



# WHAT EUROPEAN CITY-DWELLERS WANT FROM THEIR MAYORS POST-COVID - SURVEY

May 2021

## SUMMARY

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented disruption of mobility in cities across Europe. As the long journey towards a post-pandemic world begins, cities are now at a make-or-break moment. Will mayors decide to go back to a deadly 'pollution as usual' or will they fast-forward the transition towards liveable, clean and healthy cities?

The Clean Cities Campaign, a new European movement aiming to encourage cities to transition to zero-emission transport by 2030, decided to gauge the public opinion in a representative Pan-European online survey with 10,050 respondents in 15 cities across 8 countries. The results show a clear picture of what European urbanites want:

1. **An overwhelming majority of European city dwellers want more greenery:** More than eight out of ten (82%) want more green space and greenery, which is the single clearest signal from the opinion survey.
2. **A clear majority in cities demand more space and action for clean mobility:** 68% want more effort by cities to promote the use of public transport, and a majority also want more space to be reserved for pedestrians (66%) and cycling (56%).
3. **Almost three in four demand more protection from air pollution:** 71% in the 15 cities think that their leaders should do more to protect them from air pollution.
4. **A majority wants only emission-free cars in cities after 2030:** 59% think that petrol and diesel cars should no longer be allowed to be driven in cities after 2030.

Interestingly, respondents who were infected or had family members or close friends who caught Covid-19 expressed a stronger demand for sustainable mobility. Moreover, the demand for greenery is stronger than in surveys from before the pandemic. This could indicate a change in the attitudes of city dwellers caused by Covid-19.

A wide range of policy options are available to drive these mobility changes. The Clean Cities Campaign calls on mayors and governments to reallocate public space to walking, cycling and greenery and to reduce the overall number of cars in cities. Furthermore, the campaign calls for promoting and investing in public transport and shared electric mobility, and the phasing-out of polluting vehicles from cities by 2030 at the latest.

The EU should decide to set an end date for the sales of cars and vans with internal combustion engines in its upcoming review of the CO2 standards.

## 1. Context and objectives of the survey

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused an **unprecedented disruption of life in cities** across Europe. Mobility has been particularly affected, with road traffic falling drastically after the first lockdown policies were imposed in March and April 2020.<sup>1</sup> Public transport ridership and the use of shared-mobility services also fell sharply.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, this exceptional situation **also opened a window into a possible future**. As a side effect of lockdown policies, air pollution dropped. Suddenly, the air in Paris was the cleanest it has been in 40 years and the inhabitants of Milan could clearly see the nearby Alps.<sup>3</sup> A Pan-European survey conducted in May 2020 showed two in three European city dwellers said that they did not want to return to pre-Covid air pollution levels.<sup>4</sup> The survey also confirmed that city dwellers changed their daily mobility. Efforts to support covid-safe mobility, such as new pop-up bike lanes, **boosted walking and cycling**. 1,400 kilometers of new additional cycle lanes have been installed across the continent since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

As the long journey towards a post-pandemic world begins, **cities are at a make-or-break moment**. Many people have been **leaving European cities** during the pandemic<sup>6</sup>, often to enjoy more greenery elsewhere<sup>7</sup>, and real estate prices dropped for the first time in decades in Paris<sup>8</sup>. Also, private **car use has been rebounding** and pollution levels are close to pre-pandemic levels in many cities.<sup>9</sup> Will mayors decide to go back to a deadly 'pollution as usual', humanity's foremost environmental health threat, or will they make the best of the situation and **fast-forward the transition** towards liveable, clean and healthy cities?

It is at this moment that the [Clean Cities Campaign](#) decided to gauge the public opinion in European cities. The Clean Cities Campaign is a new European movement aiming to encourage cities to transition to zero-emission transport by 2030. The campaign champions active, shared and electric mobility for a more liveable and sustainable urban future. The objective was to map the views of city dwellers on mobility attitudes, air pollution and space distribution, and provide decision-makers in cities and governments with a clear understanding of what citizens demand.

