



Local & Regional Europe  
L'Europe locale & régionale

# Election of the next European Parliament in 2024: a Call to Action

# Empowering Europe's Future: Local and Regional Governments' Agenda for Effective Governance and Cooperation

Europe and the world continue to face profound challenges to which national governments alone are unable to adequately respond. At the same time, the upcoming elections for the European Parliament (EP) in 2024 take place at a moment when Europe's democracy is confronted by unparalleled challenges.

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and our national associations remain steadfast in our support for fundamental values, in particular democratic governance, respect for human rights, subsidiarity, and sustainability. The importance of upholding local and regional autonomy, against the tendencies of recentralisation and attempts to reduce power at the local level too, are core to CEMR's mission. Therefore, we eagerly await the outcome of next year's EP elections and are keen to work with the new Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to exchange on and co-create effective policies.

Local and regional governments (LRGs) are not only responsible for the delivery of key public services in our territories; they and their representative associations also bridge the gap between Europe and its citizens. On the one hand, they are instrumental in helping the inhabitants of Europe's municipalities, and regions to understand the relevance of the EU for their daily lives. On the other, they communicate the needs of our territories, to the EU and international policymakers. Municipalities are oftentimes the largest employer in the local area and play a key role as employers and in shaping the local workforce.

Yet as implementers of public policies, LRGs face the proliferation of EU initiatives. This is particularly true in the field of climate, energy and environment, an area where EU decision-makers have been highly active in

recent years and where action to successfully deliver a decarbonised future in large part relies on action by LRGs. The quality of our governance arrangements in Europe can and should be boosted by the contribution, know-how and capabilities of local and regional leaders. Our governance-in-partnership model in Europe is an essential tool for helping to deliver inclusive outcomes that leave no-one and no place behind.

The next European Parliament must commit to a policy agenda that genuinely serves our citizens, businesses, and communities, underpinned by partnership and co-creation. CEMR and its national associations are keen to play a constructive role in this process. Our key messages and recommendations are important prerequisites to kickstart this discussion.

# Active subsidiarity and stronger multi-level governance cooperation

- Subnational governments are responsible for over 50% of public investment<sup>1</sup> and it is regularly estimated that involvement of regional and local governments in the implementation of EU legislation at the national level is at least 70%, depending on the country in question.
- Effective policies are unpinned by good governance arrangements with the principle of subsidiarity<sup>2</sup> at its heart. This calls for decisions to be taken at the closest possible level to the citizen, recognising the local level as the primary point of action. Policy implementation adapted to place allows the principles of local self-government to be better applied.
- Ensuring the application of meaningful subsidiarity arrangements is crucial for better policies and requires the enhanced involvement of local and regional governments in all phases of the EU decision-making process.
- Collaboration and coordination across and between levels of government are essential to deliver public services that effectively respond to people's needs and for Europe's ability to properly respond to future crises. EU policy and decision-makers must cooperate with LRGs, on how best to achieve the ambitious EU objectives including on climate, energy, and sustainable industry ensuring subnational challenges and needs are properly addressed.

# Recommendations

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As co-legislators, Members of the European Parliament should, at an early stage of the legislative process, examine the effects of the proposals on local and regional administrations to ensure workability and foster optimal outcomes.

The next European Parliament should insist that the 'Partnership Principle' be applied to all EU policies, particularly as concerns future EU funding instruments and investment policies; furthermore, it should work with the European Commission to seek the extension of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (Delegated Regulation 240/2014).

CEMR urges the Members of the next European Parliament to establish a permanent dialogue between high-level policy-makers from the EU and national governments to cooperate with local and regional administrations, in the implementation of key EU policy issues such as renewables, energy efficiency and net zero industries.

EU co-legislators must ensure that the design of any new policies planned in the context of the EU's Green Deal, are designed and negotiated in line with effective partnership between all tiers of government – EU, national and subnational.

The next European Parliament should encourage all EU policymakers to work towards more simplified and streamlined State aid rules, which would foster the conditions for improved local economic development. This is particularly necessary, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased construction and energy costs, resulting from the Russian attack on Ukraine.

