

# BRUSSELS DECLARATION OF EUROPEAN MAYORS

A European policy fit for the future  
*Signed 24 January 2024, Brussels*



## Preamble

*Declaration developed under the auspices of the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union and signed at the High-Level event of European Mayors organised on 24 January 2024 by the Brussels-Capital Region.*

The year 2024 is Europe's crucial political year, with the renewal of the European Parliament members and the formation of a new College of the European Commission.

We, Mayors of cities, Presidents of metropolitan areas and representatives of associations of cities across Europe, with this declaration, are calling upon all European institutions to adopt an ambitious and effective European urban policy in the future European political mandate 2024-2029.

## Principles for an ambitious European urban policy

We reaffirm the importance of safeguarding and implementing the current building blocks that make up an ambitious European urban policy:

- The **New Leipzig Charter** endorsed by the Member States as a common framework for EU urban policy and an important text that guides the work of both European institutions and cities to become greener, more productive and more just;
- The **Urban Agenda for the EU** and especially its unique added-value and selling point as a form of multi-level European urban governance and as a vehicle with which to talk about urban and territorial matters, within which cities are key partners with regard to implementation;
- The **Territorial Agenda 2030** endorsed by the Member States as a framework to promote territorial cohesion in Europe and to ensure that no place is left behind;
- The **European Green Deal** as a paradigm shift in EU policies and science and an ambitious, interconnected, innovative and systemic goal with an important urban angle, in which cities and

metropolitan areas will play a pre-eminent role in the achievement of its goals;

- The **New European Bauhaus** as an important approach towards the development of affordable, inclusive, sustainable and beautiful living spaces in cities and metropolitan areas.

We call for an ambitious European urban policy based on a systematic and more **structured, binding dialogue** between European institutions and cities, for the more effective integration of the **urban, metropolitan and territorial dimensions** within all relevant European policies, for a **paradigm shift** towards a more sustainable model and for the **increased involvement of cities** and local governments in the development of European governance, regulation, programmes and funding.

In implementing urban policies, we are committed to respecting and promoting the **EU's fundamental values** of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

## **Challenges for an ambitious European urban policy**

By 2050, it is projected that 80% of the European population will reside in urban areas. Consequently, cities and metropolitan areas of all sizes must play a pivotal role in achieving the various EU objectives relating to vital transitions in climate and biodiversity, as well as economic and social models. Cities and metropolitan areas have the potential to make an essential contribution towards the realisation of the European Green Deal, which sets the ambitious goal of achieving climate neutrality in Europe by 2050.

We have identified several challenges to be tackled by EU institutions, in order to enable cities and metropolitan areas to effectively contribute towards these common European objectives:

### **The increased involvement of local governments**

While cities and metropolitan areas wish to collaborate with EU institutions, the subsidiarity principle is often inadequate as a means of enabling meaningful engagement and often ends up

excluding local governments and local representatives from the EU decision-making process;

### **A recognised conception of real urban wealth**

There is a growing tendency to believe that cities, particularly larger ones, do not require EU funding due to their high GDP. In reality, urban areas are characterised by higher population densities and a greater diversity of needs amongst their residents, are facing continuously rising environmental and health issues, and consequently are experiencing exacerbated social, economic and territorial inequalities, thereby validating the need for EU funding;

### **A sustained and long-term Cohesion Policy**

Cohesion Policy, designed as a long-term investment policy to reduce territorial, social, economic and environmental disparities, is increasingly being repurposed to serve other short-term objectives or emergency interventions unrelated to Cohesion;

### **A strengthened partnership principle**

A growing tendency is the ineffective or the lack of consultation with local governments in the development and allocation of EU funding, or, in the case of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RFF) process, the side-lining of the partnership principle. This is creating a risk of nationalisation of fund management and is jeopardising decisions relating to local investment priorities;

### **A unified urban European approach**

Over the years, the EU has developed many positive actions directed at cities, but the absence of a unified approach and the recent sprawl of European urban policies, initiatives, and tools is creating confusion and is straining the resources of cities already under pressure;

### **The mainstreaming of the urban dimension**

This dimension is being given insufficient consideration at EU level, in that urban impacts and cities' competence and responsibilities are often overlooked within regulatory initiatives and programmes originating from the European Union;

### **Overcoming the rural-urban divide**

There is a rising tendency to pit rural and urban areas against each other, despite their interdependence at the functional urban area

level. Cities and metropolitan areas should rather be supported to develop metropolitan strategies in collaboration with their surrounding peri-urban and rural areas, thereby taking into account the role they play by providing jobs, economic activities and services (health, education, leisure, etc.) to inhabitants living within their functional urban area and beyond.

