

A better Europe starts in cities

A strategic agenda for the EU in the urban century

The need for a strong European Union that defends respect for the rule of law, fundamental rights and democratic values, has not been more apparent since its early days. In times of perma-crisis, Europe must have the means to act swiftly in response to emergencies and the significant concerns of people, while pursuing the long-term goal of a sustainable and inclusive future. An empowered EU, working closely with member states, regions and cities, is vital to achieve this.

The daily challenges experienced by many people include access to affordable housing and essential public services, securing a job that offers a decent salary, paying energy bills, and putting healthy food on the table. These challenges have been exacerbated by the rise in the cost of living, putting more middle-income people at risk of poverty and vulnerable groups at risk of social exclusion. The impacts of the climate crisis and the industrial transformation, as well as war in Europe and at our borders, further add to the sense of insecurity and instability.

These crises have deepened existing inequalities and created fertile ground for populism across our continent. As mayors of Europe's larger cities, we are deeply concerned by the increased polarisation in our societies, within our cities and between urban and rural areas. Fuelled by uncertainties about the future and misinformation, this populism drives hostilities, increases alienation, disregards women's and minorities' rights, and undermines Europe's social fabric and our communities.

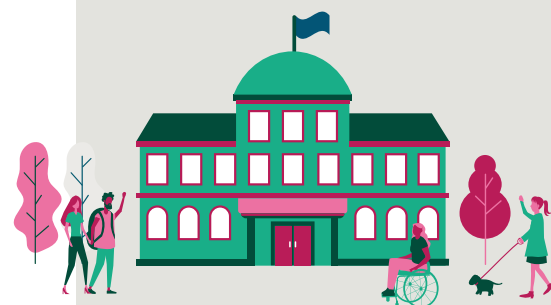
75% of Europe's population lives in urban areas. Cities make a difference to most people by offering a good quality of life in sustainable, inclusive and well-managed urban and metropolitan areas. Stronger cities benefit both urban residents and their surrounding areas as cities increasingly develop alliances with peri-urban and rural areas, while also providing public services for the wider area.

Cities have a significant capacity to take action to tackle the major global challenges. During the Covid pandemic, the Russian war in Ukraine and the energy and cost-of-living crisis, city leaders demonstrated determination in combatting challenges locally, responding to residents' immediate needs, and advising other government levels on the next steps. The innovation capacity in cities is essential to Europe's resilience in times of crisis today and in the future.

As city leaders, we strive to make our cities sanctuaries of freedom of expression and tolerance, recognising the richness of diversity. We are committed to and will encourage our citizens to vote for a progressive future for the European Union. This means an EU that champions our shared values –human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, justice, and human rights – in Europe and beyond. These values are the foundation for a united Europe when intensifying the efforts for a fairer and sustainable future.



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For a more united EU, closer to the people, the EU must harness the transformative power of its cities for the common good. The decisions we make today determine our future. A better Europe starts in cities, and to make it happen, the EU should focus on the following:



A Europe that delivers for people

Cities strive to ensure people's rights are met when delivering public services, both in-person and online. It is a high priority in the provision of affordable and social housing, when investing in jobs and skills, and offering safety and security and inclusion for vulnerable groups, including refugees and people in need of international protection. Cities also promote public health and well-being, alongside sustainable and inclusive cultural policies. The EU should:

- ✓ Raise the ambition for the European Pillar of Social Rights to make it a powerful motor for the just transition across all strategic priorities of the EU, while protecting people's social rights in the green and digital transformation.
- ✓ Involve cities in implementing the Pillar and ensure collaboration across all levels of government to clarify responsibilities and reinforce delivery, while considering the increased pressure on essential social services generated by multiple crises.

A results-oriented European Green & Social Deal

Cities need a better enabling framework, in terms of both policy and finance, to implement bold measures for sustainable transport, energy-efficient buildings, circular economy, sustainable food systems and the widespread adoption of renewables, while making full use of their public purchasing power. Meanwhile, the acceleration of the net-zero transition of the industrial sector must deliver green and quality jobs at the local level, which can be achieved when working closely with city authorities. The EU should:

- ✓ Commit to an ambitious climate target of at least a 90% net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 to implement the EU climate law; and mainstream climate adaptation across EU policies, while supporting cities with local adaptation plans.
- ✓ Foster partnerships between local authorities and industry to successfully implement a Green Deal Industrial Plan that delivers benefits for people through jobs and skills.



