



**European Committee
of the Regions**

Background note on

climate change
and environment

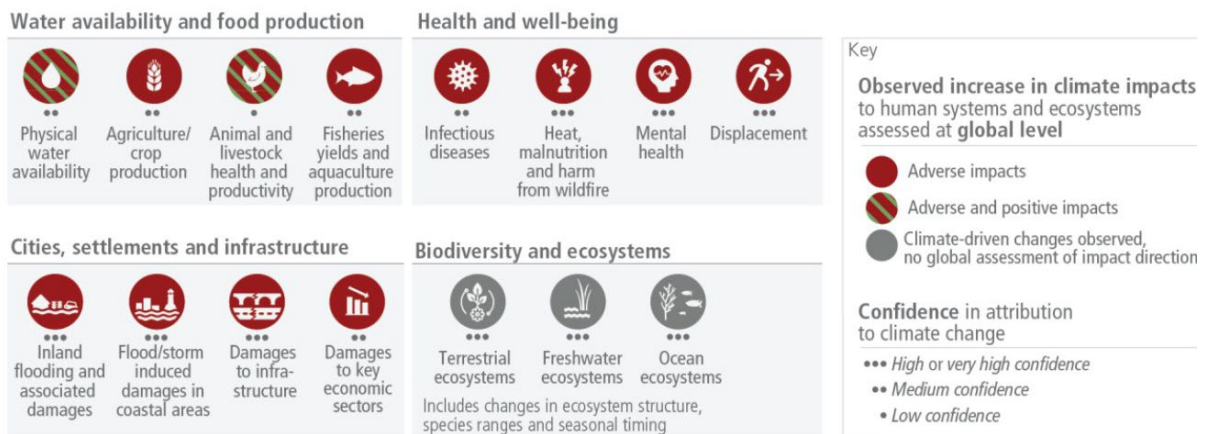
FACTS AND FIGURES

The **triple planetary crisis** of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution is threatening the well-being and survival of millions of people and species around the world.

Human activities have unequivocally caused global warming, with the global surface temperature reaching a 1.1°C increase above 1850–1900 levels in 2011–2020. Climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes, leading to widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people. It is one of the main causes of the average decline of 69% in wildlife species populations since 1970 globally. 80% of key natural habitats are rated as being in poor or bad condition across Europe.

In the EU, every year, pollution causes 1 in 8 deaths. At the same time, air pollution costs health and economic activities an estimated EUR 330 to 940 billion per year in the EU. Air quality standards are still breached in more than 100 cities in the EU.

The overall fivefold growth of the global economy in the past five decades has come at a massive cost to the global environment. There is only one planet Earth, yet by 2050, the world will be consuming as if there were three. Global consumption of materials such as biomass, fossil fuels, metals and minerals is expected to double in the next forty years, while annual waste generation is projected to increase 70% by 2050.



Source: [IPCC Climate Science Assessment Report](#), 2023, Widespread and substantial impacts and related losses and damages attributed to climate change

MAIN TERRITORIAL ACHIEVEMENTS AND/OR CHALLENGES

- **Development of local and regional strategies to address the impacts of climate change**, such as Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans, Local Green Deals or specific climate adaptation plans: cities are using EU-driven frameworks to deliver on their climate-neutrality goals by 2050. The [Horizon Europe Missions](#) will, through a demand-driven and cross-sectoral approach, support more than 100 cities in their green transition, and enhance their resilience by 2030.
- **Recognition of the key role of subnational authorities in the internationally agreed [Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework](#)**: cities and regions are implementing urban greening plans, as well as nature protection and restoration measures within their territories. However, to ensure their success, greater integration and synergies with national strategies, and further financial and technical support, are needed.
- **Recognition of the fact that cities and regions are instrumental for broadening climate action** and responding to climate change in the internationally agreed [Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan](#) at COP27. Increased presence and recognition of local and regional authorities in climate negotiations.
- **Increased awareness of the need to reduce air, water, soil and noise pollution**: local and regional authorities are putting more efforts into enforcing pollution-related legislation. Pushed by initiatives such as the Green City Accord, and the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform, cities and regions are showcasing interesting projects and best practices for tackling pollution and protecting their citizens' health and the environment.



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MAIN MESSAGES TO PROMOTE (POLICY DEMANDS)

Local and regional authorities (LRAs) can play a crucial role in addressing the triple planetary crises by **working upwards with national governments and international organisations**, as well as downwards by **engaging with their local communities**. As territorial-based leaders, LRAs can develop initiatives and implement organisational and technical changes to encourage the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants, enhance the protection, conservation and restoration of nature, deploy nature-based solutions and support citizens in adapting to the impacts of climate change, in line with the Conference on the Future of Europe proposals 1-5.

