

Report on the activities of Covenant Supporters for the year 2013

Covenant Supporters demonstrate their potential to strengthen the implementation of the Covenant of Mayors

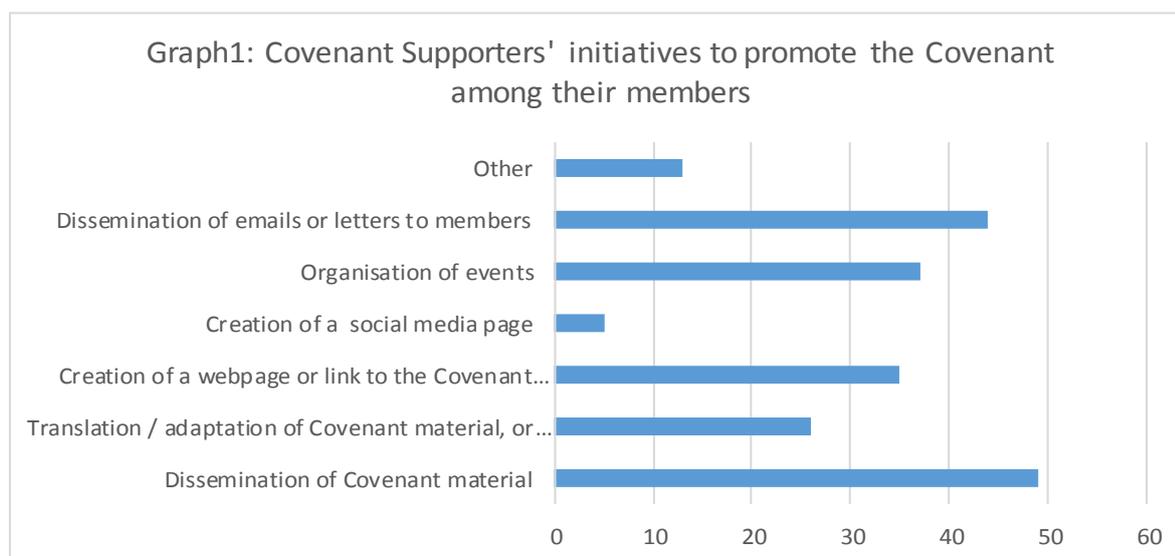
Covenant Supporters are European, national or regional networks and associations of local and regional authorities involved in the Covenant of Mayors to promote the initiative, guide their members through the Covenant process, and facilitate the exchange of experiences.

Covenant Supporters are committed to regularly inform the European Commission about their activities. The present report is based on the responses from 57 Covenant Supporters engaged in the Covenant for more than one year¹. These Supporters are represented in 26 different European countries, in addition to the European and supra-national networks of local and regional authorities. Together, they count around 11000 members, of which approximately 2000 are involved in the Covenant.

The 2013 report demonstrates the key contribution of Covenant Supporters to the success of the Covenant of Mayors, both in terms of promotion of the initiative and support to its implementation. In addition, the contributions received provide ideas and good practices which will feed into the future development of the Covenant of Mayors and the activities implemented by the Covenant of Mayors' Office.

From the promotion of the Covenant of Mayors to capacity-building of municipalities

As networks of local and regional authorities, Covenant Supporters are **powerful allies to promote the Covenant of Mayors** towards their members. In 2013 all respondents implemented various activities to promote the initiative, using a wide array of tools at their disposal (see graph 1).



¹ 71 Covenant Supporters have been invited to fill-in a questionnaire developed by the Covenant of Mayors' Office and 57 responses have been received. Five Covenant Supporters which have not been participating in the reporting exercise for two years have been suspended from the initiative.

The organisation of events is an efficient way to make the Covenant and its achievements known among Covenant Supporter's members. 65% of the respondents organised an event in 2013, at regional, national (e.g. General assemblies), European (e.g. European Sustainable Energy Week) and even international level (e.g. UN Conference of the parties on climate). Although some events were purely informative (presentation of the Covenant), most of them were already beyond promotion, and definitively oriented towards capacity-building of Covenant of Mayors' signatories.

