



Time to empower Europe's cities

EUROCITIES position on the new Leipzig Charter

February 2020

The new Leipzig Charter should:

1. Elaborate a clear European urban vision and measurable objectives
2. Give a genuine role to cities in EU policy making, building upon the urban agenda
3. Put principles into practice reflecting the diversity of European cities
4. Ensure sufficient investment in the EU's urban areas, and resources to implement the urban agenda

Urban areas are home to over 75% of the EU's population: creating around 70% of jobs, implementing more than 70% of EU legislation, and generating over 85% of the EU's GDP. Cities, responsible for about 80% of energy use, are essential for Europe's transformation to a climate neutral continent by 2050, as set out in the European Green Deal. They are also where the vision of an economy that works for people will be implemented first. The Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) cannot be successful without a strong local dimension. As the level of government closest to people, city authorities can lead participatory policy making, ensuring that local developments respond to the concerns of people, essential to building trust between citizens and governments.

However, the potential of cities to deliver on EU's strategic objectives is frequently overlooked, including by the political guidelines of the new European Commission¹. The process related to the update of the Leipzig Charter is an opportunity to boost the role of cities in the EU and stress the importance of local intelligence for better policy making at national and EU level. Against the backdrop of the negotiations on the future long-term budget for the EU, and as most of the urban agenda partnerships are at the final stages of their work, a renewed Leipzig Charter comes at the best possible time. We must make the most of it.

EUROCITIES welcomes the opportunities provided by the forthcoming German EU presidency to contribute to the reflection on the renewal of the Leipzig Charter. It has generated the possibility to develop further on the urban agenda for the EU (UAEU) together with member states, cities and their networks as well as with the EU institutions, especially the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions. Based on these exchanges as well as our active involvement in the UAEU, we believe that the new Leipzig Charter should:

1. Elaborate a clear European urban vision and measurable objectives

The renewal of the Leipzig Charter offers a chance to take the UAEU to the next level by developing a clear vision for urban development, and the role of cities in Europe, aligned with global objectives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement. It should support the ambition of the European Green Deal, be clearly linked to the European Pillar of Social Rights and provide strategic direction for Europe's urban areas as well as an umbrella for European

¹ [The political guidelines of the new European Commission](#)

sectoral policies to work more coherently towards a sustainable, inclusive, people focussed and prosperous Europe.

The Leipzig Charter should

- go beyond merely setting out a strategy on sustainable urban development for Europe, identifying clear objectives but flexible enough to respond to emerging challenges. The document should reflect an ambition to work towards an inclusive society, a prosperous local economy and a healthy urban environment with vibrant and open spaces where city governments can address global challenges and are fit for the future².
- emphasise gender equality, affordable housing policies, social inclusion and reduction of social and territorial disparities to actively reduce inequality.
- include measurable objectives to inspire action and stimulate implementation measures. These objectives should be aligned with global goals (such as the SDGs) as well as European indicators such as the Social Scoreboard of the EPSR. Several actions of the urban agenda partnerships can be used as inspiration based on the Finnish Presidency paper clustering actions thematically³.
- encourage the various cohesion policy related European programmes and initiatives (such as URBACT, ESPON and the European Urban Initiative) to ensure synergies between their activities and the Charter, to create an environment that allows investments to be better planned, better targeted and more efficient.
- acknowledge the global responsibility of European cities. In particular, the Leipzig Charter offers the opportunity to firmly anchor and promote the importance of European and global municipal partnerships for transfer of knowledge, technologies and experience. The mutual learning process between cities within Europe and between the global north and the global south should be reflected in the new Charter.

2. Give a genuine role to cities in EU policy making, building upon the UA

The agreement on the urban agenda in 2016 was a turning point for cities, member states and the EU, taking multi-level governance and partnership approaches to a new level. The work led within the urban agenda has been positively received⁴. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement.

The Leipzig Charter should

- establish a high level group on the urban agenda, composed of a core group of representatives from cities, member states, MEPs and relevant Commissioners to drive progress on urban matters at EU level, inspire and push for a strategic cross sectorial agenda for cities in Europe.
- kick off annual EU urban leadership summits gathering city, national and EU leaders to define a common agenda, shared responsibilities and actions.
- identify a mechanism that will allow the results of the urban agenda on better regulation, funding and knowledge and multi-level governance to be channelled into EU and national policy making. Building on the Commission's assessment of the urban agenda, the German Presidency should - in collaboration with the partnership coordinators - develop comprehensive conclusions of the partnership results, ensuring that the relevant recommendations are used in the Charter.

