Covenant of Mayors
for Climate & Energy
EUROPE

Rural areas as key players in the energy transition

Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans in rural areas

17 September, 2025 | Rural Pact Conference | Alison De Luise, Covenant Office

An Initiative of the European Commission

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11 000+ Signatories

MITIGATION
Climate neutrality
by **2050**

ADAPTATION

ENERGY POVERTY

7 500+ action plans submitted, including
2 000+ joint action plans

200+ Covenant coordinators
280+ Covenant supporters

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Inspiring examples of energy transitions led by rural municipalities

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Campi Salentina, Italy

- Under 10,000 inhabitants
- Economy reliant on agricultural production – olives, grapes, sunflower

G.R.O.W.S Project (2021-2025) goals

- increase energy savings and energy production from renewable sources in public buildings
- ensure the availability and optimisation of renewable energy sources on the territory
- increase efficiency of public lighting
- reduce CO2 emissions by making public buildings and services more efficient
- foster public-private partnerships
- improve capacity building of small municipalities on Energy Performance Contracts (EPC).

Novel elements

- first town of its size to receive large EIB grant to undertake this work (through ELENA) – €1.5m
- engagement of 23 neighbouring municipalities in the project.

Achievements to date

- more than 40 buildings (mainly schools) undergone deep retrofits in line with the “nearly zero-energy building” (NZEB) standard
- LED bulbs replacing old bulbs in over 22,400 old street lights
- 23 energy performance contracts
- contract value for nZeb buildings € 60,255,801

Expected results based on progress to date

- estimated final energy savings for Energy Efficiency projects over 15.07 GWh per year
- estimated final energy production from Renewable Sources over 1.134 GWh per year
- CO2 reduction over 4,913 t/year.

Other notable project elements

- There is a focus on addressing energy poverty.
- The municipality has established ‘GROWS Energy InfoPoint’ to disseminate environmental sustainability practices to local businesses and private citizens.
- The technical office of the Municipality is available to help small and medium-sized municipalities and small businesses that intend to implement energy efficiency projects.
- The Municipality has issued a Municipal Council Resolution to join the Apulian Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Productive District (within the framework of energy communities).

Chalki, Greece

Source: https://www.solarpowereurope.org/advocacy/solar-saves/stories/how-a-small-greek-island-became-a-solar-pioneer

An island municipality that pioneered a citizen-led renewable energy community (solar PV), making it one of the first “green islands” in Greece, with surplus benefits redistributed to households at risk of energy poverty.

- Funding: National green island scheme, EU Recovery and Resilience Facility
- Target group: Entire island population, with direct benefits for households in energy poverty
- Highlight: The 1 MW photovoltaic park owned by the energy community has led to a 55% reduction in electricity bills for the 250 residents, businesses, and the municipality of Chalki.
  - This translates to annual savings ranging from €180,000 to €250,000 and a reduction in CO2 emissions by 1,800 tons annually.

Leverano, Italy

A rural municipality (14,000) that promotes collective self-consumption projects and citizen cooperatives for solar energy, while also embedding social inclusion measures for low-income and disabled households.

- Funding: Regional/EU schemes
- Target group: Rural households, particularly those at risk of energy poverty
- Highlight: Citizen-owned solar projects that lower bills and strengthen social cohesion.

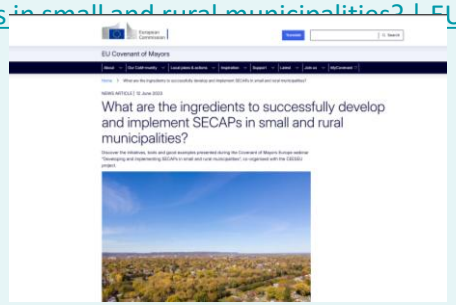
Volvi, Greece

A sparsely populated rural municipality (23,000) working with youth councils and social services to integrate renewable energy initiatives into broader community development and inclusion strategies.

- Funding: National social and regional development programmes
- Target group: Families with limited resources in rural and semi-rural areas
- Highlight: Emphasises community participation to ensure energy measures are socially inclusive.

