

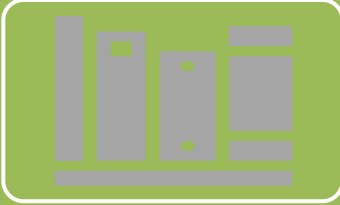
September 2022

Urban sustainability transitions in Europe: - overview

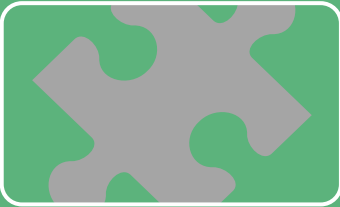
Spela Kolaric, Eunomia



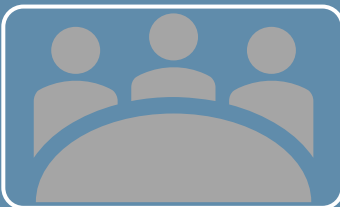
Focus of the EEA urban sustainability work



Developing the knowledge base



Developing a conceptual framework



Undertaking / supporting engagement with internal experts and external stakeholders

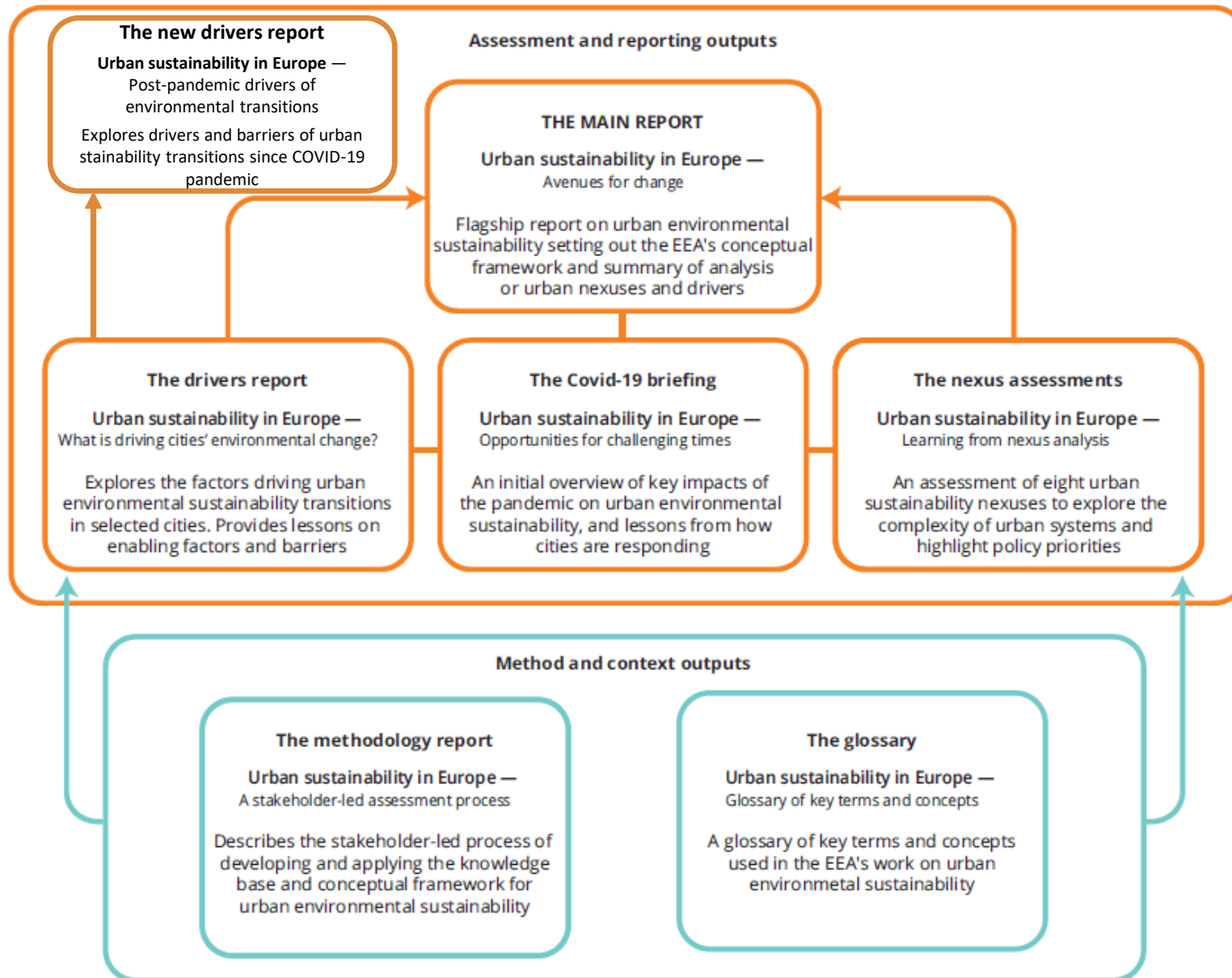


Undertaking assessments

- Understanding drivers of urban environmental sustainability transitions
- Analysis of priority urban sustainability nexuses



