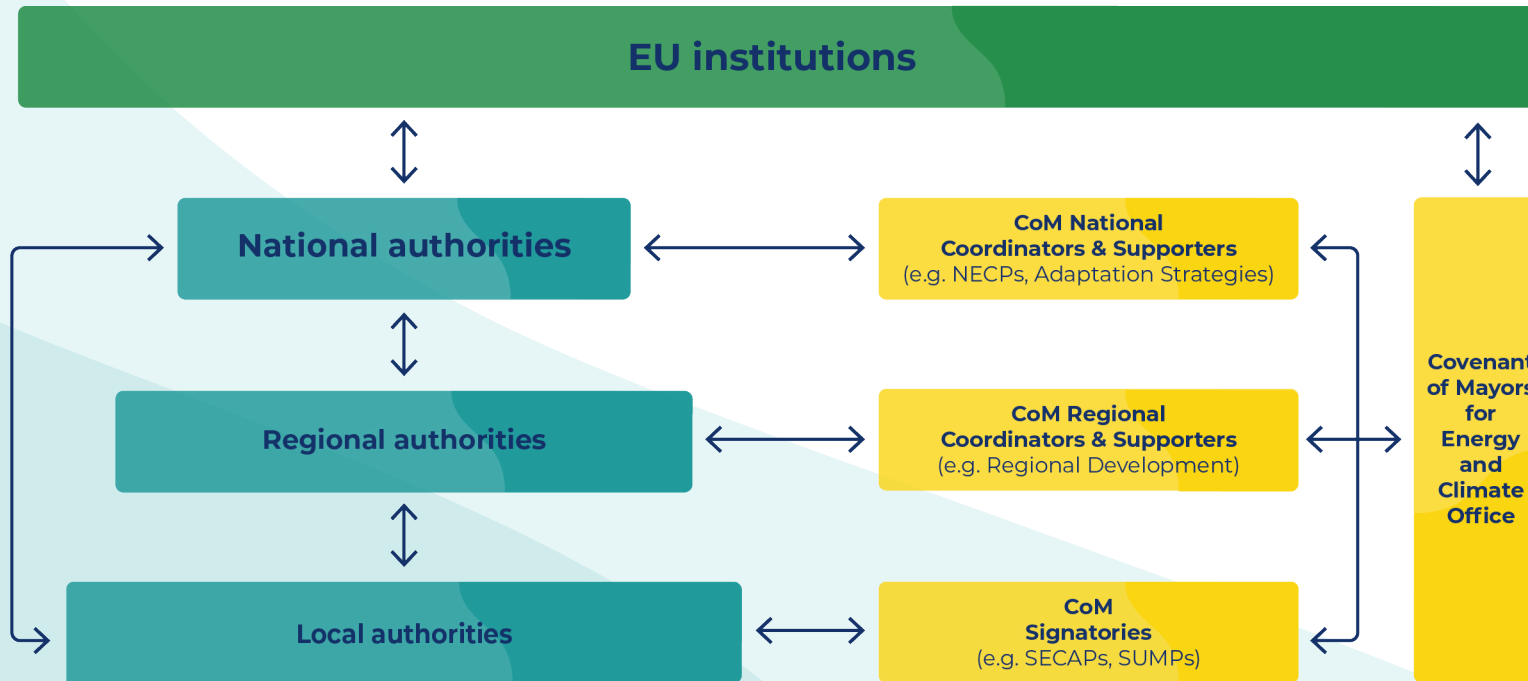
To set up effective MLG, two key elements – namely “structures” and “dialogue-processes” – should be established. The first addresses formal/informal **frameworks and platforms** (e.g. who is involved and how they are represented), while the latter considers **opportunities for dialogue** (e.g. which interactions exist between stakeholders and what they each contribute). There is no one-size-fits-all approach to establishing MLG structures and dialogue-processes. Rather, MLG must be tailored to local, regional and national contexts to enhance policy frameworks.

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<sup>1</sup> MLG impacts diverse (public) processes, hence the term “policy” is used throughout this document in a broader sense to include various types of legislation, high-level strategies, action plans, regulatory guidelines, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Committee of Regions' ***White Paper on Multilevel Governance*** (2009).

