



The Green City Dimension

Making use of circular procurement and specific targets and indicators

Supporting the green transition of cities



This article is part of a series of articles based on the 14 Partnerships of the Urban Agenda for the EU. Structured around the three city dimensions of the New Leipzig Charter (the Productive, the Green, and the Just City), the articles link Partnerships' actions and activities with other relevant EU projects and initiatives supported by Cohesion Policy (including Urban Innovative Actions, URBACT, or Article 7 cities benefitting from ERDF). The articles demonstrate the key role of cities in the Urban Agenda for the EU, and focus on specific actions they have led and implemented. Overall, the articles aim at showcasing practices and experiences on how different tools and funding support can help cities face their challenges in a strategic way towards sustainable urban development.

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Making use of circular procurements and specific targets and indicators

Cities' transformation in the post COVID-19 era with a focus on urban planning

Overall, while the link between COVID-19 prevalence and urban design characteristics has created many debates in the media and the public, it is not yet clearly justified how different design parameters such as connectivity, block size, land use mix, or polycentricity, influence the infection and mortality rate of COVID-19 and the capacity of cities to respond to the pandemic.

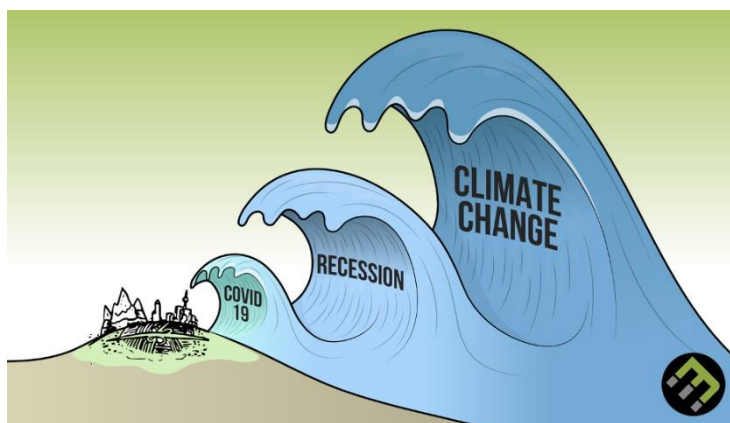


Figure 1: Urban challenges. Source: *What's Next for Corporate Sustainability in a Post-COVID19 World*.

Arguments point to the idea that to facilitate effective physical distancing during pandemics, cities need to allocate more space to active transport modes and open/public areas. Such reconfigurations may also provide opportunities to further integrate urban greenery into cities, thereby achieving additional health and climate adaptation co-benefits. They may also contribute to resilience against other stressors and adverse events (Sharifi, 2019c).

Nature Based Solutions (NBS) is recognised as an 'umbrella concept' for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. Various policy areas working with nature are addressed to solve different but interlinked societal challenges related to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (EEA Report, 01/2021).

Policy pillars supporting the green transition of cities

As a key pillar of the [European Green Deal](#) (EC, 2019c), the [new EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) (European Commission, 2020e) includes a nature restoration plan among its objectives, which has the potential to strongly support the uptake of restorative NBS in the countries of the European Union (EU). Furthermore, the European Commission (EC) introduced the [new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change](#), setting out a pathway to prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The strategy highlights the value of NBS as key, multipurpose, no-regret solutions.

Moreover, the [new Circular Economy Action Plan \(CEAP\)](#) was adopted in March 2020, and is one of the main building blocks of the [European Green Deal](#). The EU's transition to a circular economy will reduce pressure on natural resources and will create sustainable growth and

jobs. In combination with the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, it paves the way to achieving the EU's 2050 climate neutrality target and halting biodiversity loss.

A holistic approach, supported also by the New Leipzig Charter, is required to cope with the challenges and achieve the transformation of cities into sustainable systems.

Adopting the concept of circular economy in resource management provides a pathway towards this transformation. Different kinds of resources including water, energy, materials, buildings, and open spaces *per se*, can be subjected to alternative, innovative, and more sustainable management, contributing to cities' green transformation.

What is the role of public procurements?

Every year, over 250 000 public authorities in the EU spend around 14% of GDP (around EUR 2 trillion per year) on the purchase of services, works, and supplies (**European public procurement policies**). These public authorities shall choose the most economically advantageous tender, considering criteria beyond the price or cost, including qualitative, environmental, and/or social aspects. The EU has developed green public procurement criteria to facilitate the inclusion of green requirements in public tender documents.

