

**Interreg
Danube Region**



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Be Ready

Monitoring UHI Risks and Building Adaptive Capacities in Danube Region Cities

Policy Recommendations (D3.3.1)

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	General Policy Recommendations	4
3	Sector-Specific Recommendations	11
4	Implementation Strategies	14
5	Conclusion	20
6	References	22

Introduction

The Danube Region faces increasing challenges from climate change, with Urban Heat Islands (UHI) emerging as a critical environmental and public health risk. As temperatures rise, urban areas experience intensified heat stress, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations and straining infrastructure. Addressing this requires a transition from isolated technical fixes to a systemic shift in climate-resilient governance. This document serves as a blueprint for transforming urban heat management into a coordinated, evidence-based priority across the macro-region.

Developed as Deliverable 3.3.1, under Activity 3.3, this policy recommendations document synthesizes project results into actionable guidance for decision-makers. It is designed to support local, national, Danube region, and EU authorities and experts working in climate adaptation and mitigation. The recommendations are structured to operate across multiple governance levels, ensuring coherence from municipal implementation to macro-regional strategy. By targeting a broad audience of policymakers and urban planners, the document aims to facilitate the post-project transfer of knowledge and foster future collaboration between partner cities and wider networks.

The recommendations extend beyond general policy frameworks to include sector-specific guidance for healthcare, education, transport, energy, and housing. This approach recognizes that UHI resilience must be structurally embedded in public services and infrastructure standards. By addressing the specific needs of these sectors, the document ensures that adaptation measures are practical and directly relevant to the daily lives of citizens. It outlines implementation strategies, including monitoring frameworks and financing instruments, to ensure long-term viability beyond project cycles.

Ultimately, this document serves as a blueprint for transforming urban heat management into a coordinated, evidence-based priority. It seeks to empower Danube Region cities to create cooler, healthier, and more equitable communities capable of withstanding future climate extremes. Through broad dissemination at the final project conference and engagement with organizations such as Eurocities and the 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities initiative, the

recommendations aim to drive systemic change. Beyond general frameworks, these recommendations emphasize cross-project synergies and transnational knowledge transfer. By aligning policy with practical action, the document supports the transition from isolated interventions to a resilient, adaptive Danube Region.

General Policy Recommendations

Local and Regional Level: Empowering Communities and Ecosystems

Vision

Urban heat island mitigation becomes a common and sustainable practice in local and regional governance. Cities and regions will use thermal risk data to inform decisions, prioritize interventions in vulnerable areas, and integrate climate adaptation into planning, public services, and investments. Through institutional cooperation, exchange of experiences, and alignment with regional development strategies, urban heat island mitigation measures will be implemented coherently, be replicable, and scale up, contributing to healthier, more resilient, and more liveable communities.

Policy recommendations based on project results:

1. Integrate UHI governance into regular local decision-making and administration

Local authorities should integrate the governance mechanisms tested through the project, such as “Local Climate Sandboxes” and cross-sectoral coalition structures, into routine municipal processes. Turning these actions into current practices helps to maintain them in the long term, update urban heat assessments, and better collaborate across relevant sectors.

2. Prioritise UHI interventions in identified heat-risk hotspots

Correlating interventions with validated UHI assessments increase the efficiency of public investments and allow targeting measures to urban areas with high heat exposure and low adaptive capacity, with direct impact on vulnerable groups.

3. Develop pilot actions into intervention models that can be easily replicated and maintained

Pilot actions should be developed into practical solutions that local authorities can fund, implement, and maintain in the long term.

4. Integrate UHI considerations into local public services and facilities

Information about the risks of urban heat should influence how public services and buildings are planned and improved, helping people stay safe during heatwaves.

5. Work with local communities and design solutions for each place

Working with local actors in design and co-creation supports UHI measures that are widely accepted, practical, and sustainable.