MLG represents “coordinated action [...] based on partnership and [...] responsibility being shared between the different tiers of government concerned and [...] democratic legitimacy and the representative nature of the different players involved”.<sup>2</sup>



### How does the Covenant Europe leverage multi-level governance for successful climate action?

MLG's approach to comprehensive integration mirrors the systematic approach promoted by the Covenant Europe itself, which aims to incorporate diverse actors to more effectively develop proper baselines for both mitigation (e.g. emissions, energy performance, **energy poverty** and transport) and **adaptation** (e.g. risks, vulnerabilities and impacts). Part of this effort includes the work of a community of higher-tier **Coordinators** and **Supporters** who already successfully facilitate local authorities' planning through their iterative **Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan** (SECAP) cycles. Additionally, each **Signatory** should not only horizontally integrate various municipal departments and entities, but are also strongly encouraged to further

Completing the picture: In addition to vertical and horizontal cooperation, MLG can be further enhanced by also engaging non-governmental actors (e.g. in a "quadruple-helix" approach, which combines public institutions with civil society, academia and businesses) for the added value of their fresh perspectives. In fact, such a multi-sector approach is seen as so worthwhile that it was recently embedded as a "local climate pact" into a new chapter of the Covenant Europe's own political commitment document.

As such, the Covenant Europe is ideally placed to demonstrate a multi-level platform that **enables low-carbon, resilient and inclusive development** in collaboration from local to national levels. By reinforcing know-how on conducive governance mechanisms, multi-faceted planning, streamlining investments to manage impacts and promoting an engagement in a resilient and green recovery, the Covenant Europe can provide key support to the implementation of a successful European Green Deal.

The targets and actions of Covenant Europe Signatories can contribute to the objectives and targets of the Paris Agreement in meaningful ways, while also serving as key instruments for the governance of the Energy Union, notably via the National Energy and Climate Action Plans (NECP). The actions designed, implemented and transparently monitored by Signatories can clearly complement relevant national policies contributing to international goals. At the same time, they can simultaneously generate direct, sustainable and long-term impacts in a variety of cross-cutting sectors (e.g. nature-based solutions, biodiversity, circular economy, health, social inclusion, etc.) tailored for the local communities they represent.

Well-implemented MLG enriches policy-making processes with multiple benefits and leads to longer-term frameworks, stronger relationships and more successful initiatives. In other words, effective MLG is useful across the board:

- Legislation and policy instruments can become better synergised with each other, to leverage their full potential and **optimise on-the-ground impacts**.
- Priorities shared across levels can accelerate implementation through stronger **enabling frameworks** and more **efficient planning** of available resources.
- The dialogues fostered through solid MLG tend to enhance relationships between national and subnational authorities, thus helping to **save costs** through reduced inefficiencies and **avoid conflicts** with parallel national processes or “downstream” adoption.
- By bringing everyone to the table, MLG inherently stimulates **shared ownership** of both the policy-making process itself and subsequent implementation.

The Covenant Europe supports cities, regions and countries in advancing action with regard to adapting to climate change and building resilience. This is accomplished through ongoing work to understand and improve governance methods, risk-planning and leveraging applicable investment capacities. Optimised MLG helps to ensure that policies across levels and sectors remain **consistent with adaptation principles** outlined in the new **EU Adaptation Strategy**. This Strategy focuses on multiple areas: ecosystem-adaptation and integrated MLG; enhanced monitoring using clear goals and indicators; the importance of conservation and restoration of ecosystems; mainstreaming climate adaptation into all relevant policies; increasing funding at all governance levels by mobilising public and private investments; and augmenting crisis prevention preparedness, disaster response and green recovery.

MLG is well-aligned with many complementary approaches supported by the Covenant Europe. Its applicability for diverse circumstances makes it part of a **proven set of solutions** to ensure that stakeholders across the continent are suitably consulted and able to contribute meaningfully. The **EU Urban Agenda Partnerships** is a successful example of MLG in action, focusing on fourteen key topics, including the energy transition and climate adaptation, amongst others, and has been shaped by strong cooperation with city and regional representatives. Other initiatives that are part of this same trend of leveraging stakeholder dialogues include the European Committee of the Regions in its support of the **Green Deal Going Local** and the European Commission's (EC) promotion of local **Climate Pacts**. The latter, which aligns well with the previously-mentioned new Covenant Europe chapter, aim to more formally integrate diverse actions at the local level to contribute to Member States' national climate and energy goals.



