



EU | Cities Refresh – EU Covenant of Mayors campaign to increase cities' urban heat resilience

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Background and objectives

The increasing number of heat waves pose an existential threat to communities worldwide. Global temperatures reached record highs in 2023 and 2024. In Europe, heat represents the leading cause of climate-related deaths, claiming around 48 000 lives in 2023. As the fastest-heating continent, Europe's liveability is at risk. Thus, in 2025 the EU Covenant of Mayors initiative launched the campaign [Cities Refresh](#) which aims to empower and inspire cities and towns to:

- RESTORE health, for safer, more liveable environments for everyone.
- REBUILD communities, for more inclusive societies and strong social ties.
- RENEW urban design, for heat-resilient spaces adapted to a hotter future.
- REVIVE local economies, for vibrant and safe place to live, work and visit.

Over a six-month period, starting in April 2025, the campaign has been highlighting and promoting a wide range of solutions available to local governments, through inspiring examples accompanied by compelling stories and images.

Key features

- **Campaign's website** (<https://eu-mayors.ec.europa.eu/en/Cities-Refresh>) – a central page with all relevant information about the action, tools and success stories.
- **Call for actions** - cities can submit their concrete actions (through a [survey](#) and provided template with guidelines) to address extreme heat
- **Communication package** – all materials in one place for successful dissemination of the action

Implementation

The Cities Refresh campaign is run by the **EU Covenant of Mayors**, an initiative of the European Commission under the co-leadership of the European Commission's Directorate – General for Energy (DG ENER) and Climate Action (DG CLIMA). All EU Covenant of Mayors **signatories**, counting more than 11,000 municipalities across Europe and covering about one-third of the EU population, have been invited to join the campaign. Cities and their agencies can submit, via a [form](#), **examples of actions** they are taking to improve the resilience of urban areas to increasing temperatures. These actions are then featured on the website's interactive map and promoted via the Covenant's communication channels. By joining and promoting the campaign, cities and their agencies can inspire others to take



those actions needed to adapt towns and cities to current and future heat waves. A curated **Refresh Kit**, a comprehensive digital toolbox packed with practical guidance, tools, success stories and publication to support cities' journeys, is also available on the Covenant website.

Budget (or other cost data)

The Cities Refresh campaign does not finance cities to undertake actions - each city or municipality needs to secure its own resources. Many do this by combining local budgets with other national or European programmes to implement projects. The EU can also provide funds via cohesion policy funds, LIFE projects or recovery and resilience programmes. Examples of how such funding is used includes financing measures like cooling infrastructure, green urban design, or targeted support for vulnerable citizens. Thus, the Cities Refresh campaign acts as a connector: it brings cities together, shares tools and success stories, and guides them towards the financial opportunities that can help turn their ideas into reality.

Results and impacts

The Cities Refresh has created a strong platform for action. Cities big and small, northern and southern, have already joined the campaign including Marseille (France), Athens (Greece), Weiz (Austria), Antwerp (Belgium), Rotterdam (Netherlands), Botkyrka (Sweden), Guimarães (Portugal), Worms (Germany), Getafe (Spain) and Maribor (Slovenia). The campaign's website and accompanying contents are continuously updated. Practical guidance and best-practice examples, put on the website, can give other cities and municipalities ideas which they can easily replicate.

The campaign's real impact will be seen over time as more cities translate this inspiration into on-the-ground changes. The expected benefits of this campaign are wide. Cities' focus on cooling strategies, shading, green spaces, and heat-health actions will reduce the risks of heatwaves and potential life-threatening situations for general public. Moreover, better planning of urban environment will make public spaces more resilient so that daily life and activities can be continued even during extreme temperatures.

Another important impact area is equity. Besides addressing extreme temperatures and its risks, vulnerable groups, such as older people, low-income households or outdoor workers, are also taken into account. The idea is to link heating effects and summer energy poverty and help vulnerable citizens in overcoming extreme temperatures and improving their comfort. The broader economic benefits are also made clear as part of this campaign: reduction of electricity consumption (for cooling spaces), avoidance of tourism gaps during extreme temperatures and disruptions to local industries, and creation of healthier and more attractive urban spaces.

Lessons learnt

One of the main lessons learnt from this campaign is that **the way we frame the issue matters**. When urban heat effects are presented not only as a climate challenge, but also as a question of health, fairness and economic viability, it becomes easier to engage different city departments and obtain stronger public support for action. Antwerp, Belgium shows this in practice: by connecting cooling strategies directly to public health, the city made the topic tangible and relevant to everyday life.

Another important lesson is that **levels of resilience differ widely**, meaning that heat does not affect everyone in the same way. Older people, low-income households, children and outdoor workers are particularly at risk. In Botkyrka, Sweden, urban greening projects have been combined with social initiatives so that vulnerable groups benefit most. By linking the campaign to the topic of summer energy poverty via another EU initiative, the [Energy Poverty Advisory Hub](#), Cities Refresh makes it clear that adaptation has to go hand in hand with social justice.

Cities are also realising that heat resilience cannot be achieved via one-off or short-term actions. Actions must take into account **planning rules and regulations, street design and the way we use green and blue infrastructure**. Athens offers a good example – they integrate cooling corridors and shaded public spaces that help the whole city stay liveable even during extreme temperatures.

Finally, mutual exchange can act as a catalyst for actions. Cities learn best from each other. Whether it is Marseille redesigning public spaces or Rotterdam adapting its waterfront, these stories stimulate ideas and motivation across the network. Supported by the European Commission's EU Covenant of Mayors, this mix of local inspiration and European backing is proving to be a powerful recipe for change.

Sources

<https://eu-mayors.ec.europa.eu/en/Cities-Refresh>

<https://eu-mayors.ec.europa.eu/en/Cities-Refresh-Communication-Package>

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