EEA's outputs on urban sustainability in Europe



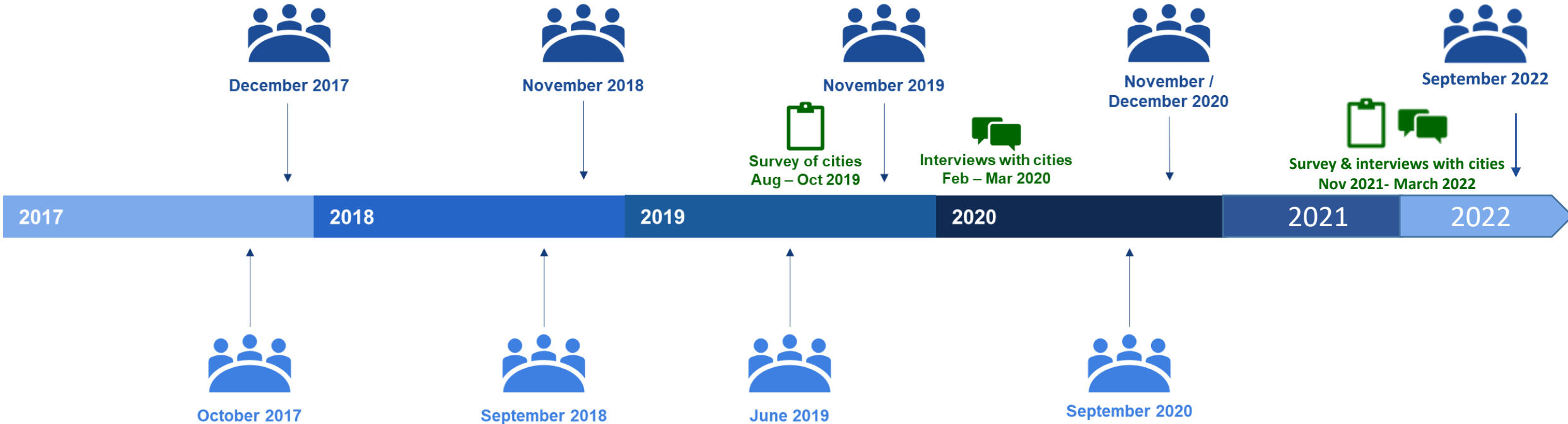
The EEA's Urban Sustainability in Europe outputs:

- The main report
- The first drivers report
- The Covid-19 briefing
- The nexus assessments
- The glossary
- The methodology report (2021)
- The new drivers report (2022)



