

# SC5-14-2019

# Visionary and integrated solutions to improve well-being and health in cities: Clustering Activities

## Joint Manifesto

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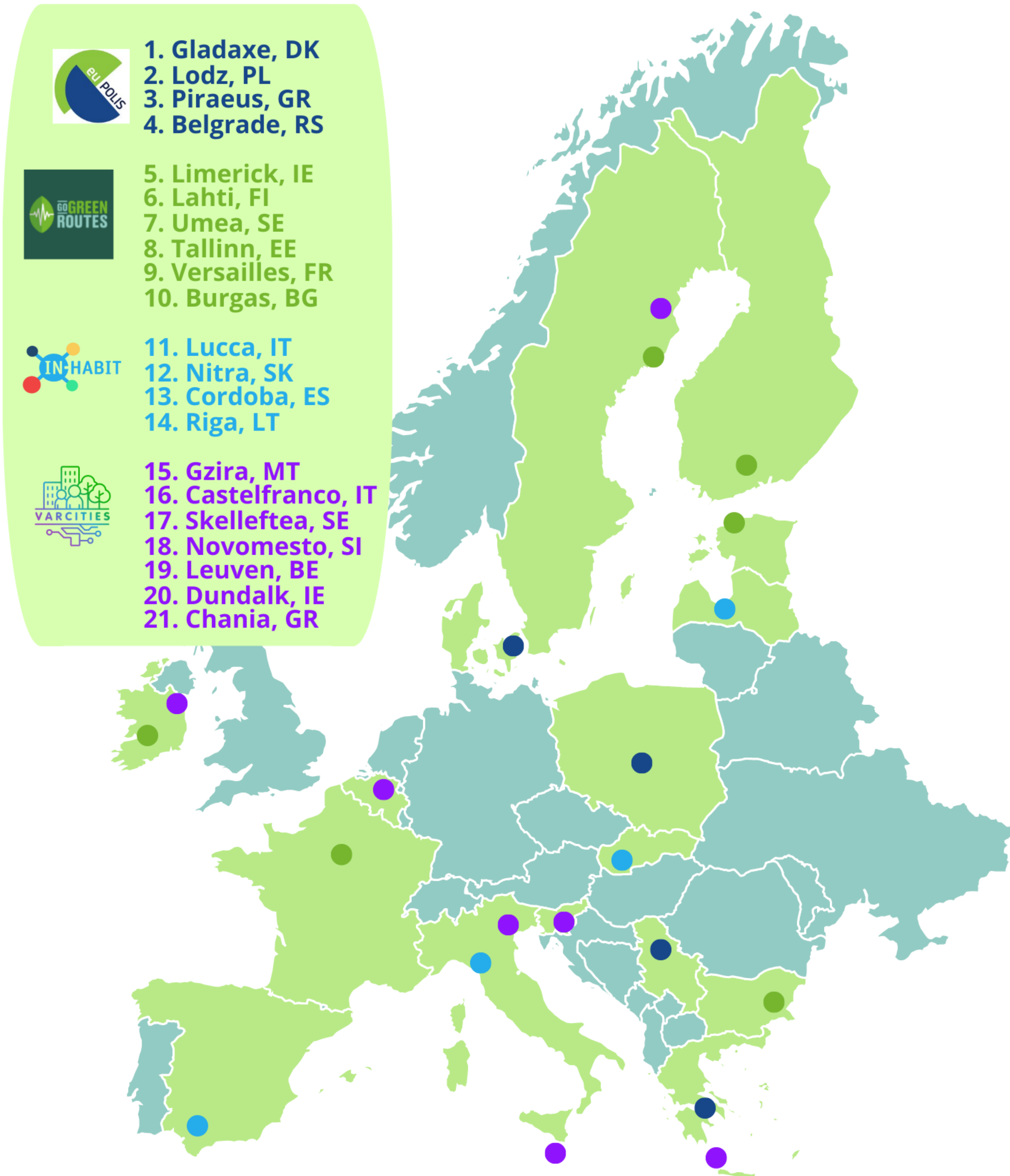




# OBJECTIVES

The following is a joint manifesto from four sister projects which **calls on European cities to launch initiatives that offer visionary and integrated solutions at the intersection of social, cultural, digital and nature-based solutions (NBS) to increase the health and well-being of citizens.** We are funded under the call SC5-14-2019 to address the challenge in an ambitious way and we commenced our innovation actions in September 2020 running for between 4 and 5 years.

