



ELDW THEME FOR 2021-2022

“PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT: LOCAL COMMUNITIES TAKE ACTION”

Our societies have faced an unexpected global challenge and have been struggling to overcome the outbreak of Covid-19. Besides the pandemic, a wide range of challenges such as migration influx, climate change and natural disasters loom ever larger.

In fact, while an essential battle has been fought against the Covid-19 pandemic, humanity's greatest existential threat continues to grow: climate change. It represents one of the most urgent dangers to modern societies, having a direct and indirect impact on our communities and citizens. Responding to climate change requires immediate and effective measures at all levels of governance, with local and regional authorities being at the forefront of reducing the negative impacts of environmental changes on their communities.

Therefore, building up resilient communities in Europe and strengthening the protection of citizens must be placed as a priority. Thanks to its 15 years of experience, the ELDW initiative has the capacity to support mobilisation of local and regional authorities in increasing their resilience to climate change. For this reason, it was proposed that the ELDW in 2021 and 2022 should focus on: **“Protecting the Environment: Local Communities Take Action”**.

Citizen participation is not only the bedrock of democracy and good governance, but should also be the first objective included in the process of changing attitudes and behaviour. According to several studies, *resilience-building plans and strategies* for addressing climate change are not as effective as they are intended to be if they are not supported by citizens' efforts and adopted behaviour.

Awareness raising by encouraging partnerships and citizen engagement has a key role to play in resilient city development. Therefore, to protect the environment and build resilient communities and societies, awareness raising should be the main component of the ELDW 2021-2022 activities. Indeed, involving citizens, establishing trustworthy channels, using digital technologies and contents, and increasing transparency should be added as sub-themes of



the 2021 and 2022 editions. In this way, substantial advances will be achieved in the operationalisation of urban resilience.

The practice of providing access to knowledge and resources for citizens who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised at local and regional levels is defined as inclusiveness. To ensure resilience, **citizen involvement** is important, especially coming from youth and children. Also, the involvement of representatives from different local stakeholder groups will help to create a sense of shared ownership. The fight against climate change cannot happen without consulting everyone.

To establish **trustworthy channels** to connect with citizens, to ensure their easy access to information about disasters, obstacles, or the challenges as well as the positive developments in the city, **digital technologies and contents** are encouraged to be used by municipal authorities.

Transparency refers to the extent to which shareable, appropriate, critical and sensitive information and data are made available to citizens. Transparency requires authorities to make it easier for citizens to access information, notably through open data and records management which allows tasks to be completed more effectively. Therefore, citizens should be informed about each stage of the decision-making process and they should easily reach the information using digital technologies, user-friendly applications, and so on. The municipality should also ensure that the information is disseminated through regular communication channels to provide all groups of the population (especially the elderly) with access to it.

Protecting the environment and building resilient communities cannot be waged by governments only. The ELDW partners are thus invited to create informal networks among local stakeholders and to work around shared values by discussing different paths in achieving the common objectives.



New modalities for ELDW

Local authorities and their associations are now encouraged to organise events and activities in accordance with the theme of the ELDW during **the whole year**, culminating in a flagship event in the week of **15 October**.

As a matter of fact, to highlight their active commitment to raising the citizens' awareness of local democracy, local and regional authorities taking part in the ELDW can request the title of **“Partner of the European Local Democracy Week”**. This title is granted *a posteriori*, upon the actual participation and report on activities.

The municipalities must fill in a form, either directly on the website or by email (by 10 December at the latest) showing that they fulfilled the following eight criteria:

1. Allocate a specific budget for citizens' participation;
2. Run an ELDW promotion campaign using the ELDW visual identity decided upon and provided by the Congress;
3. Carry out a number of specific activities linked to the leading theme of the year;
4. Organise an event with a pan-European dimension. A Congress representative may be invited to this main event;
5. Extend the social scope of the initiative by reaching out to different groups of citizens (children, women, Roma and Travellers, people with a disability...);
6. Promote the engagement of young people and youth organisations;
7. Implement sustainable initiatives;
8. Implement innovative activities and projects.

The ELDW participants are encouraged to actively promote exchanges of information and good practice between them, especially by using the **online platform** of the ELDW website.

National coordinators can also register directly on the ELDW website, and they will then be validated by ELDW team. Upon that step, they will be able to post activities from any municipality of their country and help those who need it. Besides national coordinators, municipalities or associations that would like to share ELDW activities can do so by registering on the ELDW website.




What kind of activities to organise under this theme in 2021-2022?


