

The urban dimension of EU policies

Towns and cities are home to over 70% of the EU's population, and many of the economic and environmental policy challenges facing Europe have an urban dimension. Within the EU, a shared vision of urban development has gradually taken shape at intergovernmental level. Over recent years there have been increasing calls for concrete actions at EU level and for the development of an EU urban agenda, which could facilitate greater coherence in policies affecting urban areas and give city authorities and stakeholders a greater input in decision-making processes.

Background

As there is no legal basis for urban policy in the European Union treaties, discussions on the urban agenda at EU level have taken the form of intergovernmental cooperation, with informal meetings of ministers helping to shape a shared vision of urban development among the Member States. Over time, countries have reached consensus on specific objectives and values for urban areas through documents such as the [Leipzig Charter](#), the [Toledo Declaration](#) and the [Territorial Agenda 2020](#), but these agreements are not binding on the Member States. This has led to calls from a number of Member States (as well as various stakeholders) for more concrete action, a move which subsequently gained the support of Member States in [Vilnius](#) in November 2013.

European Commission communication

In July 2014, the Commission adopted a [Communication](#) on the urban dimension of EU policies, launching a public consultation on the need for an EU urban agenda, its objectives and possible functioning. According to the [results](#) of the consultation, an EU urban agenda should help cities implement European priorities and push the EU towards achieving its political objectives. Respondents believe there is no need for new legislation, new funding sources or for the transfer of new competences to the European level but rather for better legislation. The Commission proposes that the EU urban agenda focus on the three priority areas of smart, green and inclusive cities, ensure the effective application of better regulation tools, enhance the coordination of EU policies affecting cities and improve urban intelligence, benchmarking and monitoring.

European Parliament

The European Parliament is due to vote on an [own-initiative report](#) drafted by the Committee on Regional Development (rapporteur Kerstin Westphal, S&D, Germany) in response to the Commission's communication. The report advocates closer local level involvement at all stages of the policy cycle, based on a new multi-level governance method, and calls for an early-warning mechanism to allow local authorities to check compliance with the subsidiarity and proportionality principles. The report also recommends territorial impact assessments to ensure the feasibility of relevant EU policy initiatives at local level and the appointment of an EU urban coordinator to monitor the coordination of policies with an urban dimension and the creation of a 'one-stop shop' on urban policies. It stresses the need for detailed urban data and calls for the inclusion of the urban agenda in the Commission's annual work programme.

Future outlook

Clear differences remain among the Member States in terms of their approach to an EU urban agenda. However discussions are being taken forward by the Luxembourg [Presidency](#) of the Council of the EU, with an informal ministerial meeting on the issue scheduled for November 2015, and work towards a political declaration on an EU urban agenda set to take place under the succeeding Netherlands Presidency in 2016.