

City of Helsinki's Environmental Protection Targets 2040

Approved by the City Board on 7 September 2026.



Helsinki

City of Helsinki's Environmental Protection Targets 2040

City of Helsinki, publications of the Central Administration 2026:31

ISBN 978-952-386-806-9 (pdf)

ISSN-L 2242-4504

ISSN 2323-8135 (online)

Photos: City of Helsinki Image Bank

Design and layout: Mainostoimisto KMG Turku

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Introduction

The City of Helsinki's Environmental Protection Targets 2040 is a document that guides the city's environmental protection activities and contains medium and long-term environmental protection targets. It specifies environmental targets related to the City Strategy 2025–2029 and sets targets for other environmental protection areas that the strategy does not cover. The City Strategy sets out the city's policies on climate protection, adaptation to climate change, the circular economy, biodiversity protection, nature conservation, and protecting the Baltic Sea.

The environmental protection targets for 2040 are a part of the city's overall sustainable development strategy. The document combines the goals for ecological sustainability and sets long-term targets that are fundamental for carrying out environmental protection consistently. An SDG analysis (UN Sustainable Development Goals) has been carried out for the sub-areas of these targets, and the links between the sub-areas and the SDG goals are discussed in the text for each of these sub-areas.

Helsinki's environmental protection targets for 2040 were approved by the City Board on 11 March 2024. The decision stipulates that the objectives will be reviewed once each council term after the

adoption of the new City Strategy. In the context of this review, the objectives were updated to correspond with the objectives of the 'A Helsinki We Can Be Proud of' City Strategy and to reflect changes in legislation. Furthermore, the status of the 2025 target policies was reviewed and some target years, related records and monitoring indicators were updated.

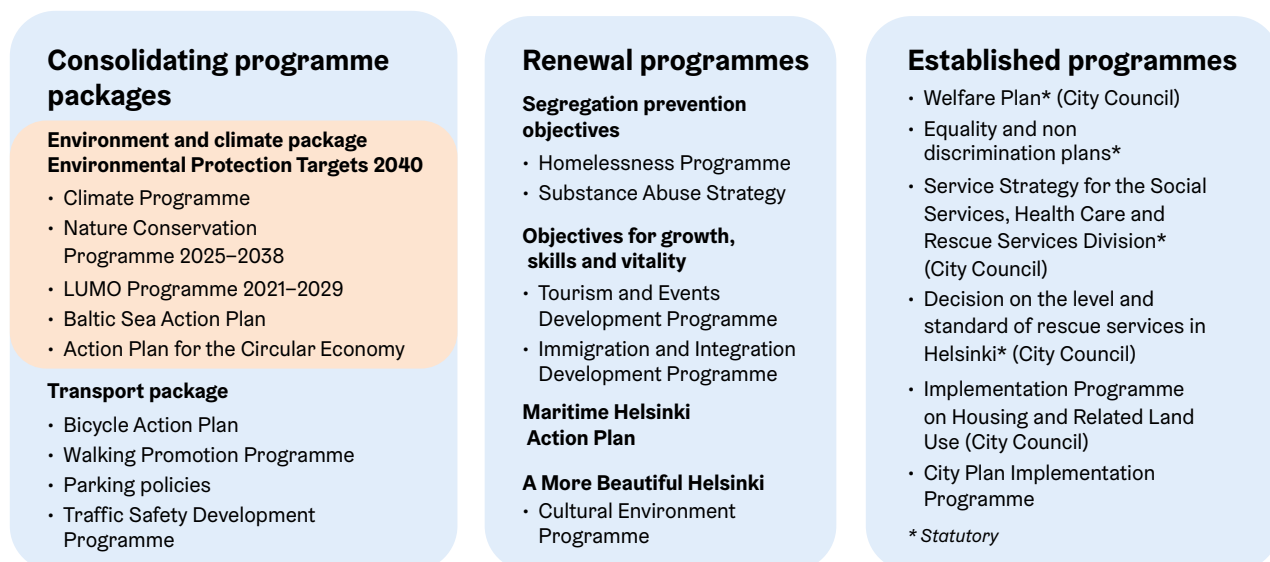
The background memorandum on Helsinki's environmental protection targets and the impact assessment were also updated in the course of the review. The background memorandum outlines the rationale for reviews outside the scope of the strategy.

