

EUROPEAN CITIES FOR EUROPEAN POLICYMAKING AND DEMOCRACY

A Declaration of European Local Governments to Strengthen Cities' Participation in EU Policymaking and European Democracy

Barcelona, 8th November 2023

Seven months ahead of the European elections, we, the representatives of large cities of the European Union (EU) commit to shaping strong democracies on all levels of government, deepening citizen participation in decision-making, fighting populism, disinformation, and all sorts of discrimination, in order to contribute to a stronger and more democratic EU. To this end, we call the European Parliament and resulting EU institution to ensure a seat at the table for city governments within the EU governance architecture.

In this context, in spite in financial and budgetary challenges, cities and their governments continue to innovate to tackle the climate, social and economic crises.

We see with great concern that socio-economic disparities are growing and especially women are hit harder by the multiple crises; empowering women in all fields of society is key to a living democracy; linking the rule of law mechanism to gender equality and women's rights is key to equality.

City governments further warn against austerity measures and call for tax justice and fiscal decentralization to ensure that the cities of the future are just, green and prosperous and can serve the common good, as expressed in the New Leipzig Charter.

Therefore, **we call for the following actions by the governments of the EU Member States and the EU institutions:**

1. Strengthen democracy, decentralisation and local participation within the EU

- We will aim to ensure high turnout at the upcoming European elections as representatives of cities and metropolitan areas, especially amongst the young and first voters and will work to enhance local participatory democracy, including on EU level by creating more opportunities for direct involvement of citizens.
- We are prepared as cities to build a strong joint initiative with the EU institutions and member states to defend democracy and to fight against disinformation.
- We support inclusive and participatory democracy for all our citizens and encourage the EU institutions to evaluate **Council Directive 94/80/EC with regard to establishing voting rights for third-country nationals living in EU member states on a permanent basis.**

- We urge EU institutions and member states to foster decentralization, to guarantee local self-government and ensure the effective implementation of the principle of subsidiarity defined in the Treaty on European Union, while strengthening the partnership with local governments.
- We urge EU institutions and member states to bring multilevel governance mechanisms to the next level to ensure the effective institutional participation of city governments in EU policy-making.
- In line with the citizens' recommendations on the Conference on the Future of Europe, future initiatives should be to ensure the realities of cities and regions inform EU policy development at early stages of deliberation, e.g., by involving city governments and their representative bodies in High-Level Expert Groups of the European Commission and Council Working Groups.

2. Promote fiscal decentralization and local financial sustainability

- We remind member states and the EU institutions of the necessity of continued efforts to empower city governments, as the level of government closest to citizens, through adequate fiscal capacity and autonomy to provide for all the services and infrastructure to guarantee a good quality of life for all.
- We expect member states and the EU institutions to provide cities with adequate financial resources to cover the responsibilities attributed to them by regional, national and EU legislative frameworks, and urge member states to avoid unfunded mandates and to redistribute tasks and resources between the national, regional and local level in a democratic, transparent and accountable way.
- We call upon the EU institutions and member states to guarantee mandatory participation for city governments in the design, implementation and monitoring of EU funding impacting cities (i.e., recovery and resilience facility, cohesion policy, among others). In this context, we support initiatives to secure direct access of local and regional authorities to EU funding, especially in key sectors of social cohesion, as labour market, affordable housing and the integration of migrants and refugees.
- We reiterate the calls from cities since many years for a change in the Stability and Growth Pact to allow for long-term public investment in infrastructure by a "Golden Rule" and more leeway in the investment clause.

3. Enhance the urban dimension of EU policies

- We require that EU policies reflect urban and metropolitan realities and the interests and aspirations of city governments and their stakeholders, which includes surrounding rural areas.
- We call to ensure that the intergovernmental discussions on urban matters taking place in the context of the Urban Agenda are organized in timely and meaningful manner.

- As cities we would like to ensure that this opportunity is used not only to discuss the Urban Agenda partnerships but also as a forum to discuss all relevant EU legislations and initiatives.
- We call to include in the Urban Agenda the discussion of the crucial role EU member states have in supporting and enabling the implementation of a growing number of EU Urban initiatives and policies, including the Horizon Europe Mission on Climate Neutral Cities, and the New European Bauhaus.

4. Involve cities in the EU Presidencies and Council configurations

- We expect cities to be systematically involved in the preparation and implementation of the EU Presidencies for all areas that have an impact on urban and metropolitan issues. This subnational perspective on the design and implementation of political decision making and policy priorities will not only enhance implementation effectiveness but also reinforce democratic accountability.
- To ensure a long-term strategy, we call EU institutions and member states to involve both the relevant national and European city network, including Eurocities as the leading network of major European cities.
- We urge the member states and the Council to better include cities and their representatives in relevant council configurations.

5. Reform the European Committee of the Regions to ensure greater participation of city and metropolitan governments

- We urge to recognize the European Committee of the Regions to a binding role in local and regional EU policymaking. Although the European Committee of the Regions is one of the most advanced institutional mechanisms worldwide, its non-binding advisory character is one of its most severe structural weaknesses.
- While we acknowledge the productive involvement from cities across Europe in the Committee of the Regions, and in light of the current underrepresentation of major cities in it, we demand moving toward the reconfiguration of the Committee of the Regions in a new bicameral Committee of the Regions and Cities. The Chamber established to ensure the representation of local governments will have to ensure the representation of large cities and metropolitan areas with at least 50% of the seats, while striving for gender balance. The dual structure of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe provides a useful example.