

Implementing the New Leipzig Charter Through Multi-Level Governance: Next Steps for the Urban Agenda for the EU

I. The Continued Need for Multi-Level Urban Governance in Europe

The New Leipzig Charter with its set of strategic principles of good urban governance provides a framework guiding post-2020 urban policy coordination in Europe. This framework reaffirms the objectives and achievements of the Pact of Amsterdam, thus linking the Urban Agenda for the EU's working method to the New Leipzig Charter's strategic principles.

We, the Ministers responsible for urban matters, emphasise that the Urban Agenda for the EU as a valuable implementation instrument towards more coherent and urban-friendly policies will be continued and developed further to strengthen its impact and efficiency.

1. Consolidating, Delivering and Advancing the Urban Agenda for the EU

We, the Ministers, highlight that the Urban Agenda for the EU has clearly fostered multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance in Europe and has had a positive effect on the cooperation between local and regional authorities, Member States, the European Commission and other EU institutions, and further urban stakeholders. The key achievement of the Urban Agenda for the EU is the opportunity given to local and regional authorities to discuss urban priority themes with European institutions, national ministries and other partners – jointly identifying possibilities in which to enhance the complementarity and coherence of EU policies affecting urban areas and to strengthen their urban dimension. This is in line with the key role of cities in multi-level policymaking.

The European Commission's assessment of the first years of implementing the Urban Agenda for the EU has also demonstrated many positive results. At the same time, it

has indicated the need for improvements to reach the initiative's objectives more profoundly.

We underline the importance of the Urban Agenda for the EU as a means to foster the implementation of the United Nations New Urban Agenda and to pursue the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals' urban dimensions.

We agree that we need to make the Urban Agenda for the EU more impactful and efficient in the future and to harness the achievements of the process to date. Hereby, the three key pillars laid out in the Pact of Amsterdam – Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge (Base and Exchange) – continue to be instrumental.

The assessment of the Urban Agenda for the EU pointed out that resource constraints are an important issue to be addressed. Accordingly, sufficient funding and effective implementation structures based on multi-level governance are pivotal for a more impactful delivery of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

We welcome the European Urban Initiative under Cohesion Policy as an instrument to support the Urban Agenda for the EU and the inter-governmental cooperation on urban matters, and to strengthen integrated and participatory approaches and their sustainability as well as to foster coherence between EU policies, programmes and initiatives in the area of sustainable urban development. The strengthened urban dimension of Cohesion Policy needs to be based on and should contribute to the principles of the New Leipzig Charter, and promote the concept of functional areas where relevant, thus fostering a harmonious and balanced development for Europe, whilst taking into account the specific situation in Member States and regions.

At the same time, we emphasise that all stakeholders and governmental levels involved should actively explore all possibilities to allocate resources to the Urban Agenda for the EU, taking into account the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

2. Maintaining and Reinforcing Multi-Level and Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation

The multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach as well as the unique opportunity, particularly for local and regional authorities, to enter into a dialogue between all relevant levels have been identified as important strengths and achievements of the

Urban Agenda for the EU. The same goes for the Thematic Partnership approach and the flexible, ‘experimental’ nature of the Partnerships. Yet, the lack of clear and transparent processes, requirements and specific objectives, as well as an uneven level of engagement among stakeholders are issues to be addressed.

We, the Ministers, reaffirm that multi-level and multi-stakeholder Thematic Partnerships remain the key delivery mode of the Urban Agenda for the EU, among the wider set of actions aimed at improving the urban dimension of EU policies, as established by the Pact of Amsterdam. Other forms of cooperation in line with the multi-level and multi-stakeholder principles that contribute to sustainable urban development should be considered and further explored.