Thus, many respondents referred to content-related events, addressing thematic issues or challenges faced by Covenant municipalities (e.g. political mobilisation, energy efficiency, financing SEAP development and implementation, local energy planning, baseline emissions inventory development, collection of energy data and cooperation with energy stakeholders, new developments of the Covenant and its links with other initiatives, stakeholders involvement, , etc.). This is a new orientation in comparison with the previous years and demonstrates that **the time of the pure promotion of the Covenant is over: the priority is now to accompany municipalities in the implementation of their commitments.**

Most events had a strong emphasis on the exchange of experiences and networking between different partners involved in the Covenant (e.g. signatories, Covenant Coordinators, Covenant Supporters) or able to support Covenant signatories (e.g. cooperation with other public authorities or stakeholders to organise events). Respondents highlighted their efforts to support interaction and offer a platform for best practices' exchange, in order to inspire their members involved in the Covenant and the ones considering joining.

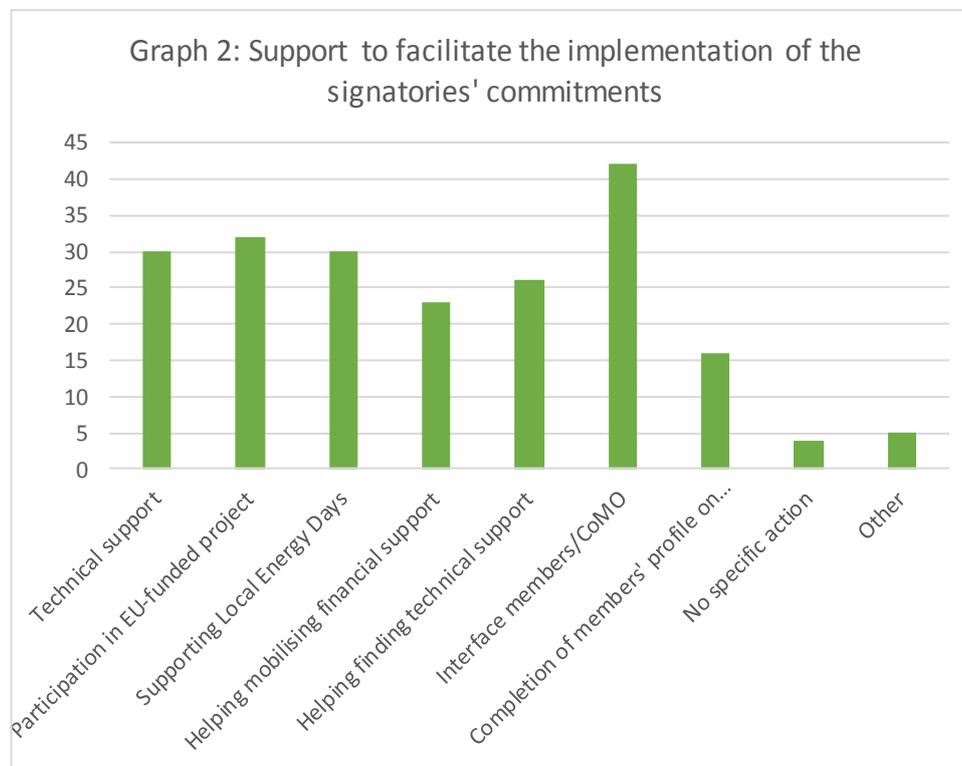
In this respect, **the added-value of participating in an EU-funded project has to be underlined** as it provides a structured framework for the organisation of events and interaction between different partners. In particular, several projects funded by the European Union were explicitly mentioned, such as [NET-COM](#), [Energy for Mayors](#), [Meshartility](#), [Covenant CapaCITY](#), [SEAP Plus](#), [100% RES community](#), [SEAP Alps](#), [EnercitEE](#), [Green twinning](#).

In addition, **the creation of national Covenant Clubs was very positively referred to**, especially in the following countries: Poland, Austria, Flanders, Serbia, France, Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, Baltic area, and Croatia. Covenant Supporters usually play a prominent role in these platforms and many respondents stressed their added-value in terms of arena for exchanging information, promoting the Covenant, speaking from one voice at national level, organising training and fostering cooperation.

