

**We are committed to assuming our global responsibility for peace, justice, equity, sustainable development and climate protection.**

It is clear that if the world is to reach any sensible, stable level of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, major cuts in emissions will have to be made. Local authorities play an important role in managing a wide range of sectors that emit greenhouse gases and thus, this Commitment is about seeking locally based solutions to emission reduction in order to guarantee global environmental and social justice, equity, thus peace, sustainable development and climate protection.

We will therefore work to:

**1. develop and follow a strategic and integrated approach to mitigate climate change, and work towards a sustainable level of greenhouse gas emissions.**

Over the last 100 years, average temperatures in Europe have increased by about 0.8% and will probably continue to rise by between 1°C and 6°C by 2100 (EC, 2001). Why act against climate change? Global warming will have a profound and unpredictable impact on the planet. Above all, it will interfere with our daily habits. Water scarcity, extreme weather events, a rise in temperature and sea level, droughts, floods etc. will affect our health, cause the extinction of many species and habitats and may lead to catastrophic impacts. All this implies high economic and social costs in the future, which can no longer be ignored. Major cuts in greenhouse gas emissions are therefore needed.

Burning fossil fuels remains the number one source of greenhouse gas emissions. Thus, to mitigate climate change, switching to a low-emissions development pathway is inevitable. However, the development of local climate protection strategies is not a widespread practice. This is due to the fact that climate change is often perceived as a distant threat, dealt with at global level, while local authorities address and prioritise local problems in a limited space and time frame. To overcome this way of thinking, local authorities need to start integrating climate concerns, as a concept, into their decision-making. Information on local emission sources needs to be gathered and reduction targets need to be fixed, in order to develop practical and innovative solutions and assess results and progress. For example, the setting up of a [Municipal Climate Protection Report](#) helps to understand to what extent a municipality has made progress towards its climate protection goal and requires quantitative consumption and emission data, as well as qualitative information. In the short term, low budget problems can be overcome by identifying, harmonising and strengthening existing local actions which promote climate protection and many municipalities have engaged in these activities ([French Guide on local Climate plans](#), [the European Climate Menu](#), [Vienna's Climate protection plan](#)). Participation of and consultation with local actors (citizens, enterprises, administrations) is also fundamental. It helps to build consensus and multiplies the efforts made to reduce emissions ([Sustainable Energy Europe](#) )

Developing a local climate protection strategy thus helps to fulfil other Aalborg Commitment goals, such as working towards more responsible consumption and lifestyle choices, a more balanced use of natural common goods, a better quality of life, solidarity between generations, social cohesion and enhancing the economic attractiveness of local areas. Engaging in climate protection is a political choice that, in the long run, will bring economic, social and environmental advantages.

### **2. mainstream climate protection policy into our policies in the areas of energy, transport, procurement, waste, agriculture, and forestry.**

A reduction in greenhouse gas emissions implies primarily reducing energy consumption and improving energy efficiency, as well as changing the way we generate and use energy for all purposes. However, responsibilities and possible solutions do not lie solely within the energy sector. We use energy directly to produce electricity, heating and for transport and any kind of mechanical processing. However there is also an invisible energy consumption, incorporated in manufactured goods and food we buy and waste we produce. Transport is responsible for causing significant greenhouse gas emissions and travel by cars and airplanes is predicted to rise in the future, also due to demographic changes and lifestyles, which lead to a growing mobility demand, an increase in one-person households and in resource use per capita. In turn, urban sprawl and pollution threaten the proper functioning of soils, green areas and forests acting as ‘sinks’ which absorb carbon dioxide from the air. Consequently, tackling greenhouse gas emissions is a particularly complex task. Its causes are manifold and interrelated with policies in the areas of energy, transport, procurement, waste, agriculture and forestry.

Of course, in such a scenario, initiatives launched to solve one problem may lead to new problems elsewhere and conflict with other policy domains. Thus, the need to mainstream climate protection policy into all other policy areas is essential. Integrated approaches result in better planning and more significant results. Efforts include the development of integrated Energy Plans, Sustainable Urban Transport Plans, Waste Minimisation Plans, Sustainable Urban Design, Sustainable Construction, Green Public Procurement initiatives, Urban Environmental Management Plans, Local Agenda 21 processes etc. ([A Decision-maker's Guide](#), [Enviplans](#), [Waste management and climate](#), [BUSTRIP Project](#)). However, it is important to direct these actions towards a long-term local climate protection strategy. For example, the [European Climate Menu](#) supports European local authorities in formulating and implementing a structured and integral climate policy. A good climate protection policy also brings other local advantages: energy efficiency and investment in renewable energy reduces costs, energy-dependency and air pollution, as well as improving the quality of life and creating new jobs ([Making business sense of climate change](#)).

Nevertheless, integration cannot be achieved solely by public sector bodies: a commitment from industrial and commercial sectors is also needed, as well as procedures to improve public and stakeholder participation. These issues are dealt by Aalborg Commitments 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8. In relation to mobility and sustainable land-use see Aalborg Commitments 5 and 7.

### **3. raise awareness of the causes and probable impacts of climate change, and integrate preventive actions into our climate change policy.**

One of the main aims of any climate protection policy is to mitigate climate change: actions taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are meant to stabilise concentrations in the atmosphere in order to avoid or delay the occurrence of global warming. However, even if we cut emissions successfully, some degree of climate change will nevertheless occur. This is due to emissions accumulated in the atmosphere through past human activities and the considerable time delay occurring between the reduction in emissions and lower concentrations in the atmosphere. Climate change cannot be completely halted and some effects are already visible. Temperatures will rise, even if we mitigate the process and local communities will be vulnerable to the consequences of climate change such as flooding, heat waves, more frequent and severe water shortages. Local authorities have therefore an important role to play in adapting to these inevitable effects and must integrate environmental risk measures into their policies.