The long-term vision for environmental protection extends to 2040, and the medium-term targets are listed under each environmental protection theme. The figure on page 6 outlines the city's entire ecological sustainability programme, in which the City Strategy and this document set the environmental protection targets, and the environmental protection sub-programmes provide the measures to achieve these targets.

In the medium-term targets, one or two key targets are shown in **bold** for each sub-area.



Programme package for the strategy period (City Council, City Board)



Open-ended, committee-level and soon-to-end programmes and policies

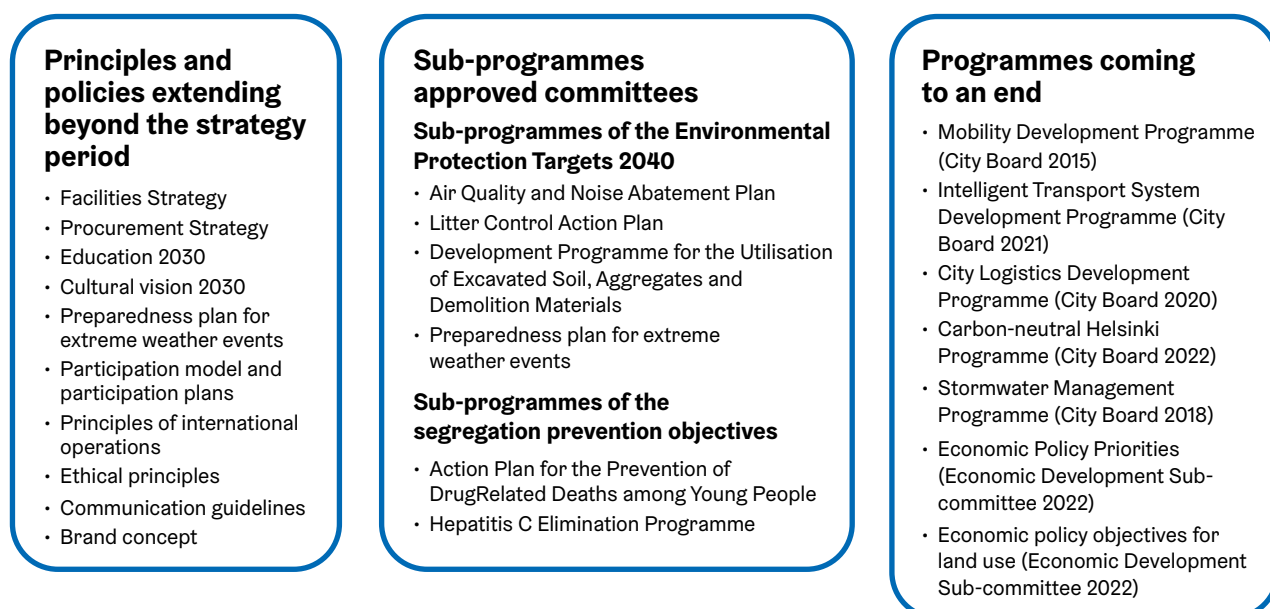


Figure 1. Strategy implementation model and the environmental and climate programme package.

Updating, monitoring and reporting on the environmental protection targets

The environmental protection targets are updated at the beginning of every council term after the new City Strategy is ready. Progress on these targets will be monitored annually and reported as part of the city's Environmental Report (the link will open in a new window) to the City Council. The environmental report also presents the key indicators and trends in the sub-areas. The divisions' annual action plans set out concrete measures to improve the environment for the following year and, in particular, the potential investment needs for the Urban Environment Division over a ten-year period.

The Environmental Report provides information on ecological sustainability for the city's biennial Voluntary Local Review (VLR) on implementing sustainable development. The city's Executive Group and the City Council review progress towards the environmental protection targets twice during each council term. The sub-programmes implementing the environmental protection targets will be monitored through the web-based Environmental Watch service.

The annual targets set for the sub-areas of environmental protection mean that the targets should be achieved by the end of that year.