**IN-HABIT, VARCITIES, euPOLIS and GoGreenRoutes,** are committed to achieving a series of bespoke visionary solutions to promote health and well-being in urban conurbations, by establishing sustainable and inclusive models for increasing the health and well-being of citizens exposed to different climatic conditions and societal challenges. Our projects working across almost two dozen urban conurbations in Europe with links to urban centres beyond work with a total of nearly five million citizens.





# EUROPEAN AND GLOBAL CONTEXT



The devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change has led to economic recession, social inequity, and made it more difficult to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). However, during lockdowns we had a glimpse of a carbon neutral future with reduced pollution, a dramatic shift to green space to meet both individual and community needs.

Subsequently, we have witnessed a proliferation of policy developments and citizen attention around health and well-being in cities, accelerating sharply since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Tenth World Conference on *Health Promotion for Well-being, Equity and Sustainable Development* was the first time that the World Health Organization (WHO) used *well-being* as the theme for a major conference. As a result, the participants adopted the "Geneva Charter on Well-being", which emphasises the imperative to create sustainable "well-being societies" committed to achieving equitable health today and for future generations without ecological limits.

## AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

The Rome declaration was formulated to focus the effort of the EU towards a more sustainable and prosperous Europe. More specific initiatives have also been launched. The City Science Initiative on Mental Health in Cities proposes to undertake a series of work lines for improvement, focusing particularly on the accessibility of mental health and well-being infrastructures, and on human-centred engagement and co-creation processes to address mental health and well-being. The European Green Deal is undoubtedly Europe's leading economic transformation initiative to implement real and concrete actions to mitigate the effects of climate change. It is aligned with mobilising action on NBS, while assisting in delivering the European Recovery Plan.

## AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

On the global agenda, the most recent COP27 put for the first time concrete and explicit focus on the use of NBS as a tool for ecosystem restoration. While the EU and others had driven the NBS agenda, and the UN had related goals on sustainable cities and communities (UN SDG 11), climate change became a catalyst for accelerated policy shifts. Governments emphasised the need to respect, promote and consider obligations on human rights, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.

In a historic UN Biodiversity Conference – COP15 – governments agreed a new Global Biodiversity Framework, which commits them to deliver "urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss" to "put nature on a pathway to recovery" by 2030. This was a momentous agreement, including global consensus from 196 countries to protect 30% of land and sea, cut environmentally harmful subsidies and increase finance flows for protecting and restoring nature. This new set of biodiversity targets for the next decade through Convention on Biological Diversity puts urban environment in the forefront of climate and nature actions.