However, due to regional variation in and uncertainty about the likely impacts of climate change and the breadth of interests potentially affected, work on adaptation remains at an early stage around the world. Ensuring the capacity to adapt to climate change needs good planning and, to be effective, any adaptation strategy must result in climate risk being considered as a normal part of decision-making (urban planning, construction and use of infrastructures, etc.). Thus, risk concerns must be taken on early in the development process of policies and the identification of priority areas must align with social objectives and values. For instance, climate can influence productivity and reliability of supply. Thus, agriculture, water supply, settlements, emergency services and energy supply are crucial sectors.

Adaptation strategies aim to increase the resilience of human and natural systems to possible changes in climate conditions where this is likely to be feasible and cost effective. Since measures will have to be put into practice by individuals, local authorities and enterprises, awareness-raising and education are essential to achieve a thorough understanding of the interrelationship between social, economic and environmental aspects ([Nottingham Declaration Action Pack](#)). Good management of ecosystems saves lives and property. Thus, professional training, as well as investing in mitigating technology, vulnerability of infrastructures, coastal zone management, research into agricultural crop, diseases etc. become crucial ([AMICA Project](#)). Although these actions cannot stop climate change, they might help the aftermath of natural occurrences be less disastrous and reduce future economic, social and environmental damage.

Aalborg Commitments 5 and 2 deal with management and planning issues, while Aalborg Commitments 1 and 7 help raise participation and address human health issues. Aalborg Commitment 3 promotes sustainable management of ecosystems.

### **4. reduce our impact on the global environment and promote the principle of environmental justice.**

Currently, world energy consumption is based primarily on fossil fuels (80%). Furthermore, only ¼ of the world's population, living in industrialised countries, consumes ¾ of the world's main energy resources. This development model, however, is not viable in the long run. If the entire human population was to consume natural resources and energy as the industrialised countries do nowadays, we would probably need three planets to sustain ourselves. However, our planet is a limited resource and as such, current trends raise important environmental equity concerns.

First of all, fossil fuels are a non-renewable energy resource and are being depleted at a faster rate than they are regenerated by the Earth. At the same time, the burning of fossil fuels in order to produce energy, releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, causing climate change. While greenhouse gas emissions are rather localised, climate change has global impacts. For instance, 5% of the world's population lives in the European Union where about 15% of global greenhouse gases are generated. Nevertheless, it is in the Arctic region where a rise in temperature nearly twice the global rate has been recently recorded (ACIA, 2004). In turn, the Arctic provides the world with important natural resources (such as oil, gas, and fish) that will be affected by climate change, while the melting of arctic glaciers is one of the factors contributing to sea-level rise around the globe. As such, people outside the Arctic have a great stake in what is happening there.

Unfortunately, our policy-making has not yet caught up with these complexities. However, industrialised countries have the duty to provide emission 'space' for developing countries to raise their emissions sufficiently to develop their economies. Local authorities must therefore play their part in contributing to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet, by calculating and reducing the ecological footprint of their city/town, for example ([Zero Carbon Campaign, a Decision-maker's Guide](#)). Engaging in actions towards responsible consumption and lifestyle choices and a vibrant and sustainable local economy, as set out in the Aalborg Commitments 4 and 8, encourages a more sustainable use of resources and reduces our impact on the environment. Holding polluters accountable on issues of health and environmental justice, as well as working on pollution prevention, climate protection, natural resources management, energy efficiency and local management towards sustainability (see Aalborg Commitments 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9), help mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects.

### **5. strengthen the international cooperation of towns and cities and develop local responses to global problems in partnership with local governments, communities and relevant stakeholders.**

Developing countries have the same right as industrialised countries to raise their standard of living: environmental and social injustice at global level threatens peace, development, economy, resource allocation, social cohesion and quality of life. Facts tell as though, that the traditional development model undertaken by industrialised countries strongly harms the global environment. Indeed, environmental degradation, problematic resource allocation and underlying inequalities at global level are some of its side-effects. A new development model is needed, compatible with the planet's natural and human carrying capacity. Mistakes made in the past must be avoided and any future engagement in development must be based on sustainability principles. However, effective decision-making depends upon understanding and properly addressing the unique needs of different socioeconomic groups. Industrialised countries must take on their responsibilities for the negative impacts of their actions on the global environment and co-operate with local authorities in developing countries in order to improve their quality of life and provide them with clean technology transfer and offsetting sustainability initiatives and enhancement measures.

Partnerships for sustainable development, municipal international co-operation arrangements, bilateral assistance schemes and joint implementation of measures to protect the climate, biodiversity, water resources and soil, are the way forward ([Cities for Climate Protection Campaign](#)). Possible targets for local authorities are to increase the number of city partnerships for sustainability, to increase support towards NGOs which are active in the field of international co-operation, to strengthen local sustainable development actions between developed European towns and non-European less developed ones, particularly those of neighbouring regions, as well as in developing countries ([Sustainable Energy Communities](#), [BISE Project](#)). In the long run, local authorities must help empower less favoured countries by building networks and by providing information, technical assistance, media, action and organising training, as well as participating in education and action campaigns towards environmental and social justice in general.

Overall, cities and towns are a threat to the natural environment, with significant impacts on the natural resources, as a result of consumption, pollution and other factors. As such, local authorities cannot achieve global sustainability without taking into account the impacts of their local resource use, emissions and export of impacts, all issues which are dealt by the Aalborg Commitments 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8.

**To find further Resources relating to Aalborg Commitment 10, click here:**  
[http://www.localresources21.org/theme\\_matrix.php?t=10](http://www.localresources21.org/theme_matrix.php?t=10)