

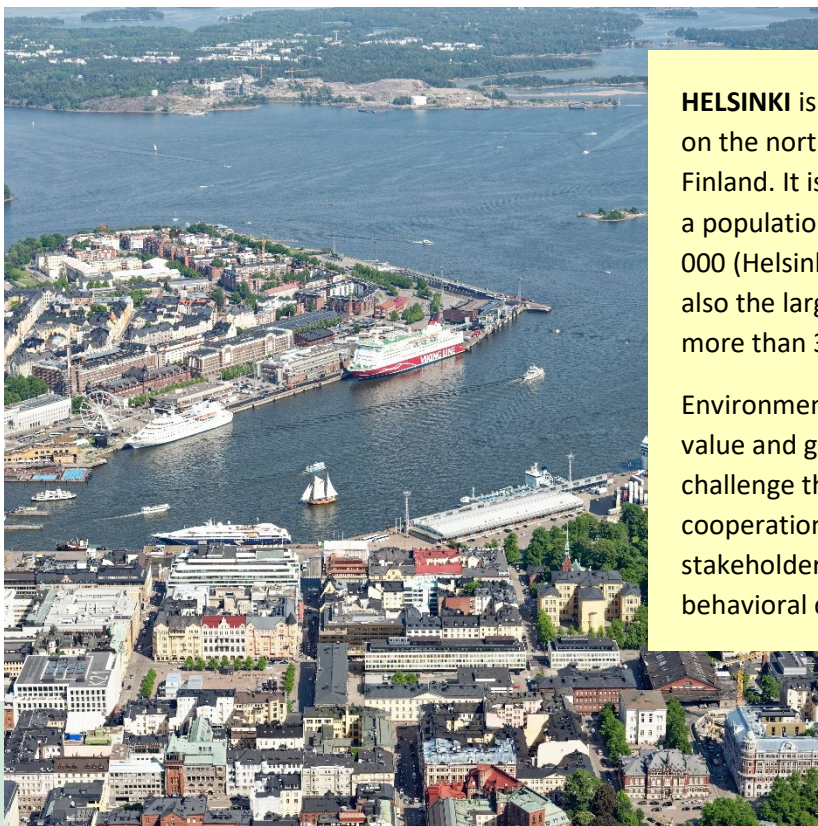
BEST PRACTISES IN PLASTIC-FREE SOLUTIONS

The BALTIPLAST project co-financed by Interreg BSR helps to drive the transition to a green and resilient Baltic Sea region.

Developing Litter control action plan 2.0

HELSINKI, FINLAND

Photo: Erik Lahteenmaki / City of Helsinki



HELSINKI is the capital of Finland, located on the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland. It is the largest city in Finland with a population of 674 000 (Helsinki), 1 555 000 (Helsinki Region). The City of Helsinki is also the largest employer in Finland with more than 37 000 employees.

Environmental leadership is an important value and goal for the city. Littering is a challenge that has to be addressed by wide cooperation between the city divisions and stakeholders, communication, and behavioral change.

Littering is a major problem in Helsinki, causing environmental and health damage, reducing the attractiveness and amenity of urban areas and negatively affecting the urban image. The aim of the Litter Control Action Plan is to gather the best ideas for practical measures to reduce litter, tackle the growing problem of litter and the damage it causes to the environment and health, raise awareness and knowledge of the problem of litter, and guide efforts towards reducing litter.

Challenges and actions

Littering is an environmental problem that negatively impacts nature, health and city image. The annual costs for cleaning the public areas are more than €11 million in Helsinki. **The political will increased to take action and the development for the first Litter Control Action plan started in 2020.**

The Litter Control Action Plan consists of a programme of measures and a network bringing together those working on litter. The aim of the Litter Control Action Plan is to gather the best ideas for practical measures to reduce litter, tackle the growing problem of litter and the damage it causes to the environment and health, raise awareness and knowledge of the problem of litter, and guide efforts towards reducing litter. First Action Plan programme was valid in 2022-2025, and is updated for the year 2026.