Ecological sustainability overview

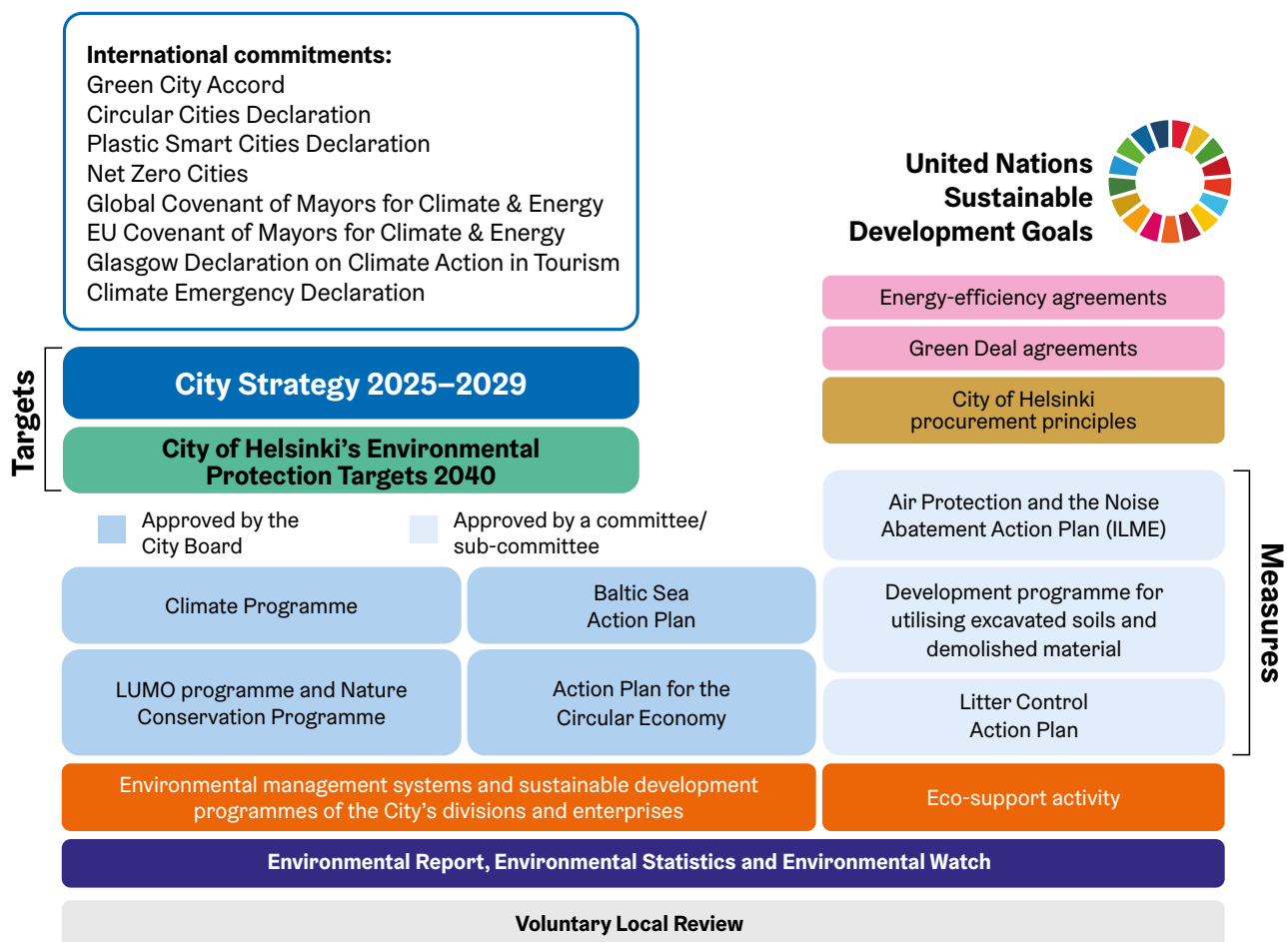


Figure 2: The city's entire ecological sustainability programme.

