

## The New 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 was influential in the development of EU initiatives such as the Urban Agenda. It has now been updated to link in with this new urban framework and take account of the fresh challenges facing cities, with the New Leipzig Charter adopted at the informal meeting of ministers responsible for urban and territorial development on 30 November 2020.

### The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities (2007)

Taking its name from the German city in which it was signed, the [Leipzig Charter](#) outlined 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 aimed 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 lay at the heart of the 2007 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**. The charter encouraged cities to draw up integrated urban development programmes, focusing on 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. For deprived urban areas, it recommended the roll-out 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, EU 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 its 2020 [resolution](#) on maximising the energy efficiency potential of the EU building stock sharing the New Leipzig Charter's view that cities play a key role in enhancing energy efficiency. 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](#).

### Content of the New Leipzig Charter

Entitled the **New Leipzig Charter – The transformative power of cities for the common good**, this non-binding [document](#) 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 text includes specific references to the contemporary global challenges that

*This is an update of an ['At a glance' note](#) published in July 2020.*

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 item, with the revised charter also providing a policy framework to deliver global and European agreements such as the [United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), the [Paris Agreement](#), New Urban Agenda and the [European Green Deal](#) at urban level.

The text is divided into five sections. As set out in its **preamble**, the new charter emphasises the pursuit of the common good, and aims to safeguard and enhance quality of life in all European towns, cities and functional areas and to ensure that no one is left behind. Noting that measures that focus on local developments should be designed at the appropriate spatial 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 that can deal with social, economic and ecological challenges and ensure a high quality of life for all. While 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 development actors, outlining five key principles: urban policy for the common good, integrated approach, participation and co-creation, multi-level governance and a place-based approach. Section four on **Empowering cities to transform** encourages all levels of governance to support active and strategic land policy and land-use planning and to actively shape the digital transformation, stressing that solid urban governance is necessary to transform all cities into just, green and productive urban systems. 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. 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. The New Leipzig Charter also includes an [annex](#), Implementing the New Leipzig Charter Through Multi-Level Governance, which establishes a link between the Urban Agenda's working method and the Charter's strategic principles of good urban governance, and outlines the next steps for the Urban Agenda, setting out proposals to further strengthen its impact and efficiency through action in areas such as multilevel cooperation, communication or governance, including measures to be taken by all partners.

### Advisory bodies

In its [opinion](#) adopted in October 2020, the European Committee of the Regions considers that the New Leipzig Charter represents a political opportunity which enables cities to act as a benchmark for the practical implementation of urban policies in Member States, which can thus help to strengthen the credibility of the European project, and agrees with the New Leipzig Charter's operating principles of an integrated approach, place-based approach, multi-level governance and participation and co-creation. The European Economic and Social Committee's September 2020 [opinion](#) recommended that the new circumstances that have emerged since the adoption of the Leipzig Charter be fully included in the new Charter to ensure it is functionally compatible with the future EU multiannual financial framework, emphasising also the need for it to systematically consider resilience in view of the anticipated increase in distortions and risks.

### Other stakeholders

[Eurocities](#) has highlighted 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. The [European Council of Spatial Planners](#) (ECTP-CEU) welcomed the initiative to revise the Leipzig Charter. Despite supporting the overall structure, set-up and content of the New Leipzig Charter, it noted 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

Although representing a key urban milestone, the new charter arguably risks being overshadowed by the discussions on the cohesion policy framework and the coronavirus recovery plan, vital issues for EU cities.

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