1. Nature-Based Solutions



2. Healthy Urban Living



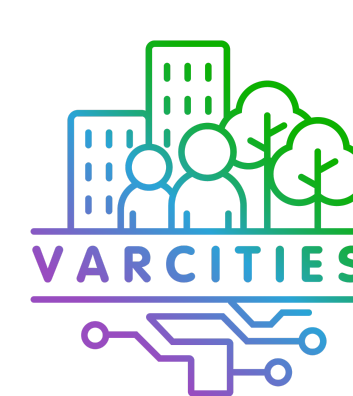
3. Culture and the Arts



4. Gender, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



5. Digital Innovation





# I. NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

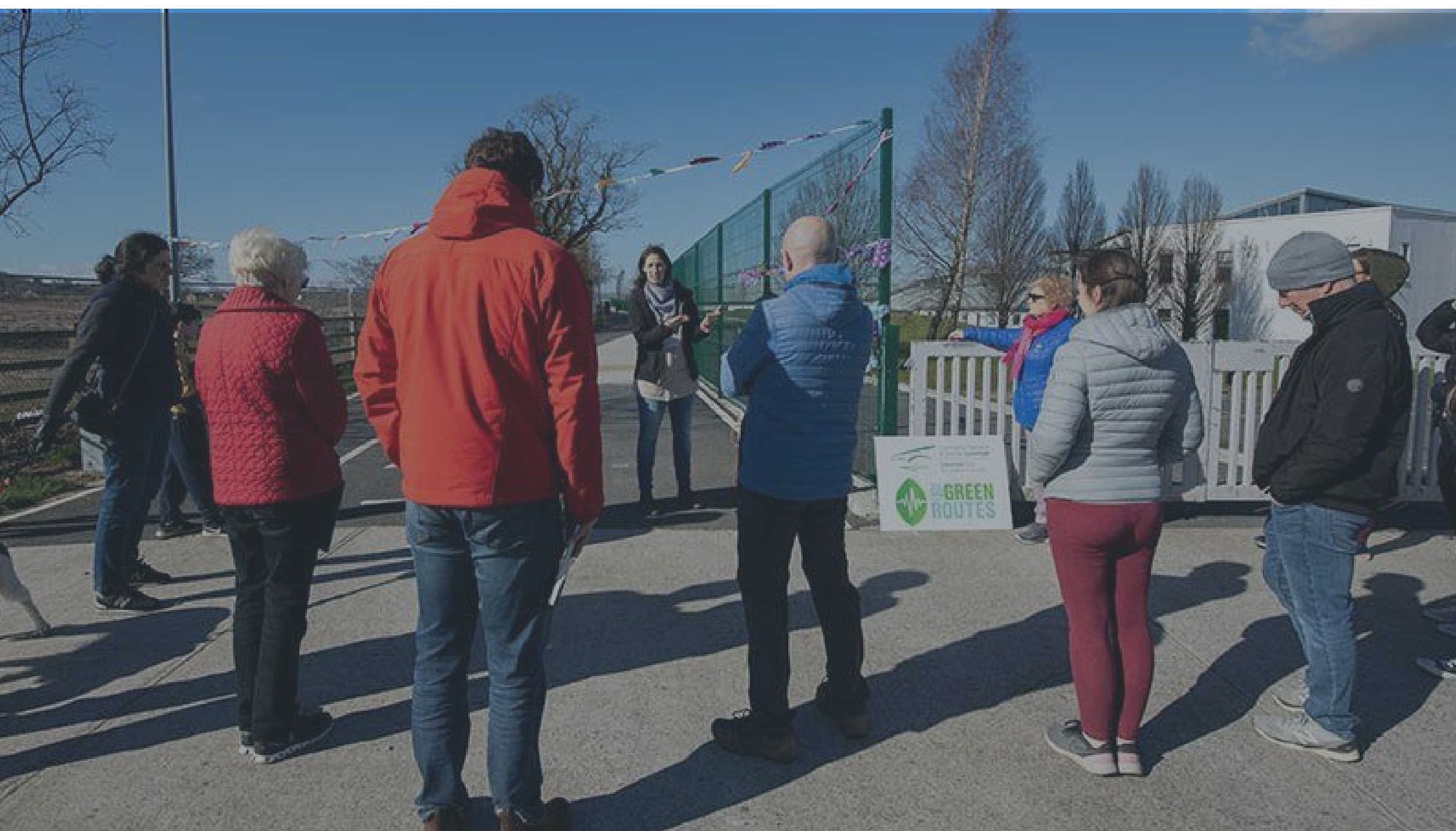
To address the 'wicked problems' linked to climate change and nature degradation, one of the main tools are Nature-Based Solutions. NBS are defined as “actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems, which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services and resilience and biodiversity benefits”.

In urban environments, the importance of solutions based on connecting with nature in all forms, including human-animal bonds, should be highlighted. Nature connection, or our perceived relationship with nature, may be critical to promoting both human and environmental health. The UN has estimated that investment in NBS needs to double by 2025, triple by 2030 and quadruple by 2050.

## EUROPEAN PLATFORMS

Practically speaking the European Union has provided specific platforms through the creation of Horizon Europe Missions. Two missions are of particular importance in our context: 1). Climate Neutral and Smart Cities, which promotes the involvement of local authorities, citizens, businesses, investors and regional and national authorities to achieve climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030, and 2). Adaptation to climate change, which aims to increase resilience against the impacts of climate change. Such missions serve as centres of experimentation and innovation for solutions that can be transferred to other European cities and regions and beyond with the aim of achieving zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Lack of nature in the city exacerbates co-hazards of noise and air pollution and amplifies urban heat islands which can be further aggravated by climate change. Recent scientific evidence from [GoGreenRoutes](#) clearly demonstrates that ensuring access to green space can save lives. Meeting the WHO recommendation for available urban green space -all citizens should have 0.5 hectares within 300m of their residence-is just a start point.



