

From local and regional authorities to EU Policy Makers: One/Planetary Health Approach for a Sustainable Future

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INTRODUCTION: NATURE, HEALTH, AND DEMOCRACY IN URBAN SPACES

As the cities, regions and towns of Europe, we stand at a pivotal moment, where the health of our populations, our environment and nature, and our democratic values are intricately intertwined. The triple crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are directly and adversely impacting our health and well-being. The [One/Planetary Health](#) approach, which recognises the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health, must be at the core of European policymaking. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of addressing the root causes of public health crises, many of which stem from ecological degradation and weakened health systems. As urban populations grow older and climate change intensifies, the well-being of all depends on the health of the urban environment and ecosystems.

We, the undersigned cities, call upon the European Union policymakers to adopt and champion a **One/Planetary Health approach** in environmental policies and strategies. We urge the European Union to embed nature-based solutions, public health priorities, and democratic governance into the core of all EU legislation and programs, ensuring a holistic, resilient, and equitable future for all. We call upon ensuring the **availability of funds for local implementation and research** to drive innovation in prevention and treatment, and we commit to the following principles and actions:

1. PROMOTING ONE/PLANETARY HEALTH IN URBAN POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The **health of humans, animals, plants and ecosystems is inextricably linked**. A holistic health approach recognises that addressing challenges such as pandemics, chronic diseases, and mental health requires tackling environmental determinants such as air quality, water, and biodiversity. It also needs to tackle health and environmental inequalities. EU policies must support cities in implementing strategies that account for these interconnections, ensuring sustainable and inclusive urban living and reducing the risk of future health crises.

Key Actions:

- ✦ Embed One/Planetary Health principles into EU urban policies, public health, and environmental (including zero pollution, carbon neutrality) strategies.
- ✦ Guide cities in reshaping urban spaces with nature-based solutions including social inclusion to improve air quality, reduce pollution, prevent flooding and enhance biodiversity, thus improving urban populations.
- ✦ Develop integrated policies designed in collaboration with peri-urban and rural areas for the health and wellbeing of the urban and rural populations (for example food, mobility and infrastructure policies).
- ✦ Secure EU funding for health promotion projects that foster human, animal, and environmental health.

2. STRENGTHENING PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS THROUGH COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed significant vulnerabilities in Europe's public health systems. **To prepare for future crises, we must invest in preventive, inclusive healthcare and resilient systems**. This includes addressing the root causes of pandemics, such as habitat destruction and biodiversity loss, while strengthening the capacity of cities through coordination and collaboration across sectors, multilevel governance and partnership development to respond and prevent health emergencies.

Key Actions:

- ✦ Encourage partnerships between cities and EU institutions to enhance knowledge sharing and capacity building in healthcare preparedness.
- ✦ Provide technical and financial support for multi-level governance to ensure holistic solutions, top-down and bottom-up solutions to health challenges.
- ✦ Fund inter-sectoral collaborations between health and environmental sectors to enhance human-nature connectedness and reduce the burden on the health systems through a holistic framework.
- ✦ Encourage partnerships between cities, peri-urban and rural areas for managing shared health risks, environmental challenges, and resource dependencies, ensuring a healthier, more resilient population and ecosystem.
- ✦ Fund research and evidence building for decision-making and implementation towards one/planetary health in urban environments while addressing environmental concerns.



3. ENSURING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO NATURE FOR URBAN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Nature plays a critical role in human health, from reducing stress and promoting mental health to improving physical well-being. However, as urbanisation increases, equitable access to green spaces becomes more challenging, particularly for marginalised communities. **Access to nature is not only a health issue but a fundamental democratic right.** Restrictions on access to public or private green spaces undermine citizens' rights to a healthy environment and exacerbate inequalities. The EU must prioritise policies that protect and expand urban green spaces, ensuring that all citizens - regardless of socioeconomic background - can benefit from the restorative powers of nature.

Key Actions:

- ✦ Mandate the integration of green spaces and nature-based solutions in urban planning and development across all agendas.
- ✦ Promote access to urban green areas within cities as well as forests, parks, and rural landscapes for all urban populations, with an emphasis on accessibility, safety, and inclusivity for vulnerable groups.
- ✦ Strengthen democratic participation in urban environmental governance, ensuring citizens' voices are central in the decision-making process.
- ✦ Establish democratic platforms that bring together urban and rural citizens to address issues related to access to nature (such as organizing participatory initiatives like collaborative work camps that support farmers while fostering environmental stewardship and solidarity).
- ✦ Ensure that citizens receive a comprehensive education and awareness on the benefits of nature and the importance of protecting and preserving natural ecosystems, promoting shared responsibility for environmental stewardship across all member states.

4. SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE URBAN PRACTICES AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Urban environments are the frontlines of health and sustainability challenges. Cities must lead by promoting sustainable and inclusive practices such as circular economies, eco-friendly transportation, and nature-positive urban planning. These efforts, when well thought, not only improve health outcomes but also reduce environmental footprints, promote biodiversity, and strengthen democratic governance.

Key Actions:

- ✦ Develop EU policies that incentivise sustainable and equitable urban practices, including circular economies, sustainable food production, energy efficiency, and sustainable mobility.
- ✦ Promote cross-sector collaboration between health, environment, and urban planning sectors to create healthier, more resilient cities.
- ✦ Fund research and evidence building for decision-making and implementation towards nature-based solutions in urban environments.
- ✦ Actively involve citizens in shaping sustainable and equitable urban policies through participatory governance.
- ✦ Support education and awareness raising on sustainability topics to enhance human-nature connectedness as well as support development of "green-health" skills and expertise.
- ✦ Incorporate training on nature-based health interventions for all health professionals for guiding patients to nature for certain ailments and to improve their mental and physical resilience.



CONCLUSION: A UNITED CALL FOR ACTION

Local authorities are uniquely positioned to lead the way in advancing the **One/ Planetary Health** approach in tandem with nature-based solutions in the urban domain. By **embedding nature, health, equity and democracy into the EU's policy making framework** and integrating health concerns in environmental policies and vice versa, we can build resilient, sustainable and inclusive urban environments that protect both the health of all our citizens and the planet. Using the momentum built through the Lyon Declaration and the [People and Planet conference](#) in the City of Lahti as well as the participation of the Mayor and deputy Mayor of Lahti and Lyon at the [ICLEI World Congress](#), the undersigned cities call upon EU institutions to take urgent actions to support these goals, ensuring a future where human and environmental health are in harmony.

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This paper reflects the position of the ICLEI Europe network of Local and Regional governments as a whole, and may not reflect the position of every Member individually.