Call for expressions of interest to join the Urban Transitions Mission

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

By, and for cities

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Introduction

The Urban Transitions Mission (UTM) is launching a new call for cities to join the Mission’s City cohort. A first cohort of 48 cities is already engaging with UTM since December 2022, to demonstrate integrated pathways towards holistic, people-centred urban transitions built around clean energy and innovative net-zero carbon solutions.

The Mission is now looking for 250 new pioneering cities to join by the end of 2024. Cities are invited to apply online and express their interest to join the Mission’s cohort through a brief questionnaire reflecting the assessment criteria, which can be found here, on the UTM website – www.urbantransitionsmission.org.

The expressions of interest received will be reviewed on a rolling basis. The new cities engaging in the cohort are expected to commit to work with the Mission starting from the end 2023/early 2024, depending on their needs, and work until at least until 2025.

These Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) aim to inform cities, Mission Innovation member countries, and stakeholders of the Urban Transitions Mission (UTM) and to clarify this selection and engagement process.

The FAQs and the Online Application Form for cities are available at: Join The Cohort – UTM (urbantransitionsmission.org)
1. About the Urban Transitions Mission

What is Mission Innovation?

The Mission Innovation’s Urban Transitions Mission has been launched in the framework of Mission Innovation, which is a global initiative of 23 countries and the European Commission (on behalf of the European Union) catalysing a decade of action and investment in research, development and demonstration to make clean energy affordable, attractive and accessible for all.

Launched alongside the Paris Agreement in 2015, Mission Innovation (MI) brings together governments, public authorities, corporates, investors and academia to enable widely affordable clean energy globally and achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. Mission Innovation is the main intergovernmental platform addressing clean energy innovation through action-oriented cooperation. Mission Innovation’s members represent over 90% of global public investments in clean energy innovation and have increased their annual investments by USD$5.8 billion since 2015.

Mission Innovation 2.0 was launched on 2 June 2021 as a global initiative catalysing a decade of action and investment in research, development and demonstration to make clean energy affordable, attractive and accessible for all. This will accelerate progress towards the Paris Agreement goals and pathways to net zero.

What is MI’s Urban Transitions Mission (UTM)?

The Urban Transitions Mission (UTM) was launched at the COP26 in November 2021 with the aim to increase the capacity of cities worldwide, empowering them to shape urban transitions based on robust knowledge and a strong net-zero community of support and exchange. The UTM frames itself as THE broker of solutions and knowledge, connecting cities and existing initiatives, guidance and knowledge, while also identifying gaps and challenges to reach the goal or net-zero urban transition globally. Thanks to increased capacity and access to knowledge, cities engaging with the UTM will be able to mobilise their inherent strength and the potential of their communities – and develop their own customised solutions to effectively transition to net-zero. The Mission aims to close the gap between research, development and deployment on systemic transition pathways to net-zero, resilient and human-centred cities through multi-level, multi-sectoral, and outcome-oriented partnerships.

How long is the UTM intended to last?

Mission Innovation activities aim at accelerating net-zero by 2030, which is therefore the year of the Mission’s goal.
The UTM will continue to engage and further collaborate with partners and stakeholders, as highlighted in the *Joint Statement of the Urban Transitions Mission*. After the first period of activities until 2025, the UTM may extend its activities for five more years to continue to support the delivery of the mission’s goal by 2030.

**What is the Goal of the UTM?**

The Mission is already working with a *cohort of 48 ambitious cities* worldwide since November 2022 to demonstrate integrated pathways towards holistic, people-centred urban transitions built around clean energy and innovative net-zero carbon solutions. Thanks to a progressive engagement starting from the end of 2023/ beginning of 2024, an additional group of 250 will engage with the UTM to further implement holistic urban transitions. Cities will work together with the Mission and its *Global Innovation Alliance* to test and validate these pathways towards net-zero, inspiring cities across world regions on their journey towards decarbonisation.

The Mission will mobilise decision makers across all levels of government to prioritise climate-neutral and net-zero pathways enabled by clean energy and systemic innovation across all sectors and in urban governance. By accelerating capacity-building and closing the gap between research, development and deployment, the Mission will empower cities to adopt innovative solutions and help reach the tipping points in the cost and scale of those solutions for urban transitions.

