UBC | UNION OF THE BALTIC CITIES

SUSTAINABLE CITIES COMMISSION

Annual report 2025

UBC Sustainable Cities Commission

Published March 2026

Editorial 4

Our work 5

UBC SCC Secretariat 5

UBC SCC Advisory Board 2026−2027 6

2025 in numbers 7

UBC Sustainable Cities Commissions meeting 8

XVIII UBC General Conference 8

UBC TALKS webinar series 2025 9

UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2030: implementation 10

Climate-resilient cities 12

UBC SCC climate resilience project 13

ClimaResponse 13

Water-smart cities 14

Water trends and highlights from UBC cities 15

UBC SCC water projects 17

EMPEREST 17

HAZGONE 18

Blue Action BANOS 19

Achieving Zero PFAS 19

Mobility-smart cities 20

Mobility trends and highlights from UBC cities 22

UBC SCC mobility projects 24

SUMPs for BSR 24

BSR Urban Mobility 25

Energy-smart cities 26

Energy trends and highlights from UBC cities 27

UBC SCC energy projects 28

Climate-4-CAST 28

EnTRA 29

Resource-efficient cities 30

Resource-efficiency trends from UBC cities 31

UBC SCC resource-efficiency projects 32

BALTIPLAST 32

ChemClimCircle-2 33

NonHazCity 3 33

Change(K)now! 35

Circular MuSe.....35

Biodiverse cities.....36

Biodiversity trends and highlights from UBC cities.....36

UBC SCC biodiversity project.....37

Urban Biodiversity Parks 37

Strategic Partnerships.....38

Union of the Baltic Cities Sustainable Cities Commission

ubc-sustainable.net

UBC is the leading network of cities in the Baltic Sea Region, mobilising the shared potential of its member cities to tackle challenges related to social, economic and environmental development. **Established in 1991**, today the network includes over **70** cities and municipalities, as well as associated cities from Ukraine.

One of 8 thematic UBC Commissions, **the Sustainable Cities Commission Secretariat supports developing clean, resilient, and attractive urban environments**. UBC cities are recognized as global forerunners in climate-smart development, and together we work towards green, resource-efficient and sustainable future.

Editorial

The year 2025 was marked by strong continuity, renewal, and concrete delivery within the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission. As the implementation of the UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2022-2030 progressed, our focus remained on translating shared priorities into practical cooperation, tools, and measurable impact for our member cities.

An important milestone was the renewal of the UBC SCC Advisory Board. At the Commission meeting in October 2025 in Malmö, new members for the 2026-2027 term were confirmed, forming a group of 12 experts from member cities, including three Co-Chairpersons. The Advisory Board plays a crucial role in steering the Commission's strategic direction and strengthening cooperation across the network by bringing national expertise and topical knowledge into our joint work. The annual Commission meeting in Malmö also provided a valuable opportunity for cities to meet, align priorities and explore new cooperation opportunities on the topics of climate and biodiversity. Bringing together over 70 representatives from the UBC network, the event created space for open exchange, practical learning, and the development of new partnerships.

Project cooperation continued to be the backbone of our activities. In 2025, the Commission was involved in the implementation of 12 projects altogether, launching three new project platforms HAZGONE, EnTRA and BSR Urban Mobility and starting two new projects, ClimaResponse and ChemClimCircle-2, all funded by the Interreg BSR Programme. By the end of the year, we successfully concluded the EMPEREST and BALTIPLAST projects, delivering concrete tools and policy recommendations on hazardous substances, PFAS, and plastic reduction to cities and European stakeholders. This dynamic project portfolio demonstrates the strength of our network in attracting funding, scaling solutions, and ensuring long-term regional impact.

Capacity building remained at the heart of our mission. Through the UBC TALKS webinar series, we organised five targeted online sessions in 2025, gathering 241 live participants from 29 member cities. These webinars serve as an accessible and practical learning platform for local authorities, addressing current sustainability challenges and policy developments. Combined with active participation in regional and EU-level events, policy dialogues, and strategic partnerships, our outreach throughout the year further strengthened the visibility and influence of UBC cities.

Overall, 2025 demonstrated the value of cooperation, shared expertise, and a strong project-based approach. Together with our UBC member cities and cooperation partners, we continue building a resilient, climate-neutral and sustainable Baltic Sea Region by turning our strategic vision and Sustainability Action Programme into concrete local action.

Warm greetings,
Agnieszka Ilola
Head of Secretariat at the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission

Our work

UBC SCC Secretariat

The Secretariat of the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission has been hosted by the City of Turku since 1996, and it is currently integrated into the Project Services unit of the city. The international team of experts creates opportunities for networking, connecting member cities, communicating local excellence across borders, and managing international projects.

Agnieszka Ilola
Head of Secretariat

Mariia Andreeva
Communications Coordinator

Maija Rusanen
Special Advisor

Ira Sibelius
Special Advisor

Olena Zinchuk
Special Advisor

Helmi Andersson
Project Coordinator

Lotta Lehti
Project Coordinator

Oona Uusitalo
Project Coordinator

Adham Maharramli
Project Officer

UBC SCC Advisory Board 2026−2027

UBC SCC activities are supported by the Advisory Board, which steers the Commission's activities and strengthens the cooperation with UBC member cities by bringing national and topical expertise. At the UBC SCC Commission meeting in October 2025, the Advisory Board convened to announce new members for the next term (2026–2027, de facto starting from December 2025), forming a group of **12 experts** from member cities including three Co-Chairpersons.

Co-Chairs		
Dagmara Nagórka-Kmiecik	Gdańsk	Poland
Anna von Zweygbergk	Turku	Finland
Thea Ohlander Arfwidsson	Malmö	Sweden
Advisory Board members		
Andres Jaadla	Rakvere	Estonia
Jaanus Tamm	Tartu	Estonia
Olli-Pekka Mäki	Turku	Finland
Stephan Braun	Greifswald	Germany
Gunita Osite	Jelgava	Latvia
Dace Liepniece-Liepiņa	Liepāja	Latvia
Linda Zeibote	Riga	Latvia
Ola Nord	Malmö	Sweden
Per-Arne Nilsson	Malmö	Sweden

In 2025, the Advisory Board held four online meetings:

4 January. Starting the planning of the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission meeting in Malmö, discussing the Commission's contribution to the XVIII UBC General Conference in Słupsk, introducing events and activities offered to cities by SCC projects. Starting the process of forming the new Advisory Board for the term 2026–2027.

7 April. Discussing the programme and topics of the UBC SCC Commission meeting 2025 and setting the goals for the SCC workshop at the XVIII UBC General Conference. Introducing 3 new platform projects with SCC as a lead/project partner.

3 June. Opening the registration to the UBC SCC Commission meeting and inviting member cities. Discussing UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2030 mid-term evaluation process and a survey for cities to follow this progress.

16 December. Introducing the new Advisory Board. Sharing feedback from the Commission meeting and the XVIII UBC General Conference. Highlighting open funding opportunities.

2025 in numbers

12 projects with **106** cooperating organisations

Total project budget ca. 44 MEUR

5 webinars in 2025

241 UBC TALKS participants

3 Sustainable Cities Bulletins and **30** newsletters

1033 LinkedIn followers

Advocating cities' needs and interests **on regional arena**

915 Facebook followers

419 Instagram followers

Presented at over **20** events around BSR

Our team joins **key regional fora** and launches **own informative and training events**

UBC Sustainable Cities Commissions meeting

1−3 October 2025 in Malmö, Sweden

The Union of the Baltic Cities Sustainable Cities Commission meeting 2025 attracted **over 70 urban leaders, climate experts, and changemakers**! The whole three-day event hosted representatives from 21 local authorities (among them, **12 UBC member cities**) – including mayors, climate protection and environmental experts, strategic planners, and financial officers, – in a dynamic mix of keynote presentations, hands-on workshops, city showcases, and study visits.

This year's meeting addressed green urban governance from the climate perspectives. On the first day, an open **Climate Budget Summit** inspired cities to apply climate budgeting to translate high-level climate targets into tangible and quantifiable local actions. On the following day, the main Commission meeting under the theme "**Creating Climate-Proof and Nature-Positive Cities Together**" took place with expert keynotes and workshops on **climate adaptation and biodiversity**. The third day featured a special workshop on **local actions against PFAS**, a threat already well-recognised in Sweden and growing in awareness in other BSR countries. During the meeting, also the UBC SCC Advisory Board convened for a special session on nominating new members to the board for the term 2026–2027.

Aiming to connect local narratives in the BSR with the European and global agenda, we invited presentations from the **EU Cities Mission** (Anna Huttunen, City Advisor at the NetZeroCities project), **ICLEI Cities Biodiversity Center** (Ingrid Coetzee, Director of Biodiversity, Health & Nature), and **CDP** running the global CDP-ICLEI reporting system (Étienne Métais, Associate Director). In turn, local achievements from UBC members were introduced by many cities, including the hosting city of **Malmö** (Thea Ohlander Arfwidsson and Per-Arne Nilsson), **Greifswald** (Stephan Braun), **Lahti** (Heli Huuskonen), **Riga** (Liene Griķe), **Tartu** (Mirjam Võsaste), **Turku** (Anna von Zweygbergk and Maija Rusanen), and **Umeå** (Doris Grellman).

This annual event offered rich content, peer learning, co-creation, and partnership-building – the hallmarks of the UBC network's commitment to a sustainable, climate-neutral, and biodiverse urban future.

XVIII UBC General Conference

4–7 November 2025 in Słupsk / Dolina Charlotty, Poland

The XVIII UBC General Conference featured insightful panel discussions, practical workshops, and strategic debates on the role of cities in the future of the European Union. The event brought together **150** representatives from UBC member cities, EU institutions, and partner organizations.