## NBS REPORTS

In recent years there have been many advances in reporting on NBS and how to use ecosystem services accounts, with the aim of achieving the ambitious sustainability targets of the European Green Deal. To learn more about the NBS projects and their benefits, the ecosystems targeted and the social challenges addressed, a comprehensive [graphical report](#) has recently been published that compiles all the initiatives undertaken to date. Nonetheless, there is a lack of operational skills, knowledge, funding and market acceptance, as well as appropriate governance models for those who want to implement and build NBS (e.g., local governments).



# I. NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

For that reason, addressing issues of environmental justice and universal access to green spaces is crucial to achieving healthy urban environments, in line with the guidelines of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), where they include the need to provide inclusive and accessible green spaces for everybody. On paper, since 2016 the [UN HABITAT New Urban Agenda](#) initiative is working to improve life across the urbanised world by developing interlinkages between different policy agendas and establishing an incremental and inclusive information systems.

The [New European Bauhaus](#) is the initiative that connects the European Green Deal with our living environments and experiences. Architectural and urban development should be based on health and well-being as a starting point. The initiative calls on citizens to imagine and build together a sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for our eyes, minds, and souls. **Creating healthy and comfortable environments makes people happier, and therefore healthier.**

For a long-term improvement of urban environments, we need to adopt comprehensive policies and more holistic approaches, that consider various dimensions of health and well-being. Recent scientific advances in Europe and the United States have formalised that the sum of daily environmental factors to which the inhabitants are exposed (e.g. food, air, social interactions, exercise) constitute the urban exposome. Such approaches bring broader perspectives to urban environmental problems and a way to cope with them.

Since a healthy economy is a healthy society, policies must be geared towards building prosperous, liveable, and resilient cities. Consequently, a supporting pillar of the European Green Deal is the [Circular Economy Action Plan](#). This plan introduces legislative and non-legislative measures for the EU's transition to a circular economy to reduce pressure on natural resources, and to create sustainable growth and jobs. It is also a prerequisite for reaching the EU's 2050 climate neutrality target and halting biodiversity loss. **By reducing dependence on raw materials, keeping products in use and balancing local production with global supply chains, we create thriving cities.**

Another reference is the [New Leipzig Charter](#), which is based on three basic pillars for sustainable city development: **just, green and productive**. This is a key policy reference document for sustainable urban planning in Europe. It underlines the need to establish integrated and sustainable development strategies for cities and to ensure their practical implementation in urban environments, starting from its city centres to its surrounding areas. Member States committed to incorporate this charter into their national or regional urban strategies. This is a key issue, as the alignment of all these European initiatives with local policies in practice is often complicated, as the objectives, and especially the timing, differ between the local, national and European policy actors.





## II. HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN AREAS

Lack of nature in the city exacerbates co-hazards of noise and air pollution and amplifies urban heat islands which can be further aggravated by climate change. Recent scientific evidence clearly demonstrates that ensuring access to green space can save lives. Meeting the WHO recommendation for available urban green space -all citizens should have 0.5 hectares within 300m of their residence-is just a start point. Re-naturing cities requires an inclusive approach to avoid gentrification and other risks.

The existing market-based or tech-based approaches to greening the cities and reducing their carbon footprint are not enough to ensure the sustainable transformation of our cities. It requires a strong civil component, based on co-production and grassroots engagement, to ensure equity and social sustainability. **We argue that applying the rights-based paradigm in the conceptualization of the city's future is crucial in building an innovative human-based planning approach.**



Health or access to nature remain a sine qua non condition of enjoying the citizens' rights to the city and, as such, are worth special attention in the context of the planning processes. We build our concept of a healthy city on the vision of caring cities, which proposes a new model of urban environments with people at the heart of decision-making, reflecting the diversity of users' preferences and experiences, to ensure that spaces are adapted to meet people's different needs, instead of making people adapt to the urban conditions. Health-related and NBS interventions should develop true opportunities for participation and empowerment, building communities resilience and social sustainability. Visionary and integrated solutions are promoted and investigated by the 4 projects intertwining the right to health with the right to the city because the guaranteed access to healthy urban spaces reduces inequities in the access to well-maintained spaces. As a result, also the disadvantaged groups can enjoy positive urbanization effects. In other words, the interconnection between the right to the city and the right to health promotes equity in urban planning. Monitoring change in areas liveability offers an opportunity to anticipate and mitigate potential negative urban processes.