## **Policy Priorities for the EU mandate 2024-2029**

We endorse the objectives of the New Leipzig Charter for **just, productive and green** cities. Within this framework, we believe that the top priorities for urban areas during the upcoming EU mandate should be:

- 1. Promoting the right to affordable, qualitative and sustainable housing;**
- 2. Combating social and gender inequalities and promoting inclusion;**
- 3. Fighting climate change, ensuring a healthy environment and restoring biodiversity;**
- 4. Developing a safe, inclusive and sustainable mobility.**

## **Recommendations for the EU mandate 2024-2029**

To integrate urban matters more effectively within all relevant European policies and institutions and to increase the involvement of local governments in EU policy and decision-making processes, We present **six concrete recommendations** to the European institutions:

## **1. Systematic and more structured, binding dialogue and involvement of local governments at European level**

- Involve cities and metropolitan areas before European legislation is adopted, by means of an arena composed of their representatives that would give recommendations;
- Involve representatives of cities and metropolitan areas systematically in all relevant expert groups nominated by the European Commission;
- Involve cities and metropolitan areas in the preparation of the urban policy programme of each incoming presidency of the Council of the European Union;
- Involve cities and metropolitan areas in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Green Deal, as an effective way of achieving the objectives of a fairer, greener and more inclusive Europe;
- Establish a system in which EU Institutions are required to report about the ways in which they have been involving cities and metropolitan areas in the EU decision making process.

## **2. Better integration and coordination of urban matters on a European level**

European Parliament

- Create a sub-committee on urban matters.

Council of the European Union

- Involve the different configurations of the Council of the EU in taking up urban issues relating to their remit, in particular the thematic action plans arising from the Urban Agenda for the EU;
- Ensure that ambitious urban policies are made a priority within the EU strategic agenda 2024–2029 to be adopted in June 2024.

European Commission

- Nominate a Vice President for local, urban, metropolitan and regional matters with a precise focus and a place-based mandate, with the ability to work horizontally in order to coordinate the work and to streamline the method of the urban agenda for the EU within other relevant European initiatives;
- Reinforce the role of the European Commission's DG REGIO as a pivotal actor to better coordinate the work done by the

European institutions towards cities and metropolitan areas, while retaining a strong link to and ensuring complementarity with Cohesion Policy and European territorial cooperation programmes;

- Reinforce the impact of the Urban Agenda by including its actions in the annual work programme of the European Commission.

European Committee of the Regions:

- Ensure a better representation of cities and metropolitan areas;
- Change the name to "European Committee of Regions and Cities".

### **3. More urban-friendly EU regulations**

- Involve the intergovernmental level (Council on urban matters and Council on territorial cohesion) in the decision-making process for European regulations and directives that will have an impact on urban areas;
- Systematise the use of the territorial assessment tool in the case of new regulations impacting upon cities and metropolitan areas and create new tools to strengthen the urban proofing of EU legislative proposal, building upon the experience developed by the European Committee of the Regions in this matter;
- Establish a regular feed-back loop allowing cities and metropolitan areas to express what works and what does not work on a local level in order to improve the new regulations;
- Increase the vigilance of the European Commission in terms of market regulation, particularly in the housing sector, by taking action both in terms of state aid rules and of regulations on speculative investment in housing.

### **4. More accessible and urban-friendly EU funding**

- Allow cities and metropolitan areas to reduce their investment gaps and support them in their long-term public investments in the areas of climate mitigation and adaptation and a just transition, especially in the infrastructure, energy, mobility, digitalisation, housing and social cohesion sectors;
- Support a cohesion policy for all regions, cities and metropolitan areas as a long-term development policy based on the principles of shared management, partnership and

multilevel governance and with a reduced European administrative burden;

- Include a mandatory urban earmarking in all relevant EU programmes post-2027 and recognise the specificities of cities and urban areas with regard to the allocation and implementation of EU funds as well as in the uptake of EIB financing;
- Dedicate EU resources in order to increase the cooperation between cities and to improve the capacities of cities and metropolitan areas to understand and use European programmes, funding and financing.

## **5. Promotion of metropolitan governance**

- Develop, alongside the European Commission's long-term vision for the EU's rural areas, a forward-looking EU vision for urban areas that is endorsed by EU institutions and that recognises the reality of the metropolitan level;
- Include an urban, metropolitan and territorial dimension in all relevant EU post-2027 policies and programmes;
- Foster the development of metropolitan monitoring and strategies for functional urban areas, by providing effective support for the cooperation between cities and the peri-urban and rural areas that surround them;
- Recognise the role of urban and metropolitan areas in cross-border locations and strengthen them as they face particular challenges.

## **6. A Paradigm Shift: envision a new sustainable model that includes appropriate indicators and enables the transition towards just, productive and green cities**

- Reaffirm the support to the SDGs and their indicators, in particular "SDG 11 on inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities", and the EU's international commitments, which require bold socio-economic and ecological transformations as well as collaboration between all levels of government;
- Support cities and metropolitan areas by enhancing their capacities and skills to implement the SDGs, the EU's international commitments and EU related regulations on a local level;
- Reinforce the collection of European statistics at the relevant spatial levels and the development of European standard



indicators beyond the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), better fitted to encompass the realities of urban territories (environmental indicators, social indicators, well-being indicators, etc.);

- Make use of those indicators to measure the performance of urban territories, to define the allocation of European funds and to integrate them within the framework of the European Semester.

The Brussels-Capital Region will promote and advocate for these recommendations throughout the Belgian presidency of the Council of the EU and beyond.

## **Signatories**

European urban networks

European cities and metropolitan areas

## **Contacts**

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