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To:

Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans
Commissioner Kadri Simson
Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius

Brussels, 12 October 2021

Open letter

Renaturing our cities for climate action and citizens’ wellbeing

The climate crisis requires bold and unprecedented efforts. Unless significant reductions in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades, the global temperature will increase above 1.5 °C and the consequences for the health of planet Earth and for humanity will be ungovernable.

The latest Assessment Report¹ of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights that human influence has warmed the climate at a rate that is unprecedented in at least the last 2000 years. Human-induced climate change is the cause of weather and climate extreme events across the globe. Consequently, taking decisive actions is crucial to mitigate the risks stemming from such events.

Greening our buildings can help to tackle some of the effects of human-induced warming and the so-called urban heat island effect, while at the same time providing a habitat for pollinators, help restore biodiversity, reduce building’s energy consumption and accelerate the transition to renewable energy. Greener cities also allow to reduce noise and pollution, and to improve citizens’ physical and mental health. Interweaving green infrastructure with the built environment contributes to limiting further urbanisation, which according to the IPCC report will increase the severity of heatwaves as well as heavy precipitation and resulting runoff intensity.

The built environment is a core area of the Union’s decarbonisation efforts in the next ten years². **We believe that green infrastructure, with the support of the right legislative framework, can play a key role both for climate mitigation and in supporting urban areas to adapt to a changing climate.** With urban population projected to further grow in most European regions hosting major cities³, investing in the switch from grey to Blue Green Infrastructure (BGI)⁴ must be a priority to renature our cities, reduce their carbon footprint and improve the health and wellbeing of their residents.

¹ [Sixth Assessment Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#)

² [A Renovation Wave for Europe](#)

³ [The future of cities](#), Joint Research Centre

⁴ Blue Green Infrastructure (BGI) are interconnected networks of natural and designed landscape components, including water bodies and green and open spaces

This letter, co-signed by 36 organisations representing global and national industry associations, companies, universities, think tanks and NGOs, comes to you in view of the **revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD)**. We believe that the EPBD can lead the way for healthier, more biodiverse and decarbonised buildings and cities.

We therefore call on the European Commission to introduce in the EPBD revision proposal mandatory provisions for the integration of green infrastructure in new and renovated buildings. In this respect, we recommend to the European Commission to:

- Systematically integrate green infrastructure in a new Zero Emission Building standard and require combination with solar renewables installations⁵ (bio-solar roofs) such as solar thermal and/or photovoltaic energy;
- Require commercial and public buildings, undertaking renovations, to install green roofs and walls in combination with solar renewables installations (bio-solar roofs) such as solar thermal and/or photovoltaic energy;
- Require Member States to provide incentives for large residential buildings occupying a land surface of 400m², and more, and undertaking renovations to install green roofs in combination with solar renewables installations (bio-solar roofs) such as solar thermal and/or photovoltaic energy.

Such provisions, enhanced by biodiversity considerations, circularity principles and green procurement as a stimulus for green markets, will support the goal of making buildings and cities carbon sinks and energy-positive, as stressed in the Renovation Wave communication and in the inception impact assessment for the revision of the EPBD.

European citizens will support these actions. The recent lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic stressed the importance of access to nature and green spaces. At the moment, this is restricted only to some specific areas with parks and gardens, despite it being essential for everyone mental and physical health and general well-being. **With the right legislative framework, we can make nature and green areas accessible to all by installing vegetation on billions of square meters of roofs and impervious surfaces which would be otherwise unused.** The beneficial socio economic and health effects of green roofs and walls, particularly for energy-poor and economically deprived communities, children, pregnant women, and senior citizens, are tremendous and have been widely researched since many decades⁶.

We count on your support, and we are looking forward to working with you to promote the inclusion of vegetative systems integrated with renewable energy within the European urban fabric, with the multiple goals to make our buildings and cities more sustainable, liveable, beautiful, inclusive and resilient and contribute to the EU climate goals for 2030 and 2050.

Thank you for your consideration.

Your sincerely,

⁵ Combining solar PV and/or solar thermal collectors on green roofs can bring some great benefits, as they combine the energy-generating capacity of solar energy with the advantages of a green roof system that retains water and generates a biodiverse habitat - a win-win situation.

⁶ [Urban green spaces and health. A review of evidence.](#) WHO Europe, 2016

Co-signatories:

