

# Towards a National Platform: Türkiye

A case study from NetZeroCities

**Authors:** Deniz Celik Bulgurlu (Climate-KIC), Olga Krajewska (ICLEI) and Hamid Yammine (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid)

*Within Europe's borders, and geographically part of it, there is a country that is making enormous efforts and ambitions to achieve climate neutrality by 2030 and beyond: Türkiye.*

Türkiye has proven itself to be a country committed to the European Union's Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission through the active engagement of its cities. Proof of this is the commitment to the mission shown by the cities of **İstanbul and Izmir, which have already obtained the label**, but it is also worth highlighting the high level of participation by other Turkish cities in NetZeroCities programmes and activities open to mission-minded cities such as the Twinning Learning Programme, where up to eleven Turkish cities have benefited from exchanges with other cities, learning from their pilot projects and good practices, and sharing their good practices in return!

## **Context and Starting Point**

Within Europe's borders, and geographically part of it, there is a country that is making enormous efforts and ambitions to achieve climate neutrality by 2030 and beyond: Türkiye. These efforts are not only at the national and city levels, but also seek to connect with the European sphere, specifically through projects such as **NetZeroCities** and **CAPACITIES**, among others. The first point of contact between the European Mission of cities and Türkiye was through the Capacities project, a project that works closely with NetZeroCities. At that time, the main partner was **TÜBİTAK**, a research and innovation agency in Turkey that seeks funding opportunities for cities in the country.

At this point, it is important to note that Türkiye, despite not being part of the European Union, has the possibility of accessing European funds through various cooperation agreements. Türkiye is a country associated with the EU, with an Association Agreement (Ankara Agreement of 1963) and a Customs Union since 1995. In this regard, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and climate change Environment and the Ministry Foreign Affairs are essential in establishing the connection with the European Union. More recently, this engagement has translated into the emergence of a national ecosystem for climate neutral cities. [Climate-Neutral Cities Network \(İNŞA\)](#) was initiated following needs from cities to create this network, and this need was supported through, NetZeroCities City Expert Support Facility (CESF). In principle, this platform will operate between August 2025 and August 2026. Funding amounts to €21,930, and the lead partner is the Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU). While modest in scale, İNŞA represents a strategic step toward embedding Mission-oriented approaches within Türkiye's municipal landscape and strengthening long-term collaboration between Turkish cities and the wider European climate-neutrality ecosystem.

## **Origin and Key Actors Involved**

At the NetZeroCities level, the first thing to mention is that Istanbul and Izmir joined the project right from the start. To date, both Istanbul and Izmir have completed their Climate City Contract and have

already obtained their mission labels. Based on the mission's relationship with these two cities, discussions began about the possibility of establishing a national ecosystem in Türkiye, trying to find the best model for it. This conversation continues today, as we strive to find the model that works best for cities. It is important to note that coordination between NetZeroCities and CAPACITIES has been essential, supported by clearly identified focal points within both consortia who work in regular and direct contact. Through ongoing collaboration and joint discussions with partners, this coordination has enabled aligned support mechanisms, continuous practitioner-led knowledge exchange between Mission Cities and mission-minded cities, and the effective transfer of core Mission concepts into practice.

Then, at one point, the [Union of Turkish Municipalities](#) became part of the dialogue as well, which has greatly enhanced its value. At the same time, local knowledge and mission cities' activities and experience did strengthen Marmara Municipalities Union's possible role. NetZeroCities has contracted Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU) as a local partner to strengthen national engagement, city-to-city collaboration, and build a national network to facilitate a capacity-building programme in Türkiye. These connections have enabled some progress to be made towards the goal of building a national ecosystem around the decarbonisation of cities by 2030. And among the most recent events, Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU) has undertaken the national coordination of the City Expert Support Facility under the NetZeroCities programme. Through this initiative, MMU aims to foster knowledge exchange, collaboration, and capacity development mechanisms that support municipalities in their transition toward climate neutrality. For this purpose **Climate-Neutral Cities Network (İNŞA)** of Türkiye has been established to bring together both leading and newly engaged municipalities on a common transformation path toward a climate-neutral future through a comprehensive capacity-building and networking programme.

