

Urban dimension of cohesion policy in the new programming period

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The European Parliament adopted by 592 votes to 47, with 48 abstentions, a resolution on the urban dimension of cohesion policy in the new programming period.

Whilst urban issues fall under the responsibility of national, regional, and local authorities, urban areas nevertheless play a key role in the effective implementation of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies and are therefore viewed as a high priority in cohesion policy. In this context, the Parliament makes the following recommendations:

Taking account of the urban dimension of regional development: stressing the importance of sustainable urban development and the contribution of urban areas to regional development, MEPs call on the Commission regularly to evaluate the impact of EU policies on the economic and social situation (particularly issues relating to education and culture), as well as the health, transport, environmental and security situation in urban areas.

Member States are called upon to take all necessary measures to support their capital cities and other metropolises in their efforts to deal with the challenges arising from urbanisation and the resulting population increase, in areas of waste management, housing, employment and education.

URBAN Community initiative: MEPs express concern that the urban dimension is inadequately taken into account by some Member States in the implementation of cohesion policy. They highlight the positive experience of the URBAN Community initiative and call for these achievements in the urban dimension of structural funding to be taken into account and for similar mechanisms to be introduced into the mainstream funding available for sustainable urban development, thereby enabling a larger number of cities to benefit from these achievements.

Definition of ‘urban areas’: MEPs consider that it would be useful for Member States to define the term ‘urban areas’. Any obligatory definition and designation of urban areas should be left to Member States in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity based on European common indicators. However, it would be useful for Member States to define, through a process of public consultation, on a case-by-case basis, the urban dimension, as they perceive it, in order to strengthen internal harmonisation and improve interaction with the Commission.

Recourse to sub-delegation: Member States have the possibility of delegating to the cities the management of European Structural Funds (ESF) geared to the implementation of measures aimed at achieving sustainable urban development. MEPs regret the fact that the possibility of sub-delegation has so far not been fully utilised and are convinced that a clear role for urban areas as intermediary structures should be envisaged and encouraged in the context of the multi-level governance approach in the next programming period.

Integrated approach to urban planning: MEPs propose that any public urban development support should be based on integrated urban development plans. They call for the integrated approach to be made a binding condition, as soon as possible but no later than the next programming period, for granting and implementing Structural Funds and also for receiving loans from the European Investment Bank. The

Commission is called upon to draw up guidelines comprising recommendations and examples of good practice concerning integrated urban development plans and to encourage also the exchange of best practices between national, regional and local authorities.

Urban management plans: Member States are called upon to prioritise, within their national strategic reference frameworks and operational programmes, funding for projects which implement sustainable urban management plans. MEPs recommend that sustainable urban management plans include at least some of the following elements:

- a waste management plan;
- noise maps and action plans, local air pollution and environmental programmes;
- forecasts for population growth;
- reclamation of abandoned sites and buildings;
- regeneration of neighbourhoods in decline and de-industrialised areas;
- availability and accessibility of public services;
- urban structure and the proportion of green areas;
- facilities for people with disabilities;
- upgrading the cultural, historical and natural heritage;
- estimating water and energy requirements and efficient use of water and energy;
- availability of public transport and effective traffic management;
- integration of vulnerable groups (emigrants, minorities, people with few qualifications, people with disabilities, women, etc.);
- availability of decent housing at affordable prices, and plans to combat crime.

Strengthening governance and improving the use of resources: MEPs identify an urgent need to reinforce the administrative capacity of urban governance and call for existing financial, human and organisational resources to be used more efficiently in order to create and strengthen the networks established by towns and cities in the field of sustainable urban development.

In this context, they stress the need for infrastructure which helps maintain particular characteristics (e.g. historical), modernisation (e.g. innovation poles), economic growth (e.g. SMEs) and seasonal activities.

The resolution also supports the idea of the principle of revolving JESSICA funds and its potential for economic growth in urban areas.

Lastly, the Parliament recommends that the Commission and Member States establish an **EU High Level Group on Urban Development** and apply the open method of coordination to urban development policy at EU level.