

## Moving forward with the Urban Agenda for the EU

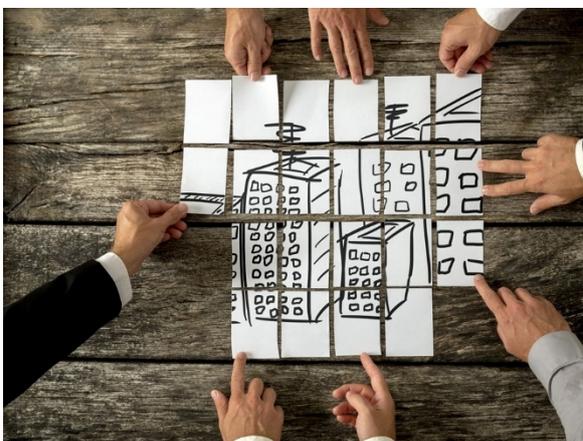
### SUMMARY

Our towns and cities are home to nearly three quarters of the EU's population, and most EU policies concern them, be it directly or indirectly.

While the revised 2014-2020 cohesion policy framework introduced a number of new instruments intended to enhance the urban dimension of cohesion funding, a shared vision of urban development has gradually taken shape at inter-governmental level, accompanied by increasing calls to give city authorities and stakeholders a greater say in policymaking. To help guide these discussions, the European Commission launched a public consultation following its July 2014 communication on the urban dimension of EU policies. Its findings indicated broad support among city stakeholders for an Urban Agenda for the EU. The European Parliament also prepared an own-initiative report on the issue, as part of a process that would ultimately lead to the signing of the Pact of Amsterdam on 30 May 2016, a clear political commitment to deliver an Urban Agenda.

With the Pact providing for the creation of 12 urban partnerships focusing on key urban themes, all partnerships are now in operation. Recent developments include the launch of a permanent secretariat for the Urban Agenda, and the identification of the Urban Agenda for the EU as the Union's main delivery mechanism for the UN's New Urban Agenda. The publication of action plans by the first four partnerships is also expected soon. Yet in spite of the positive assessment provided by the Commission's recent report on the Urban Agenda, challenges still remain, with the CITIES Forum in Rotterdam on 27-28 November 2017 providing a useful platform for discussing how to move forward.

*This briefing is a further update of an [earlier one](#) originally published in June 2016.*



### In this briefing:

- Introduction
- The Urban Agenda takes shape
- The Urban Agenda in practice
- The UN's New Urban Agenda
- Voices in the debate on an Urban Agenda for the EU
- Assessing the Urban Agenda
- Outlook

## Introduction

Towns and cities are a core part of the fabric of Europe's landscape and many of the policy challenges facing Europe, such as social exclusion or environmental deterioration, have a disproportionate impact on urban areas. Crucially, however, Europe's towns and cities also contain the solutions to these very challenges: as places where people and resources congregate, they provide unrivalled opportunities for promoting sustainability, energy efficiency, economic innovation and social inclusion. There is much to be gained by ensuring more effective coordination between the many policies impacting on urban areas and by taking account of the experiences of local and regional authorities in delivering policy on the ground. This can be achieved by developing a common framework of action – an Urban Agenda for the EU.

## The Urban Agenda takes shape

### Towards a shared vision of urban development

With no legal basis for urban policy in the Treaties, discussions on urban development at EU level have taken place primarily within the framework of intergovernmental cooperation. Over time, ministers responsible for urban development have reached a consensus on specific objectives and values for urban areas through documents such as the 2007 [Leipzig Charter](#) on the sustainable development of cities, the 2010 [Toledo Declaration](#) and the 2020 [Territorial Agenda](#). After decades of debate, 2015 marked a turning point for the Urban Agenda. Discussions were taken forward by the [Latvian Presidency](#), with the June 2015 [Riga Declaration](#) of ministers for territorial cohesion and urban matters providing key political support, while the Urban Agenda finally became a reality with the signing of the Pact of Amsterdam under the Dutch Presidency in 2016.

