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NEXT Black Sea Basin

Green Urban Resilience

Booklet on Climate-Smart Public Spaces: A Guide for Municipalities

LANDLAB

THE STRENGTH OF THE PROJECT LIES IN ITS PARTNERSHIPS

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GREENING CITIES FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Urban Booklet for Municipalities

The Urban Guide for Municipalities has been developed within the framework of the Green Urban Resilience – Green Climate Change Adaptation Solutions for Smart and Resilient Cities in the Black Sea Basin project (BSB00006).

The project supports cities in the Black Sea Basin in addressing climate change impacts, particularly rising urban temperatures and heat stress, through green and blue infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and capacity building.

This guide serves as a practical reference for municipal administrations, especially departments responsible for parks, green areas, urban planning, and maintenance. It supports municipalities in planning, designing, planting, and maintaining climate-resilient urban green spaces that improve urban cooling, ecological resilience, and quality of life.

Through cross-border cooperation and knowledge exchange, local authorities and experts translate scientific knowledge into applicable solutions. The guide provides clear and adaptable guidance on:

- integrating green infrastructure into urban planning,
- selecting climate-resilient plant species,
- improving maintenance practices, and
- strengthening institutional and community capacity.

By applying the approaches presented in this guide, municipalities can take concrete steps toward reducing urban heat stress, enhancing biodiversity, and building more resilient and livable cities.

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Table of Contents

The Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme is co-financed by the European Union through European funds.

The Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme is co-financed by the European Union through European funds.

01 Introduction

The Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme is co-financed by the European Union through European funds.

1.1 Purpose and scope of the Urban Guide

The Urban Guide for Municipalities has been developed within the framework of the Green Urban Resilience – Green Climate Change Adaptation Solutions for Smart and Resilient Cities in the Black Sea Basin project, implemented under the Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2021–2027. The project brings together municipalities and experts from partner countries to address urban heat stress and climate risks through green and blue infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and capacity building.

This guide serves as a practical reference for municipal administrations, particularly departments responsible for parks, green areas, urban planning, and maintenance. It provides adaptable guidance for planning, designing, planting, and maintaining climate-resilient urban green spaces. Rather than prescribing a single model, the guide supports municipalities in translating climate adaptation goals into concrete, locally appropriate actions.

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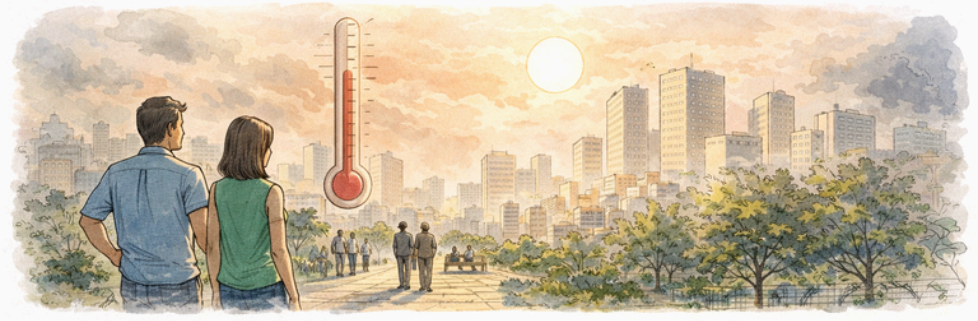
1.2 Urban Climate Challenges and the Role of Municipalities

Cities are increasingly exposed to climate-related challenges such as rising temperatures, more frequent and intense heat waves, water stress, and environmental degradation. These impacts are felt most strongly in dense urban areas where impervious surfaces, limited vegetation, and high population density amplify heat stress and reduce thermal comfort. The consequences extend beyond environmental concerns, affecting public health, daily mobility, energy demand, and the overall quality of urban life, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Municipalities play a central role in addressing these challenges, as they are responsible for the planning, design, maintenance, and management of public spaces and green infrastructure. Through informed decision-making and long-term strategies, local authorities can reduce climate risks by integrating nature-based solutions, improving urban microclimates, and ensuring equitable access to cooling and healthy public environments. By acting at the local scale, municipalities are uniquely positioned to translate climate adaptation policies into tangible, site-specific actions that directly benefit communities.