6. Improve coordination and skills at the regional level

Regional authorities can help other cities use solutions that already work by sharing experience, offering technical help, and building skills. This helps cities respond to urban heat in the same way and with better results.

7. Align urban heat mitigation with regional development priorities and investment plans

Including urban heating actions in regional programmes and funding decisions helps cities manage better with heat in the long-term using public money.

8. Citizen Science & Data Co-creation

Implement citizen science initiatives for real-time forecasting and gathering hyper-local data. This participation helps refine heat maps and identify specific hotspots through the lived experience of residents.

9. Localized Green Interventions & Pocket Parks:

Prioritize the transformation of neglected public spaces into high-quality green areas. These interventions must utilize indigenous vegetation and local resources

to ensure ecological compatibility, climate fitness, and lower maintenance requirements.

National Level Policy Recommendations

Vision

To provide strong national leadership in creating climate-resilient, healthy, and equitable cities by establishing unified standards, mobilizing resources, and coordinating cross-sector action to systematically reduce Urban Heat Island (UHI) impacts, protect vulnerable populations, enhance biodiversity, and guide sustainable urban development across all regions of the country.

1. Standardize UHI measurement and reporting

Establish harmonized national guidelines for how UHI is measured, analyzed, and reported to allow comparison across neighborhoods, cities and countries.

2. Create open data platforms

Publish UHI data and projections publicly so researchers, urban planners, and communities can access and use them. Facilitate links between climate, health, energy, biodiversity and socio-economic datasets and research. Include projections under different climate scenarios, spatial maps, and risk assessments as part of national climate adaptation reporting.

3. Integrate UHI into spatial planning and land-use policies

Require UHI risk assessment for new urban developments and major retrofits. Incorporate UHI criteria into national urban planning standards (e.g., density, street orientation, green space targets). Update building codes to optimize reflective roofs and facades, shading, and ventilation. Zone for urban green corridors that also support biodiversity and microclimate cooling.

4. Adopt UHI thresholds and heat-risk zones

Define heat-risk levels in urban areas to guide emergency planning and infrastructure investment.

5. National targets for urban greening

Set minimum targets for tree canopy coverage, per capita green space, and shaded streets in all urban areas. Prioritize planting in low-income and highly exposed neighborhoods. Support creation or restoration of water bodies, ponds,

fountains, and permeable landscapes to enhance evaporative cooling. Incentivize privately implemented UHI mitigation measures.

6. Heat-health action plans

Update national heatwave preparedness plans to include UHI dynamics. Coordinate early-warning systems with local authorities and healthcare providers.

7. Public education campaigns

Raise awareness of UHI causes and simple adaptation actions (e.g., shading, hydration, retrofits). Make sure populations at higher risk are reached.

8. Funding for UHI projects

Create national funds for urban heat mitigation projects prioritizing vulnerable areas. Offer fiscal incentives for cool roofs, heat-reflective pavements, shading, green infrastructure, and energy-efficient retrofits.

9. Cross-sector governance structures

Establish inter-ministerial committees on urban heat involving environment, health, transport, energy, and planning authorities. Periodically assess policies for effectiveness and equity, adjusting targets and strategies accordingly.

10. Mandatory Green Standards

Transition from voluntary guidelines to obligatory green measures for cities. National frameworks should require dedicated UHI strategies as a prerequisite for municipal infrastructure funding.

11. Education for the Next Generation

Integrate UHI and climate adaptation planning into national educational curricula for urban planners and architects to build long-term professional capacity.

Policy Recommendations to Prevent and Mitigate the Effects of UHI at Danube Level

Vision

For Urban Heat Island resilience within EUSDR Priority Area 5 is to establish urban heat as a recognized and systematically addressed climate risk across the Danube Region, placed alongside floods and droughts within the macro-regional

disaster risk reduction framework. This would be achieved through strengthened transnational cooperation, integrated funding mechanisms, and a shared monitoring system, with nature-based and blue-green infrastructure solutions at its core. Ultimately, the goal is a climate-resilient Danube Region where cities collaborate across borders to reduce heat stress, protect vulnerable populations and manage the interconnected challenges of heat, water and hydrological extremes through evidence-based, coordinated action.