**Policy makers should promote innovation hubs to engage citizens and promote sustainable local solutions for more inclusive communities.**



# III. CULTURE & ARTS

The role of culture is an important part of sustainable development, as it is both socially and economically beneficial. However, this resource is generally undervalued, under-respected and under-protected. For that reason, we must work to develop policies that capitalise on cultural diversity as a resource for sustainable living, and promote an inclusive and equitable ecosystem at all levels that values the contribution of those working in the culture, arts and heritage sectors. It is important to actively work for the valorisation of material and immaterial cultural heritage to keep it alive, which is both an asset and a strategic living resource, playing a crucial and catalytic role in sustainable development, well-being, cultural diversity and social cohesion.

Among the various European initiatives we can find that some progress has been made in communication between the EU and the cultural sector through the [Status and Working Conditions of Artists and Cultural and Creative Professionals study](#). This report provides insight into the situation and the working conditions of cultural professionals and creative artists. The Commission continues to hold a sectoral social dialogue with performing arts organisations, through the [Committee on Live Performance](#). The Commission also launched an [EU study](#) on the health and wellbeing of music creators, and projects as the [Culture4health](#) which addresses the Commission's objective of the Preparatory Action - Developing bottom-up policies for culture and well-being in the EU. The COVID-19 pandemic hit this sector particularly hard, acting as a trigger for awareness of the needs. Consequently, European actions have been launched recently to mitigate the main threats and weaknesses within the culture sector. Therefore, the policy makers should support public and private financial initiatives for sustainable investment to strengthen the cultural economy, and to ensure safe and reliable working conditions in the culture sector.

**Culture, arts and heritage are undervalued resources to boost inclusive health and wellbeing that should be researched and promoted.**



# IV. GENDER, INCLUSION & DIVERSITY

In order to establish objectives and a roadmap, the CE presented on 24 November 2020 the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027), and the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Relations (2020-2025), which aim to accelerate progress on empowering women and girls, and safeguard gains made on gender equality.

More recently, the EU has taken policy measures to further eradicate violence against women with the proposed EU law on combating violence against women and domestic violence. It has also acted to ensure that men and women have equal opportunities at work, passing laws such as the EU rules on reconciliation of work and family life and the European Care Strategy, where the Commission unveiled its agenda to promote equality between women and men in all its diversity.

Despite the strong political commitment of some parties, and due to global challenges (pandemic, inflation, increase in vulnerable population), there is an increase in discrimination based on racism, homophobia, transphobia and misogyny, as well as a polarisation of political parties, resulting in limited attention to GDE&I approaches. We have also seen in the post COVID-19 period an increase in violence and harassment against women and LTGBQI+.

Our sister project cluster calls for a greater commitment to continue fighting the gender gap, and support women's empowerment, as there is a stagnation of the wage and employment rate gap in many sectors. To promote women's participation in the digital economy, we need to close the gender digital gap, where women's access to technology, finance and employment must be actively promoted.

In VARCITIES, IN-HABIT, euPOLIS and GoGreenRoutes projects, no one is left behind. Our main action is to ensure the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies, by considering individual characteristics and circumstances, through fair stakeholder participation in engagement activities.

Intensive mechanisms will be used in the following co-creation activities, in order to ensure that stakeholders are engaged towards the projects: a master list of common criteria and sub-criteria for GDE&I data collection has been developed to facilitate inclusive approaches; common actions, events and awareness campaigns are planned to be organized, to promote the health and wellbeing of citizens across Europe, with a focus on collecting evidence to amplify the voices of citizens from these activities.

## Gender Inclusion and Diversity Policy Context





# V. DIGITAL INNOVATION

Critical and emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, advanced computing, and virtual reality could improve the digital urban economy and lead to safer and more sustainable cities. In this regard we have noted the need for a clear commitment by cities to provide transparency and consistency through provision of data and information on social dimensions via openly accessible platforms data access, otherwise it will be difficult for action by researchers. There is also a need for better support to Micro-, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises' (MSMEs) digital transformation to strengthen their capacities in applying sustainable business practices. Virtual reality offers a tool to showcase future scenarios, both in terms of urban greening or climate change impacts. This can be a public-engagement tool and provide a window into the citizens perception of the public realm after NBS or other interventions.