This publication provides useful recommendations for harnessing the benefits of well-implemented MLG, especially those related to climate actions being steered at the national level across Europe (e.g. NECPs or coal transition plans). Its content is based on a desk review of the European context and targeted interviews with Covenant Europe Coordinators, Supporters and Signatories, as well as other experts, in twelve EU Member States. Some of the insights gained from these practitioners and local/regional government representatives) help ensure that the points made here remain relevant, up to date and **actionable in all corners of Europe**, and beyond.

The recommendations gained through this approach have been categorised according to five, well-established principles of good governance (**Openness, Participation, Accountability, Effectiveness and Coherence**)<sup>4</sup>. These key pillars, alongside complementary methods to leverage them for maximum benefit in national climate policy processes, help form a blueprint to establish strong MLG. The final chapter includes a quick reference to guide the systematic optimisation of MLG in the reader's own unique context.



Openness



Participation



Accountability



Effectiveness



Coherence

Further relevant inspirations of **MLG in action worldwide** are also certainly found across the globe, such as the following positive examples:

- **Colombia's** cross-sectoral collaboration among national ministries and subnational actors to create and implement its own NDCs<sup>3</sup>;
- Successful local and regional Emission Trading Schemes (ETS) in **Japan** inspiring explorations into a possible national ETS; and
- **Kenya's** "whole-of-government approach" to pass its national climate change law and establish dedicated teams within subnational and national public institutions.

<sup>3</sup> Nationally Determined Contributions can be found in the **NDC Registry** of the UNFCCC.

<sup>4</sup> Principles outlined in the EC's **White Paper on European Governance** (2001).



## Why is **openness** crucial to multi-level governance?

When MLG is structured in an open manner, stakeholders can better understand how the policy chain functions and how they can participate. This, in turn, can stimulate more willingness from them to share crucial insights. If all **information and contributions are transparently** communicated, then the process fosters more meaningful interactions and a sense of ownership, as well as broader acceptance of the entire process. This is true even among those not directly involved, which speaks to the ability of MLG to enable more system-wide, comprehensive climate action.

### Institute a well-structured approach that clearly defines its purpose and phases

MLG can best enhance policy processes if it is set up in a systematic manner that clarifies for all stakeholders why the policy is being formulated in the first place, and includes an explanation of who will and could contribute (which ideally would be informed by comprehensive stakeholder mapping) and also clearly outlines when different parts of the process will occur and how MLG methods will be applied each step of the way.

→ **Take action now!** *Draw up a MLG roadmap within a publicly available document linked to a specific policy process and which ensures clarity, stimulates wider acceptance and streamlines communication for more efficient engagement.*

### Explain actors' roles within in the whole process and the value of their contributions

It is important to foster a strong understanding of roles, including who is in charge of the overall policy process and which other roles are (to be) taken up by others. At the same time, it can lend even greater credibility if made public which actors have already been involved, and which tasks or contributions can be attributed to them.

→ **Take action now!** *Publish a framework of intended roles which tracks and follows up on stakeholders' contributions, to both guarantee full transparency and stimulate a sense of purpose to their involvement.*

#### Covenant connection

Climate action planning and risk management often require working beyond the borders of individual cities or regions; both for mitigation (e.g. air quality or mobility) and adaptation measures (e.g. forest fires or flooding). Local and regional authorities, as well as other stakeholders, need full support and opportunities to collaborate in order to address cross-boundary issues across various governance levels.

The Covenant Europe Signatories are well placed to lead the way, since they already have access to best practices, tools, knowledge and guidance that help them to better manage risks, develop resilient mitigation/adaptation strategies, implement effective action plans and prioritise green (recovery) investments. Many of these examples and other valuable materials – produced and tested in the field by the Covenant Europe Office and its Coordinators, Supporters and Signatories – can be found in the publicly-available [library](#) of **capacity-building opportunities and resources**.

### Establish a clear timeline with sufficient opportunities for meaningful engagement

It should be ensured that all MLG activities are all planned out properly and announced in a transparent manner. Contribution rounds should allow sufficient time and not during poorly timed periods. Iterative feedback loops may help further enhance final results and give stakeholders multiple opportunities to weigh in, but also should not be left open for so long that the overall process is unnecessarily slowed down.