### New cohesion policy developments 2014-2020

The new cohesion policy framework, which accounts for one third of the EU's [total budget](#) (heading 1b of the multiannual financial framework – MFF) places a particular focus on the urban dimension during the 2014-2020 programming period. One of the key developments in this area is Article 7 of the [ERDF Regulation](#) which provides that at least 5 % of the European Regional Development Fund resources allocated at national level under the investment for jobs and growth goal must be earmarked for integrated actions for sustainable urban development. The urban dimension has also been reinforced through Article 8 of the ERDF Regulation, which supports studies and pilot projects identifying or testing new solutions for sustainable urban development issues ([Urban Innovative Actions](#) (UIAs)), encouraging innovation in this field and the involvement of urban authorities in their preparation and implementation. Equally, the [Urban Development Network](#) (UDN), established under Article 9 of the ERDF Regulation, boosts local level involvement, advancing discussions on the implementation of the urban dimension by supporting capacity building, networking and the exchange of good practices between urban authorities implementing sustainable urban development strategies. By calling on the Commission to align the work of the UDN and the themes of UIAs to the framework of the Urban Agenda, the Pact of Amsterdam recognised the importance of these tools for delivering the Urban Agenda, establishing a direct link with the cohesion policy structure for 2014-2020.

### The Pact of Amsterdam

Signed on 30 May 2016, the [Pact of Amsterdam](#) sets out the objectives of the Urban Agenda: to strive to establish a more integrated and coordinated approach to EU policies and legislation that impact on urban areas; to involve urban authorities in the design of policies; and to strengthen policies' urban dimension without necessitating new EU funding, changing the current distribution of legal competences and decision-making structures or transferring competences to EU level. In terms of its operational framework,

the activities of the Urban Agenda will be coordinated by the 'DG meeting on urban matters', which brings together national civil servants (directors-general) with responsibility for urban affairs and representatives of the European Commission, the CoR, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and EUROCITIES. The Pact also identifies the role of the key players in the Urban Agenda. These include, among others, urban authorities, Member States, the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, and partnerships, which the pact defines as the key delivery mechanism for the Urban Agenda, and whose action plans can provide input for the design of future, or the revision of current, EU legislation. An annex to the pact, the Working Programme of the Urban Agenda for the EU, specifies its operational framework and the Urban Agenda's working method and themes, setting out 11 concrete [actions](#): the first action covers urban partnerships, with the other 10 focusing on improving the urban dimension of EU policies via vertical or horizontal coordination, impact assessments and knowledge.

#### Pact of Amsterdam

Defines objectives and establishes the operational framework for the Urban Agenda for the EU  
 Focuses on three instruments: better regulation, better funding, better knowledge exchange  
 Identifies 12 priority themes for the Urban Agenda for the EU  
 Defines 11 actions and a working method for institutional players and stakeholders

### The Urban Agenda for the EU in practice

#### The role of partnerships

A vital instrument for the Urban Agenda, [partnerships](#) have been set up for each of the 12 themes (see below), to identify the issues that need to be addressed to enhance the urban dimension in a given policy area. Participation is voluntary, with the 15 to 20 members of each partnership, which include representatives of the European Commission, Member States, local authorities, city networks and others, working in partnership with one another, under the guidance of a coordinator, a city and/or Member State. Lasting three years, each partnership prepares and implements an action plan, which identifies bottlenecks and makes proposals for strengthening the urban dimension by focusing on three areas: **better regulation**, which looks at how to give existing rules a greater urban dimension, **better use of financial instruments**, which examines how to optimise use of current financial instruments, and **better knowledge exchange**, which considers means of improving existing networks. In addition, 11 cross-cutting issues have been identified that partnerships should consider when organising their work, such as good urban governance, sound urban planning or use of integrated approaches.

