

Action plan between city of Zaporizhzhia and city of Lahti

Previous Cooperation

The cities of Zaporizhzhia and Lahti have maintained a historical sister city agreement since 1953, making Lahti the first and longest-standing partner of Zaporizhzhia. Although inter-municipal cooperation was not regular in the decade leading up to 2022, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and the military aggression against Zaporizhzhia led to strengthening ties of solidarity between the two sister cities.

In response to the challenges and risks posed by the ongoing war against Ukraine, Lahti and Zaporizhzhia signed an *Action plan for 2023–2024*, outlining both short—and long-term goals to support the Ukrainian city in crisis and prepare for its sustainable reconstruction. Another key priority of the document was supporting the companies, education, R&D, and civil society organizations on both sides and promoting cooperation in these fields.

As part of the action plan, the two cities implemented the following initiatives:

- Established reliable and continuous communication channel for cooperation coordination, news exchange and cooperation activities.
- Promoted and connected Zaporizhzhia to the EU city networks where Lahti is a member and active (Eurocities and Union of Baltic Cities). Also expanded cooperation from city to regional level and connected closely Embassy of Ukraine in Finland to our cooperation.
- Integrated Ukrainians and volunteers living in Lahti region in our cooperation.
- Scouted, collected and educated Lahti region companies interested in reconstruction of Ukraine.
- Renaming of Zaporozhje park in Lahti to Zaporizhzhia park to reflect correct Ukrainian spelling at the end of year 2022.
- Dalia Mixtape #2 feat. Leila Josefowicz Sinfonia Lahti charity concert at the end of the year 2022 in Lahti. Entry fees were donated in full to charity organization to support children and school rebuild in Ukraine.
- Photo exhibition “War in Our Home: Zaporizhzhia” held in Lahti to raise awareness among Finnish people about Ukraine’s fight against Russian aggression (February 2023).
- Visit of Zaporizhzhian delegation to higher education institutions and companies in Lahti during the exhibition’s opening week. The goal was to promote Finnish-Ukrainian partnerships and collaboration (February 2023).
- Charity documentary screening of “I have no home. Scars of Zaporizhzhia” (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt29920764/>) in Kino Iiris cinema in Lahti in 2023. Voluntary entry fees were donated in full to charity organization active in Zaporizhzhia.
- Award winning documentary “The Real Frontline” (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt32197002/>) released in 2024 made by Lahti based film director Jani Wallenius. Zaporizhzhia supported the production with contacts and permissions support.

- Summer camp program for children from Zaporizhzhia organized by the city of Lahti and the Training Center Pajulahti in both 2023 and 2024.
- Visit of the Zaporizhzhia City Council delegation to Lahti. The program included meetings between mayors and city officials, the signing ceremony of the action plan, and visits to companies (Ecowec Oy, Oilon Oy, Peikko Group) and other organizations in the Lahti region (September 2023).
- Renaming of Gagarin Park in Zaporizhzhia to ‘Sister Cities Park’ to honor the strong bonds with sister cities and express the deep gratitude of Zaporizhzhia’s residents. A formal letter regarding this decision was sent to Mayor Niko Kynnäräinen (November 2024).

Additionally, in November 2024, with the participation of Ambassador of Ukraine to Finland, Olga Dibrova, Head of the Zaporizhzhia Regional State Administration, Ivan Fedorov, Chair of the Päijät-Häme Regional Council, Pekka Komu, and Regional Mayor Niina Pautola-Mol, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the Zaporizhzhia region and the Päijät-Häme region of Finland. The document aims to promote cooperation in the fields of industry, agriculture, transport and logistics, trade and economy, science and technology, culture, tourism, sports, environmental protection, and the efficient use of natural resources, as well as education and youth policy. This significant step will further strengthen the foundation for mutually beneficial cooperation between the sister cities Lahti and Zaporizhzhia and regional cooperation will be part of our action plan.

The action plan update in 2026 builds on the lessons learned from the previous cooperation in 2023–2024 and aligns with the strategic areas of collaboration between the Zaporizhzhia region and Päijät-Häme. However, it is not a final document and will be updated as new opportunities and projects arise. The action plan does not entail any financial commitments—each party is responsible for its own costs, and project financing must be arranged separately on a case-by-case basis in writing.

