

Green City Accord

Clean and Healthy Cities for Europe

We, the Mayors and Leaders of Local Governments signing the Green City Accord, share a vision of an urban future where, by 2030, our citizens breathe clean air, enjoy clean water, have access to parks and green spaces, and experience less environmental noise. Our vision also sees the circular economy becoming a reality, with waste turned into a resource and recycling becoming the norm.

We want our people to see their city as an attractive place to live, work and invest in. A place that supports their health and well-being. To achieve this vision, we will use all the powers at our disposal and commit, by signing this Accord, to tackling the most urgent environmental challenges facing our cities, and to fostering a just ecological transition that will make our cities more sustainable and resilient. Our cities will be an inspiration to others around the world.

We, Mayors and Leaders, acknowledge that:

Our cities hold the key to sustainable development. Today, urban areas are home to over 70 per cent of the European Union's population. Throughout history, cities have been at the heart of human development, serving citizens who deserve prosperity in a clean, healthy environment.

While our joint efforts have helped improve the environment and raised standards across the European Union, many problems remain. Air pollution continues to be the main environmental cause of premature death and disease. Good water status has not been achieved and Europe's water bodies still face significant pressures. Biodiversity and ecosystems continue to deteriorate. Environmental noise is a growing concern, and inefficient waste management practices mean that significant quantities of valuable resources are lost, hindering the transition to a more circular economy.

A clean and healthy environment improves our quality of life, and plays an important role in ensuring our physical and mental well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of safeguarding the environment to boost our resilience. While poor air quality compromises our health and makes us more vulnerable to health threats, access to parks, forests and other green spaces benefits our overall well-being. Conserving and restoring nature are powerful tools in the fight against climate change.

With the European Green Deal adopted in December 2019, the EU is advancing towards greater sustainability. Our cities will play an important role in the implementation of the Deal, turning its ambitions into a reality on the ground. With this additional effort, we will also advance towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹.

¹ In particular, SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; and SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.



We, Mayors and Leaders, therefore, commit to safeguarding public health and well-being by taking ambitious action at local level, in close collaboration with citizens, civil society, sub-national authorities (including other local governments), national authorities, EU institutions, the private sector and academic institutions, with a view to achieving the following goals by 2030:



A significant improvement in **air quality** in our cities, moving us closer to respecting the World Health Organization's Air Quality Guidelines, while ending exceedances of EU air quality standards as soon as possible.



Important progress in improving the **quality of water bodies** and the **efficiency of water use**.



Considerable progress in conserving and enhancing urban **biodiversity**, including through an increase in the extent and quality of green areas in cities, and by halting the loss of and restoring urban ecosystems.



Advance towards the **circular economy** by securing a significant improvement in the management of household municipal waste, an important reduction in waste generation and landfilling, and a substantial increase in re-use, repair and recycling.



Significant reduction in **noise** pollution, moving us closer to the levels recommended by the World Health Organization.

We will address all five areas, while prioritising the areas that present the most significant challenges for our city.

In each of these five areas, we, Mayors and Leaders, undertake to:

- Establish baseline levels and set ambitious targets within two years, going beyond the minimum requirements set by EU legislation²
- Implement policies and programmes, in an integrated manner, to achieve our targets by 2030
- Report regularly on implementation and progress.

To make this happen, we are ready to exercise strong political leadership to mobilise the relevant municipal departments, engage citizens and local stakeholders, build the necessary capacity and skills, prioritise our resources, promote sustainable products and services through our public procurement practices and enforce the necessary regulations.

² Setting targets that go beyond the minimum requirements set by EU legislation applies to all areas except water quality, where our target will be to meet the requirements set by the EU's water legislation, including the Water Framework Directive, Drinking Water Directive, Bathing Water Directive, and Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.

To support our commitment, we, Mayors and Leaders, encourage our sub-national and national governments and EU institutions to:

- Take action on sources of pollution and other causes of environmental degradation that are outside our boundaries or beyond our control
- Mobilise and allocate adequate technical and financial resources and set the appropriate policy frameworks to support the implementation of our commitment
- Work with cities to integrate urban environmental challenges in the development of relevant policies at all levels
- Promote local innovation to accelerate the development and adoption of technologies and solutions that help our cities become greener and healthier.

Our commitment in each of the five areas is outlined in separate sections that form part of this document.

Name of the Mayor or equivalent representative:

.....

Position:

Date:

Signature:

Mandated by (name of Municipal Council or equivalent decision-making body):

..... on (date):



Our commitment to achieving clean air

Air pollution is the main environmental health risk in Europe, with the problem most prevalent in cities.