Analysis of social media and App supported approaches can, with due regard for citizens privacy and needs, rapidly highlight key issues for discourse and analysis. Transformative methods including social media sentiment analysis can bridge the digital divide and are increasingly accessible across platforms.

The digital component in our participant cities assesses the user-friendliness, accessibility to knowledge about environmental data by different social groups and integration of digital tools to support cities. All gathered data will also be fed and displayed in the open access platform, while the indicators will be visualised so that they can be easily read by everyone.



**Digital innovation including virtual nature are not a threat to people but a pathway to support connections.**



# ACTION PLAN

Our Shared vision in future actions to advance integrated solutions to improve well-being and health in cities



## Democratising

Equitable access to health and wellbeing as universal right for all citizens independently of their social and economic status.



## Supported

Working with Governments, cross-sectoral partners, and NGO's that respect and support the value sharing creates.



## Transformative

All can be agents of change for health, well-being and sustainability, shifting to a new way of thinking and acting.



## Just and Fair

Ensuring environmental justice, equity and equality are at the cornerstone of our activities.



## Embedded

Strongly rooted in the needs of individuals, communities and their environments.



## Creative

Imaginative, innovative and disruptive with new paradigms for the people and policy.



## Evidence-based

Scientific evidence (e.g. participatory methods; use of advanced sensor technologies) should guide actions.



## Connected

Working with nature, for nature, for people in a cohesive way that enriches connections.



## Biodiverse

Ensuring biodiversity is protected, enhanced and restored to optimise ecosystems aiming for Nature + approach.



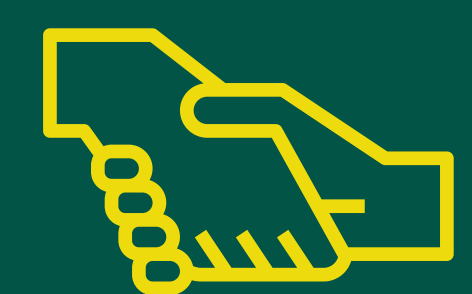
## Future looking

Proactive approach that put the basis to address the future needs of citizens, considering actual and potentially emerging threats.



## Inclusive

Dedicated approach to ensure access to nature for the most vulnerable, specially those with protected characteristics.



## No one left behind

Actions should be co-created, co-designed, co-executed and co-evaluated with all stakeholders included those traditionally excluded.



## Sustainable

Proactive approach that put the basis to address the future needs of citizens, considering actual and potentially emerging threats.



## Engaged

Actions should be co-created, co-designed, co-executed and co-evaluated with all stakeholders included those traditionally excluded.



## Healthy

Dedicated approach to promote health, mental health and well-being, not simply the reduction of disease.



# ENDORSEMENT

## We the undersigned commit to:

- Reaffirm the collective commitment to respect the right of all people to attain the highest levels of well-being and physical and mental health.
- Demonstrate how the integration of social, cultural, digital and nature-based solutions into urban design and planning might reduce health-related environmental burdens in socially deprived neighbourhoods, foster equitable access for all to public spaces, enhance their quality and use and promote sustainable urban mobility patterns.
- Underline the need for strong political commitments to ensure the access to health and wellbeing, especially among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and the importance of considering gender, diversity, inclusion and equity aspects, to ensure that no one is left behind.
- Emphasise the need to implement measures to protect, conserve, sustainably use and restore public spaces, and to ensure cities' sustainability and resilience and the contribution of public spaces to health and wellbeing.
- Meet the needs for strong public, private and citizen's commitments to increase health and wellbeing by achieving greenhouse gas emission neutrality/carbon neutrality by 2050, sustainable mobility and preservation of biodiversity, considering the latest scientific developments and the local circumstances.
- Prioritise the importance of revitalising green, social and health infrastructure investment in a sustainable, inclusive, accessible, and affordable way.

## Signed by



# KEY LINKS

- [EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities](#)
- [EU Urban Agenda](#)
- [WEF Video on Urban Green Space](#)
- [New European Bauhaus](#)
- [IN-HABIT](#)
- [European Skills Agenda](#)
- [euPOLIS](#)
- [New Leipzig Charter](#)
- [VARCITIES](#)
- [Circular Cities and Regions Initiative](#)
- [GoGreenRoutes](#)
- [Intelligent Cities Challenge](#)
- [EU Green Deal](#)
- [City Science Initiative](#)

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