

LEUVEN, BELGIUM

This success story showcases the adaptation efforts of the Flemish region, Leuven, in Belgium and how these have been propelled further through its association to the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change. By focusing on Nature-based Solutions, governance and spatial planning, Leuven is tackling its difficult climate challenges, including flooding and extreme heat.

EU MISSION IMPACT

Leuven became a Charter Signatory for the Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change in January 2024 and has been working on improving its Climate Adaptation Policy.

In February 2024, Leuven had its kick off meeting for MIP4Adapt's Technical Assistance Programme. The programme is delivering support in areas such as improving Leuven's Climate Risk Assessment as well as identifying appropriate climate adaptation financing and funding sources. The Technical Assistance will help the region to tailor its climate adaptation strategy to different areas in the city, ensuring that investment is spent on the most appropriate climate solutions for the area.

The city has been developing sustainable solutions for decades and has a high level of support from different stakeholders, including its citizens. Joining the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change has acted like a springboard for implementing such initiatives. We have been able to scale up our adaptation efforts to ensure the prioritisation and implementation of solutions have the greatest impact in tackling the effects of climate change.

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REGIONAL PROFILE

Situated east of Brussels, Leuven is a dynamic city renowned for its rich history, prestigious academic institutions, and lively cultural scene. Leuven is home to 100,000 inhabitants and an additional 45,000 students, giving its reputation of being a centre for innovation and research. Several sustainability and adaptation activities are already being implemented throughout the city, and its citizens tend to be well-informed and supportive of climate actions.

CLIMATE CHALLENGES

Leuven is located on the river Dyle, making it highly susceptible to flooding, particularly during heavy rainfall and storm events. The extensive use of concrete and other impermeable surfaces exacerbates this issue, preventing proper water absorption as well as contributing to the urban heat island effect. This intense heat in the summer months not only elevates temperatures but also strains local infrastructure and health services. Furthermore, the rapidly growing population amplifies these climate risks, putting pressure on mobility, housing, open space access and CO2 emissions.

SOLUTIONS

The region has established the Leuven 2030 organisation to progress its climate adaptation work. The NGO has developed an investment plan for the city climate contracts. These contracts engage all stakeholders—from the public sector to businesses and citizens—placing the responsibility for policy ownership and implementation in their hands. This collaborative approach ensures that climate action is comprehensive and reflects the diverse interests and needs of the entire community.

Leuven 2030 is also working to establish a climate fund to investigate how successful adaptation projects can be linked to less profitable projects to accelerate the city's climate transition. Leuven 2030 now receives consultancy on this issue through the MIP4Adapt technical assistance programme.

The region is also implementing an ambitious spatial planning initiative as part of its new vision, aiming to enhance its resilience against flooding and mitigate the urban heat island effect. It focuses on the greening and de-paving of the region's squares and public spaces, transforming them into vibrant, sustainable areas. This effort not only addresses immediate environmental challenges but also strengthens the region's ecosystem, providing long-term ecological benefits.

In addition to these measures, the region is actively focusing on Nature-based Solutions (NbS). These solutions harness natural processes to tackle environmental issues, offering sustainable and cost-effective alternatives to traditional infrastructure. Examples include greening and reversing soil sealing in the city centre through EU-funded NbS projects like PACT and JustNature. Leuven is also providing subsidies for citizens to implement NbS on their private property, such as tree planting or green roof installation.

OUTPUTS

Leuven has gathered the relevant climate data for the region. The next step involves analysing this data to identify which hazards are impacting various areas of the city and to what extent. This analysis will guide the implementation of the most effective solutions.

Additionally, an inter-departmental group has been established to coordinate the efforts of different local government departments already engaged in adaptation initiatives. This will ensure a cohesive and effective adaptation strategy and implementation.



LESSONS LEARNED

Securing appropriate financing is crucial for the success of any project or initiative. Diversifying funding sources and exploring various financing options, such as grants, loans, public-private partnerships, and crowdfunding, can provide the necessary capital and financial stability.

Effective governance is fundamental to the success of adaptation projects and initiatives, particularly those aimed at addressing multifaceted challenges. Engaging all stakeholders enables the pooling of knowledge, sharing of best practices, and alignment of goals, ensuring more comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