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02 Resilience Framework for Municipalities

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2.1 Key Principles for Building Resilient Cities

Urban resilience requires coordinated action across governance, planning, finance, ecosystems, infrastructure, and society. This Resilience Action Plan provides municipalities with a structured framework to reduce disaster risks, strengthen adaptive capacity, and integrate climate-resilient green infrastructure into urban systems.

The following action steps outline key steps that municipalities can take to build resilient cities, supported by practical implementation tables.

The 10 Strategic Steps

1. **Organize Governance and Leadership** Municipalities should establish clear organizational structures with defined roles and responsibilities, ensuring that risk reduction is integrated into all stages of strategic and spatial planning.
2. **Identify Current and Future Risk Scenarios** Up-to-date data on hazards, vulnerabilities, and exposure should be developed. Participatory risk assessments should inform urban development and long-term planning decisions.
3. **Strengthen Financial Capacity for Resilience** Municipalities should assess the economic impacts of climate risks and develop financial mechanisms to support resilience-building actions, including green infrastructure investments.
4. **Prioritize Resilient Urban Development and Design** Urban planning and design should be based on current risk assessments, with particular attention to vulnerable populations and risk-adaptive regulatory frameworks.
5. **Protect Natural Ecosystems and Buffer Zones** Natural ecosystems inside and around cities should be identified, protected, and enhanced as natural buffers for climate and disaster risk reduction.
6. **Assess Institutional Capacity of Urban Stakeholders** The capacities of public institutions, private actors, academia, and civil society should be reviewed and strengthened to support coordinated resilience efforts.
7. **Strengthen Community Resilience Capacity** Community participation and social networks should be supported through inclusive engagement tools and local initiatives.
8. **Improve Resilience of Urban Infrastructure and Services** Critical infrastructure and basic services should be protected and upgraded to ensure continuity during and after climate-related events.
9. **Prepare for Disaster and Emergency** Response Preparedness and emergency response plans should be regularly updated and coordinated with early warning systems, placing affected populations at the center of response and recovery.
10. **Accelerate Recovery and Build Back Better** Post-disaster recovery and reconstruction should align with long-term planning goals and aim to create safer, greener, and more resilient urban environments.

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Strategic Implementation Matrix

Indicative timelines are provided for guidance. Responsible units should be defined by each municipality according to its institutional structure and planning cycle.

Priority Area	Target / Work Area	Action	Output & Indicator	Duration	Proposed Responsible Unit
1. Governance	Resilience Task Force	Formalize a cross-departmental committee	Approved organizational structure	3 Months	Mayor's Office / City Council
2. Risk Data	Heat & Risk Mapping	Process LANDLAB thermal data into GIS	High-resolution heat maps	6 Months	IT / GIS / Urban Planning
3. Financing	Climate Budgeting	Integrate green infrastructure into the 5-year plan	Budget allocation for NbS	Annual	Finance / Strategy Dept.
4. Urban Design	Shading Standards	Mandate 40% canopy cover for new public squares	Updated urban design code	12 Months	Urban Planning / Zoning
5. Ecosystems	Buffer Protection	Catalog and protect existing "Cool Islands"	Protected area status in master plan	18 Months	Environmental / Parks Dept.
6. Capacity	Expert Training	Local "Training for Trainers" workshops	15+ experts certified per city	1 Day/Group	Human Resources / LANDLAB

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Strategic Implementation Matrix (continued)

Priority Area	Target / Work Area	Action	Output & Indicator	Duration	Proposed Responsible Unit
7. Community	Public Awareness	Workshops for residential garden owners	20+ citizens trained in water-care	Seasonal	PR / Social Services
8. Infrastructure	Transit Cooling	Greening of bus stops and transit corridors	Number of "Green Shelters" installed	24 Months	Transport / Public Works
9. Response	Early Warning	Digital heat alerts for vulnerable citizens	Functioning SMS/App alert system	Seasonal	Civil Defense / Health Dept.
10. Recovery	"Build Back Better"	Mandatory NbS integration in renovations	Number of grey-to-green conversions	Ongoing	Building Control / Planning

2.2 Institutional Capacity, Risk Awareness, and Community Resilience

Resilient cities depend on the ability of institutions and communities to understand climate-related risks, respond to changing conditions, and adapt over time. Municipal departments, local stakeholders, and citizens each play distinct but complementary roles in reducing vulnerability and strengthening urban resilience, particularly in the face of increasing heat stress and environmental pressures.