#### Twelve themes of the Urban Agenda for the EU

Jobs and skills in the local economy	Climate adaptation
Urban poverty	Energy transition
Housing	Urban mobility
Inclusion of migrants and refugees	Air quality
Sustainable use of land and nature-based solutions	Digital transition
Circular economy	Innovative and responsible public procurement

Learning from the experiences of the first four pilot partnerships, a structured method has gradually developed for the organisation of the urban partnerships' work, including a set timeframe for deliverables. Under this procedure, each urban partnership begins with

the preparation of a scoping paper, setting out its proposed themes and objectives, which is discussed at an inaugural kick-off meeting. Further meetings follow, with an orientation paper to be drafted within four months of the inaugural meeting, leading to the preparation of a background paper (draft action plan) at the end of the first year. An open public consultation is then held on the contents of this document, with the action plan then submitted for final approval by the DG Meeting on Urban Matters. Thereafter, each urban partnership has a period of 36 months in which to implement the measures set out in its action plan. Established in groups of four under three successive EU presidencies, the 12 urban partnerships are at different stages in terms of their implementation, ranging from the first four pilot partnerships, which have all prepared draft action plans whose adoption is expected in the coming months, to the most recent four partnerships formally established only under the Maltese Presidency in the first half of 2017.

### Partnerships in practice

November 2015 saw the launch of the first four pilot partnerships, which serve as a testing ground for the new framework. The partnership on [housing](#), coordinated by Slovakia, examines the provision of good quality affordable housing and housing policy, while Belgium and France will jointly coordinate the [urban poverty](#) partnership, which tackles poverty and promoting the inclusion of people at risk of poverty in deprived neighbourhoods, focusing on child poverty and homelessness. The partnership on [air quality](#), coordinated by the Netherlands, will consider policies and systems to ensure good air quality, targeting sources of pollution such as industry, motor vehicles, and agriculture. Coordinated by the city of Amsterdam, the [inclusion of migrants and refugees](#) partnership will establish a framework to manage the integration of non-EU migrants and refugees in the areas of housing, public services and employment. All four pilot partnerships have now prepared background papers setting out their draft actions, and a [public feedback](#) process was launched in July 2017 to allow interested stakeholders to share their views on the proposed actions, which are used to feed into the final action plan. To date, one urban partnership (Air Quality) has published a final action plan.

**Table 1 Overview of urban partnerships**

Theme of Urban Partnership	Coordinators	Deliverable published
Housing	Slovakia	Background Paper
Urban poverty	Belgium, France	Background Paper
Air quality	The Netherlands	Action Plan
Inclusion of migrants and refugees	Amsterdam	Background Paper
Digital transition	Estonia, Oulu, Sofia	Orientation Paper
Circular economy	Oslo	Orientation Paper
Urban mobility	Czech Republic, Karlsruhe	Orientation Paper
Jobs and skills in the local economy	Romania, Jelgava, Rotterdam	Orientation Paper
Climate adaptation	Genoa	Orientation Paper
Sustainable use of land nature-based solutions	Poland, Bologna	Orientation Paper
Energy transition	London, Gdansk, Roeselare	Orientation Paper
Public procurement	Haarlem	Orientation Paper

A further four partnerships were launched in February and March 2017. The [digital transition](#) partnership, coordinated by Estonia and the cities of Oulu and Sofia, aims to provide better public services to citizens and to create business opportunities, covering areas such as health and social care services, eGovernment or future skills development. The partnership on the [circular economy](#) seeks to encourage the reutilisation, repair and recycling of materials and goods to stimulate growth and jobs. Coordinated by the city of

Oslo, its February 2017 launch meeting set out plans to focus on the three vertical themes of urban resource management, circular business drivers, and circular consumption. The [urban mobility](#) partnership, whose principal coordinators are the Czech Republic and the German city of Karlsruhe, aims to ensure better conditions for urban mobility for EU cities, and has identified four initial themes: active modes of transport and public space use, innovative solutions and smart mobility, local public transport, multi-modality and governance. The partnership on [jobs and skills in the local economy](#), meanwhile, seeks to identify how cities can foster quality and inclusive employment. Coordinated by Romania, the Latvian city of Jelgava and Rotterdam, it has outlined issues such as the 'next economy', jobs and skills, public services, business location, and effective local governance as key areas of action.