1. Recognize Urban Heat Islands as an Emerging Environmental Risk under EU Strategy for the Danube Region Environmental Risks Priority Area

In line with the Action Plan of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (2020), Urban Heat Islands should be recognised as an emerging environmental risk within the framework of the Priority Area on Environmental Risks (EUSDR PA5). Urban heat should be addressed alongside floods, droughts and other climate-related hazards as part of macro-regional disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation cooperation.

2. Strengthen Transnational Cooperation on Urban Climate Resilience in the Danube Region

Building on the Action Plan's of EUSDR objective of PA5 to enhance cooperation and coordination across sectors and participating countries, measures addressing Urban Heat Islands should be integrated into existing cooperation mechanisms of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region. Steering Group members, National Coordinators and relevant thematic actors should facilitate structured exchange of already existing examples, solutions, data, methodologies and policy solutions among cities of the Danube Region.

3. Embed Urban Heat Considerations into Transnational and European Funding Priorities

Consistent with the Action Plan's emphasis on coordinated implementation and alignment of funding instruments, actions related to urban heat mitigation and adaptation should be integrated into the priorities of the Interreg Danube Region Programme and other relevant European Union funding instruments. Urban development and infrastructure projects in the Danube Region should include systematic climate and heat resilience screening during project preparation and evaluation.

4. Promote Nature-Based Solutions for Urban Cooling as a Macro-Regional Approach

Climate change manifests predominantly through alterations in the hydrological cycle, including more frequent droughts, intense precipitation events, and prolonged heatwaves. Water plays a decisive role in moderating climate extremes due to its high heat capacity, evaporative cooling potential, and its influence on local and regional microclimates. In urban environments, the presence, retention, and sustainable management of water bodies significantly reduce heat stress and mitigate temperature extremes.

Measures such as urban forests, green corridors, restored wetlands, water retention systems, permeable surfaces, and multifunctional blue-green infrastructure should therefore be prioritized. These interventions simultaneously contribute to environmental protection, climate adaptation, flood and drought risk reduction, public health improvement and social cohesion, while reinforcing the water–climate nexus that is central to long-term resilience in the Danube Region.

5. Develop a Common Monitoring and Indicator Framework for Urban Heat Resilience

Following the Action Plan's focus on results-oriented implementation and measurable impact, a harmonized macro-regional monitoring approach for urban heat resilience should be developed. Common indicators — such as reduction of surface temperature hotspots, increase in urban tree canopy coverage, and protection of vulnerable populations — would enable comparable assessment across cities of the Danube Region and support evidence-based policy development. This monitoring framework should build on existing hydrometeorological data systems and transnational data-sharing mechanisms, including the Danube Hydrological Information System. Integrating temperature, precipitation, soil moisture, river discharge, and drought-related datasets would allow a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between heat stress, water availability, and hydrological extremes. Linking urban heat monitoring with hydrometeorological information would strengthen early warning capacities and ensure that adaptation measures reflect the interconnected nature of climate change impacts in the Danube basin.

Policy Recommendations to Prevent and Mitigate the Effects of UHI at European Union Level

Vision

European cities must transition from isolated technical interventions to systemic adaptation that harmonizes climate resilience with high aesthetic value and social inclusion. The objective is to create "Cool Hearts of Cities"—spaces that are not only functional and resilient to Urban Heat Islands (UHI) but also beautiful, sustainable, and accessible to all.

1. Integrating Data Intelligence into Spatial Planning (Evidence-based Policy)

Mandate the use of advanced monitoring and forecasting systems as a fundamental baseline for all urban development strategies and master plans.

