Brussels 2040 - Volt Belgium Electoral Program for the Brussels Regional Parliament Elections

Context and Background

After a grassroots idea gathering phase in autumn 2022 where both Volt-members as well external citizens could submit any idea to become an electoral priority in the 2024 election, we organised a democratic preferendum in December 2022 to choose our top 10 electoral priorities. After the preferendum, a team of more than 30 Volt-members, internal and external experts and citizens co-drafted the specific texts for the main priorities and sub-priorities chosen in our preferendum. Those specific texts were then discussed at events and at our general assembly back in April 2023 in Namur where we formally voted on the final texts. Therefore, the texts presented here are already officially adopted as our 2024 electoral program. In the upcoming months there will still be an amendment phase for minor corrections, without changing the main priorities chosen in the democratic preferendum.

Top 10 Regional Election

01	Regional infrastructure and connectivity with an emphasis on investments in green infrastructure	06	Climate Change Mitigation
02	Mobility and Public Transport	07	Equal Opportunities
03	Tax Justice	08	Housing and city planning
04	Energy Transition	09	More competences to the EU + Reform Brussels
05	The future of Education	10	Citizen Participation

FUTURE MADE IN EUROPE

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Electoral Priority 1: investments in green and resilient infrastructure

If Brussels, Belgium and Europe want to be both economically and ecologically prosperous 15 years from now, and we want to have healthy livable environmental conditions in our regions and cities, we have to accelerate and increase investments in sustainable and resilient infrastructure.

Climate Legislation is Infrastructure Legislation: We **build down climate emissions via positive infrastructure investments** to make Europe climate neutral by 2040. The **transport sector** is the only sector in Europe where emissions increased instead of decreasing in the last decades. Sustainable infrastructure such as Rail Infrastructure can address **climate, jobs and equity** at the same time and allows for climate neutrality and **economic growth** to co-exist. Infrastructure, such as rail, **connects people**. Further, we expand investments in national and cross-border **electricity grids** (elaborated on in Electoral Priority 4: Energy Transition).

When we decide to make an investment in infrastructure, we have to make the investments that not just help our generation, but the next generation and two and three generations from now. We have to be **stewards of the economy, the environment and our health.** We have to make sure the air we breathe is clean, that the water we drink is clean and that the future of our children is more sustainable, more prosperous and more inclusive than the reality of today.

Flanders and Europe need the best and most sustainable infrastructure in the world to become an economic powerhouse: For this we must significantly accelerate its investments in infrastructure, especially sustainable infrastructure. Belgium must modernise and revolutionise its **transportation, energy, and communication networks** to remain competitive.

Infrastructure Connects People : Infrastructure promotes social inclusion and equity. From railways to communication networks to energy grids, infrastructure enables the movement of goods, services, and information that drives economic growth and development. Investing in modern and sustainable infrastructure, including railway transportation like night trains or high-speed rail and communication networks like 5G, can help us create more connected and resilient communities. By providing fast and reliable connectivity, both offline and online, we can connect people and communities across borders, promote the exchange of ideas and knowledge, and support new technologies that can improve people's lives.

Main Proposal 1: Revolutionise Pedestrian and Cycling infrastructure.

We recognise the work done by the current Brussels administration, which resulted in cyclists count more than doubling between 2019 and 2022. **Let's be realistic, however: Brussels is not yet a bicycle city, and many of the solutions of the current administration were poorly designed and executed, and lacking on aspects like cyclists' comfort and safety.** It's time for a more accelerated change and time to look better to **European Best Practices** such as real bicycle cities like Utrecht in the Netherlands.
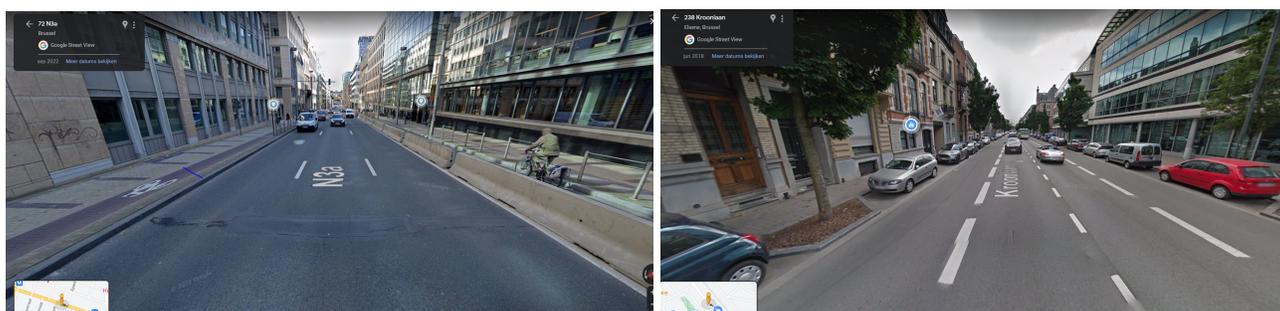

Figure: (Left) N3a between Maalbeek and Kunst-wet. 3 big lanes for cars in one direction. 2 very small lanes for cyclists. **(Right)** Kroonlaan in Etterbeek/Elsene without any cycling infrastructure.

We need to think out of the box and reject outdated standards that prioritise cars over people. We want to transform Brussels from a king city for automobilists to the queen city for pedestrians and cyclists. Taking away road lanes and converting them to bicycle lanes, and expanded car-low and car-free zones in the city can help us achieve this goal. Studies have shown that such changes can lead to reduced congestion, air pollution and fewer traffic fatalities. Reduced congestion will also hugely benefit automobilists, and reduce air pollution as well: also people driving a car breathe our air and become sick and hospitalised due to traffic related air pollution.

Build it and the cyclists come! We propose building over **50 kilometres of at least 4-metre wide bicycle lanes** in the Brussels area between 2025 and 2030 and **100 kilometres** by 2040. This will give cyclists the space they need to move around safely and sustainably. By investing in new bicycle infrastructure, we can also reduce the number of adults and children who rely on cars for transportation, sometimes because they deem cycling unsafe or unhealthy due to air pollution.

Too many pedestrians and cyclists die on our roads, often after collisions caused by automobilists. Too many adults and children make (ironically) use of a car because they deem Brussels not safe enough to cycle. Too many

adults and children (ironically) use a car because they deem the air they breathe in Brussels too polluted and unhealthy to cycle in.

But we can't forget about **pedestrians**. We need to expand sidewalks and redesign streets to prioritise and separate pedestrians and cyclists. This will create a more pleasant and enjoyable walking neighbourhood for everyone.

Broad bicycle lanes in Utrecht - picture © Urban cycling Institute (Left), Gemeente Utrecht (right)

Funding: The congestion tax (see Electoral Priority 2) we will introduce, will gather an additional revenue of 0,5 billion euros/year or € 7,5 billion over the next 15 years for the Brussels region. We propose to spend € 2,5 billion into bicycle infrastructure during the next 15 years in addition to the already allocated and planned budget.

Main Proposal 2: Expand the Metro network in Brussels. Where not feasible, surface trams or RER-like systems/S-trains should be built as an alternative.

To meet WHO recommendations on physical activity, air pollution, noise and green space accessibility levels, we don't only have to massively increase our bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, but also improve public transportation, and especially urban rail transport.

Urban rail transport has a higher potential for attracting passengers than buses and therefore we must focus on developing a robust urban rail transportation network that not only benefits our generation but the next generations to come.

[The proposed metro network in this article of L'Echo](#) we see as an idealistic end goal to strive for. We want to clarify however that the technical feasibility of some of the lines may not be very good and **we prioritise the construction of new metro lines with a robust technical feasibility and the highest passenger volume potentials.** In places where it seems not feasible or extremely difficult to build the metro lime, a surface tram or RER-like system can be explored as an alternative.