The composition of the remaining partnerships was agreed at the 4 April 2017 [meeting](#) of directors-general in charge of urban development, and all four are now fully operational. Coordinated by the Italian city of Genoa, the partnership on [climate adaptation](#) aims to improve the capacity of cities to address and adjust to the impact of climate change through proposals in the fields of better regulation, funding and knowledge. The partnership on [sustainable use of land and nature-based solutions](#), which is jointly coordinated by Poland and the city of Bologna, seeks to examine suburbanisation and the role of nature-based solutions in development, draw up best practices for innovative urban development in the EU and put forward specific measures for the sustainable use of land and the implementation of land-based solutions in urban areas. Jointly coordinated by London, Gdansk and the Belgian city of Roeselare, the [energy transition](#) partnership aims to establish a smart, integrated energy system which is secure and resilient, affordable fair and equitable, and clean and sustainable, by focusing on four areas: energy sources, production and storage; energy distribution networks; smart data platforms, controls and energy management and, lastly, energy consumption. The partnership on [public procurement](#), meanwhile, which is coordinated by the Dutch city of Haarlem, aims to move beyond ensuring strict compliance with public procurement rules to encourage the development and implementation of a procurement strategy that can act as an integrated and supporting management tool for governance.

#### **Additional resources for the Urban Agenda**

Along with the launch of new partnerships, the past year has also seen the development of a number of web-based and administrative resources to further support the rollout of the Urban Agenda. In October 2016, the Commission launched its [one-stop shop](#), a website that provides cities with information about the Urban Agenda and funding for cities, including access to databases such as the [urban data platform](#) that promote knowledge sharing and better policy making on urban issues. Since the adoption of the 2017 EU budget, the European Commission and the European Parliament have released funding of €2.5 million over a three-year period to support the running of the Urban Agenda secretariat, highlighting the political importance of the urban agenda for both institutions. This will help facilitate the organisational work of the different partnerships, promote synergies between them and help introduce the urban agenda to a wider audience through a dedicated communications strategy. The permanent secretariat, set up in January 2017, has recently launched a new [website](#) for the Urban Agenda for the EU, which is the primary source of information about the agenda and its 12 partnerships.

Reflecting the need for accurate urban data, work on the collection of new territorial evidence for the Urban Agenda is being undertaken by [ESPON](#), the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion, which actively promotes the use of

territorial evidence in policymaking, with the process also supported by the European Commission's 2016 State of European Cities [report](#) prepared to help the work of the Urban Agenda for the EU, in particular its objective of better urban intelligence and information. Such measures should help provide the necessary framework to ensure a solid evidence-based foundation for the partnerships' work. The importance of the urban agenda has also been recognised in [the seventh cohesion report](#), which notes that the urban agenda should lead to more effective funding that is better adapted to city needs.

### Urban Innovative Actions

Directly linked to the themes of the Urban Agenda, [Urban Innovative Actions](#) support the Urban Agenda by helping to identify solutions in the field of sustainable urban development in the same 12 thematic areas, and tie in with the thematic objectives under the ERDF. The first call for proposals for **Urban Innovative Actions** (UIAs) was launched in December 2015. Introduced under Article 8 ERDF, UIAs make funding available for urban authorities, providing them with a low-risk means of testing experimental solutions in the area of sustainable urban development, which can then be rolled out across the EU. Following calls for applications, UIA projects are chosen on the following criteria: degree of innovation, quality, level of partnership, and whether results are measurable, as well as the transferability of a project to other EU areas. The first call for proposals, which has a budget of €80 million, covered the following [four topics](#): **urban poverty, integration of migrants and refugees, jobs and skills in the local economy and energy transition**. A second [call for proposals](#) was completed in October 2017, with a total of over €60 million awarded to 16 projects selected under the three topics of the circular economy, urban mobility and the integration of refugees, tying in with the themes of the second set of partnerships, while a third call is due to be launched in December 2017.

