

Udalsarea 2030: how Euskadi promotes local climate action through multi-level governance

1. Multi-level climate action in the Basque Country

The Basque Country is a region in northern Spain made up of 252 municipalities and just over 2.2 million inhabitants. Despite its small size, it combines strong economic activity with high natural value: almost a quarter of its territory is protected by the Natura 2000 network. This reality makes climate and energy policies central to regional planning.

In recent years, the Basque Country has significantly strengthened its regulatory framework. The approval of the 1/2024 Law on Energy Transition and Climate Change requires 73 municipalities with more than 5,000 inhabitants to have a Climate and Energy Plan and encourages the remaining municipalities—mostly smaller ones—to develop these plans individually or collectively. This law complements the 4/2019 Law on Sustainable Energy, consolidating a coherent framework that promotes local climate action.

To make these goals a reality, the region is working with a long-term roadmap that is only possible through close coordination between government levels. It is in this context that Udalsarea 2030, the Basque Network of Sustainable Municipalities, was created in 2002 and has evolved from focusing on the Local Agenda 21, towards acquiring a stronger focus on climate and energy. Today, it is the main platform for coordinating the implementation of the Covenant of Mayors in the Basque Country and for channeling regional policies to the local level.

2. Multi-level governance structure and operating model

Udalsarea 2030 has grown steadily: from initially counting on 16 municipalities to 226 municipalities in 2026, 23 regional entities and 11 supra-municipal structures. In total, 260 entities are part of the network.

The network operates with four-year strategic plans, developed jointly with participating municipalities and organizations. Membership is voluntary and renewed periodically through commitment agreements.

Its governance structure integrates the three main levels of administration in the Basque Country:

- Basque Government, responsible for climate legislation and strategy.
- Provincial Councils, which coordinate at the provincial level and finance part of the actions.
- Local councils, responsible for local climate action.

Furthermore, given the territorial diversity, county entities have a key role in grouping small municipalities and facilitating the implementation of climate action reaches areas where technical capacity is limited.

This structure is complemented by sectoral organizations of the Basque Government specializing in environment, energy, water or rural development (such as Ihobe, EVE, URA and HAZI), as well as the association of Basque municipalities EUDEL.

The operational functioning combines:

- A political Presidency, represented by the Councillor of the Department of Industry, Energy Transition and Sustainability of the Basque Government.
- A Technical Committee, which includes municipal staff with technical skills.
- A committee for the coordination and promotion of local action, made up of representatives from the Presidency of the Basque Government, Ihobe and other supramunicipal entities of the Basque Public Sector
- A Technical Secretariat, represented by Ihobe, the Public Environmental Management Company of the Basque Government.

3. Promote local climate action through a multi-level governance model

Udalsarea 2030's **governance model** is based on creating a framework that fosters a much more fluid and dynamic relationship between regional and local levels regarding climate and energy policies. It helps **align local objectives with regional, national, and European policies** and encourages their implementation at the local level. In turn, the model also **allows for the definition of regional climate and energy policies** in the Basque Country from a local perspective. In short, over the years, the network has **promoted an effective multi-level governance model**, widely disseminated and used among municipalities, with **the clear objective of promoting local climate action** by ensuring:

1. A coherent local climate and energy plan based on rigorous diagnoses and assessments
2. The definition of locally adapted objectives aligned with regional, national and European policies
3. The provision of strategic resources and tools adapted to local contexts
4. The involvement of the different municipal departments in the definition and implementation of local action
5. Activation of citizen participation processes and work towards a just climate and energy transition
6. Standardized monitoring and evaluation of progress

As a result of the networks' long experience acquired organically together with the commitment of its members, Udalsarea 2030 has **continuously developed and provided resources and tools for the development, implementation, evaluation and monitoring** of climate and energy action.

Some of these resources and tools, developed by Ihobe, include: a methodological guide for developing Climate and Energy Plans; a local risk and vulnerability assessment for each municipality; carbon footprint and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory calculators; and assessment and monitoring tools. Thanks to these tools, the network has a better understanding of the challenges and needs of local contexts, enabling it to anticipate and respond effectively for municipalities.

In this context, the EU Covenant of Mayors initiative becomes an important framework for assessing the efforts of local authorities and municipalities in promoting climate action. Ihobe and EVE, as regional coordinators of the Covenant in the Basque Country, provide support and guidance to municipalities working on their climate and energy plans and greenhouse gas inventories, so they can report in a standardized way. Currently, both the EVE and Ihobe are working with the Covenant coordinators to harmonize regional and Covenant tools.

4. Financing opportunities

Although Udalsarea 2030 does not manage funding opportunities itself, it has become a useful platform for local municipalities to be informed about the funding available for local climate and energy actions.

For example, the Basque Government provides funding through financial mechanisms such as the annual grant to finance the development of climate and energy plans. Funding lines are also available for innovative adaptation measures. Additional funds are available at the provincial level, where the Provincial Councils offer support for energy attraction and climate plans. **Between 2007 and 2025, the Basque Government allocated €72.5 million of regional funds to local sustainability action.** This funding was allocated across different thematic areas of intervention, such as climate action, air quality, biodiversity, soil protection, the circular economy, and education. Ihobe acts as a collaborating entity with the Basque Government for the management of the annual grant program, which includes clarifying any questions from applicant municipalities.