Engagement with experts, stakeholders and cities

External stakeholder workshops

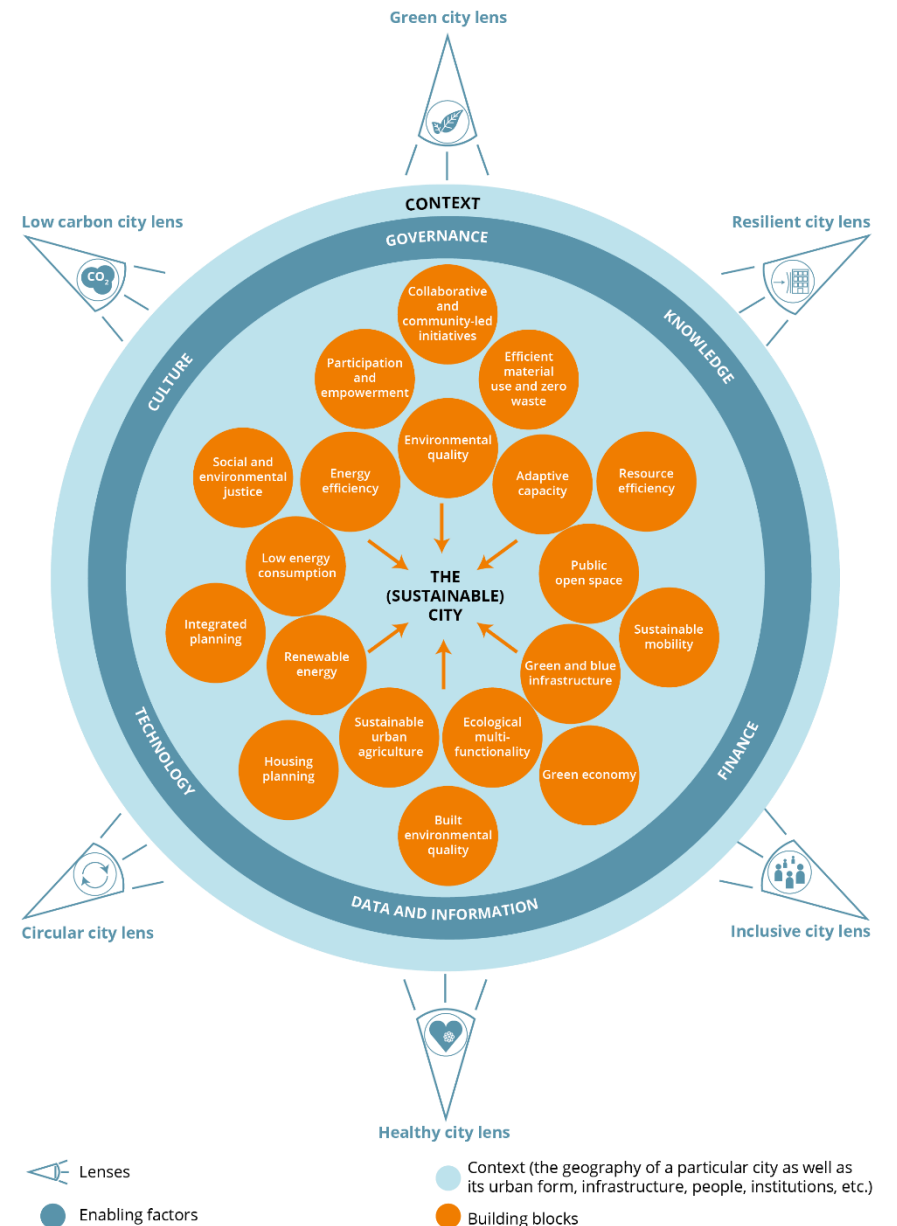


Internal EEA experts / ETCs workshops and meetings

The conceptual framework

Based on four main components:

- **Lenses** - a range of perspectives that represent priority issues/concerns reflecting the EEA's environmental remit
- **Context** - a range of current and historic, physical, social and institutional characteristics which create and shape the setting in which a specific city exists, develops and functions
- **Enabling factors** - relatively high-level forces that based on their level of availability facilitate (drivers) or hinder (barriers) the transition towards urban environmental sustainability
- **Building blocks** - key qualities that contribute to urban environmental sustainability



September 2022

Urban sustainability in Europe — Post-pandemic drivers of environmental transitions



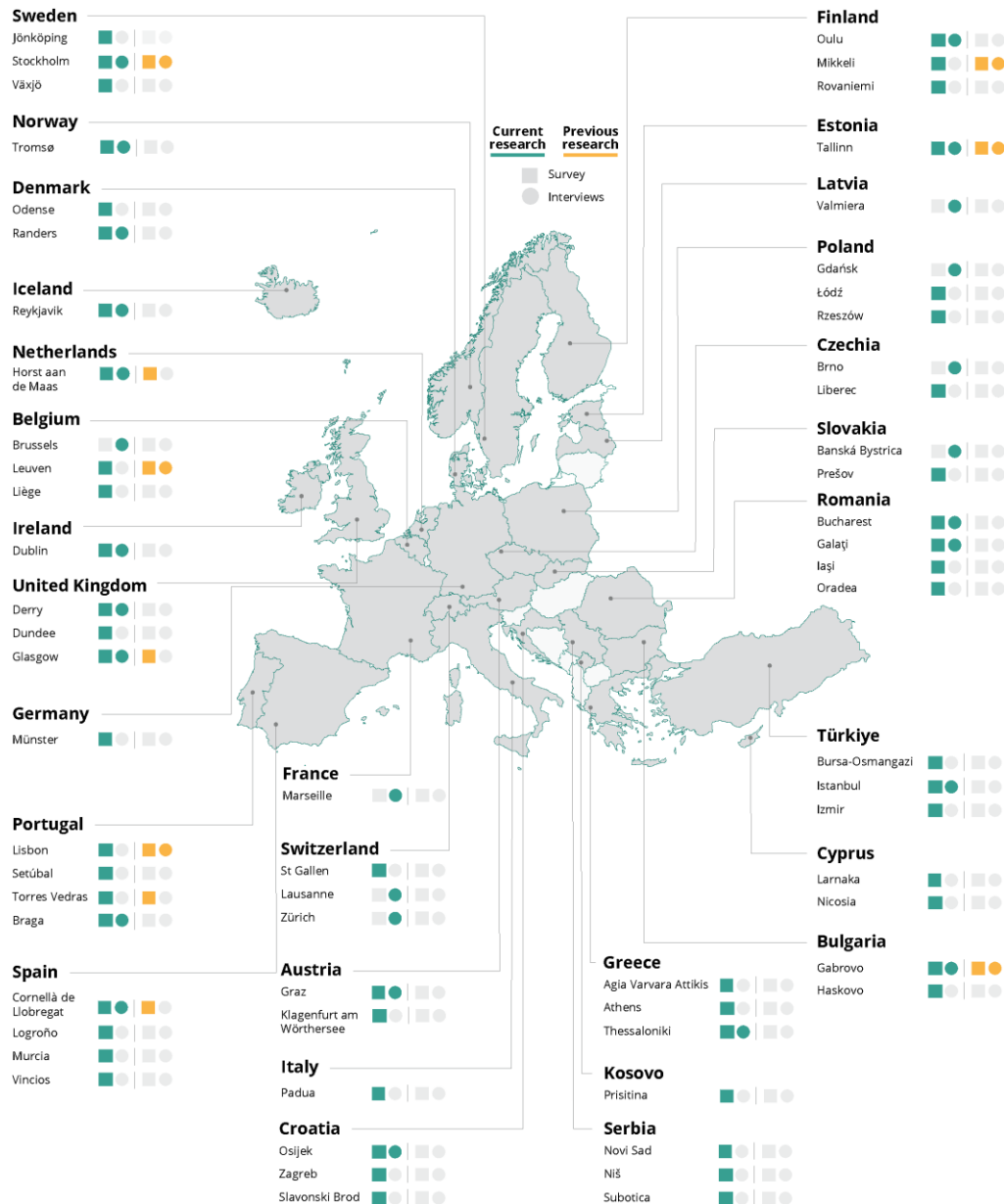
Purpose of updated drivers study (2021-22)