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<sup>1</sup> TomTom. (2021). Traffic Index, 2020. [Link](#)

<sup>2</sup> European Parliament. (2020). COVID-19 and urban mobility: impacts and perspectives. [Link](#)

<sup>3</sup> Transport & Environment. (2021). Blue Sky Recovery - How to keep lockdown low levels of air pollution in European cities. [Link](#)

<sup>4</sup> Transport & Environment. (2020). No going back to pre-Covid pollution levels. [Link](#)

<sup>5</sup> European Cyclists' Federation (ECF). 2021. COVID-19 Cycling Measures Tracker. [Link](#)

<sup>6</sup> New York Times. (2021). Many people left Europe's cities in the pandemic. [Link](#)

<sup>7</sup> The Guardian. (2020). Escape to the country: how Covid is driving an exodus from Britain's cities. [Link](#)

<sup>8</sup> Le Monde. (2021). Immobilier : l'année 2021 commence par une baisse des prix à Paris. [Link](#)

<sup>9</sup> European Environment Agency. (2020). European Air Quality Index. [Link](#)

## 2. Methodology of the survey

The survey was commissioned by Clean Cities and run by [YouGov](#), a renowned global public opinion and data company, and conducted as follows:

- Fieldwork was undertaken between 3rd to 22nd March 2021.
- The total sample size was 10,050 adults interviewed in 15 cities across 8 countries from Western, Southern and Eastern Europe. The cities covered were London (UK), Birmingham (UK), Madrid (Spain), Barcelona (Spain), Milan (Italy), Rome (Italy), Hamburg (Germany), Berlin (Germany), Paris (France), Lyon (France), Brussels (Belgium), Antwerp (Belgium), Warsaw (Poland), Kraków (Poland) and Budapest (Hungary)
- The survey was carried out online.
- The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults living in the city interviewed in (aged 18+).

## 3. Main results of the survey

Overall, the results indicate that there is strong support in the cities surveyed for more green space, a fairer sharing of public space between different transport modes, more effort to curb air pollution and for only allowing emission-free cars to be driven in European cities after 2030. Some of these results contrast with findings from before the pandemic, especially when it comes to the demand for more green space and greenery, where previous surveys showed high satisfaction levels.<sup>10</sup>

This might indicate that the experience of the pandemic, with months-long lockdown policies and curfews imposed in many cities, may have led to a change in attitudes. It is also noticeable that city-dwellers who either got infected with Covid-19 or have family members or close friends who got infected generally show stronger levels of support for changes in space distribution and urban mobility, which may indicate that people who directly experienced or witnessed the effects of the virus have formed stronger views on change they want to see in their city.

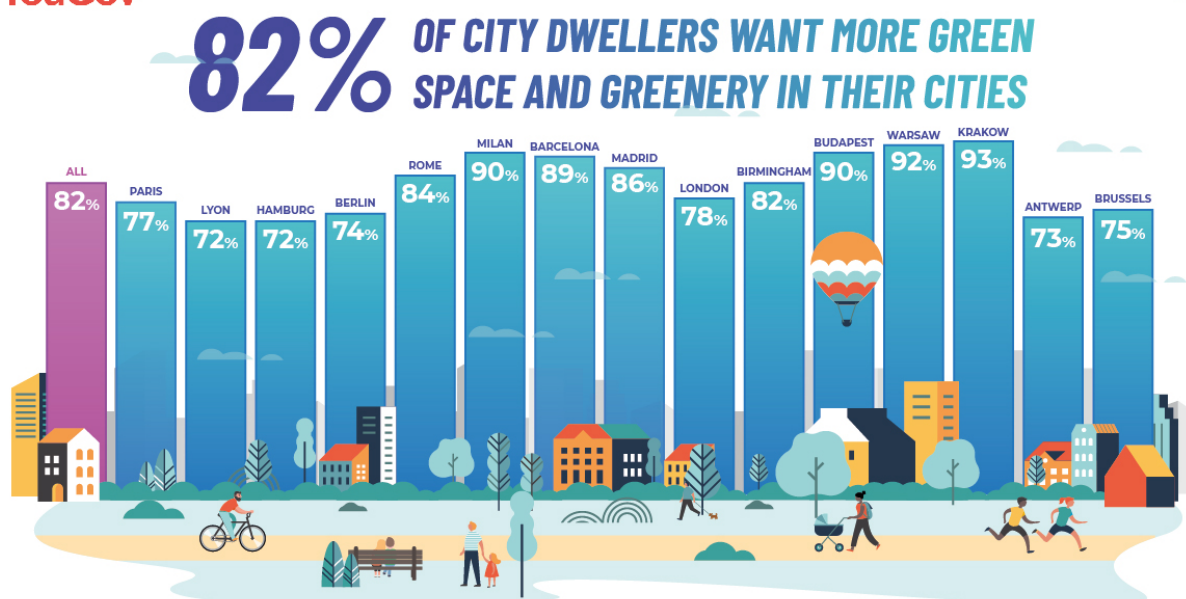
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<sup>10</sup> European Commission. (2015). Quality of life in European cities (see page 136). [Link](#)

