

Resolution, 03 March 2020

Municipal climate and sustainable development strategy

Our initiative: targeted implementation of climate action and sustainable development

Climate action and sustainable development are **tasks for the whole of society which must be implemented at all tiers of government** in a targeted and socially equitable way. In 2015, Germany signed up to the **Paris Agreement** and the United Nations **2030 Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The municipalities are a game changer in efforts to achieve these goals, given their diverse areas of responsibility and multifaceted engagement. In this strategy paper, we show how the federal level can do more to support the municipalities and empower them to take effective measures in order to achieve the agreed goals. We take into consideration that many competences (e.g. responsibility for the municipalities' financial resources) rest with the *Länder* (Germany's federal states).

The Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda

An effective and socially equitable policy of transformation is the only way we can protect our global climate, conserve our life-supporting resources, and achieve truly sustainable development in social, environmental and economic terms.

To this end, policy-makers at all levels need to consistently uphold the goals of the Paris Agreement and stick to the **remaining greenhouse-gas budget**. Depending on the model used, that is 580 or 770 Gt of CO₂ (figures for the start of 2018) for a 50 per cent probability of limiting global warming to 1.5°Celsius.¹ Yet global greenhouse gas emissions are currently around 42 Gt per year, and rising. If emissions remained at this level, the budget would be used up within a few years.

One key idea which underpins the 2030 Agenda is looking at **social, environmental and economic interests and challenges** together in all political decisions. Goals have been formulated in areas such as poverty, health, education, gender equality, energy, industry and infrastructure, worldwide inequality among countries, cities and settlements, consumption and production patterns, climate action and biodiversity.

Together, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda thus offer a good foundation for creating synergies between the social and environmental challenges and for taking a **cross-sectoral perspective of the transformation at all levels**.

We believe, in line with the 2030 Agenda, that climate action must be implemented in a socially equitable way, together with measures to promote **equivalent living conditions** in all regions.²

¹ See: IPCC Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C, 2018, https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/SR15_SPM_version_report_LR.pdf

² See also: Resolution adopted by the Greens parliamentary group, Gleichwertige Lebensverhältnisse ermöglichen ("Facilitating equivalent living conditions"), 2019, <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/files/beschluesse/beschluss-gleichwertige-lebensverhaeltnisse.pdf>

1. Analysis of the current conditions for the implementation of climate and sustainable development goals

1.1. Municipal stakeholders as a dynamic game changer

The climate efforts made by cities, towns and municipalities are immensely important because the municipalities build, maintain and manage key economic, social and environmental infrastructures.³ They make decisions on social, housing and environmental policy and on related provisions at local level, and they are also involved in the implementation of national social and environmental policy. Municipalities have a wealth of **responsibilities**, such as urban, neighbourhood and regional development, allocation of land, local transport planning, creation of sustainable construction law, development planning with land use plans and construction plans and public procurement. As a result, municipalities are in a position to reduce emissions in key sectors in a socially compatible way. The municipalities are also responsible for public services. They are the authorities responsible for ensuring the local population's wellbeing. The **combination of social tasks and environmental challenges** means that municipalities have a vital role to play in shaping a **socially compatible transformation** towards sustainable development, climate action and climate change adaptation with the involvement of the local population.

Municipal decision-makers and civil stakeholders have the vital **local technical and regional knowledge** to tailor measures implementing the climate and sustainable development goals to local possibilities, needs and circumstances. The **municipal level has long been active in these areas**, across party lines, in various alliances and partnerships between **the public administration, municipal enterprises, local authority associations, the research community, social welfare bodies, NGOs and companies**. As a result, the municipalities have valuable experience and active networks. Proximity to the local population simplifies **local participation processes**. Cooperation with volunteers is also a tried and tested approach, and plays a significant role in the implementation of projects in the environmental and social field.

Today, with social **stakeholders from various movements** demonstrating a new energy and willingness to take action, there is enormous potential for joint action to be taken at all levels on climate protection and sustainable development. Supporting participatory structures fosters a greater sense of **identification with this task**, boosts **support within society for the transformation**, and creates a **broad basis of legitimacy, rooted in consensus democracy**, for measures in this context.