Building on previous work by expanding the sample of European cities and asking what can we learn about drivers and barriers of urban sustainability transitions since the COVID-19 pandemic? In particular:

- How these may have been influenced by the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, European recovery efforts, as well as shifts in the wider policy context (e.g. NextGenerationEU, European Green Deal, EU Urban Agenda)
- Understanding if there are clear patterns and similarities in what drives or hinders urban sustainability transitions across cities



Participants and Methodology used



New research

- cities of all EEA member states, larger sample
- 56 survey respondents (EUSurvey)
- 27 in-depth interviews (of which 19 cities also completed the survey)
- participation dominated by cities of Southern and Eastern Europe

Previous research

- EGCA (European Green Capital Award), and ECGLA (European Green Leaf Award) winners and finalists
- 26 survey respondents (40 eligible)
- 7 in-depth interviews (all interviewed cities completed the survey)
- Participation dominated by cities from Northern and Westerns Europe (geographical spread mirrored that of the awards)

Total new & previous research

- 80 cities participated (survey or interviews)
- 72 survey respondents (10 cities in both studies)
- 31 in-depth interviews (Stockholm, Tallin, Gabrovo in both studies)
- Views of cities from all parts of Europe

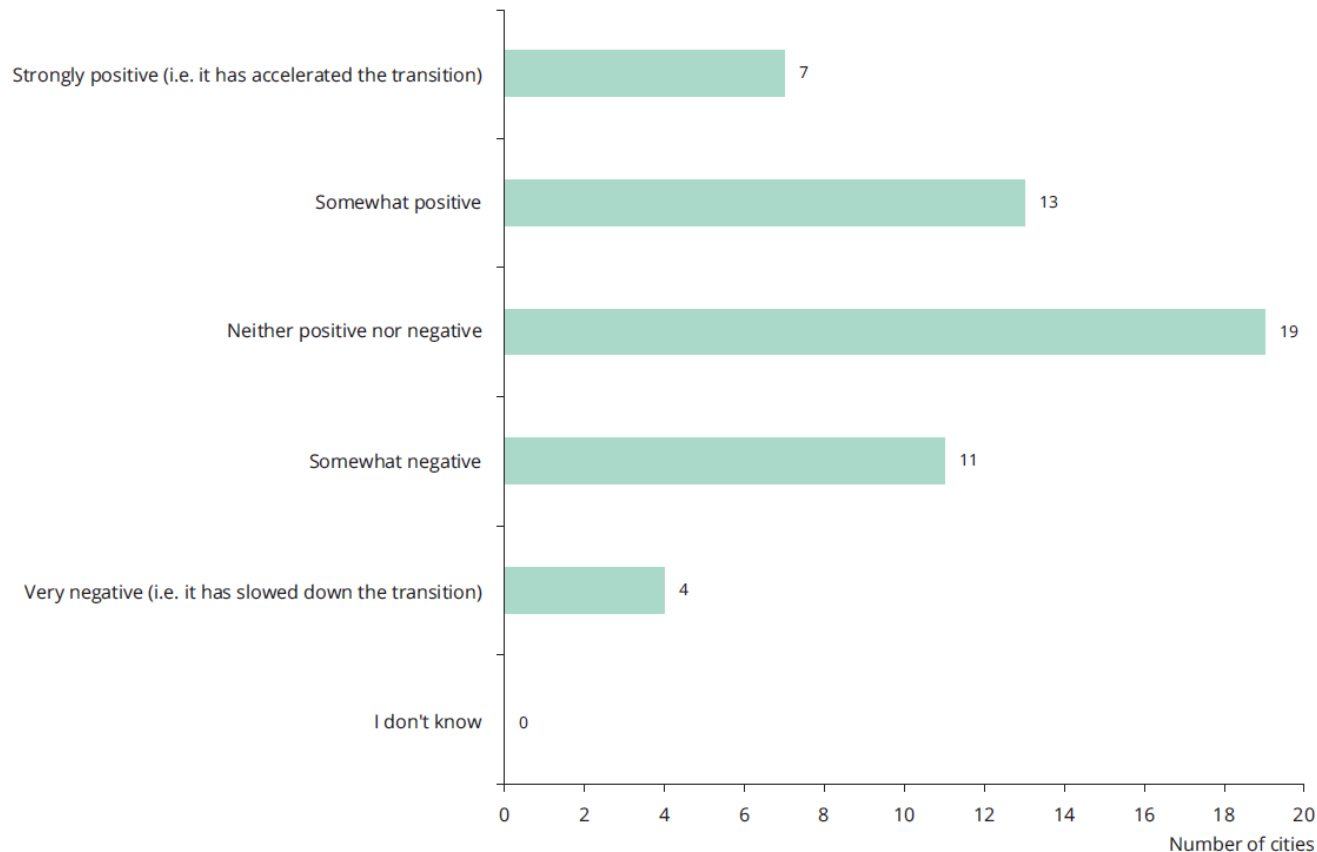
Map: Cities that participated in the current research



