

Renewal of the Leipzig Charter

Adopted during the 2007 German Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities helped establish the concept of integrated urban development at EU level and has been influential in the development of subsequent EU initiatives such as the Urban Agenda. It is currently being updated to take account of this new urban framework and the emerging challenges facing cities, with the new Leipzig Charter due to be adopted at the end of the current German Presidency, in December 2020.

The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities (2007)

Taking its name from the German city in which it was signed, the [Leipzig Charter](#) outlines a set of common strategies and principles for urban development policy agreed upon by its signatories, the EU ministers for urban development. Building on previous declarations such as the Lille Action Programme, the Rotterdam Acquis and the Bristol Accord, it seeks to provide a European dimension to urban development and to help improve overall living conditions in cities by developing a common vision for the sustainable development of Europe's urban areas. Two key principles lie at the heart of the Leipzig Charter: the promotion of an **integrated urban development approach** that takes account of the various spatial, sectoral and temporal aspects of urban policy and involves all stakeholders, including the public; and the need **to pay special attention to deprived urban neighbourhoods**. It encourages cities to draw up integrated urban development programmes, highlighting issues such as creating and ensuring high-quality public spaces, modernising infrastructure networks, and proactive innovation and education policies as key actions within the scope of urban development policy. When it comes to deprived urban areas, it recommends the rollout of strategies to upgrade the physical environment, strengthen the local economy and labour market and support the education and training of children and young people in disadvantaged areas.

By signing the Leipzig Charter in 2007, Member States committed themselves to:

1. initiate a political debate in their states on how the Leipzig Charter can be integrated in national, regional and local development policies,
2. use integrated urban development and the related governance as a tool for its implementation and establish any necessary framework at national level,
3. promote balanced territorial organisation based on a European polycentric urban structure.

The **European Parliament** has voiced its support for the Leipzig Charter, with its 2008 [resolution](#) calling on the Member States and the Council to take swift action to achieve its goals, and to fully involve all stakeholders, such as local and regional governments, economic and social partners or other private actors in the implementation of programmes. While the Leipzig Charter has arguably helped lay the foundations for subsequent initiatives such as the Urban Agenda and the introduction of ring-fenced funding for integrated sustainable urban development, issues such as migration and climate change are having an increasing impact on EU cities, leading to calls to renew the 2007 text to ensure its relevance.

Moving towards the renewed Leipzig Charter

In light of new socio-political challenges and new political frameworks for urban development, the EU ministers responsible for urban development signed a [declaration](#) on 14 June 2019, calling for the renewal and development of the Leipzig Charter during the [2020 German Presidency of the Council of the EU](#).

The draft of the new Leipzig Charter

Entitled the **New Leipzig Charter – The transformative power of cities for the common good**, the [draft](#) of 5 May 2020 builds on the basic idea of the 2007 Leipzig Charter that all areas of urban policy must be coordinated in a spatial, sectoral and temporal manner through an integrated approach that gives simultaneous and fair consideration to all concerns and interests relevant to urban development. Compared to the 2007 Charter, however, the draft includes specific references to the contemporary global

challenges that are having a direct impact on European towns and cities and can intensify disparities in our societies such as climate change, resource scarcity, migration, demographic change, pandemics and rapidly changing economies. The consideration of digital challenges, such as the rise of digital technologies, the digital divide and market dependencies is another new element. The draft also highlights that the local and global level today are more linked together than ever before and that the New Leipzig Charter provides an urban policy framework to deliver global and European agreements such as the [United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), the [Paris Agreement](#), the [Urban Agenda](#) and the [European Green Deal](#).

The text is divided into five sections. As set out in its **preamble**, the new Charter is based on the pursuit of the common good, and aims to safeguard the liveability of all European towns and cities and ensure that no one is left behind, with these aims being delivered through integrated urban development, a place-based, multi-level and participatory approach. Noting that challenges need to be addressed at the appropriate territorial scale, the second section, **Transformative power of European cities**, identifies three spatial levels of European cities – the neighbourhood level, local authorities and functional area – as well as three dimensions of European cities – just, green and productive – which, when combined, can help to build resilient cities, address social, economic and environmental challenges and ensure a high quality of life. Recognising that the key working principles from the 2007 Leipzig Charter are still valid, section three on the **key principles of good urban governance** emphasises that they need to be updated in view of today's global challenges and implemented by all urban actors and that the balanced transformation of cities with a view to achieving the sustainable development goal (SDGs) and the objectives of the Green Deal will only be possible if governmental and non-governmental actors at all levels and sectors work together.

Stressing that good urban governance is necessary to transform all cities into just, green and productive urban systems, section four on **Empowering cities to transform** encourages all levels of governance to support active and strategic land policy and land-use planning as well as the active shaping of the digital transformation. It also emphasises the need to ensure adequate policies and funding for cities and provide a powerful national urban policy framework and funding as well as coherent EU regulation and funding instruments. In this context, the ministers agree to continue, reinforce and improve the Urban Agenda for the EU, recognising it as a major process that can help support cities and functional areas in implementing the strategic priorities of the Leipzig Charter. Noting that the new Leipzig Charter provides a strong framework for good urban governance, the **Closing Appeal** calls upon the EU institutions, Member States, local and regional authorities and urban stakeholders to put the agreed framework into practice through European, national, regional and local initiatives and programmes.

Advisory bodies

In its [draft opinion](#) (Rapporteur: Juan Espadas Cejas, PES, Spain) expected to be adopted in plenary in [October 2020](#), the European Committee of the Regions considers that the New Leipzig Charter represents a political opportunity which enables cities to act and can thus help to strengthen the credibility of the European project. The Committee also emphasises the need to promote the work carried out by various urban partnerships and to strengthen the link to the Urban Agenda. Furthermore, it calls for a roadmap enabling cities to implement the new Leipzig Charter, and proposes that the Member States produce regular reports on how they have integrated the Leipzig Charter into their national policies.

Other stakeholders

[Eurocities](#) highlights that it is time to empower Europe's cities, and that the New Leipzig Charter should elaborate a clear European urban vision and measurable objectives, building upon the Urban Agenda, and give cities a genuine role in EU policy-making and ensure sufficient investment in the EU's areas and resources to implement the Urban Agenda. The [European Council of Spatial Planners](#) (ECTP-CEU) welcomes the initiative to revise the Leipzig Charter. Despite supporting the overall structure, set-up and content of the New Leipzig Charter, it notes that it needs to address the coronavirus crisis and that there should be more cohesion in the EU directives regarding urban development and planning activities.

Outlook

While discussions will continue in the months ahead, with the new Leipzig Charter due to be signed in December 2020, the significance of this event could well be overshadowed by the discussions on the cohesion policy framework and the EU's coronavirus recovery plan, vital issues for the EU's cities.

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