While air quality has improved in recent decades, as a direct result of more robust air quality policies at various levels of governance, concentrations of air pollutants in many cities and regions still exceed both EU standards and the levels recommended by the World Health Organization. Exposure to high levels of air pollution, especially to fine particulate matter (PM_{2,5}), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and ozone (O₃), leads to some 400 000 premature deaths annually in the EU. Air pollution also causes acidification and eutrophication, with negative impacts on Europe's nature and biodiversity.

The European Union has developed policies and legislation to improve air quality. The Ambient Air Quality Directives, for example, set air quality standards and monitoring requirements across the EU.

Improvements in air quality depend on effective action to address the major sources of air pollution – transport, energy (including domestic heating), and the agricultural and industrial sectors. Synergies with climate, energy and transport policies also require coherent action at national, regional and local levels.

Cities play an important role in improving air quality, targeting the sources most prevalent in an urban setting. By stepping up their level of commitment and taking further action, our cities can make a significant contribution towards achieving the EU's wider zero pollution ambition for air, delivering notable improvements in urban air quality across the EU by 2030 and meeting EU air quality standards as soon as possible.

We are committed to a future where our citizens can breathe clean air and hereby set out our commitment.

In signing the Green City Accord, we pledge to achieve a significant improvement in air quality in our cities, moving us closer to respecting the World Health Organization's Air Quality Guidelines by 2030, while ending exceedances of EU air quality standards as soon as possible.

We will:

- Take action, implement policies and enforce regulations to achieve ambitious reductions in air pollutants from sources within our control
- Integrate air quality impacts and co-benefits into the development of other relevant policies and plans, in particular, Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) under the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy – especially in transport or energy-related mitigation actions, Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs), the deployment of renewable energy, and spatial planning processes.

We will consider the following actions and measures:

- Creating low or zero emission zones, implementing vehicle restrictions or financial incentives (such as road or parking charging) and supporting cycling and the use of electric vehicles
- Making public transport more attractive, more accessible and cleaner
- Addressing air pollution from energy consumption, by promoting energy efficient buildings with clean heating and cooling systems and renewable energy installations
- Regularly monitoring air quality across the city and making the data available to the public in a timely and accessible manner
- Working with relevant institutions to ensure high quality emissions inventories, models, and analysis
- Collaborating with relevant institutions for more research on the local health impacts of air pollution, local benefits of air quality improvements, and local economic implications
- Raising awareness of air pollution to help citizens reduce their exposure.

Our commitment to improving the quality of water and the efficiency of water use

Across the EU, rivers, lakes and coastal waters remain under significant pressure, and the majority of water bodies are still failing to achieve good ecological and chemical status. Preserving the quality and the availability of groundwater, which accounts for some 50% of our drinking water, will be important. Access to clean, affordable water for drinking and sanitary purposes is a precondition for human health and well-being.

The EU has a comprehensive body of water legislation³ in place to control the main sources of pollution and ensure integrated water management, but implementation and enforcement need to be strengthened. Further efforts are required to enhance implementation and to protect and improve the quality of Europe's water resources.

Securing clean and safe water for a growing urban population remains a constant challenge. While there has been significant progress in collecting and treating urban wastewater, new pressures such as climate change, water scarcity, and the upgrade of facilities to tackle further pollutants require continued and sustainable solutions.

The European Green Deal's 'zero pollution' ambition recognises the need for more action to prevent urban water pollution (including urban runoff) and underlines the importance of restricting harmful pollutants such as microplastics and chemicals, including pharmaceuticals. The reuse of treated wastewater has been emphasised in EU policy on resource efficiency and more recently in the context of work to achieve a circular economy. Urban areas can make an important contribution towards achieving the EU's zero pollution ambition, as well as facilitating water reuse and efficiency.

We are committed to a future where our citizens can enjoy clean water and hereby set out our commitment.

In signing the Green City Accord, we pledge to improve the ecological and chemical status of our local water bodies, to contribute to the protection of water sources that supply our drinking water, and to increase the efficiency of water use in our cities by 2030.

We will:

- Take action, implement policies and enforce regulations to improve the quality of water and the efficiency of water use in our cities
- Integrate water actions in other relevant policies and plans.

³ The Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EC), Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC), Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC), Floods Directive (2007/60/EC), among others.