In addition to the internal urban rail network of Brussels, we also propose to **improve connectivity to other regions in Belgium.** For example, we want a rail solution (metro line, tram or light rail) from Brussels to Leuven via Tervuren. One of the options is to expand metro line 5 from Herman-Debroux to Leuven via Tervuren and Bertem. This also creates massive sustainable housing opportunities on this axis between Leuven and Brussels and can upgrade those regions. If the expansion of metro 5 to Leuven seems not feasible, then we should opt for a tram or light rail connection.
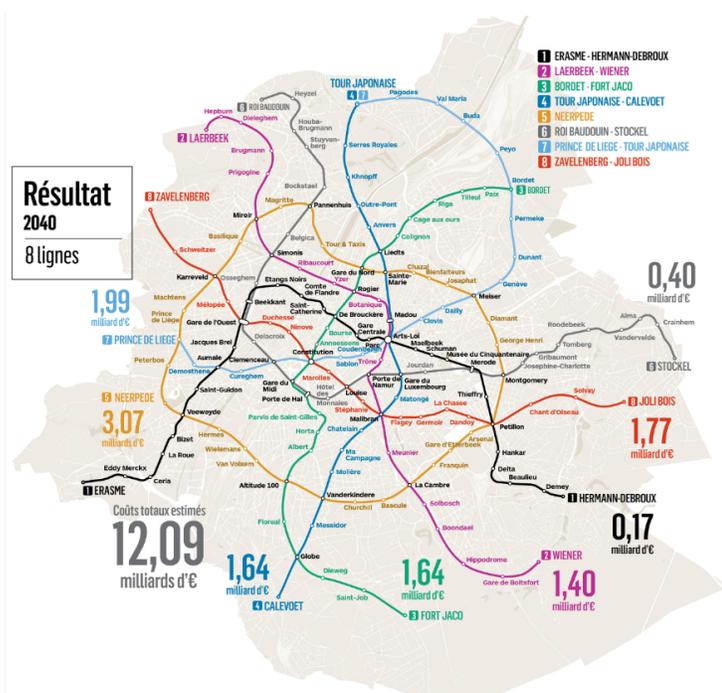

Figure: The Metro solution discussed in the article of L'echo. We see this as an idealistic end goal, but want to **prioritise lines with the highest passenger volume, modal shift potentials and robust technical feasibility.**

Funding: The congestion tax (see Electoral Priority 2) we will introduce, will gather an additional revenue of 0,5 billion euros/year or € 7,5 billion over the next 15 years. We propose to spend € 5 billion into metro and other

urban rail infrastructure during the next 15 years in addition to the already allocated and planned budget. In addition, we ask for co-funding from other regional governments, the national government, the European Commission and the private sector.

Main Proposal 3: Resilient and sustainable water infrastructure to mitigate droughts and floods

Scientific research demonstrates that the single most effective measure to reduce both droughts and floods is to reduce the percentage of concrete surface. This will foster percolation of the water to the lower water tables. This enables to increase the water reserve in periods of droughts (much more than reducing water consumption) and also increases the amount of rainwater infiltrating, reducing the risk of floods. This should be thoroughly reflected in all infrastructure projects.

 In cities, reducing space for parkings and cars, and in rural areas converting more agricultural land to forests, as well stimulating people to have grassland and trees as much as possible on their domain are specific measures on how to reach this goal

The Regional government should start with **awareness campaigns to raise the importance of infiltration for mitigating both drought and floods.**

In addition, existing **water infrastructure**, such as rivers, canals and dams, should be made more resilient and flexible to deal with more extreme flooding and drought circumstances. Specifically for Brussels, we investigate the possibilities to **open up underground parts of the Zenne river to the surface** in a green pedestrianised atmosphere, following best European practices of Ghent and Utrecht.

Electoral Priority 2: Mobility and Public Transport

The issue of traffic congestion and its negative impact on society is a growing concern in many regions, and Brussels is no exception. The excessive use of cars not only leads to financial losses and traffic incidents but also contributes to poor air quality and urban sprawl. To address these challenges, the government/region must reevaluate its mobility plan and shift towards more sustainable and eco-friendly modes of transportation. Alongside affordable public transport and better operational management of existing train and public transport systems, building more bicycle lanes and facilitating bicycle sharing, 24/7 urban public transport, electric car sharing systems, congestion pricing, and monthly car-free Sundays are essential elements in the mix. By embracing a more holistic approach to mobility, Brussels can create more livable and sustainable cities, reduce costs, and drive economic growth, all while improving the health and well-being of its citizens.

Main Proposal 1: 24/7 affordable public urban rail transport in Brussels & suburbs

(1) Implementing the success of European best practices in Brussels. Brussels can still learn a lot to further improve its public transport system. In Copenhagen Metro runs 24/7 and in Prague trams run 24/7. While there is a night network of buses within Brussels, expanding operating metro hours of the tram or metro system to 24/7 offers considerably increased comfort for passengers, providing us as citizens more freedom while cutting carbon and pollution emissions by generating a modal shift. In the first instance, we propose, similar to Prague, to make the tram network operate 24/7 with an option to extend this to the metro system after technical feasability analysis.

(2) We want existing public transportation to be affordable. For "De Lijn", "MIVB" and "TEC" we propose 4 categories of passes: hourly passes of €1, daypasses of €3, monthly passes of € 15 and annual passes of € 150.. We want to keep the reduced € 12 tariff for local public transport in Brussels for young people and elderly. We also work together with all transportation companies to establish a cross-company pass that is valid in the entirety of Belgium. An annual national rail pas is available for €250, and a combined rail pass for national railways and local transport within Brussels for € 350 annually

Main Proposal 2: Increased rollout of bicycle-sharing systems and electric-car-sharing systems.

(1) We stimulate bike ownership and at the federal level we take measures to reduce bicycle costs, by reducing VAT to 0% for bike purchases and bike maintenance. In addition, it should be very easy and convenient to get a bicycle in other places where you don't live, without taking your own bike. We incentivise bicycle-sharing systems in all cities with more than 50K inhabitants and to improve existing systems to make them more user-friendly. This could be integrated into services of regional/ local public transport operators.

(2) Support and Expand Electric-Car-Sharing Systems. A private car is parked 23 hours a day and can stimulate unnecessary car use.It also absorbs during all these hours, parking space which is scarce public space. We need to shift to electric-car-sharing systems. One shared car takes 5 to 12 privately-owned cars from the road, because being part of a car-sharing system will reduce car-overuse, while being convenient and affordable. No more worrying about maintenance, insurance or parking. You can simply enjoy the ride, knowing that you're doing your part to make the world a better place. You might just find that a combination of cycling, public transportation and electric car sharing systems are the perfect match for you.and much more convenient that it may see at first hand. Of course, at first those systems are more feasible in urban and suburban areas, and residential cores of smaller municipalities and not in remote rural areas. That's where we want to start with it.

Main Proposal 3: Congestion charges in cities with an urban rail network.

We propose a congestion charge of €2.5 per hour for the inner city center of Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp and Charleroi, with a 90% discount for residents living within these areas, so they will barely pay anything (e.g. to do groceries) within their neighborhood. The charge will discourage individuals from outside the city from using a car, and encourage the use of public transport or park and ride options. No registration is needed and once-a-month billing will be handled automatically through technical solutions (e.g. ANPR cameras).

The successful implementation of congestion charge zones in London, Stockholm, and Gothenburg led to significant reductions in traffic congestion, air pollution, and improvements in public

transportation usage. For example, in London, the congestion charge zone resulted in a 30% decrease in traffic congestion, 38% increase in public transport use, considerable increases in walking and cycling, a decrease of traffic collisions and fatalities by 40 per month and a decrease in air pollution by over 25%. This is resulting in lower healthcare and social security costs for taxpayers due to less sick leave, medication, and hospitalisations for conditions such as heart attacks, cancer, and asthma exacerbations.

This proposal will generate a minimum of €500 million annually, which will be stored into a lock box and allocated to improve bicycle, urban rail, and light rail infrastructure. An independent panel of experts, scientists and citizens can choose new sustainable transport projects for which the money can be used.

The goal is to reduce the negative health effects of road transport while also benefiting car drivers with reduced congestion and travel times.