Setting an ambitious vision to procure responsibly and innovatively has the power to enhance sustainability, boost new business models, and raise awareness among actors involved in the whole supply chain, including citizens, who are the end users of the public authorities' services. In doing so, the procurement of services and products becomes a valuable investment towards a better future.

The public procurement mechanism is a strategic driver to help cities towards their green transition.

A European mechanism to put forward the new Urban Agenda

The importance of NBS and circular economy, and the power of public procurements, were recognised very early on as part of the EU strategic objectives. In the frame of the Urban Agenda for the EU, three multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder Partnerships have been established, working together for several years on producing and implementing action plans on these emerging topics. These are the Circular Economy Partnership, coordinated by the City of Oslo, the Innovative and Sustainable Procurement Partnership, coordinated by the City of Haarlem, and the Partnership for Sustainable Land Use and NBS, coordinated by the City of Bologna. Each of them produced valuable outputs, which have the potential to inform and improve considerations for urban development in terms of the respective themes.

This article demonstrates the key role of cities in the Urban Agenda for the EU, and highlights specific actions that they have led and implemented. In addition, it showcases sustainable urban development projects undertaken by cities to face their challenges in a strategic way. Integrated urban strategies have been designed with support from the ERDF, while the role of the URBACT and Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) programmes in helping cities to develop pragmatic, new, and sustainable solutions has also been revealed.

Bologna: Strategic guidelines to transform cities inspired by the Urban Agenda Partnership

The Partnership on Sustainable Land Use and NBS started its work in June 2017, with the aim of identifying relevant actions for reducing urban sprawl and land take on the one hand, and on the other, mainstreaming the introduction of nature, and natural features and processes, into cities. Both approaches aim to achieve liveable compactness.

Nine actions have been identified and included in the action plan of the Partnership. Four of them are led by the City of Bologna:

- Including land take and soil properties in impact assessment procedures;
- Indicators of land take;
- Better regulation to boost NBS at European, national, and local levels;
- Awareness raising in the areas of NBS and sustainable use of land (urban sprawl).

In 2018, the City of Bologna, inspired by the work of the Partnership, began reviewing the General Urban Plan; a regulatory tool which identifies strategic guidelines, objectives, and priorities to transform the quality of the city and territory in the long term.

*The new plan encompasses the experience gained through the active involvement of the city in the **Partnership on Sustainable Land Use and NBS**.*

Valentina Ballotta, Action Leader for the Urban Agenda Partnership on Sustainable Land Use and NBS, and Urban Planner at the City of Bologna, recognises that *“the involvement of Bologna in the Urban Agenda Partnership helped us to put forward internal dialogue between different municipality departments. Most importantly, it helped the city to raise awareness on the topic, come to a consensus on what NBS are, and how they can contribute to the health and wellbeing of citizens, and provided a methodology to work in an integrated, participatory way across various stakeholders, including the citizens”*.

Indicators for land take

Promoting the regeneration of man-made soils and opposition to new land take are at the heart of the plan, aligned with the principles of circular economy. Focusing on the perspective of ensuring sustainable use of land, the objective set is to strike a balance between high density urban environments, adequate standards of public and green spaces, and good living conditions for all.



Land take is the main reference indicator for measuring new urban developments.

Figure 2: Overview of green areas. © Municipality of Bologna

Workshops and discussions took place, as Bologna led the relevant action in the frame of the Urban Agenda Partnership. The aim was to propose a set of common indicators, or a composite index of net land take, that considers urban greening, re-naturalisation processes, and soil sealing/de-sealing, as well as to provide a common assessment framework for the environmental impact of spatial planning.

Inspired by the work done in the Partnership, and given that Bologna has a lot of former military sites, a trend of restoring and regenerating areas or buildings emerged. This process does not count as new land take, and is therefore in line with the principles of circular economy and regenerating the city.

The existence of a regulated target for land take that already covered the whole Emilia-Romagna region played a catalytic role. Regional Law 24/2017 sets a target of 3% maximum new land take by 2050. Very few exceptions are permitted, mainly for public developments. The law also provides a series of other mechanisms for land take and soil sealing limitation.