² See [EUROCITIES strategic framework 2020-2029](#)

³ Input paper on the continued implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU; Strengthening the synergies and the overall potential impact by clustering its actions, August 2019

⁴ See latest surveys [conducted by the Romanian Presidency](#), EUKN Survey, [EUROCITIES](#), and [DG Regio of the European Commission](#)

- create a transparent communication process, building on Finnish Presidency paper clustering action thematically⁵, whereby the European Commission regularly report to member states and the urban stakeholder community on the follow-up of the findings of the UA partnerships and how EU policy developments are aligned to the recommendations.
- clarify roles and the division of tasks between the levels of government involved in urban development at EU level. It is necessary to strengthen the commitment of the parties involved, notably member states. Also, the urban agenda should become a formally acknowledged policy instrument for multi-level governance of the European Commission, leading to clearer engagement by its sectoral directorates.
- encourage member states to use the governance model introduced by the urban agenda, which involved cities in a coordinated manner, as a basis for a multi-level governance model and work on its improvement in areas identified by the different assessments.
- be a stepping stone for the continuation of the urban agenda, building on its strengths. The Finnish Presidency input paper clustering UAEU actions⁶ represents a new and interesting approach to capitalising on the work of the partnerships and strengthening implementation.
- promote the regular use of urban impact assessments to strengthen better regulation. The outcomes of the better regulation work strand of the urban agenda should be improved through clearer connections to the REFIT platform.
- encourage member states to ensure the proper involvement of local authorities in the preparation, implementation and follow-up of EU programming at national level.
- recognise the importance of high-quality subnational data to better understand urban realities across Europe for better evidence-based policy development. The efforts of the Commission's STRAT board tool should be continued as it provides an excellent overview of EU investments in sustainable urban development. On the basis of the better knowledge findings of the urban agenda partnership the Commission should develop a proposal as how the urban database should be improved.

3. Put principle into practice reflecting the diversity of European cities

The principles emphasised by the draft Leipzig Charter are widely accepted and essential to sound urban development. Nevertheless, turning the principles into practice are challenging at all levels of government due to silo thinking, inadequate governance mechanisms, financial resources, investment conditions, for example, and as a result of the diversity of our cities.

The Leipzig Charter should

- do more than simply describe the importance of different urban development principles. It must propose recommendations and commitments for their better implementation. It is also important to recognise that different cities have different needs and there is 'no-size-fits all'. The set of principles will be weighted differently in different local and national contexts.
- give new momentum to cooperation for integrated functional (metropolitan and urban-rural) development. Member states should create strong organisational, legal and financial frameworks and incentives, while recognising the competence at local level to agree on priorities for collaboration.
- strengthen the cooperation, of spatial planning and urban policy experts, in line with the messages of the territorial agenda. The work of ESPON plays a very important role and should be used by member states when making decisions.

⁵ Input paper on the continued implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU; Strengthening the synergies and the overall potential impact by clustering its actions, August 2019

⁶ Idem

4. Ensure investment in the EU's urban areas and resources to implement the urban agenda

It is essential that the share of financial resources allocated to cities remains at least on the level of the current programming period's budget in the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020. Drastic cuts would be detrimental to the territorial development of the EU and to cities' ability to contribute to EU's strategic objectives. Furthermore, improving efficiency could play a critical role in making public spending more effective.

The Leipzig Charter should

- stress the need for joined up funding and investment in urban areas to which the European Structural and Investment Funds are offering a sound framework. The European Urban Initiative is another opportunity for cities within cohesion policy. Cities also draw on support from a broad range of EU instruments beyond cohesion policy funds, such as Horizon Europe, LIFE+, InvestEU, Creative Europe, Digital Europe, and the Asylum and Migration Fund. Also, the European Investment Bank's role in financing, for instance, more affordable housing while maintaining a social diversity in urban areas, is highly welcomed. The funding stream must generate synergies locally, for instance by linking grey and green infrastructure investments in transport in densely built areas.
- inspire member states to be more ambitious on the minimum allocation for sustainable urban development, regardless of the final agreement on the budget allocated under the European Regional Development Fund.
- commit member states to the wider use of integrated territorial tools such as integrated territorial investment, community-led local development and the new policy objective 'Europe closer to its citizens'.
- push for direct access to EU finance for cities, in matters where they are responsible for the implementation of policy. Direct responsibilities need to be matched with direct access to EU finance in areas such as social inclusion and unemployment, ensuring that it is channelled to where it is the most needed.
- advocate for the pivotal role of urban areas in implementing Europe's strategic and ambitious green policy objectives and promote the direct allocation of city-tailored EU funds to secure the desired outcomes.
- push for an increase in resources necessary for the implementation of the UAEU actions as well as the recommendations of other relevant frameworks for cities, such as the Leipzig Charter or the territorial agenda.
- support capacity building for city authorities, engaging policy makers and project developers to ensure transfer and use of knowledge on urban development across Europe. Financial incentives should support initiatives such as job shadowing or staff exchanges as supporting capacity building leads to better quality public investments. Beyond the exchange of good practices, effective tools for learning together must be promoted, including peer reviews, in-depth study visits and mentoring.