



**URBAN POLICY**  
*in Belgium*

## FORE WORD

On the occasion of the Belgian presidency of the Council of the EU, the three Belgian regions representing Belgium in the Informal Council on Urban Affairs have produced this brochure to present their urban policies.

Belgium is one of Europe's most densely populated countries. It lies at the heart of the transnational macro-region of Eurodelta, which brings together almost 45 million residents sharing a common industrial past.

The urban factor is therefore of paramount importance in Belgium, and this is reflected in the public policies developed by the three regions.

As part of the Belgian presidency of the European Union concerning urban affairs, Belgium wants to be a presidency that cares about cities, and is keen to convey 3 messages:

- Strengthening the urban and metropolitan dimension in European policies and the programming of funds post-2027;
- Reaffirming the importance of cities as European partners and driving forces;
- Recognising spatial planning, the territorial approach and urban governance as essential tools for achieving European objectives.

Have a good read!



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**Tour & Taxis**  
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## BELGIAN INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

Belgium is a federal state made up of three communities (the Flemish, French and German-speaking communities) and three regions (the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels regions). The regions primarily have competences over territorial issues such as the environment, spatial planning, housing, mobility, infrastructure, the economy and employment. Communities have competences over matters relating to individuals such as culture, education, social welfare services, health and sport.

Since the 2011 state reform, Belgium has fully entrusted urban policy to the regions. Each of the three regions focuses on its own priorities, which are also linked to the powers of the regions and communities. There is therefore no Belgian national urban policy. Each region is responsible for its own urban policy, but all are guided by one key concept: sustainability in its environmental, social and economic forms.

In the following brochure, each region will present its own urban policy.

### Colophon

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Urban policy  
**IN THE BRUSSELS-  
CAPITAL REGION**







## INTRODUCTION

The Brussels-Capital Region has a population of 1.2 million and an area of 162 km<sup>2</sup>. It's important to distinguish between the Brussels-Capital Region itself and the city of Brussels, home to 160,000 residents, which is one of the 19 municipalities that make up the Brussels-Capital Region. The Brussels-Capital Region is an exclusively urban region. Although prosperous, the Brussels-Capital Region faces many challenges, such as social inequalities, mobility and housing.

Since its creation in 1989, the Brussels-Capital Region has had a policy that favours urban development. This combines local and regional approaches for the benefit of its residents, with metropolitan and international dimensions to promote its role as a national and European capital.

In addition to purely regional measures, the Brussels-Capital Region also mobilises European funds (ERDF, ESF, URBAN, URBACT, EUI, Interreg, Horizon Europe, etc.) to implement its urban policy. These funds have been invested in regenerating the former industrial districts along the Brussels canal.

## TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND TOOLS



**Although it only has a territory of 162 km<sup>2</sup>, the Brussels-Capital Region has experienced strong demographic growth over the last 20 years, resulting in an increased need for housing, facilities, green spaces, jobs, etc. The aim of the territorial development policy is to make the best possible use of the territory to meet these challenges.**

### Regional Land-Use Plan

The Regional Land-Use Plan (PRAS/GBP) is the main tool for regulating the Brussels territory. For each parcel or block of land in the Brussels Region, it determines whether or not it can be built on, and the intended use for each area (residential, commercial, nature area, etc.). It defines functions, called “land uses”, and establishes the conditions for their development. This plan therefore determines the urban structure and has an impact on essential aspects of the living environment and the protection of the environment.

### Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

Adopted in 2018, the PRDD / GPDO is a policy plan that aims to determine the Region's territorial and sectoral development objectives up to 2040. It is the territorial tool that sets out the vision and provides guidance in response to its challenges. In particular, the aim is to control densification and ensure Brussels maintains its diversity, while preserving equity between the different areas of Brussels and promoting sustainable development.

Since 2001, the PRAS has only undergone partial modifications. A thorough modification of this Plan is now necessary in order for the region to adapt to current and future social and environmental developments. The Brussels government has entrusted Perspective with this modification mission.