1.2. Acute problems faced by the municipalities in the implementation of sustainable development, climate action and climate change adaptation projects

The municipalities thus play a key role in the implementation and achievement of the goals which have been set, but in many places they lack the capacities they need to do so. The main problems faced by the municipalities in the implementation of climate and sustainable development goals are a **difficult financial situation** in some cases, a **shortage of skilled workers**, a **lack of posts** in the municipal administrative structures, and conflicting aims in the duties to be fulfilled at municipal

³ Many major parameters for future climate policy, such as the question of carbon pricing to encourage changes in behaviour, or the introduction of speed limits on motorways, are matters for regulation at EU or federal level and are not discussed here.

level. These bottlenecks in the municipal administrations also **slow down planning and consent procedures**.

In detail, the difficulties faced in the implementation of climate and sustainable development goals at municipal level involve the following points, in particular:

- **A shortage of skilled workers and short-staffed municipal administrations:** If, for example, building modernisation is to be increased five-fold, this also requires five times as many workers and far more specialists (planners, advisers, etc.) in this specific sector. There is currently a shortage of skilled labour in many fields. The workers required are not available in the labour market and are not currently in training. Particularly in the skilled crafts sector and the social sector, (municipal) planning and advisory services, the operation of local public transport, or landscape planning, there is a shortage of skilled workers to implement sustainable development, climate action and climate change adaptation measures. In addition, the administrations often lack staff specifically for cross-sectoral coordination of these measures and for funding applications, implementation and monitoring.
- **Difficult financial situation:** Many municipalities do not have the financial resources to implement necessary sustainable development, climate action and climate change adaptation measures. In some cases, existing funding programmes are not transparent, are overly bureaucratic, and have timeframes which are not coordinated with budgets. This makes it difficult for municipalities to access them, especially since – as mentioned above – the municipalities lack staff responsible for submitting applications. Many funding programmes require co-financing by the municipalities, which is impossible for municipalities in a weak financial position. According to our constitution, funding programmes must have a limited duration, and the funding must be progressively reduced. This does not provide planning security for municipal projects. The fact that many funding programmes are under-resourced is also a problem, as they are not set up, in quantitative terms, to ensure the timely achievement of climate neutrality, for example, in line with the Paris goals.

2. Potential solutions and calls for action

With targeted adjustments to the parameters for investment, the federal level can play an important role in supporting the municipalities. Our strategy concentrates on federal measures which will directly benefit the municipalities. This is because **climate action and sustainable development are tasks for the whole of society in which everyone must play a part**.

2.1. Creating synergies

The Federation, the *Länder* and the municipalities must drive forward change within their respective competences while defining the goals as a **joint task**. The aim of a good sustainable development and climate policy must be to establish **targets and measures** which are **binding for each level** and which are **sufficient** to implement the Paris and 2030 Agenda goals. **All policy measures must be focused on achieving this**. The Federation must create incentives for the municipalities to integrate the sustainable development goals in all areas where they are active.⁴ Another important factor in

⁴ See: German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), In our hands – strategic cornerstones for sustainable development in municipalities, 2019, https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/RNE_OB19_strategic-cornerstones-for-sustainable-development-in-municipalities.pdf

this is the local adaptation of the German Sustainable Development Strategy and the strategies of the *Länder* to reflect indicators for monitoring of the SDGs in the municipalities.⁵

2.2. Combining financial and technical support

When new tasks are established, the Federation has an obligation, based on the principle of concomitant financing, to make the necessary financial resources available to the *Länder* (and, indirectly, to the municipalities). This does not affect the fundamental responsibility of the *Länder* to ensure the municipalities have adequate financial resources. The Federation and the *Länder* must ensure the municipalities have the necessary funding to perform their tasks, so that they can actually implement sustainable development and take efficient climate action and can recruit the staff required for this. This is the only way to create **long-term planning and investment security**. If the Federation is to support municipalities, in particular, which have the potential to play a strong and active role, there is a need for **easily accessible information and advisory services** regarding the available funding⁶, non-bureaucratic funding application processes, assistance regarding the implementation options, and sufficient **financial resources**.

2.3. Implementation mechanism: restructuring the Federation's municipal funding programmes

The federal level has a range of programmes in the Energy and Climate Fund and in various departmental budgets within the federal budget which provide funding for social and environmental measures to support climate action, climate change adaptation and sustainable development in municipalities. Although some of the established programmes⁷ are important pillars for the work of the municipalities, the Federal Government's current funding landscape is, on the whole, overly complicated, not continuous enough, and not very efficient.