Many diverse activities allowing to raise awareness around environmental issues and the importance of acting to mitigate climate change can be organised such as:

- ✓ Challenges: cleaning up the streets or the sea, zero waste challenges...
- ✓ Outside/field activities: walks in forests, by the sea coast, tree planting events to sensitize to the importance of protecting and preserving such areas
- ✓ Public debates that contribute to providing access to knowledge and resources to citizens on topics such as mobility change, how to reduce one's footprint...
- ✓ Award ceremony for people taking positive action to protect the environment and the biodiversity in their local communities
- ✓ Exhibitions on the impact of climate change, or any other related topic


These activities will improve the dialogue between the elected representatives and the citizens on how to take action to mitigate climate change, but they will also raise awareness and motivate citizens to take daily action to participate in the protection of the environment and biodiversity.


Examples of activities carried out under the theme:


 **The Municipality of Buca (Türkiye)** organised a “disaster awareness programme”, in which topics like disaster preparedness, risks in our living environment, disaster and emergency plan, disaster and emergency kit and correct behaviour before and after the disaster, were explained to their personnel and interested citizens.

 **The Municipality of Büyükçekmece (Türkiye)** formed an Environmental Council with experts, volunteers, associations, and NGOs actively involved in recycling issues in the district. In this council, the opinions of environmental volunteers were taken into account. The Council was aimed at taking action on projects for the improvement of the environment. In addition, this council included joint projects and studies on zero waste, energy and other environmental issues concerning the district.



 **The City of Chemnitz (Germany)**, as a long-standing partner of the ELDW, also participated in the 2021 ELDW Edition and connected activities with the European Mobility Week, the European Commission's flagship awareness-raising campaign on sustainable urban mobility. Among other things, the city organised telephone consultation hours with a focus on how local communities take action to protect the environment. Citizens could inform the city Council about their proposals on how to make the City of Chemnitz more sustainable in the future. The city also built parklets in different areas, with children involved in constructing them.

 In **the City of Bludenz (Austria)**, voluntary private individuals and members of associations cleaned up the urban area together. They focused primarily on natural areas, forest paths and watersides.


 **The Municipality of Cascais (Portugal)** joined ELDW for the third time. Cascais has, in recent years, invested both in educational activities among the population, especially young people, and in environmental sustainability projects such as: asbestos removal in schools; building biological lakes at schools; setting up ecopoints for paper, plastic and caps inside school spaces; reforestation of areas affected by fires; promoting the use of renewable energy in infrastructures of the Volunteer Fire Brigade and Sports Clubs; opening Cycle Paths and Cycle Routes; and arranging green spaces, benches for mobile phone chargers, bus stop covers with wi-fi using solar energy, and community gardens for the production of organic agricultural products. The municipality established a program named "Irec" – innovation in recycling – as a pilot project that challenges all consumers to return empty drink packages and insert them, once again, in the production cycle of new packaging or products.


Involving youth and children in environmental protection activities: examples of best practices from municipalities


Since the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs at local level is enshrined in the preamble of the European Charter of Local Self-Government of 1985, and detailed in its Additional Protocol of 2009, it is fundamental for an established and functioning local democracy to promote education for democratic citizenship among young people and children.




Moreover, by engaging children and youth, local authorities will understand better their needs and will be able to develop more targeted responses for and with the younger generation, thus building a more inclusive democratic local community and a more environment-friendly environment, which is one of the key priorities of most young people.

 In **the City of Skopje (North Macedonia)**, the town council promoted a dialogue between youth and local politicians, in order to discuss the commitment of young citizens in environmental protection. Elected representatives thus visited 5 high schools to discuss environmental issues that concern young people. A dialogue took place between young people, politicians from the City Council and environmental experts from the Eco-Council/Green-Council. The five high schools where these activities took place develop activities to protect the environment and are very active in promoting eco-friendly behaviours.

 In **the City of Chemnitz (Germany)**, a project was built to encourage children to get to school by any other way than by car (on foot, by bicycle, skateboard, public transport, among many options). Children collect stamps for every journey, whether to school, to kindergarten, or to their leisure time club they complete without a car. At the end, children or groups as a collective might get a prize.

 In **the Municipality of Büyükçekmece (Türkiye)**, a waste library was established in a school. The goal was to emphasise the importance of recycling and the importance of zero waste in terms of protecting the environment.

 **Ahmetbey Municipality (Türkiye)** organised a painting competition in which children and young people participated with the goal of drawing attention to the issue of climate change and the importance of water saving and to raise general awareness to those issues. Successful students selected out of a total of 104 paintings were given bicycles and different gifts.

As you can see, many types of activities can be organised in the framework of the ELDW in order to strengthen local democracy and implement eco-friendly policies. Obviously, your municipality is free to imagine other events under the theme of the year.