Communication and Coordination

An established communication channel will be used to coordinate actions and exchange actual news in a constantly changing situation. Contact persons will exchange information and meet regularly online or, if possible and required, offline. The cities’ administrations will meet at least once a year or as needed based on reports and proposals from the contact persons. The cities’ administrations will agree on prepared joint actions and monitor the execution of the action plan.

Contact person (Lahti):

Miikka Venäläinen, Head of Business Development, City of Lahti
+358 44 018 7378, miikka.venalainen@lahti.fi

Contact person (Zaporizhzhia):

Viktorija Agientaieva, Director, City Development Institute of Zaporizhzhia
+38050 454 5600, irmzpcity@gmail.com

Joint Events and Promotion of Cooperation

Joint events will focus on strengthening ties between the two municipalities and local organizations (companies, associations), increasing awareness among Finnish citizens about the current situation in Ukraine, and providing opportunities for residents of Lahti and Zaporizhzhia to learn more about their sister city, culture and language. Lahti will involve Ukrainians and other volunteers living in Lahti in organizing joint events.

A key priority will be cooperation and knowledge-sharing in the municipal sector. Lahti's expertise in strategic planning, sustainable development, public services, and citizen engagement can support Zaporizhzhia's post-war recovery and future development—particularly in the creation of a comprehensive recovery program for the city. To facilitate this exchange, partners will organize both online events (conferences, workshops) and offline study visits.

Additionally, the City of Lahti will continue promoting the relationship with Zaporizhzhia at the national and EU levels, specifically when Ukraine will be the focus of actions. Specific events will be added to the action plan, as agreed upon by contact persons.

Recovery and Sustainable Development

Preparing for the recovery and supporting post-war development processes in Zaporizhzhia is focus area of cooperation. With its extensive experience in sustainable development, Lahti can provide valuable support in enhancing municipal management, refining local strategies, and preparing joint projects. Key cooperation priorities in this area include:

- *Reconstruction, civil protection and new sustainable solutions* – scouting and connecting companies who can provide innovative solutions for better rebuild of Zaporizhzhia.
- *Carbon-neutral construction and construction waste management* – enhancing sustainable reconstruction.
- *Infrastructure, sustainable energy solutions and energy efficiency* – developing resilient and eco-friendly solutions involving students of the universities of Lahti and Zaporizhzhia.
- *Sustainable mobility* – new solutions and improving mobility solutions and emergency vehicles recovery.

Despite being located near the current front line (approximately 30 km away), Zaporizhzhia is actively planning for post-war reconstruction. The city has already begun to actively plan for post-war reconstruction, covering the restoration of destroyed residential buildings, infrastructure, and social facilities. Due to its strategic location and strong industrial base, Zaporizhzhia has the potential to become a logistics hub for the restoration of the east and south of the country.

In 2024, with the support of the [Ro3kvit Urban Coalition](#), Zaporizhzhia developed its Urban Resilience Strategy, outlining short—and long-term priorities for sustainable development. This strategy is the first step in further developing a comprehensive recovery program and other strategic documents.

Public Safety and Crisis Response

Three years of Ukraine's resistance against Russian military aggression have given the country and its communities extensive, albeit unwanted, expertise—offering valuable lessons for European states. In the case of Zaporizhzhia, these lessons include crisis adaptation, the coordination of humanitarian efforts, and the development of effective systems for security, public safety, and emergency response.

In the first months of the full-scale invasion, Zaporizhzhia became the primary humanitarian hub for people fleeing temporarily occupied territories. Since then, it has remained a key centre for volunteer activity. Numerous organizations operate in the city, providing aid not only to civilians but also to the military, facilitating the delivery of humanitarian supplies, medicine, and essential equipment.

Zaporizhzhia can share a range of best practices developed to address wartime challenges—from equipping local first aid and information points to operating 'crisis buses' for emergency evacuations to implementing cross-sectoral response protocols after attacks.

Finnish experience in civil protection and innovations in this sector will help Zaporizhzhia to develop better standards and to integrate civil protection measures, like shelter networks, in reconstruction projects.

A key priority will be exchanging expertise and discussing effective emergency response protocols and civil protection. This cooperation will involve professionals from various sectors, including doctors, rescue workers, emergency responders, as well as city officials responsible for crisis management. Also, private sector innovations and know-how will be included in cooperation.