The **allocation structures** must be improved and restructured. To bring what are, in some cases, acute funding disbursement problems under control, **application and project accounting processes must be simplified, co-financing rules must be reviewed**, and funding programmes must be consolidated and made more user-friendly and long-term. It is important to give particular consideration to small municipalities and those in weaker financial positions⁸. One way of achieving this is to reduce the co-financing requirement to zero for lagging municipalities and municipalities in weak financial positions, for example.

In addition, with the introduction of a third Joint Programme for Regional Public Services, the Federation's funding policy can be restructured and targeted support can be provided to lagging regions. The Joint Programme's locally anchored regional management and regional budgets will

⁵ See: Bertelsmann-Stiftung, SDG-Indikatoren für Kommunen ("SDG indicators for municipalities"), 2018, https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/Projekte/Monitor_Nachhaltige_Kommune/SDG-Indikatoren_fuer_Kommunen_final.pdf

⁶ For example: developing and providing greater resources to the existing Service Centre for Municipal Climate Action (SK:KK) in the framework of the National Climate Initiative

⁷ For example: "National Climate Initiative", "Urban Development Assistance", "Service Agency Communities in One World"

⁸ See: Resolution adopted by the federal party conference of the Greens, Handeln – und zwar jetzt! Maßnahmen für ein klimaneutrales Land ("Act – and act now! Measures for a climate-neutral country"), 2019, https://antraege.gruene.de/44bdk/Handeln_und_zwar_jetzt_Massnahmen_fuer_ein_klimaneutrales_Land-30307/pdf

give people at local level – including at inter-municipal level – additional financial resources and means by which they can press for sustainable solutions on the part of institutions providing public services.⁹

2.4. Financing

At the same time, a **new investment programme** and an **increase in funding levels** are needed. Additional financial resources for investment in climate action and sustainable development can be drawn from a **credit-financed federal investment fund** which, as a special fund in the federal budget, is not subject to the budget's annuality principle. To ensure optimal management of the investments, the *Länder* and municipalities should receive a binding share of the funding from the federal investment fund¹⁰. The funding must be distributed in line with need.

2.5. Framework for allocating funding and implementing projects in the municipalities

The allocation of funding to the municipalities should be tied to the following criteria:

Qualified and binding local guiding principles

To receive funding, municipalities must produce qualified and binding local guiding principles, tailored to local conditions, for individual funding periods. Incentives must be created for a bottom-up approach to project development, in which the municipalities can decide on a low-threshold basis where measures and funding are needed. It is of vital importance that the funding guidelines provide leeway regarding the specific actions to be taken. Only in this way can the municipalities tailor the strategies and projects to local circumstances and needs. After all, the transformation opportunities and potential will be different in the Southern Black Forest region than on the North Sea coast. It is essential to support **cross-sectoral, holistic planning and implementation which is tailored to local conditions**.

Close cooperation with experts and **external evaluation of the implementation** are important for quality assurance purposes regarding the allocated funding. In the long term, (existing) instruments should be regularly reviewed in terms of their eco-social benefits, and adjusted where necessary. There is also a need for **measures to strengthen interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral work** at municipal level.¹¹

⁹ See: Resolution adopted by the Greens parliamentary group, Gleichwertige Lebensverhältnisse ermöglichen ("Facilitating equivalent living conditions", 2019, <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/files/beschluesse/beschluss-gleichwertige-lebensverhaeltnisse.pdf>)

¹⁰ See: Resolution adopted by the federal party conference of the Greens, Zukunftsfähig wirtschaften für nachhaltigen Wohlstand - Rahmen setzen für die sozial-ökologische Marktwirtschaft ("Sustainable economic activity for sustainable prosperity – setting a framework for the social and environmentally friendly market economy"), 2019, <https://cms.gruene.de/uploads/documents/Wirtschaft-Zukunftsfahig-wirtschaften-fuer-nachhaltigen-Wohlstand-Beschluss-BDK-11-2019.pdf>

¹¹ See: German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), In our hands – strategic cornerstones for sustainable development in municipalities; Mayoral Dialogue on the Sustainable City, 2019, www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/975274/1504348/9948b30cdaa5f59c965b12dfe6910ef9/2018-08-23-zuschriften-dialog-institutionen-data.pdf?download=1

Federal measures to strengthen municipal approaches

The municipalities are responsible for urban, regional and transport planning, as well as for municipal utilities and enterprises (energy supply, waste and sewage disposal, local public transport, etc.), and they own buildings, forest estates and vehicle fleets; as a result, they control key levers which can be used to bring about a transformation in terms of environmental policy. However, an ambitious implementation requires the municipalities' competences and scope for action to be adjusted in some areas.