## Master Development Plan

A Master Development Plan (PAD/RPA) is a singular regional planning tool that defines the strategic and regulatory aspects of an urban strategy for a specific area. This tool occupies an important place in the hierarchy of regional plans.

A Master Development Plan (PAD/RPA) determines:

- Uses (residential, retail, offices, etc.) and surface areas to be dedicated to these uses;
- The general framework for public spaces (road structure, public spaces, landscape);

- Construction features;
- The organisation of mobility and parking;
- The protection of cultural heritage.

These plans are drawn up in consultation with the public authorities and actors concerned. They also involve private urban stakeholders. Perspective organises a participatory dynamic with residents and civil society around the PADs with a view to mobilising citizen expertise.



Akenkaai  
> Quai des Péniches, Brussels

URBAN POLICY

## URBAN REGENERATION POLICIES AND TOOLS



**Urban regeneration is achieved through a variety of programmes at various spatial scales, focusing in particular on creating or renovating public spaces, on environmental quality, real estate, economic revitalisation and support for social cohesion and community life. Urban regeneration actions are concentrated on an Urban Regeneration Zone (ZRU/ZSH), which brings together deprived neighbourhoods where the public sector is stepping up its investment.**

### Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract

Historically, Sustainable Neighbourhood Contracts (CQD/DWC) have been the principal mechanism for regenerating disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Conducted over a six-year period in partnership with local authorities, these plans involve various operations within a neighbourhood in a single municipality. CQDs are mainly structured to meet crucial needs in terms of creating or renovating housing, renovating public spaces, creating local infrastructure, and improving the environment and social cohesion within neighbourhoods. They also support certain economic or commercial activities.

Thanks to a participatory approach, residents, associations and municipalities are closely involved in the various projects carried out under each programme. On the socio-economic front, a number of initiatives have been launched for the benefit of young people and more vulnerable people

### Urban Renewal Contract

An Urban Renewal Contract (CRU/SVC) is an urban renewal tool designed to improve public spaces and urban networks, create infrastructure and housing, and enhance environmental and economic quality. The 7.5-year project covers several neighbourhoods and municipalities, with the aim of improving the quality of areas along local borders that are often neglected. It also benefits from public and private investment to concentrate as many resources as possible within the area in question.

A CRU is piloted by the Region. Consultation is arranged with the municipalities and other public administrations (responsible for the environment, mobility, infrastructure, etc.). The project also involves consulting the population during the preparation of the CRU, and a public survey is organised when the CRU is validated by the Region's government.

in Belgium



## Street and Block Contract

In 2022, the Brussels government approved the implementation of a new urban renewal policy instrument, i.e. Street and Block Contracts (CACI/AHC). This unique instrument will be deployed on a very local scale (one or two blocks, or one street) in specific areas that have been overlooked by the general urban policies. The CACI is a four-year action plan designed to improve the quality of life of residents living on one or more blocks or on one street, involving public spaces, support for social and civic life, the environment, community facilities, etc.

## School Contracts

The School Contract is a regional urban renewal programme aimed at improving the school environment in the Brussels-Capital Region and strengthening the relationship between schools and their neighbourhoods. Each School Contract lasts for four years and brings together the Brussels-Capital Region, a school, its organising authority and the municipality where the school is located. It also involves neighbourhood associations, residents, school users and managers of community facilities.

The School Contract enables a school to obtain regional support to improve the quality and safety of its environment (safe, high-quality school surroundings, green spaces, etc.).

8

URBAN RENEWAL  
CONTRACTS

1673

HOUSING UNITS CREATED  
THROUGH SUSTAINABLE  
NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTRACTS

20

SCHOOL CONTRACTS

## RENOLUTION

The buildings in the Brussels region are old, and many of them are only insulated poorly, if at all. Built mainly before the 1960s, they consume too much energy, are poorly adapted to the effects of climate change and are responsible for more than half of the Region's direct greenhouse gas emissions.