#### Urban Innovative Actions

- Innovative sustainable urban development projects
- Open to urban authorities (or groups thereof) of over 50 000 inhabitants
- Co-financing rate of up to 80 %
- Maximum of €5 million available per project
- Maximum project duration of three years
- Total budget of €372 million over a seven-year period
- Clear link with the Urban Agenda

### The UN's New Urban Agenda

The UN's [New Urban Agenda](#) provides a framework setting out how global cities should be planned and managed to promote sustainable urbanisation and ensure they are more inclusive, environmentally sustainable and prosperous. Adopted unanimously by 167 countries at the UN Habitat III Conference in Quito in October 2016, it builds on the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which identified 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) and highlighted the role of cities as drivers for future sustainable growth. This idea also lies at the heart of the New Urban Agenda. A key objective of the Habitat III conference was to reach consensus on a global roadmap for SDG 11, which calls on countries to make cities **inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**.

#### New Urban Agenda

Prefaced by the Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All, which outlines the challenges and opportunities posed by urban growth, the document sets out the shared vision of the New Urban Agenda, a list of transformative commitments for sustainable

urban development, covering its social, economic and environmental dimensions, and measures to ensure the effective implementation of the agenda. Individual countries are invited to make voluntary commitments to support the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. These should be concrete, measurable and achievable actions focused on implementation.

### **Links with the Urban Agenda for the EU**

The Urban Agenda for the EU represents the principal mechanism through which the UN's New Urban Agenda will be implemented across the European Union. The [Pact of Amsterdam](#) establishes a direct link with both the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, stipulating that the Urban Agenda for the EU will contribute to the implementation of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, notably SDG 11, as part of the Habitat III process. Against this background, the EU has outlined a specific [commitment](#) to implement the New Urban Agenda through the Urban Agenda for the EU. This commitment has been included in the Quito Implementation Plan accompanying the New Urban Agenda, which lists the commitments of the various partners to delivering the outcomes of the New Urban Agenda in their territories. The importance of the Urban Agenda for the EU as a vehicle for helping the EU to meet its sustainable development goals under Agenda 2030 has also been recognised in the Commission's November 2016 [communication](#) 'Next steps for a sustainable European future – European action for sustainability', which outlines a specific role for the EU Urban Agenda in this context.

### **Common vision for sustainable urban development**

The Urban Agenda for the EU and the UN's New Urban Agenda set out a similar vision for achieving balanced and sustainable urban development based on a place-based approach, with the 12 main themes of the Urban Agenda for the EU being broadly reflected in the social, economic and environmental dimensions of the New Urban Agenda. As highlighted by the European Union Knowledge Network's (EUKN) [overview](#) of the two agenda frameworks, the New Urban Agenda outlines a wide range of urban priorities that will also be covered by the EU's urban partnerships, such as the inclusion of migrants, energy transition, climate change or the digital transition, with both agendas also setting out urban governance methods that are underpinned by equal partnerships between all players involved. Both agendas also advocate a strong system of multilevel governance founded on principles such as decentralisation, the devolution of powers and decision-making, inclusiveness and cooperation between various levels of government and stakeholders, including from the private sector and civil society.

## **Voices in the debate on an Urban Agenda for the EU**

### **European Parliament**

The European Parliament (EP) made an important contribution to the debate in 2011 with a [resolution](#) calling for a stronger urban dimension in EU policies and the development of a joint working programme or EU urban agenda. The EP strengthened the urban dimension further by successfully negotiating the delegation of powers to urban authorities under Article 7 of the ERDF Regulation during the trilogue discussions on the 2014-2020 cohesion policy package. It has also been heavily involved in the discussions on the Urban Agenda and adopted an [own-initiative resolution](#) (rapporteur: Kerstin Westphal, S&D, Germany) on this topic on 9 September 2015. The resolution stresses that the Urban Agenda should involve the local level more closely at all stages of the policy cycle, based on a new multi-level governance method. It calls for an early-warning mechanism to allow local authorities to check compliance with the subsidiarity and proportionality principles, and argues that the Urban Agenda should strive to gain the best leverage from invested funds by creating synergies between EU programmes, and

national and private-sector funding. The EP also calls for territorial impact assessments to ensure the feasibility of relevant EU policy initiatives at local level as well as the appointment of a special EU urban coordinator to monitor the coordination of policies with an urban dimension and the creation of a one-stop shop on urban policies, with the latter demand reflected in the final text of the Pact of Amsterdam. It highlights the need for more detailed urban data, and regular urban policy summits, drawing on the 'Cities of Tomorrow' forum, noting that the Urban Agenda should be in line with the EU's overall objectives, particularly the EU 2020 strategy, and be part of the Commission's annual work programme. A long-time advocate of an Urban Agenda, the Parliament's [URBAN Intergroup](#) was also closely involved in the discussions.