Key lessons on drivers and barriers

- In the context of urban environmental sustainability efforts, cities reported that COVID-19 has mostly had a positive impact

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cities' environmental sustainability transitions

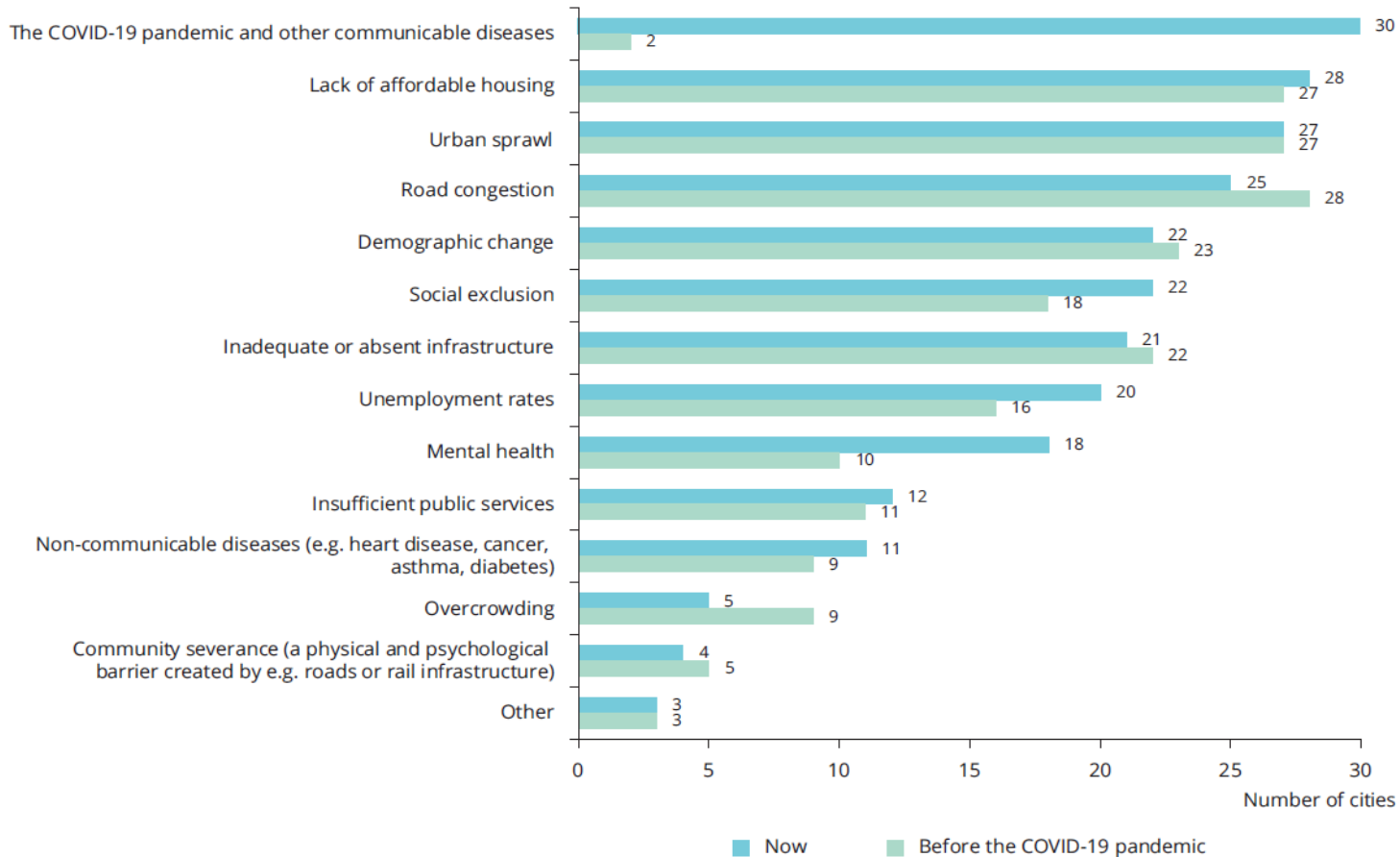


- **Fast change** on unprecedented scale **is possible**
- Better understanding of **risk** related to delaying action
- **Local government has capacity/ flexibility to respond** to rapidly changing context
