



The Just City Dimension

How are urban initiatives and actions supporting Green, Just and Productive Cities in the EU?

UAEU Webinar: 4 October 2021

*Regional and
Urban Policy*



Welcome and introduction

The last event of the series of webinars addressed the Just City dimension, as outlined in the New Leipzig Charter.

Introductory remarks referred to the importance of local authorities' strategies in improving the development of solutions such as affordable housing and access to basic services, but also in promoting diversity, inclusiveness, and supporting equal opportunities for all. The Just City dimension represents a strategic vision for the future, so this

webinar was an opportunity to showcase knowledge and experience gathered by Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU) Partnerships and other EU initiatives, such as URBACT and Urban Innovative Actions (UIA), but also to reflect on future possibilities for the renewal of the UAEU, and the start of the 2021–2027 Cohesion Policy programming period.

Part 1: Dynamics and solutions around UAEU Actions and other EU initiatives

The first part of the webinar showcased projects and initiatives related to the development of solutions for a variety of complex and interrelated matters (e.g. housing, inclusiveness, migration) that were carried out in the context of the Urban Agenda for the EU, URBACT, and UIA. All presentations from the speakers are available on [Futurium](#).

Three cities presented their initiatives and projects:

- The **City of Amsterdam**, in its function as a Coordinator of the Urban Agenda Partnership on [Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees](#), presented [Action 7](#) ('Better protecting children in migration of the Partnerships') of the new [Action Plan](#) for the period 2021–2022. Action 7 focuses on issues related to the number (around 30 000) of unaccompanied children in the EU, and working with other cities, Member States, and EU institutions to create a safety net for children who arrive in Europe alone. This includes improving awareness of barriers to the protection of children in migration, and identifying potential solutions to improve cross-border cooperation.
- The **City of Vienna**, Coordinator of the Urban Agenda Partnership on [Affordable Housing](#), emphasised that housing is a human right, and that the Partnership worked on linking affordable housing with sustainable development. The Partnership developed 13 Actions and multiple recommendations, many of which have been taken up by Member States and EU institutions (e.g. the Committee of Regions (CoR) and European Parliament). Furthermore, even though the Partnership formally ended in 2018, they have continued to advocate for affordable housing. This has included liaising with the Presidencies of the Council of the EU on housing policy monitoring systems, and assessing ongoing EU initiatives, such as [the Renovation Wave Strategy](#), and the [Action Plan](#) of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#).
- The **City of Ghent** presented their work on the right to housing for all and how to extend safe and affordable housing, especially to vulnerable groups, through the two EU projects it is part of. The Urban Innovative Action project [ICCARus](#) supports approximately 6 000 vulnerable homeowners in Ghent, and has enabled the city to invest €30 000 in each house to improve energy efficiency and inhabitants' basic quality of living. The URBACT APN [ROOF](#) project aims to end homelessness through city-level innovative housing, and all the cities involved (including Ghent) have benefitted from better local cooperation between sectors focused on homelessness and housing.

Key take-aways were formulated by Matthew Bach (Just Transition Coordinator, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability)

- The connection between sustainability and justice cannot be unravelled; one needs to ensure that sustainable developments are just, and that just transitions are sustainable.
- When providing the basic services needed, it is crucial to keep in mind that it is not just about receiving funding to provide these services, but also that they are provided within planetary boundaries to ensure they are not counter-productive.
- The question of territorial space is key, as cities are not in isolation, and the connection to peri-urban spaces is a very relevant question for research currently.
- The EU is already taking some steps, but there should be better integration of the European Green Deal and the EU Pillar of Social Rights. It is crucial to avoid separating them, but also to keep the local level at the forefront of all the EU initiatives and strategies.
- It is important to not only talk about a Just transition purely in terms of carbon intensive regions, but also keeping a societal vision of the goal, through inclusion and putting people at the centre.

Q&A with participants

During the discussion, the administrative barriers that the UAEU Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees had to work through in supporting refugee children across Europe were mentioned, highlighting that during the Partnerships' first phase (while working on Action 1, 'Recommendations on the protection of unaccompanied minors', from the Partnership's [Action Plan 2016–2020](#)), a [set of policy recommendations](#) were developed for cities on how improve the protection, social inclusion, and guardianship of unaccompanied minors, which included elements related to administration (e.g. facilitation of rapid referral into child and family services). Nevertheless, there is room for improvement when it comes to cross-border cooperation in terms of enhancing the involvement of stakeholders at all levels, allowing for flexibility of Member States, and eliminating

administrative barriers to the identification and relocation of children. It was also highlighted that the Partnership's work not only focuses on new arrivals, but also aims to work inclusively, including with pre-established migrants.

Looking to the future of the Urban Agenda for the EU, a question was raised on the potential for the next Urban Agenda Partnership on Housing to take a wider regional approach, as housing markets go beyond city boundaries, and affordability solutions could in some cases be found through collaboration across functional urban areas. In this regard, there is a need to find ways to cope with the ever-rising costs of construction and housing in cities, as well as to overcome the territorial and socio-economic segregation within them. Work therefore needs to be jointly carried out at city, national, and EU levels.



Part 2: Future EU opportunities towards Just cities

The second part of the webinar presented various EU initiatives which can support cities in becoming more just, and included a guided discussion with all speakers. All presentations from speakers are available on [Futurium](#).