We therefore agree on a more flexible setup of Thematic Partnerships in terms of duration, composition, and outputs within a more targeted, balanced and transparent framework in the future. This implies that concrete goals will determine the Partnerships’ cooperation. Additionally, the involvement of cities of all sizes is key to reflect the diversity of European urban areas and the different needs they may have. The selection of partners will follow dedicated calls for Partnerships based on ex-ante assessments, aiming to safeguard a suitable level of partners’ thematic and procedural expertise. Adequate resources will ensure Partnerships can achieve their objectives and operate within low-threshold administrative procedures. In order to ensure a higher sector-specific impact, close cooperation with representatives of the relevant European Commission Directorates-General and national ministries should be operational from the start of each Partnership.

We point out that it is pivotal to build on the valuable body of work produced by the 14 Thematic Partnerships since 2016 and to continue supporting action implementation. The thematic clustering of Partnerships’ actions in order to create synergies can potentially be a very strong tool for the further development of the Urban Agenda for the EU’s thematic orientation. Procedurally, too, lessons can be learned from the pilot phase of the Urban Agenda for the EU: stronger transfer of experiences to relevant stakeholders as well as stronger cooperation between Partnerships need to be promoted.

New themes for Thematic Partnerships or comparable multi-level instruments should be in line with and provide input to EU policy priorities and initiatives, especially when these have a clear urban dimension. This applies in particular to the

European Green Deal, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Digital Strategy, the Recovery Plan for Europe and in connection with global priorities highlighted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda.

3. Achieving Better Regulation, Better Funding and Policy Coherence

We, the Ministers, acknowledge that the Partnerships of the Urban Agenda for the EU have provided useful insights into bottlenecks and challenges related to the implementation of EU policies and legislation. At the same time, the Urban Agenda for the EU assessment has found relatively few actions focused on Better Regulation or Better Funding. Consequently, these streams require a more targeted approach. Their future delivery needs to be intimately linked to the EU policymaking and funding cycles and existing institutions and processes.

We emphasise that continuous legal and procedural expertise is key and needs to be available to the Partnerships to ensure effective and timely actions. This expertise is indispensable in order to establish close links to the Better Regulation Agenda, including the Fit for Future Platform.

We therefore recommend that the Better Regulation strand of the Urban Agenda for the EU will be linked to the Annual Work Programme and considered, where appropriate, as regards the Rules of Procedure of the Fit for Future Platform. In addition, the future Urban Agenda for the EU and its delivery modes need to continuously have access to legal support, among other services, in order to foster legislative actions and recommendations that directly benefit EU cities and regions.

We commit to duly consider, as appropriate, the actions and recommendations emerging from the Urban Agenda for the EU.

4. Ensuring Better Knowledge and Stronger Communication

The Urban Agenda for the EU assessment yielded a need for improved internal communication among key actors. For the purpose of more transparency, ownership, and a better flow of information particularly on the implementation of actions, the horizontal and vertical dialogue for urban policy should be strengthened.

We, the Ministers, highlight that both elements of the Better Knowledge stream – knowledge base and knowledge exchange – should be pursued with a differentiated and targeted approach. Hereby, the Partnerships should be able to capitalise on existing support structures and to involve relevant partners. With regard to knowledge base, these are in particular the knowledge policy units within the Commission’s Directorates-General, the Commission’s Joint Research Centre, Eurostat, ESPON, JPI Urban Europe, Horizon Europe, EUKN, and other knowledge programmes and networks. Knowledge exchange as well as capacity and knowledge building should be supported by the Cohesion Policy programmes and initiatives, in particular by the European Urban Initiative and the URBACT programme. In general, the manifold research and innovation activities supporting science-policy cooperation offer a big potential and should be considered in the future Urban Agenda for the EU process. Engaging stakeholders from third countries and within frameworks established by inter-governmental organisations with regard to international cooperation in urban development can additionally be beneficial to dissemination and capitalisation.

We acknowledge the need for a stronger strategic alignment between the Territorial Agenda 2030, the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy, national urban policy frameworks, and the Urban Agenda for the EU. At the local and regional level, a wider circle of cities and stakeholders should benefit from the outcomes of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

We therefore regard National Contact Points as pivotal to support the relevant capitalisation, communication and dissemination activities. Hereby, the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality need to be safeguarded and the duplication of structures should be avoided.