Haarlem: A pioneer in championing ambitious targets

Haarlem, a mid-sized city with a population of 160 000 inhabitants located in the Noord-Holland province of the Netherlands, is a pioneer in championing ambitious targets, and the **Winner of the Procura+ Award for Procurement Initiative of the Year 2020**. Procura+ is a network managed by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), and consists of European public authorities that connect, exchange, and act on sustainable and innovative procurement.

Haarlem first introduced an action plan to become climate neutral in 2008. The city bases its public procurement work on this ambition. It strives to be a frontrunner in sustainable public procurement, and is working hard to transition to becoming a gas-free city with a circular economy.

Haarlem's strong focus on public procurements has led the city to become a coordinator for the work and development of the Urban Agenda Partnership on Innovative and Responsible Public Procurement.

Focus on building competences

Based on experience, public organisations responsible for planning and conducting public procurements at local level vary considerably in size and form. Smaller municipalities do not always have (enough) expert procurement officers, and their level of competence on the details of applicable law, and the processes and general know-how of innovative procurement, varies. One element stands out, however; their expert knowledge of what the municipality actually needs to buy.

To strengthen local ownership of public procurement and to minimise the risk of yielding rigid and ineffective solutions, Haarlem recognised the need to expand local capabilities in innovative and sustainable public procurement, and join forces locally through the establishment of Local Cooperation Centres, very early on.

A Local Cooperation Centre has proven to be a good way to implement a procurement strategy.

Analytic [guidelines for setting up a Local Cooperation Centre](#) have been developed as part of work led by the Partnership on Innovative and Responsible Public Procurement.

The most important step in establishing a Centre is to gain support at the strategic level, and embed local cooperation in the broader context of a city's procurement strategy. This is explained in more detail in the guidance on [Building Procurement Strategy](#). This guidance toolkit has been created divided into three parts: the strategic level, the tactical level (what process and methodology of design is being used, and the component parts a procurement strategy includes), and the operational level.

Magic can happen

"Most usually, people are afraid to do things in a new way, and changing mindset is difficult. However, transformation is happening. In the past, if someone raised the need to re-use furniture or other materials, there was resistance. Now, it is the facility manager who seeks out materials, either to re-use them directly, or to transform them. As there are a lot of

inspiring examples, moving from linear to circular economy is now becoming a normal way of living”, says Valentina Schippers-Opejko, Coordinator of the EU Urban Agenda Partnership on Innovative and Responsible Public Procurement.

According to Valentina, “legislation is not necessarily a barrier towards reuse of materials. We need to think of solutions and not concentrate on the persisting problems. Towards this, it is critical to involve the industrial market early in the transformation process, as there are technical solutions that are not obvious or widely known. If these potential innovation agents are involved early enough, they gain the chance to be prepared for the things to come, push forward investments in research and innovation, and come up with applicable solutions. It is only then that magic happens”.

Market consultations are very important. It is necessary to maintain transparency, non-discrimination, and equity, and provide the same information to everyone.

Putting circular criteria into public tenders cannot be a ‘one person job’. The process needs to receive attention from multiple perspectives, by involving all different bodies and stakeholders from multiple levels of governance, disciplines, and helixes. It is not only about economy or environmental sustainability criteria. The social aspect is equally important, aiming to benefit citizens, who should be the end beneficiaries of the green transformation.

Online treasures coming from the Urban Agenda Partnership and further developed through URBACT networks

The work that has been put forward by the City of Haarlem was also inspired by its role in leading the Urban Agenda Partnership on Innovative and Responsible Public Procurement. The Partnership has delivered all its actions and presents them in an interactive way [online](#).

Moreover, the recent [URBACT online course on strategic procurement](#), organised with the involvement of the Partnership and the URBACT Action Planning Network [Making Spend Matter](#) (2018–2021) and coinciding with the work of [PROCURE](#) (2016–2018), both of which are financed by the [URBACT programme](#), confirmed that there is a growing community eager to learn from each other about how to apply procurement more strategically in cities.

Inspiration from Maribor

Support for integrated, sustainable urban strategies which address economic, environmental, climate, demographic, and social challenges is at the centre of Article 7 of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund (CF) Regulation. In this framework, Maribor has set the institutional and operational mechanism for the selection of impactful urban interventions. The starting point for this has been the introduction of an integrated strategy focused on circular economy, which has received funding from the ERDF (GREENCYCLE project). This integrated urban strategy

had the power to initiate a number of urban development initiatives in Maribor, which have transformed it into a rapidly growing European city.