The measures listed below provide an overview of the necessary transformations and also offer a **blueprint for potential funding projects** in the various areas of municipal responsibility:

a. Digital solutions for more sustainable development, climate action and climate change adaptation

From smart, connected transport to intelligent infrastructure, a large number of **digital applications are available which can play a key role in helping municipalities** to achieve their sustainable development and climate goals, or to adapt to climate change. Not every goal can be achieved using digital solutions, and not every digital project contributes to the goals, but without digital innovation it is almost impossible to address many of the challenges facing municipalities – whether in transport policy, civic participation or the energy-efficient running of municipal buildings. Accordingly, **sustainable digital solutions must always be considered in connection with all of the following approaches**; their actual effectiveness must be examined and examples of best practice must be circulated.

b. Energy policy: 100% renewable

Around the world and across Germany, energy production is the biggest source of climate-damaging greenhouse gases. The reason for this is the intensive use of fossil fuels, including for energy generation (coal, oil, gas). Action can be taken at municipal level against this, and in support of the energy transition, especially if municipalities have their own utilities. In total, municipal enterprises produce around 15%¹² of Germany's power supply:

- Shifting to renewable energy for municipal utilities and developing energy strategies with the aim of 100% renewable municipal energy supplies (including municipal heat planning for heat networks with waste heat utilisation)
- Using public buildings to generate renewable energy
- Improving energy efficiency and reducing energy consumption in public buildings and institutions, as well as in private households
- Developing decentralised municipal storage capacity for electricity generated from renewable sources
- Supporting and cooperating with citizens' energy companies (e.g. cooperatives)

c. Urban development policy, urban and regional development, land use

Urban development policy, and urban and regional development, are municipal areas of responsibility which have a huge potential to shape developments, as they offer scope for action in

¹² See: German Association of Local Utilities (VKU), Figures, data and facts for 2019, Local public utilities and waste management companies in figures, https://www.vku.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Verbandsseite/Ueber_Uns/VKU_ZahlenDatenFakten_2019_EN.pdf

land management (sustainable development plans), the design and maintenance of infrastructure and green spaces, and housing policy (multi-functional spaces):

- A sustainable (new) approach to land use: **sensitive infill development** with a particular focus on avoiding land sealing, creating fresh air corridors (air quality and air exchange)¹³ and taking compensatory measures (restoration of previous surfaces, tree planting) when new land sealing takes place
- Environmental upgrading of open and green spaces in urban areas to help cool towns and cities, promote biodiversity¹⁴ and boost quality of life, and to this end: adaptation of the funding guidelines and inclusion of networks (roads, green belts) which are of importance for the town or city as a whole in the list of criteria
- Social and inclusive neighbourhood development based on current urban development assistance programmes (together with housing-policy measures to create affordable housing)
- Creation of incentives for jobs in decentralised areas in order to reduce commuter flows and strengthen regions¹⁵
- Climate-friendly neighbourhood modernisation
- Driving forward the heat transition (particularly in the building stock; appointment of neighbourhood managers, mandatory standards for new buildings equivalent to at least the KfW-40 standard)¹⁶
- Modification and conversion of traffic spaces for individual car traffic: reducing the number of traffic lanes and parking spaces for motor vehicles frees up potential space for alternative means of transport and green spaces

At federal and *Land* level, spatial planning must be made fit for the future, including by developing new participatory instruments for spatial planning to mediate usage conflicts and bring all stakeholders to the table in good time.

d. Transport and mobility policy

The municipalities must be given the opportunity to shape the forthcoming transition in the field of mobility through their responsibility for local public transport¹⁷ and for road and parking management. In other words, they are responsible for deciding on the distribution of traffic spaces between the various transport users – cycling, pedestrian traffic, local public transport, individual (motorised) car traffic and, in some cases, ferry and port traffic – and thus for deciding on the modal