- **Grater awareness of inequalities**, more solidarity



Key lessons on drivers and barriers

Socio-economic challenges faced by cities and their regions

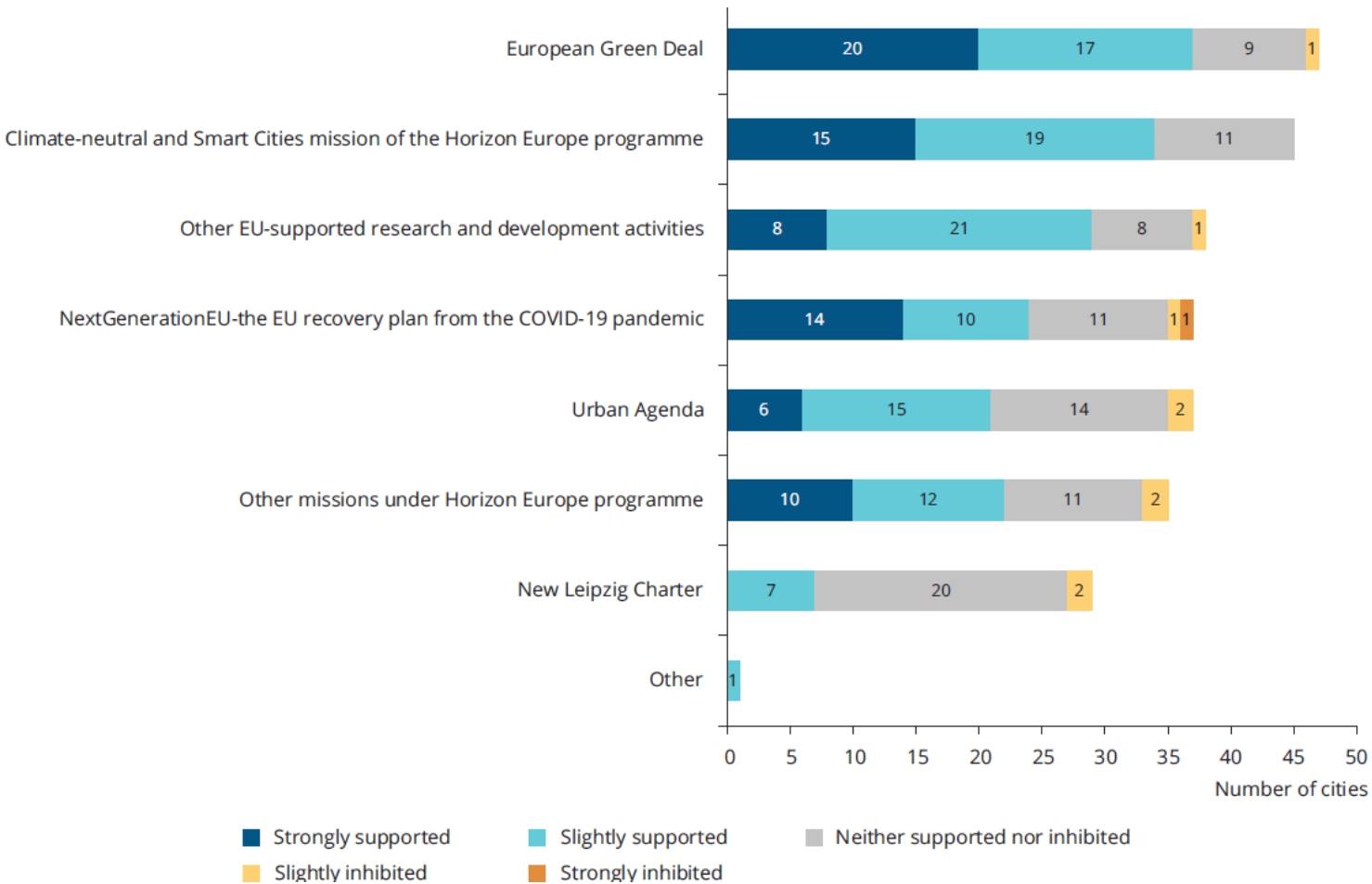


- ...but these benefits could easily be eroded if the recovery from COVID-19 is not inclusive
- Transition pathways need to be tailored to individual cities and their unique qualities
- Despite this, there are recurrent themes and challenges that are common to all cities such as rethinking existing infrastructure, tackling urban sprawl and car-centric urban planning