Main Proposal 4: Volt proposes to implement a monthly car-free Sunday in all Belgian cities with a population of > 50 000 inhabitants

We propose monthly car-free Sundays in all Belgian cities with population > 50k to promote healthy, livable cities and create awareness of environmental and health burdens of car dependency. Traffic-related air pollution can be reduced by 50-80% on car-free Sundays compared to average Sundays, leading to public health and environmental benefits such as increased physical activity and less space occupation by cars. It also boosts the local economy and provides joyful activities and events. Pedestrians and cyclists can enjoy the city more than ever, traveling on roads that are otherwise dangerous and difficult to cross. On a car-free Sunday, large parts of cities can be transformed from places where people only want to pass through to places where people actually love being. In addition, car-free Sundays can strongly boost the local economy. Free public transport should be available on car-free Sundays. Gradual evolution towards the end goal can start with progressing from zero or one car-free Sunday per year to one car-free sunday per season or each month during spring and summer. A corrective referendum can be organised at the local level 12 months after implementation of monthly car-free Sundays to confirm or reject continuing with the proposal, as research shows higher support after implementation, people should first experience the situation before making a final decision.

Electoral Priority 3: Tax Justice

Main proposal 1: Introduction of the job bonus in Brussels

Currently in Flanders, the job bonus is an annual bonus of max € 600/year for people earning below 2500 EUR bruto. We expand this currently Flemish system to Brussels and Wallonia. We want to increase the job bonus to max € 1000 / year and make it eligible for everyone with a net salary below 3500 EUR (bruto), with gradual steps (the lower the income, the higher the bonus).

This proposal can become self-financing because it's part of our plan to increase the **activity rate of the Belgian population as much as possible.** The purpose of the proposal is

In addition, we support the plans to oblige people between jobs who are still jobless after a period of 12 months to do community work 12 hours a week. This community work can also be in private companies: we will develop a platform where private and public companies can request community workers. **Community work for 12 hours a week still allows them to spend considerable time on finding a real permanent job.** In certain cases, if the jobless person can demonstrate they are following educational courses for more than 12 hours/week that will help them by finding a next job, the community work can be reduced from 12 to 6 hours per week during maximum 24 months.

Main Proposal 2: Increased efforts against corruption, fiscal fraud, tax evasion and social fraud.

The issue of fiscal and social fraud in Belgium is one that affects us all. Every year, the government loses billions of euros in revenue due to fraudulent activity. For fiscal fraud alone, this is estimated to cost more than 30 billion euro annually (1). It is time that we take a stand and tackle this problem head-on. The funds lost to fraud could be used to improve our communities, invest in education, invest in infrastructure, rail and public transport, lower taxes on labor and have a more fair tax system for everyone and provide essential services to those in need. Most of the fiscal fraud combating efforts have to be done on the federal level, but also The regions can do their part combating social fraud and other forms of fraud that are (partially) their responsibility.

Main Proposal 3: Reduce avoidable diseases & deaths from pollution & behavioural factors

Wood stoves and cars have a billion-euro societal cost per year. For cars, it exceeds € 20 billion per year (environmental costs + congestion) and for wood stoves it's estimated to be €2,6 billion per year.

For **cars**, we propose congestion charging and Low Emission Zones (LEZ) in cities, supporting the expansion of LEZ in Brussels. By 2035, we will phase out the sale of fossil fuel and hybrid cars in line with the EU proposal. Reducing car use remains vital for ecological, health, and economic benefits.

Regarding **wood stoves**, we propose mandatory registration to create a data-driven inventory. From 2025 to 2035, only modern pellet stoves with a <1g/hour particulate matter limit will be allowed in Brussels (checked by real-practice tests to avoid a second Dieselgate scandal). By 2035, no new wood stoves will be permitted due to alternative, eco-friendlier heating options.

We advocate for regional and EU cooperation to tackle pollution that transcends borders. In addition, Local communities can take action against high PM2.5 or NO2 levels. Our goal is to meet WHO air pollution guidelines of 5 µg/m³ PM 2.5 exposure and 10 µg/m³ NO2 exposure.

Additionally, city mobility policies should promote active transport and physical activity to combat obesity. We recommend cautious permitting of fast-food chains near schools and stimulate incentives for healthy food environments.

Main Proposal 4: Boosting the Circular Economy in the regions

The circular economy envisions a resource-efficient society inspired by nature, where waste from one ecosystem becomes a resource for another. This system, though sometimes wasteful, fosters abundance and resilience. Our response to the Covid crisis highlights the need for effectiveness over efficiency. We should embrace this model as the world grows more volatile, treating economies as ecosystems, not linear machines, to avoid past mistakes.

This policy aims to create the infrastructure for circular economic ecosystems in Belgium. Governments can't do this alone but can facilitate conditions. We propose a Circularity Grading System for all for-profit activities, starting with large corporations, then SMEs, and finally small businesses. Companies self-assess and have years to improve their grade; non-compliance results in a progressive circularity tax. Close collaboration with the EU is essential.

To encourage innovation and entrepreneurship in the circular economy, we propose state-backed bank loans of €500k -> €3M for startups and companies contributing to circularity. This ambitious subsidy program will be funded by the circularity tax mentioned earlier.

Electoral Priority 4: Energy Transition

It is universally accepted that transitioning away from fossil fuels is vital for the future of humanity and indeed the world as we know it. Volt proposes a pragmatic approach based on a combination of nuclear energy and renewable energies, with the latter taking a growing portion of our energy production over the years.

This will achieve the following three objectives:

1) **Protection of the environment** - The climate is rapidly changing and requires a transition to sources of clean energy that do not produce greenhouse gas, directly or indirectly, especially if Belgium is going to play an active role in reaching the Paris Agreement targets.

2) **Affordability for everyone** - Everyone should be able to have access to affordable energy to cater for their basic needs. This means developing means for governments, in particular the Belgian government, to control prices. We believe that this will be possible by regulating consumption, developing storage and efficient usage mechanisms.

3) **Security of energy supplies** - Belgium needs to ensure as much energetic security as possible. A balance between foreign policy, EU policies and national policies has to be found. As a pan-european party Volt can contribute to find the right balance. At the same time it needs to contribute to a more favourable EU energy sharing policy.

Mechanisms to reduce fluctuations in the production and the consumption of energy should be developed. This will require the private and public sectors to adapt. The Belgian government needs to step in and ensure this transition is done swiftly yet smoothly.

Regarding **Nuclear Energy,** whih is elaborated in our energy proposals for the federal election, Volt Belgium proposes to keep existing nuclear reactors operational as long as it is safe and feasible, as it guarantees energy independence, is resource-efficient, emits no CO_2 or harmful emissions, and has a stable cost structure. We want to repeal the law that forbids future nuclear energy and create a new legislative framework for nuclear power that promotes recycling of spent fuel, contributes more to the federal budget for R&D, and commits to a long-term strategy for radioactive waste at a European level. These are core proposals for the federal energy policy, while this document will focus on the proposal for regional energy policy.

Main proposal 1: More solar & wind energy, especially where space-efficient

Belgium should support the deployment of infrastructure necessary for the production of low CO_2 renewable energy, in collaboration with other EU countries. It should actively contribute to the establishment of an EU-based supply-chain of equipment necessary for the production of renewable energies in Europe. The current dependency on manufacturers located outside the EU

makes Belgium and other EU countries vulnerable to geopolitical tensions. In addition, we can bring the manufacturing of the new green infrastructure into the EU. This would allow Belgium and the EU to apply higher standards, thus significantly lowering the carbon footprint of the renewable energy supply chain. And this would create jobs in Europe.

Belgium should further contribute to the European energy supply through the accelerated development of wind farms, both in-land and off-shore. Hydraulic energy (Hydro-power) should be further developed, and solar panels should be used for private dwellings as well as industrial complexes. Belgian industries and households should also adapt so that the energy consumption is concentrated when there is an excess of production.

Main Proposal 2: A better integrated energy grid for Belgium and it's regions within the EU and internationally

Volt believes that it is essential to further integrate the Belgian grid with the European electricity grid, in order to ensure a stable supply of energy thanks to various sources. A pan-European approach is indeed essential as it is in many other domains. In order to guarantee the provision of energy a given supplier should not cover more than 10% of the total demand.

Investments should be directed towards the rapid development of sources of renewable energy and storage technology (such as hydrogen) in Europe. If it involves poorer nations, the energy supply should be linked to their economic development, to avoid any new risk of exploitation. This could apply for instance to solar farms in Africa.

Volt believes that economic and societal development will only be possible if stable energy supply and consumption are achieved in a sustainable manner. This is why Volt wants to maintain the production of nuclear energy in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It also intends to

massively invest in renewable energy and storage technologies. This is only achievable through integration of supply and demand at a European level. Volt believes that Belgium can play an important role thanks to its central location. Future generations across Europe are counting on us to lay the foundation for a better and more sustainable future.

