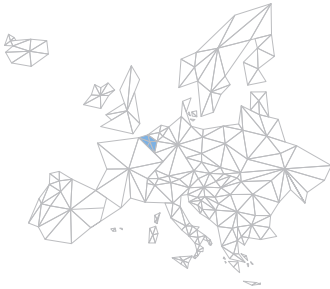


How is the Urban Agenda for the EU contributing to sustainable urban development and territorial cohesion?

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Abstract

The Urban Agenda for the EU is an institutional innovation aiming at improving the urban dimension of policies in the European Union. It gives a voice to cities at the EU level, and facilitates multi-stakeholder cooperation and multi-level governance to design solutions for specific urban issues. It creates a framework for dialogue and implementation of solutions for cities, while pushing forward common values for integrated and sustainable urban development, to further promote territorial cohesion across the EU territory and beyond.



Territorial Cohesion was introduced into the **Treaty of the European Union** by the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 and aims at a balanced and sustainable territorial development across EU regions and cities. Each citizen, wherever they live, should profit from the inherent features of the territory and should have adequate access to public services and to housing, sufficient job opportunities, and public spaces. This applies to urban areas of all sizes spread across Europe.

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The Urban Agenda for the EU was launched by the Pact of Amsterdam in 2016 in order to try and find solutions to major urban challenges. It focuses on three pillars: better regulation, better funding, and better knowledge

Presidency of the EU) in 2016. It is an innovative, multi-level governance initiative involving actors at EU, national, regional, and local levels, as well as stakeholder organizations, which work jointly and on an equal footing in order to try and find solutions to major urban challenges. The UAEU focuses on three pillars: better regulation, better funding, and better knowledge.

Territorial cohesion is also at the core of the Urban Agenda for the EU. Besides seeking a more integrated approach to EU policies affecting urban areas, the UAEU strives to contribute to territorial cohesion. It is promoting urban development through improvements of policies, strategic frameworks, guidelines, funding, or increased cooperation.

Since the launch of the Urban Agenda for the EU, 14 Partnerships have been established. The partnerships on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees, Air Quality, Housing, and Urban Poverty are the so-called “pilot” or *Amsterdam partnerships*. They were followed by the Bratislava partnerships established in 2017, namely Digital Transition, Circular Economy, Urban Mobility, and Jobs and Skills in the Local Economy. In that same year, four more partnerships were launched, the Malta partnerships on Energy Transition, Climate Adaptation, Innovative and Responsible Public Procurement, and Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-Based Solutions. In 2019, two additional partnerships came to life: the Vienna partnerships, focusing on Security in Public Spaces, and Culture and Cultural Heritage.

Each partnership was tasked with drafting and implementing an action plan, usually made up of five to fifteen actions aiming at improvements in the regulatory, funding, or knowledge landscape. This plan is the main tool guiding the partnership’s work; it is finalized by consensus and covers all three pillars, but may also extend to policies, governance, and practice. Partners meet and exchange ideas over several months, bringing their expertise and putting forward questions from their perspective as representatives of a level of government, or of an organization.

The fourteen action plans are inspired by the needs of cities and their citizens. For each action plan, a public consultation was organized in order to invite all



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possible actors and interested individuals to contribute directly to the finalization of this document and to make it as accurate and targeted as possible on the issues to be tackled (European Commission, 2019, *Urban agenda for the EU. Multi-level governance in action*). In this way, the Urban Agenda for the EU offers a unique means to bring Europe closer to its citizens, and to open up participation in debates and discussions concerning sustainable urban development in particular. These action plans also benefitted from wide consultation processes within the European Commission and Member States.

Partnerships keep working throughout the design of the action plans but also, and most importantly, for the delivery of the actions they contain. This process,



as part of the experimental nature of the initiative, allowed partnerships to build actions from the start and to carry them out, considering their very diverse nature. Expertise was provided and partners also extended their circle to reach out to a number of relevant supportive stakeholders in order to reach their goals. In that sense, one of the most valuable features of the Urban Agenda for the EU has been its capacity to link policy actors who would otherwise not necessarily be in contact.

The Urban Agenda for the EU is governed through an informal governance structure. This allows the development of a more global perspective on urban development, guiding the deployment of the initiative and making it as effective as possible in order to reach all relevant governance levels.

The Directors-General Meeting on Urban Matters (DGUM), the high-level decision-making body initiated prior to the Urban Agenda for the EU, provides the overall strategic steering of the UAEU. The DGUM is composed of all Member States, the Commission, and city representatives and associations (European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Eurocities, Council of the European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)), and is co-chaired by the country holding the EU Presidency and the Commission (European Commission, 2017). The DGUM meetings may include a range of organizations as observers, such as representatives of partner states, the European Economic and Social Committee

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Urban Agenda for the EU

Pact of Amsterdam



EU
2016

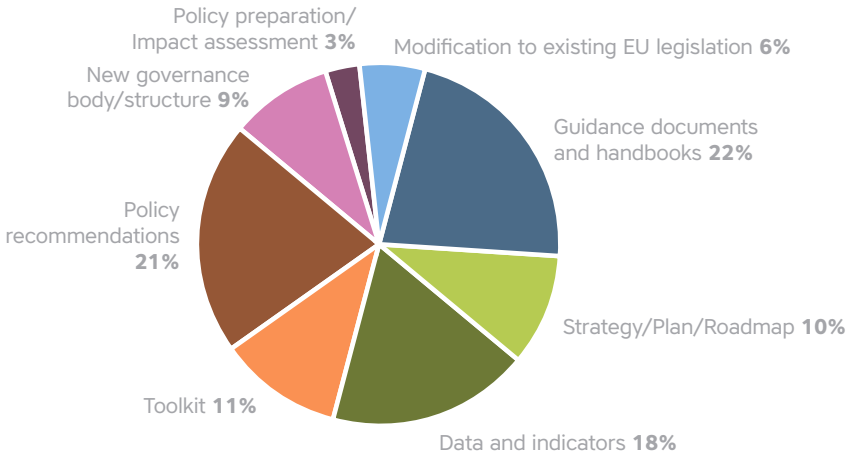
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(EESC), the European Parliament (EP), the European Investment Bank (EIB), URBACT, ESPON, and the European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) (European Commission, 2016).