A vast array of activities to support the implementation of municipalities' commitments within the Covenant of Mayors

Covenant Supporters used different tools at their disposal to support their members in the implementation of their commitments², such as their political committees and technical working groups, a dedicated mailing list, the development of a specific documentation or the creation of experience-sharing opportunities, in particular between their members engaged in the Covenant and others. In 2013, only 4 respondents did not take specific action to facilitate the implementation of the commitments taken by their members within the Covenant, whilst **the wide majority implemented activities aiming at providing technical, financial or administrative support (see graph 2).**

² When they sign the Covenant of Mayors, municipalities commit to implement [a certain number of activities](#), such as the development of a sustainable energy action plan within one year.



The 90 networks engaged as Covenant Supporters in December 2013 gather both non-specialised associations and technical networks of local and regional authorities. Thus, **the level of technical support to Covenant signatories greatly varies among Covenant Supporters.**

- Respondents from networks specialised in the field of energy and climate described various activities aiming at independently providing technical support to their members, including capacity-building training, study tours, development of guidelines, support in the preparation of energy-related projects, personalised support for baseline emissions inventory and Sustainable energy action plan (SEAP) development, data collection and processing, development of tools and methodologies, etc.
- This did not prevent non-specialised networks to implement very relevant activities, for instance putting in contact their members with relevant stakeholders able to provide technical assistance, twinning and mentoring between municipalities, promotion of technical tools and methodologies available, translation of technical documents, etc.

Respondents underlined that beyond technical issues, financing remains the major challenge when it comes to the development and implementation of SEAPs. Therefore, **many of them dedicated a lot of effort to help their members find adequate sources of financing.** Their initiatives ranged from gathering and disseminating information about financing tools available, including the organisation of capacity-building events or dedicated working groups, to lobbying activities for the creation / continuation of European or national financial programmes to support the Covenant signatories, via training and support in preparing financial applications.

Last but not least, **the involvement of Covenant Supporters in EU-funded or transnational projects proved to be extremely useful to support their members involved in the Covenant, both in terms of experience-sharing and technical support.** Several Covenant Supporters joined such projects and made sure that their involvement and the results of the projects benefited to their whole membership.

Raising the visibility of the Covenant of Mayors to obtain greater recognition and support

Half of the respondents included the Covenant of Mayors in the political strategy of their organisation, its annual work programme and/or major position-taking and political initiatives. Graph 3 provides an overview of the advocacy activities implemented by Covenant Supporters. Concrete examples shared by respondents referred to events targeting the general public, the creation of a Covenant excellence price, or meetings with relevant public authorities at regional/national level to obtain political and financial support for the Covenant of Mayors. **The role of the national Covenant Clubs** was again mentioned as a useful tool to enhance the visibility of the Covenant and unite different stakeholders for the representation of the initiative at national level.

Graph 3
Advocacy activities of Covenant Supporters



Responses provided by several European associations of local and regional authorities committed as Covenant Supporters provides a good illustration of advocacy initiatives in 2013:

- Organised political meetings between Covenant signatories and high-level representatives of the European institutions, such as EU Commissioners and members of the European Parliament, on the Covenant achievements, with the objective of obtaining political recognition and support ;
- Exchanged with European institutions and bodies (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, European Agency for competitiveness and innovation, etc.) about development and needs of the Covenant.
- Organised of a strong promotion/lobbying for developing the Covenant initiative concept in other geographical areas (e.g. the Balkans, China, India).
- Participated in the decision-making process on key European strategies linked with the Covenant of Mayors (e.g. continuation of the financial programme "Energy Intelligent Europe programme", contribution to the debate on the 2030 EU framework on energy and climate defining the European political priorities in the mid-term).
- Promoted the Covenant initiative towards a series of EU key stakeholders involved in energy and climate issues.
- Participated in events at European and international level to make the success of the Covenant of Mayors better known.

Interaction with the Covenant of Mayors' Office and recommendations

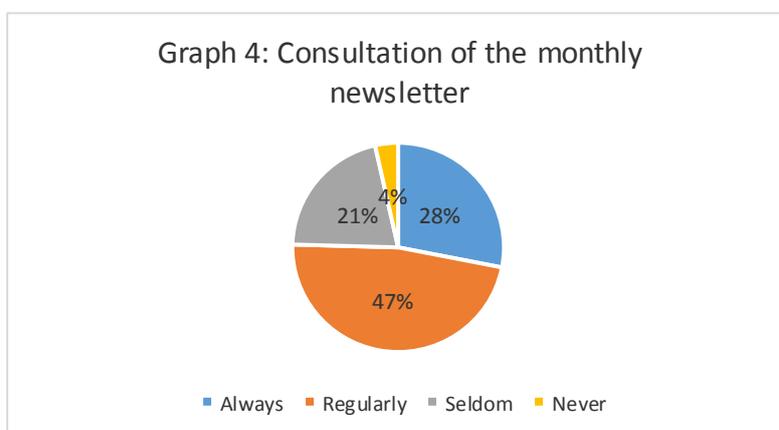
The analysis of the responses provided by the Covenant Supporters demonstrates that the contacts and exchange of information could be improved. Thus, 66% of the respondents recognised that they seldom or never sent information about their activities to the Covenant of Mayors' Office.

Website of the Covenant of Mayors

Most of Covenant Supporters consulted the website regularly (once a month or more) but there is less evidence that all the functionalities of the website and the Extranet are well-known. Only 22% of the respondents confirmed that they know how to use the Extranet ("My Covenant") to manage their profile, consult the Rss feed or find technical documents. Besides, the respondents did not use the possibility to promote their best practices ("benchmarks of excellence") on the website. 60% of the respondents never published a best practice under their profile and only 14% did it in 2013. This proves that the "Benchmark of excellence" section of the website could be improved to better promote Covenant Supporters' best practices.

Covenant newsletters

A wide majority of respondents regularly read the newsletter (see graph 4). There is a very broad consensus that the most useful information relates to good practices, case studies on local initiatives and implementation of the Covenant. Two other major topics mentioned by a majority of respondents are the information about the Covenant developments and information about financing opportunities, including projects.



Events organised by the Covenant of Mayors' Office

Only a minority of respondents (16%) did not participate in events organised by the Covenant of Mayors' Office. The majority took part either in an annual ceremony, a thematic workshop and/or a webinar. Expectations towards future events are the following:

Regarding the format:

- **There is a rather broad support for webinars**, especially for short, thematically-focused or country-specific events. Some limits were pointed out, such as the effectiveness of physical meetings when it comes to attract new signatories and promote the Covenant, or the lack of direct and informal interaction between participants.



- Several respondents highlighted **the added-value of events organised in a national context** and in respective national languages (e.g. in France or Italy, through national Covenant clubs).
- Recommendations were made for **practical events focusing on concrete examples and practical tools**, thus going beyond the awareness raising.
- One respondent suggested organising “train the trainers” workshops, targeting for instance Covenant Coordinators and Supporters, as they are themselves training municipalities.

Regarding the content:

- **Financing was unanimously mentioned as the priority topic for events organised by the Covenant of Mayors’ Office.** In particular, the following issues were mentioned: innovative financing schemes for SEAP implementation, energy performance contracting, public-private partnerships (legal framework and financial issues), and the mobilisation of Structural funds. It was recommended not only to focus on big-scale projects and to take into account the national framework.
- **Supporting the exchange between Covenant Supporters** was the second priority topic identified by respondents. Other topics mentioned by a majority were **SEAP implementation, methodologies for monitoring and reporting SEAP implementation and the collection of data.**
- In addition, suggestions were made to address the following issues: mobilisation of political support, the future of the Covenant (after 2014 and 2020) and its links with other initiatives (e.g. adaptation) and fields (e.g. waste, air), the exchange of best practices, especially from frontrunners signatories (e.g. in terms of SEAP development and implementation). A number of concrete and technical themes were also proposed.
- Some comments were made on the **Covenant annual ceremony**: some respondents stressed the need to keep a high level political dimension (e.g. with participation of national Covenant representatives - Mayors' special session) as well as a high media visibility.

⇒ The Covenant of Mayors’ Office will draw on the conclusions from the input provided by Covenant Supporters in the present report. Concrete recommendations and best practices described in the different contributions will be taken into account by the Covenant of Mayors’ Office for its future work. Specific comments will be transmitted to the relevant Covenant officer.