Strong institutional capacity enables municipalities to assess risks, coordinate across departments, and implement long-term adaptation measures, while informed and engaged communities contribute to risk awareness, everyday resilience practices, and sustained support for public interventions. Together, institutional preparedness and community involvement form the foundation for inclusive, effective, and durable urban resilience strategies.

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03 Climate-Resilient Urban Green Planning

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3.1 Nature-Based Solutions and Green–Blue Infrastructure

Nature-based solutions provide municipalities with practical, cost-effective, and multifunctional tools to address climate-related urban challenges. In the context of urban heat stress, their primary value lies in their ability to reduce surface and air temperatures, improve thermal comfort, manage stormwater, and support public health simultaneously.

For effective implementation, nature-based solutions should be planned as functional infrastructure, not as isolated landscape elements. This requires the deliberate integration of vegetation, soil systems, water elements, shading structures, and permeable surfaces into urban design and infrastructure projects. Streets, squares, parking areas, and densely built neighborhoods are priority locations where green–blue infrastructure can deliver immediate and measurable cooling benefits.

In practice, **green–blue infrastructure applications** may include:

- tree-lined streets with sufficient soil volume and permeable pavements,
- bioswales, rain gardens, and vegetated drainage systems integrated into road design,
- shaded public squares combining trees, water features, and light-colored surfaces, and
- urban parks designed to function as cooling corridors rather than isolated green islands.

By combining green spaces, water bodies, shading elements, and soil-based solutions, municipalities can increase the climate adaptation capacity of public spaces while maintaining usability and accessibility during extreme heat events.

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3.2 Ecological Connectivity and Risk-Sensitive Planning

Urban green areas should be planned as interconnected systems rather than isolated sites. Ecological connectivity strengthens biodiversity, supports ecosystem functions, and enhances the overall resilience of urban environments. Connected green networks also improve airflow, extend cooling effects beyond individual sites, and create continuous shaded routes that support daily urban movement.

From a planning perspective, ecological connectivity requires coordination across departments responsible for parks, roads, water management, and urban development. Green corridors, linear parks, riverbanks, and vegetated streets should be aligned to form continuous networks linking larger green areas, neighborhoods, and public facilities.

Risk-sensitive planning ensures that green infrastructure is strategically located in areas most exposed to **heat, flooding, or environmental stress**. Priority should be given to locations where shading, cooling, and permeable surfaces can significantly improve thermal comfort and daily urban use, such as:

- highly paved streets and squares,
- areas with limited tree cover and high pedestrian density,
- neighborhoods with vulnerable populations, including children and older adults, and
- zones affected by surface water accumulation during heavy rainfall.

By aligning ecological connectivity with risk-sensitive planning, municipalities can maximize the protective and adaptive benefits of urban green infrastructure while ensuring that investments respond directly to local climate risks.

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04

Climate-Resilient Plant Selection

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4.1 Criteria for Species Selection

Plant selection is a critical factor in the success of climate-resilient urban green areas. Municipalities should prioritize species that are well adapted to local climatic conditions, tolerant to heat and drought, and capable of thriving with limited maintenance.

Selection criteria should also consider soil conditions, water availability, compatibility with surrounding urban infrastructure, and shading potential, especially in pedestrian-oriented public spaces.

4.2 Native, Adaptive, and Low-Maintenance Planting

Native and adaptive plant species contribute to ecological stability, require fewer resources, and support local biodiversity. Low-maintenance planting strategies reduce long-term operational costs while ensuring the durability of green spaces.

Diverse planting compositions, including trees, shrubs, and groundcovers, enhance resilience, provide effective shading, and contribute to year-round environmental and health benefits.

From Principles to Practice

Plant selection should be based on function, not appearance.
Municipalities are encouraged to select species according to their contribution to cooling, shading, and long-term resilience.

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Tree Selection

- Prefer species with broad canopies and high shading capacity.
- Ensure sufficient rooting volume to support mature growth.
- Avoid species with shallow roots or high water demand under heat stress.

Shrubs and Understory Selection

Use shrubs to reduce reflected heat from paved surfaces.
Select species tolerant to drought and poor urban soils.
Avoid excessive use of ornamental species requiring intensive maintenance.