Helsinki's vision for environmental protection 2040

City Strategy goals:

Helsinki is creating a sustainable future for generations to come, while also preserving the city as a green and nature-filled place to live, move and grow.

Helsinki takes its obligation to combat climate change and biodiversity loss seriously. Helsinki has also pledged to achieve its target of net-zero carbon emissions by the year 2040 at the latest.

Helsinki is preparing for extreme weather phenomena caused by climate change in a proactive and risk-minimizing manner.

Protecting nature and its biodiversity is the foundation of Helsinki's environmental policy. We will continue to work towards our climate and environment goals listed in the 2024 City Council-approved Environmental Protection Goals 2040.

Helsinki's vision for Environmental protection 2040

Helsinki is an international pioneer in environmental management. The city and its businesses are based on a carbon-neutral circular economy, in which natural resources are used sustainably, and products and materials are kept in circulation for as long as possible. Biodiversity has increased despite the city's growth and development. The amount of waste generated in the city has decreased and all generated waste is recycled in accordance with the waste hierarchy. The effectiveness of the environmental criteria used in the City Group's procurement is significant, and the carbon footprint of procurement has been reduced.

The city's employees, residents and businesses are environmentally conscious and operate in environmentally sustainable ways.

Helsinki will enable a just transition to a climate-resilient and climate-secure city. The City will reach the net zero target by 2040, which means that the City's emissions and sinks will be in balance. The residents' carbon footprint will decrease steadily.

Traffic emissions, street dust, and fireplace use will not impair air quality, and the target and guideline values for it will not be exceeded. City residents will not be exposed to prolonged and intense noise from traffic.

The marine environment off the coast of Helsinki, small water bodies, and groundwater have achieved good status. The objectives and measures for achieving excellent status have also been defined. The city has restored its coastal areas and small waters identified as having significant natural value and created new conservation areas to safeguard habitat diversity and vitality. At least 30% of the sea area is lightly protected, and one third of this area is protected under the Nature Conservation Act. Underwater noise, pollutants and marine litter have decreased.

Urban biodiversity has increased. The amount of forested and wooded areas has remained at around a third of the total land area. The area of nature reserves has been increased to at least 10% of the total land area. The ecological status of forests, peatlands and wetlands has improved. Land use will ensure the preservation of natural soils in the urban environment and compensate for any damage that may be caused.



Medium-term targets for environmental protection

Climate change

Climate change is a significant threat to Helsinki's future. The climate change objectives are divided into adaptation and mitigation objectives. The City's climate work will be implemented through a climate programme, an emergency plan and an action plan for making the built environment greener.

Medium timeframe

- The city has prepared for rising sea levels, increasing stormwater runoff, flooding from heavy rainfall, and heat waves by developing its climate risk management and up-to-date preparation.

Adapting to climate change

City Strategy goals

- Helsinki is preparing for extreme weather phenomena caused by climate change in a proactive and risk-minimizing manner. We are compiling these measures in a separate preparedness plan. We are preparing for the effects of climate change by adapting our city infrastructure and site planning to meet the demands created by torrential rain, floods and heat waves. We are reducing heat islands in the city's indoor and outdoor spaces with appropriate city planning and construction. We are ensuring that Helsinki is adequately prepared for stormwater, seawater and waterway flooding. We are adding more green infrastructure. We keep the city's green areas in good condition. We will enhance and improve the quality of the maintenance and cleaning of streets, parks, open spaces and other public areas. All newly established areas of the city must have parks and green areas.



Mitigating climate change

City strategy goals

- **We are raising our emissions reduction targets by striving to achieve an 85 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by the year 2030.**
- We will reduce traffic emissions and make sure that public transport and other more sustainable modes of transportation appeal to everyone. We will promote the electrification of motor vehicle traffic, in particular by ensuring the construction of charging infrastructure together with private operators. We will ensure that the city's ports make shore-side electricity available to vessels, and that the conditions are in place for the electrification of boat traffic. We will also electrify local water transport.
- Non-combustion-based energy production plays a vital role in the city's ability to reduce Helsinki's carbon emissions and mitigate environmental impact.
- In order to reduce indirect emissions, Helsinki will focus on reducing the emissions created by its construction of housing and infrastructure as well as its public procurement. Examples of the city's pioneering measures in this area include the use of carbon-binding concrete and the rapid adaptation of other low-emission or circular economy building solutions. We are tightening the carbon footprint requirements we have set for construction.

