

**INCOMING BELGIAN PRESIDENCY
OF THE COUNCIL 
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2024**

2nd DRAFT

Brussels Declaration of European Mayors

A European urban policy fit for the future

DRAFT

2nd Draft Proposal

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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, call 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 to safeguard and implement the current building blocks for an ambitious European urban policy:

- The **New Leipzig Charter** endorsed by the Member States as a common framework for the EU urban policy and an important text to guide 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 multi-level European urban governance to talk about urban and territorial matters, with cities as key partners for implementation;
- The **Territorial Agenda 2030** endorsed by the Member States as a framework to promote territorial cohesion in Europe, leaving no place 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 and the preeminent role of cities and metropolitan areas to achieve its goals;
- The **New European Bauhaus** as an important approach to develop 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, a better integration of the **urban, metropolitan and territorial dimensions** in all relevant European policies and a **paradigm shift** towards a more sustainable model and an **increased involvement of cities** and local governments in the development of European governance, regulation, programmes and funding,

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 play a pivotal role in achieving the various EU objectives related to vital transitions in climate and biodiversity, as well as economic and social models. Cities and metropolitan areas hold the potential of a vital contribution to the realization of the European Green Deal, which sets the ambitious goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 for Europe.

However, We identify several challenges that hinder cities and metropolitan areas from effectively contributing to these common European objectives:

1. **An increased involvement of Local Governments:** While cities and metropolitan areas wish to collaborate with EU institutions, the subsidiarity principle is often inadequate for meaningful engagement and often ends up excluding local governments and local representatives from the EU decision-making process;
2. **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 have higher densities and more diverse resident needs, face continuously rising environmental and health issues, and consequently have exacerbated social, economic and territorial inequalities, validating the need for EU funding;
3. **A maintained 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 for other short-term objectives or emergency interventions not related to Cohesion;
4. **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 creates a risk of nationalisation of fund management and threaten decisions related to local investment priorities;
5. **An unified urban European approach:** Over the years the EU has developed many positive actions towards the cities, but the absence of a unified approach and the recent sprawl of European urban policies, initiatives, and tools creates confusion and strains the resources of cities already under pressure;
6. **A mainstreamed urban dimension:** This dimension is insufficiently considered at the EU level, with urban impacts and cities' competences and responsibilities often overlooked in regulatory initiatives and programmes from the European Union;
7. **An overcome Rural-Urban Divide:** There is a rising tendency to pit rural and urban areas against each other, despite the interdependence of both as defined as functional urban areas. Cities and metropolitan areas should rather be supported to develop metropolitan strategies with their surrounding peri-urban and rural areas, taking into account the role they play by providing jobs, economic activities and services (health, education, leisure....) to inhabitants living within their functional urban area.

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. Combatting **social and gender inequalities** and promoting **inclusion**;
3. Fighting **climate change**, ensuring healthy **environment** and restoring **biodiversity**;
4. Developing a safe, inclusive and sustainable **mobility**.

Recommendations for the EU mandate 2024-2029

To better integrate urban matters in all relevant European policies and institutions and better involve local governments in EU policy and decision-making process, 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 through an arena composed of city representatives that would give recommendations complementary to the existing consultation processes;
 - Involve systematically representatives of cities and metropolitan areas in all relevant expert groups nominated by the 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 to better achieve the objectives of a fairer, greener and more inclusive Europe;
 - Establish an EU Institutions reporting on the way they have been involving cities and metropolitan areas in the EU decision making process.

2. Better **integration and coordination of urban matters** at 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 ambitious urban policies become a priority in 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, able to streamline the method of the urban agenda for the EU in others 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, keeping a strong link and 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 Commission.

Committee of the Regions

- Ensure a better representation of cities and metropolitan areas;
- Change the name into "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 with an urban impact;
- Systematise the use of the territorial assessment tool for new regulations impacting 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, what does not work at local level in order to improve the new regulations;
- Increase the vigilance of the European Commission in terms of markets' regulation, particularly in the housing sector by acting both in term of state aid rules and 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 related to climate mitigation and adaptation and a just transition, especially in the infrastructure, energy, mobility, digitalization, housing and social cohesion sectors;
- Support a cohesion policy for all regions, cities and metropolitan areas as a long-term development policy based on 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 for the allocation and implementation of EU funds as well as in the uptake of EIB financing;
- Dedicate EU resources 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 Commission long term vision for the EU's Rural Area, a forward looking EU vision for Urban Areas endorsed by EU institutions and recognising as well the role and relevance 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, through effective support to the cooperation between cities and its surroundings peri-urban and rural areas.
- 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 embedded with appropriate indicators that enables transition to 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 societal and economic transformations as well as collaboration between all levels of government;
- Support cities and metropolitan areas by enhancing their capacities and skills to implement locally the SDGs, the EU's international commitments and EU regulations requiring bold societal and economic transformations;
- Reinforce the collection of European statistics at the different appropriate 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...);
- Make use of these indicators to measure the performance of urban territories, to define the allocation of European funds and to integrate them in 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