In addition, we want to prolong the operation of existing nuclear power plants and repeal the law that forbids future nuclear power. As this is a federal competency, those policies are comprehensively discussed in the federal electoral program.

Electoral Priority 5: Education

For Volt, education is the tool of choice to promote social mobility and inclusion and to foster a united and dynamic democracy based on open, pluralistic societies. Society needs well educated and empowered people of all kinds for it to function well. Education is therefore not only a 'right' for individuals but also an 'obligation' society owes itself to organize it in the best possible way. To ensure that schools are inspiring, safe, ready for the modern world, attractive, and stimulating workplaces for all students, Volt believes that education in Belgium should focus on fighting inequality, promoting innovative teaching approaches and empowering teachers to make this happen. Although Belgium invests heavily in education compared to most European countries, performance inequality amongst students, schools and regions is high and increasing. Volt wants to fight for equalized learning opportunities with a set of evidence based proposals. Moreover, we are convinced that the fragmentation of education along ideological lines hinders the adoption of innovative and transformative teaching approaches as implemented successfully in some other

European countries. Finally, such transition is only possible if teachers feel more supported, empowered and valorized in their job.

Thus, Volt Belgium Education policy program is divided in 3 thematic blocks:

- ❖ Equalize learning opportunities in education
- ❖ Empower teachers in their profession
- ❖ Promote transformative teaching

Main Proposal 1: Equalize learning opportunities in education

Situation: The impact of poverty on school results in Belgium is considerably high. The OECD, in their PISA reports, have for years pointed out that Belgium has one of the highest levels of education inequality of all OECD countries. By the time they are 15, children from the poorest 25% of families lag 3 years behind their rich peers from the top 25%. To combat inequality stretching over generations we have three concrete proposals.

<u>**Our proposals to reduce educational inequality**</u>:

- **Supply free lunches at school:** Providing free lunches at school helps to ensure that all students have access to a healthy diet, which is an important factor for their physical and cognitive development. We would like to achieve this through more governmental funding, in cooperation with the various educational networks and by promoting partnerships with local organizations and/or businesses. Other measures to improve school meals include offering a variety of healthy food options, promoting nutrition education, and involving students in menu planning.
- **Cut school bills for families living in poverty:** We propose to cut school bills for families living below the poverty line (€2,868 per month for a family with two adults and two children). This will especially have an impact on families with children going to secondary schools, where yearly bills pile up to €1300 on average. Currently it falls on schools themselves to keep their

bills payable, resulting in forcing them to cut expenses. This is detrimental to extramural activities and (cultural) events. Thus, inequality is bad for all students.

- **Increase digitalization - no child left behind:** The lack of digital access and skills among some school-aged children and parents is leaving them behind. We aim at expanding affordable internet access for households with school-aged children through regulations in partnership with ISPs (internet service providers), ensuring that all students have access to a device with updated software, either through leasing, private purchase, joint purchases, or reuse of PCs. Preserve and enhance the increased use of online streaming for students unable to attend in-person classes, as was implemented during the Covid pandemic.

- **Reduce school dropout:** High dropout rates lead to a less educated and skilled workforce, which has negative consequences for the economy and the society. To reduce dropout rates, we want to provide more academic support and tutoring to struggling students, offer alternative education options such as vocational training or online learning, and address the root causes of dropout such as poverty, bullying, or mental health issues.

  Additionally, we think it is time to challenge the traditional ways of schooling. Not all children succeed in a system focused on theoretical learning. This results in them dropping out of school at the age of 18, without a degree. Thus we must make sure that alternative courses (e.g. VDAB courses) are also available, known and respected as options. Similar to Germany or Switzerland, vocational training should be seen as a valuable choice.

- **Make tutoring more affordable for those in need:** Volt wants to make tutoring after school hours available and more affordable, especially for students in a financially difficult situation who cannot afford private tutoring. We cannot expect parents to be experts in all school subjects. Having students fall behind in the classroom also puts teachers under pressure. They will be forced to either take on extra workload (for free), slow down their pace or give up on some students. Although we want to encourage teachers (financially) to take up the role of after school tutor, we cannot expect them to do this on their own and we want to make sure that the means are available to hire additional staff.

- **Increase support to schools with a high concentration of students in need:** It is important to strengthen schools that have a higher concentration of students with extra needs. We want to encourage teachers to apply for jobs in schools situated within lower income neighborhoods by

offering them a bonus. This has been done successfully in Amsterdam, where teachers receive a bonus and an 8% increase in salary if they choose a school with a high number of students that need extra help. We must, however, make sure that disadvantaged students do not suffer further setbacks because of a lack of teachers and to show that teachers choosing to take on a more challenging job are valued.

- **Expand free preschool & kindergarten:** Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly those that do not speak the language of their school education at home, benefit from an earlier start in pre-school. Research shows that an earlier start in education reduces school dropouts and inequality in the future has positive effects on social behavior (OECD PISA). Since the cost of pre-school is already low and there are financial incentives to encourage school attendance, we need to look at other incentives to encourage parents to enroll their children at a lower age. We want to Increase enrollment in preschool, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds by providing free preschool for children from low socio-economic families, including a free lunch, and engage with parents to promote the benefits of preschool.

- **Enhance lifelong learning:** Volt is a firm believer that education is crucial for personal and professional growth and places a strong emphasis on the value of lifelong learning. The goal is to create a more skilled workforce and a stronger economy by fostering a culture of ongoing education. This is particularly important for individuals who did not have access to quality education in their youth. By promoting lifelong learning, Volt seeks to reduce poverty and create a more equitable and inclusive society. However, in Belgium, only 20% of working adults participate in additional training, which is lower compared to similar countries. We propose investing in lifelong learning by making educational opportunities more financially and time-wise accessible and equitable for adults through institutions such as universities, technical schools, and community centers. Empower unemployed or underemployed individuals by offering education and training opportunities instead of punishment. Existing lifelong learning opportunities should be better promoted, as there exist various (often affordable) lifelong learning opportunities at universities, language institutes and other institutions, but many of those initiatives are not well known.

- **Increase cooperation between the public and the catholic education systems:** Since both systems are partially funded by the government, this proposal aims at cutting costs by improving efficiency to fund a portion of the policies that focus on reducing educational inequality.

Main proposal 2: Empower teachers in their profession

Situation: The success of education policies lies in the valorization of the teaching profession. A focus on the career development and support of teachers is crucial for improving education outcomes. By prioritizing teacher training and making higher education more suitable for teacher formation, we can ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively educate future generations. Only by valuing the important role teachers play in education, the policies proposed will be effective in creating a successful education system.

Our proposals to increase teacher's satisfaction:

- **Reinforce teachers as the actors of change within education:** It is important to give teachers agency, as the current problem with schools being too focussed on the 'as is' - performance level of students' is not effective, according to observers who cite this as the reason for the low academic standards. Moreover, they oppose the idea of schools resembling private entities as schools are fundamentally different from companies.

- **Make teachers' jobs more flexible**: We propose to reform the current systems that benefit part-time working into a fluent scale of salary, that rewards doing more hours and make it a free choice to do less hours for a still acceptable salary. Thus, teachers going the extra mile will be financially rewarded. This will make the profession competitive with other fields. If the schools are lacking qualified teachers on certain topics, this system also enables external experts and professionals to teach for a limited number of hours besides their main profession.

- **Reform teacher training**: The complaint that being a teacher is a lot of administration and lacking freedom, starts in their training. Teachers-to-be (those attending a bachelor in teaching) are subjected to write out multiple pages for each given hour of class. The training should help

trainees to get a grip on their class material, become experts in the topics they are going to teach, and focus on practical experience in front of a classroom. This is how to keep the love for teaching alive.

Main proposal 3: Promote transformative teaching

Situation: Society and technology have been evolving at lightning speed over the last decades and so should education. The current educational system in Belgium though has only slowly adapted. It is characterized by a strong fragmentation along ideological lines and a traditional approach on teaching and testing, rooted in a 19th century vision on knowledge transfer. However, with better understanding of alternative innovative teaching methods and today's advancements in digitization, the internet and AI (such as ChatGPT), Volt believes there is an urgent need and opportunity to fundamentally transform education in Belgium. This transformation should contribute not only to a more meaningful experience of teaching and studying but also to society as a whole with better educated and empowered people

Our proposals to promote transformative teaching:

- **Encourage innovative and future-oriented approaches in teaching:** Some of these teaching methods are project-based learning, peer-to-peer learning, competence-based education, circular learning, and digital capabilities like AI and virtual teamwork. We suggest measuring the success of schools by tracking student enrollment and dropout rates, staff retention and professional development, and school connectivity via funding. These innovative approaches are intended to create a more engaging and effective learning environment, with an emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and entrepreneurship.

- **Promote more critical thinking, media literacy and entrepreneurial mindset in schools:** To equip students with essential skills to thrive in the modern world, we advocate for integrating critical thinking and media literacy, which are crucial in a society where reliable

sources of information are scarce and fake news is rampant.

Additionally, we want to promote the development of entrepreneurship skills, including risk-taking and resilience to foster a success-based mindset. Finally, we suggest promoting English as a third language to improve communication across European countries and beyond. Together, these skills will better prepare students for success in the rapidly changing job market.

Electoral Priority 6: Climate Change Mitigation

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing our modern civilization. Europe is no exception. The European Union has already committed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.[1] Reaching those targets on time will require massive efforts from all, individuals, communities, businesses and governments. Volt Europa has set the goal of becoming climate neutral by 2040 and by such will have to sustain key strategic policies, some of them unpopular, costly and/or even at times controversial, over long periods of time, if we wish to reach those targets.

This exercise is all the more delicate for two other major reasons. First, there is no guarantee that making a country ecologically sustainable and free from fossil fuel dependence will allow people to keep a dignified and good quality of life.

It is believed that economic and ecological prosperity can go hand in hand. For instance, investing in sustainable infrastructure, such as railways, can cut carbon emissions while at the same time boost economic growth. But failing to find the right balance between achieving net zero carbon emissions and making sure people continue having dignified and proper quality of life is potentially a cause for rising populism.

Second, keeping global temperature rise under 2°C is a global effort. As of today, is it highly unlikely that China, India and many other developing countries will engage as seriously as Europe to reach these targets. Therefore, while Europe does its best to prepare for a fossil fuel free world, it is imperative for Belgium to prepare for the most problematic consequences of climate change. On the other hand, we also highly focus on climate change policies that

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[1] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/climate-change/paris-agreement/

are also beneficial for the Belgian population from other perspectives than the climate perspective such as Public Health and Economy.

With these elements in mind, Volt Belgium's 2024 Climate Change Mitigation Campaign Policy is articulated around two major parts:

1. Reaching the Paris Agreement targets the smart responsible way
2. Preparing for the consequences of climate change

I. Reaching the Paris Agreement Targets[2]
A. Overall Strategy

Overall, addressing climate change requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach, involving not just Europe but the entire global community.

Share of EU greenhouse gas emission by source, 2017
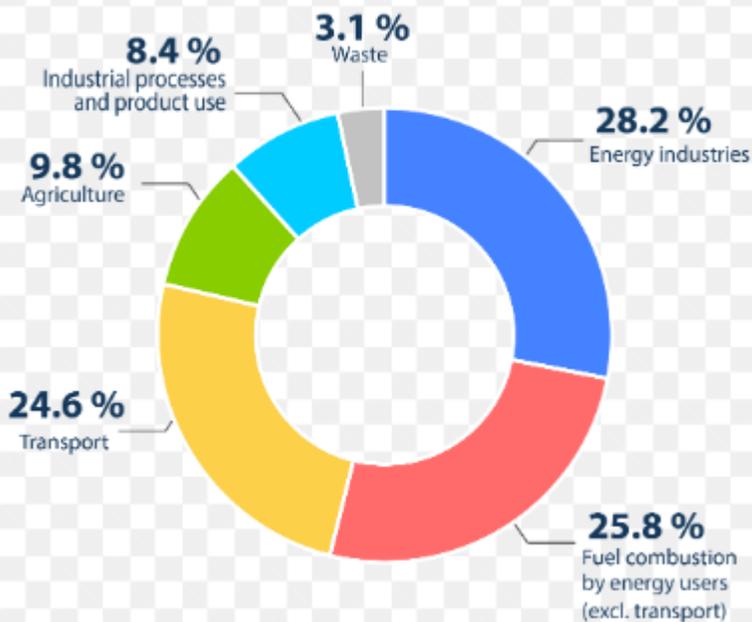
In Europe, the most important contributors to carbon emissions are the transportation sector (around 25% of which 72% from cars), energy sector (>=25%), fuel combustion excl. Transport (>=25%) and agriculture (10%).

In most sectors, there is a decrease in emissions during the last decades (however insufficient) - except for the transportation sector where the emissions still increase. At the same time, forests serve as a carbon sink.

Europe in general, and Belgium in particular, can play a leading role in tackling this challenge by prioritising the following strategic points (other electoral priorities): investments in green infrastructure, sustainable mobility, a tax structure to support circular economy and greener consoumption patterns, a smart energy transition and creating carbon sinks, supporting biodiversity.

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[2] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/5-facts-eu-climate-neutrality/

Greenhouse gas emissions by sector, Belgium
Emissions are measured in carbon dioxide equivalents (CO2eq). This means non-CO2 gases are weighted by the amount of warming they cause over a 100-year timescale.
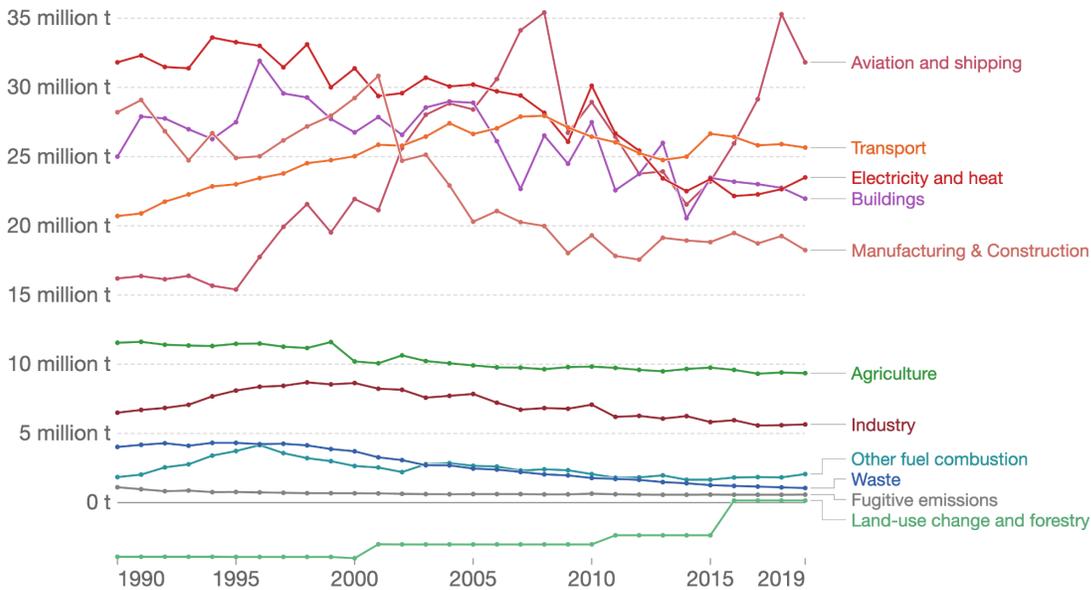
Source: Our World in Data based on Climate Analysis Indicators Tool (CAIT).
OurWorldInData.org/co2-and-other-greenhouse-gas-emissions • CC BY