→ **Take action now!** *Publicise a clear schedule of relevant activities and deadlines for each stage of the process, ideally offering multiple chances to engage, avoiding inconvenient periods (e.g. holiday seasons or moments with higher childcare needs) and considering different accessibility needs to avoid undermining efforts to contribute.*

### Confirm that information flows in a way that is understandable to stakeholders

Strong MLG enables information and reference materials to be made transparently available to all, instead of limiting access to a few privileged actors. These materials and information must be easy to digest and avoid overly-technical terminology which might confuse or discourage some stakeholders' engagement.

→ **Take action now!** *Provide wide access to all necessary information and background documents, and avoid using obscure jargon whenever possible.*

### Communicate actively with stakeholders via known, accessible channels

It is just as important to communicate information in a correct manner. Dynamic methods can stimulate proactive engagement, but should still utilise diverse media and formats commonly used by all relevant stakeholders.

→ **Take action now!** *Announce key activities periodically to ensure that relevant actors know when and how they can get involved. Take advantage of traditional and digital outlets (e.g. mailings, newspapers, TV, radio, public sessions, website articles, email, social media, e-meetings, etc.) to ensure outreach and access for all intended audiences.*

#### MLG in action → Latvia

A **strong communication** strategy targeting citizens, professionals, academia and businesses was at the centre of the **Latvian NECP** drafting process. The national government gave diverse opportunities to discuss energy and climate goals by organising **multiple campaigns**: via information sessions on national TV, hosting public conferences/hearings and a series of virtual meetings (also uploaded online for later reference). Such **open processes** were also reflected in the development of the document itself, where national government representatives were joined in dedicated working groups by key municipalities, planning regions and experts from academia and other sectors, to discuss the NECP action by action.



## What does **participation** bring to multi-level governance?

The inclusion of all relevant actors into policy development lies at the very heart of MLG, thereby both **institutionalising and democratising climate action**. Integrating various actors from start to finish, from the design to implementation of a policy, helps assure consideration of their needs and complementarity with their own climate and energy activities. The cooperation between Covenant Europe Coordinators and their Signatories is a great example of MLG turned into successful action.

Such open participation can help develop synergies between actions, as well as foster shared ownership in the wider community. The key to such inclusive engagement is finding the right balance between efficiency and sufficiency – still relying on known participants with **trusted expertise**, but nonetheless bringing into the mix **fresh perspectives** to enhance climate policies.

### Unite valuable insights from diverse local and regional institutions

Participatory MLG opens the door for often side-lined subnational authorities to contribute their worthwhile perspectives into policy-making. Vertical integration of their unique insights from the start can substantially align a given policy with their on-the-ground data and needs, as well as enhance more effective implementation down the line.

→ **Take action now!** Invite local and regional public entities into a co-creative process for more substantive insights and benefits. Aim also to engage a diverse set of stakeholders beyond the “usual suspects” (e.g. capital cities or economically strong regions) to ensure that the policy is attuned to more remote areas needs as well.

### Collaborate with other national institutions to develop complementary policies

It is just as important to cooperate horizontally as it is vertically, meaning co-creation, or at least coordination, with other departments in a given organisation, as well as within separate national-level entities. Such an approach not only ensures cross-sectoral coverage, but streamlines separate activities each institution might be working on. This can be useful to help avoid confusion from conflicting or overlapping policies.

→ **Take action now!** Break silos by collaborating with colleagues in other ministries, agencies, etc. in policy-making to learn from and build upon their experiences. Ensure the involvement of local and regional authorities by creating exchange platforms and opportunities on a regular basis – be sure to support them appropriately with the resources, capacities and political mandates to contribute meaningfully.

#### Covenant connection

Take advantage of all the *Signatories, Coordinators and Supporters* in Covenant Europe, which represent a **ready-made pool of experienced public and non-public actors** already familiar with MLG. These actors have beneficial expertise on climate issues and are generally open to cooperation, including contributions to improve national policies.

### Create multiple entry points to suitably involve relevant participants

MLG allows for a range of variable stakeholder engagement methods. A few actors may take part in a more intense co-creative process, while certain selected stakeholders may be requested to contribute to specific parts. Targeted groups of participants can be specially invited to consult on the policy, while broadly opening up channels for public feedback and comments can yield an even wider set of opinions. The beneficial outcomes of MLG can be further multiplied when contributors are offered several chances to get involved. A few rounds of feedback can provide both flexibility for stakeholders (in that they have multiple chances to give input in the case that they have conflicting time commitments) and allow for iterative contributions.