2. Implementing Aesthetic and Functional "Green, Blue, and White" Infrastructure (Sustainability & Beauty)

Treat climate adaptation elements as architectural landmarks and central design features rather than mere technical add-ons.

3. Social Equity and Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Inclusion & Social Engagement)

Prioritize adaptation of investments in "vulnerability hotspots"—areas with high heat exposure and a high density of sensitive populations (the elderly, children, and low-income households).

4. Legislative Anchoring and Financial Sustainability (Governance & Finance)

Incorporate mandatory standards for Blue-Green-White infrastructure into national and European building codes and ensure the "ring-fencing" of dedicated financial resources.

5. Transnational Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building (Cooperation)

Facilitate "Large–Small City Partnerships" to ensure that innovative UHI mitigation practices are transferred from major metropolitan hubs to smaller municipalities within the Danube region and beyond.

To ensure effective climate resilience, it is recommended that the EU establishes a mandatory requirement for investors to incorporate consolidated, non-fragmented green infrastructure of a predefined minimum area into any new development or urban complex. This infrastructure must be implemented

as a contiguous spatial unit rather than isolated patches, ensuring its functional capacity to provide significant cooling, enhance evapotranspiration, and serve as a non-negotiable adaptation measure against the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect.

6. New European Bauhaus

Adopt the New European Bauhaus (NEB) principles to ensure adaptation measures are not only functional but also beautiful and inclusive. Recommendations should serve as the "pillars" for reimagining public buildings, merging energy performance with aesthetic and social value.

Sector-Specific Recommendations

Vision

Urban Heat Island resilience across healthcare, education, transport, energy and housing systems must become structurally embedded in public policy, infrastructure standards and investment decisions throughout the Danube Region. Sectoral governance should systematically reduce heat exposure, protect vulnerable populations, and align climate adaptation with long-term urban sustainability.

Healthcare Sector

Urban heat significantly increases morbidity and mortality, particularly among elderly and chronically ill populations (Degirmenci et al. 2021; World Bank 2024). Healthcare systems must therefore integrate UHI risk assessments into strategic planning, emergency preparedness, and infrastructure investment. Facilities located in identified heat hotspots should be prioritized for adaptation, recognizing hospitals as critical resilience infrastructure.

Climate-sensitive building design, passive cooling and blue-green integration reduce thermal loads and improve microclimatic conditions (Kumar et al. 2024).

Heat-health action plans should reflect spatial variability within cities and strengthen coordination between health services, social institutions and municipal authorities to reduce compounded vulnerabilities during extreme heat events.

Education and Institutions

Urban heat exposure negatively affects cognitive performance, wellbeing and learning conditions, particularly in densely built areas lacking vegetation (World Bank 2024). Educational facilities should integrate UHI risk assessments into planning, renovation and campus design, ensuring that passive cooling, shading and landscape measures contribute to both thermal comfort and broader mitigation goals (Kumar et al. 2024).

Institutional preparedness must extend beyond infrastructure, aligning school-level heat contingency planning with municipal early-warning systems. Cross-sector coordination strengthens the protection of vulnerable student populations during prolonged heatwaves.

Transportation and Urban Infrastructure

Transport infrastructure contributes substantially to UHI intensity due to extensive impermeable surfaces and heat-absorbing materials (Degirmenci et al. 2021). Urban mobility planning should integrate UHI screening into design standards and investment decisions, prioritizing shading, surface permeability and green corridor integration along major transport routes.

Public transport facilities must ensure thermal safety during extreme heat, while transport governance frameworks should align infrastructure development with long-term cooling strategies (World Bank 2024).

Energy

Urban heat increases electricity demand for cooling and intensifies peak loads during heatwaves, placing stress on energy systems (World Bank 2024). Energy policy should integrate spatial temperature projections into infrastructure planning and decarbonization strategies to avoid reinforcing heat-energy feedback loops.