¹³ See: Green emergency programme, Land for Development Campaign – One Hundred Thousand Roofs and Homes, 2019, <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/themen/bauen-wohnen-stadtentwicklung/dachausbau-statt-flaechenfrass>

¹⁴ See: Green programme, Urban development assistance for green and blue infrastructures for resilient towns and cities worth living in, 2019, <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/themen/bauen-wohnen-stadtentwicklung/nachhaltige-staedtebaufoerderung-fuer-zukunftsfeste-staedte>

¹⁵ See: Green motion on equivalent living conditions and the Green Pact for Regions Worth Living In, 2019, <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/themen/entwicklung-laendlicher-raeume/gleichwertige-lebensverhaeltnisse-ueberall-schaffen-pakt-fuer-lebenswerte-regionen>

¹⁶ See: Green action programme, Fair Heat, 2020, <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/themen/bauen-wohnen-stadtentwicklung/klimafreundlich-wohnen>; see also: PolitikBrief, Gebäude-Energiewende: Welche Maßnahmen jetzt notwendig sind ("PolicyNote, Energy transition for buildings: what measures are now necessary"), 2019, https://www.geea.info/fileadmin/Downloads/Politikbrief/geea_PB_2019_final.pdf

¹⁷ The *Länder* are responsible for rail transport.

balance. If the transition in the field of transport is to be successful, mobility and urban development must be looked at together, e.g. in strategies such as “Municipalities of short distances”. Relevant measures include:

- Strengthening local public transport, in particular by implementing a regional mobility guarantee which gives everyone affordable access to a regular and reliable local public transport service
- Implementing announced measures to speed up planning in the field of local public transport, reactivating and electrifying more railway lines, and expanding funding programmes for refurbishment, new construction and upgrading of local public transport
- Upgrading railway stations to create mobility hubs which are accessible throughout and which offer improved conditions for users, particularly in rural areas (renovation and revitalisation, integration of railway station neighbourhoods in urban development); these hubs should offer various new mobility services and solutions, from bus and rail services to taxis, car sharing services and bikes to hire
- Upgrading the network of cycle paths and coordinating activities with the Federation and *Länder*, e.g. creating cycle parking facilities at stations (including multi-storey cycle parks and cycle lockers), increasing the options to take bicycles on local and long-distance transport, and developing private ride-sharing networks and “rideshare benches”, particularly in rural areas
- Reorganising the road network and traffic management to bring about improvements for pedestrians and cyclists by introducing municipal parking space management, reducing the number of parking spaces and increasing the price of parking in urban areas, excluding high-emission vehicle types, and/or introducing an urban charging scheme
- Introducing a 30 km/h speed limit on all roads in built-up areas. The municipalities may raise the speed limit to 50 km/h in places where this does not create an additional risk
- Promoting a further shift towards electric cars, in particular by adding charging points with the aid of federal funding programmes, and through the application of the Electric Mobility Act (*Elektromobilitätsgesetz*) in the municipalities
- Transforming maritime and inland water transport: municipal ports and ferry services must also rapidly transition to climate-neutral, zero-emission and environmentally friendly technologies. Research and regulatory incentives must be increased to this end. Land use at ports must be optimised, where possible

e. Construction

Municipal construction offers opportunities for local decision-makers to significantly reduce emissions on municipal building sites via construction materials, building types and energy sources. The funding programme can be used to support climate-neutral and circular construction, as well as climate-neutral and energy-efficient buildings. This requires:

- The introduction of sustainability criteria for the award of public construction contracts, with established standards for refurbishments (KfW-55) and new buildings (at least KfW-40)
- The expansion of energy-related modernisations of public and private buildings, and the implementation of the neighbourhood-based approach to energy-related modernisations
- The prioritisation of “passive house” and “energy plus” construction