B. Creating Carbon Sinks by Supporting Biodiversity in Forestry and Agriculture
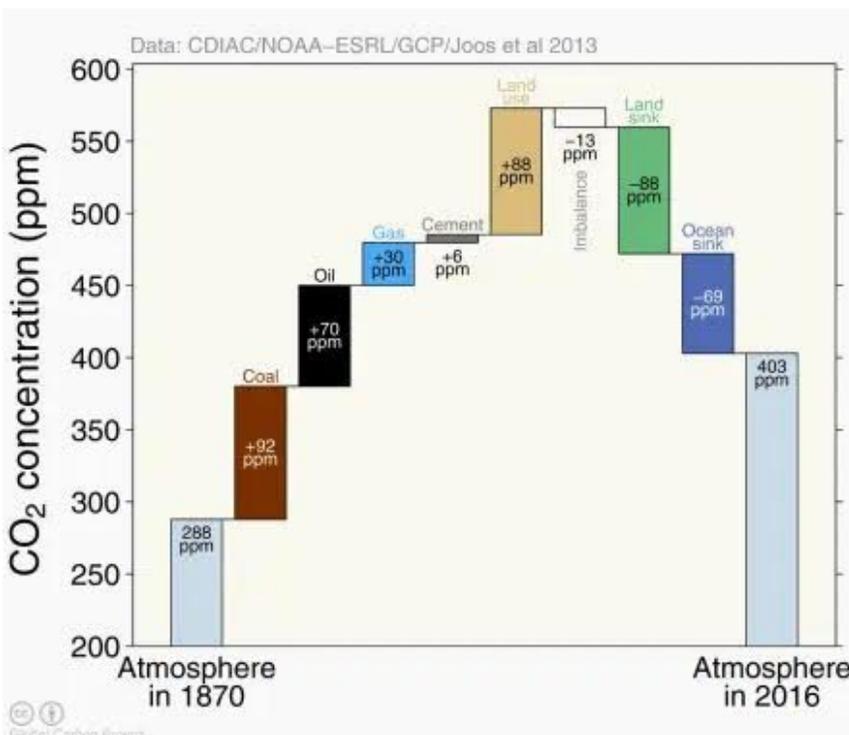
As one can see in the diagram next by, carbon sinks can be divided in two categories:

- Ocean sink
- Land sink

What is interesting to note is that despite oceans covering 70% of the planet, they are doing less than 50% of the carbon sink job.

To think that the leftover 30%, the planet's exposed lands, is responsible for the other 50% of carbon sinking is wrong. It is only a small fraction of those lands that contribute to removing CO_2 from the atmosphere. These are forests, wetlands and the rich soils filled with carbon based micro organisms who are responsible for this carbon sequestration. Combined, they represent around 10% of our planet's surface. Then parallel to land sinks, there is agriculture. Agriculture is globally responsible for 80% of all deforestation, 70% of the water extracted from nature, 60% of biodiversity loss and ⅓ of all greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, we also acknowledge that for example electric cars, who drive mostly on lithium batteries, also cause carbon emissions through deforestation for lithium mining: this carbon emissions from electric cars are often neglected in online calculation and comparison tools. While Electric Cars over lifetime, while taking into account the deforestation carbon emissions, emit less than fossil fuel cars, they are far from as efficient in reducing CO2 emissions as public transport especially railways and slow transport such as bicycles. Lithium mining for electric cars already surpasses lithium mining for all consumer electronics together, and the lithium mining for the batteries for electric vehicles is expected to rise further exponentially.

Understanding that less than 10% of our planet's surface is doing more than 50% of the job for removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and that agriculture is the major force behind natural habitat degradation should help people understand how important forestry, biodiversity and agriculture are when dealing with climate change, similar to the energy transition itself, if not more, as countless other living creatures depend on it.[3]

Illustrated another way: focusing only on reducing CO_2 emission, is like cleaning one's car only from the outside. One is forgetting to clean the inside as well. And, in a similar way, washing the inside of your car requires different tools.

It is not only about planting trees. It is about creating ecosystems. Therefore, it is crucial to find the right balance between two complementary policies, those that support and empower existing natural ecosystems and those that promote new forms of agriculture.

II.   Policies
    A. **Supporting Smart Forestry and Natural Habitat Policies**
        1. The Belgium Federal Government needs to take the necessary steps for protecting **the nature of 30% of its surface**. To reach this, Volt BE proposes a national plan to ensure that:
            a) By 2040, 10% of the country's surface falls under a "Natural Preservation Act"
                (1) no human activity other than authorised and strictly regulated:
                    (a) Eco-tourism

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[3] Note that this number is gradually shifting towards oceans as deforestations continues to grow

(b) Academic / educational trainings

(c) Scientific research (private or public)

b) By 2040, a minimum of 10% of the country's surface needs to fall under the "Sustainably Conservation of Natural Habitats Act"

(1) A series of human activities are allowed as long as they contribute to maintaining existing ecological balances.

(a) Such activities include:

(i) Regulated hunting

(ii) Logging as a form of forestry maintenance

(iii) Specific forms of agroforestry and of agriculture

(iv) Recreational parks

(v) Private / public housing

(vi) Ecotourism

c) By 2040, an additional 10% of the country's surface needs to be properly reforested (ecosystem re-building)

(1) This surface will to be added to the "sustainability conserved natural habitat" category or "preserved natural habitat" if that is achievable

(2) This surface will be pilot lands for innovative agro-forestry projects and/or agriculture related circular economy initiatives[4]

d) Reaching these targets means running a nation wide mapping of existing natural habitats in order to identify the places where these policies will be best applicable.

e) The carbon sequestration potential of those lands will then be calculated and converted into a CO_2 subsidy

f) In the case of exceptional ecosystems, an additional biodiversity subsidy will be granted to the land owner

2. In collaboration with the regional governments, eco-tourism is an activity that is attracting more and more people every year. The regional governments will be invited to create a complementary ecotourism development plan, to support the federal initiatives aimed at developing preservation and conservation areas.

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[4] the activity needs to have a significant measurable carbon sink element to it that is equal or superior to preserved areas

Electoral Priority 7: Equal Opportunities

Main Proposal 1 Systemic Inclusion - an essential ingredient for a healthy Belgian democracy

Our European Union is founded upon the values of Respect for human dignity, Freedom, Democracy, Equality, Rule of law, and Respect for human rights, including those of minorities. To realise a society built on these values, Volt is committed to advance policies that lead to Belgium being a systematically inclusive society that offers equal opportunities for all. Systemic inclusion is of high importance as such a society would be beneficial to all Belgians.

The importance lies in different dimensions. First off there is the ethical dimension, where we refer to Art. 23 of The Belgian Constitution[5], stating that everyone has the right to lead a life in keeping with human dignity, as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights[6], whose purpose is to promote human rights within the EU territory. A life of dignity is one which is fully lived, and where society enables individuals to reach their full potential without any undue barriers.

For the social dimension we identify many consequences for not including a part of the society: individuals who are excluded from society face increased threat to their personal security, they are often forced into a life of crime or live in neighbourhoods with higher crime rates, disadvantaged communities, which often face challenges such as brain drain, emigration, social conflict, expansion of slums, instability, urban violence, divided societies, and violent conflict, etc.[7]

A final dimension, which we identified as equally important, is the economical one. Promotion of social equality is sometimes perceived as very costly and not worth the benefits.[8] Yet the IMF has identified that the opportunity cost to the French economy alone is equal to 1,5% of the nation's GDP over 20 years.[9] Furthermore, many countries that achieve relatively equal societies demonstrate stronger economic competitiveness.[10] Social inclusion can also be seen as an opportunity cost as a diverse workforce is more creative, innovative and understands the needs of the market better.[11]

Main Proposal 2 Tackling inequities in all spheres of life and policies

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[5] https://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/pdf_sections/publications/constitution/GrondwetUK.pdf

[6] https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/government_in_ireland/european_government/eu_law/charter_of_fundamental_rights.html

[7] https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/compilation-brochure.pdf

[8] https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/compilation-brochure.pdf

[9] The Economic Cost of Racism – IMF F&D

[10] Therborn, G. (2007) Presentation. Expert Group Meeting on Creating and Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration. Paris, France, 10 - 13 September 2007

[11] https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/compilation-brochure.pdf

To build a systemically inclusive society, we must understand how systemic exclusion occurs in the first place. Exclusion is the product of a variety of contributing factors, from inherited obstacles such as the living conditions of the family and surroundings we are born in, to access to education and support whilst in education, and upon completion of one's education, access to the labour market and a workplace, where we can bring our full self, and be supported to achieve. It can be affected by external factors such as where we live, who we encounter, the services we must interact with, and the biases of those who provide these services, and these factors accumulate over time.