Among the topical discussions, our Sustainable Cities Commission organised a double session to introduce the member cities the wide spectrum of cooperation opportunities – attended by **9 UBC member cities**. From running projects and upcoming events to tailored trainings increasing professional capacities, we have a lot to offer in the field of sustainability!

UBC TALKS webinar series 2025

The regular UBC TALKS webinar series launched by UBC SCC are an important capacity development tool for local authorities – all topics are carefully selected to address the challenges and trends of the local administration officers. In 2025, we organised **five webinars**, attended by **241** live participants from various departments in **29 UBC member cities**.

Introducing new era of toxic-free water cycle

- **25.3.2025 | 70 PARTICIPANTS**
- Coalition Clean Baltic presented the European regulatory contexts, and the EMPEREST partners from **Tartu**, **Tallinn**, **Gdansk** and Szczecin introduced results of testing technologies to remove micropollutants from wastewater. Training materials for cities and WWTPs were introduced.

Urban Biodiversity Parks

- **27.5.2025 | 37 PARTICIPANTS**
- The pioneering European project on the biodiversity parks concept, led by **Turku**, presented its experiences and progress. **Malmö** and **Riga** tuned in with own experiences and urban greening plan preparations.

Climate and disaster risk reduction

- **10.6.2025 | 39 PARTICIPANTS**
- UBC Sustainable and Safe Cities Commissions jointly address the interconnected challenges of climate adaptation and disaster risk preparedness. Joined by CBSS and three cities - **Gävle**, **Kristiansand** and Tampere - we explored scalable solutions to strengthen climate resilience.

Monitoring and evaluation for the sustainable urban mobility planning

- **7.10.2025 | 34 PARTICIPANT**
- Continuing to learn and implement the SUMP concept, this edition featured tools and city cases, introduced by the University of **Gdańsk**, **Cesis** and **Turku**, and the SUMP Clinic presentation.

Climate budget concept and tools

- **2.12.2025 | 61 PARTICIPANTS**
- How to start climate budgeting in your city - we learned this with the HafenCity University **Hamburg** and with the help of city cases from **Espoo** and **Aarhus**. A tool for this is developed as we type - don't miss it (or the rest of the training course) in 2026!

All UBC TALKS webinars are recorded and available in our video library as learning materials: study them yourself and share with colleagues from other departments!

UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2030: implementation

The Sustainability Action Programme 2022–2030 of the Union of the Baltic Cities has entered a decisive **implementation phase**. With its five core topics: **water**, **mobility**, **resource efficiency**, **biodiversity**, **energy**, and **climate change** as a cross-cutting priority, the SAP provides a shared framework guiding sustainability action across UBC member cities.

After four years of the Programme operation, in 2025 the focus shifted from strategic framing to strengthening implementation and impact assessment in member cities. To support this transition, the UBC SCC Secretariat **launched a survey among member cities (8 September – 24 October 2025)**, **organised a workshop** at the XVIII UBC General Conference in Słupsk (Poland), and **facilitated discussions** during the annual Commission meeting in Malmö (Sweden). These mid-term reflection activities were designed to identify practical pathways for accelerating action.

Maija Rusanen (UBC SCC / City of Turku) presenting key takeaways for biodiversity bottlenecks and priorities mapped at the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission meeting 2025 in Malmö. Photo by Mariia Andreeva

The survey and workshops gathered insights on cities' current priorities, policy frameworks and implemented measures across five core topics, while placing particular emphasis on existing challenges, future priority actions and support needs and examples of local initiatives that could inspire peers across the network. The findings, incorporated into this report, provide an overview of trends across the UBC network, while also highlighting practical measures that demonstrate progress in specific topical areas.

The mid-term evaluation of the UBC Sustainability Action Programme indicates **steady progress in aligning member cities around shared sustainability objectives in five core topics**, while highlighting **structural challenges** that continue to affect the pace and scale of implementation.

The central finding is the strong recognition of **cities as key actors in tackling climate, mobility, circularity and biodiversity challenges**. As a level closest to citizens, cities are driving practical solutions yet face limitations in resources and mandates. Climate action is widely acknowledged to require extensive investments and systemic change, while cities alone can't address all aspects without stronger national support and private sector involvement.

Majority of responding cities have either adopted or are in the process of **adopting climate and biodiversity targets** aligned with national or EU frameworks. Carbon neutrality is a recurring ambition, often supported by participation in wider European initiatives such as Climate-neutral and Smart Cities Mission and Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change. Cities are mainstreaming climate and biodiversity considerations into urban planning and applying nature-based solutions to address infrastructure and resilience development needs. Practical examples such as urban biodiversity parks and ecosystem-based planning illustrate how cities can deliver multiple co-benefits, including improved habitats, climate resilience and enhanced quality of life for citizens.

However, **the progress remains uneven**. While some cities are advancing with ambitious goals, such as becoming carbon neutral and nature-positive by 2030, others face structural and capacity-related barriers. Common challenges include fragmented governance ("silos" between sectors), competing land-use pressures driven by urban growth and insufficient recognition of the economic and societal value of ecosystem services. Biodiversity is still often perceived as secondary to development priorities, reflecting gaps in political commitment and awareness.

In terms of thematic trends, **cities are advancing in energy efficiency, renewable energy, district heating decarbonisation and sustainable mobility**. However, cities report difficulties in reducing emissions due to high private car use and individual consumption patterns, alongside the need to engage private sector and citizens more effectively in local actions.

Several persistent challenges and gaps emerge consistently across all five core topics:

- city administrations often operate in silos, limiting integrated and multi-benefit solutions,
- many cities lack robust monitoring systems and clear indicators to measure progress,
- financial and capacity constrains with limited municipal budgets and dependence on unstable national funding hinder long-term investments,
- political and social challenges e.g. climate and environmental actions are not always seen as economic priorities and shifting societal behaviour remains difficult.

Climate-resilient cities

In recent years, it has become increasingly evident that cities in the BSR need to improve their preparedness and **adapt to climate change** impacts. Urban areas are particularly vulnerable to climate hazards, such as heatwaves and floods, due to the high number of hard surfaces and the lack of green canopy. In 2025, UBC SCC worked a lot towards raising awareness on the topic of **climate resilience**.

Climate resilience milestones

MARCH

Kick-start of the ClimaResponse project – strategic cooperation on the local and national level to comprehensively address climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction

JUNE

UBC TALKS webinar about climate hazards: under the cooperation of UBC Sustainable and Safe Cities Commissions with CBSS, cities exchanged experiences and solutions to city and community preparedness

OCTOBER

Climate discussion continued at the UBC SCC Commission meeting in Malmö, linking climate budgeting to reach climate neutrality in cities with biodiversity and water management measures for stronger climate adaptation

UBC SCC climate resilience project

ClimaResponse

The ClimaResponse (Responsive Local Action for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction) project supports municipalities and regions in the Baltic Sea Region in strengthening their climate resilience by providing practical solutions, evidence-based approaches, and innovative tools to address climate risks effectively.

Funding: Interreg BSR Programme

Duration: Mar 2025 – Feb 2028

Budget: 3,1 MEUR

UBC members in the project: Klaipeda, Kristiansand, Gävle

Project contacts in UBC SCC: Mariia Andreva, Helmi Andersson

Taking forward previous initiatives CASCADE and CliMaLoc projects, under the lead of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the ClimaResponse began its macroregional adventure. As a **project partner**, UBC SCC coordinates transfer activities.

The **kick-off for the project** was hosted by CBSS in Stockholm on 1-2 April 2025, setting up the work plan for the next three years. Already in June, ClimaResponse was a key contributor to the **UBC TALKS on climate and disaster risk preparedness**. The importance of strengthening community preparedness was introduced by CBSS, and UBC member cities **Kristansand** and **Gävle** shared their experiences and approaches in integrating climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction into local planning and governance processes. Organised jointly by UBC Sustainable and Safe Cities Commission, the webinar highlighted the interconnected challenges of climate adaptation and disaster risk preparedness.

Agnieszka Ilola introducing UBC Sustainable Cities Commission to the ClimaResponse consortium at the kick-off in Stockholm. Photo by CBSS Secretariat

Water-smart cities

In 2025, UBC SCC continued its work towards water-smart future of the BSR cities. Stepping into the consortium of the Mission Ocean's project BAB, we increased the opportunities for UBC members to apply for **funding to pilot local actions**. With the topic of **hazardous substances**, we drove local ambitions and implementation forward, located at the spearhead of the regional action with expert consortia from the projects EMPEREST and HAZGONE.