A great ambition

Maribor does not have a landfill site, and does not want to have one, nor does it wish to dispose of waste resulting from incineration. Thus, recovery has been the only way to go.

Acknowledging the need to operate synergistically and maximise implementation capacity in order to fulfil its full circular potential, in 2016 the Slovenian city established the WCYCLE Institute in the framework of the [WCYCLE initiative](#). The WCYCLE Institute brought together local utility companies to re-think their business models, while WCYCLE takes the form of a platform which provides a space for the discussion and initiation of new circular economy projects for different stakeholders in the city and the region.

Today, the WCYCLE Institute is in the process of being merged with the Maribor Regional Development Agency (MRA), with the aim of implementing circular economy projects more broadly at the regional level.

A regional leader on the topic of circular economy

The first attempt to start unfolding the WCYCLE model's objectives for the whole city and region coincided with the GREENCYCLE project, financed by the Interreg Alpine programme. One of the outputs of GREENCYCLE was the [Strategy for the Transition to the Circular Economy in the Municipality of Maribor](#), which outlined a vision for the city.

*In 2018, Maribor became the first Slovenian city with a **circular economy strategy**.*

To this end, the City of Maribor, envisioning changes concerning municipal waste management and waste management strategy, designed two actions linked to waste collection. The first action is complementary to a new method for calculating mixed municipal waste and biowaste using a 'pay as you throw' system. Once again, these were implemented with support from cohesion policy funding through the [Winpol Interreg Europe](#) project.

Putting forward the Strategy for the Transition to the Circular Economy in Maribor through an Urban Innovative Actions project

Aligned with the Strategy, one of the projects that the city is implementing is [Urban Soil 4 Food \(US4F\)](#), financed by the [Urban Innovative Actions initiative](#), which gives urban authorities the opportunity to unlock their potential and test new ideas and solutions within these themes, fostering a genuine bottom-up approach. The [US4F](#) project opts to increase local food self-

sufficiency, promotes beneficial cooperation between all urban stakeholders, and contributes to a more responsible, healthier urban existence.

The project aims to reduce the amount of biological and construction waste that ends up in landfill by 2 400 and 2 000 tonnes per year, respectively, and divert this into producing 3 000 tonnes of soil per year. Three types of soil will be produced; to grow food in urban gardens and on balconies, for the maintenance of the city's green areas, and for use in building roads and pavements.

According to Brina Lazar, Senior Advisor and Project Manager at the Municipality of Maribor, "with the current COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of projects such as Urban Soil 4 Food, which are related to circular economy and food self-sufficiency, came into the spotlight, as food is what we all really need".

Synergies with a focus on the construction sector

The soil that is expected to be produced will be used in the pilot site of the **CINDERELA Project**. Thanks to successfully participating in a Horizon 2020 call (HORIZON 2020 CIRC: 2016–2017), the waste utility company of Maribor, Nigrad d.d., with the support of the Slovenian National Building and Civil Engineering Institute (ZAG) and WCYCLE, is ranked among the eminent European institutions which, by 2022, will demonstrate the efficient use of construction and industrial waste. In the frame of CINDERELA, Maribor will produce recycled aggregates, geotechnical composites, green concrete, and recycled soil from the **Urban Soil 4 Food** project.



Figure 3: Pilot production plant and demo site of the CINDERELA project. © Nigrad d.d. 2021

Planning to upscale experiences through the URGE: Circular Building Cities URBACT Network

Having identified very early on that construction and demolition materials constitute a great resource, Nigrad d.d. participates as an industrial partner in the **URGE: Circular Building Cities Action Planning Network**, financed by the **URBACT programme**. As there is a gap in the implementation of circular economy principles in this sector, Nigrad d.d. will design an integrated action plan in collaboration with local stakeholders proposing, and in the long term implementing, the results of the CINDERELA project, together with additional actions.

According to Nuša Lazar, Expert Associate and Project Manager for Nigrad d.d., and URBACT Local Coordinator for the URGE project, *“through the implementation of different circular economy projects and involvement in diverse networks and programmes, approaches are developed on how the locally available secondary raw materials for urban construction works can be substituted for virgin materials. Lessons learned are crucial for the future development and activities of Nigrad and other construction companies since they create a window of new circular business opportunities”*.