RENOLUTION is the Brussels-Capital Region's strategy to accelerate the renovation of buildings in Brussels. The aim is to achieve better and faster renovations in many more buildings, in order to cut average energy consumption in housing by a third. To achieve this, all sectors work together within the RENOLUTION Alliance. RENOLUTION grants are available to private individuals and professionals for both renovations and energy-saving work.



VUB USquare Campus  
> Brussels







The Flemish approach to urban policy is contained in the core concept of 'urbanity', which has formed the basis for this policy for more than 20 years. The concept of 'urbanity' focuses on a number of specific qualities, peculiar to urban living environments, which act as levers to shape coexistence in diversity. Central to this are the 5 Ds (in Dutch) as principles for urban policy: density, diversity, democracy, sustainability and digitalisation (which stands for "dichtheid, diversiteit, democratie, duurzaamheid and digitalisering" in Dutch). Especially in light of the 15-minute city, we would like to add a sixth D, that of 'service'.

Policy – and certainly local policy – should focus on a quality supply of basic facilities and services for the population. Not only is it a basic right for citizens, it also strengthens local democracy. The concept of urbanity is aimed at promoting coexistence and cooperation in good conditions, ensuring that no one is left out.

Cities are the intersections where all social challenges converge. As places where social challenges arise first, most often and most sharply, cities are best positioned – better than other levels of government – to address these big issues pragmatically and concretely.

More than elsewhere, the diversity in cities provides opportunities for innovative (formal and informal) partnerships between local governments and a wide range of residents or resident groups, organisations, associations, knowledge institutions, businesses and other groups. Such partnerships also strengthen the social fabric of the city, providing the basis for a renewing democracy. Many people look upon the requested (by policy) and unrequested changes in areas such as climate, energy or mobility with sadness – or fear. Cities are pre-eminently the place where people can learn to deal with all these new developments. But then cities must have sufficient policy space. This requires, among other things, a different approach to governance: the top-down 'government' of higher levels of government gives way to a more pragmatic and locally based 'governance', based on the principle of subsidiarity. This approach is very much in line with Benjamin Barber's 'If Mayors Ruled The World'. This book dates from 2013, but is more applicable than ever, in these times where democracy is under severe pressure.

The Flemish urban policy has a number of its own instruments that give shape to this vision and provide support to cities, based on the recognition of these cities as labs, pioneers and levers.

## URBANITY

The idea of urbanity comes close to a broad interpretation of sustainability, captured in the United Nations sustainability goals.

Urbanity stands for a way and form of living together: it stands for high-quality densification, for diversity in the broadest sense, for building community in which place is the binding element and not origin, provenance, religion, colour or gender.

Urbanity stands for encounter and debate among people, thus providing the geographical framework for building democracy.

Urbanity stands for micro forms of solidarity, within the macro forms of social security.

Urbanity stands for careful handling of space and environment, for a diversity of functions that are present together and thus reinforce each other: culture, care, economy and innovation; knowledge and information.

Urbanity stands for interaction between governments, civil society, businesses, knowledge institutions and citizens.

## URBAN RENEWAL



The instrument of 'urban renewal' launches annual calls for innovative and interdisciplinary projects and ideas. A multidisciplinary jury evaluates these projects. The starting point is the city as the ideal place for area-based innovation.

Within urban renewal, cities can apply for a number of grants:

- **Project grants:** Flanders supports cities in the realisation of concrete urban renewal projects with the aim of increasing the attractiveness, sustainability and liveability of cities.
- **Concept grants:** Through these, cities receive support in developing innovative concepts under the guidance of a multidisciplinary team, with a strong focus on co-creation.
- **Thematic grants:** a small-scale and innovative urban renewal project that responds to specific urban challenges. These grants should allow for a quick response to new challenges or to challenges for which adequate answers have not yet been formulated. Thematic urban renewal projects are therefore, by definition, experimental and innovative in nature.

In addition, Flanders is investing in infrastructure as well as new urban partnerships. Important here is the integrated socio-spatial approach, and facilitating linkage opportunities between different social challenges. This tool creates proximity and accessibility between the places where we live, work, shop and relax, with urban renewal as a lever.