Water milestones in 2025

MARCH

UBC SCC is in the core partner group of the new HAZGONE platform, building on 14 projects to take forward hazardous substances governance in the Baltic Sea Region

MARCH

Organising UBC TALKS webinar about effective technologies to remove organic micropollutants from wastewater with successful examples from UBC members **Tartu**, **Tallinn**, and **Gdansk**

NOVEMBER

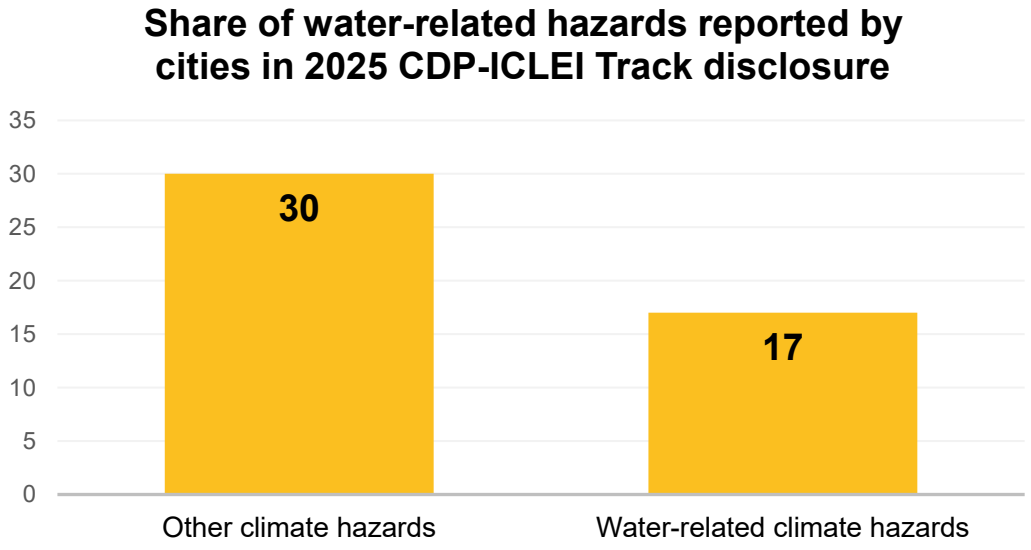
Opening the Blue Action BANOS funding calls for projects and cooperations to protect our oceans and waters under the Mission Ocean

DECEMBER

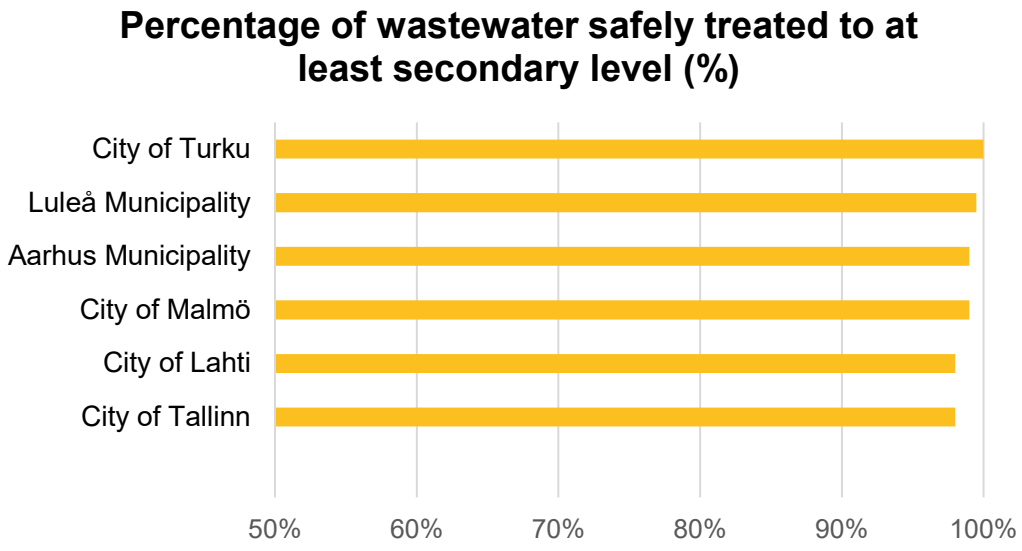
Finalising the EMPEREST project and taking regional messages on PFAS and organic micropollutants forward to European policymakers

Water trends and highlights from UBC cities

Throughout the years, water features prominently in UBC member cities' climate risk profiles. In the 2025 CDP-ICLEI Track disclosure, **heavy precipitation** is among the most frequently identified hazards, with **urban flooding** and **river flooding** closely following. **Coastal flooding/sea level rise** also appears among the disclosed hazards. This confirms that managing excess water, stormwater capacity, and flood resilience remains a key priority across the region.

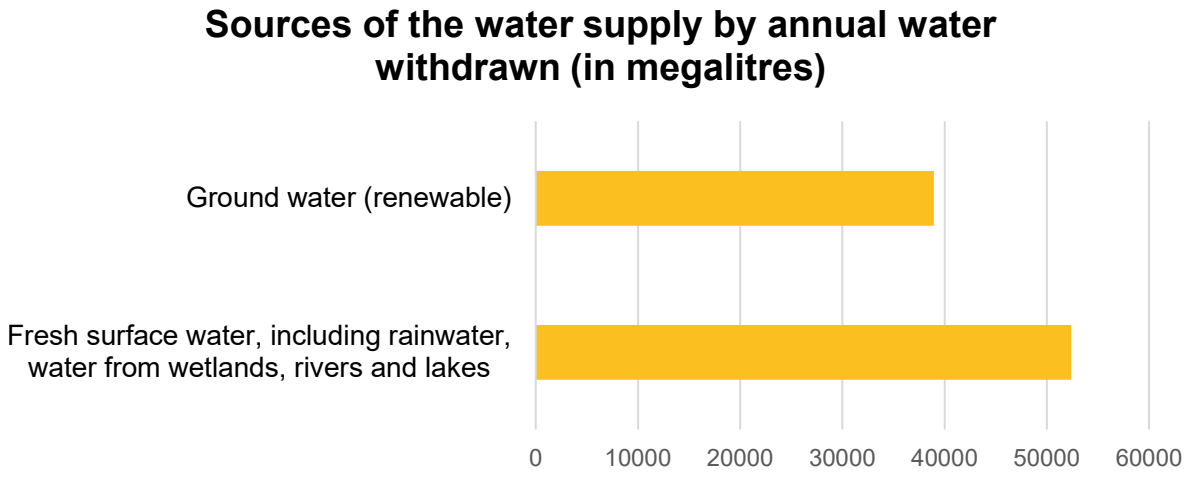


Beyond risk identification, wastewater treatment performance remains consistently high among reporting cities. Cities report both the **volume of wastewater produced** and the **share of wastewater safely treated to at least a secondary level**. As shown in the second chart, wastewater treatment performance is consistently high, indicating strong operational standards and sustained development in wastewater management.



The following chart illustrates the reported structure of **municipal water supply sources**. Fresh surface water, including **river, lake and wetland sources**, represents the largest share of reported withdrawals, with **renewable groundwater** accounting for a substantial proportion of

supply. This reflects the natural resource base of the Baltic Sea Region, where surface and groundwater systems remain central to urban water provision. The disclosures highlight **the importance of safeguarding these resources under changing precipitation patterns and climate variability**.



Cities describe water-related impacts, often emphasising the need to resize stormwater capacity, protect water quality, and strengthen resilience of stormwater systems:

TALLINN: "A sustainable urban drainage system will be built in Tondimõisa park. During the works, a modern, multi-stage stormwater treatment system will be built in the Tondimõisa Park area. The aim of the system is to reduce the amount of pollutants reaching the Baltic Sea and increase the city's resilience to floods caused by stormwater."

TURKU: "As a result of intensifying rainstorms, stormwater risks in particular will increase. The risk of sea floods, especially resulting from winter storms, is significant in the coastal area of Turku."

LAHTI: "Heavy rains are expected more often, and that can create urban floods. Stormwater floods damage infrastructure and properties (…) Management capacity changes and capacity re-sizing will be needed."

MALMÖ: "Urban flooding is a consequence of heavy rainfalls… Malmö, an urban municipality with many hard surfaces, lacks the ability to absorb the amount of water (…) The damage is expected to have a large impact on real estate and insurance."

Disclosure indicates that UBC cities are managing a complex challenge: **increasing precipitation-driven risks** while sustaining and improving **core urban water services**, including wastewater treatment performance and resilience of stormwater systems.

UBC SCC water projects

EMPEREST

The EMPEREST (Eliminating Micro-Pollutants from Effluents for Reuse Strategies) project aimed at the elimination of organic micropollutants, and specifically PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) from the water cycle, addressing local authorities, water utilities, as well as regional stakeholders.

The **EMPEREST project** was led by the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission.

In 2025, EMPEREST organised a **workshop in Szczecin** in May, a **seminar in Malmö** in October in relation to the SCC annual meeting and the **final conference in Berlin** in November, entitled "The Future of Water in the Changing World: Innovative solutions against PFAS and micropollutants", hosting altogether over **260** participants.

Funding: Interreg BSR Programme

Duration: Jan 2023 – Dec 2025

Budget: 5,43 MEUR

UBC members in the project: Riga, Gdańsk, Kaunas, Tallinn, Tartu, Turku, Jonava, Malmö, Panevėžys, Tauragė.

Project contacts in UBC SCC: Lotta Lehti, Mariia Andreva, Agnieszka Ilola

The EMPEREST four main results were all published during 2025:

1. Guidelines for monitoring and assessment of PFAS in the aquatic environment, developed by HELCOM Secretariat. The document shows that PFAS pollution is widespread in the Baltic Sea and the catchment area, including the fish in the sea, – and proposes methodology for monitoring and assessing the situation.

2. A local PFAS risk-assessment tool for cities, developed by the City of Riga. The tool, tested with 29 BSR municipalities, provides local authorities with guidance for identifying PFAS pollution hotspots in their municipality, and for mitigating the risks. This Excel tool covers the whole municipal water cycle starting from water abstraction, water treatment, water supply system, sewage collection, and sewage treatment to treated wastewater discharge.

3. Report on testing advanced treatment technologies at wastewater treatment plants, aiming at removing organic micropollutants from effluent. The tests, conducted in Gdańsk, Szczecin, Kaunas, Tartu, Tallinn, Turku, and Riga, aimed at evaluating the efficiency of advanced treatment technologies in reducing micropollutant concentrations in wastewater. The findings will support the local implementation of the revised Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD).

