

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Everyone Can Make a Difference With COMPAIR, A New Form of Citizen Science for Collaboratively Combating Climate Change

Harnessing the potential of new digital technologies enables communities to work together to achieve clean air for all. Newly launched innovation initiative COMPAIR, led by Digitaal Vlaanderen, empowers people to become citizen scientists helping them explore what they can do personally to improve air quality and influence urban decision making.



Caption: COMPAIR Pan-European Project Team at launch meeting in Ghent, Belgium.

Photo courtesy of Jurgen Silence

Ghent, Belgium, November 12, 2021. For the past two weeks the eyes of the world have been centred on Glasgow and the coming together of world leaders to set forth new plans to tackle climate change. Whilst the new targets and measures coming out of COP26 are laudable, it will take more than a gathering of politicians to limit global warming as temperatures rise, crops fail and natural disasters strike. Everyday people from doctors and nurses to teachers, lawyers, researchers, office workers, small business owners, students and the unemployed will also have to band together and help and lead the fight against climate change.

COMPAIR (Community Observation Measurement & Participation in AIR science), a new initiative launched this November, aims to do exactly that. The project will support citizens across Europe, including those with no science background, to use digital sensors to collect local climate data and help

them analyse it to co-create new climate friendly behaviours and policies that address sustainability both at home and across the continent.

“The idea behind citizen science is to harness the power of collaborative volunteer research to explore or collect data sets that could not be collected by professional researchers alone” explained Lieven Raes, COMPAIR Project Coordinator from Digital Vlaanderen, at the project launch meeting in Ghent. “Together communities can build nuanced data sets at the micro-local level that will help everyone to understand detailed changes in air quality and how community actions affect it.”

Starting in the cities of Athens, Berlin, Sofia, Plovdiv and the region of Flanders, COMPAIR empower people to design and run air quality experiments around local issues. Easy to use air sensors, both fixed and mobile, will help them capture high quality data that can be used by themselves and by city administrations for research and policy making. New technologies including digital twins and virtual reality apps will make the data visible, understandable and actionable by the citizen on a personal level. This combination of citizen generated data with new technologies will help ensure people can react in real-time to air quality issues, whilst contributing to more evidence-based and sustainable urban policy.

Susie Ruston McAleer, communications lead for COMPAIR, said “its critical that climate actions and policy are meaningful and connected to people's lives in their community. They know better than anyone what the problems are in their neighbourhoods, so are best placed to help find solutions to local issues. We want to show people that science and technology can be accessible and fun and that everyone has the capacity to improve the quality of their environment. Every action, no matter how small, scales up to make a big difference to our cities, countries and our planet”.

With a Consortium of 15 organisations from 6 different European countries, including the European Citizen Science Association (ECSA), COMPAIR brings together the advanced technical, research and engagement skills needed to improve the quality of citizen science outputs and mainstream it as a valuable resource for urban decision making.



Caption: COMPAIR Pan-European Project Team. Photo courtesy of www.wecompair.eu

“We are excited to have our official city data supplemented by more detailed citizen-generated sources,” said Mr Raes. “Official measuring stations provide some data on urban air pollution and general weather conditions but these are on a macroscale and do not necessarily paint a complete picture of our cities or region. The new possibilities for enhancing public sector decision making, in a manner that gives ownership of the data back to the public for actionable change is very exciting for all”.

COMPAIR is open to anyone interested in improving air quality to help mitigate climate change. Selected participants in the pilot cities - Athens, Berlin, Sofia, Plovdiv and the region of Flanders - get a free digital sensor, citizen science guidance and an online dashboard to visualise their activity. Register your interest at www.wecompair.eu

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Additional Information for Editors

COMPAIR is an Innovation project which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101036563.

COMPAIR will run for 3 years, starting in November 2021, working with local authorities and citizens to run citizen science experiments to supplement gaps in official air quality data to (a) co-create more effective social actions and (b) influence city policy. Together these actions will contribute towards healthier and greener cities for all.

Consisting of 15 organisations from 6 different European countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, United Kingdom, and The Netherlands, the initiative is led by Digitaal Vlaanderen.

COMPAIR will explore how citizen science, if well organized, can contribute to the many elements needed to realize efficient and effective environmental change, such as the availability of reliable data; personal and societal involvement and awareness; open and participation.

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