



Local & Regional  
Europe

# A stronger Europe for everyone:

A new EU agenda in partnership with  
Local and Regional Governments

The results of the latest European elections highlight a growing sense of uncertainty among European citizens. Challenging economic conditions in some countries, coupled with unequal access to infrastructure, services, and job opportunities across different regions, are contributing to growing polarisation, which poses significant challenges to social cohesion within our territories.

While mayors and local leaders across Europe continue to be trusted by their communities, they face increasing pressure to balance shrinking economic resources with the dual imperatives of tackling climate change and facilitating the green transition, all while providing essential public services to an increasingly aging population. These demographic challenges threaten to deepen the divide between peripheral and central Europe, exacerbating disparities between urban and rural areas.

To revitalise the European project and ensure a more competitive, sustainable, and equitable future for Europe's citizens, it is crucial to champion a new era of long-term, multi-level governance partnerships and collaborations.<sup>1</sup> European policies must be streamlined and tailored to address the concrete needs of people across the continent where they are located. For this new mandate, it is therefore important for the EU to focus on key issues that are critical to the single market.

Cities, municipalities, and regions are where EU policies have the most direct impact. From implementing energy-saving measures during the energy crisis to investing in sustainable transports or waste treatment facilities, local and regional governments are at the forefront in responding to global challenges. Their initiatives, including managing health or other crises, receiving and supporting migrants, serve as European, and even global examples of timely and effective governance.

Europe is confronting increasingly complex social, economic, and environmental challenges. The ongoing armed conflicts in the Middle East are intensifying these difficulties and raising security concerns across the continent, highlighting the urgent need for stronger, coordinated efforts to protect peace and stability. In this complex scenario, the 2024-2029 political guidelines for the next European Commission are both ambitious and extensive. Local and regional governments (LRGs) are essential allies in translating these proposals into tangible outcomes while supporting foresight that helps to build resilience and preparedness.

Local self-government competencies and experience are crucial for the effective implementation of existing climate frameworks, strengthening cohesion and growth policies, organising and delivering services of general interest, addressing skills and labour gaps, and advancing gender equality in Europe. Moreover, their innovative approaches and tools are strategic for the Union's enlargement priority and for adopting a more strategic approach to Europe's neighbourhood.

To build a stronger Europe and ensure a better future to its citizens, the EU must leverage the transformative potential of cities, municipalities, and regions with a focus on:

**To build a  
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citizens...**

# AN EFFECTIVE AND JUST GREEN TRANSITION

Approximately 70% of climate change mitigation policies are expected to be implemented at the subnational level, while nearly 90% of climate adaptation measures will be managed locally or regionally.<sup>2</sup> LRGs have made substantial investments in future sustainability. According to a 2024 OECD report, in 2019 subnational governments were responsible for 69% of climate-significant public investment, which surpasses central government contributions. Despite this commitment, only one-third of LRGs feel confident in their ability to translate Green Deal and net-zero policies into local and regional realities. Financial constraints and staff shortages are among the key challenges of cities and municipalities in urban and rural areas. Moreover, inadequate communication and consultation with national and EU decision-makers further exacerbate these issues.

To address these issues the EU should:



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# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 01.

Ensure an effective implementation that responds to the needs and capacities of territories and local communities. The new EC Vice-President for implementation, simplification and interinstitutional relations should mandate a comprehensive evaluation of the needs and impact of the infrastructure investments. These investments are essential to implement sectoral legislation and to enable the bundling and rationalisation of costs.

## 02.

Promote effective mechanisms to engage LRGs in the legislative process and strengthen collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including public-private partnerships. This approach will help develop long-term sustainable policies and investment strategies that are tailored to the socio-economic realities of territories, leveraging collective strengths to achieve common objectives.

## 03.

Increase direct funding to local and regional governments and enable a more simplified public procurement regime - with no mandatory provisions - to support the green transition. These instruments enhance Europe's competitiveness and have a significant societal impact.

# AN ENHANCED FOCUS ON TERRITORIAL AND SOCIETAL COHESION

The current model of cohesion policy needs reforms to better focus on competitiveness and territorial development while reinforcing its core principles. The reforms shall enable cohesion policy to become the EU's primary investment tool for fostering competitiveness and enhancing job opportunities through a decentralised cooperation approach across all territories and local communities.

For the post-2027 period,<sup>3</sup> cohesion policy should aim to ensure access to essential local and regional public services, including healthcare, education and skills, transport, and digital connectivity. It should foster local and regional governments capacities to plan and finance the delivery of services of public interest that are tailored to the specific needs of their communities. This focus will promote social equality and convergence among territories and communities.

Additionally, the policy should support investments and reforms that drive inclusive and sustainable growth across all regions, recognising the importance of the urban-rural continuum.

A new model for cohesion policy can only be implemented if local and regional governments are central to the process, both in designing and benefitting of the funding.

For a more effective cohesion policy, we call the EU institutions to:



For a more  
effective  
cohesion  
policy...

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 01.

Allocate an ambitious budget to cohesion policy of at least one-third of the EU total budget. While a simpler framework with fewer programmes linking key reforms with investments is welcomed, it is crucial that priorities uphold principles of place and people-based, multi-level governance and partnership.