4. Training materials package on PFAS and other micropollutants, available at Baltic Smart Water Hub. The training package strengthens the water sector resilience to emerging risks with information and solutions targeted at water experts in municipalities and other organisations.

The social media campaign **#EMPERESTagainstPFAS** added to the overall visibility of the project results among local authorities and stakeholders with over **60 000** engagements.

Participants of the EMPEREST final conference in Berlin in November. Photo by Mariia Andreeva

HAZGONE

The HAZGONE (Connecting up- and downstream measures for better hazardous substances governance and policy in the Baltic Sea Region) project platform equips public authorities, NGOs, and businesses with knowledge, best practices, and training to tackle hazardous substances and micropollutants through the first holistic strategy, combining prevention at the source and advanced clean-up at the end of the pipe.

The **HAZGONE platform** is led by the City of Riga. As a **project partner**, UBC SCC coordinates preparing comprehensive outreach and training modules for local authorities, NGOs and businesses. The **Baltic Smart Water Hub**, established and administered by UBC SCC since 2017, is further developed in the platform.

Funding: Interreg BSR Programme

Duration: Jul 2025 – Jun 2028

Budget: 1,2 MEUR

Platform contacts in UBC SCC: Lotta Lehti, Mariia Andreeva

The goal of HAZGONE, synthesising outcomes from 14 EU projects, is to establish more complex connections in the region within the topic of hazardous substances, **linking prevention stakeholders (industries, SMEs) with the downstream treatment response (wastewater treatment)** – and local authorities are at the core of this dialogue.

During 2025, HAZGONE project partner met in Helsinki for the kick-off meeting on 19-20 May 2025, and later in Vilnius on 24-25 November 2025 for the first conceptual workshop.

Blue Action BANOS

BlueActionBANOS is a Horizon Europe -funded initiative that places communities at the heart of ocean and water restoration in the Baltic and North Sea (BANOS) region. As part of the European Union's Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030", the project supports local actors in restoring marine and freshwater ecosystems, reducing pollution, and accelerating the transition to a carbon-neutral and circular blue economy.

UBC SCC is a member of the **BlueActionBANOS** consortium offering funding, guidance and support in the Baltic and North Sea area. The consortium started its work in September 2025 and it will continue until August 2029. During the first months, the work focused primarily on the preparation of the funding calls for pilot projects with strong local engagement (Community-Led Actions) and for strategic roadmaps for long-term sustainability (Transition Agendas).

The **first calls for projects in Community-Led Actions and Transition Agendas** were launched on 28 November 2025. As an information multiplier in the BSR, UBC SCC informed its members about this opportunity to fund tangible change in local water management and blue economy.

Achieving Zero PFAS

The Achieving Zero PFAS project aims to take action against PFAS by facilitating cooperation and knowledge-sharing as well as coordination between stakeholders.

UBC SCC is a project partner in the **Achieving Zero PFAS project**, which is led by IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute (September 2024 – August 2026), funded by the Swedish Institute.

Despite many efforts, the knowledge about per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) is still very limited in many countries – the project especially focuses on capacity development within this topical area in Lithuania and Ukraine. In 2025, the project conducted **soil and water analyses of PFAS in Lithuania**. It also started the "**PFAS school" in Lithuania and Ukraine**, i.e. a series of online guest lectures to university students in different fields.

Mobility-smart cities

In 2025, **Sustainable Urban Mobility plans (SUMPs)** integrating urban logistics continued to be the most important strategic planning tool for cities to improve urban accessibility, safety, and quality of life by fostering sustainable transport, reducing car dependency, and cutting emissions. With the revision of the **European TEN-T regulation** (2024) requiring urban nodes to develop and monitor SUMPs, knowledge, enabling good practice and peer exchange on this topic are more important than ever. Despite wide adoption of SUMPs in our region, impacts to **modal shift** remain limited and discussion on how to promote effectively the use of active modes such walking and cycling, continued.

Mobility milestones in 2025

MARCH

Launch of the BSR Urban Mobility platform cooperation and the organisation of hybrid event "The Changing Landscape of Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning"

SEPTEMBER

BSR Urban Mobility and SUMPs for BSR projects on the stage at the **TEN-T corridor sessions at Urban Mobility Days 2025 in Vilnius**, social media campaign "**Active Mobility Bingo**"

OCTOBER

UBC TALKS webinar about monitoring and evaluation for the sustainable urban mobility planning with local achievements from **Cēsis** and **Turku**

DECEMBER

Launching the registration to an extensive training program on SUMP topics, including 10 online events, and a call for applications to the SUMP clinic, offering individual support for cities tailored to match their unique local challenges.

In March 2025, the SUMPs for BSR project, together with UBC member **Gävle**, organised a hybrid event “The Changing Landscape of Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning” exploring the **implications of the recently revised TEN-T regulation for the cities** and their functional urban areas, particularly those listed as **urban nodes**. The discussion brought up perspectives from different levels, the DG MOVE, the national SUMP Contact Point as well as the city level, on preparing for the new requirements of the regulation.

Participants of the hybrid event. Photo by SUMPs for BSR

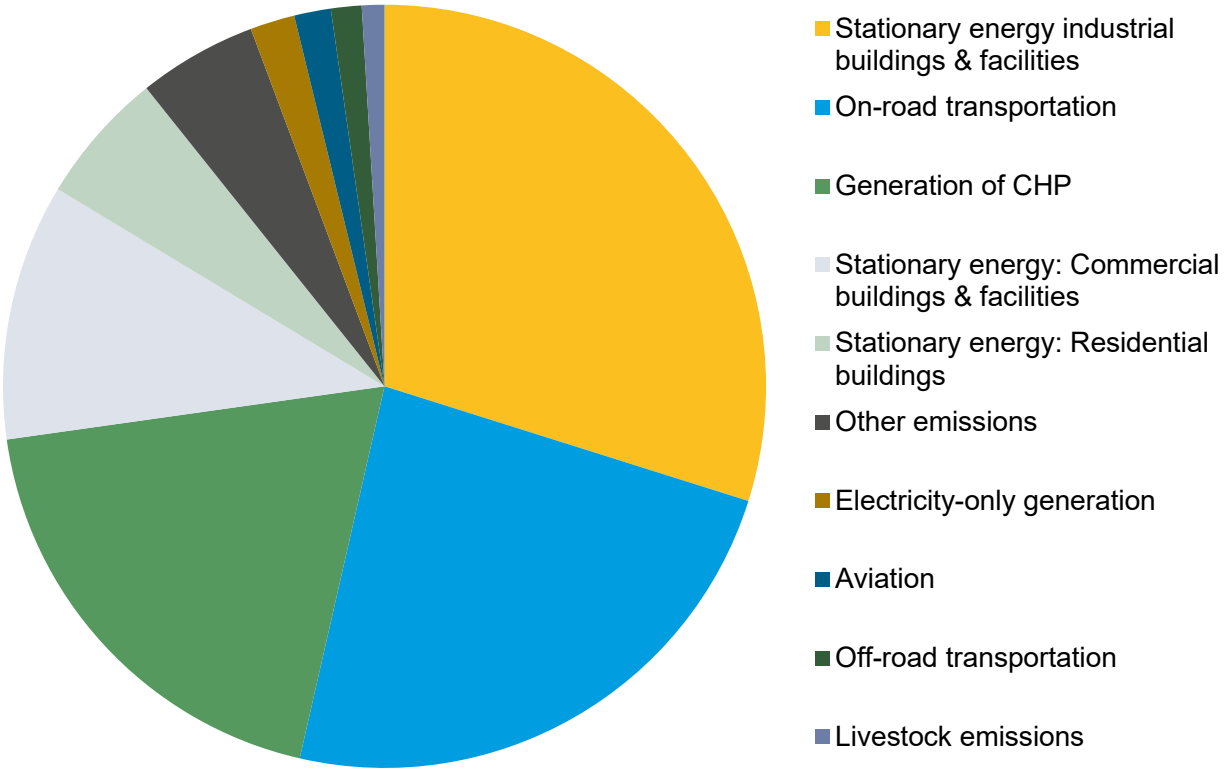
In late 2025, the BSR Urban Mobility platform project conducted a **survey on the TEN-T preparedness in Baltic Sea Region** – the survey on sustainable urban mobility and logistics planning. The survey received **86 responses** from cities, regions and other organisations, covering all BSR countries. 20 of the responses came from UBC member cities, of which 15 are urban nodes. The results showed that **12 of these UBC cities already had a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) in place**, while the others were either preparing their first SUMP or working with mobility plans that were not yet fully aligned with the European SUMP framework.
» Explore the survey results in full

The UBC cities that responded to the survey reported similar challenges with urban mobility and logistics planning. **Funding limitations and staff capacity constraints** were the most common barriers for sustainable mobility and logistics planning, followed by challenges related to **political commitment, existing infrastructure, and competition for urban space**. These findings highlighted the continued **need for peer learning, capacity building and cooperation** within the UBC network, which we provide with the help of the projects BSR Urban Mobility and SUMPs for BSR supporting cities in turning planning efforts into effective implementation.

Mobility trends and highlights from UBC cities

Transport remains one of the most significant sources of emissions in UBC member cities. As illustrated in the chart, **road-based mobility** accounts for a substantial share of total reported emissions, second only to major stationary energy uses such as **industrial buildings and facilities**. Reducing transport emissions continues to be central to cities' climate strategies.