Exclusion and discrimination are experienced differently and individuals may face discrimination on not just one, but multiple aspects of themselves. Building a systemically inclusive society therefore requires applying both a multi-dimensional as well as an intersectional lens that accounts for the existence of contributing factors that lead to exclusion, but also to the diversity of lived experiences that may mean that for some individuals some factors are more affecting than others. Public policies aiming to build a systemically inclusive society will only succeed with the appreciation of this reality and the implementation of solutions that are multi-layered.

Volt Belgium champions tackling social inequity via an intersectional approach. We are convinced that intersectionality is an essential lens that must be applied in all policies aiming to ensure no one is left behind. Volt Belgium supports an effective mainstreaming of systemic inclusion, seeking for the development and adoption of comprehensive National and Regional Action Plans for Systemic Inclusion, developed in partnership with the concerned communities. These Action Plans should have measurable outcomes and targets, data should be collected to monitor effective progress by public and private actors, and measures of redress and accountability are necessary to ensure appropriate financial means are made available to carry these plans out.

The National and Regional Action Plans for Systemic Inclusion should involve all relevant ministries address the key determinants of socio-economic inequalities, including ensuring equitable access to:

- Housing and a healthy living environment,
- Good and services,
- Education,
- Labour market and an inclusive workplace
- Leisure, cultural, and sporting services
- Transportation & mobility services
- Public and social services
- Social and financial capital
- Effective protection against discrimination and enforcement of rights
- Political representation and participation

As part of implementing the action plan, an observatory for equality data collection, covering both public and private actors' equality data collection, should be established to collect comprehensive data on the prevalence of exclusion and to track progress against the indicators for success stemming from the action plans.

Volt champions the strengthening of equality and civil society bodies, that serve as intermediaries between public authorities, affected communities and individuals, by ensuring both sufficient funding for these bodies to carry out their work, but also by adopting legislative reforms that facilitate the ability of these actors to act on behalf of victims of discrimination in front of the courts.

As demonstrated by the Ukraine War, the adoption of a humane migration policy and facilitated access to the labour market can be highly effective and reduce burden on social services. Our economy benefits when we facilitate excluded individuals accessing the labour market legally. Volt champions the creation of a humane migration policy that enables new entrants to contribute fully to the economy and consequently the financing of the expanded goods and services base required by increasing the capacity of public services to process, and determine eligibility of candidate refugees, repatriate those who have no legal standing, whilst creating corridors for regularisation of individuals who have integrated into society.

Main Proposal 3 No one left behind

Volt is committed to championing policies in government that ensure that no one is left behind. Far too long, the economic cost of exclusion has been ignored or underestimated. At a time when Belgium faces numerous crises and challenges, many of the solutions that must be deployed require all Belgians to reach their full potential. As a country committed to the EU values, we will ensure that comprehensive federal, regional and provincial plans exist to tackle discriminations where they happen, but also take into account the historic, structural, and systemic causes of these discriminations. To tackle them, we champion a mainstream approach, underpinned by a comprehensive evidence base stemming from both public and private sources, and measurable targets that ensure real progress is taking place to reduce the number of people facing exclusion and discrimination. This is essential not just for victims, but also for society as a whole which ultimately suffers from the costs of exclusion.

Electoral Priority 8: Housing and City Planning

Across Europe, the rise of housing prices deprives younger generations of a life in dignity. More generally, a poorly designed city may potentially have a large impact on our health and wellbeing, with car-focused city planning being a key factor in this burden. Without clear and affirmative action, unhealthy cities will continue to make Europeans sick and create a structural and unnecessary burden on hospitals, the health sector in general, and our economy.

The cost of buying a house has seen a 45% increase between 2010 and 2022 in the EU [1]. This is especially challenging for young people who often do not possess significant capital, and struggle to get a loan.

Home ownership is sharply decreasing for young people in Europe (and more houses and wealth are accumulated in the hands of fewer, richer and often older people). For example, 62,5% Southern Europeans born between 1965 and 1979 owned a house at age 30, and this percentage has dropped to 37,5% for people born in 1980 or after [2].

City planning: Urban and Transport planning considerably influences human health and wellbeing. Around 20% of premature mortality in cities (where 70% of the population is projected to live by 2050) could be avoided if we have better urban and transportation planning in cities, with reducing the car-dependency (by investing in sustainable mobility: active and public transport; reducing space for roads and parkings) of cities and increasing green spaces, and recreation being an essential part of the urban transition towards healthier cities [3] [4].

Most young Europeans under 30 would like to buy a home [5]. After the Covid pandemic, health is still at the top of people's main concerns and priorities. Unhealthy cities are a hidden burden of disease, hospitalisations and deaths. In particular, unhealthy elements in cities, like cars, wood smoke, or industry emissions, are just as toxic to our wellbeing and to the planet's sustainability as better-known harms, such as asbestos or PFAS contamination.

Our towns and cities are more than just the built environment. They shape our daily life, our health, and our happiness. It's where we move, where we meet our friends, where we work and where we spend our free time. Belgium has some of the most beautiful cities and towns in Europe, but there are many things that we think can - and should - be done better. Here's Volt's vision for the city of the future.

Main Proposal 1: Affordable and Inclusive Housing and city planning

(1) Affordable housing

The acquisition of a home is often seen as an important step in our lives as individuals and crucial for those wishing to start a family. Not only does the lack of having a home hurt our position and chances within society, it highly affects our health as well. This is why Volt believes in the right to a home, which aims to keep the housing market more affordable while providing financial aid to those wishing to purchase their very first home. We will make concrete proposals for this looking to **European Best Practices:** we can learn from some projects that are already in place in other countries to make buying and renting a home or apartment more affordable, especially for younger people. Furthermore will the right to a home include further investments into qualitative social housing, shelters and temporary sleeping spaces.

(2) Inclusive city

Volt envisions a built environment in which every person can thrive, independently of their background, abilities or gender. Today, many barriers to inclusion remain in our public spaces, whether those are the steps which force a disabled person to take a detour, the lack of public lighting making vulnerable people avoid places at night, or the unavailability of information in languages other than the local one. Volt wants to achieve inclusive public spaces by involving associations and representatives of minorities throughout the design of large urban projects, and develop guidelines that can easily be applied by local authorities in their development projects to check for and remedy any potential barriers to inclusion.

Main Proposal 2: Healthy and Sustainable Housing and city planning

(1) Cool cities: reduce urban heat islands

Summers are getting hotter, and often cities experience much higher temperatures than nearby rural areas. This is not only uncomfortable, but can also pose a health risk for vulnerable people. Volt proposes that, instead of cooling down the inside of our cars, trains and houses using air conditioning, we start cooling down the entire city, in a natural way. We need to identify the hottest parts of our cities via heat maps and, based on this, adapt the urban area around them. This might mean the planting of trees and the greening of facades, but could also include infrastructure like fountains, sun sails and pergolas. In addition, allocating less space to roads, parkings and cars and

more space to green areas and citizen-centered spaces like meeting places and plains is part of this. To find the best mix for the local context, Volt advocates for a co-creative approach in which residents and businesses, together with city planners and experts, plan, design and create their future living space. Furthermore, new constructions and renovations should be tax incentivized to include green facades and roofs as well as other architectural elements that allow for the cooling of public spaces.

(2) Sustainable housing

Our built environment is amongst the main producers of CO2 emissions. Modern buildings reduce energy consumption via insolation and more efficient appliances. While we want to promote the building of energy efficient houses, they should not replace existing buildings. For the emissions of new constructions to be balanced out by reduced energy consumption, they need to be used for ten or twenty years, by which time new renovations (and emissions) take place. Volt therefore promotes the reuse and upgrading of existing buildings over demolition and reconstruction. We propose tax credits for the energetic renovation and reuse of unrenovated or abandoned buildings.

(3) Healthy city

As the world's population continues to grow and urbanize, it is increasingly important that we prioritize the health and well-being of our cities and their inhabitants. Studies have shown that around 20% of premature mortality in cities like Barcelona, and similar percentages are expected in Belgian cities like Brussels and Antwerp, can be attributed to environmental factors such as air pollution, lack of green spaces, and lack of physical activity. A huge amount of city space is allocated to cars, both in terms of parking lots, street parking, and cars on the roads. In contrast, public transport is much more space-efficient and can help reduce the negative health impacts associated with car-oriented urban design.