→ **Take action now!** Actively encourage key stakeholders to participate appropriately (e.g. co-creation, specific contribution, targeted consultation or commenting). Be sure to plan for diverse entry points and enough time for multiple feedback loops.

### Consult non-governmental stakeholders to further boost cross-cutting angles

Applying a multi-lateral component to MLG can widen the spectrum of inputs and strengthen a policy's potential to address key issues in a more holistic manner. This can intensify its impacts, not to mention broaden its acceptance among key external actors.

→ **Take action now!** Exploit the proven “quadruple-helix” approach – which strives for the public sector to cooperate with civil society, businesses and academia – to diversify viewpoints and ensure the necessary buy-in for implementing climate action.

#### MLG in action → Spain

The Network of Towns and Villages towards Sustainability (*Xarxa de Ciutats i Pobles cap a la Sostenibilitat*) is an open, voluntary group of committed municipalities cooperating on shared priorities and needs. The network includes a set of working groups, each appointed with technical staff from the Province of Barcelona, and also sometimes **inviting national government representatives** to provide training and clarifications on applying national law at local level. For its already-established working group explicitly focused on the Covenant Europe, the network now integrates relevant academic and business experts to augment its **cross-sectoral approach to climate issues**. In light of all its success, the network is also starting to expand to municipalities from **neighbouring provinces** who are interested to benefit from its strong MLG experiences.



## Why embed **accountability** in multi-level governance?

A policy built on an accountable MLG-based process tends to assure everyone, including the general public, of the overall **legitimacy** of the resulting policy itself. With clearly defined roles, mandates and responsibilities for each contributor within the policy chain, the resulting policy can itself be perceived as more **robust, valid, acceptable and fair**. At the same time, strong accountability can even further stimulate a constructive willingness from stakeholders, whether involved or not in this particular case, to collaborate on other activities undertaken in the future.



### Highlight roles and mandates for those contributing to the policy process

Stakeholders' various positions within MLG, as well as the conditions or mandates under which they are required to act or contribute, should be well-defined. Clarification of these roles and expectations is highly recommendable for leaders steering the process, as well as any involved public authorities and any other contributors representing other groups (e.g. a few selected cities or an association acting on behalf of others).

→ **Take action now!** Both at the start and during the process, actively consider if there is any need to introduce special roles (e.g. providing internal oversight) or new mandates (e.g. for a dedicated structure created explicitly to manage interactions around a given policy).

### Specify clear responsibilities and milestones for each stage of the policy chain

A well-defined process should identify key duties to be carried out each step of the way and establish benchmarks by which to measure their successful completion. This clarifies for all involved, as well as for any “watchdogs”, what is to be accomplished and by whom.

→ **Take action now!** Assign key responsibilities to specific entities, or at least to certain expected roles. Where appropriate, make use of mandated obligations (e.g. applied to subnational institutions) to ensure participation, as well as using key performance indicators to evaluate, report on and verify the achievement of tasks at each stage.

#### Covenant connection

The Covenant Europe provides proof in practice on successful contributions that local and territorial authorities can bring to policy-making processes, specifically to reach climate and energy targets. The Covenant Europe not only showcases local **commitment to implement climate action**, but provides an overview of how governments can contribute to national targets and European objectives. Thanks to their baseline inventories, vulnerability assessments and action plans, Signatories can provide valuable information to all levels of government on how action should be prioritised to address needs, from the community level to the national level.

The SECAPs developed, as well as the monitoring of the actions outlined therein, offer a set of roadmaps for stakeholders at any level to **monitor, report and verify** how actions are carried out on the ground. As public documents, they can also provide a means for citizens or other stakeholders to check on the progress made, thereby making Signatories accountable for the implementation of local priorities and actions. The SECAP process can also help subnational and national level authorities retain a clear overview of the impacts of the Covenant Europe Signatories' actions, and how they contribute to reaching the objectives of their respective countries' NECPs.

### Ensure that all contributions are duly assessed for potential integration

It is important that contributions into a policy chain are themselves also treated in an accountable manner. All stakeholder feedback must be fairly considered for potential integration into the final result. The aim is to avoid that any involved parties feel either that they have been ignored or that only privileged actors truly influence the policy. Done well, strong MLG communicates and demonstrates to everyone that it is a fair, open process, thereby inspiring the confidence to contribute meaningfully.