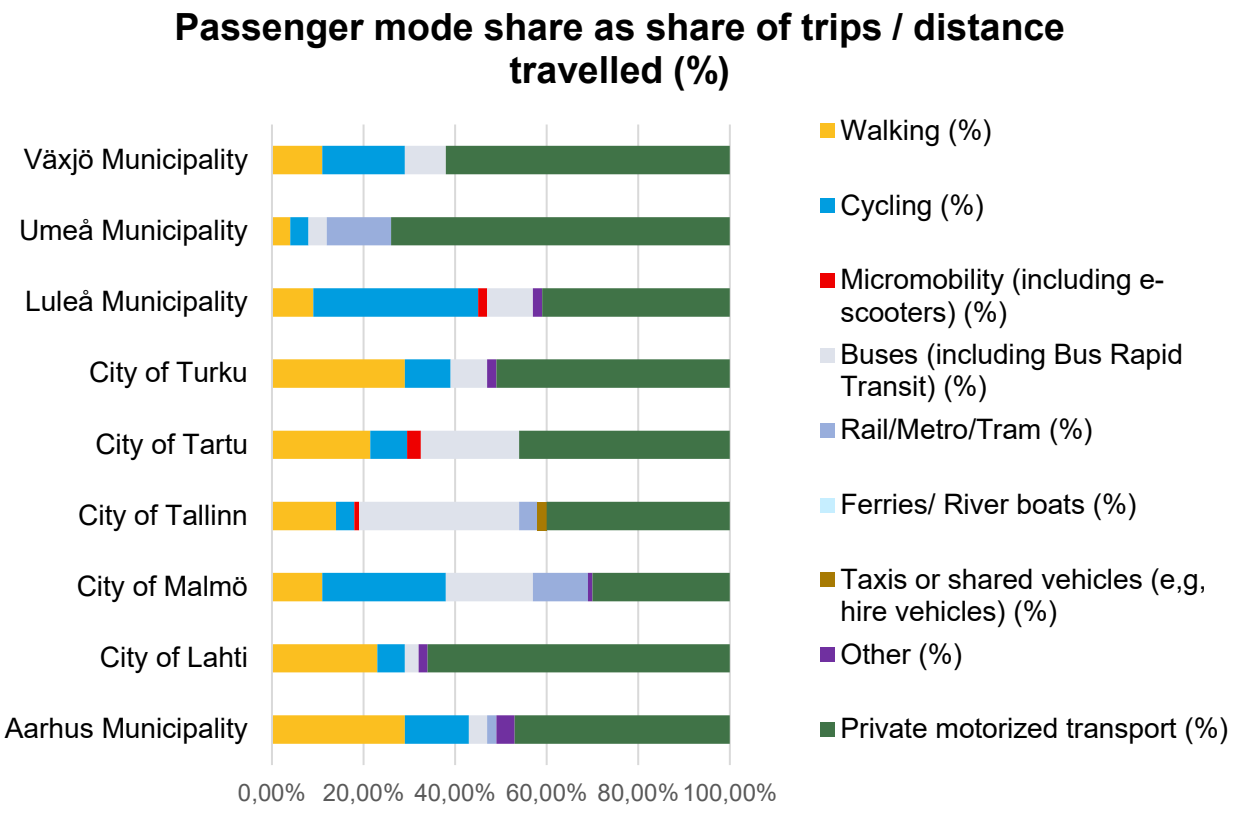
Share of direct CO2 emissions



While **private motorised transport** remains significant in many cases, **active mobility and public transport** account for a substantial share of travel in cities. Some cities demonstrate strong walking and cycling shares, highlighting the diversity of mobility patterns across the region.

VÄXJÖ: "By planning the city smarter, we make it easier to walk and bike instead of using cars."

LULEÅ: "The mobility office L to Å encourages more people to travel sustainably through behavioural change measures."



TURKU: "Public transport in Turku will be turned into a carbon-neutral service by 2029."

UMEÅ: "Over 75% of the local bus fleet is fully electric (…) By 2027 all city buses will be fully electric."

MALMÖ: "The goal is that every bus used in city traffic will run on electricity by 2031."

Beyond emissions and modal split patterns, cities report a wide range of transport-related mitigation measures, reflecting both **infrastructure investments and behavioural approaches**.

TALLINN: "Tallinn is expanding its cycle path network with a goal to build around 40 km of new bicycle lanes."

MALMÖ: "In the coming years, 27 km of dedicated cycle highways will be constructed across the city."

The disclosures indicate that mobility transition in UBC member cities extends beyond monitoring and reporting. Cities combine **fleet electrification, public transport investment, cycling infrastructure expansion and demand management tools** to reduce transport emissions and reshape urban travel patterns. While modal structures differ, mobility transformation remains a central and evolving priority across the Baltic Sea Region.

UBC SCC mobility projects

SUMPs for BSR

The SUMPs for BSR (Enhancing effective Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning for supporting active mobility in BSR cities) project helps small & mid-sized municipalities develop and implement sustainable urban mobility plans to encourage shift towards people's active mobility and thus a healthier lifestyle while reducing traffic emissions at the same time.

In **SUMPs for BSR project**, UBC SCC as a part of City of Turku is the **Lead Partner** and responsible for the transfer activities. The project focuses on increasing the uptake of **Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning (SUMP)** especially in small and mid-sized BSR cities.

Funding: Interreg BSR Programme

Duration: Nov 2023 – Oct 2026

Budget: 3,07 MEUR

UBC members in the project: Turku, Cēsis, Gdynia, Greifswald, Gävle, Panevezys

Project contacts in UBC SCC: Ira Sibelius, Adham Maharramli

SUMPs for BSR will develop a common framework on monitoring and evaluation for sustainable urban mobility planning, a unified model for testing and experimenting with innovative mobility solutions, and a training programme supporting a larger audience of cities in their SUMP processes.

In 2025, SUMPs for BSR project partners worked on improving the **framework for monitoring and evaluation of the SUMP**, contributing to its applicability by developing two practical tools: the **Indicator Selector Tool** and the **Monitoring and Evaluation plan template.** The tools and the framework have gone through an extensive validation process supported by lessons learned from the piloting in the partner cities and are being finalised. **The model for experimenting with active mobility measures** was further developed through workshops and peer-review meetings and has been amended with the real-life case studies from the pilots.

To ensure a long-lasting impact of the work, the UBC SCC, supported by the project consortia, designed a **training programme on SUMP** to transfer knowledge and experiences to the BSR cities. The preparations to launch the tailor-made support to the small and mid-sized cities by **SUMP Clinic** were kicked off. To promote participation in training and peer-learning opportunities, a multi-month social media promotional campaign was kicked off in October, which caught the attention of the target audience. The development of the **BSR SUMP Competence Centre** online platform (**bsr-sump.eu**) for hosting the training materials and project outcomes continued in collaboration with University of Gdansk.

In March 2025, the project hosted a **hybrid event** exploring the **revised TEN-T regulation** and its implications for urban node cities and in October, the **UBC TALKS webinar** about how to embed monitoring & evaluation into SUMP, and how active mobility can be integrated across the whole SUMP cycle.

In September 2025, partner cities of the SUMPs for BSR project organised an international active mobility campaign "**Active Mobility Bingo**", with engaging tasks and quests. The campaign had an extensive interest and widespread participation. Partner cities have nominated the best entries that received sustainable awards and praise.

UBC SCC presented SUMPs for BSR activities at the European Commission's flagship event **Urban Mobility Days 2025** in Vilnius at the **North Sea Baltic Corridor session** for cities along this TEN-T corridor and at the **Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region** in Sopot, in the Networking Village, promoting the upcoming training programme and inviting the municipalities to seize this opportunity.

BSR Urban Mobility

The BSR Urban Mobility (Enhancing active and efficient urban mobility in the Baltic Sea region) platform project connects cities, regional authorities, and policymakers in a peer learning network to support the implementation of sustainable urban mobility plans and deliver on EU goals for multimodal, zero-emission transport.

Funding: Interreg BSR Programme

Duration: July 2025 – June 2028

Budget: 1,18 MEUR

Platform contacts in UBC SCC: Oona Uusitalo, Maija Rusanen

The BSR Urban Mobility project is a platform project where UBC SCC is the **Lead Partner**. It is a peer-learning platform project connecting cities, regional authorities, and policymakers across the Baltic Sea Region to support the implementation of Sustainable Urban Mobility and Logistics planning. It advances EU objectives for multimodal, zero-emission mobility. By bringing in together outcomes from 17 mobility projects, the platform provides tools, guidance, and tested solutions to address shared urban mobility challenges.

Building on previous project results and needs assessment, BSR Urban Mobility facilitates **transnational cooperation through peer-learning and capacity-building activities** for cities and regions. These activities result in a **Training Package on Sustainable Urban Mobility and Logistics Planning** and **BSR Urban Mobility Policy Framework** that develops transnational policy dialogue into joint policy recommendations. The project platform works as a **voice of the Baltic Sea Region cities and regions towards the policy makers.**

In 2025, the organisation and planning for the project began. The project launched a survey inviting local and regional authorities to share their insights on sustainable urban mobility and logistics planning in the Baltic Sea Region. The survey assessed the current state of the art, identified key policy priorities and challenges, and examined cities' awareness and preparedness to respond to the revised TEN-T requirements, particularly among Urban Nodes. **The survey results** will guide the design of the networking, peer-learning, and capacity-building activities starting in 2026, ensuring that these activities answer to the actual needs of the cities and can support the cities in transitioning to more sustainable urban mobility and logistics.

Energy-smart cities

Energy transition continued to be an important topic for cities in 2025, especially in with the crucial need for **energy independence** under plethora of crises, from security to climate. UBC SCC made a big progress in intensifying discussions about **climate budgeting** to reach climate neutrality and joined the platform EnTRA dedicated to consolidating latest **energy solutions** to better equip cities.