The Pact of Amsterdam recognises that “the complexity of urban challenges requires integrating different policy aspects to avoid conflicting consequences and make interventions in cities more effective”. Beyond the specific theme the partnerships are dealing with, consideration for a number of cross-cutting issues is also a crucial part of this process, in order to strongly ground their contributions within relevant frameworks and principles. Governance across administrative borders, sound and strategic urban planning, adaptation to demographic change, or an integrated and participatory approach, represent the core of this policy alignment which further contributes to implement sustainable urban development and territorial cohesion through the proposed actions.

After five years of work, the development and implementation of the actions of the Urban Agenda have provided knowledge and inputs for further sustainable urban development and territorial cohesion in the EU. A total of 132 actions have been produced, with 60% of them considered to be finalized at this stage (**Monitoring table of Actions** of the Urban Agenda for the EU). They range from guidance documents, to new governance structures, with examples of policy recommendations as well as proposals for indicators and data.

Types of actions undertaken by the partnerships (Assessment Study, 2019)



Source: Technopolis Group based on the UAEU Monitoring Table of Actions.

Some examples can be highlighted in order to show the diversity, and the specificness, of the deliverables that were created by partners in order to provide a definite solution from a multi-level governance perspective.

The Air Quality Partnership has worked on identifying gaps in the regulation and its implementation with regards to sources of emissions of air pollutants to help policy-makers better understand and meet the requirements of the European Air Quality Directive (Action 1). It produced a joint position paper reviewing the interaction between different regulations and the implementation of air quality legislation, including with regard to funding mechanisms and knowledge sharing. The position paper includes recommendations on how to improve the implementation



Policy labs were organized to exchange experiences between countries about methods for tackling local deprivation, which resulted in detailed guidelines on how to set up a local pact

of air quality legislation and identify regulatory gaps in the urban environment through an integrated approach.

The Urban Poverty Partnership developed two actions aimed at the regeneration of urban deprived areas and neighbourhoods. One of these actions (Action 7) argues for the creation of a “local pact” for the regeneration of urban deprived areas, a multi-fund instrument allowing cities to play a leading role in designing their urban regeneration strategies, and receive financing from the Cohesion Policy. Policy labs were organized to exchange experiences between countries (France, Germany, Poland, and Spain) about methods for tackling local deprivation, which resulted in detailed guidelines on how to set up a local pact.



More recently, the Partnership on Culture and Cultural Heritage has started working on a strategic plan for culture enhancement in the urban framework (Action 6). It aims to recompose the entire urban and territorial framework related to urban cultural components through specifically dedicated tools and planning systems that combine all fragments of urban culture into a coherent and effective strategy of enhancing heritage at the local level thereby fostering integrated holistic approaches.

Some actions contributed to easing cities' access to funding by developing guidelines for EU funding programmes, some aimed at establishing permanent mechanisms to facilitate the exchange of ideas, projects, and practices related to EU initiatives that require local expertise, and others developed actions that aim to influence EU legislation. Through the work of its partnerships, the Urban Agenda for the EU sought to create opportunities for improving solutions on the ground, to trigger sustainable urban development via concrete implementation solutions, and promote actions providing more territorial cohesion, and sustainable and integrated development.

Beyond the partnerships, the Urban Agenda for the EU is also supported through a **“one stop shop for cities”** which provides an entry point to other EU policies with an urban dimension. The involvement of local and regional authorities to improve existing EU legislation also forms part of the UAEU remit. This has been

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materializing via the **Fit for Future Platform (F4F)** with the European Committee of the Regions becoming part of its Government group, bringing with them their **RegHub network of regional and local authorities**, and with Eurocities as part of its stakeholder group.

Looking towards the future, the overall ambition of involved stakeholders is to continue working with the Urban Agenda for the EU as a common framework for improving urban development at EU level. The European Commission has already reinforced urban policy coordination to ensure better coherence in EU policy, to establish complementarities, and to build on synergies. In particular, coordination takes place at both policy and operational levels, through the inter-service group dedicated to urban matters, which coordinates EU policy developments. To



ensure the future liveability of European cities, the Cohesion Policy invests in integrated sustainable urban development, supports participatory approaches, and provides support to capacity building and experimentation. The urban dimension of the Cohesion Policy fosters intergovernmental collaboration under the Urban Agenda for the EU, which will continue to be supported through the European Urban Initiative in the 2021–2027 programming period.

With the New Leipzig Charter and its **implementing document**, adopted by EU Member States in November 2020, the Urban Agenda for the EU has at its disposition solid principles and grounds to continue to deploy, to involve cities and citizens, and to create solutions for supporting urban development and territorial cohesion across the European Union. ■

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