The global replication potential of the partnership can lead to tipping points in the cost and scale of integrated climate-resilient and accessible solutions across sectors and across world regions.

**What is the UTM Global Innovation Alliance?**

UTM mobilises a Global Innovation Alliance (GIA) of partners, and national governments to support cities to develop, pilot, and scale innovative solutions and approaches for urban transitions.

GIA members commit to share solutions, needs and lessons learnt, and co-create innovative approaches to support UTM cities globally to be net-zero climate, resilient, and people-centred. GIA members will make their knowledge and expertise available, connecting with cities across the globe via the Mission’s global knowledge exchange centre. They will help replicate best practices, adapt and leverage solutions across all sectors, as well as address identified needs and gaps.

Find out more about GIA members [here](#).

**What is the difference between the Urban Transitions Mission and the EU Cities Mission?**
The EU Mission: Climate–Neutral and Smart Cities is one of the EU Missions, initiatives in the framework of the Horizon Europe research and innovation programme for the years 2021–2027 as a new way to bring concrete solutions to some of our greatest challenges. EU Missions combine research and innovation with new forms of governance and collaboration, as well as citizens engagement. The EU Cities Mission will involve local authorities, citizens, businesses, investors as well as regional and national authorities to deliver 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030, and ensure that these cities act as experimentation and innovation hubs to enable all European cities to follow suit by 2050.

Both the EU Cities Mission and the UTM benefit from the support of the European Commission, which, in the case of the Urban Transitions Mission, is a co-lead partnership together with Global Covenant of mayors and JPI Urban Europe. Synergies and complementarity among the two Missions will be continuously sought, while working towards the same goal of achieving net-zero as quickly as possible, by 2030.

For EU cities participating in both EU Mission and UTM, the UTM will strive to strengthen and complement the support provided by the EU Mission as much as possible. The two Missions align and connect as follows:

- Both Missions are focused on the urban transitions and the promotion of innovative approaches, mobilising local governments, citizens, businesses, investors as well as regional and national governments for a cross-sectoral, holistic approach.
- Both Missions engage with a selected number of cities that will receive the support in delivering on their journey to climate neutrality. Since 2022, 100+12 European cities are engaged in the EU Cities Mission, while 48 global cities, from 24 countries worldwide, have joined the UTM.
- The Missions will work together to identify barriers and remove red tape to accelerate implementation and upscale innovation. They will work to speed up access to funding by providing capacity building to develop sound investment plans, supporting existing project pipelines, and strengthening collaboration with national governments, private sector and community stakeholders.
- The two Missions will pursue a joint effort to provide complementary support to the 10 cities taking part in both initiatives (Aarhus, Cluj–Napoca, Klagenfurt am Wörthersee, Lappeenranta, Lisbon, Łódź, Mannheim, Turku, Valencia and Vitoria–Gasteiz), and will expands their cooperation to offer meaningful assistance to the cities that will join both Mission following the expansion of the UTM city cohort with 250 new cities, from the end of 2024.
- Cities in both Missions will have access to a shared space for knowledge transfer and capacity building: the Urban transitions Mission Centre – an online platform dedicated to facilitate exchange and knowledge transfer among cities engaged with both Missions, providing a networking space and allowing them to exchange on coordinated and integrated implementation of the actions supported via the two Missions.
The **UTM will not require cities to follow any specific or new methodological approach**, but will focus on helping cities to revise their existing climate and energy action plans, to prioritise actions according to scientific data and evidence, and bridge implementation gaps to reach net-zero, based on innovation needs.

The UTM will broker access to solutions, in collaboration with a [Global Innovation Alliance](#) of partners offering support, resources and expertise (e.g., IRENA, UNFCCC Global Innovation Hub, World Economic Forum, among others). The UTM will provide cities joining its cohort with the opportunity to apply innovation, test, pilot and scale up solutions, and to access dedicated R&I funding and capacity building – these opportunities will be delivered in collaboration with national governments, private sector and global institutions, as well as by piloting research and innovation on the ground in collaboration with other Missions.