→ **Take action now!** Apply “due diligence” methods by monitoring inputs, fairly evaluating feedback (best with clear, published criteria) and tracking accepted contributions within the policy chain. Ideally there should also be follow-up with all contributing actors (whether their contributions were approved or not) and possibly even transparent attributions to those who provided certain ideas integrated into the final policy.

#### MLG in action → The Netherlands

The Netherlands has established a cooperative decision-making process (called “*Polderen*”, from “*inpolderen*” for “land reclamation”, based on **collective consensus** being required to build dikes). This model has become quite embedded into Dutch culture, even in policy-making such as for making the country’s ***Climate Agreement*** more accountable to stakeholders. As part of this initiative, the national government created a new operational division to allow nearby municipalities to cooperate better with each other on mutually acceptable sustainable energy ambitions. While the country’s governance outlines twelve provinces, now thirty new regions have been created for the purpose of allowing municipalities to better plan **joint projects across traditional administrative boundaries**. Not only does this expedite implementation timelines, they also benefit from cost-savings by avoiding duplication of efforts, combining staff capacities and even merging locations for more cohesive project sites. To ensure full accountability, each of the thirty new regions has a board of experts representing their respective municipalities, whose role is to formulate proposals that will have to be approved by each municipality. The idea is that nationally-set goals are not only implemented at a local level via an accountable process, but that local priorities can be collectively defined and “flow upwards” to better inform national processes as well.



## How can multi-level governance improve effectiveness?

There is often a direct correlation between how impactful a policy can ultimately be and how effectively MLG principles are applied to it. Well-designed MLG frameworks and dialogues tend to function better, and therefore also inspire more active stakeholder engagement. When actors understand when, how and why their contributions matter, it can lead to more **meaningful interventions**. It is also worth emphasising that the more efficiently that MLG is applied to a policy, the more **cost-effective** it can be, from development to funding/investment to implementation down the line. The Covenant Europe provides a perfect starting point to discuss how to streamline and leverage multi-level contributions to tackling climate change. It offers an opportunity not to be missed to strengthen partnerships, such as national public bodies (e.g. ministries or energy agencies) becoming National Coordinators. Not only will they become key allies supporting Signatories in meeting their own commitments, but of course can also steer them to ensure they contribute to the **joint implementation of national targets**.

### Decide how formal structures need to be for effective action

Whether MLG should use formal or informal processes can vary from country to country, and even from policy to policy. In some cases, a more official framework may be important for lending stronger authority and coordination to the policy process. In other situations, the flexibility of less formal mechanisms may be advantageous – the key point remains to determine the approach most appropriate for the given context.

→ **Take action now!** Map out relevant stakeholders to inform the development of a suitable structure for collaboration and exchange, particularly keeping in mind key actors' realistic capacities. However, even in cases of more formal platforms, be sure to still allow space as needed for these actors (e.g. subnational institutions and/or non-governmental sectors) to self-organise and organically evolve complementary structures.

### Outline joint priorities, specific objectives and expected results

MLG itself is more effective when goals and outputs are well-defined for each stage of the policy chain. In practice, this can mean managing the process in a series of stages building on the outputs and lessons learned from previous steps – subnational data, frameworks and agendas can also prove essential to inform on these points. This approach can help align and optimise policies, streamline available resources and secure “buy-in” from targeted communities.

→ **Take action now!** Jointly discuss priorities across levels to help distinguish objectives and results across short- to long-term timeframes. Find solutions which blend funds, combine capacities and efficiently use resources to maximise benefits in line with various priorities. Create vertical (i.e. local and regional authorities) and horizontal (i.e. national public entities) partnerships to ensure that desired goals and outputs truly reflect subnational expectations and also synergise with other national-level processes.

#### MLG in action → Belgium

Flanders' regional government recently approved the ***Flemish Climate Pact*** in collaboration with municipalities to ensure its **effective linkage to local needs**, including a mitigation/energy pillar explicitly aligned for compliance with the Covenant Europe. Furthermore, the idea of inclusivity is built in from the start, not just those interactions between public authorities, but also other actors (including residents) being encouraged to give input and identify concrete ways that they can personally contribute effectively to the achievement of local/regional goals. Flanders' Climate Pact also foresees a monitoring system to feed into biannual progress reports. These serve as a basis to **compare performance against identified objectives**, also during meetings dedicated to such discussions among involved actors.