DG GROW, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, and DG REGIO presented some of their current and future initiatives and relevant EU policy frameworks:

- According to stakeholders involved during the establishment of the [Affordable Housing Initiative](#) managed by **DG GROW**, the challenges of today are too big to be addressed with social policy alone. The objective of the Affordable Housing Initiative is to pilot the renovation of 100 lighthouse social and affordable housing districts, and bring together actors to pitch new (but also proven) practices for renovation. It follows a district-level approach, which facilitates integrated discussion between citizens and various stakeholders (e.g. social, environmental, economic). Two calls were launched as part of the Affordable Housing Initiative, the first being the [European Affordable Housing Consortium](#), which prioritises the provision of support to local industrial partnerships in implementing the lighthouse districts, among other things. The second calls for [Lighthouse demonstrators](#) to demonstrate, at district level, renovation pilots in various areas with the idea of 'liveability' at the forefront (e.g. technology and social innovation).
- **DG REGIO** presented the Urban dimension of Cohesion Policy 2021–2027, which has been strengthened compared to the previous period by focusing more on sustainable urban development and by including a new objective (PO5) in the policy framework which focuses on 'A Europe Closer to citizens'. To give more context to the Urban dimension of the Cohesion Policy, a [handbook](#) on Sustainable Urban Development Strategies was developed. When it comes to the Just dimension of sustainable urban development in the Cohesion Policy, one objective (PO4) specifically focuses on making Europe 'more social'. Furthermore, the current Cohesion Policy also includes a targeted territorial approach which allows for investments in just and social development, and requires the involvement of relevant territorial actors (under objectives PO4 and PO5). The European Urban Initiative (EUI) is related to support for sustainable urban development as it brings together various EU urban initiatives and programmes. Following the renewal of the UAEU through the Ljubljana Agreement in November 2021, the EUI will be the mechanism through which the European Commission will continue to provide support to address urban challenges, notably through a multi-level governance perspective.
- The **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights** presented the new framework, launched on 11 October 2021 during the [Fundamental Rights Forum 2021](#), which has been developed to help cities reinforce fundamental rights within their work. The framework uses the [Human Rights City approach](#), and builds on three types of elements: foundations (commitments), structures (mechanisms), and tools (methods and resources). It has been developed to remain flexible and adaptative to cities and policies, and to help cities that want to embed more human rights considerations into their work.

Afterwards, a [guided discussion](#) took place, first touching upon regulatory requirements for affordable housing in new projects that vary between countries and cities. These differences were kept in mind during consultations for the Affordable Housing Initiative, including through imagining social innovative aspects and measures that could be taken at different levels. This shows the need to put the various stakeholders around one table to share potential solutions that could be adapted to fit multiple levels.

In terms of participation in EU projects and how this influences the strategic and social dimension of cities' plans, the successful participation of Ghent in the ICCARus project convinced the City Council of Ghent that the concept worked, and they invested funds to continue the activities of the project.

Multi-level cooperation is a very valuable approach for achieving the 'Just City' objective. Cooperation between all levels of governance is currently being implemented more often than previously, as proven by the fact that various key documents are now being elaborated through a multi-level process (e.g. the New Leipzig Charter). Nevertheless, cities could be more structurally involved in institutional work in various areas; cities could be invited to share their thoughts and experiences, especially in relation to urban challenges. There are multiple relevant issues that cities are concerned with which have a local, national, and a cross-border dimension, and all these levels should be involved in the development of solutions.

Furthermore, [DG JUST](#) is organising a new award for inclusive and diverse cities, and this year's special award will focus on Roma inclusion.

The [UIA Secretariat](#) presented the [Just Transition for Cities Capitalisation](#) project, a knowledge activity that aims to identify and extract good practices and lessons learned in just transitions for cities from the 86 UIA projects to then be disseminated among urban practitioners. Cities are key players for implementing just transitions, and can thus contribute to green and more inclusive territorial developments. The project extracts and shares the main lessons learned from implementation in relation to this topic. This is achieved by analysing different approaches, tools, good practices, etc. developed by UIA projects. The project focuses on three specific related areas: skills for a green future, affordable transitions for all, and democratic transitions for all.

Conclusions and main take-aways:

- The multi-level governance approach was deemed crucial across all three webinars and can be used to help cities become more just. Several challenges that cities deal with (e.g. providing access to services, education, affordable and sustainable housing, equal opportunities, etc.) are not only problems at city level, but also national and EU level. Therefore, by using a multi-level approach to try and resolve shared problems, all involved stakeholders can discuss how to work together and help each other.
- Using and implementing a rights-based approach in urban development in order to achieve the objectives of the just city is of high importance. Human rights are rights for all, particularly for the most vulnerable people (e.g. children, the elderly, people with disabilities, etc.), and so fundamental human rights must be considered when developing urban policies and implementing activities to achieve the objectives of a just city.
- The Just City dimension encompasses a variety of issues, as multiple different areas fall under it, including gender equality and the empowerment of women. In this context, the interlinkage between achieving the objective of a just city and the provision of basic services, such as education and affordable housing, cannot be forgotten. Providing these services, as well as social services, health care, and culture, is at the core of what a Just City is, as they play an important role in meeting the needs of citizens, whether they are young, old, disabled, living alone, or with a family.
- The importance of continued work on ensuring that everyone is included is also an important element of what makes a just city; a place where no one is left behind. Work must continue to ensure that equal opportunities are given regardless of gender, socio-economic status, origin, or ethnicity. This is especially important at this point in time, as the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the negative effects of inequality, and this is particularly noticeable in cities.
- Finally, knowledge-sharing among and with cities is another important activity in achieving a just city, as cities are at the frontline of addressing different challenges and can capitalise on the acquired knowledge to make societies more just, and also more productive and green.