Key lessons on drivers and barriers

The effect of international and EU policy initiatives on environmental sustainability transitions in cities



- **EU laws and policy frameworks** matter (e.g. European Green Deal, EU mission: climate-neutral and smart cities , NextGenerationEU) – as does the creation of a **shared identity and sense of purpose** across cities



Key lessons on drivers and barriers

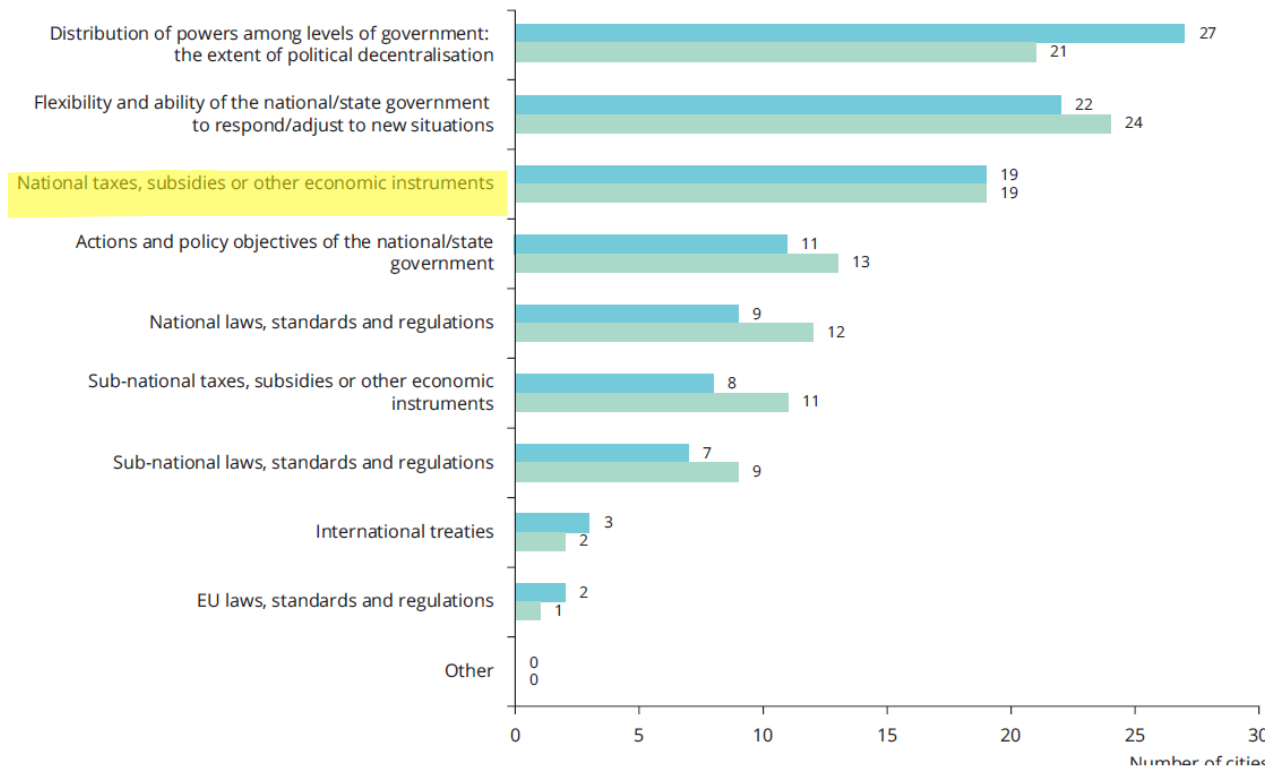
- National and supranational governments can facilitate as well as inhibit, systemic change (e.g. unaligned local, national and supranational priorities)

Factors related to national governance that supported or inhibited cities' environmental sustainability transitions