Medium term

- Helsinki has reduced indirect emissions in housing and infrastructure construction and public procurement in line with the category-specific targets set for 2035 by a government resolution.
- Helsinki has contributed to the development of methodologies for calculating consumption-based emissions and has monitored and supported the reduction of the carbon footprint of city residents.
- Helsinki will maintain the existing levels of carbon sinks and has increased the amount of greenery in the built environment to meet the net zero target outlined in the strategy.

Metrics

- Total greenhouse gas emissions of city area (Scope 1 and 2)
- Greenhouse gas emissions of city area per capita (Scope 1 and 2)
- Total consumption based emissions and consumption based emissions per capita
- Quantity of carbon sinks
- Tree canopy cover
- Permeable areas as a percentage of total land area



Air protection

The current EU limit values are not in danger of being exceeded in Helsinki. The new EU Air Quality Directive came into force at the end of 2024, and it will significantly tighten the limit values by 2030. Meeting the new limit values will be a challenge for Helsinki, especially for particulate matter, or street dust. New limit values for benzo(a)pyrene from residential wood combustion and nitrogen dioxide from traffic exhausts may also be exceeded. In 2021, the WHO set new health-based air quality standards that are much stricter than before, and these are widely exceeded in Helsinki.

The city's air protection is implemented through Helsinki's Air Quality and Noise Abatement Plan 2024–2029.

City strategy goals

- We will reduce traffic emissions and make sure that public transport and other more sustainable modes of transportation appeal to everyone.



Medium term

- **Helsinki will be able to meet the future limit values under the EU Air Quality Directive 2024/2881 by 2029 at the latest:**
 - The daily average value of particulate matter may be no more than 18 times higher than 45 µg/m³.
 - The annual average value for benzo(a)pyrene will be less than 1 ng/m³ at monitoring stations in areas of small residential houses.
 - The annual average target for nitrogen dioxide will be below 20 µg/m³.
- New sensitive sites being planned, such as day-care centres, schools, playgrounds, senior centres and service homes, will not be exposed to air quality that is poorer than the urban background level.

Metrics

- Annual mean value of nitrogen oxide at Mannerheimintie and Mäkeläinkatu / Teollisuuskatu measurement stations
- Number of days exceeding limit values of thoracic particulate matter (PM₁₀) at Mannerheimintie and Mäkeläinkatu / Teollisuuskatu measurement stations
- Annual mean value of Benzo(a)pyrene at Vartiokylä measurement station
- Percentage of successfully completed measures of the Air Quality and Noise Abatement Action Plan





Noise abatement

Environmental noise is a significant factor impairing the quality and amenity of Helsinki's living environment. High levels of continuous noise also cause adverse health impacts. Road traffic is the main source of noise pollution, but noise is also generated by other traffic and temporary activities such as construction and events.

The City of Helsinki's noise abatement activities are implemented through the Helsinki's Air Quality and Noise Abatement Plan 2024–2029.

City strategy goals

- We will reduce traffic emissions and make sure that public transport and other more sustainable modes of transportation appeal to everyone.

Medium term

- **Helsinki will have a healthy, comfortable and high-quality acoustic environment. The number of residents exposed to continuous and intense traffic noise will be reduced by 2030.**
- Helsinki will foster and develop a pleasant and peaceful acoustic environment in the city's green spaces. All city residents will have convenient access to green spaces with tranquil acoustic environments.
- Sensitive sites, such as day-care centres, schools, playgrounds and service homes, will not be exposed to environmental noise but will have a healthy and comfortable acoustic environment.
- Noise impacts from temporary activities (e.g. construction and events) will remain moderate.