Youth and Education

Connecting schools, universities, vocational education institutions, and R&D institutions in both regions will remain a key focus in our action plan. The primary goal of educational cooperation is to share expertise, create opportunities for students and graduates, and promote youth and professional exchanges.

In Zaporizhzhia, ensuring accessible school education and a safe learning environment for all children—including internally displaced, traumatized, and those with special educational needs—is a pressing priority. Given that the Finnish education system is regarded as one of the world's best, Lahti's experience and expertise can provide valuable support in addressing current challenges in the school education sector.

At the same time, Zaporizhzhia can contribute by sharing its experience in adapting the education system during crises. Notably, the city and the broader Zaporizhzhia region are leading the national initiative to establish 'underground schools', designed to safely reintegrate children into full-time education despite ongoing security threats.

EU-integration and Cross-Sectoral Cooperation

Ukraine—and Zaporizhzhia in particular—have found international partners and friends based on shared values: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights. Today, Zaporizhzhia aims to be an equal partner to its sister cities in the EU, learning from best practices in governance and municipal management while also sharing its own experience gained in extremely challenging conditions.

However, much work remains in advocating for and advancing Ukraine’s integration into the EU. In this context, collaboration between sister cities can focus on policy learning, exchanging best practices, funding opportunities, joint cultural and educational projects, and awareness campaigns on European values. The success of these efforts depends not only on direct cooperation between Lahti and Zaporizhzhia but also on the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders—including city administrations, public organizations, youth initiatives, cultural institutions, and media.

Another priority is training municipal employees on how to participate in EU programs and align local projects with EU policies and standards. Equipping city officials with the necessary knowledge and skills will strengthen Zaporizhzhia’s ability to integrate into European frameworks.

Monitoring the action plan

Considering the constantly changing war situation in Ukraine, the action plan will be monitored continuously by contact persons and reported to city administrations when needed. Based on mutual discussions, the action plan can be changed according to the situation.

When connecting new parties for the implementation of the action plan, contact persons will be updated or added to this document. Also, more specific actions inside decided topics will be specified in this document later based on discussions between different organizations.

Cities’ administrations will organize regular meetings at least once a year to review the progress of the action plan and to make any necessary adjustments. Additional meetings can be organized as needed.

_____, on _____, 2026,

Rehina Kharchenko
Secretary of Zaporizhzhia City Council

Niko Kynnäräinen
Mayor of City of Lahti

Attachment 1: Joint Actions

Information Campaigns

Resilience Digest of Zaporizhzhia

Given the rapidly changing situation in Ukraine and the ongoing Russian hybrid war, there is widespread disinformation about events and processes in the country, particularly in frontline territories. Moreover, the war can distort perceptions of life across Ukraine, including in specific cities. This misperception affects not only international partners but also Ukrainians themselves—for example, residents of Kyiv may struggle to imagine how Zaporizhzhia continues to host cultural events or attract new businesses.

To address this, the City Development Institute of Zaporizhzhia will prepare a quarterly digest to share verified, accurate, and comprehensive information with partners, particularly the city of Lahti. The digest will cover key local and national events, development and recovery efforts, humanitarian initiatives, and the impacts of international cooperation. It will highlight major news, announcements, ongoing projects, challenges, and achievements in Zaporizhzhia. The digest will be published online and distributed via email in English.

Contact person (Lahti):

Miikka Venäläinen, Head of Business Development, City of Lahti
+358 44 018 7378, miikka.venalainen@lahti.fi

Contact person (Zaporizhzhia):

Viktoriiia Agientaieva, Director, City Development Institute of Zaporizhzhia
+38050 454 5600, irmzpcity@gmail.com

Joint events

Joint events will focus on strengthening ties between the two municipalities and local organizations (companies, associations), increasing awareness among Finnish citizens about the current situation in Ukraine, and providing opportunities for residents of Lahti and Zaporizhzhia to learn more about their sister city, culture and language. Lahti will involve Ukrainians and other volunteers living in Lahti in organizing joint events.

Contact person (Lahti):

Henna Keihäs, Cultural Producer, City of Lahti
+35850 383 6551, henna.keihäs@lahti.fi

Contact person (Zaporizhzhia):

Oleksii Maksymenko, Acting Director of the Department of Culture and Tourism of the Zaporizhzhia City Council
+380672612008, reception.kult@zp.gov.ua

Activating local Ukrainians and integrating refugees

Ukrainians has strong community in Lahti, and it is second largest minority (over 1300 persons). Large part of this minority came as refugees. Ukrainians has interest, strong networks and understanding that could be beneficial in cooperation between Finland and Ukraine on every level and integrating and providing meaningful activities to Ukrainian community is one of the priorities. NGOs are important part of these activities. At the same time Zaporizhzhia is important IDP hub in Ukraine.