## 02.

Secure cohesion policy investments are fit for purpose and maximised. This requires involving all stakeholders throughout the entire process - from design and planning to implementation. It is particularly important to engage local and regional government representatives, as they have a profound understanding of their territories' challenges, strengths, and the needs of their citizens. Additionally, thematic concentration should be made more flexible to allow programs to address the actual needs and priorities of the areas in which they are implemented.

## 03.

Ensure the Executive Vice President for Cohesion and Reforms oversees territorial development in a broad context, including the territorial aspects of other European sectoral policies. This role should consider the urban-rural continuum and focus on establishing an enabling framework for local and regional public investments.

# INVESTMENTS IN LOCAL-TO-LOCAL AND REGIONAL-TO-REGIONAL COOPERATION

Local and regional governments are pivotal in advancing both green and digital transitions, positioning Europe to effectively address global challenges. However, LRGs do not always have the right technical, financial and administrative skills and capabilities required to deal with the many transformation challenges. Investing in city-to-city and region-to-region cooperation not only bolsters their ability to manage these transformations on the ground but also promotes greater European resilience and innovation.

Such cooperation is essential for strengthening the technical, financial, and administrative capacities of local and regional authorities, enabling them to lead these transitions effectively and navigate future uncertainties.

Decentralised cooperation<sup>4</sup> is a fundamental tool for collaboration among local and regional governments, fostering European values and bridging gaps between territories.

We therefore call on the EU to:





# RECOMMENDATIONS

**01.**

Invest more in technical, financial, and administrative capacities of local and regional authorities to equip them for the challenges of current transitions and ensure they are prepared for future developments.

**02.**

Enhance financial support for decentralized cooperation as a key tool for fostering inclusive international collaboration, equality, and democracy, contributing to the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the local level.<sup>5</sup>

**03.**

Reinforce twinning programs among local and regional governments including with EU candidate Countries to facilitate mutual capacity building, knowledge exchange, and skills development, while promoting long-term relationships and collaborative projects. This would be important also for promoting European integration of EU candidate Countries.

# STRONGER EFFORTS TOWARDS A TRULY EQUAL, DEMOCRATIC AND INCLUSIVE EUROPE

Building equal, democratic, and inclusive societies in Europe is an ongoing process that demands long-term commitment of governments, institutions, communities, and individuals. Gender equality and respect for minorities are fundamental pillars of the European Union, and these values must be actively upheld at every level of governance. In an increasingly diverse Europe, it is essential to create environments where everyone is integrated and feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute.

Local and regional governments are crucial in this effort. They are uniquely positioned to design and carry out inclusive policies, activities, and programs that reflect the diverse realities of their communities, thereby contributing to effective implementation of EU and international policies and agreements, such as the Pact on Migration and Asylum and

the Istanbul Convention.

The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life<sup>6</sup> exemplifies the commitment of visionary local leaders to drive change at the community level, setting a standard for the EU as a whole. By adopting an intersectional approach, the Charter encourages municipalities to go beyond gender-focused initiatives and embrace a broader spectrum of inclusion and diversity, ensuring that all voices are heard and that no one is left behind.

As the European Union expands, its enlargement policy should prioritise inclusivity by empowering local and regional governments and their associations to foster good governance, local democracy, and the rule of law in candidate countries.

It is vital to view local and regional governments as key allies and actively involve them in translating and implementing the EU legal framework. This includes championing local self-government, strengthening institutional capacity, and advancing multilevel governance reforms.

We therefore call the EU to:

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**01.**

Support the upscaling and implementation of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life and enhance the potential of the Charter as a unique tool for advancing greater equality at local and regional levels. This Charter serves as a model for promoting gender equality and inclusivity, offering practical guidance for municipalities striving to create more equitable environments.

**02.**

Integrate an intersectional perspective into all policies and activities across Europe at all levels. By adopting a gender-transformative perspective, local and regional governments can address the diverse needs of all genders, fostering more inclusive, effective, and sustainable solutions.

**03.**

Ensure the prompt and comprehensive implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, with full involvement of local and regional governments in the process.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 04.

Support cities in their efforts to integrate EU citizens from other member states. This can be achieved through targeted, long-term funding programmes, while social security systems need better coordination at the European level to safeguard freedom of movement and prevent abuse.

## 05.

Address the existing skills gap at local and regional levels within the candidate countries by targeted projects and prioritise shared learning through decentralised cooperation between EU candidate countries and member states. This approach will help close existing skills gaps, improve the quality of local services, and enhance the overall well-being of citizens.

# CEMR IN A NUTSHELL

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions is Europe's first and broadest association of Local and Regional Governments. We are unique, being the only organisation that encompasses 60 national associations of Local and Regional Governments spanning over 41 European countries.

Through them, we bring together more than 110,000 governments across all tiers of governance – local, intermediate, and regional. Additionally, as the European section of the global organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), we champion European Local and Regional Governments on the world stage.

## REFERENCES

1. [The Prague Declaration: More Trust in and Stronger Voice for Local and Regional Governments](#)
2. CEMR report: [The Local Green Transition – Prospects for an Inclusive and Competitive Deal](#)
3. CEMR position: [Future of EU Cohesion Policy post-2027](#)
4. [PLATFORMA programme](#)
5. CEMR – PLATFORMA key recommendations on achieving the 2030 Agenda through empowering LRGs: [European Territories Localising SDGs – The time for impact is running out](#)
6. [European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in local life](#)