An overview of the main connection points and differences is given in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EU Cities Mission</th>
<th>Urban Transitions Mission</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope</strong></td>
<td>Cities from European Union and associated countries</td>
<td>Cities signatories of the Global Covenant of Mayors, worldwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>City cohort</strong></td>
<td>100 cities + 12 from EU associated countries</td>
<td>50 cities (2022) + 250 cities (2023/2024)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>R&amp;I, collaboration, system approach</td>
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<td><strong>Timeline</strong></td>
<td>2021 – 2030</td>
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<td><strong>City pathways/ methodologies</strong></td>
<td>City Climate Contract</td>
<td>Existing plan enhanced via the urban transition net-zero framework</td>
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**Are cities part of the EU Cities Mission eligible to apply for the UTM?**

Yes, any city responding to the eligibility criteria of the call can apply. The UTM welcomes EU Mission cities and look forward to both the knowledge they can transfer from their work with other EU cities into this global mission, as well as the opportunity for them to share back with other EU Mission Cities what they have learned from their global peers.

**Do cities part of the EU Cities Mission need to apply to join the UTM?**

Yes. All cities interested in joining the UTM must apply by filling in the [online form](#).
2. Cities’ engagement in the Mission

What does the UTM offer to cities?

- A framework designed to help cities strengthen their own climate plans and strategies, prioritise actions, and reap the benefits of systemic approaches to reach their net-zero target.
- A global platform for knowledge exchange, that provides cities with direct access to good practices, integrated solutions, peer-learning opportunities and guidance for each step of their city climate journey.
- Help to identify needs-based solutions in partnerships with the UTM Global Innovation Alliance, other Missions and in collaboration with other cities across the world, also granting high international visibility.
- The opportunity to apply innovation, test, pilot and scale up solutions and to access dedicated R&I funding and capacity building via the MiCall series.
- Opportunities to engage with the national level to foster innovation, access climate finance and collaborative governance models.

Please note that the UTM does not provide direct financial resources to the cities of the cohort to engage with the Mission or implement their actions.

What commitment is expected of a city participating in the UTM?

- Revising their existing climate and energy action plans and prioritising actions to reach net-zero. Cities will showcase their innovation and progress via existing reporting commitments.
- Serving as both a solution provider to support net-zero pathways – inspiring, applying solutions, and acting as an innovation hub – identifying R&I gaps and challenges to help other cities in the urban transition to net-zero.
- Participating in the Annual Innovation Summit and engaging in knowledge-transfer and capacity building opportunities with other UTM cities to accelerate their journey to net-zero.
- Engaging in dialogue with the national government and the Mission’s Global Innovation Alliance.

Will participating cities receive a set budget of financial support?

No, the Mission doesn’t have a set budget to support cities directly, at this time.

Nonetheless, the Mission will offer cities opportunities to explore access to finance and investigate innovative financing mechanisms via a Urban Transitions Mission Centre.
(UTMC) launched in May 2023. Cities engaged in the UTM will also have opportunities to access dedicated R&I funding and capacity building via the MiCall series.

In addition, the UTM will collaborate closely with partners of the Global Innovation Alliance (including MI Member governments, city partner organisations, private sector, urban research & innovation clusters, finance institutions and youth organisations) to accelerate implementation of the city cohort’s climate action, and identify related resources and knowledge.

Identified actions may foresee an active engagement with the Global Innovation Alliance (GIA), as well with private sector partners with the aim to facilitate access to funding, increase capacity of city officials to develop sound and bankable actions and business plans to reach the net-zero objectives.

**Will the UTM ask cities to apply any specific approach/methodology?**

The Urban Transition Mission offers cities an urban transition net-zero framework that will build on the knowledge and expertise of a Global Innovation Alliance of supporting partners and organisations and the first-hand experience of the cities engaged.

The goal is not to provide a new methodological approach: this framework aims to help and guide cities in developing and implementing their pathway to net-zero transitions, helping cities to strengthen their existing climate and energy action plans, across all steps of their city climate action journey. It also wishes to aid prioritisation, gap identification, and assessment of co-benefits of climate, to help cities adopt system wide approaches to reach net-zero.