### Tailor interactions by applying dedicated working modes appropriately

Tackling climate change through policy solutions can often be most effective by first disentangling its cross-cutting and inter-linked challenges. Because every country's situation is unique, no "cookie-cutter" approach can be provided, meaning that MLG should be suitably tailored to address the most critical issues. Climate action truly requires a process of discovery and the application of appropriate methods matching the local to national context. The Covenant Europe provides opportunities to learn about replicable methods already exploited by Signatories and Coordinators, and which can inspire successful working modes that allow actors to unravel climate problems together.

→ **Take action now!** Break down core subjects into thematic units and split up the policy chain into manageable stages. Assign dedicated stakeholders and mechanisms (e.g. specific working groups, targeted contributions or specific consultations) – ideally these groups or individuals will have clear mandates and goals. Map out at each level which methods can work well, and determine any enabling actions still needed to foster policy goals. At the same, be sure a coherent narrative remains prominent, revealing how individual inputs contribute to the bigger picture.

#### MLG in action → Italy

Italy has been particularly successful in accelerating climate action planning through MLG, by effectively linking climate and energy actions promoted via the Covenant Europe with the allocation of European Reconstruction and Development Funds (ERDF). For example, the regional authorities of both Sicily and Emilia Romagna use ERDF funds to ensure strong energy action plan development by local authorities, and more recently have made SECAPs a prerequisite to access ERDF funding for further activities (e.g. for Sicilian municipal energy managers or the renovation of Emilia-Romagnan public buildings). Though it is not the only example of such good practice in climate **funding**, it demonstrates quite well that **explicit links between funds and planning/action on the ground** can contribute effectively to processes and impacts at multiple levels.



## How does multi-level governance lead to **coherence**?

MLG should both be coherent with how things function within the broader national context, and its processes themselves should contribute to augmenting the wider **consistency of policies** in a given country. Policies designed from the start to account for other actors' needs and mandates tend to be better **aligned to subnational agendas** and capabilities as well. Such built-in complementarity means that stakeholders are likely more willing to contribute to policy-making processes. At the same time, synergising a policy with others at the same or other governance levels helps to **avoid overlaps, redundancies and confusion**. It helps subnational institutions be better prepared for the **harmonious and rapid implementation** of a policy. Local action can help substantiate and even drive ambitious targets for national policies. Additionally, synergies can also be exploited transversally by taking advantage of relevant international initiatives (e.g. the Covenant Europe) and already-existing resources to adapt lessons learned and thereby avoid fully “re-inventing the wheel” in climate policy development.

## Harmonise policy development with the local, regional and national context

Proper alignment with various levels is an important precondition for the development of integrated policy-making, and local and regional governments should be targeted as primary stakeholder groups to contribute. However, it is crucial to remain mindful of their individual jurisdictions, processes, agendas and priorities, and to respect and support their capabilities and willingness to contribute. Clearly understood roles and mandates help optimise potential contributions across levels, and any enabling conditions needing to be implemented should be identified.

→ **Take action now!** Orient the policy in such a way that it aligns with the agendas and needs of those actors deemed most crucial to get involved. In some cases, it may be necessary to apply pressure (e.g. obligations), set up clear frameworks or provide incentives and support (e.g. dedicated mandates or assistance with resources) to enable their engagement in the process itself, as well as subsequent implementation. Regularly assess what has worked well and under what conditions, and exploit these insights to support innovation and enabling measures for further successful policies.

### MLG in action → Finland

The Finnish government is moving from a fragmented approach to climate action toward a more integrated one. Whereas earlier all the national ministries (as well as their respective sectors in general) considered how to include climate aspects in their own plans and what climate change meant to them separately, now the government is upgrading how it operates between bodies with an aim to **build up more coherent organisational synergies**. It is already obvious that having more diverse interactions can stimulate both inclusion and participation, but Finnish actors are also seeing that such cooperative work leads to expedited timelines and enhances results in a more consistent manner. They are realising more and more that stakeholders must be coordinated across all streams of climate actions, in particular by integrating adaptation with mitigation. Finland is already actively working towards such an end through MLG, not only among national bodies, but also by explicitly engaging Covenant Signatories to **ensure coherence with local climate resilience** needs and practice.