Metrics

- Exposure levels of road traffic noise (over 55 dB LAeq7-22) based on noise assessments every five years
- Percentage of successfully completed measures of the Air Quality and Noise Abatement Action Plan



Water protection

The condition of Helsinki's aquatic environment is affected not only by the status of the Baltic Sea but also by the quality of stormwater runoff, nutrient and pollutant loads from construction sites, and nutrients from diffuse pollution. Water bodies contribute significantly to health and wellbeing and are valuable for their landscapes and recreational value. In line with the City Strategy, Helsinki will protect the Baltic Sea and its shores and reduce emissions into the Baltic Sea. Helsinki's water protection activities will improve the status of small waters and coastal waters and support the recovery of migratory fish stocks in its waters. Achieving good status for water bodies is a binding EU law.

The Baltic Sea Action Plan 2024–2028 (the link will open in a new window) is one of the means for water protection. Water protection will also be integrated into urban development by employing the City of Helsinki Nature Reserve Programme for 2025–2038 (PDF in Finnish) and the Maritime Helsinki Action Plan, for example.

City strategy goals

- We will resolutely nurture and protect our one-of-a-kind archipelago and marine environment.
- We will safeguard the diversity of our region's aquatic nature. We will devote special attention to protecting the Baltic Sea and its underwater marine environment.
- We will stop dumping snow into the sea. We will make sure that our winter maintenance practices do not endanger small waterways.
- We will rehabilitate and maintain streams, rapids and other waterways.
- No construction will be planned in Helsinki's most valued nature areas.

Medium term

- **The chemical and ecological status of Helsinki's marine waters and small water bodies will improve significantly.**
- The protection of aquatic biodiversity will be enhanced by creating new conservation areas by 2030 that align with the Nature Reserve Programme.
- The amount of microplastics in water systems and plastic debris in the environment will decrease by 2027.
- Flowing waters will be restored, and migration routes for fish and other organisms that inhabit flowing water will be improved.
- Marine nature and small water bodies will be comprehensively taken into account in city planning, construction, and maintenance, and recreational and harbour services, based on up-to-date ecological data.
- Helsinki's oil spill response preparedness will be improved to protect beaches and small water bodies.

Metrics

- Proportion of the marine area off the coast of Helsinki in good ecological status
- Proportion of Helsinki's important groundwater areas in good status
- Implementation rate of the Baltic Sea Action Plan
- Number and total area of protected marine and coastal areas, and their proportion of the city's marine area



Protecting biodiversity

Biodiversity means the richness and variety of nature types and species, as well as species' internal genetic variance. Biodiversity is disappearing at an alarming rate. The primary threat to biodiversity is widespread habitat destruction and a deterioration in the quality of nature. Biodiversity protection will be implemented through the City of Helsinki Biodiversity Action Plan 2021–2028 and the City of Helsinki Nature Conservation Programme 2025–2038 (PDF in Finnish).

City strategy goals

- Protecting nature and its biodiversity is the foundation of Helsinki's environmental policy.
- We will continue Helsinki's long-term work to conserve the city's one-of-a-kind urban nature. We will launch a new nature conservation area programme that will create a framework for establishing eight new protected nature areas each year.
- Each resident of Helsinki, no matter what part of the city they live in, should have easy access to nearby nature.
- No construction will be planned in Helsinki's most valued nature areas. Decision-making in Helsinki is based on up-to-date reports on the wellbeing of our city's natural environment.



Medium term

- **By 2030, the loss of biodiversity in Helsinki will have stopped and will be increasing.**
- The share of forested and wooded areas will have remained at around a third of the total land area.
- In 2030, Helsinki's ecological networks will be connected and ecologically functional as part of the regional system.
- The status of habitat types will have improved through restoration and management where necessary.
- The spread of invasive alien species will be halted by 2030.
- The city will avoid construction on green areas. However, if it is necessary to zone green areas for development, damage to nature will be minimized and the rest will be compensated. The Helsinki model for ecological compensation will be completed in 2026 and introduced as soon as possible.
- We will set a surface area target for increasing the area of meadows and other traditional biotopes in the city by 2027.

Metrics

- Quantity of natural areas
- Tree canopy cover
- Total amount and surface area of protected areas and the percentage of that surface area of the total land area
- Percentage of successfully completed measures of the LUMO Programme
- Qualitative metrics for monitoring Helsinki's progress towards halting biodiversity loss





Soil protection and remediation of contaminated soil

Soil protection is important for carbon balance, biodiversity and human health. As Helsinki's urban structure becomes denser, remediating contaminated land is a significant challenge. The systematic use of soils also contributes to the circular economy.