Supporting factors

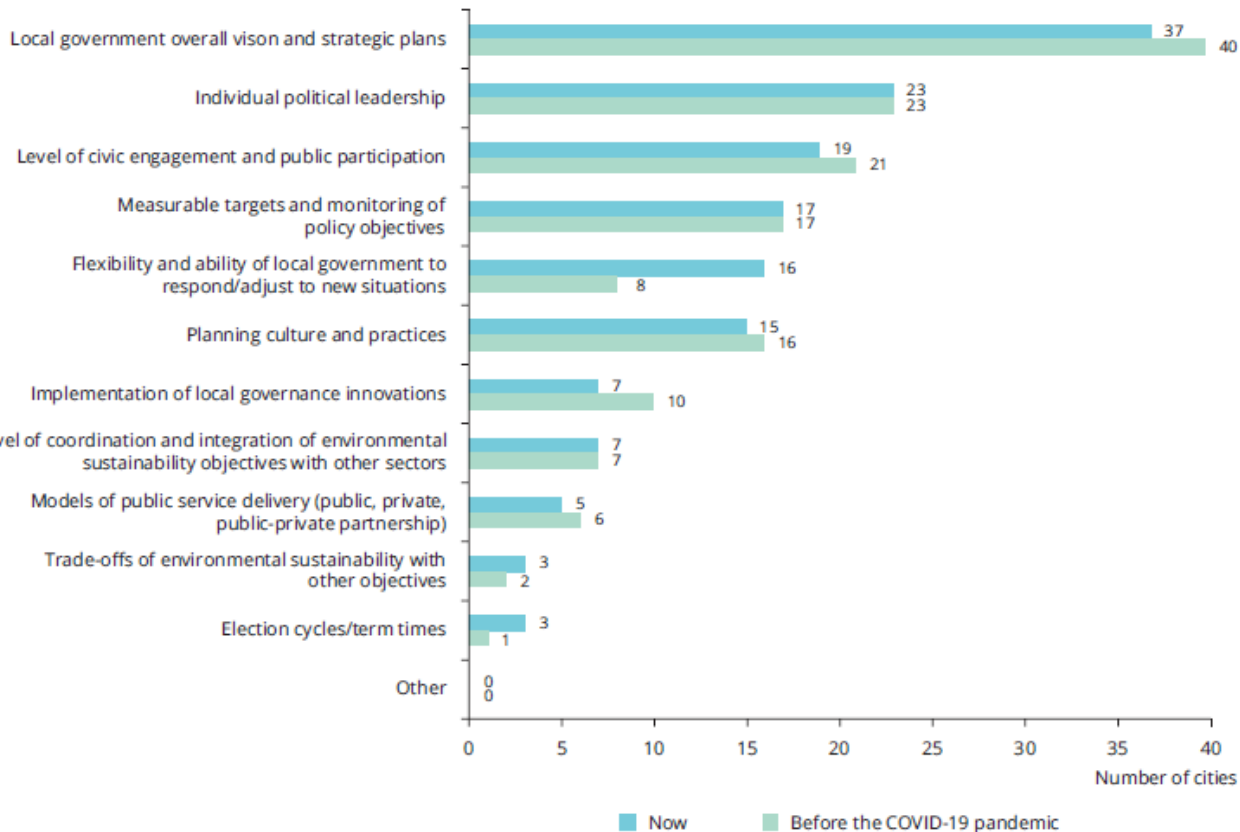


Inhibiting factors



Key lessons on drivers and barriers

Factors related to local governance that supported environmental sustainability transitions in cities



- **Cities' strategic planning and a clear vision** are important, but once established the focus should **shift to implementation** including greater emphasis on measurable **targets, accountability** mechanisms, dedicated **funding**
- **Mainstreaming climate and sustainability considerations** across all government departments is increasingly recognised as a priority
- Cities need to be **empowered, both politically and financially**, for real change to take place



Key lessons on drivers and barriers

- **Knowledge sharing** between cities through networks and with other stakeholders is critical to co-create **solutions** (e.g. the C40 Global Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force)
- **Local research and experimentation** can accelerate **innovation** using cities as testbeds
- **Involving** various **stakeholders** and supporting **public** engagement in decision-making processes leads to **better** outcomes by creating sense of ownership, and responsibility
- **Young people are increasingly important agents of change** across European cities



Key lessons on drivers and barriers

- **New technologies** can play an important role, but **need to be inclusive and fit for purpose**
- **Updated and accessible data and information is needed to monitor progress**
- **Communicating information effectively and innovatively** is an important part of **engaging the public**
- **Accessing EU, national and private funding** can play a key role, but can be challenging to access due to the time and technical skills application requires
- **Cities need more support** to uncouple growth from resource consumption, however they should act as perhaps they have more powers than it seems (e.g. by removing perverse incentives that lead to unsustainable outcomes such as urban sprawl and car ownership).



Future research opportunities

- Exploring in more detail themes that may be driving the sustainability transition, by for example considering a small number of case-study cities in more depth and/or selecting priority themes (arising from research to date) and researching these in more detail
- Tracking the impact of recent EU policy changes and the pandemic on urban environmental sustainability
- Expanding the sample size to include more cities and enable more comparative analysis





Thank you