Energy efficiency standards, reflective materials and vegetative integration reduce indoor overheating and cooling demand, supporting both mitigation and adaptation objectives (Kumar et al. 2024). Coordination between energy regulators and urban planners is essential to ensure alignment between grid investments and cooling strategies.

Housing and Residential Areas

Residential density, material choices, and limited vegetation significantly shape neighborhood heat exposure (Degirmenci et al. 2021). Housing policy should integrate UHI risk assessments into development and renovation programmes, ensuring climate-sensitive design and prioritizing socially vulnerable areas.

Retrofitting measures that improve insulation, reflectivity, and green integration simultaneously reduce indoor heat stress and energy demand (Kumar et al. 2024). Housing governance should align spatial planning, social policy, and climate adaptation to reduce structural heat vulnerability.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring across all sectors should focus on measurable outcomes rather than procedural compliance. Evaluation should assess reductions in heat-related health impacts, improvements in indoor and neighbourhood thermal performance, integration of UHI screening into sectoral investment frameworks, and reduced cooling-related energy stress. Outcome-oriented monitoring strengthens accountability and aligns sectoral adaptation with emerging best practices in urban climate governance (Degirmenci et al. 2021; World Bank 2024).

Implementation Strategies

While the preceding sections set out policy directions at the local, national, Danube and EU levels, this chapter outlines the operational steps required to implement these policies in a structured and coordinated manner. It builds directly on the 'Be Ready' strategic framework, which identifies phasing, financing, monitoring and differentiated approaches as the four conditions that enable UHI resilience to be scaled up beyond project cycles.

Implementation is organised into three sequential phases: short-term actions, long-term strategies and an evaluation framework. These phases reflect the

phasing model of the Strategic Framework: quick wins and pilots, medium-term regulatory integration and long-term structural transformation.

Short-Term Actions

Objective: To establish the institutional and data foundations required for the sustained implementation of these recommendations, and to deliver the first visible interventions that will build public confidence and political commitment.

1. Institutional readiness

UHI initiatives that rely on individual commitment or temporary projects will not be sustainable. Each participating city should therefore designate a coordinating unit responsible for the UHI agenda, establishing a cross-sector working structure that involves the departments of environment, health, spatial planning, and emergency response. Basic reporting responsibilities should be defined from the outset.

Regional competence centres and national ministries should provide municipalities with limited capacity with technical support.

2. Deployment of harmonised UHI monitoring baselines

Evidence-based prioritisation requires comparable data. Participating cities should establish monitoring baselines, including the following:

- surface temperature assessment;
- tree canopy coverage and impermeable surface area ratios;
- identification of heat vulnerability hotspots linked to demographic data.

To ensure both technical accuracy and contextual relevance, a combination of satellite-based products and local GIS analysis should be used. Monitoring definitions should align with EUSDR PA5 standards to enable cross-border comparability.

3. Quick wins and targeted interventions

Once baseline data has been established, cities should implement immediate, low-cost cooling measures in identified hotspot areas, prioritising locations where there is both high exposure and a vulnerable population.

These interventions may include planting trees, installing shading structures, creating pocket parks and incorporating water-based cooling elements. These

actions provide measurable microclimatic benefits, build public support and generate political momentum for the longer-term structural integration of cooling measures.

Lessons learned should be documented to facilitate replication across the Danube Region.

Long-Term Strategies

Objective: To embed UHI resilience as a permanent feature of urban governance by transitioning from pilot-based experimentation to regulatory integration, stable financing and institutional accountability.

1. Integration of regulation into spatial planning and building standards

To ensure long-term effectiveness, UHI resilience must be incorporated into formal planning and regulatory frameworks.

Within the next planning cycle, participating countries should progressively integrate UHI considerations into spatial planning and building regulations. This may include:

- requiring UHI risk assessments for significant public and private developments;
- application of a non-deterioration principle for local microclimatic conditions;
- establishment of minimum standards for green coverage, surface permeability, and consolidated green infrastructure;
- limiting high heat-absorption materials in dense urban environments.