Discussion topics and cooperation will include but are not limited to: Best practices in work with refugees, activating refugees, NGO-cooperation, including local Ukrainians in Lahti in organizing events, establishing connections and providing work possibilities.

Contact person (Lahti):

Polina Pivnenko, International House Lahti, City of Lahti
polina.pivnenko@lahti.fi, +358 44 483 1997

Contact person (Zaporizhzhia):

Viktoriiia Agientaieva, Director, City Development Institute of Zaporizhzhia
+38050 454 5600, irmzpcity@gmail.com

Recovery and Development Actions

Sustainable construction waste management and reconstruction

Located near the current front line (approximately 30 km away), Zaporizhzhia deals with damaged buildings and construction waste on a daily basis. At the same time Zaporizhzhia is actively planning for post-war reconstruction and is doing reconstruction already. On the other hand, as a part of roadmap towards carbon-neutrality, Lahti does focus on carbon-neutral construction and construction waste management with strong focus on concrete waste recycling and utilization in rebuild process. Both cities can learn from each other how reconstruction can be done in a more sustainable and effective way, find innovations together and how construction waste can be utilized and recycled.

Cooperation will include city experts, university research and recycling laboratories and companies providing suitable innovations for reconstruction and construction waste management.

Contact person (Lahti):

Juha Kapanen, Project Manager, City of Lahti
+35844 483 1704, juha.kapanen@lahti.fi

Contact person (Zaporizhzhia):

Andrii Shaposhnykov, Deputy Director – VELTUM-Zaporizhzhia LLC.
+380 99 489 6635

Andrii Banakh, Head of the Department of Urban Construction and Architecture, Zaporizhzhia National University, Zaporizhzhia.
+38 095 076 28 62, av_banakh@znu.edu.ua

Transportation and logistics in Zaporizhzhia

Given the critical condition of the public and emergency transport fleet, which severely impacts residents' mobility and the overall functionality of the community, Zaporizhzhia seeks various forms of cooperation with Lahti to support its transportation system and to find effective approaches.

Discussion topics will include but are not limited to: Effective organization of emergency vehicle fleet, needs, possibilities and limitations, This may include receiving used vehicles as humanitarian aid following Lahti's public transport modernization efforts, connecting Zaporizhzhia to different aid programs or purchasing them at a cost-effective price.

Contact person (Lahti):

Veli-Pekka Niemikallio, CEO of Fire and Rescue Department, Emergency Services of Päijät-Häme
veli-pekka.niemikallio@pajjatha.fi, +358 44 077 3200

Contact person (Zaporizhzhia):

Mykhailo Skorokhodov, Head of the of Transport Provision and Communications, City of Zaporizhzhia
reception.transport@zp.gov.ua

EU compliance Air Quality management and monitoring

Ukraine is in European Union (EU) accession negotiations and as part of EU-Ukraine Association Agreement the country is developing the Air Quality (AQ) management and motoring toward EU regulation. Capacity of Ukraine authorities in EU compliance AQ management will be improved under the Ukraine-Finland Institutional Cooperation (UFAIR) funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. The UFAIR is led by the Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI) who has national responsibilities in AQ management.

Zaporizhzhia is one partner in the UFAIR project, and it has similar responsibilities in AQ management and monitoring with Lahti. Finland could support Zaporizhzhia by sharing experience in EU compliance AQ monitoring including joint-monitoring with industry, AQ monitoring as part of the Environmental Permit, promoting of multi-sectoral working groups on utilization of the AQ information in decision-making (e.g. emission reduction activities, land-use planning, traffic planning) and awareness campaigns for public. Cooperation will include city experts, companies with AQ responsibilities and FMI.

Contact person (FMI):

Jenni Latikka, UFAIR project manager, Finnish Meteorological Institute
Jenni.latikka@fmi.fi, +358504532163

Contact person (Zaporizhzhia):

Hlib Zolotarov, Head of the Department of Environmental Safety, City of Zaporizhzhia
reception.ecology@zp.gov.ua, +380 99 253 2070