Groundcovers

- Replace decorative lawns with drought-tolerant groundcovers where possible.
- Use groundcovers and mulch to reduce soil temperature and evaporation.

KEY QUESTIONS

Will this species still perform under higher summer temperatures?
Does it contribute to shading and thermal comfort?
Can it survive with reduced irrigation after establishment?
Is long-term maintenance manageable with municipal capacity?

GOOD PRACTICE	POOR PRACTICE
Trees planted in connected soil volumes	Trees planted in small isolated pits
Species selected for shading and resilience	Species selected only for visual effect
Mixed planting layers	Monoculture planting
Low-maintenance species	High-water-demand ornamental species

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4.3 Soil Preparation, Planting Depth, and Water Management

Successful climate-resilient plantation in public urban spaces depends not only on plant selection, but primarily on proper soil preparation, correct planting techniques, and appropriate water management during the establishment period. In many municipal projects, plant failure is linked to compacted soils, insufficient soil depth, incorrect planting levels, and inadequate irrigation practices rather than to the plant species itself.

Soil Preparation and Quality

Urban planting areas are often characterized by disturbed or compacted soils with low organic matter and limited water infiltration capacity. For this reason, soil preparation should be considered a mandatory step in all climate-resilient plantation projects.

Municipalities are strongly encouraged to ensure:

- a minimum of **20–30 cm of fertile topsoil** for shrubs and groundcovers, and greater soil volumes for trees depending on species and site conditions,
- **preservation of existing topsoil** during grading and construction activities,
- **avoidance of pure fill material** as a planting substrate without improvement, and
- **reduction of soil compaction** through appropriate construction sequencing and soil handling.

Where space allows, increasing effective soil volume and permeability significantly improves root development, water retention, and long-term plant performance, especially under heat and drought stress.

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Green Urban Resilience

Planting Depth and Root Zone Conditions

Correct planting depth is critical for plant survival and long-term stability. Trees and shrubs should be planted with the root collar positioned at or slightly above finished ground level. Deep planting increases the risk of root suffocation, reduced growth, and early decline.

In paved or highly compacted areas, municipalities should consider planting solutions that provide sufficient rooting volume and aeration, such as enlarged tree pits, structural soils, or connected root zones. These approaches support healthy root systems and improve drought tolerance in dense urban environments.

Water Management and Establishment Period

Water management during the establishment phase is one of the most decisive factors for plantation success. Newly planted vegetation requires targeted irrigation until root systems are sufficiently developed to access deeper soil moisture.

Key principles include:

- recognizing the first 18–24 months as a critical establishment period,
- prioritizing deep and infrequent irrigation rather than frequent surface watering,
- adjusting irrigation schedules according to seasonal conditions and rainfall, and

avoiding over-irrigation, which can weaken root development and increase vulnerability to stress.

Where feasible, municipalities are encouraged to use water-efficient irrigation systems, such as drip or subsurface irrigation, particularly in tree pits, linear plantings, and newly established green areas.

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Recommended Irrigation Approaches for Public Spaces

While tanker irrigation remains a common practice in many municipalities, particularly in traffic islands, medians, and areas without fixed infrastructure, it should be considered a temporary solution limited to the establishment period. Long-term reliance on tanker irrigation often results in shallow root development, inefficient water use, and increased operational costs.

For climate-resilient plantation, municipalities are encouraged to adopt water-efficient irrigation approaches that support deep root growth, reduce evaporation losses, and respond to site-specific conditions. Irrigation strategies should be selected based on space constraints, exposure to heat, and long-term maintenance capacity, rather than short-term convenience.

Public space type	Common practice	Recommended approach	Key considerations
Traffic islands and medians	Tanker irrigation	Subsurface or surface drip irrigation (where feasible); tanker irrigation only during establishment	Limit tanker use to first 18–24 months; avoid frequent shallow watering
Streets and linear plantings	Tanker or sprinkler irrigation	Drip or subsurface drip irrigation	Supports deep rooting and reduces evaporation
Urban parks and green corridors	Sprinkler irrigation	Drip irrigation combined with targeted sprinklers in shaded areas	Avoid sprinkler use during peak heat hours
Squares and paved public spaces	Irregular manual watering	Drip irrigation integrated into planting beds	Prioritize water delivery to root zones
Newly planted trees	Tanker irrigation	Deep, infrequent watering during establishment	Critical for long-term stability and drought tolerance

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05 Maintenance and Monitoring

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5.1 Sustainable Maintenance Practices

Sustainable maintenance is essential to preserve the performance and benefits of climate-resilient urban green areas over time. Municipal maintenance strategies should aim to minimize resource use while supporting plant health, public safety, and environmental quality.