Green infrastructure introduced under these standards should be implemented as spatially coherent systems to ensure functional cooling capacity.

Integrating regulatory triggers into planning procedures and building permits is a vital step in transitioning from voluntary pilot initiatives to systematic and consistent implementation.

2. Ring-fenced and aligned financing

Regulatory integration requires stable and predictable financing mechanisms.

Municipal authorities should progressively establish dedicated budget lines for urban cooling measures, including greenery programmes, retrofitting, monitoring systems and long-term maintenance.

At the national and EU levels, urban heat island resilience should be reflected in relevant funding frameworks. Supported projects should incorporate heat resilience screening and demonstrate their contribution to cooling objectives. Funding mechanisms should prioritise projects that improve local thermal conditions and prevent the significant deterioration of UHI dynamics.

For non-EU countries within the Danube Region, access to equivalent climate adaptation financing should be facilitated through macro-regional and international instruments.

The private sector should be encouraged to engage through proportionate fiscal incentives and planning advantages for projects that exceed minimum cooling standards.

3. Differentiated implementation pathways

Implementation must reflect the diversity of the Danube region, while maintaining shared minimum standards.

National governments and regional authorities should ensure that regulatory frameworks establish a common baseline while enabling proportionate pathways towards compliance.

Smaller municipalities may rely on simplified governance arrangements, regional competence centres, and targeted grant mechanisms. Larger cities can take the lead in regulatory reform, advanced modelling and data integration, while supporting smaller municipalities through structured cooperation mechanisms and knowledge-sharing networks.

This differentiated approach strengthens macro-regional coherence while ensuring implementation remains feasible in varied administrative and financial contexts.

Resource Allocation and Financing Instruments

Effective implementation requires financing mechanisms that are predictable and diversified, and that are aligned with regulatory and monitoring frameworks.

Municipal level

Municipalities should progressively establish dedicated budget lines for urban cooling measures, including greenery programmes, retrofitting, monitoring systems, and long-term maintenance.

Stable financing ensures continuity beyond project cycles and reduces dependence on temporary external grants.

1. EU, national and international instruments

Urban heat island resilience should be systematically incorporated into relevant funding frameworks at EU and national levels.

Priority instruments include Cohesion Policy and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Interreg programmes, the LIFE programme, the Horizon Europe programme and relevant development finance institutions. For non-EU countries in the Danube region, equivalent access should be facilitated through suitable international climate financing mechanisms.

UHI criteria should be integrated into evaluation frameworks to ensure alignment between financial incentives and regulatory objectives.

2. Private Sector Mobilisation

Private sector engagement should complement public investment.

This could involve providing fiscal incentives for reflective materials and green roofs, offering planning advantages to projects that exceed minimum cooling standards and integrating UHI considerations into ESG-related urban resilience metrics.

As part of responsible urban development practices, developers should progressively incorporate adaptation measures.

Implementation risks and mitigation

The implementation process may encounter structural barriers, including limited administrative capacity in smaller municipalities, political sensitivity surrounding regulatory adjustments, pressure from development stakeholders, and inadequate long-term maintenance financing.

Mitigation measures may include the phased introduction of regulations, the strengthening of regional competence centres, the creation of differentiated

implementation pathways and the simplification of grant mechanisms for municipalities with lower capacity.

It will be essential to balance minimum shared standards with proportionate implementation pathways to ensure both coherence and feasibility across the Danube Region.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability

Objective: To promote accountability, comparability and continuous improvement by shifting from output-based reporting to impact-oriented assessment, supported by adaptive management.

Core Indicator Framework

Evaluations should assess progress across three complementary dimensions: environmental performance, social resilience, and governance capacity.

Environmental indicators may include:

- reduction of surface temperature in identified hotspot areas;
- increase in tree canopy coverage;
- reduction of impermeable surface ratios;
- extent of consolidated blue-green infrastructure per capita.