<sup>1</sup> Based on a sample done in 30 OECD countries, [https://www.oecd.org/effective-public-investment-toolkit/Full\\_report\\_Effective\\_Public\\_Investment.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/effective-public-investment-toolkit/Full_report_Effective_Public_Investment.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> As defined in Article 5(3) of the Treaty on the EU

# Systemic approaches and innovative instruments for more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable societies

## Key Message 2

- Climate change and energy transition remain a top priority for LRGs, especially as the evidence of climate change becomes more visible. Local and Regional Governments play a crucial role in finding innovative and integrative responses to this crisis, particularly given the need to secure public acceptance for this necessary transition.
- The transformation of our societies by digitalisation and artificial intelligence makes it vital to develop digital solutions, underpinned by locally-generated data. This will ensure the delivery of locally-tailored and high-quality services to our communities.
- Local and regional authorities are key enablers of the digital transition, and therefore need sufficient public and private investment in digital services technologies, infrastructures, and skills to achieve this goal.
- Gender transformative approaches that challenge and transform the underlying causes of inequalities are an important aspect of successfully achieving the green, digital and just transitions in Europe.
- In addition to taking a transformative approach to gender equality, an intersectional lens which recognises and gives voice to those who experience intersecting discrimination and exclusion will be necessary to achieve a fair, equal and sustainable future for all of Europe's citizens.
- The next European Parliament will continue to play a decisive role in shaping EU migration and integration policies. Improving the dialogue between EU decision-makers and local and regional governments is an invaluable tool to enhance the implementation of EU policies targeting the integration and inclusion of migrants in our communities and society.

# Recommendations

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CEMR urges the European Parliament to be bold in promoting an enabling environment that supports the digital literacy of local public administrations. The EU's framework must be developed in line with user-centred local public services, to plug gaps where they exist.

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The European Parliament must remain an important champion for gender equality and inclusion. Its effort should focus on closing economic gender gaps, tackling violence against women, including cyber violence and harassment, and the dismantling of harmful gender stereotypes to ensure safe and equal participation of women in political life.

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The next European Parliament should promote strong collaboration between EU policy and decision-makers on the provision of ad-hoc and flexible funding resources and appropriate instruments to support the reception, integration, and inclusion of migrants in local communities.

# An integrated territorial approach throughout EU policy-making

- Meaningful participation of territories of all types and sizes brings notable benefits to the European Union by highlighting the range of challenges that exist and allows for them to be addressed in a joined-up and holistic way. It allows for the establishment of place-based strategies, according to the needs of specific territories and communities.

- Urban and rural areas have assets that are mutually complementary and can be mutually reinforcing, underpinning the idea of the urban/rural continuum. Divisive urban and rural policies are counterproductive; it is vital to apply a comprehensive and integrated territorial approach.



# Recommendations

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European policymakers need to further strengthen the EU's place-based Cohesion Policy and adhere to the 'do no harm to cohesion' principle when drafting new and revising existing legislation.

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Future EU co-legislators should encourage the next European Commission, set to take office in the autumn 2024, to nominate a dedicated Commissioner for Territorial Development with a clear mandate to drive the EU's strategic and long-term Cohesion Policy.

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Following the investiture of the next European Parliament, we urge the new co-legislators to establish a "Public Service intergroup" focusing its work on improving local and regional public services.

# An open and responsible model of international cooperation

- European partnerships, twinning arrangements and enlargements of the European Union have demonstrated their importance, by fostering shared common values, contributing to openness and greater understanding between diverse groups and communities.
- International cooperation is crucial to achieve the 2030 Agenda at the local and regional levels. Learning among peers in Europe and further afield can bring positive and mutually beneficial change that raises standards for local public policies in Europe and globally.
- Decentralised cooperation supports the establishment of equal partnerships by building bridges between territories. Funding instruments could be further territorialised so that they can be adapted and made accessible to LRGs.
- National governments and the EU should accelerate the localisation and territorialisation of the SDGs. This requires that LRGs be assigned the appropriate autonomy of action, adequate means and resources to implement the 2030 Agenda in their communities.

# Recommendations

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The next European Parliament is urged to continue supporting decentralised cooperation as a tool of reference; this approach has proven its effectiveness and fostered inclusive international cooperation and democracy amongst the EU and its global partners.

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EU policy and decision-makers should give political space and recognition to LRGs by establishing regular dialogue with the subnational level and by including local elected representatives in their delegations to any relevant high-level meetings. These include the High-Level Political Forum meetings and other summits hosted by the United Nations and the European institutions.

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The next European Parliament should reinstate and enshrine funding lines and opportunities for LRGs across EU external financing instruments with particular attention to the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe.

So as the clock ticks down to the next European Parliament elections, it is vital that the voice of local and regional governments are heard, as the political parties put the final touches to their manifestos and draw up their list of candidates. CEMR is putting forward its agenda for engagement with the EU's co-legislator, as we believe that only by working together in partnership with Europe's future policymakers, do we have a chance of achieving the outcomes on the ground that we all seek.

## CCRE-CEMR

Conseil des Communes  
et Régions d'Europe  
Council of European  
Municipalities and Regions  
1 Square de Meeûs  
B - 1000 Brussels