Key maintenance principles include:

- adaptive irrigation management based on plant maturity and seasonal conditions,
- regular inspection of vegetation health and structural stability,
- reduced use of chemical inputs through ecological maintenance practices, and
- continued application of organic mulch to support soil moisture and temperature regulation.

Maintenance activities should be aligned with the original design intent and plantation strategy to avoid practices that undermine plant resilience, such as excessive pruning or unnecessary soil disturbance.

5.2 Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Monitoring allows municipalities to evaluate the effectiveness of green infrastructure interventions and adjust maintenance practices in response to changing climatic conditions. Simple and consistent monitoring systems can provide valuable feedback on vegetation performance, water use efficiency, and microclimatic benefits.

Monitoring activities may include:

- visual assessment of plant health and canopy development,
- observation of shading performance and thermal comfort in public spaces,
- tracking irrigation frequency and water consumption, and
- documenting maintenance challenges and adaptive responses.

Adaptive management ensures that urban green areas remain functional, resilient, and beneficial throughout their lifecycle, even under increasing climate stress.

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06 Public Areas for Implementation

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6.1 Parks, Streets, Squares, and Waterfronts

Public spaces offer significant opportunities for implementing climate-resilient green infrastructure.

Urban parks and forests provide cooling and recreational benefits, while streets and squares can be redesigned with trees, shading structures, bioswales, and permeable surfaces to reduce heat and improve comfort.

Waterfronts and riparian zones play an important role in climate adaptation by combining ecological protection, urban cooling, and accessible public space.

6.2 Schools, Institutional Areas, and Vacant Lands

Schoolyards, institutional campuses, and underutilized urban areas can be transformed into multifunctional green spaces. These areas offer opportunities for demonstration projects, environmental education, and community engagement.

Temporary or permanent greening of vacant land can improve microclimates, increase shading, and strengthen neighborhood resilience, particularly during heat events.

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07 Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing

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Training for Municipalities and Local Communities

Capacity building is essential for the successful implementation of climate-resilient urban green infrastructure. Municipalities require not only strategic frameworks, but also trained staff who can translate planning principles into everyday implementation and maintenance practices. For this reason, the Urban Guide is directly linked to the training activities developed within the Green Urban Resilience project, targeting municipal park and green area departments, urban planners, and technical staff.

Training activities focus on practical and transferable competencies rather than abstract concepts. Participants strengthen their ability to apply climate-resilient planning principles, select appropriate plant species, and implement sustainable maintenance and water-efficient management practices. Particular emphasis is placed on understanding urban heat stress, shading strategies, soil health, and the role of green and blue infrastructure in improving thermal comfort and public health.



Key training outcomes include:

- improved capacity to integrate green and blue infrastructure into urban planning,
- informed plant selection based on climate resilience and maintenance needs,
- application of sustainable maintenance practices such as mulching and efficient irrigation, and
- increased awareness of heat-related risks and public health benefits.

Training activities also engage local communities as active contributors to urban resilience. By linking written guidance with face-to-face training and awareness-raising activities, the guide supports knowledge retention, shared responsibility, and long-term support for climate-resilient green infrastructure across the Black Sea Basin.