The design and functioning of cities can have a profound impact on the health and quality of life of those who live in them. With these factors contributing to negative health outcomes, it is vital that we take a holistic approach to urban design that places health at the center. To reach this goal, specific policies and measures should be implemented, such as promoting active transportation options like cycling and walking, increasing green spaces and parks, implementing regulations to reduce air pollution, and incorporating health impact assessments into urban planning decisions. The advantages of these policy measures include improved health and well-being, increased safety

for cyclists, and a more livable, sustainable community for all. By creating health-promoting cities, we can improve the lives of millions and create more sustainable, livable communities for generations to come.

Four very specific measures here are (1) expansion of low-emission zones to all cities (which can be similar to the current Brussels model) (2) the introduction of low emissions zones for wood stoves in addition to cars as besides traffic, which is in general the most dominant source of air pollution exposure, wood stoves also create unacceptable high particulate matter exposure in residential areas (3) the obligation to implement health impact assessment in urban and spatial planning assessments like MER and (4) a fair allocation of space in cities, with a maximum % of space that may be allocated for cars (roads and parkings) and minimum percentages for green areas, recreational areas, pedestrians, cyclists and public transportation.

(4) Clean city

Clean urban spaces increase appeal and use of amenities such as parks, playgrounds and transport. At the moment, two issues influence the cleanliness of our cities: trash collection and littering. Trash bags lying in the street the day before pickup are not only an eyesore, but also create problems with animals and diseases. The same goes for the absence of sufficient numbers of public trash bins, which incites littering and leads to the need to frequently clean our public spaces. Volt proposes to combat this at the source: Install central underground trash collection points in every other road, and increase the number of modern trash bins in our public spaces. Furthermore, we propose an obligation for new and renovated houses to include central trash collection rooms as it is already standard in many other european countries.

Electoral Priority 9.A. : Reform Brussels

Currently, Brussels is multi-layered and inefficient. There is the Brussels-Capital Region, with the competencies of regions, with a parliament and a government (minister-president). The provincial competencies are shared by the *Hoge ambtenaar van de Brusselse Agglomeratie/Haut fonctionnaire de l'Agglomération* and the minister-president of the Region. Within this region, there are 19 municipalities, each with their own mayor, city council, and priorities. Those priorities are often not aligned across the municipalities, while the reality shows that they are entangled. The borders between the municipalities have faded away and we are living in a reality of 1 metropolitan area.

Our proposal

We want to reform Brussels into 1 capital city with 19 districts.

For our proposal we are looking at the model of other European capital cities, such as Berlin or Prague. We believe that the current Brussels-Capital Region should become the City of Brussels, a city with regional, provincial and municipality competences in one, where the mayor acts also as regional minister-president, and provincial governor. The current 19 municipalities would become districts within the city, for this we could use the Antwerp model.

Volt wants to make the governance of Brussels more efficient, by turning the 19 municipalities into districts of 1 city, with municipal, provincial and regional competences

Electoral Priority 9.B: Strategic Expansion of EU Competences

Volt believes that a lot of issues are the same all over Europe (or even beyond) and need a European response. Therefore it would make sense to move competences from a national and regional, or even a local, level to the EU.

1. **Health care**

   The Corona pandemic has shown that the divided national or regional representatives were not able to answer a global pandemic. Each country or region had their own measures, with each a different impact on the people living there. Borders were closed, families torn apart,

and the impact on the health care system was different everywhere.

Each country was fighting for their own delivery of masks or other medical material, competing with other member states, instead of collaborating to get more done. The latter was shown with the vaccines, here the EU stepped in and negotiated with the pharmaceutical companies as a big economical and political power, with positive results.

2. **Energy**

   The war in Ukraine, with the resulting reduction of Russian energy import, again created a competition between member states. Member states would go and negotiate with other fossil fuel exporting countries on their own, while the energy network is interconnected. CO2 emissions from a country's coal plant doesn't stop at the border, especially if this plant is built at the border. Not every country has access to a sea, limiting the options for wind energy.

3. **Climate**

   Climate change doesn't stop at the border. It impacts the whole continent with floods in the Belgian-German border region, forest fires over the whole south, melting glaciers in the Alps.

4. **Asylum and migration**

   Volt wants a human refugee policy and a smart labour migration policy for the EU. Collaboration and solidarity are a prerequisite to prevent future migration crises in Europe. We will show our European values by receiving refugees and asylum seekers in a human way and provide them a future. No adult nor child can be stuck in dangerous and inhumane places like camps on Moria or Lesbos. Volt also wants to give labour migrants a better future by providing them with clarity about the possibilities. That way we will improve the situation of the labour migrants, ourselves and their countries of origin.

5. **Agriculture**

   Currently, farmers in different countries have different rules to follow, but their products can be exported all over the EU without issues. This creates a situation of unfair competition.

Volt is a European party, with a focus on the EU. Therefore, we want to move more competences to the European level, where it makes sense.

Electoral Priority 10: Citizen Participation

More and more citizens are turning away from society and policy. The number of people with an anti-government attitude is increasing. Citizens feel badly represented by their elected representatives and find this problem important, as studies show. Moreover, an important source of frustration is that citizens have no impact on policy between two elections. This dissatisfaction is as great at the regional as at the federal level.

Research shows that this makes people long for a strong leader.[12] In response, Volt wants to strengthen democracy with stronger citizenship. For a revival of democracy with strong elements of citizenship and citizen participation, we want to introduce the following proposals at the levels of the regional government:

Main proposal 1: plebiscite (referenda)

We want to **implement the decree on plebiscite in the constitution** and want to **implement 'citizen reports'** based on the US Oregon Model.
The current constitution provides for non-binding referendums at regional level. However, there is no implementing decree in Flanders yet, unlike the Brussels Region.

Volt wants citizens to be well and objectively informed before a plebiscite. Volt wants to provide all voters with a citizens' report before every plebiscite.

The 'citizen report' is based on the Oregon model that has been applied in the US since 2010 (CIR - Citizens Initiative Review).

It starts from a panel of 18-24 drawn citizens who are as representative as possible of the population. The panel studies all **pros and cons of the proposals** during five days, with the help of experts and agree mutually on facts and numbers.

This report is then presented to the public through the press. Voters also receive this report **along with their ballot paper** for a plebiscite.

Main Proposal 2: Petition Right

Volt advocates extending the right to petition, which already exists federally, to the Flemish and Walloon Region, as already exists in the Brussels Region. In this way, petitioners have the right to speak in parliament.

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[12] https://www.rtbf.be/article/noir-jaune-blues-un-leader-fort-cest-une-societe-faible-11141484

Main Proposal 3: Improve the Municipal decree

(1) First of all, **One clear and detailed participation regulation** is necessary. Currently, each municipality draws up its own participation regulations. As a result, the conditions in one municipality may differ or be stricter than in another municipality.Volt proposes to provide all participation instruments unambiguously and in detail in the municipal decree.

Secondly (2), **Citizen councils should be drawn in the participation regulations**[13] : The municipal decree describes a number of participation instruments, such as plebiscites. However, the instrument 'civic councils drawn by lot' is missing. Volt also wants this instrument to be included in the municipal decree.

Further (3), **More transparency in decision-making should be the case**: There are many councils who want their administrative documents to be viewed as little as possible, both by municipal councilors and citizens. Volt is in favor of adopting the Walloon decree in the Flemish and Brussels regions.[14] The more extensive transparency obligations in the Walloon transparency decree[15] must therefore also be included in the Flemish decree on local government[16] be included.

The text obliges municipalities and provinces to publish the draft deliberations and summary notes on the agenda items of the public meeting of their council no later than five clear days before that of the municipal council.[17]

The only personal data communicated are the names of the representatives, elected persons and candidates for these positions. The personal data of other natural persons involved are anonymised. The municipality can make documents public via this free tool:
deliberations.be

We notice that transparency is sometimes limited by, for example, making texts available online in the form of photos, so that they are not used by search robots.indexed. Volt wants to prohibit such forms of regulatory obstruction.

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[13] https://lokaalbestuur.vlaanderen.be/werking-bestuur/burgerparticipatie

[14] https://transparencia.be/

[15] https://wallex.wallonie.be/sites/wallex/contents/acts/69/69946/1.html - art 3

[16] https://lokaalbestuur.vlaanderen.be/werking-bestuur/bekendmakingsplicht

[17] https://www.stradalex.com/fr/sl_news/document/sl_news_article20220719-6-fr