Energy milestones in 2025

MARCH

Joined the EnTRA project platform designed to synthetise and further spread effective energy solutions

OCTOBER

Launched the Climate Budget Summit in Malmö to intensify the discussion around climate budgeting to calculate emissions on the path towards net-zero, with support from the Climate-4-CAST project

NOVEMBER

UBC TALKS webinar about climate budget concept and tools brought the knowledge and local application cases in **Espoo** and **Aarhus** to develop cities' capacity on the topic

Energy trends and highlights from UBC cities

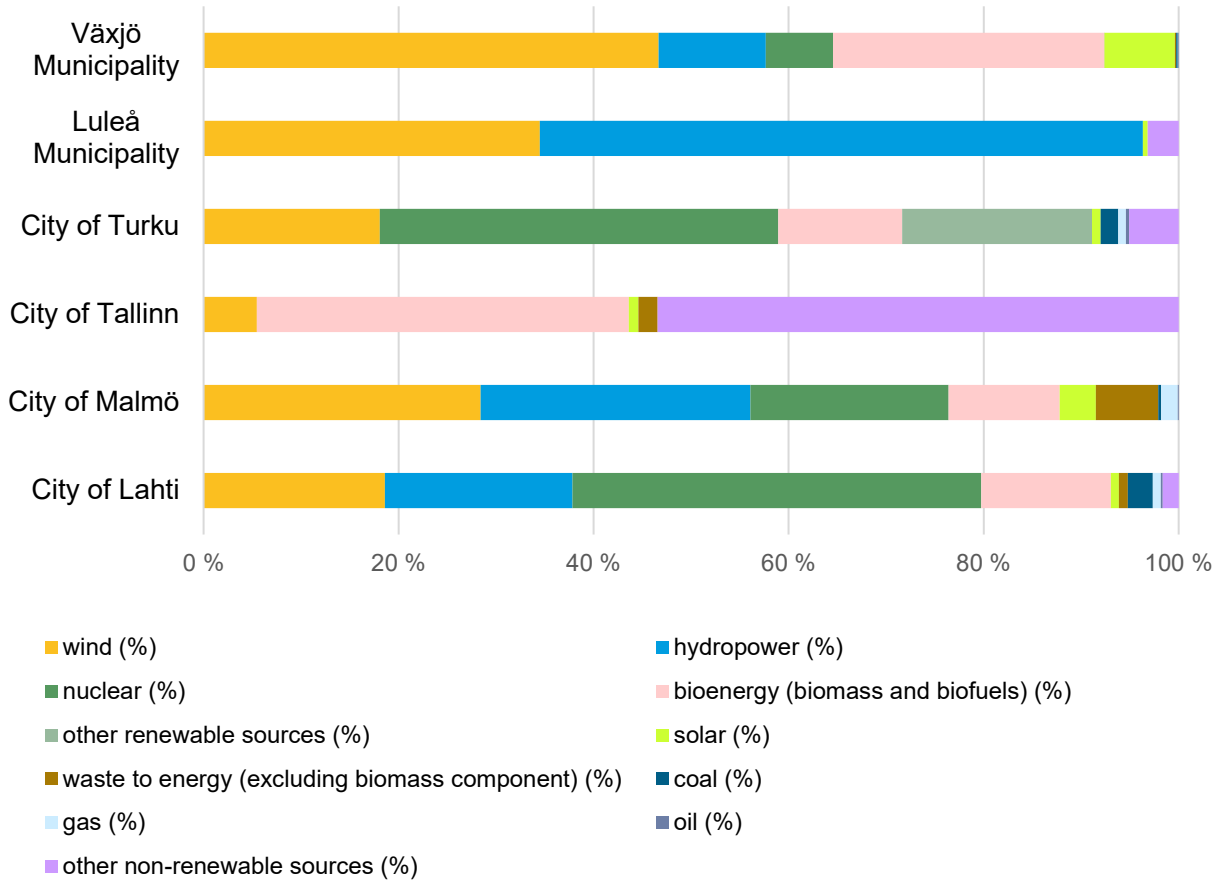
UBC member cities continue to advance the **decarbonisation** of their energy systems, while reflecting diverse regional energy sources. The disclosed electricity consumption mix demonstrates significant variation across cities, shaped by national energy structures.

Renewable energy sources – particularly **wind, hydropower and bioenergy** – represent a substantial share of reported electricity consumption. In certain cases, renewable sources form the dominant component of the energy mix. **Nuclear energy** also contributes significantly, reflecting broader national energy portfolios.

At the same time, there a visible progress continues towards cleaner energy systems: **natural gas and other non-renewable sources** remain present to varying degrees, but **coal and oil** appear only marginally in the disclosed electricity mix.

In parallel, cities report **clear long-term climate objectives** supported by intermediate milestones. Emissions reduction targets aligned with 2030 are commonly referenced, alongside longer-term carbon neutrality ambitions. Energy system transformation, including renewable integration, electrification and efficiency improvements, is consistently positioned as a cornerstone of local climate strategies.

Energy mix in total electricity consumption



Cities also highlight concrete steps towards energy system transformation, including **renewable energy production, fuel substitution and electrification**:

LAHTI: "Biogas is produced from bio waste and sewage sludge, with a capacity of up to 80,000 tons of bio waste per year and an annual production of up to 50 GWh. The biogas is delivered to gas stations and utilised by local vehicles, while part is used for the facility's own energy needs."

UMEÅ: "Electric buses are powered by renewable wind and hydrogen-based energy, resulting in close to zero greenhouse gas emissions."

LULEÅ: "During procurement of new vehicles, priority is given to vehicles powered by fossil-free fuels."

UBC SCC energy projects

Climate-4-CAST

The Climate-4-CAST (A Climate Action decision Support Tool to accelerate cities' progress towards climate neutrality) project provides authorities with a tool to visualise and analyse various action scenarios for meeting climate goals to better plan public budgets with climate neutrality measures and monitor results of their implementation.

Climate-4-CAST project, led by HafenCity University Hamburg, addresses local, regional and national authorities. As a project partner, UBC SCC coordinates transfer activities and organises a training course.

Funding: Interreg BSR Programme

Duration: Nov 2023 – Oct 2026

Budget: 3,77 MEUR

UBC members in the project: Hamburg, Aarhus, Riga, Gdańsk, Turku, Växjö

Project contacts in UBC SCC: Olena Zinchuk, Mariia Andreeva

Climate-4-CAST supports cities by helping integrate climate actions into urban governance processes – with **climate budgeting and an interactive tool** specifically developed for such calculations. In 2025, 6 cities of the consortium continued piloting the **Climate Action Decision Support (CADS) Tool** and exchanging experiences in different approaches, challenges and benefits to implementing climate budgets locally.

An important milestone was launching the **Climate Budget Training Course**, organised by UBC SCC and running from October 2025 to the autumn 2026. This course includes 6 modules, organised as a mix of online and physical events exploring different sides to the climate budgeting process. While event topics progress diving deeper into the climate budgeting approaches, all are organised independently, so interested cities are welcome to join them at any point. This training course brings together cities from all around Europe into the dialogue and peer exchange.

Module topics:

1. Getting started with climate budgeting (October-November 2025)
2. Obtaining mandate and setting cooperation (January 2026)
3. Climate actions portfolio and emissions data inventory (March 2026)
4. Analysing costs & benefits, building scenario and interpreting results (May 2026)
5. Hands-on practical training on applying the CADS Tool (September 2026)
6. Climate budget for communicating with your Mayor and your Citizens (autumn 2026)

In 2025, already **over 100 local and national experts** took part in the first training module.

Workshop on climate budgeting. Photo by Mariia Andreeva

EnTRA

The EnTRA (Energy Transition for Climate Neutrality in the BSR) platform project builds a resource hub with planning and management tools, training materials, and a mentoring programme to help public authorities and sectoral agencies scale up the energy transition in the region. EnTRA consolidates outcomes from 18 EU projects.

The EnTRA platform, led by HafenCity University Hamburg, aims to improve **consistency of knowledge transfer on energy transition solutions** and to enable broad uptake of both technical and governance solutions. UBC SCC is a **partner** in this project, focusing on disseminating the energy solutions to cities in the Baltic Sea Region.

Funding: Interreg BSR Programme
Duration: July 2025 – June 2028
Budget: 1,2 MEUR
Platform contacts in UBC SCC: Olena Zinchuk, Mariia Andreeva

Resource-efficient cities

The circular economy topic remained very prominent in the UBC network in 2025. UBC SCC continued cooperation in several projects that prepare concrete solutions for cities, ranging from measures to reduce **plastic pollution** and to developing **green public procurement** taking into consideration climate, chemicals and circularity approaches.