### 3.1 An overwhelming majority of European city dwellers want more greenery

YouGov

CleanCities



Source: YouGov. Pic. Total sample size was 10,050 adults interviewed in 15 cities in 8 countries

**Figure 1: 82% of city dwellers want more green space and greenery in their city. Source: YouGov, 2021.**

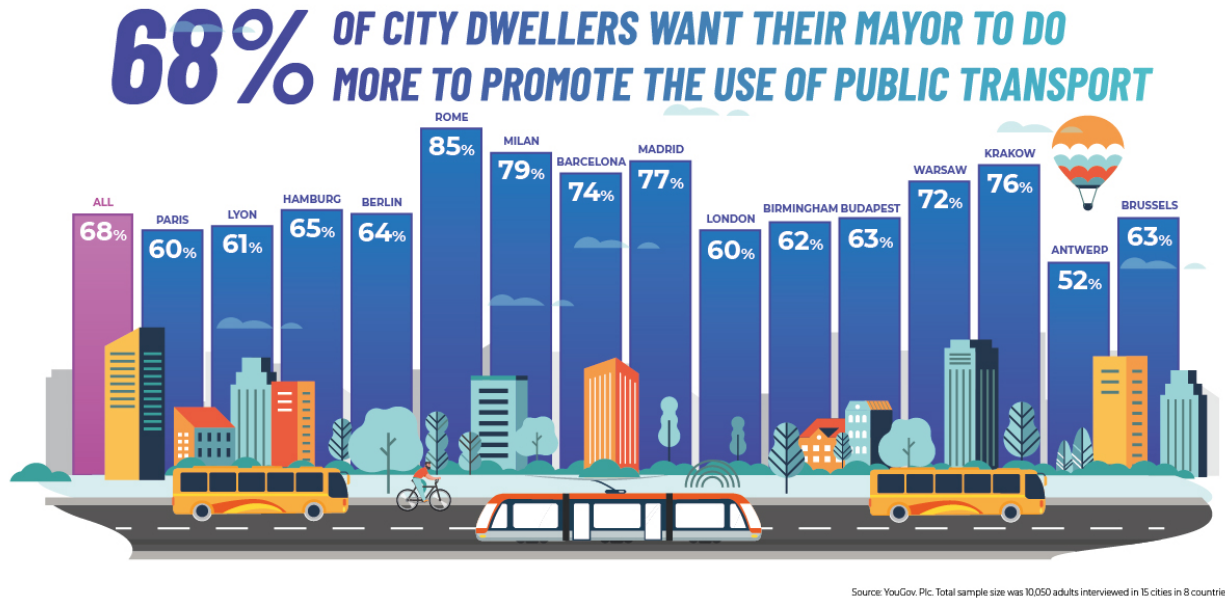
When asked whether they agreed that “there should be more green space (e.g. parks, etc.) and greenery (e.g. trees in the streets, etc.) in your city”, the results showed that:

- More than eight out of ten (**82%**) of all city dwellers interviewed **agreed**, which is the **single clearest signal** from the opinion survey.
- **In all cities**, there are **very high levels of agreement** with the statement, ranging from 72% in Hamburg (Germany) and Lyon (France) to 93% in Krakow (Poland).
- City dwellers who were **closely touched by Covid-19** showed **significantly higher levels of agreement** (83%) compared to those who said that they “do not know anyone who had Covid” (76%).