This operation offers enormous benefits: by mobilising and motivating public sectors and governments as project partners by considering the urban renewal projects as a kind of common area-based policy. In addition, it appears that each euro of project grant generates 7 euros of co-financing.

since 2002

**86** PROJECT GRANTS  
**108** CONCEPT GRANTS

since 2017

**29** PROJECTS HAVE BEEN APPROVED AS THEMATIC CALLS

## NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENT CONTRACTS



Through these neighbourhood improvement contracts, the ABB (Agency for Home Affairs) supports cities and towns in addressing challenges in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood improvement contracts concentrate primarily on challenges that transcend 'local' capacity and levers. The focus is on defined neighbourhoods, with persistent and interrelated challenges but also opportunities, for example in terms of coexistence, safety, health, economy, housing and/or infrastructure challenges.

Central to this narrative is the importance of the neighbourhood and the district level, as the scale with which citizens most identify. Local governments know the context at that level and know what needs to be done. They do not always have all the levers to reach solutions (for example, because of conflicting regulations as obstacles). This contract therefore includes a formal commitment from other policy areas of the Flemish government to actively participate in solutions.

Neighbourhood improvement contracts are complementary to urban renewal, emphasising support for operational activities. They also build a community and active learning network between cities and municipalities, with opportunities to link together social challenges. The success of this approach speaks for itself; the methodology has even been adopted for other initiatives.



Starters' Home  
> Vilvoorde



## SMART CITIES



Today's social challenges are complex. To make good policy decisions, it is important that they have a solid basis. Good, high-quality data sets are indispensable today. A smart city deploys technology to enhance the liveability of the city, but the use of technology is not an end in itself. It is only useful if that technology improves and promotes the lives of city dwellers. In such a smart city, citizens, businesses, local governments and research institutions work together to find more efficient and effective solutions to urban challenges.

The Smart Flanders programme initially began as a support programme around open data. This focus is still there today on trajectories to increase data quality and the use of citizen science projects to obtain better data, but the focus has been broadened to an integrated programme operation working around specific themes, among others to provide answers to mobility issues, climate challenges, and nature-based solutions. The support programme also provides tools to develop future policies based on predictions (e.g. crowd control), simulations via digital twins, and agreements to ensure interoperability with architecture principles (Flemish Open City Architecture Principles VLOCA).

## OTHER FORMS OF SUPPORT TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS



In recent years, ICT security and privacy (GDPR) have also been a major focus in these trajectories. As a result, cybersecurity has become an important part of the support process, including the development of a toolkit to make governments more resilient, and co-financing for ICT security audits to reveal vulnerabilities. Support is also offered for the implementation of the NIS2 directive. Besides the above forms of service, the ABB can help in other ways as well.

- We offer an **expert pool** for technical support to smaller cities to develop an integrated policy approach to smart densification and addressing climate adaptation challenges.
- The **100 Districts Platform** provides expert support for an integrated approach to depaving, greening, water buffering, clustered (shared and electric) mobility, collective renovation and renewable energy in specific neighbourhoods.
- The **Municipality – City Monitor** is a data and knowledge platform for local governments as a basis for data-driven policy. Based on data sets and a triennial survey of city dwellers, indicator sets are used to publish a picture of urban dwellers' perceptions of their city. The website allows cities to benchmark themselves against neighbouring municipalities and peers.







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Wallonia's urban policy aims to support urban municipalities in their development projects.

Urban policy in Wallonia has the following objectives:

- Supporting cities in the various functions they fulfill for the benefit of the territory;
- Combating urban sprawl by encouraging the concentration of new housing projects in well-located areas of urban hubs, particularly industrial sites to be repurposed after decontamination, and vacant lots;
- Increase the number and surface area of green spaces in urban areas;
- Set up "neighbourhood contracts" and focusing on the right scale by enhancing priority neighbourhoods.

