

EU regions in the transformation towards a climate-neutral future



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The European Union (EU) intends to become **the first climate neutral continent in the world**. The outline for the transformational change is provided by the European Green Deal (EGD). The goal of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to be reduced by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, is legally enshrined in the European Climate Law. The **progress of EU regions** towards climate neutrality is **quite differentiated**. The examples of regions successfully transforming towards climate neutrality provided a wide range of different **approaches and solutions** representing various starting points, scopes and circumstances for the transition process.

and efficient use of available financing sources for the transition process and further innovation **move the transition forward**. Inclusion of external experts and gradual detachment from external funding are also beneficial for regions on their way towards climate neutrality.



Main observations

The study

provides information on requirements and goals for a successful transformation towards a climate neutral future at regional level in the EU

Initiating the transformation with selected areas of economic activity is a good starting approach, while reaching actual climate neutrality requires profound changes in all economic sectors as well as in cross-cutting areas such as governance, finance, just transition, enabling technologies and lifestyle changes.

The main **barriers** for the transformation are the **lack of involvement of citizens** and the

general **attachment to the status quo**, the **absence of targets and monitoring systems**, the lack of experts, **know-how, and resources in smaller regions** are also **internal barriers**. The **dependency on external financial support** but **also lack of awareness on possible funding and financing** opportunities as well as **insufficient regional autonomy** for climate related decisions and dependency on complex interrelations with frameworks in the neighbouring regions, the national level, and the continent have also hindering influence on the progress towards climate neutrality.

The effective **solutions** can best be achieved when the internal capabilities, such **as the openness to innovation and experimentation** as well as experience in the development of strategies for climate neutrality and expertise are provided within the region. **Smooth**

Participatory character, communication with the citizens including experts and all relevant stakeholders are also indispensable for a successful transformation. Internationalisation, communication, and networking outside the region as well as being part of a network together with other regions are a valuable source of information and support regarding success stories and avoidable mistakes.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

The recommendations for the EU underline the importance of **pursuing the ambitious goals** for climate neutrality and executing the agreed targets. It is advisable to strengthen the regions which are planning to actively contribute to these goals by creating a possibility for **direct EU support** for these initiatives. It should be also **possible to support the citizen driven initiatives for climate neutrality**. Further **sectoral regulations**, including taxonomy regulation, e.g. introducing stricter definition and demarcation of climate neutrality should be considered. **The competence of the EU** in the field of transformation towards climate neutrality in terms of standards and norms differentiated by the local/regional conditions



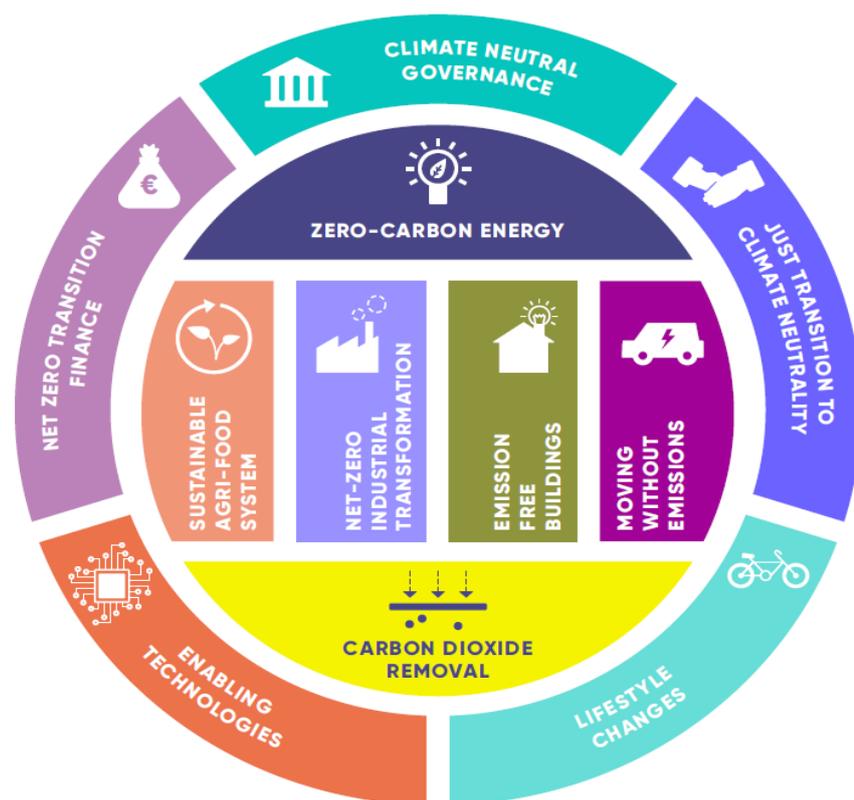
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should be further **increased**. **Clear and easy to find information on funding opportunities** should be broadly available. Limiting the transformation process by the funding period or semester should be avoided. For this purpose, the **continuity** of management on the regional and local level should be actively supported. The interruptions should be prevented by documentation and continuous transfer of knowledge within the region. To boost the transferability of solutions the **interregional exchange** should be further encouraged and facilitated. Many technological solutions for climate neutrality are still not existing, therefore applied science projects should be developed to foster the transition. It is recommendable to support the organisation of living labs to develop and try out technologies and solution.

Key areas for EU action

1. Strengthen the regions which are planning to actively contribute to a climate-neutral future with direct EU support.
2. Clear and easy to find information on funding opportunities should be broadly available.
3. The continuity of management on the regional and local level should be actively supported.
4. To boost the transferability of solutions the interregional exchange should be further encouraged and facilitated.

Figure: Elements of a climate neutral regional system



Source: Velten et al. (2021), p. 5.

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