There is also specific financial support provided by other supra-municipal entities within the network. For example, the Basque Energy Agency (EVE) focuses its support on the energy sector, offering programs to support electrification (photovoltaics, heat pumps), sustainable mobility (low-emission cars, the MOVES program for electric vehicles), and local industries in transition. Tax exemptions are also offered for certain technologies and are expected to be expanded in the future.

At the national and EU levels, Udalsarea 2030, through its secretariat Ihobe, participates in or coordinates projects that support the implementation of climate action at the local level. [The Urban Klima 2050 - Life project](#) is a flagship example of this approach: it promotes the energy and climate transition by implementing innovative climate adaptation solutions in seven Basque municipalities. Udalsarea 2030 also participates in the [Octopus](https://www.udalsarea2030.eus/news/the-basque-country-to-take-part-in-) <https://www.udalsarea2030.eus/news/the-basque-country-to-take-part-in->

[a-new-european-life-project-to-speed-up-the-energy-and-climate-transition-through-local-authorities](https://www.udalsarea2030.eus/news/the-basque-country-to-take-part-in-a-new-european-life-project-to-speed-up-the-energy-and-climate-transition-through-local-authorities)Life project <https://www.udalsarea2030.eus/news/the-basque-country-to-take-part-in-a-new-european-life-project-to-speed-up-the-energy-and-climate-transition-through-local-authorities> as an example of best practices and a reference for other European Enabling Organizational Networks (EONs) to be established throughout the EU. These and other similar EU projects pave the way for Udalsarea 2030 to support all types of municipalities in accessing EU funding to implement climate action.

However, the network's technical staff explained that many ambitious and interesting projects remain to be implemented, due to local financial and technical limitations. Udalsarea 2030 is **promoting initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors to standardize the planning and implementation of local climate and energy plans** and to support municipalities in exploring new sources of funding. Furthermore, the Covenant is becoming an invaluable platform for local climate action to gain visibility and recognition.

5. Achievements in local climate and energy action

The network boasts numerous achievements to be proud of over the years. Below are some of the most significant climate action accomplishments of recent years.

- The promotion of local climate and energy policies in the Basque Country has yielded significant results. By 2025, **approximately 130 municipalities were developing or already had climate and energy plans in place**. In fact, alongside the 73 municipalities (those with more than 5,000 inhabitants legally required to have a plan), many smaller ones are developing their plans voluntarily.
- Currently, **56 Basque municipalities are in the process of joining or have already become EU Covenant of Mayors signatories**. The goal is to reach 100 signatory municipalities by 2028.
- More than **100 Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) have been identified as examples of adaptation actions** in the Basque Country, and more than 30 have already been documented and collected in a publicly available viewer that will grow with new solutions as these are implemented.
- A network of **climate shelters** is being developed throughout the Basque Country by identifying and recording their characteristics and locations. To date, 10 municipalities have been mapped, including the three provincial capitals.
- To support municipal adaptation assessment and planning, Ihobe has developed **252 detailed risk and vulnerability assessments**, providing each municipality with a comprehensive analysis of the climate risks affecting its local context. This tool has been widely used for local climate and energy planning and is currently being updated according to the European Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA) methodology.

All this work is shared, energized and contrasted through Udalsarea 2030, which during 2025 held three committee meetings with more than 150 people and 100 mobilized entities, thus reaching the 69th meeting of the network. In addition, four regional meetings were organized (39 people and 36 entities mobilized) and three regional policy initiatives were tested through consultation processes via the network.

7. Barriers and next steps

The successful evolution of Udalsarea 2030 has been characterized by its growth, consolidation, foresight and joint definition of a governance model based on integration and cooperation between the local, provincial and regional levels, which has been highly valued by the partners, especially the smaller municipalities.

However, some challenges remain, mainly related to human resources, technical expertise, and funding. Municipalities, especially smaller ones, face difficulties due to a lack of staff or specific technical knowledge, particularly in implementing nature-based solutions and defining adaptation measures, where there is limited experience. From its groundwork, Udalsarea 2030 still sees a knowledge gap in the definition of the climate and energy plans, and the identification of best practices on climate action.

In response to some of these challenges, Udalsarea 2030 collaborates with municipalities to better understand barriers and needs and to provide tailored services. Part of this support is channeled through the European Life [OCTOPUS project](#) to promote the development and implementation of local climate and energy plans and to encourage more municipalities to join the Covenant of Mayors. To align these tools with the 1/2024 Law on Energy Transition and Climate Change, and other frameworks such as the Covenant of Mayors initiative, these tools are being updated and standardized.

7. Key figures (updated to December 2025)

- Number of municipalities in the Basque Country: **252**
- Number of municipalities in the network: **226**
- N. supramunicipal structures: **11 (regional entities)**
- Number of municipalities adhering to the Covenant of Mayors: **~ 56** (Target: **100** by 2028)
- Number of approved energy and climate plans: **~130**
- Emissions reduction target: net emissions reduction of 45% by 2030; climate neutrality and resilience by 2050 ([Long-term strategy for 2050](#))
- Budget (Regional funds mobilized 2007-2025): **72.5 million euros**

Links

- <https://www.udalsarea2030.eus/home> **Udalsarea** <https://www.udalsarea2030.eu/s/home> **2030: Basque Network of Sustainable Municipalities - Home**

- **Udalsarea 2030 - Activity report of the Udalsarea 2030 network in 2025**

Case study contact: *Udalsarea 2030:* udalsarea2030@ihobe.eus