An inclusive digital agenda that protects people's rights and the climate

Increased attention is urgently needed to a growing ICT footprint, recognising the implications for raw materials and ensuring alignment with the goal of climate neutrality by 2050. Moreover, the EU should:

- ✓ Introduce a comprehensive framework that guides and supports policymakers in upholding fundamental human rights in digital spaces. It would support cities in accessing the necessary tools to effectively protect citizens' digital rights.
- ✓ Work with city authorities to address the digital divide, ensuring that digitalisation leaves no one behind. This can be achieved by developing a common EU tool for monitoring, measuring and comparing performances at local and regional levels.



A local Europe with the capacity to act

Local authorities with the capacity and capabilities to tackle complex challenges are a significant lever for change and Europe's societal transformation and resilience going forward. Cities must be empowered to develop sustainable and reliable investment strategies, including by ensuring adequate administrative and financial capacity to drive urban transformation. The EU should:

- ✓ Invest in reinforcing technical and administrative capacity in local administrations, including city authorities, and ensure more direct access to EU funding.
- ✓ Increase the EU's own resources for a greater direct investment capacity in urban sustainability, adapt the EU's budgetary rules to ensure greater flexibility in long-term public investment and incentivise local public investment.

A coherent European strategy for urban policies

Based on the Urban Agenda for the EU and the New Leipzig Charter on the transformative power of cities for the common good, a strategy for urban policies must outline how to work better with cities and their role and participation in shaping EU developments alongside member states and regions. Also, the EU should:

- ✓ Establish a regular and direct dialogue between the political leadership of the main EU institutions and city leaders, and more transparent governance mechanisms that systematically involve cities in EU policy making.
- ✓ Appoint an Urban Envoy, centrally placed in the European Commission, with a mandate to oversee and coordinate all EU policies and initiatives for cities and urban areas, ensuring a positive impact and political attention on the potential and needs of cities.



Why cities?

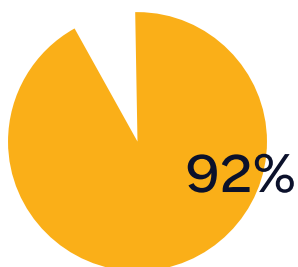
City leaders and administrations can do things that no one else can. They:

- have a unique understanding of locals' needs and the expertise to tackle global challenges at local level and deliver core services essential for the quality of life in cities.
- are the level of government closest to and often most trusted by people, enabling them to create incentives to encourage the necessary behaviour changes to reach policy objectives.
- are best placed to embody a vision, coordinate activities of different groups of local stakeholders and have convening power to lead coalitions towards shared goals.
- understand complex challenges from a place-based perspective and break silos to implement joined-up policy solutions to, for example, poverty, skills gaps, sustainability, and housing.
- have unique public spending power, with the potential to shape markets for greater sustainability and inclusion, which can boost innovation and identify new ways forward locally.
- have the power of place. They can use their land use planning powers to organise space to support policy objectives e.g. energy efficiency, social inclusion, and sustainable urban mobility.

These assets are all highly relevant for an EU with an ambition to drive a global climate leadership, increasingly engaging people and industry in the societal transformation, while reinforcing Europe's proud policies of cohesion, solidarity, social inclusion, and combatting inequalities.

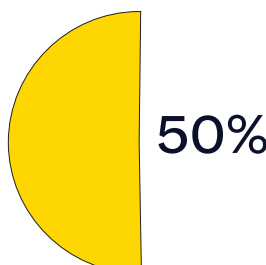


What Mayors say about working with the EU*



92% of mayors feel they contribute to delivering EU priorities through local policy implementation.

50% of mayors feel that EU institutions and policymakers need to better consider cities' specific needs and potential.



50% of mayors say they have encountered situations where current EU rules and policies prevent them from achieving their goals.

*The data is based on the Eurocities Pulse which surveyed 92 mayors from European cities in 2023. The figures include mayors from EU countries only.

Eurocities in brief

Eurocities is the largest network of European cities. We count over 200 large cities among our membership, representing more than 150 million people across 38 countries, from within and outside the European Union.

Vision

We strive for a Europe where cities are at the heart of European and national decision making, to create a better sustainable and inclusive future for all.

Mission

Eurocities is the leading network of major European cities, working together and with other stakeholders to ensure a good quality of life for all our citizens and make cities places where everyone can enjoy a good quality of life and a sustainable future.