There is no separate action plan for soil protection, nor does the City Strategy set any targets for soil protection.

Medium term

- **By 2030, soil protection and its sustainable use will be taken into account in all land use.**
- By means of land use planning it will be secured, that contaminated soils will be recognised and the contamination in the city area will be reduced

- By means of active and efficient environmental supervision there is an intention to ensure that no soil and groundwater contamination occurs within the city.
- The Iso-Huopalahti landfill will be remediated by 2035.

Metrics

- Number of decisions for remediated soil sites per year
- Quantity of permeable surfaces as a percentage of the total land area



Promoting the circular economy and minimising littering

By transitioning to the circular and sharing economy, we can preserve our diminishing natural resources and reduce waste generation. The circular and sharing economy is also an effective way to combat climate change; reducing the use of virgin raw materials also reduces the emissions resulting from the production of materials.

In line with the City Strategy, the City of Helsinki's Action Plan for the Circular Economy (the link will open in a new window) is being implemented on an ambitious scale. For soils, the targets will be implemented through the programme for developing the use of excavated soils (in Finnish; the link will open in a new window).

We will reduce environmental litter through the Litter Control Action Plan 2026–2029 (the link will open in a new window).

City strategy goals

- When it comes to the circular economy, we are a bigger player than our size suggests.
- Examples of the city's pioneering measures in this area include the use of carbon-binding concrete and the rapid adaptation of other low-emission or circular economy building solutions.
- Promoting the circular economy in construction is one of the city's top business policy priorities.
- We will enhance and improve the quality of the maintenance and cleaning of streets, parks, open spaces and other public areas. We engage residents, housing companies, property owners, event organisers and businesses in improving cleanliness and tidiness.

Medium term

- **Buildings will be designed to be durable, adaptable, repairable and recyclable when demolished.**
- Infrastructure and housing construction projects will include project-specific circular economy targets by 2035.
- The amount of food waste generated by food services provided and purchased by the City organisation will be reduced by 50% between 2021 and 2030.
- The utilisation of the city's facilities and lending of goods and equipment by libraries will increase significantly by 2030.
- The city will eliminate single-use plastic packaging wherever feasible from a health and safety perspective.
- The recycling rate of the municipal waste generated by the city organisation will increase to 60 per cent by 2030.
- Littering of marine and public areas will be efficiently prevented.

Metrics

- Indicators of the Circular economy green deal commitment
- Percentage of successfully completed measures of the Circular Economy Action Plan
- Percentage of successfully completed measures of the Litter Control Action Plan
- Share of reused furniture of all furniture procured by divisions of city organisation
- Recycling rate of municipal waste from the city organisation's service buildings
- Amount of food waste in the city organisation's food services



Promoting responsible procurement

Responsible procurement reduces negative impacts on the environment and promotes positive impacts. The city contributes to the emergence of a sustainable market by leading the way in developing and deploying new solutions that promote energy and material efficiency, chemical-safety, a circular economy, and the conservation of biodiversity. The City of Helsinki Procurement Principles guides responsible procurement.

City strategy goals

- As Finland's largest public procurer, Helsinki is also working to reduce the indirect emissions and environmental impact of its procurements.
- In order to reduce indirect emissions, Helsinki will focus on reducing the emissions created by its construction of housing and infrastructure as well as its public procurement.

Medium term

- **Helsinki is a leader in climate-friendly and environmentally sustainable procurement. All of the Helsinki City Group's procurements will be assessed for their environmental impacts, and all procurements will generally have ambitious environmental targets.**
- In the city's construction procurement, environmental sustainability considerations will guide planning and implementation as follows:
 - We will set ambitious targets for the carbon footprint that will be more stringent than the national targets.
 - We will consider the impacts of climate change comprehensively and prepare for the risks it poses.