### Committee of the Regions

Representing the interests of local and regional authorities at EU level, the Committee has played an active role in the debate on the Urban Agenda. Its July 2014 [own-initiative opinion](#), 'Towards an integrated urban agenda for the EU', called on the Commission to present a white paper for an integrated urban agenda, which should lead to the urban dimension being anchored in the EU decision-making process (a concept referred to as '**urban mainstreaming**') rather than formulate a specific EU strategy. It noted the need for a new model of governance to ensure the closer and earlier involvement of towns and cities at all stages of the policy cycle. Its 2016 [opinion](#) notes that the aim of the Urban Agenda is to improve the quality of life in towns and cities and to develop new forms of urban governance, stressing that EU policies must not encourage competition between urban and rural dimensions. It urges the European Commission to play a strong coordinating role through the appointment of its First Vice-President as coordinator for the Urban Agenda. The opinion calls for a systematic review of ways of improving support for urban areas and recommends use of the European Investment Bank's Advisory Hub to help towns and cities access EIB financing instruments. In particular, the CoR calls for a white paper to evaluate the results of partnerships, including better governance.

### Local stakeholders

There has been wide support for the idea of an Urban Agenda among many local stakeholders. The **Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)** noted in its 2015 [position paper](#) that the Urban Agenda should facilitate local authorities' action on the ground, by treating local governments as key partners, giving cities better access to EU funding and collecting accurate local data, among other things. Whilst endorsing the 12 priority themes of the Urban Agenda, the April 2016 [declaration](#) of the **Mayors of the EU Capital Cities** called on the Commission to include the Urban Agenda for the EU in its annual work programme and reflect the urban dimension more systematically in its impact assessments, urging all parties involved to work quickly to remove the bottlenecks to current urban challenges.

### Assessing the urban agenda

Released a few days ahead of the biennial CITIES forum in Rotterdam in November 2017, the **European Commission's** [report](#) notes that the Urban Agenda has achieved some concrete results during its first year, with all 12 urban partnerships now in operation, a governance system in place and four action plans due to be adopted by the end of 2017. It considers that the working method based on multi-stakeholder involvement functions well and could be rolled out in other policy areas, highlighting also the balanced nature of the cities in the partnerships as regards their size and geographical location. The report argues that coordination on urban issues within the Commission has improved, adding

that many cities have shown that they are able to make a meaningful contribution to EU policymaking. It also emphasises the international dimension of the Urban Agenda, noting its role in delivering the New Urban Agenda in Europe and acting as a model for the recent Union for the Mediterranean Urban Agenda, and stresses the increasing role of cities in global initiatives such as on sustainable development. The Commission remains committed to continue promoting the Urban Agenda, as it is convinced that cities are important actors who must be involved in the design and implementation of EU policies.

The positive impact of the Urban Agenda on the urban dimension of EU policies is also emphasised in a July 2017 [report](#) by the European Urban Knowledge Network, which notes that the Urban Agenda is a key tool for improving multi-level cooperation between stakeholders on urban policy, enhancing coordination on urban matters between and with EU institutions. The report also highlights the successful roll-out of the 12 urban partnerships, involving the development of a multi-level working method welcomed by all partners, which has enabled direct communication between cities and the EU institutions and has the potential to strengthen the role of cities in EU policymaking. Nonetheless, it identifies a number of concerns relating to the establishment of the partnerships, including a lack of balance in the size of the cities involved, the low level of Member State participation in the last four partnerships and the absence of universities, businesses or ESIF managing authorities in the partnerships, and pinpoints several obstacles to multi-level cooperation. These include the lack of financial and human resources facing most coordinators and partners, with at times low levels of expertise, as well as an overly ambitious work schedule, all of which highlights the importance of the support provided by the Commission and the technical secretariat. In addition, the report emphasises a lack of links between the Urban Agenda and the New Urban Agenda, especially at the level of the urban partnerships, and concludes with a number of recommendations, such as the need to provide more resources, ensure partnerships have a more balanced composition, with greater partner involvement and a more transparent partnership selection process.