### 3.2 68% want more efforts to promote the use of public transport

YouGov

CleanCities



**Figure 2: 68% of city dwellers want their mayor to do more to promote the use of public transport.**  
Source: YouGov, 2021.

When it comes public transport the survey showed that:

- **68%** want of all city dwellers their mayor to do more to promote the the use of public transport (between 52% in Antwerp and 85% in Rome)
- Respondents who were **closely touched by Covid-19** showed significantly **higher levels of agreement** compared to those who said that they did not know anyone who had Covid (70% vs. 62%).

### 3.3 A clear majority want more space for walking and cycling

YouGov

CleanCities



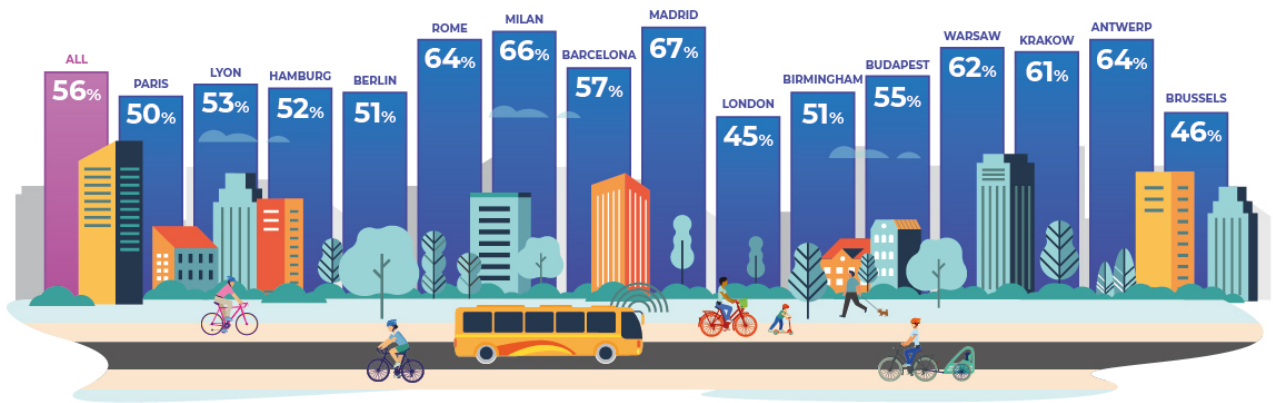
Source: YouGov. Plc. Total sample size was 10,050 adults interviewed in 15 cities in 8 countries

**Figure 3: 66% of city dwellers want more space for walking. Source: YouGov, 2021.**

City dwellers were also asked whether more public space in their city should be reserved for specific forms of active and public mobility, showing that:

- **66%** across all 15 cities agree that more public space should be reserved for **pedestrians** (ranging from 58% in Brussels to 76% in Rome),
- **56%** of all city dwellers want more public space for **cycling** (between 45% in London and 67% in Madrid),
- Respondents who were closely **touched by Covid-19** showed **significantly higher levels of agreement** compared to those who said that they did not know anyone who had Covid (69% vs. 63% for walking, 59% vs. 51% for cycling).

# 56% OF CITY DWELLERS WANT MORE SPACE FOR CYCLING



Source: YouGov, Plc. Total sample size was 10,050 adults interviewed in 15 cities in 8 countries

**Figure 4:** 56% of city dwellers want more space for cycling. Source: YouGov, 2021.

### 3.4 Almost three in four demand more protection from air pollution

YouGov

CleanCities



Source: YouGov. Pic. Total sample size was 10,050 adults interviewed in 15 cities in 8 countries

**Figure 5: 71% of city dwellers want their mayors to do more to protect them from air pollution.**

Source: YouGov, 2021.