We will consider the following actions and measures:

- Identifying water as a critical determinant of sustainable environmental urban planning, e.g. by driving green infrastructure for the mediation of urban runoff
- Retaining rainwater and managing and controlling storm water overflows including utilising natural retention measures
- Addressing contaminants of emerging concern (micropollutants, pharmaceuticals, and microplastics), by using targeted measures and innovative approaches including modern treatment technologies and nature-based solutions where possible
- Supporting the circular economy by reducing pollution at source, via the technical demonstration of energy-neutral wastewater networks and wastewater treatment plants, by reducing leakage along the networks, and reusing treated wastewater
- Restoring the functioning of aquatic ecosystems to achieve good ecological status of water bodies
- Improving monitoring to establish better links between the quality of water bodies and the treatment process
- Contributing to the effective coordination of water management policy throughout the region as relevant for the city's water supply and for reducing pressures on water
- Building awareness and utilising citizen science to ensure that citizens understand the importance of water for human health and well-being and its role in the circular economy, and are aware of the costs and effort needed to ensure its safety.

Our commitment to conserving and enhancing urban biodiversity

Despite progress in recent decades, the protection of habitats and species has been inadequate, restoration has been small-scale, and the implementation of legislation has been insufficient. As a result, European biodiversity and ecosystems continue to deteriorate. Invasive alien species are a growing threat to native biodiversity. Moreover, urban sprawl is expanding in the EU, affecting the essential environment functions performed by soil and landscapes, and reducing the availability of green spaces.

As urban populations increase, the restoration, preservation and enhancement of biodiversity becomes ever more important for our health and well-being. In cities, nature provides opportunities for sustainable urban farming, recreation, physical exercise and social interaction. Nature-based solutions are an effective means of addressing urban challenges, from alleviating noise and air pollution, to purifying water, sheltering and cooling property, absorbing carbon and mitigating flood risks. The potential of urban and peri-urban spaces to contribute to climate change mitigation, including through tree planting and ecosystem restoration, deserves wider recognition.

The EU has a comprehensive range of nature policies already in place. The Birds and Habitats Directives are the main EU legislative instruments governing the protection of biodiversity and nature, and the basis of Natura 2000 – the largest network of protected areas in the world. In May 2020, further steps were taken with the adoption of a new EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. The strategy proposes ambitious actions to put biodiversity on the path to recovery, and calls on EU cities with populations above 20,000 to develop Urban Greening Plans that create biodiverse and accessible urban green areas and limit harmful practices.

We are committed to a future where our citizens enjoy urban green spaces and hereby set out our commitment.

In signing the Green City Accord, we pledge to achieve considerable progress in conserving and enhancing urban biodiversity, including through an increase in the extent and quality of green areas in cities and by halting the loss of and restoring urban ecosystems by 2030.

We will:

- Take action, implement policies and enforce regulations to protect, restore and enhance nature in our cities
- Work with relevant stakeholders to mainstream biodiversity and nature-based solutions in other sectors.

We will consider the following actions and measures:

- Increasing the extent and/or quality of green infrastructure in our cities to deliver a range of benefits to citizens and biodiversity and to reconnect urban and peri-urban green areas
- Expanding the use of nature-based solutions to increase resilience against climate change and to tackle urban problems such as heat waves, flooding, air and water pollution and noise
- Ensuring that new urban infrastructure projects have a net positive contribution to biodiversity
- Preventing further soil sealing wherever possible and establishing strict rules to compensate for the negative environmental impacts in cases where soil sealing is unavoidable
- Identifying and remediating contaminated soil sites
- Eliminating the use of pesticides and limiting management practices harmful to biodiversity in urban green areas
- Preventing the introduction and spread of invasive alien species in urban areas
- Supporting species-rich communities of wild pollinators in urban areas
- Raising awareness about nature's benefits and encouraging citizens to take action
- Identifying areas in and around our cities with potential for ecosystem restoration and/or tree planting to contribute to EU-wide climate change mitigation and biodiversity restoration targets
- Contributing to the effective protection and management of urban Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas for the benefit of nature and our citizens.

Our commitment to advancing the Circular Economy, reducing waste and boosting recycling

Waste management continues to be a significant challenge across the EU. Urban expansion has resulted in rising production and consumption patterns and an increase in municipal solid waste generation. In 2018, of the 251 million tonnes of municipal waste generated, only 47% was recycled or composted⁴. A significant amount of municipal waste is still sent to landfill or incineration. Failure to reuse products and recycle materials leads to increased resource extraction and processing.