### ***Current Stage and Vision***

Currently, fifty-five Turkish cities participate in the platform. Participating cities are divided into accelerators and newcomers, with accelerators being Mission cities or twin cities participating in the [Twinning Learning Programme](#). In the Turkish context, local governments hold stronger and more explicit mandates in the field of climate adaptation, particularly through urban planning, water management, disaster risk reduction, and infrastructure resilience. Their mitigation-related competences, on the other hand, such as in energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, and waste management, are more indirect and often depend on national frameworks or inter-institutional cooperation. Nevertheless, municipalities are increasingly developing their own mitigation actions at the local scale, contributing to the broader national decarbonization agenda through localized solutions.

**İNŞA** represents a national community in Türkiye designed specifically for municipalities under the City Expert Support Facility. It provides local governments with access to the knowledge, guidance, and peer-learning opportunities they need throughout their climate-neutrality journey. In this process, MMU acts as a facilitator—supporting municipalities in aligning their efforts with the European Green Deal objectives and fostering collaboration, capacity development, and knowledge exchange at the national level. By the end of the programme, **İNŞA** is expected to enable municipalities to:

- *Their institutional capacity, planning, and monitoring systems in the transition toward climate neutrality.*

- Adopt a framework aligned with the NetZeroCities approach in local data management, target setting, and action planning processes.
- Establish a lasting network of knowledge exchange and cooperation among municipalities.
- Enhance the national visibility of the climate-neutral cities approach in Türkiye.

### ***Challenges and Enabling Conditions***

- One of the main challenges in the Turkish ecosystem will be to integrate the efforts of the various initiatives currently underway, with the aim of ensuring that they all pull in the same direction. Through the CESF activity, the first step was taken and it is aimed to mobilise key partners involved across relevant programmes. They are invited to join the dialogue and design process of the network from the start with the intention of fostering shared ownership, strengthening coordination, and reducing the risk of duplicate efforts across initiatives.
- At the same time, many Turkish municipalities are working to understand the implications of the new Climate Law and how it intersects with their existing climate commitments and local action plans. As the national framework becomes more defined, the central challenge will be ensuring effective vertical coordination so that local climate strategies, land-use planning, infrastructure investments, and emissions targets are fully aligned with national requirements. Achieving this alignment will demand substantial technical expertise, adequate financial resources, and clear regulatory guidance. Strong institutional cooperation and targeted capacity-building support will therefore be crucial to enable cities to translate the law into concrete, measurable action on the ground.
- Furthermore, CESF funding for **İNŞA** ends in August 2026 with a possibility to extend for one more year. It will be a significant challenge to see how the work carried out can be continued and how it can continue to be linked to other initiatives.

### ***Future Steps and Opportunities***

**In 2026, Antalya (Türkiye) will be one of the venues for COP31**, which represents a tremendous opportunity to show the world what the country is doing to move towards climate neutrality. For Cohort 4 of the Twinning Learning Programme, two new Turkish cities are joining the NetZeroCities ecosystem: **Samsun and Mersin Yenisehir**. The participation of these cities in the exchange of lessons learned with pilot cities can serve as a bridge for continuing to work with Türkiye's national ecosystem. On the other hand, **Turkish cities have been very active in participating in learning resources recently offered by NetZeroCities**. There is an opportunity for growth in both directions, both for the national platform and for the organisations working on the project, which increasingly understand the complexities of a national context.

### ***Transferable lessons for other platforms***

Türkiye is by far the largest country in terms of geographical area within NetZeroCities, and the fact that they are making the effort to build a national ecosystem of cities is not only inspiring, but can also serve as a benchmark for other countries where such efforts are not yet possible.

At the same time, the use of a NetZeroCities CESF as a tool to kick-start a national ecosystem is something that can serve as an example in other countries where such efforts have not yet materialised.

All of this also allows for better use of the knowledge resources and synergies generated at the NetZeroCities level.

Another interesting aspect that can be learned from Türkiye is the connection created between NetZeroCities and CAPACITIES in the country, which is not particularly advanced in many countries where both projects operate. The way in which this has been achieved here could even be replicated with other projects with which other memorandums of understanding have been signed.