



An EU urban agenda

For and with European cities

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The recognition of the role of cities in the EU has grown a great deal over the past 25 years. This is confirmed by the number of European initiatives, funding programmes, campaigns and policies that address urban challenges. An EU urban agenda must strike a balance between providing a framework for cities to deliver European policies, while also respecting subsidiarity requirements. An urban agenda at EU level needs a practical approach, which strengthens the direct dialogue between the EU and its cities in new ways. It must support the integrated approach in cities through increased coordination of initiatives impacting on cities and urban areas.

Ambitious urban objectives

An EU urban agenda must clearly recognise the important role of cities in delivering the Europe 2020 vision of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It must confirm cities' role as part of the solution in the EU and strengthen the role of cities and their surrounding areas:

- as drivers of the European economy
- as key players in climate action
- as front-line managers of social cohesion and inclusion
- as strategic leaders for integrated and sustainable urban development

Previous intergovernmental agreements - such as the Bristol Accord, the Leipzig Charter and the Toledo Declaration - have acknowledged the advantages of an integrated approach in cities. An urban agenda should not lead to more EU legislation across different policy areas for cities to implement. Rather, it must make the most of the expertise and leadership already present in cities to shape priorities and solutions through their direct involvement in decisions on policy and investment.

A practical and coherent approach

What cities need are not just more words, but a practical, more coherent and coordinated approach to EU policy-making.

Urban coordination

Much of what the EU does impacts on Europe's cities. A major challenge for coordinating an urban agenda is its scope. Every city leader knows how departmentalism compromises

delivery. The same is true at national and EU level. Addressing urban challenges in an integrated, joined-up way ensures better, quicker results and value for money.

The growing cross-sector coordination of policies with an urban dimension at European level must be reinforced and lead to similar processes at national level. The objective should be to integrate the urban agenda across a wider range of EU policy areas and across the Commission's directorates general. The Commissioner for regional and urban policy, overseeing coordination of urban issues, should have the resources available at sufficiently high level across the Commission services (e.g. special advisor/coordinator for urban issues) to drive this process and to make sure that the urban dimension is taken into account in new initiatives. Coordination procedures must link national and European urban policies more closely together, be fully transparent and increasingly involve cities and city networks directly. This can facilitate a better understanding of strengths and challenges in cities as well as requirements for policy solutions supporting an integrated approach in cities.

Urban dialogue

A direct dialogue between cities and the European Commission must be strengthened so that EU policy developments match needs on the ground and that innovation in cities feeds into the policy development process. There are different ways of doing this, for example, involvement of city representatives in European expert groups and engaging cities in peer reviews of national policies at European level.

Different methods are used in different policy areas with varying degrees of success. The Commission should exchange internally as well as with cities on the different models and on how to develop them further. Benefits of coordinating city participation in different initiatives could also be considered, e.g. by engaging a group of urban experts in a number of policy areas simultaneously rather than ad hoc. Reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs of city representatives should be possible in some cases so that cities from all member states have the possibility to engage in European policy development.

In addition to the Commissioner for regional and urban policy, other European commissioners should increasingly engage directly with cities and city networks to ensure the urban dimension of a much broader range of European policies is understood. European networks of cities can facilitate this direct contact with cities so that meetings and visits in urban areas are included in commissioners' programmes when visiting member states.

Urban days

A consortium of urban stakeholders, including city networks and the European Commission, should organise bi-annual conferences in Brussels encouraging dialogue between European, national and city-level government on urban strengths and challenges.

These events should assess the impact of EU policies on cities and urban areas, and consider the urban dimension of forthcoming initiatives. City networks can provide input on good practices in implementing sustainable urban development. An urban agenda

must remain flexible, both in priorities and scope, to make sure that emerging issues can also be tackled.

Informal ministerial meetings on urban issues are important to ensure momentum and progress at European level. These meetings could take place, for example, at least once in every EU Presidency trio and could be coordinated with other ministerial meetings on areas of priority for cities.

Positive outcomes for cities

All these innovations - better coordination, dialogue and urban days - should not be simply gestures, but need to result in positive, concrete, outcomes for Europe's cities. Cities already implement a vast range of EU policies on the ground. But the urban dimension of those policies is not always recognised in the policy development process. Implementation can be reinforced by an EU urban agenda based on a practical and coherent approach as well as the direct involvement of cities.

In the longer term, an urban agenda must ensure a much greater recognition of the need to better balance priorities in European investment programmes. For the 2014-2020 budget period there is a clear ambition that European investments must create results on the ground. To this end, the EU must make the most of the potential return to be made on investments in cities, which in turn will benefit all of Europe.