



To be released immediately

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## Environmental sustainability as a new transversal driving force of the regional growth

**In a recently released report the Interreg Europe EURE project analyses the use of ERDF funds allocated for the development of urban policies in 10 thematic areas and offers a set of recommendations for the future of EU Urban Policy. Pinpointing environmental sustainability as a new transversal driving force of the regional growth, the report suggests that the new cohesion policy should include "green deals" i.e. agreements signed not only by regions and the EU but also by local authorities and business actors in order to redefine the economy and boost the development.**

*Brussels, Belgium* – With more than 80 % of its population expected to live in urban areas by 2050, Europe is a highly urbanised continent. These urban areas are seen as both the source of and solution to today's economic, environmental and social challenges. This requires an adequate response and efficient governance. Consequently, several instruments and programmes have been developed by the EU such as the New Urban Agenda for the EU (adopted in 2016), the new Leipzig Charter (adopted in 2020).

The partners of the [Interreg Europe EURE](#) project geared their attention to one of these instruments, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) aimed to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions. They investigated **how the ERDF funds allocated for the development of urban policies are being used and how they can be improved** in the territories covered by the project. Results of their work have been compiled in a newly released report entitled "[For a better and sustainable quality of life in European cities](#)".

### Analysing the EU intervention in urban areas

The report provides an overview of the **reasons why the EU is, and should continue intervening in urban areas as well as how urban areas actors perceive the EU intervention**. It is based on the deep experience of the EURE project partners who come from 9 countries and cover 480 cities and a population of more than 10 million inhabitants of the European Union. The report contains important information on the **state of art in the EU** on:

- ✓ **Sustainable Land Use and Urban Renewal**
- ✓ **Water supply and Management**
- ✓ **Waste management and Circular Economy**
- ✓ **Energy Transition**
- ✓ **Sustainable Urban Mobility**
- ✓ **Air and Noise Quality**
- ✓ **Climate Adaptation**
- ✓ **Green Growth and Eco-Innovation**
- ✓ **Social Inclusion**
- ✓ **Governance for sustainable urban development and Civil Society Participation**

**55 best practices** examples illustrate the analysis to show cases of success stories in Europe in different thematic, including **10 good practices of ITI** – Integrated Territorial Investments – concerning Sustainable Urban Development.

## 15 recommendations for the future of the EU Urban Policy

The report concludes on a **set of recommendations** to the European Commission to be considered in the **implementation of the next Regulations concerning EU funding in the framework the structural funds programming period of 2021-27**. They cover four areas: How **future EU Urban Policy** should look like; Recommendations for each one of the **urban policy thematic; Financing; Governance**.

While exploring how future EU Urban Policy should look like, EURE partners highlight the importance of **environmental sustainability**, which must be understood as a transversal reference framework of the cohesion policy not only as an important element for safeguarding the natural resources and ensure a development process which is compatible with the challenges of climate change. Environmental sustainability is a real driving force of the regional growth. The **new cohesion policy**, in accordance with each regional planning process, **will have to include “green deals”**, that is agreements signed not only by regions and the EU but also by local authorities and business actors in order to redefine the economy and boost the development.

The other main recommendations are:

- 1. New urban policy should encourage and support financially the reduction of urban sprawl.**
- 2. All Cities and Groups of Cities** should be encouraged to have **long term Strategies and Action Plans** to implement measures to: **assure water supply in future; reduce flood risk and underground water pollution.**
- 3. All Cities and groups of Cities should implement the necessary actions to reach goals marked in the Circular Economy Package.** But they should not be alone in the process, **national and European advice and financial support** should be available to encourage urban actions.
- 4. Cities and Groups of Cities should reinforce their energy efficiency measures, integrating as much as possible renewables.**
- 5. Promote sustainable intermodal urban mobility** through interventions aimed at improving the sustainable urban mobility actions and the development of **infomobility and intelligent transport solutions** for a better use of services and services infrastructure by citizenship.
- 6. Cities and groups of Cities should implement the European Commission Clean Air Policy Package**, including a Clean Air Programme for Europe setting objectives for 2020 and 2030, adopted in 2013; and follow the guidance provided in the Communication "A Europe that protects: Clean air for all", adopted in 2018.
- 7. Cities and groups of Cities should implement Environmental Noise Directive 2002/49/EC.**
- 8. Promote adaptation to climate change, risk prevention and resilience to disasters through prevention interventions.**
- 9. Cities and groups of Cities should promote social inclusion.** They should be strongly advised, encouraged, and supported to **prepare and implement Social Inclusion Action Plans** for their territories, that include financing measures to create local economy and jobs.
- 10. Cities and groups of cities should strengthen biodiversity, green and blue infrastructure** in the urban environment and reduce pollution through interventions aimed at creating green infrastructures in the urban area.
- 11. To increase national and EU financial support to Cities**, in particular to smaller cities, which can be considered as leaders of FUA – Functional Urban Areas, and involve smaller cities around them in a polycentric system. Therefore, **the allocation of EU structural Funds should be increased in the Operational programs to at least 10%**, in current prices using the facility of the actual allocation that is of at least (8%).

12. **Cities and groups of Cities should in the future reinforce governance by development concepts such as Smart Cities and governance participation involving the civil society in the decision-making process.**
13. **To include in the future, for the purpose of organizing urban planning and management in national polycentric regions, the FUA with about 20,000 or more inhabitants. These FUAs should therefore be able to access European funds for European urban policy in the form of ITI's.**
14. **Reflect about the adequacy of create a new level NUTS IV, especially to have appropriate statistics for the Urban Policy. Urban evolution has generated a transformation in the scale that has led to different figures (counties, urban agglomerations...). Nevertheless, there is neither accurate nor uniform information about this administrative level to be used as input to design the Urban Policy.**
15. **That the European Commission recommends ITI's should be used in the next EU 2021-27 programming period as a main instrument for SUD. ITI's should be encouraged not only for urban areas, but as well for Functional Urban Areas. In this case ITI's should be encouraged as well for Cross Border Functional Urban Areas.**

The report "[For a better and sustainable quality of life in European cities](#)" as well as an [executive summary](#) are available on the [EURE website](#).

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**More information:**

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The [EURE project](#) – Effectiveness of Environmental Urban policies to improve Resources Efficiency – proposes the exchange of experiences as a way to improve the environmental performance management of EU urban spaces, including the urban areas with a low population density.