Various strategies are adopted depending on the size of the city:

more than  
**50,000**  
inhabitants

For cities with more than **50,000** inhabitants, two successive systems coexist: the **large city policy** and the **integrated urban policy**.

between  
**12,000**  
&  
**50,000**  
inhabitants

Municipalities with populations of between **12,000** and **50,000** are eligible for the **Urban Development** scheme.

fewer than  
**12,000**  
inhabitants

Municipalities with fewer than **12,000** inhabitants can receive support for specific projects under the **Cœurs de Villages** (Heart of the village) scheme. This scheme complements other sources of funding such as the Communal Rural Development Programme (PCDR).



In order to optimise and develop Wallonia's urban policy, following the transfer of competence of this policy from the Federal State to the Belgian Regions, Wallonia has implemented three successive and distinct policies:

### 1 Large city policy (PGV)

The aim of this policy is to provide financial support to cities with over 50,000 inhabitants whose average net income per capita is lower than the average net income for Wallonia, to implement projects that meet regional objectives aimed at improving their living environment and enhancing their attractiveness.

Seven large cities are covered by this policy: Charleroi, Liège, La Louvière, Mons, Mouscron, Seraing and Verviers. They share an annual budget of just over 12 million euros.

The nine cities concerned are: Charleroi, Liège, La Louvière, Mons, Mouscron, Namur, Seraing, Tournai and Verviers.

A budget of 280 million euros has been allocated to the implementation of this new policy, distributed between the populations of these nine major cities, on a pro rata basis.

Based on the amounts allocated, the cities have drawn up an action plan in line with regional themes:

- Development of priority neighbourhoods
- Energy renovation on a city-wide and/or neighbourhood basis
- Social cohesion
- Urban mobility policy
- Organisation and commercial management of city centres
- Greening cities and adapting to climate change
- Connected cities
- Urban tourism and heritage
- Urban housing
- Renovation of sites to be redeveloped, located in city centres.

### 2 Integrated urban policy (PIV)

This policy aims to provide financial support to the 9 Walloon cities with populations of over 50,000 to implement projects that meet the following two major regional objectives:

- Development of priority neighbourhoods through initiatives focusing on energy renovation, mobility and housing.
- Rehabilitation of brownfield sites in city centres.



### 3 Urban development (DU)

Urban development is aimed at Walloon cities and municipalities with a population of between 12,000 and 50,000, considered to be "urban in character".

However, certain municipalities with fewer than 12,000 inhabitants may be eligible if they demonstrate their urban character on the basis of predefined criteria, such as population density or the concentration of housing and services.

As a strategic and operational tool, the DU enables municipalities to develop their territory and implement development projects in defined priority neighbourhoods.

Introduced in July 2023, it aims to synthesise two existing operational development tools, i.e. urban renewal and urban regeneration, into one single procedure, while retaining the specific features of each one.





Its aim is to assist and support municipalities in:

- An urban renewal project designed to revitalise a neighbourhood in decline through a comprehensive urban planning project combining several interventions on buildings and public spaces.
- An urban regeneration project involving a partnership between the municipality and a private actor. Its aim is to reclassify urban centres through interventions on housing and public spaces.

The various initiatives are chosen on the basis of a contextual analysis of the municipality, carried out with regard to the following regional objectives:

- Making urban municipalities more welcoming
- Making urban municipalities a vehicle for improved coexistence and solidarity
- Encouraging the reconstruction of the city, within the boundaries of the city
- Focusing on high-quality housing and living environments
- Providing a network of attractive public spaces, including green spaces
- Making urban municipalities a driving force for economic redeployment
- Creating intelligent urban municipalities

Ultimately, the DU instrument must present a medium- to long-term territorial development project and a coordinated set of development actions. It must therefore cover **five major aspects**: strategic, operational, spatial, cross-cutting and temporal.

Wallonia has set up a [platform of Walloon cities](#) to unite all Walloon urban development actors in a single network and guarantee information exchange on urban policy.

This brings together knowledge and feedback on urban development, as well as support and training for the actors involved. It will also act as a link between local players and the region of Wallonia.