- We will set strict targets for energy efficiency and significantly increase the production of renewable energy in buildings.
- We will conserve natural resources and prevent waste by using the circular economy.
- We will define operating models for construction that will safeguard biodiversity and protect natural values.
- Construction sites and their associated transport will be fossil-free, the majority of machinery and vehicles will be powered by electricity, hydrogen or biogas, and other environmental impacts of the construction site will be minimised.
- The City's food procurement (food stuffs, catering, and restaurant services) will be carried out in an environmentally responsible way. The climate and environmental impacts of procurement will be significantly reduced through the systematic use and monitoring of comprehensive procurement criteria and contract terms.
- The city's food services will achieve the targets to halve meat and dairy consumption by 2030 compared to 2025 levels.
- To increase the proportion of plant-based food, we will ensure that the menus and recipes comply with the city's environmental goals and are constantly being updated.
- We will calculate the ecological footprint of Helsinki residents and introduce measures in the City Group that are most effective in reducing the residents' ecological footprint.

Metrics

- Percentage of procurements (in euros and number of units) for which environmental criteria have been set
- Qualitative assessment in construction and food procurement
- Consumption of meat and dairy products: grams of meat per customer per week and consumption of liquid dairy products, grams per customer per day



Promoting environmental awareness and sustainability

Our environmental efforts require the contribution of all Helsinki residents. Environmental education aims to promote a shift in values, knowledge, skills and behaviours towards sustainable development and increase environmental awareness. There is currently no separate action plan for promoting environmental awareness and sustainability, but it is promoted through eco-support activities, and its targets will be pursued across all of the environmental protection sub-programmes, as appropriate.

City strategy goals

- We strive to develop the means of participation so we can reach Helsinki residents of all ages and backgrounds.
- Our activities promote the connection diverse communities and people from different backgrounds feel with Helsinki, as well as their identity as a Helsinki resident.



Medium term

- **The city's personnel, management, and leadership will be committed to achieving the environmental protection targets and will be able to apply them in their work.**
- Learning communities like playgrounds, early childhood education, schools, educational institutions, libraries, youth services and cultural services will have expertise in environmental sustainability.
- Environmental education and training will be carried out in a way that is knowledge-based, inclusive, empowering and skills-building.
- Every child will have access to nature schools, environmental schools or guided field trips into the natural environment during school hours.
- City residents will be environmentally conscious and make environmentally friendly choices in their everyday lives.

Metrics

- Results of an environmental attitude survey of city residents and personnel about every five years
- Number of participants in environmental training
- Number of participants in nature schools, environmental schools, guided field trips to natural areas and nature days of early childhood education
- Number of companies on the service map offering circular economy services



Environmental management

'Environmental management' means managing activities so that the environmental protection targets are taken into account in all the City Group's activities and decision-making. There is no separate action plan for environmental management.

City strategy goals

- Our goal is to build a city that not only grows but also develops sustainably and responsibly.
- We continue to track our progress towards Helsinki's achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Medium term

- **The divisions and municipal enterprises and subsidiaries with significant environmental impacts will have a verified environmental management system and/or a sustainability programme that broadly takes into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Other municipal enterprises and subsidiaries will integrate environmental management into their operations, following the principles**

of streamlined environmental management systems, and/or develop a sustainability programme.

- Each work community will have a trained eco-support staff member with working time dedicated to carrying out this task.
- All divisions, as well as municipal enterprises and subsidiaries with significant environmental impacts, will have at least one full-time (or equivalent) environmental sustainability or responsibility expert. Large entities will have at least two such full-time (or equivalent) experts.
- The city's Executive Group and the City Council will review progress towards the environmental protection targets twice during each council term.

Metrics

- Percentage of divisions, municipal enterprises and subsidiaries with environmental certifications, following the principles of an environmental management system, or implementing a sustainability programme
- Number of eco-support staff trained per year
- Share of city's organisations which have described their way of manage and implement environmental management



The logo consists of the word "Helsinki" in a white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a white rectangular frame with rounded corners and a small notch at the bottom center.

Helsinki

City of Helsinki | Urban Environment Division, Environmental Services

Pohjoisesplanadi 11–13, 00710 Helsinki

PO Box 1, 00099 City of Helsinki

Switchboard +358 9 310 1641 | hel.fi