Resource efficiency milestone in 2025

MARCH

The ChemClimCircle-2 (CCC2) project launched with a successful kick-off meeting in Riga

NOVEMBER

The winning policies of the **NonHazCity Building Awards** have been announced

NOVEMBER

Green Governance Day 2025 in Vilnius showcased how Baltic Sea Region city leaders are turning procurement into climate action

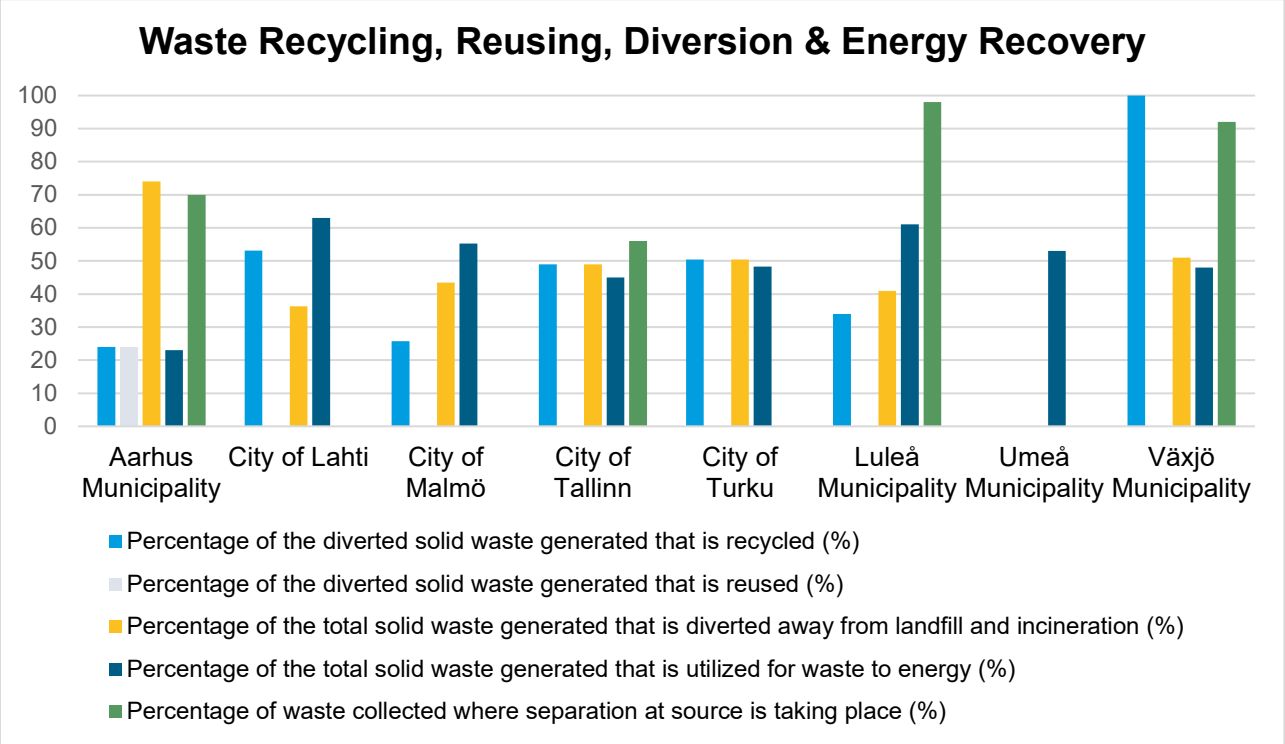
DECEMBER

UBC SCC organised a conference "**From Waste to Wisdom: Baltic Quest for Plastic Reduction**" in Turku to discuss plastic reduction measures across different city administrations

Resource-efficiency trends from UBC cities

Resource efficiency and circular economy approaches are increasingly reflected in the disclosures of UBC member cities, particularly in **waste management, material recovery and sustainable procurement**. The reported waste data indicates substantial use of **waste-to-energy**, alongside continued efforts to divert waste away from landfill and incineration. In several cities, source separation is also well established, creating better **conditions for recycling and biological treatment**.

TURKU: "The procurement strategy was prepared in 2021 to support the carbon neutrality and biodiversity targets. The criteria and directions are developed for each product and service category together with other actors in the region and nationwide. In addition to the actual strategy, its implementation is reported annually."



Waste-to-energy remains a significant part of municipal waste management in several cities, while diversion from landfill and incineration also represents a considerable share. Some cities report high levels of source separation, pointing to more developed collection and treatment systems.

Beyond waste management, cities are increasingly **linking circular economy objectives with procurement and operational practices**. A clear majority of reporting cities indicate that they have introduced strategies or standards to reduce emissions through procurement, pointing to a growing integration of climate and resource efficiency considerations into purchasing decisions.

MALMÖ: “Malmö has an extensive ongoing work with sustainable and circular procurement. Since 2019, the City has a contract for reused furniture (new contract began in 2023), which has led to about 200 tons less CO2-emissions per year. Over 20% of the office furniture bought by the city is reused.”

VÄXJÖ: “The sustainability unit is working very close to the procurement unit to identify what tenders should be in focus this year, and what requirements should be developed.”

Overall, the disclosures suggest that resource efficiency is increasingly approached through a combination of established waste treatment practices, improving material recovery systems and more strategic procurement. While the level of implementation varies across cities, the integration of circular economy principles into both operational systems and purchasing practices points to a gradual shift towards more resource-efficient and climate-aligned urban management.

UBC SCC resource-efficiency projects

BALTIPLAST

The BALTIPLAST (Baltic Approaches to Handling Plastic Pollution under a Circular Economy Context) project brought technological solutions to help public authorities reduce plastic waste and trigger investments in sustainable sorting and recycling.

The **BALTIPLAST project**, led by Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, focused on reduction of plastic in production and consumption, with UBC SCC supporting this work with transfer activities. With the finalisation of the project implementation in 2025, BALTIPLAST solutions are now ready for uptake by local authorities!

Funding: Interreg BSR Programme

Duration: Jan 2023 – Dec 2025

Budget: 4,27 MEUR

UBC members in the project: Helsinki, Kaunas, Tallinn, Valmiera, Hamburg.

Project contact in UBC SCC: Mariia Andreva

The digital space “**BALTIPLAST Plastic Waste Management Platform**” features a framework for implementing strategic change to the plastic waste management on the city level; concrete tool for a plastic inventory at the city office or at home; a model for improved sorting of plastic at the waste management facilities; and an educational kit for local authorities containing best practices, lessons learned and trainings. **Discover the Platform:**

1. Go to **www.dl4sd.org** and select **BALTIPLAST** from the list
2. Click "**Create new account**" (or log in if you already have one)
3. Confirm your registration via email and click "**Enrol me to interact with the content**"
4. **Discover interactive materials to support you in reducing plastic!**

ChemClimCircle-2

The ChemClimCircle-2 (Fostering implementation of the ChemClimCircle approach to Green Public Procurement in the Baltic Sea Region) project provides public authorities with targeted training and an online platform to easily integrate climate protection, circularity, and chemical reduction goals into public procurement, promoting a greener and toxin-free future.

UBC SCC joined the **project ChemClimCircle-2 (CCC-2)** to coordinate the transfer of solutions beyond the project consortium and co-develop the Navigator tool for green public procurement. The CCC-2 project, bringing together 22 partners and 23 associated organizations from eight Baltic Sea Region countries, **kicked-off** in Riga in March 2025.

Funding: Interreg BSR Programme

Duration: Mar 2025 – Feb 2028

Budget: 4,29 MEUR

UBC members in the project: Taurage, Helsinki, Turku, Tallinn, Cesis

Project contact in UBC SCC: Agnieszka Ilola

During its first implementation year, the consortium established a strong strategic and operational foundation for advancing green public procurement (GPP). A cornerstone milestone was the delivery of the **Scoping Report**, based on input from 20 municipalities and regional authorities, which defined key barriers and refined the CCC-2 framework for integrating climate, circularity, and chemicals considerations into procurement processes. The project also refined the **CCC Matrix** into an expanded, question-based assessment tool, completed organizational evaluations with 12 implementing partners, and selected Lithuania's advanced GPP monitoring dashboard as the basis for a scalable **monitoring concept** applicable across all procurement stages.

At the end of November, the CCC-2 **partnership gathered in Vilnius** for a two-day working meeting focused on strengthening the project's strategic direction and accelerating the development of practical tools for greener public procurement. The meeting included the discussion about the final output of the project – the ChemClimCircle Navigator for Green Public Procurement – which is the digital tool designed to guide public procurers and end-users through their public procurement processes.

NonHazCity 3

The NonHazCity 3 (Reducing hazardous substances in construction to safeguard the aquatic environment, protect human health and achieve more sustainable buildings) project helped municipalities, entrepreneurs and individuals construct and renovate buildings with tox-free materials to protect health and the environment.

The **NonHazCity 3 project**, led by the Riga City Council has been finalised in December 2025. The Final Conference of the project was organised on 25 November 2025 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

In 2025, UBC SCC supported the exchange and cooperation between NonHazCity 3 and EMPEREST projects. These projects jointly organised a high-level panel discussion **"How to minimise the harmful effects of toxic chemicals on the environment, human health and circular economy?"** at the Europe Forum in Turku on 27 August. Further, NonHazCity3 and EMPEREST, in collaboration with projects BALTIPLAST and ChemBee, launched a national stakeholder dialogue for Finnish local stakeholders **"Towards a safer tomorrow – Reduction measures of plastic and harmful chemical in municipalities"** on 9 December. This collaboration effectively highlighted the need for comprehensively addressing up- and downstream measures in hazardous substances' management – and gave concrete advice on how to get started in this work at city level.

Prominent event in 2025, the project launched the **NonHazCity Building Award 2025**. This Award recognised public policies that reduce **hazardous substances in the building and construction sector**, also taking under consideration the climate impact and circularity. The UBC SCC Secretariat joined an **international jury of experts** of the Award, the process of which included a call for nominations, pre-selection and evaluation, jury decision and report as well as award ceremony. Among the nominations, very prominent were the UBC members from **Greifswald** (Guidelines for Sustainable Buildings), **Hamburg** (HafenCity Ecolabel) and **Riga** (Guide for Circular Management of Construction Waste). The winning policies of the NonHazCity Building Award have been announced at the Green Governance Day in Vilnius in November 2025. The **brochure "Building Non-Hazardous Cities for Future Generations"** showcases several nominated and winning initiatives with concrete policy examples.

NonHazCity 3 developed several solutions relevant for the application in cities:

1. Strategic solution for managing hazardous substances in buildings and construction materials – Best practice cases and learnings.
This publication presents practical insights from municipal pilot projects aimed at improving strategic management in public construction. It focuses on the testing, refinement, and implementation of three integrated solutions that support tox-free, circular, and climate-friendly procurement practices.