Social and health indicators may include:

- reduction in heat-related morbidity and mortality;
- proportion of vulnerable residents within an accessible distance of cooling spaces;
- coverage of early warning systems for at-risk populations.

Governance indicators may include:

- share of public investments screened for UHI impact;
- number of municipalities applying harmonised monitoring metrics;
- existence of permanent municipal budget allocations for urban cooling;
- inclusion of defined maintenance responsibilities within implemented measures.

Maintenance planning should be considered an integral part of the implementation process to ensure the long-term durability of interventions.

1. Reporting and transparency

Cities should report progress using harmonised templates that are aligned with the coordination structures of EUSDR PA5.

Results should be aggregated at the macro-regional level to enable benchmarking and peer comparison. Where feasible, monitoring data should be made publicly accessible through interoperable data platforms that build on existing tools.

Periodic external evaluation could support the strategic review and refinement of implementation pathways.

2. Adaptive management

Monitoring systems should support a structured review cycle, with evaluation findings informing adjustments to intervention priorities, regulatory approaches, and financing allocation.

Macro-regional cooperation mechanisms, including structured city networks, can encourage peer learning and continuous improvement throughout the Danube Region.

Conclusion

The policy recommendations presented in this document establish a comprehensive framework for transforming Urban Heat Island (UHI) mitigation from isolated pilot projects into systemic, sustainable governance practices across the Danube Region. The overarching vision is clear: to create a climate-resilient Danube Region where cities collaborate across borders to reduce heat stress, protect vulnerable populations, and manage the interconnected challenges of heat, water, and hydrological extremes. Achieving this requires a shift from reactive measures to proactive, evidence-based adaptation embedded in the core of urban planning and public service delivery.

Success depends on the effective integration of UHI governance at all levels. Locally, authorities must institutionalize mechanisms such as Local Climate Sandboxes and prioritize interventions in identified heat-risk hotspots to ensure immediate impact on vulnerable communities. Nationally, the standardization of measurement, the creation of open data platforms, and the anchoring of UHI criteria in spatial planning and building codes are essential for consistency and scalability. At the macro-regional and European levels, recognizing UHI as a priority environmental risk within the EUSDR framework and aligning funding instruments will facilitate the necessary transnational cooperation and resource mobilization.

Central to this strategy is the emphasis on data-driven decision-making and nature-based solutions. The development of a common monitoring and indicator framework will enable comparable assessments across the region, fostering accountability and continuous improvement. By prioritizing blue-green infrastructure, cities can simultaneously address cooling needs, biodiversity loss, and flood risks, reinforcing the water-climate nexus critical to long-term resilience. Furthermore, the recommendations underscore the imperative of social equity; adaptation measures must specifically target areas with high heat exposure and low adaptive capacity, ensuring that the elderly, children, and low-income households are protected.

The implementation strategies outlined - ranging from short-term institutional readiness and quick wins to long-term regulatory integration and ring-fenced financing—provide a practical roadmap for execution. However, the transition from policy to practice requires sustained political will, cross-sectoral coordination, and dedicated financial resources. By adopting this multi-level approach, the Danube Region can move beyond fragmented technical interventions toward a holistic model of "Cool Hearts of Cities."

By fostering cooperation at different levels and across borders, Danube Region cities can break through institutional "bubbles" to create a unified front against climate extremes. Through harmonized training, mandatory standards, and deep community engagement, we will transform urban heat management into a cornerstone of a sustainable, beautiful, and resilient future.

In conclusion, the path to UHI resilience is not merely a technical challenge but a governance imperative. Through the coordinated action of local, national, and regional stakeholders, supported by robust monitoring and inclusive planning, the Danube Region can secure a healthier, more liveable future. The

recommendations herein offer the blueprint, the commitment to implement them defines the legacy of the next generation of urban development in the Danube Basin.

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