

European countries adopt Vienna Declaration on clean, safe and healthy transport and first-ever Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion

Vienna, Austria, 18 May 2021

Today, European countries adopted the Vienna Declaration to spur the transformation towards clean, safe, healthy and inclusive transport and mobility, with a strong focus on promoting cycling across the pan-European region¹.

The Vienna Declaration was signed at the end of the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment. The virtual meeting, hosted by the Federal Government of Austria, brought together 46 ministers and state secretaries and representatives of 41 countries in the pan-European region.

The group discussed how to introduce substantial changes in transport and mobility systems in order to address multiple challenges such as ambient air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, physical inactivity and noncommunicable diseases, and social inequity in access to transport and mobility.

Ministers and representatives of the European countries also adopted the Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion, a first-of-its-kind initiative that extends across the region.

¹ The pan-European region consists of the 56 Member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and includes all 53 Member States of the WHO European Region.

The Master Plan calls for:

- doubling cycling in the region by 2030;
- significantly increasing cycling and walking in every country;
- reallocating space for cycling and walking;
- improving the active mobility infrastructure in every country;
- increasing cyclist and pedestrian safety;
- developing national cycling policies, strategies and plans; and
- integrating cycling into health policies, infrastructure and land-use planning.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the important role of active mobility in public health and the necessity of strengthening the resilience of mobility to crises and disasters. European authorities agreed that post-pandemic recovery packages need to focus on innovative approaches to expanding clean, safe, healthy and inclusive mobility and transport, including by reducing car dependency, improving rail traffic and public transport, and significantly increasing safe walking and cycling.

Building on lessons learned from the pandemic, and recognizing the value of our public transport systems and frontline workers who ensure that these services continue, a set of recommendations was developed to assure the sustainability and resilience of transport and mobility systems.

Calling for a pan-European strategy on transport, health and environment

The Vienna Declaration calls for a comprehensive pan-European strategy for transforming mobility towards zero emissions, ensuring health-promoting mobility, and building safe and efficient transport in the decade to come. Its recommendations point towards a restart for sustainable transport and investments in green and healthy mobility and transport for all in the region.

“The climate crisis is the biggest challenge of our time. In adopting the Vienna Declaration, we commit to taking leadership in building forward better, and to making our mobility and transport systems climate-friendly, clean, safe and health promoting,” explained Ms Leonore Gewessler, Federal Minister for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology of Austria.

“There are tremendous positive effects that green transport can have on our citizens’ health and climate action, as well as on the recovery of the economy and on the creation of jobs. I am pleased that we have agreed on the first-ever Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion. This is an historic milestone to promote active and zero-emission mobility all over Europe. Climate action is the right solution at the right time,” she affirmed.

Ms Gewessler concluded, “Austria will further support the implementation of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme, in particular by developing a pan-European competence centre for active mobility, and by launching new partnerships on child- and youth-friendly mobility and sustainable mobility in tourism.”

Building forward better in the pan-European region

Car dependency, restricted use of public space, and lack of safety for cyclists and pedestrians contribute to physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyles, which increase the risk of noncommunicable diseases and obesity.

Increasing cycling and walking in every country, ensuring cyclist and pedestrian safety, and including active mobility in health policies, as proposed in the Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion, can reduce the burden of diseases and the impact of road crashes in the region.

“Our commitment to transform transport systems enables us to incorporate health-care promotion into urban planning by putting a strong emphasis on cycling and walking. These modes of active mobility are associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular diseases and an increase in overall well-being,” said Dr Wolfgang Mückstein, Federal Minister for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection of Austria.

“We have the unique opportunity to make a substantial and sustainable contribution to improving well-being by incentivizing active mobility and therefore improving air quality and cutting greenhouse gases,” Dr Mückstein added.

The greenhouse gas emissions from transport contribute to climate change, and traffic-related air pollution, noise and road traffic crashes add to the disease burden in Europe. This burden is disproportionately concentrated in certain geographic areas and among less affluent social groups.

Recognizing that this week is also the Sixth United Nations Global Road Safety Week, it is important to acknowledge that more than 110 000 people are killed on the roads every year in the pan-European region, and that road traffic injuries are the number one cause of death globally among young people aged 5 to 29 years.

“In a region where a staggering 70% of all deaths are due to noncommunicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes or cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, transport and urban policies play a major role in shaping health – for better or for worse,” noted Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe.

“This Declaration acknowledges the interdependence of environmental and human health by promoting active mobility to prevent noncommunicable diseases and reduce air pollution, which claims more than half a million deaths every year. The goal? More resilient and healthier communities for people to live and thrive in,” Dr Kluge explained.

Answering the need for inclusive and equitable transport systems across the pan-European region

The Vienna Declaration also underlines the need to address inequalities related to transport and urban sprawl, as not all socioeconomic groups have equal access to healthy transportation, public transport networks, resources for active mobility, and recreational and green areas.

“In traditionally male-dominated fields like transport, the achievement of gender equality is still a long way off, especially in senior positions. And equal pay for equal work is still an issue since, despite progress in recent years, no country has achieved equality in earnings between men and women,” stressed United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Executive Secretary Ms Olga Algayerova.

Ms Algayerova concluded, “We must therefore prioritize inclusiveness and equality – including gender equality – as we make our transport systems more sustainable. I call on all governments of the region and all sectors to translate the vision of the Vienna Declaration into concrete action in this field.”

European countries also agreed to promote the mobilization of financial resources, including from international institutions, green finance instruments, and public and private sectors; to invest in sustainable mobility and transport systems through partnerships; to invest in strengthening capacities; and to exchange experiences across the pan-European region.

About the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP)

THE PEP is a unique intergovernmental, cross-sectoral policy platform for policy-makers and stakeholders of the countries of the pan-European region for accelerating the transformation towards clean, safe and healthy mobility and net-zero-emission transport. THE PEP is driven and guided by its Steering Committee of Member States currently chaired by Austria, and is jointly serviced by the UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

More information:

[Declaration of the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment \(Vienna Declaration\) \(2021\) – thepep.unece.org](#)

[Transport and health – www.euro.who.int](#)

[Fifth High-Level Meeting on transport, health and Environment – www.euro.who.int](#)

Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) – [thepep.unece.org](#)

For further information, contact:

James Creswick

WHO Regional Office for Europe

Tel.: 0049 228 815 0403

Mobile: 0049 172 208 3967

Email: creswickj@who.int

Jean Rodriguez

Chief, Information Unit

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Tel.: 0041 22 917 27 27

Email: jean.rodriquez@un.org