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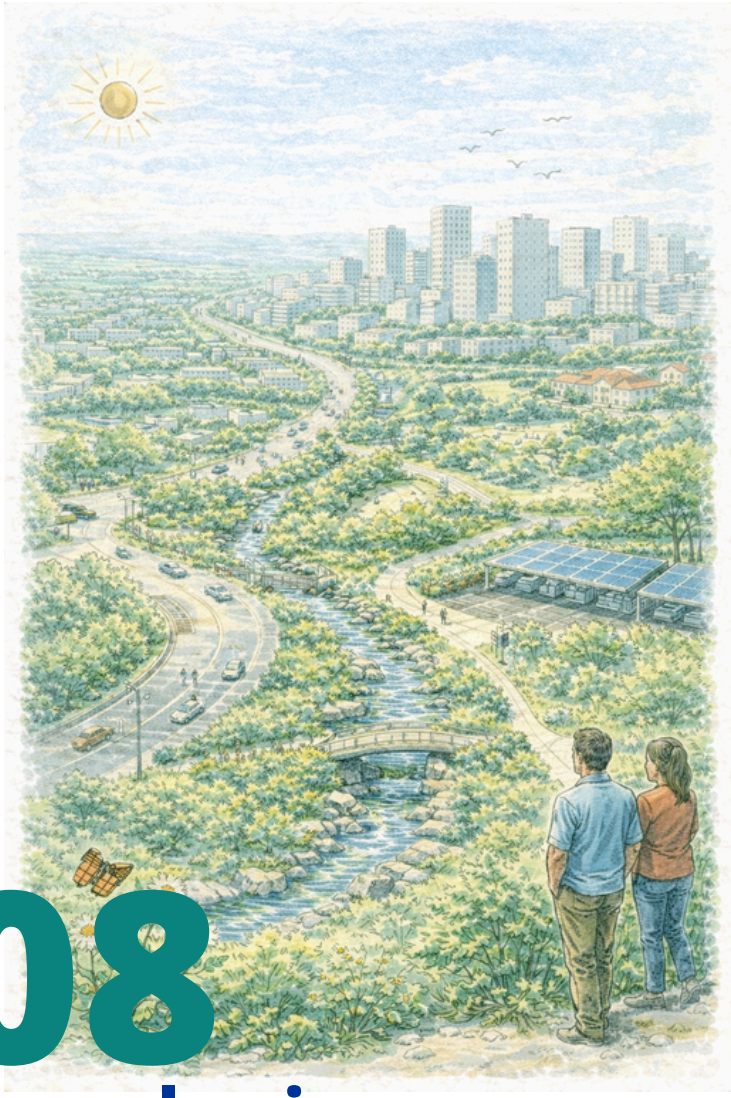

08 Conclusion

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Towards Greener, Cooler, and More Resilient Cities

Climate change is no longer a distant or abstract challenge for cities in the Black Sea Basin. Rising temperatures, prolonged heat waves, increasing water stress, and environmental degradation are already shaping daily urban life, placing pressure on public health, infrastructure, and municipal resources. In this context, urban green areas have emerged as one of the most effective and accessible tools available to local governments for climate adaptation.

This Urban Guide for Municipalities has demonstrated that climate-resilient urban green infrastructure is not limited to planting trees or creating new parks. Rather, it is a comprehensive system that integrates planning, plant selection, soil and water management, maintenance practices, institutional capacity, and community engagement. When these elements are considered together, green infrastructure becomes a strategic asset that delivers multiple benefits, including urban cooling, reduced heat stress, improved thermal comfort, enhanced biodiversity, and healthier living environments.

A key message of this guide is that design quality and long-term management matter as much as initial implementation. Climate-resilient outcomes depend on selecting appropriate plant species, ensuring sufficient soil volume and permeability, applying efficient irrigation systems, and maintaining healthy soils through practices such as mulching and composting. These measures not only increase the survival and performance of vegetation but also directly influence surface temperatures, microclimates, and the everyday usability of public spaces.

The guide also emphasizes that successful climate adaptation cannot be achieved through isolated interventions. Urban green spaces must be planned as connected systems and strategically located in areas most exposed to heat and environmental stress. Streets, squares, school surroundings, waterfronts, and underutilized urban land all represent critical opportunities for implementing nature-based solutions that improve resilience while serving local communities.

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Equally important is the role of institutions and people. Strengthening municipal capacity through training, knowledge exchange, and cross-border cooperation enables scientific knowledge and international best practices to be translated into locally appropriate actions. By engaging municipal staff, technical experts, and citizens, cities can ensure that climate-resilient green infrastructure is not only implemented but also understood, maintained, and supported over time.

Ultimately, this guide encourages municipalities to view urban green infrastructure as a core component of urban systems, rather than an optional or decorative element. By adopting the principles, practices, and implementation tools presented here, cities can take concrete steps toward reducing urban heat stress, protecting public health, improving environmental performance, and building long-term resilience.

Through coordinated planning, informed decision-making, and sustained commitment, municipalities across the Black Sea Basin can shape greener, cooler, and more livable cities that are better prepared for the challenges of a changing climate.

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