The UTM does not promote one specific methodology, but builds upon actions plans and strategies already developed by each city (e.g. EU Cities Climate Contracts). The plans/strategies must be compliant with the Global Covenant of Mayors climate commitment, steps of the action journey, and reporting requirements.

**How will the Mission facilitate exchange?**

Based on the needs assessment carried out in cooperation with the first 48 cities who joined the cohort, the UTM has established 7 clusters for exchange- four on topics and three on cross-cutting priorities:

Topical exchange clusters:

- Energy
- Nature-based Solutions
- Water
- Transport & Mobility

Cross-cutting exchange clusters:
A working group has been formed for each cluster to allow for closer exchange among cities on specific topics identified as a priority. More working groups may be launched based on demand from participant cities; specific subgroups for each clustered might be identified.

Capacity building activities, peer exchanges, training offer and opportunities to engage in pilot action will also be closely aligned with the priorities discussed and the clusters identified.

What is the Urban Transitions Mission Centre (UTMC)?

The Urban Transitions Mission Centre (UTMC) is a global platform that promotes urban sustainability and facilitates climate-neutral transitions. The UTMC helps cities to bridge knowledge and capacity gaps by linking cities with policy, implementation, and funding solutions via exchanges that transcend national and world Regions’ borders.

Building on the European Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, the UTMC supports the activities of the Urban Transitions Mission of Mission Innovation, and it enables a wide international knowledge and practice network of cities and urban stakeholders that helps drive transitions globally. It will enable cities to build their capacity in a networking environment with access to knowledge and tools on urban systems integration, technology developments, successful policies, investment and funding opportunities, as well as the co benefits, mistakes and trade-offs that cities encounter in the pathway towards a net-zero urban environment.
The UTMC makes available evidence-based solutions and good practices to accelerate urban transitions and promote financing and funding opportunities to implement integrated urban climate action. It offers advanced frameworks and moderated learning across governance levels to raise awareness of and capacities for climate neutrality policies. The UTMC also establishes a forum for international exchange and cooperation on climate-neutral and net-zero urban transitions by organizing global and regional events and comprehensive dissemination measures to raise visibility of EU and international good practice and strengthen international cooperation.

The UTMC’s activities focus on three impact pathways:

- mainstreaming knowledge and good practice to accelerate urban transitions,
- offering advanced frameworks and moderated learning across governance levels to raise awareness and capacity for climate neutrality policies, and
- establishing a forum for international exchange and cooperation on climate-neutral urban transitions.

The UTMC is funded by the European Union’s Horizon Europe. Since December 2022, a consortium of urban experts from organizations such as the Austrian Research Promotion Agency on behalf of JPI Urban Europe, the European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL), Eurocities, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM), ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, and LGI Sustainable Innovation, is facilitating the set-up and roll out of the UTMC’s activities.
3. Eligibility and application process

What is the timeline of the city cohort selection?

- The call for cities is open for cities to express their interest at [this link](#).
- Applications will be assessed on a rolling basis.
- The 250 cities selected will join progressively the UTM city cohort, by the end of 2024. An official announcement of new group joining the cohort will take place at COP28 (United Arab Emirates, 30 Nov-12 Dec).
- Cities’ engagement will kick off progressively in late 2023/early 2024.

What are the eligibility criteria for a city to express their interest?

The eligibility criteria, reflected in the online application form, are the following. In order to be eligible, the city must:

- Have at least 50,000 inhabitants.
- Be a Global Covenant of Mayors (GCoM) signatory or commit to become one within three months of engaging with the Mission.
- Have a climate action plan/strategy covering the whole city (e.g. SECAP/SEACAP/CAP or equivalent).
- Commit to engage and to allocate appropriate resources to the roll-out of this Urban Transition Mission.

Are there size limitations for cities applying?

Yes, in order to be eligible to apply, the city must have at least 50,000 inhabitants.

Are applications by metropolitan/provincial governments eligible?