5. Governing the Urban Agenda for the EU with Efficient Decision-Making and Support Structures

We, the Ministers, confirm that significant progress has been made in strengthening the urban dimension and the creation of a common framework for urban policy initiatives through the Urban Agenda for the EU. The assessment of the Urban Agenda for the EU clearly demonstrates that its achievements are related to the strengthened cooperation between local and regional authorities, Member States and the European Commission and in close partnership with other relevant European

institutions and stakeholders. However, the assessment also indicates that the Urban Agenda for the EU lacks an effective governance mechanism and that the outreach to stakeholders as well as the implementation of the actions require more attention.

We acknowledge the key role of Member States in addressing these shortcomings to deliver a more impactful Urban Agenda for the EU in the future.

In the spirit of the Riga Declaration of Ministers towards the Urban Agenda for the EU, **we recognise** the intergovernmental cooperation structures for urban matters as the appropriate platform where all relevant stakeholders can jointly discuss and govern the Urban Agenda for the EU in the future.

The Directors-General for Urban Matters (DGUM) represent the central coordinating and decision-making body of the Urban Agenda for the EU, advised and supported by the Urban Development Group (UDG) as outlined in the Pact of Amsterdam. The DGUM and the UDG will continue to benefit from the preparatory work by the Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group (UATPG).

For the future delivery of the Urban Agenda for the EU, the Partnerships will require communication, expertise, management and administrative support, as well as guidance regarding cross-cutting issues and stronger cooperation among each other. Member States and the European Commission will jointly conduct ex-ante assessments, prepare the relevant calls for Partnerships, monitor progress, and capitalise on the experience and results in a transparent manner. At the same time, there is a need to support inter-governmental cooperation on urban matters in line with the Presidency Trio's priorities, thus promoting strategic analysis and synthesis, coherence and continuity within and between Trio programmes, providing support to the DGUM and UDG, and ultimately strengthening urban policies in Member States.

We therefore agree that a dedicated and permanent Secretariat for Urban Matters can deliver these tasks in the most coordinated and efficient way, and will therefore work towards the establishment of an adequate structure under the European Urban Initiative. We believe that this will result in an overall stronger cooperation and a greater impact at the urban scale across Europe.

II. Conclusions

We, the Ministers responsible for urban matters, commit to implement the principles of the New Leipzig Charter and to sustain the continued multi-level governance and partnership approach within the Urban Agenda for the EU. We call upon all our partners to work with us to this end within the scope of their competences and within their responsibilities and capacities. In particular, we:

CALL ON the Commission:

- a) to continue playing an active role in the further development and implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU in line with the strategic principles set out in the New Leipzig Charter and in close cooperation with the Directors-General for Urban Matters, the Urban Development Group and all other stakeholders;
- b) to continue facilitating the implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU through the provision of support of the European Urban Initiative, in close cooperation with the Member States and through the engagement of the relevant Directorates-General in the process;
- c) to ensure the continuity, coherence and coordination of the Urban Agenda for the EU by supporting, where relevant, the implementation of the set of actions and recommendations emerging from the Urban Agenda for the EU to date, as well as by future Thematic Partnerships or other multi-level and multi-stakeholder delivery modes established under the Urban Agenda for the EU;
- d) to continue its efforts of further strengthening its coordination and streamlining of policies affecting urban areas in order to enhance the complementarity of policies and to strengthen their urban dimension, in particular in the areas of Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge;
- e) to align its actions on strengthening the urban dimension of EU policies with the Urban Agenda for the EU, in particular regarding its political priorities, work programme, legislative work, and planned consultations;
- f) to take into account, where relevant, the results and recommendations of Thematic Partnerships or other multi-level and multi-stakeholder delivery modes established under the Urban Agenda for the EU, after guidance by the

- Directors-General for Urban Matters, for a possible discussion in relevant Expert Groups when dealing with new and existing EU legislation;
- g) to continue to explore improved assessments of urban and territorial dimensions, where relevant, as part of impact assessments;
 - h) to report back regularly to the Directors-General for Urban Matters, on the implementation and results of the Urban Agenda for the EU;
 - i) to ensure the continued contribution of the Urban Agenda for the EU to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular their urban dimensions.