Joint SECAPs: A shared route for small rural communities

- Rural municipalities frequently pursue **joint SECAPS** in collaboration with neighbouring local authorities.
  - This helps overcome resource limitations and enables more impactful action.
- Typically, these are implemented through **inter-municipal networks**—for example, unions of rural or mountain municipalities, river basin clusters, or Local Action Groups
  - What are the ingredients to successfully develop and implement SECAPs in small and rural municipalities? | EU Covenant of Mayors



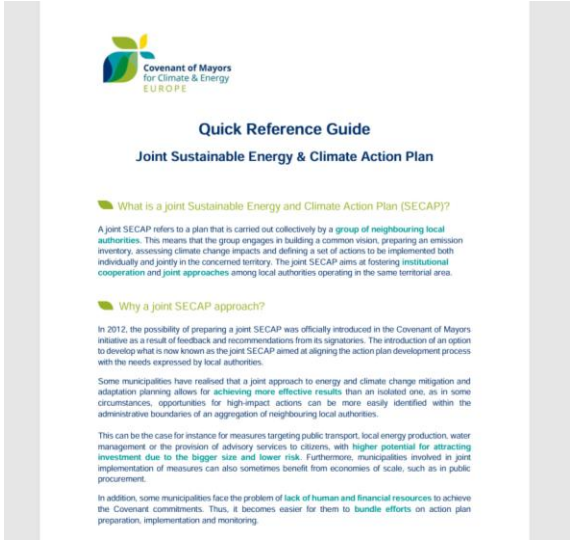
Two main options:

- **Option 1**: Each municipality sets its own greenhouse gas reduction target, but share some joint measures.
- **Option 2**: The group commits to a single, shared target and submits a common action plan.

- By 2017, **267 groups** had adopted a joint SECAP—representing over **1,080 municipalities** and covering some **6.3 million inhabitants**.
  - Notably, over 70% of these groups were in Italy, where very small municipalities are common.

Support and guidance tailored to rural contexts

- The EU's Covenant of Mayors initiative has produced **guidance materials and webinars** specifically for small, medium-sized, and rural municipalities—covering the full SECAP cycle from data collection to financing.
- A "**Quick Reference Guide**" and other resources explicitly encourage **inter-municipal collaboration**, calling out rural and mountain municipal unions as prime candidates for joint SECAPs.



Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy EUROPE

Quick Reference Guide

Joint Sustainable Energy & Climate Action Plan

What is a joint Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP)?

A joint SECAP refers to a plan that is carried out collectively by a group of neighbouring local authorities. This means that the group engages in building a common vision, preparing an emission inventory, assessing climate change impacts and defining a set of actions to be implemented both individually and jointly in the concerned territory. The joint SECAP aims at fostering institutional cooperation and joint approaches among local authorities operating in the same territorial area.

Why a joint SECAP approach?

In 2012, the possibility of preparing a joint SECAP was officially introduced in the Covenant of Mayors initiative as a result of feedback and recommendations from its signatories. The introduction of an option to develop what is now known as the joint SECAP aimed at aligning the action plan development process with the needs expressed by local authorities.

Some municipalities have realised that a joint approach to energy and climate change mitigation and adaptation planning allows for achieving more effective results than an isolated one, as in some circumstances, opportunities for high-impact actions can be more easily identified within the administrative boundaries of an aggregation of neighbouring local authorities.

This can be the case for instance for measures targeting public transport, local energy production, water management or the provision of advisory services to citizens, with higher potential for attracting investment due to the bigger size and lower risk. Furthermore, municipalities involved in joint implementation of measures can also sometimes benefit from economies of scale, such as in public procurement.

In addition, some municipalities face the problem of lack of human and financial resources to achieve the Covenant commitments. Thus, it becomes easier for them to bundle efforts on action plan preparation, implementation and monitoring.

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Covenant of Mayors Office
Mundo Madou, Avenue des Arts 7/8,
1210 Brussels, Belgium

@Covenant of Mayors – Europe

@eumayors

info@eumayors.eu

Join the journey today

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