Yes, local and sub-national governments such as metropolitan cities and counties, meeting the eligibility requirements of this call, are welcome to apply. Regional governments are invited to support cities applying, but they will not be considered eligible applicants themselves.

Can groups of (small) municipalities apply jointly?

Yes, as long as a clear administrative contact has been identified and provided within the application with a mandate to officially represent the consortium of municipalities. It is not necessary that the consortium be a formal, legal body – it is sufficient to have a less-formal agreement providing the group’s administrative contact.

The group of municipalities must have more than 50,000 inhabitants in total.
Each municipality in the joint application needs to be a signatory of the Global Covenant of Mayors, have a climate action plan/strategy covering the whole city (e.g. SECAP/SEACAP/CAP or equivalent) and commit to engage and to allocate appropriate resources to the roll-out of this Urban Transition Mission.

They also need to show geographical continuity and feature shared infrastructure.

**What are the steps for applying?**

Check your eligibility and that you truly have a mandate, and overall support, to apply on behalf of your city to this programme.

Fill in the application online. It includes requests for brief explanations on your city’s climate and energy action planning and priorities, interests, any project/action ideas that you have started developing and what capacity you would foresee to be able to commit for their development. It also includes questions related to your city’s previous experiences on international cooperation and participation in programmes and initiatives (e.g. in programmes such as International Urban Cooperation programme (IUC), Cities rate to Zero, Mission on Smart and Climate Neutral Cities, etc.).

Cities will be notified on a rolling basis of the outcomes of the selection.

Successfully selected cities are planned to start engagement in late-2023 or early 2024, according to the time of their application and specific needs. They commit to actively engage with the UTM and the city cohort at least until 2025, and to revise their existing climate and energy action plans and prioritising actions to reach net-zero. Cities will showcase their innovation and progress via existing reporting commitments.

For more information, please contact: utm@globalcovenantofmayors.org

**Why are cities required to be (or to become) signatories of the GCoM?**

The GCoM is the largest global alliance for city climate leadership, built upon the voluntary commitment of over 11,500 cities and local governments.

Cities that join the GCoM pledge to set and work towards a target consistent with or exceeding relevant national commitments defined through the UNFCCC Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). GCoM signatories commit to:

- Undertake a community-wide Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emission inventory.
- Carry out an assessment of local climate hazards, risks and vulnerabilities.
- Set measurable emissions targets at least as ambitious, and preferably more ambitious, than their respective government’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement.
- Set ambitious climate adaptation goals, in line with National Adaptation Plans (where these exist).
● Set sustainable energy access goals consistent with the principles around energy access and urban sustainability embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
● Establish an action plan to meet stated targets setting out how to implement the commitments on climate mitigation, adaptation, and access to sustainable energy.
● Measure and monitor the impact of the implemented action over time, making key data and plans publicly available.

Signatories commit to report their progress on a regular basis following the principles and requirements of the Common Reporting Framework (CRF).

By building on the political commitment pledged through the GCoM, and by building upon the GCoM climate action journey, the UTM helps cities to strengthen existing climate and energy action plans, across all steps.

This way, no additional political commitment is required, no new plan/strategy is necessary, and reporting fully aligns with the requirements of GCoM and follows the CRF’s standards.

UTM focuses on accelerating implementation and testing innovative solutions and it supports cities to prioritise, identify gaps, better assess potential for co-benefits of adopting systemic approaches to reach net-zero and climate resilient communities.

Why is it important that the applicant has a clear, official mandate to apply?

In order to ensure adequate political support, technical capacity and access to resources, it is essential for applicants to confirm they have the relevant mandate to apply on behalf of the city. To this end, we encourage applicants to discuss the engagement in the UTM with the appropriate political and administrative representatives, across all relevant municipal departments.

Should the applicant be a political or a technical representative?

The city applying shall identify autonomously who to mandate for the application.

We recommend identifying the individual/team in charge to engage with the Urban Transition Mission already in the application phase.

The applicant/team should be able to communicate in English and have the capacity to carry out the cooperation in English.

