

GREEN TOGETHER: COMMUNAL URBAN GARDENS ACROSS EUROPE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

European cities face climate challenges, social fragmentation, widespread underuse of valuable urban land, and risks to food security. Green Together proposes the expansion and support of Communal Urban Gardens (CUGs) as a low-cost, adaptable, flexible, and inclusive solution directly supporting the delivery of wider European Union (EU) policy objectives. To achieve this, we propose a three-pronged approach:

- 1 **First**, the establishment of ECUGO, a dedicated platform designed to foster a phased, multi-stakeholder approach to CUG development.
- 2 **Second**, the promotion of our Cost-Benefit Analysis Tool, which quantifies environmental benefits, public health improvements, and socio-economic gains in concrete financial figures.
- 3 **Third**, strengthen financial support for CUGs by formally recognising them as a distinct category within the EU's Cohesion Policy framework (currently under review).

I. EUROPEAN CITIES FACE MULTIPLE INTERLINKED CHALLENGES



Cities are ill-prepared for climate change. Some European capitals have warmed considerably over the past decades. Existing urban green spaces are not optimised for meeting long-term sustainability needs.



Fragmentation and social exclusion threaten modern European city life. Cities need inclusive, shared spaces that unite people across backgrounds, ages, and cultures.



Growing urbanisation has left many neglected, underused urban sites whose ecological, social, and economic potential remains untapped.



Cities depend almost entirely on imported food. Urban residents have limited agricultural knowledge. Recent increases in food prices, frequent supply shortages and unequal access to healthy food highlight the need for more diverse, locally produced and resilient sources of food within urban areas.



II. CUGS OFFER A MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTION TO ADDRESSING THESE CHALLENGES



- 1 CUGs are bottom-up catalysts for sustainable improvement of the overall quality of life in European cities.
- 2 CUGs provide environmental benefits (such as carbon capture), strengthen community ties (facilitating inter-social interaction), bring regeneration of underutilised land (such as brownfield sites) into productive landscapes, and create opportunities for local food production.
- 3 CUGs are volunteer-based, low-resource projects, thus imposing a minimal administrative and financial burden upon authorities.
- 4 Over time, CUGs offer direct (e.g. increased local property values) and indirect (e.g. mental and physical well-being) financial benefits to urban communities.

III. WE RECOMMEND 3 POLICY ACTIONS TO STIMULATE EXPANSION AND OPERATION OF CUGS

European Communal Urban Garden Observatory (ECUGO)

(1) Despite their potential, CUGs remain relatively unknown across local communities, municipal authorities and EU authorities.

(2) We therefore propose the creation of ECUGO: a dedicated observatory for CUGs. ECUGO would be a central platform that: (i) maintains reliable and up-to-date information about CUGs; (ii) maps and monitors CUGs in Europe; (iii) creates a central repository of EU funding mechanisms relevant to CUG initiatives; and (iv) establishes a European CUG network to connect all stakeholders.

(3) As such, ECUGO enables practitioners and policymakers to monitor, promote, and connect European CUGs, with the strategic vision of creating a supportive ecosystem for CUGs across the EU.

Implementer: Relevant units within DG REGIO; European Urban Initiative (EUI)

GrowValue: Communal Urban Garden Cost-Benefit Tool

(1) CUGs remain undervalued as public officials and CUG organizers do not have easy access to quantified data on a CUG's real value.

(2) The purpose-built GrowValue tool quantifies environmental benefits (e.g. carbon sequestration), public health improvements (e.g. reduced mortality and morbidity), and socio economic gains (e.g. higher property values), thus demonstrating the economic viability of CUGs. **Check the tool here.**

(3) This data helps CUG operators, officials, and civil society to monitor, promote and connect European CUGs. The tool, which can be tailored to specific local needs, should be embedded in policies (e.g. city planning, the Green Deal) and operations (e.g. public works, EU funding criteria), and supported by pilot programmes and training to build capacity.

Implementer: Local governments, EU Covenant of Mayors, civil society

Coordinating EU policy and funding for long-term support

(1) CUGs lack recognition in EU financial frameworks, leading to fragmented, inconsistent access to funding.

(2) Short-term, as part of the current revision of the multiannual financial framework, we suggest adding CUGs as a dedicated 'category of intervention' under the Common Provisions Regulation. This facilitates CUGs' access to EU Cohesion Policy-based funds and allows the Commission to aggregate CUG project data efficiently.

(3) Long-term coordination of EU financial support for CUGs could then be tailored to the gathered data, potentially informing an EC Communication on CUG-strategy or a dedicated financial scheme for CUGs.

Implementer: Relevant units within DG REGIO