The EU has put in place a legislative framework (and funding) to support Member States and cities' efforts to improve waste management. In a further step to strengthen waste management, EU laws were revised in 2018 to increase their level of ambition, in particular for waste prevention and recycling. In parallel, a comprehensive vision for the circular economy was adopted – the new Circular Economy Action Plan – with a view to reducing the EU's consumption footprint and doubling the EU's circular material use rate over the coming decade, while boosting economic growth and creating new employment opportunities. Moreover, it includes the key objective of halving the amount of residual (non-recycled) municipal waste by 2030 by implementing initiatives along the life cycle of products, from design and manufacturing to consumption, repair, reuse, recycling, and bringing resources back into the economy.

Cities are important players in implementing waste legislation and in deploying and encouraging innovative solutions that make the circular economy a reality. Local action will also make an important contribution to the implementation of the Circular Cities and Regions Initiative (CCRI), which promotes circular solutions at local and regional levels.

We are committed to a future where waste is reduced or turned into a new resource and hereby set out our commitment.

In signing the Green City Accord, we pledge to advance towards the circular economy by securing a significant improvement in the management of household municipal waste, an important reduction in waste generation and landfilling, and a substantial increase in re-use, repair and recycling by 2030.

We will:

- Implement policies and actions along product lifecycles to make our cities more circular, enforcing the necessary waste legislation, reducing waste generation, and promoting sustainable consumption.

⁴ EUROSTAT (2020). [Municipal waste statistics](#).

We will consider the following actions and measures:

- Improving and extending separate collection systems, in particular for paper and cardboard, glass, metals, plastics, bio-waste, hazardous household waste and textiles
- Using economic instruments in application of the polluter pays principle, in particular Pay-as-you-throw schemes
- Reducing waste incineration
- Putting effective measures in place to reduce the consumption of single-use plastic and to eliminate plastic litter
- Encouraging re-use, e.g. through repair activities, especially for furniture, clothing and electrical and electronic devices or in waste-free public events
- Increasing the uptake of Green Public Procurement and EMAS registrations
- Increasing public awareness/encouraging more sustainable consumption patterns and uptake of labels, including the EU Eco-label
- Piloting and demonstrating innovative circular economy solutions at city level
- Supporting the implementation of circular solutions along the entire lifecycle of products in sectors such as bio-based value chains, food, energy, buildings, and urban planning
- Reducing food waste, including by setting quantitative reduction targets
- Promoting and supporting initiatives and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Our commitment to reducing noise pollution

Noise pollution is an important environmental cause of health problems. Prolonged exposure to high levels of noise leads to sleep disturbance, cardiovascular diseases, stress and cognitive impairment. Chronic exposure has significant impacts on physical and mental health and well-being.

The most widespread sources of environmental noise are transport-related. Road traffic noise is a major environmental problem. At least 20% of the EU's population live in areas where traffic noise levels are harmful to health. Urban growth and the expansion of transport networks will lead to a further increase in noise pollution.

The EU Environmental Noise Directive is the main legislative framework to achieve noise reduction. The Directive offers a common approach to avoiding and preventing exposure to environmental noise through reporting (noise mapping and action plans), thereby reducing its harmful effects and preserving quiet areas. In parallel, a number of specific legislative measures address or control noise at source by imposing noise limits on certain vehicles or equipment.

Despite some progress, noise pollution continues to increase, blighting the lives of many citizens in urban areas. In 2018, the World Health Organization released Environmental noise guidelines for the European region that define exposure levels to noise that should not be exceeded to minimise adverse health effects.

Further action is necessary across the EU to ensure better implementation of the EU Environmental Noise Directive. Cities have a critical role in managing noise.

We are committed to a future where citizens' health is not endangered by environmental noise and hereby set out our commitment.

In signing the Green City Accord, we pledge to achieve a significant reduction in noise pollution in our cities by 2030, moving us closer to levels recommended by the World Health Organization.

We will:

- Take action, implement policies and enforce regulations to achieve ambitious reductions to mitigate noise pollution.
- Integrate the noise reduction impacts and co-benefits into the development of other relevant policies and plans, in particular, Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) under the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, transport (notably, Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans), and spatial planning processes.

We will consider the following actions and measures:

- Identifying and protecting existing quiet areas from an increase in noise levels
- Implementing quiet freight delivery plans
- Creating car-free zones, implementing vehicle restrictions or financial incentives (e.g. regarding tyre size and performance) and supporting walking, cycling and so forth
- Developing or updating noise maps and action plans, as required by the Environmental Noise Directive, and ensuring the appropriate implementation of the plans
- Managing traffic flows, reducing speed limits and using low-noise pavements to reduce tyre and road noise
- Implementing urban planning measures and changes in infrastructure to reduce noise at source
- Introducing noise barriers and building insulation solutions, if required
- Engaging the public and raising awareness of noise pollution to help citizens reduce their exposure.