Prato: A traditionally strong case addressing circularity

The City of Prato is famous for its textile district, which represents about 3% of European textile production. Thanks to its textile recycling techniques, Prato is considered one of the most advanced and innovative industrial cities in Italy. This strong tradition, together with an initial draft vision of the city towards the adaptation of sustainable solutions, strengthened Prato’s application to join the Urban Agenda Partnership on Circular Economy.

“The participation of Prato in the Urban Agenda Partnership was a turning point for the city. Until then, the city was simply pursuing participation in European funded projects, having of course also the experience in circularity applied in the textile sector. With the participation in the Partnership, we established a good access to knowledge, we collaborated with pioneers, and we raised our awareness on how the European mechanism works at the political level, which is extremely important. The city has achieved a deep understanding of the need and of the mechanism to achieve SDGs and the priorities of the new Urban Agenda. Thus, we managed to align political and technical aspects to design and pursue our local urban agenda”, says Valerio Barberis, Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning, Environment and Circular Economy of the Municipality of Prato.

Participation in the Urban Agenda gave a great boost to the city to foster participation in European funded projects focused on the green dimension of the New Leipzig Charter.

NBS in Prato funded by the Urban Innovative Actions programme

PIU' PRATO is an urban innovation project which aims to redevelop the Macrolotto Zero district of Prato. The regeneration project aims to make the area more liveable, attractive, and socially and economically lively, thanks to a series of actions to give value to public space. The actions are designed to recover abandoned buildings, construct green spaces, promote sustainable mobility, and provide a media library and co-working spaces. The project includes the redevelopment of a former factory, with the creation of spaces dedicated to social and commercial activities.



Figure 4: Macrolotto 0. © Valerio Barberis

The Prato Urban Jungle project, funded by the **Urban Innovative Actions initiative**, aims to re-naturalise neighbourhoods in a sustainable and socially inclusive way through the development of green areas. These urban areas, which have a high density of housing and construction, will be redesigned using a green approach. The project promotes a



Figure 5: Prato Urban Jungle. © Valerio Barberis

The project promotes a new strategic urban planning approach with a strong co-design and stakeholder engagement focus that will support the most inclusive urban green development in the city. It aims to achieve the regeneration of disused, under-utilised, or declining urban areas, as well as the creation of green hubs in the community, high density green islands, and structures/areas with multiple uses.

From participation in the Urban Agenda Partnership, to Prato Circular City, through URBACT: A journey that is worth pursuing

Prato participates in the **URGE: Circular Building Cities Action Planning Network**, financed by the **URBACT programme**, which disseminates knowledge not only on industrial symbiosis and circular water management, but most importantly, on the design of a strong urban governance model. The model which has worked well at European level, in the frame of the Urban Agenda Partnership, will be adopted locally. Thus, a strong new collaboration is being born in Prato – Prato Circular City – bringing together relevant actors and following a place-based, integrated approach.

According to Deputy Mayor Valerio Barberis, *“it is important to retain momentum. Indeed, there is a European debate on how to implement what has been developed through the*

Partnerships. It is fundamental that cities are involved in the governance of the action plans that have been delivered. Thus, it is a critical moment to design and introduce governance models at the local level, supporting cities to put forward the knowledge acquired at European level. For sure, mediation through national and regional levels is needed, but the transformation needs to start locally”.

Oslo: Coordinator of the Circular Economy Partnership

As “you can’t manage what you can’t measure”, policymakers, practitioners, and scholars urge the need for measurement frameworks. There are four key objectives in measuring the state-of-the-art, progress, and impacts of a certain strategy; raise awareness, make the case for circular approaches, trigger actions, monitor performance, and evaluate results.

Measuring the performance of cities in their shift towards circular economy provides an opportunity for them to self-assess their achievements and identify barriers, as well as opportunities, and adapt their development trajectory towards sustainability accordingly. The need for a sound and realistic framework of indicators for a circular economy transition in cities emerges from these considerations.

The Partnership on Circular Economy, established in January 2017, has been successfully coordinated by the City of Oslo.

The Partnership, after a thorough mapping exercise and assessment of circular economy indicators that existed to date, came up with a proposal for a set of 29 indicators.

These were categorised according to a simple typology: process indicators, which are linked to activities performed by cities in relation to supporting the transition to a circular economy; outcome indicators, which are linked to some positive changes related to different elements of the circular economy; and context indicators, which help contextualise changes in the circular economy.