What are the main principles applied in the selection process?
The selection of the city cohorts will follow an open and transparent process. Expressions of interest, submitted via an online form, will be evaluated against a number of key principles, including: ambition in climate target setting, readiness of the city’s climate action strategy, existing knowledge and solutions to be shared with peers, planned cross-sector solutions and measures, readiness to test innovation, track-record of stakeholder engagement and international cooperation.

With the aim to foster the highest impact and transferability of the innovation tested by the cohort, the Mission will strive for a balanced engagement of cities worldwide, as relevant, considering: geographical distribution, diversity in sizes, climate and urbanisation contexts, and differentiated sectoral priorities, among others.
4. Clarifications on requested input

How can I check the alignment with the Paris agreement and my national target?

Countries committing to the Paris Agreement are required to prepare, communicate and maintain **Nationally determined contributions (NDCs)**¹ which show the country’s effort to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change, and are key to ensure the success of the Agreement’s long-term goals. You can explore your country’s national targets on the UNFCCC NDCs registry and compare your city target with that of your country found in that database.

If the city sets a science-based climate target, that is aligned with the Paris Agreement. You can find a useful tool in the Science-based targets for Climate: A guide for cities, which is a technical guide developed by the Science-based target network bringing extensive and tailored detail on how cities can set a science-based target. The guide helps cities to understand what a science-based target for cities is and guides them in choosing a methodology for setting an interim science-based target by 2030 and a net zero target for 2050. It also explains how to join the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’s (UNFCCC) Race to Zero.

Because they are GCoM signatories, cities in the Mission’s cohort pledge to set targets at least as ambitious as their country’s Nationally Determined Contributions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

What is a valid greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory?

The Global Covenant allows flexibility for cities developing city-wide greenhouse gas inventories, within two years of commitment. The inventory must include at least carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide emissions from stationary energy, transportation, and waste sources².

In order for cities’ greenhouse gas emissions data to be consistent and transparent GCoM introduced the Common Reporting Framework (CRF) in 2018 as the first global reporting framework for standardising and sharing information on local climate activities. The CRF guides cities in assessing their greenhouse gas emissions, climate change risks, and vulnerabilities, as well as planning and reporting in an integrated and coherent way. This


² You can find more information here [https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/journey/#1593370692184-241679ee-77ed](https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/journey/#1593370692184-241679ee-77ed)
standard not only enables cities to identify and take the right actions in a timely manner, but also allows for better identification of shared challenges, greater cooperation, and development of common responses to the impacts of climate change.

What is a valid Risk and Vulnerability (R&V) assessment?

Cities are also required to complete a risk and vulnerability assessment to identify current and future climate hazards that the city may face from the impacts of climate change. These assessment processes aim to analyse a city’s current ability to adjust or respond to climate change while also providing a city with information about how future change will affect it.

What is a valid Climate Action Plan?

Once a city sets evidence-based goals and targets, cities create an action plan to address climate mitigation and adaptation. These plans indicate what actions a city will take to achieve its greenhouse gas emissions reduction target and climate change adaptation goals.

Is offsetting allowed by the Mission as a measure to reach net-zero?

The Mission aims at supporting net-zero cities in the long term, where ultimately the offsetting should be minimal and used only to address residual emissions not abatable in another way. Though, offsetting can be a powerful method to address the intermediate process and still allow to reduce the cities’ emissions.

How is net-zero defined? What is the difference with climate neutrality?

Referring to the world as a whole, the IPCC defines net-zero “when anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere are balanced by anthropogenic removals over a specified period”. Race to Zero considers individual actors to have reached a state of net zero when “an actor reduces its emissions following science-based pathways, with any remaining GHG emissions attributable to that actor being fully neutralised by like for-like removals (e.g. permanent removals for fossil carbon emissions) exclusively claimed by that actor, either within the value chain or through purchase of

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3 You can find more information here [https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/journey/#1593370692184-241679ee-77ed](https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/journey/#1593370692184-241679ee-77ed)
valid offset credits.” In order to reach that, the action plan shall ultimately include scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions of a city, considering the entire community.

6. Contacts

You couldn’t find an answer to your question?

Please contact us at utm@globalcovenantofmayors.org and we will be happy to support.

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