The **transition to a green, sustainable, resource-efficient economy** and a socially fair society, should be at the heart of any policy choices, building a **new, systemic and integrated approach to the design and implementation of policies and programmes**, within the planetary boundaries.

The CoR calls for **ensuring multi-level governance systems**, as well as **multi-level platforms**, consultations and dialogues to guarantee the structured, inclusive participation of LRAs in the planning and implementation of climate, pollution, biodiversity, and environment-related international strategies and national plans, including recovery and resilience plans.

Furthermore, the CoR calls for **establishing robust regulatory frameworks and direct access to funding for LRAs** to deliver integrated, cross-sectoral actions that contribute to the implementation of the SDGs, the Global Biodiversity Framework and the Paris Agreement at local level, driven by regional needs and in harmony with the local context.

The CoR asks for the **polluter pays principle (PPP) to be better integrated into environmental legislation**, as well as to better control pollution at source.

The CoR aims to **overcome the main reasons for the sub-optimal implementation of environmental legislation**, which is often the result of ineffective coordination between authorities, a lack of administrative capacity, insufficient funding, a lack of knowledge and data, insufficient compliance mechanisms and a lack of policy integration.

The CoR points out that, apart from direct access to funding, **LRAs should receive adequate technical assistance and support for capacity-building**, in order to exploit existing funding opportunities, assist these authorities in ensuring an effective balance between private and public funds and make greater use of green and sustainable public procurement for investments.

ILLUSTRATION OF HOW THE POLICY WORKS IN PRACTICE

City strategy "Tallinn 2035"

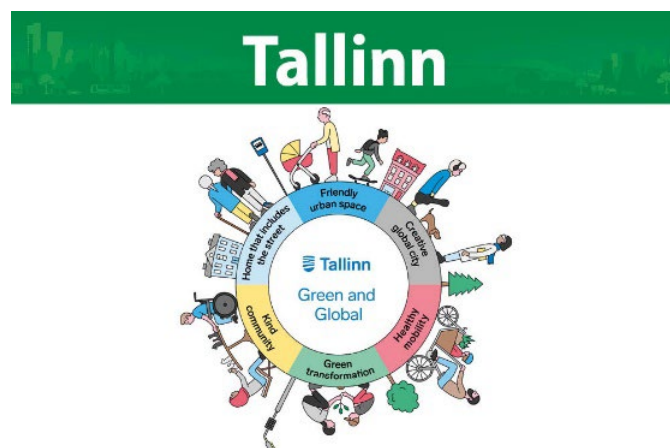
Tallinn is a green and global city where people look to the future and value their heritage. Tallinn is one of the leaders of the green transformation in Estonia: its economy and lifestyle affect the wellbeing of the entire country's population.

"Tallinn 2035" is the new city strategy, adopted in December 2020, in which new goals for greener and more inclusive spaces were set, creating a strategic planning culture and bringing a new vision for the city. Tallinn set completely new goals for a greener city area with a better and more inclusive space for its citizens. The vision of Tallinn is implemented through six strategic goals, which will be achieved through the cooperation of the entire city organisation and citizens, communities, entrepreneurs, local authorities in the urban region and state and international partners. Tallinn assesses the efficiency of its policies through the achievement of the strategic goals: friendly urban space, creative global city, healthy mobility, green transformation, kind community and home that includes the street.

"Tallinn 2035" is the city plan that **specifies activities and goals** to mitigate and adapt to the climate, pollution and biodiversity crises across all fields. The plan addresses carbon neutrality, climate adaptation, innovation, health, mobility, biodiversity, circular economy, sustainable energy and food production.

The city was selected as **European Green Capital 2023**. To boost biodiversity, the city is planning GoGreenRoutes where citizens can co-design nature-based solutions and urban gardening. A 13km pollinator highway - a natural meadow through the city for nature to flourish - is in the making.

Tallinn is the **first European capital to offer free public transport to its citizens** (since 2013). Another goal for urban mobility is that its citizens should be able to reach all necessary infrastructure within **15 min** via soft transport modes. The city is also exemplary in its use of digital tools to optimise nature-based solutions in renovation projects.



Source: Tallinn city vision and six strategic goals (Tallinn development strategy "Tallinn 2035"), 2023





European Committee of the Regions



Created in 1994, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's political assembly of regional and local representatives such as regional presidents or city mayors from all 27 Member States, representing over 446 million Europeans.

Edited by the Directorate for Communication of the European Committee of the Regions

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