According to Torild Kløvstad Halvorsen, Head of Section and Coordinator of the Urban Agenda Partnership on Circular Economy, “implementing the circular indicators as part of the ordinary economic budget process could be a way to give momentum for cities to become more circular. Oslo has done this for climate, and it is a way to secure and monitor progress”.

Mini recycling centres in Oslo

Oslo has a variety of centres, ranging from mini-recycling stations such as [the Coliseum station](#), which focuses on meeting the needs of citizens who have relatively small items they no longer need and wish to deposit without the need for a car, to reuse centres, such as [the](#)

one in Lindeberg, which has a stronger community focus and goes beyond simply promoting reuse to provide wider community support, engagement, and training services.

There are nine mini recycling stations and two mobile mini recycling stations in Oslo. Their aim is to make it easier for citizens to deliver small amounts of bulky waste and hazardous waste without the need for a car, and to promote and support reuse. They are funded through the public waste tax, and are operated by the municipality. They are 'free of charge' for citizens to use, and enable the reuse of 397 tons items in 2019.



The city wants to build on the success of this model and develop further reuse stations as shared spaces – both reuse stations and informal meeting places hosting a variety of activities for the local population. In this framework, Oslo is a partner in the **RESOURCEFUL CITIES** Action Planning Network, led by the Hague and financed by the **URBACT**

programme. This project seeks to develop the next generation of urban resource centres, so they can serve as catalysts for the local circular economy by adopting a participative and integrated approach. The network facilitates waste prevention, reuse, repair, and recycling. The centres also work as connection points for citizens, new businesses, researchers, and the public sector to co-create new ways to close resource loops at the local level. By bringing together interested actors to work alongside one another, the goal is to promote a change in individuals' values and mindsets. The **Eco Business Model Canvas model** provides insights into setting up mini recycling stations in cities.

According to Håkon Jentoft, former Coordinator of the Urban Agenda Partnership on Circular Economy, "great momentum is created for a city that is part of a network funded by the **URBACT programme** and of an Urban Agenda Partnership; it is easier to raise local ambition and to obtain political acceptance for that. Being part of one of the Urban Agenda Partnerships, it is easier to communicate EU goals and aspirations locally, and vice versa. It is a great opportunity for the city to step in front, which is always greatly appreciated by politicians who are inspired and become more engaged. The same applies in the case of participation in **URBACT networks**. Such initiatives provide an incentive for cities to assess their resources, prioritise, and get on track for implementation".

Synopsis

This article aims to showcase practices for and experiences in how different tools and funding support can help cities face their challenges in a strategic way, contributing towards sustainable urban development and addressing the Green City Dimension of the New Leipzig Charter. There remains a lot more to explore and gain inspiration from; during the period 2014–2020, around 8% (EUR 17 billion) of ERDF funds were invested in sustainable urban development initiatives (Article 7 Cities of the ERDF). The urban strategy of Maribor is just one out of approximately 980 urban-focused strategies that were drafted. An interactive mapping tool that provides a visual overview of Sustainable Urban Development (SUD), Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI), and Community-led Local Development (CLLD) strategies that are currently implemented across Europe is available through the [Urban and Territorial Dashboard \(STRAT-Board\)](#). The valuable knowledge gained through the previous programming period on how to implement integrated and place-based actions under cohesion policy is available through the [Handbook on Sustainable Urban Development Strategies](#).

What's ahead

The objectives of the European Urban Initiative (EUI) in the 2021–2027 cohesion policy are to strengthen integrated and participatory approaches to sustainable urban development, and to provide a stronger link to EU policies, particularly cohesion policy. The proposal concerning SUD in [Article 11 of the ERDF/CF Regulation](#) foresees that the ERDF will continue to support integrated territorial development and territorial strategies focused on urban areas, including functional urban areas, to address economic, environmental, climate, demographic, and social challenges.

The overall ambition of the EUI is to address fragmentation in terms of the wealth, support, and tools offered to cities under cohesion policy through two lines of action: support for innovative actions; and support for capacity and knowledge building, territorial impact assessments, and policy development and communication.

Opportunities for cities will continue to exist through [URBACT IV](#), the New Leipzig Charter (which engages Ministers to continue to reinforce and improve the Urban Agenda), and the NextGenerationEU [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#), supporting the green and digital transitions.