

# Urban development: guidelines for a urban agenda in the Union

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**OBJECTIVE:** Presentation of a general document on the future of European urban policy seeking to: - open dialogue with all parties concerned prior to the reform of the Structural Funds in 1999, - outline an 'integrated development strategy' for cities encompassing regional transport environment employment and research policies **SUBSTANCE:** The communication indicates that cities are the main source of economic growth, competitiveness and employment in the Community (20% of Europeans live in urban centres with more than 250 000 inhabitants). At the same time, cities are being affected by growing problems: unemployment, pollution, congestion, poverty and exclusion, sub-standard accommodation, crime and drug addiction. In response to this the Commission recommends an integrated approach involving decision-making authorities at all levels (local, regional, national and European) and all European policies concerned: The objective is not to develop urban policies at European level but to improve the quality of urban development by making existing methods (mainly structural) more efficient and achieving better coordination between initiatives adopted at all decision-making levels. It is also necessary to concentrate less on cities as a reference framework for the public and in favour of local democracy which is the political level closest to the citizens. It is also necessary to replace the city at the centre of the European social model based on instances of discrimination of grounds of sex and ethnic origins. Concerning the measures to be taken the Commission indicates how the Structural Funds can be used more effectively by targeting high unemployment in city centres and densely populated suburbs or improving infrastructures and public transport services to make outlying areas more accessible and more attractive. Greater attention to urban development and the reform of the Structural Funds in 1999 could result in an integrated strategy involving measures for urban areas and their surrounding regions. Promotion of 'sustainable local communities' could be developed in this framework as part of the new URBAN and INTEGRA. The Commission also proposes a number of measures seeking to promote in the longer term a European Union urban policy: - development of clear targets with specified timetables for the improvement of the urban environment taking into account sustainable development variables, - development of accessible and economically viable trans-European networks (as far as possible), - targeting of RTD activities on the problems facing cities (integrated transport, sustainable construction, new urban vehicles), - strengthening the commercial function of cities, - resolving issues relating to immigration (third pillar), - the fight against social and economic exclusion as part of the European strategy for employment and the fight against racism, - development of public health policy (particularly in relationship to poverty), - creation of relationships based on confidence between those involved at local level and the public. Finally, from the political point of view, the Commission communication will contribute to the discussions which have been planned since 1997 on cities and regions organized by the Committee of the Regions. The Commission also indicates its intention of engaging in a wider debate on urban issues on the basis of this communication. A dialogue will be sought between the Commission and all the other institutions and the local authority organizations and other interested parties. The outcome of this dialogue will be brought to an urban forum to be convened in 1998.