## Maximise synergies and minimise conflicts with other processes

MLG should itself contribute to greater coherence with other policy processes. National actors in particular can help harmonise a given policy with other parallel activities. At the same time, subnational governments are ideally placed to highlight potential obstacles that may hinder the successful “downstream” implementation of a policy. Additionally, leveraging stakeholders’ exposure to relevant international initiatives and projects helps synergise local to national actions complementing European and global good practice.

→ **Take action now!** Analyse institutional perspectives at all levels to discover those points where existing and upcoming policy processes might be redundant or complementary. Identify any roadblocks to overcome, including how political change (e.g. elections or political party dominance) may affect how the MLG process should be set up or function.

### MLG in action → Greece

Though the Greek government adopted its own *National Adaptation Strategy* in 2016, many Greek territories are now developing their own **Regional Adaptation Action Plans**, with some cities having developed their own as well. In 2017, Athens adopted its own *resilience strategy* for 2030, but even more recently has started developing a **local adaptation plan**, which would also support the implementation of a loan received from the European Investment Bank’s *Natural Capital Financing Facility*.

### Covenant connection

Embedding the Covenant Europe’s principles more strongly into national processes can help **break up “knowledge silos”** and result in improved policy alignment. A coherent application of its approach (e.g. a **formalised endorsement** of the Covenant Europe and/or even specific **obligations to commit to it**) will drive subnational authorities to develop a valuable, consistent set of emissions inventories, adaptation measures and mitigation actions to **inform and inspire higher-level processes**.

Furthermore, exploiting the Covenant Europe in a more coherent manner can provide an objective **anchoring point to guide harmonious policy-making** at all levels, including stronger resilience to political change. National and Territorial Coordinators can represent a consistent channel for Signatories to align with national processes, and accelerate a cost-effective implementation of local SECAPs contributing to NECPs.



# Which key steps strengthen **multi-level governance?**

As a vital tool for augmenting the development of policies at all levels, **MLG is especially suitable for climate action** processes. It is as applicable to the creation and implementation of comprehensive policies as it is to those addressing individual topics such as emissions, mitigation, energy, mobility, adaptation, resilience, etc.

By adopting the MLG recommendations found in this publication, policy-making processes will benefit from worthwhile, multi-faceted effects, such as:

- **meaningful dialogues** through transparent, proactive communication;
- diverse contributions leading to a sense of broad **stakeholder ownership**;
- long-term **legitimacy** and broad willingness to engage into the future;
- more **cost-effective** development/implementation of **robust policies**;
- more impactful measures **aligned with local and regional priorities**; and
- stronger synergies and more **harmonious alignment** of diverse actions.

Summary

In order to inspire action, below is a condensed summary of the key points from other sections in this document, which can be used even as a multi-level governance checklist to identify gaps and start embedding MLG processes today:



MLG, applied in an **open** manner to all facets and steps of the policy-making process, represents a valuable investment into institutionalising transparency.

- **clarity** of purpose, structures, timelines and steps
- **candidness** about stakeholders, roles and contributions
- **information** provided **actively**, using **user-friendly** terminology and **accessible** channels



How **effectively** MLG is applied to a policy chain can have a direct correlation to how impactful it is in the real world.

- appropriate engagement via **formal and/or informal** structures
- **context-based priorities**, specific **objectives** and expected **results**
- dedicated **working modes** tailored for different tasks and stakeholders



**Participatory** systems based on inclusivity are at the very heart of strong MLG, and are applicable from the design to implementation phase of a policy.

- insights solicited from both **local, regional and national** institutions
- suitable consultation with **sectors beyond public** authorities
- assured **entry points** to get involved throughout the policy chain



A **coherent** approach to MLG itself should inevitably ensure that policies are suitably harmonised within the national context

- **alignment** with other local to national **frameworks** and **mandates**
- maximal **synergies** and minimal **conflicts** with other activities



When MLG is set up to be **accountable** from the start, resulting policy-making processes likewise become more robust each step of the way.

- distinct **roles** and **mandates** for stakeholders
- clear **responsibilities** and **milestones** defined during each stage
- all contributions **duly assessed** for potential integration into the policy

For more support on MLG, readers are strongly encouraged to reach out to representatives of the **Covenant Europe Office** itself and **tap into the Covenant Europe's valuable expertise** held by its **Signatories**, **Coordinators and Supporters**.

# **Multi-Level Governance in (Climate) Action – Co-creating policy solutions to tackle climate change**