- The use of renewable and resource-conserving construction materials, for example through the introduction of municipal requirements for (public) construction, such as a minimum proportion of biogenic or recycled materials
- A requirement for photovoltaic systems to be added on roofs in the case of full refurbishments or new buildings
- Efficient development planning and strengthening of the building authority
- The inclusion of the building site's CO₂ footprint in public tenders, with the aim of achieving a CO₂-free building site

f. Sustainable public procurement

Unfortunately, environmental, social and human rights criteria are still too rarely used in public procurement, although the Act against Restraints on Competition (*Gesetz gegen Wettbewerbsbeschränkungen*) has permitted their use for contracts both above and below the EU thresholds since 2016. We therefore want to create a binding legal requirement for environmental, social and human rights criteria to be used in public procurement. Furthermore, in compliance with European law, contracts should be awarded to companies which are covered by a collective agreement or pay collectively agreed wages. The Federation must also significantly strengthen its advisory services for sustainable procurement.

g. Agriculture and regional food strategies

Regional food strategies can be implemented in facilities offering group catering (schools, nurseries, hospitals, etc.) via mandatory criteria in the award of public contracts. Encouraging the use of regional, seasonal and organic food can, at the same time, support and develop high-quality agriculture in the region. Not only is a sustainable food strategy important in terms of people's health, it is also valuable for the economic development of the surrounding area and the improvement of urban-rural relations:

- Supporting the municipalities in the development of regional food strategies
- Federal knowledge-sharing via tried and tested instruments
- Collecting and providing data on the interaction between urban areas and surrounding areas in order to map resource flows across administrative boundaries

h. Forestry

Municipal forest estates are important as municipally controlled forests for recreation, water protection and, in particular, climate protection. Municipal forests have the potential to become strategic pioneers in the creation of climate-resilient forests with a high level of biodiversity. This requires:

- Measures to increase the diversity of indigenous and European tree species, and to facilitate natural regeneration, in particular by ensuring game stocks adapted to ecosystem conditions and soil-preserving harvesting practices
- Conversion to alternative and innovative close-to-nature management strategies (e.g. with a focus on high-value timber) and to strict environmental certification systems (FSC, Naturland) by the Federation and the *Länder*, tied to environmental criteria
- More attractive integrative nature conservation measures with more long-term planning security as a result of a restructuring of contract-based nature conservation
- Establishment of a programme to support tree planting campaigns by the public involving indigenous tree species (especially rare species)

i. Waste and resource management, street cleansing, supply of drinking water, and wastewater treatment

The sectors of waste and resource management and street cleansing touch on various areas, such as support for life-cycle management:

- Facilities for collecting and recycling garden and green waste
- Construction of anaerobic digestion plants (potential for gas production)
- Changes to street cleansing to reflect environmental factors, e.g. in the case of the removal of fallen leaves (conversion from petrol leaf-blowers to insect/nature-conserving methods, leaving fallen leaves on green roadside verges)
- Information campaigns about waste avoidance, waste separation, repairs, and recycling and re-use

In the field of resource management via the municipal water works and wastewater treatment plants, information campaigns can likewise provide information about the dangers of microplastics, hormone and chemical contamination, and medical residues in water, in order to promote avoidance of these types of contamination. Other necessary aspects of the transformation are:

- Improving efficiency in the supply of drinking water and wastewater disposal (systemic optimisation)
- Using sewage sludge as an energy/raw material resource (phosphorus recovery)

j. Science and research

In many places, municipalities, civil-society initiatives and local businesses are working together with scientific and research institutions to develop solutions, e.g. in living labs. This pioneering work can show the way forward for municipalities across the country and serve as a blueprint for nationwide implementation:

- Expanding living labs and innovation spaces with the aim of developing socially equitable and sustainable solutions, including in the sectors set out above
- Establishing interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research initiatives and socio-environmental innovations in the field of sustainable development
- Strengthening citizen science initiatives, particularly in cooperation with schools, local environmental education centres, museums and other non-school places of learning, in order to bring scientists and interested members of the public together in joint research projects

k. Environmental provisions and execution of environmental legislation

The federal level adopts legislation on environmental protection which the municipalities are responsible for monitoring and executing. However, the financial and human resources that municipalities will require are often overlooked. In future, laws of this kind should include a commitment to cover the costs of monitoring and execution at municipal level. Federal communication strategies are also needed to make it easier to understand the significance of the legislation and the consequences if it is not executed.