A number of questions have been raised by stakeholders about how the partnerships will operate, a key issue in view of their role in implementing the Urban Agenda. During an [event](#) organised by the **European Economic and Social Committee** (EESC), the International Union of Tenants [called](#) for clarification on the voting principles to be used when partnerships adopt decisions, criticising the fact that civil society will effectively be represented by only two or three members in the partnerships, while academic Ivan Tovics [stressed](#) the need to ensure good geographical representation, with experts selected based on merit, not language skills or reputation. The EESC has suggested that partnerships should have more balanced representation, with greater involvement on the part of urban residents, emphasising a lack of information on how civil society organisations will be selected. An interesting discussion of some of the experiences of the first urban partnerships took place during the December 2016 [policy lab](#) on urban mobility organised by the European Union Knowledge Network (EUKN) and the Czech Republic's Ministry of Regional Development. Speakers at the meeting stressed that the nature of the work of urban partnerships meant that there was a need for experts not generalists, adding that members of partnerships should be able and willing to contribute both time and resources. Noting that the coordination of a partnership could amount to a full-time job, the meeting recommended that coordinators share experiences and learn from each other, calling also on partnerships to ensure they take account of the views of experts and stakeholders outside the partnership who wish to be active in its work.

A long-term advocate of the urban agenda, as reflected in numerous contributions such as its September 2014 [contribution](#) and its 2015 [paper](#) on the issue, **Eurocities** has recently [questioned](#) the process used to select the members of individual partnerships. It points to a lack of transparency in the whole process and notes that there seemed to be little involvement by the coordinators of partnerships. Meanwhile, the time and effort that organisations need to invest in order to be fully involved in the work of partnerships can make it difficult for them to take part in their activities, a point raised by the **European Council of Spatial Planners** in its [report](#) on the March 2017 meeting of the Urban Development Group. In terms of the composition of the partnerships, it also argued that despite improvements in vertical coordination, the inclusion of teams of sector experts means that partnerships risked adopting a sector-based approach.

## Outlook

After many years of discussion, the Urban Agenda for the EU has at last become a reality. With the Pact of Amsterdam signed in May 2016 and the successful launch of all 12 urban partnerships, a concrete plan is now being implemented to enhance the urban dimension of EU policy. Work has begun in earnest on preparing the deliverables within the framework of the urban partnerships, and the first four partnerships are expected to present their action plans in the coming months. Yet despite these positive developments, it is clear that challenges still remain, not least in terms of a certain imbalance in the composition of the urban partnerships and a general lack of both human and financial resources, particularly at coordinator level. Going forward, much will depend on the extent to which the ideas put forward by the urban partnerships are taken up by the European Commission. Perhaps most importantly, all partners involved, from the cities, Member States to the EU institutions, need to take on their fair share of responsibilities and remain fully committed to this project if the EU Urban Agenda is to achieve its ambitious goals.

## Main references

[Pact of Amsterdam](#) establishing the Urban Agenda for the EU, 30 May 2016.

[New Urban Agenda](#), United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), Quito, 17-20 October 2016.

[Communication](#) from the Commission on the Urban Dimension of EU policies – Key Features of an EU Urban Agenda, COM(2014) 490 final, 18 July 2014.

[European Parliament resolution](#) of 9 September 2015 on the urban dimension of EU policies (2014/2213(INI)).

## Disclaimer and Copyright

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament.

Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

© European Union, 2017.

Photo credits: © Gajus / Fotolia.

[eprs@ep.europa.eu](mailto:eprs@ep.europa.eu)

<http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu> (intranet)

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank> (internet)

<http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)