During three years of the implementation of the first Litter Control Action plan, some challenges has been recognized, regarding e.g., the focus areas. Second, updated version of the Action Plan is been developed during the year 2025, and the responsible team is eager to focus more on plastics and include measures that also consider the learnings from the BALTIPLAST project to be implemented in 2026. One issue that is going to be addressed in the updated Action Plan is **single-use plastics, such as cutlery and cups** that are being used a lot in events and festivals.

The goals for the updated Litter Control Action Plan 2.0 are:

1. The urban environment is cleaner and there is less litter.
2. The citizens care about their environment and litter less.
3. New partners are involved in the implementation of the Action Plan.
4. All city divisions promote litter-free Helsinki by working together.

Brief description of activities

The development process began with assessment of the current situation, followed by the first working group meetings. Clear and structured schedule was established to ensure efficiency during the process and to meet the deadline.

To build a comprehensive and inclusive Action Plan, city divisions and other relevant stakeholders were brought together in a series of **themed workshops**. Themed workshops were aligned with participants' areas of expertise. During this phase, a **shared vision** was crafted, alongside defined goals and preliminary measures.

Given that the document is both budgeted and binding, it was important to **involve the responsible parties from the very beginning**. Their early engagement helped lay the groundwork for effective implementation of the measures later on.

Further development of the measures and confirming the responsible parties and budgets was the responsibility of the **coordinating team**. The working group remained involved by offering feedback on the document text and shaping the content. When the document finally began to take its final form, the action items and budgets were locked in, managerial input was secured, and the Action Plan was ready to begin its journey through the decision-making bodies.

Timeline

Schedule for a finished document is **10 months**. Timeline is relatively tight, but since the first Action Plan has already been implemented for 3 years, the first two steps for developing and implementing the strategic framework document take little less time and resources than an entirely new strategic document work would. Working group is already familiar with the initiative, and the background and current situation have been already assessed during the first programme period.

- **December 2024:** First meetings and assessments of the current situation.
- **1st quarter of 2025:** Workshops for stakeholders and action development. Writing process starts.
- **2nd quarter of 2025:** Dedicated to budgeting, finalizing the measures, engaging managers and responsible parties, and finalizing the document text.

The final Action Plan document is going to be approved by directors and the Board in autumn of 2025. The new Litter Control Action Plan 2.0 will be implemented from January 2026 onwards.

Results

In the workshops, the measures for the program period were divided into **six themes**: communication and advocacy, cleanliness of the urban environment, construction, cooperation and participation, events, and litter control and monitoring. These themes set the framework for developing concrete measures.

All participants of the workshops had the **opportunity to suggest measures**, from which the most impactful, feasible and relevant ones were chosen for further development by voting. As a result, in total nine measures were included in the Action Plan draft.

As the draft evolved and began to take its final shape, the **budgeting process** was carried out. The final version of the Litter Control Action Plan 2.0 was then handed out to the City Board for approval.

Clear and consistent communication about the program and its measures is essential – not only within the city organization, but also for stakeholders, partners, and citizens. It ensures that everyone understands the significance of the plan and the goals it aims to achieve.

Barriers



- **Responsible parties not taking action** is always a possible challenge, but engaging them from the beginning builds trust and inclusion, which, in turn increases ownership of the programme for all partners and stakeholders.
- **Financial constraints** might pose a risk for including costly measures – this has to be taken into consideration already when drafting the measures early in the process.

Enablers



- + **Strong political support**, which also induces budgeting from the city budget.
- + **Positive experiences and reception from the first Action Plan** helps to engage stakeholders to participate in the development process and implement measures during the new upcoming programme period.
- + **Resources for the development process** – one of the learnings for the first Action Plan was, that it takes a lot of human resources and time to be able to develop a city-wide Action Plan. For this process, consultants were able to help with workshops, strategic planning and and first drafts.

Key takeaways

Mutual, important goals bring us together to find solutions. Especially in large public organizations, we have to share responsibility to make an impact. Engaging different stakeholders and interest groups in the process from the very beginning, we can strengthen the ownership – and, that's when the engagement happens!