2.6. Adjustments to implementation capacities

Changes in the public administration and cooperation across different tiers of government

The Federation and the *Länder* must significantly expand the services they offer municipalities in relation to the **development of municipal sustainable development strategies**, in the form of advice, dialogues, and the sharing and transfer of information. In this context, it is particularly important to make the sustainable development goals of the German Sustainable Development Strategy and the sustainable development strategies of the *Länder* measurable and understandable at municipal level, for example by translating national goals into specific goals for the municipal level.

Particularly at municipal level, the necessary **posts must be systematically created** for the **municipal and administrative coordination of the many fields of work and areas of responsibility** associated with the implementation of sustainable development goals and climate action goals. The administrations' access to relevant digital implementation solutions must also be ensured.

At the same time, however, the entire administration must be involved to ensure that the transformation is advanced and made visible in all areas. To this end, all relevant staff should be involved in the development of municipal strategies at an early stage.

Labour market, initial and continuing training

To allow action to be taken in all of the areas specified above, **additional capacity in line with demand** is required as well as **technical improvements** to structures in vocational training and higher education, including in skilled craft occupations, transport operators, landscape planning and management, urban planning, transport planning, resource management, and energy generation and the energy supply sector. The Federation, the *Länder* and the municipalities must work together in order to counter current and future shortages of skilled labour.

The introduction of **Education for Sustainable Development in all areas of education** is also essential.

In other words, municipalities must be equipped to support the next generation of apprentices in the region and to ensure access to vocational schools and to companies providing vocational training.

Participatory structures

Consistently and actively involving the local population, local activist groups and environmental organisations in the municipal transformation process can ensure social support for climate and sustainable development projects and thus build a new momentum. To this end, the Federation can strengthen and upgrade civic engagement at all levels in the social, environmental and sustainable development fields, including through the new federal foundation for engagement and voluntary work. This will benefit the strong and experienced structures for voluntary work at municipal level, in particular.

Planning and consent procedures¹⁸

There are several reasons why planning and consent procedures often take a very long time, or even too long. Over the past 30 years or so, the number of staff working in this area has been roughly halved. The complicated bureaucratic structures also slow down the implementation of projects in many cases. If climate and sustainable development goals are to be implemented efficiently, however, the municipalities must be given the resources they need to perform their tasks, enabling them to recruit more staff to clear the years-long investment backlog. In addition, simpler statutory provisions are needed so that the desired effects do not take decades to materialise.¹⁹ Procedures from the fields of climate action and sustainable development must be prioritised in order to accelerate efforts to implement the climate and sustainable development goals. However, the acceleration of planning and consent structures must not be pursued at the expense of nature conservation or civic involvement. Active involvement and participatory rights at an early stage help to minimise conflicts (and thus to avert potential legal disputes), improve planning and speed up implementation.

3. A new vision for change

A transformation at municipal level which includes a shift to consistent climate action and sustainable development creates a **high level of added value in economic and social terms**, and also significantly reduces environmental costs. Society's support for such measures and changes is also rising, not least because the effects of climate change are being felt more and more clearly. The transformation can be a success story – one written by the municipalities.

The programmes set out in the fields of energy, buildings and urban development will lead to **new jobs and the further development, reorganisation and upgrading of vocational qualifications**, first and foremost in the skilled crafts sector. In general, many jobs will be created at a wide range of different skill levels.

Opportunities to participate actively in shaping the transformation process can result in local residents identifying more strongly and positively with the place where they live, and at the same time open up careers in the field of municipal climate action and sustainable development.

Financing climate measures at local level can **boost the municipalities in economic terms**. Local businesses and offices will primarily **benefit** from this as implementation partners. An **economic stimulus programme of this kind for local small and medium-sized businesses** will encourage many municipalities, within a short space of time, to become part of the municipal climate and sustainable development strategy.

In this way, we can make implementing and achieving the climate and sustainable development goals a task for the whole of society.

¹⁸ See: Aktionsplan für besseres und schnelleres Planen ("Action plan for better and faster planning"), https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/fileadmin/media/gruenebundestag_de/themen_az/mobilitaet/pdf/aktionsplan-hofreiter-schnelleres-planen.pdf

¹⁹ See: Resolution adopted by the Greens parliamentary group, Neue Planungskultur im Verkehr ("New planning culture in transport"), 2018, <https://www.gruene-bundestag.de/files/beschluesse/beschluss-planungsbeschleunigung.pdf>