2. Best practices of NonHazCity pilots on tox-free, circular and climate friendly buildings.
The publication acts as a practical handbook, translating the strategic framework of NonHazCity3 (the developed solutions) into actionable insights, thereby fostering more targeted choice and implementation of solutions – both strategic and practical.

3. DIY Guide "Toxfree, circular and climate-friendly renovation of my home".
This do-it-yourself guide serves as a guideline for private users who want to carry out renovation or construction work themselves. The guide provides lists of different building materials (e.g. flooring, paints) and their risk potential regarding hazardous substances, as well as information on circularity and climate aspects.

Change(K)now!

The Change(K)now! (A mindset change from single-use to circular or multiple-use of food delivery systems in cities of the BSR) project helps municipalities reduce single-use food packaging in food delivery and catering systems, and build social acceptance among companies and people for circular reuse of food packaging.

UBC SCC is an associated organisation the **Change(K)now! project** promoting a mindset change in food delivery systems from single-use to multiple-use crockery and packaging at different use types (November 2023 – October 2026, funded by the Interreg BSR Programme).

In 2025, Change(K)now! developed the document **Reusable solutions for events**, presenting **case studies for implementing reusable systems at events**. Tested measures support the transformation from single-use to multi-use packaging at events and are intended to inspire learning, motivation, and replication. The case studies are addressed primarily to **event organizers, municipalities, and all participating stakeholders** in an event.

Other expected outputs by the end of the project include strategic framework for moving towards more circular food delivery at the local level, collection of circularity measures to reduce and avoid single-use packaging in public food provision, and a report on existing challenges in transformation from single-use to multi-use packaging at events.

Circular MuSe

The Circular MuSe (Promoting circular economy approaches that increase resource efficiency in municipal services) project takes a comprehensive and systematic approach to promote circular economy principles in municipal services throughout the South Baltic area.

The aim of **Circular MuSe** is to support municipal companies and municipalities in smaller cities and rural areas in applying circular approaches that promote the reuse of raw materials in their supply chains, thus increasing resource efficiency in municipal services (July 2024 – June 2027, funded by the Interreg South Baltic Programme). UBC SCC is an associated organisation.

In 2025, the project established the **South Baltic Knowledge Hub on Circular Municipal Services**, providing cities with an open catalogue of proven case studies and practical circular solutions tailored to municipal services (the Hub will be launched for public in 2026). This resource enables urban utility companies and municipal decision-makers to access tested approaches, reduce implementation risks, and accelerate local circular economy initiatives. In addition, the project started preparation of modular training curricula and structured mentoring programmes aiming to strengthen the strategic and operational capacities of municipal staff and utility providers. An international network of circular economy experts from research and development institutions has been formed, giving cities long-term access to external expertise and innovation support.

Biodiverse cities

In 2025, cities continued to develop and implement urban greening plans and biodiversity strategies. Discussion on how to integrate the targets of the **EU's Nature Restoration Law** into local policies and plans continued. Further, the importance of protecting and improving urban biodiversity consistently grew. Addressing this, UBC SCC supported the project on developing the **urban biodiversity parks model** and promoted biodiversity in the regional discussions.

Biodiversity milestones in 2025

MAY

UBC TALKS webinar about Urban Biodiversity Parks focused on urban ecological restoration and regeneration with best practices from **Turku**, **Malmö** and **Riga**

OCTOBER

UBC SCC Commission meeting in Malmö led a discussion and workshop on how to create nature-positive and biodiversity friendly UBC cities

Biodiversity trends and highlights from UBC cities

Biodiversity and ecosystem-related considerations are reflected in the CDP disclosures of UBC member cities through **ecosystem services, land use planning and targeted environmental actions**. While biodiversity is less frequently reported as a standalone policy area, cities increasingly link it to broader climate, land use and sustainability objectives.

Several cities highlight the risks associated with **biodiversity loss**, including the degradation of ecosystem services such as clean air and soil quality, as well as habitat fragmentation and the spread of invasive species.

In response, cities indicate a range of measures aimed at protecting and enhancing urban ecosystems. These include the **development of green space networks, restoration of natural habitats and integration of biodiversity** considerations into planning and investment decisions.

LULEÅ: "When biodiversity loss occurs, it will impact many, if not all, sectors. Indirect consequences include a reduction in the effectiveness of ecosystem services, such as clean air, soil, and water. There will also be an increase in invasive plant species, along with fragmentation and loss of habitat."

TURKU: "Developing urban green space networks includes the protection of existing green spaces, the creation of new spatial forms and the restoration and maintenance of connectivity among diverse green spaces."

The disclosures suggest that biodiversity is increasingly addressed through practical measures linked to urban planning, green infrastructure and sustainable investment. Cities are beginning to **translate biodiversity objectives into concrete actions**.

UBC SCC biodiversity project

Urban Biodiversity Parks

The project Urban Biodiversity Parks as co-creative platforms for enhancing biodiversity, learning and community involvement in urban ecological regeneration develops and pilots the urban biodiversity parks concept as a tool for urban ecological restoration and regeneration.

The aim of the **Urban Biodiversity Parks project** is to establish a platform for developing and testing experimental approaches for preserving and actively enhancing biodiversity in urban environment. Biodiversity parks will be developed as recreational areas and experiential learning platforms for citizens, NGOs, private actors and education institutions.

Funding: European Urban Initiative
Duration: Mar 2024 – Aug 2027
Budget: 4,9 MEUR
UBC members in the project: Turku, Malmö
Project contact in UBC SCC: Maija Rusanen

During the first half of the project, plans for the implementation of the **Europe's first biodiversity park – the Skanssi park** were refined and the work started with i.e. setting up the **local seed accumulation area**, **forest management activities, establishment of meadows** and **controlling invasive species**. Various stakeholders, such as school groups and residents, have been involved in the implementation from the start via **participatory nature management** and **two Bioblitz events**. Planning of **smaller pilots** in selected sub-urban neighbourhoods has been conducted in cooperation with local communities.

The City of Turku has formed a strong partnership, bringing together higher education and research institutions, regional public authority, and local companies to collaborate on Urban Biodiversity Parks. Three cities (**Malmö**/Sweden, **Košice**/Slovakia and **Neapoli-Sykies**/Greece) were invited to follow their efforts and co-develop transfer tools to maximise the transfer potentials of the results. The UBC SCC is on board to coordinate the project transfer activities.

Strategic Partnerships

EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION (EUSBSR) provides coordinated approach, synergies and more effective use of funds in joint achievement of regional objectives: save the sea, connect the region and increase prosperity. UBC SCC actively supports its implementation and cooperates with several **EUSBSR Policy Areas**, incl. PA Hazards, Nutri, Safe, Innovation, Energy, and Transport.

COUNCIL OF THE BALTIC SEA STATES (CBSS) is an intergovernmental political organisation for regional cooperation guided by three long-term priorities: Regional Identity, Sustainable and Prosperous Region, and Safe and Secure Region. UBC SCC and CBSS closely cooperate under the topic of **climate resilience** and jointly implement the ClimaResponse project.

BALTIC MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COMMISSION (HELCOM) is an intergovernmental organisation and regional platform for environmental policymaking, established to protect the Baltic Sea marine environment from all sources of pollution. UBC SCC has the official observer status at HELCOM, and we have a long history of fruitful cooperation on **smart water management** (nutrient recycling and hazardous substances' governance).

EU MISSIONS are large-scale initiatives under Horizon Europe setting time-bound goals to drive focused efforts towards the challenges incl. climate change, ocean restoration, and the development of climate-neutral and smart cities. To better bound UBC local actions with the European trends and policies, UBC SCC became the partner in the **Blue Action BANOS project** under the Mission Ocean, and we regularly exchange on climate neutrality goals with the **NetZeroCities project** under the Cities Mission.

CDP-ICLEI TRACK[1] serves as a unified platform for cities to report their climate and environment-related data, actions, plans and goals. The **cooperation between UBC and CDP**[2] started in 2016. The close partnership made it possible for UBC member cities to report their environmental data and make their cities' journey towards the climate goals visible and acknowledged. UBC cities can track the progress of their own and of similar cities, and get assistance in setting up their climate targets and goals in accordance with international standards and initiatives.

---

[1] The data used to produce this part of the report was collected through CDP-ICLEI Track. The contents of this report may be used by anyone provided acknowledgement is given to UBC, CDP and ICLEI using the following wording: This data was collected in partnership by UBC, CDP and ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability.

UBC SCC in cooperation with CDP has prepared the data and analysis in this report based on responses to the CDP-ICLEI Track 2025 Cities questionnaire. No representation or warranty (express or implied) is given by UBC SCC or CDP as to the accuracy or completeness of the information and opinions contained in this report. You should not act upon the information contained in this publication without obtaining specific professional advice.

[2] CDP refers to CDP Worldwide, a registered charity (no. 1122330) with its registered office at 4th Floor, 60 Great Tower Street, London, EC3R 5AZ, United Kingdom, as well as its affiliates CDP North America, Inc., CDP Europe AISBL and their affiliates.

Annual report 2025

Union of the Baltic Cities Sustainable Cities Commission

Authors: Mariia Andreeva, Helmi Andersson, Agnieszka Ilola, Lotta Lehti, Adham Maharramli, Maija Rusanen, Ira Sibelius, Oona Uusitalo, Olena Zinchuk

Layout: Laura Sarlin (UBC Sustainable Cities Commission / City of Turku)

Cover picture: Mariia Andreeva

Published: March 2026