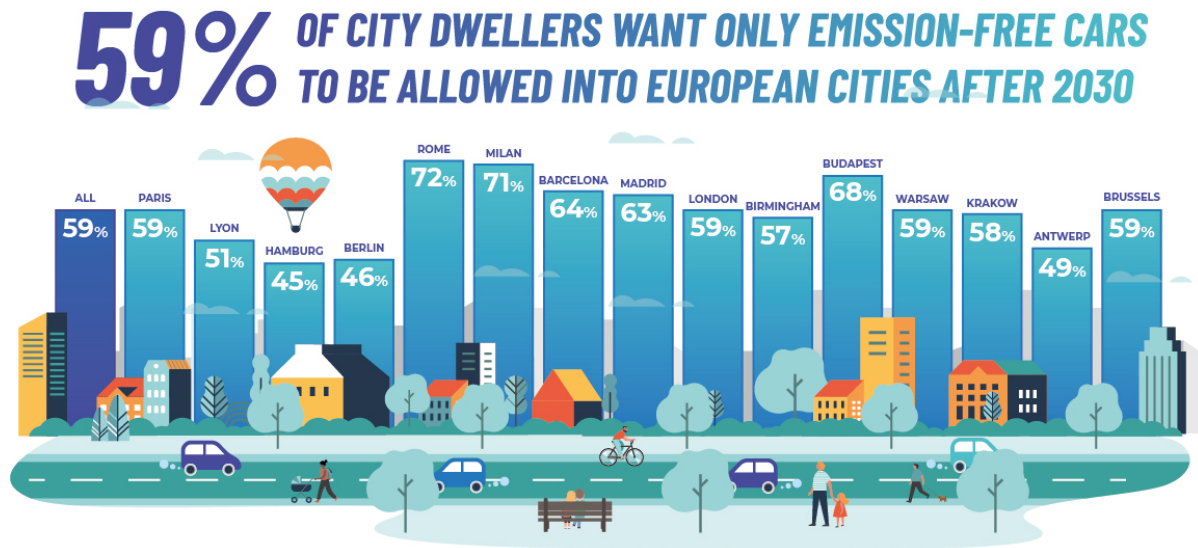
Air pollution is humanity's foremost environmental health threat.<sup>11</sup> The survey confirmed that European city dwellers feel strongly about air pollution:

- When considering the political leaders' time, effort and money, **71%** in the 15 cities think that their political leaders should **do more to protect citizens from air pollution**.
- Agreement ranges from **54%** in Berlin **to 84%** in Rome, Milan, Warsaw and Krakow.
- Respondents who were **closely touched by Covid-19** showed **significantly higher levels of agreement** compared to those who said that they did not know anyone who had Covid (75% vs. 63%).

<sup>11</sup> UNECE. (not dated). Air pollution and health. [Link](#)



### 3.5 A majority want only-emission free cars in cities after 2030



Source: YouGov. Pic. Total sample size was 10,050 adults interviewed in 15 cities in 8 countries

**Figure 6: 59% of city dwellers want only emission-free cars to be allowed into European cities after 2030. Source: YouGov, 2021.**

More and more emissions-free cars are becoming available on the market and their sales have been skyrocketing since early 2020 when the EU's CO<sub>2</sub> standards for cars and vans kicked in. When asked whether "after 2030, only emission-free cars (i.e. vehicle that operates without using a combustion engine) should be allowed to be driven in European cities (i.e. petrol and diesel cars should no longer be allowed to be driven there)":

- **59%** of city dwellers in all 15 cities expressed **support**,
- With support ranging from **45% in Hamburg** to **72% in Rome**.
- In all cities but Hamburg (45%), Berlin (46%) and Antwerp (49%), an absolute majority of all respondents expressed support.
- Respondents who were **closely touched by Covid-19** showed **significantly higher levels of support** compared to those who said that they did not know anyone who had Covid (62% vs. 53%).

### 3.6 Conclusions and policy demands

The results of the survey show a strong demand for more green space in cities, a fairer sharing of public space and better protection from air pollution in the cities surveyed. From the local to the European level, a wide range of policy options are available to drive the mobility changes in cities that Europeans are asking for.

#### KEY DEMANDS

Cities and governments have a key role to play in rethinking urban mobility by:

1. **Reallocating public space to walking, cycling and greenery, and driving down the overall number of vehicles in cities, therefore prioritising people over cars,**
2. **Promoting and investing in public transport and shared electric mobility,**
3. **Allowing only zero-emission cars and vans to circulate in cities by 2030 at the latest.**

The **EU** should set an **end date for the sales of vehicles with internal combustion engines** in its upcoming review of the cars and vans CO2 standards. Deciding to phase out polluting cars is a golden opportunity for the EU to show its citizens that their voice is being heard.

#### Further information

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