CALL ON the Member States:

- a) to take appropriate steps for and engage relevant bodies at all levels of government in the further development and implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU in line with the strategic principles set out in the New Leipzig Charter and in line with the respective competences and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality;
- b) to support, where relevant, the implementation of the actions and recommendations emerging from the Urban Agenda for the EU to date, as well as by future Thematic Partnerships or other multi-level and multi-stakeholder delivery modes established under the Urban Agenda for the EU;
- c) to take into account, where relevant, the results and recommendations of Thematic Partnerships or other multi-level and multi-stakeholder delivery modes established under the Urban Agenda for the EU, after guidance by the Directors-General for Urban Matters, for a possible discussion in relevant Council Working Parties when dealing with new and existing EU legislation;
- d) to contribute to improving the linkages between national urban policy frameworks and the Urban Agenda for the EU through National Contact Points in order to support the relevant capitalisation, communication and dissemination activities;
- e) to ensure the continued contribution of the Urban Agenda for the EU to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular their urban dimensions;
- f) to promote the mobilisation of high-level support for the Urban Agenda for the EU, in order to drive progress on urban matters in the EU, to communicate methods and results of the Urban Agenda for the EU to a broader audience,

and to inspire a strategic and political cross-sectoral agenda for cities and regions.

ENCOURAGE the local and regional authorities:

- a) to take an active role in the development and implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU in line with the strategic principles set out in the New Leipzig Charter and in line with their respective competences and the principle of subsidiarity;
- b) to capitalise on their knowledge which is essential to the Urban Agenda for the EU, as well as that of European networks representing urban interests such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and EUROCITIES in contributing with expertise to the ongoing assessment of the implications at the local level of the EU's legislative and financial framework;
- c) to continue and reinforce city-to-city collaboration at the European level, including for example through the URBACT programme, to support knowledge sharing, capacity building and implementation, also in relation to the Urban Agenda for the EU's work;
- d) to cooperate with other local and regional authorities of all sizes, the private sector, local communities, knowledge institutions and civil society in advancing the objectives of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

INVITE the European Parliament:

- a) to take into account, where relevant, the results and recommendations of Thematic Partnerships or other multi-level and multi-stakeholder delivery modes established under the Urban Agenda for the EU, after guidance by the Directors-General for Urban Matters, for a possible discussion in relevant Committees when dealing with new and existing EU legislation;
- b) to establish a continuous link between the Urban Intergroup and the Urban Agenda for the EU process.

INVITE the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee:

- a) to provide input and support, within their competences, to the further development and implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU in line with the strategic principles set out in the New Leipzig Charter;

- b) to contribute to the objectives of Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge by way of supporting the Thematic Partnerships or other multi-level and multi-stakeholder delivery modes established under the Urban Agenda for the EU with legal and procedural expertise, and by way of dissemination activities aiming to involve a broader range of stakeholders in the process.

INVITE the European Investment Bank:

- a) to contribute to the work of Thematic Partnerships or other multi-level and multi-stakeholder delivery modes established under the Urban Agenda for the EU, especially with regard to Better Funding and Better Knowledge, with its financial expertise;
- b) to reflect, where relevant, the strategic principles of the New Leipzig Charter and the objectives of the Urban Agenda for the EU in its lending, grant-loan blending and advisory services approach in the urban context, taking into account the need to support sustainable urban and regional development strategies;
- c) to develop financial instruments and financing approaches in support of the strategic principles of the New Leipzig Charter, working together with other international financial institutions and promotional banks;
- d) to work with urban stakeholders to design and implement circular and innovative business models required to achieve climate-neutral, socially sustainable and productive cities.