

# BOOSTING CLIMATE-NEUTRAL METROPOLITAN AREAS: GREEN, SMART AND RESILIENT

REPORT OF THE ANNUAL FORUM MEETING

**PORTO 2021**

11-12 November 2021

EUROPEAN  
**METROPOLITAN**  
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# Foreword

We are honoured to present the results of the sixth edition of the European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA) forum, held in Porto on 11–12 November 2021. A significant number of authorities took part in the forum, which was a considerable success.

As you are all aware, EMA is a network of metropolitan areas and cities that aims to foster dialogue among their political representatives and works to obtain greater recognition of metropolitan realities at national and European level. Today, our members represent more than 75 million people in over 20 different countries, and the number of European metropolitan areas interested in our work is growing.

This year, and despite COVID-19 challenges, the EMA forum was pleased to welcome the participation of an important number of political leaders; the European Union (EU) Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira; members of the European Parliament; and two Portuguese government ministers.

The conference took place at the same time as the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26). The different speeches delivered by our members and EMA's final political declaration show that the decarbonisation objectives set by the European Green Deal and the EU's goal to reach climate neutrality by 2050 are only achievable with the full involvement of metropolitan areas. Solutions such as smart urban mobility, the promotion of renewable energies, and energy efficiency in public and private buildings are some of the key policies being promoted by metropolitan governments.

The EMA forum was also held at a crucial moment for our territories, which is the beginning of the implementation of the EU's National Recovery and Resilience Plans. Up to now, most Member States have been reluctant to involve metropolitan areas in the preparation of their respective national plans. The different programmes of the Cohesion Policy and other European programmes under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027 provide us with a new opportunity to participate.

We also took the stage to say that we wish to be present in future partnerships under the European Urban Agenda. We know that we have a specific role to play and great expertise to share in terms of housing, energy renovation of existing buildings, urban planning, economic development, sustainable mobility, energy transition, and digital and social policies. As we say, we are the missing link between nations, states, cities, villages and people. Beyond administrative borders, we are the nodes of the real networks that connect our society, networks made by people living, working, creating and gathering, by public services, corporations and society as a whole.

This publication – which includes the policy document, the main statements of the participants and the political declaration of the EMA Conference at Porto – aims to contribute to debate about the role of metropolitan areas in the EU arena. We hope you enjoy it.

**Eduardo Vitor Rodrigues**

*President of the Porto Metropolitan Area*

**Ernest Maragall i Mira**

*Vice-President of International Relations and Cooperation  
of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area*

# Porto Political Declaration

On 12 November 2021, mayors, leaders and political representatives of the European metropolitan areas gathered in Porto for the Sixth European Metropolitan Authorities Forum, framed by the objective of "Boosting Climate-Neutral Metropolitan Areas: Green, Smart and Resilient"

## Having discussed:

- the opportunity for metropolitan areas to be game changers for sustainable, smart, resilient and green recovery
- the role of digital transformation for promoting a new and more inclusive urban living system
- the challenges to overcoming financial scarcity and steering recovery towards a more resilient metropolis

## Recalling that:

Metropolitan areas are key drivers of development. As nearly two-thirds of the European population live and work in metropolitan areas, these areas are responsible for generating 67% of the GDP and 61% of employment in the EU<sup>1</sup>. They host key economic, employment and cultural activities, being true innovation hubs for research and piloting, thus attracting further capital, investment and people.

As stated at COP26 in Glasgow, decarbonisation objectives set by the European Green Deal and the EU's goal to reach climate neutrality by 2050 are

not only ambitious but also imperative. The more frequent and extreme weather conditions have highlighted that the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is not only necessary but extremely urgent.

The COVID-19 pandemic confronted our society with new challenges, uncovering the contradictions and vulnerabilities of traditional urban models. Metropolitan areas have faced unprecedented levels and new forms of social and economic problems, being on the frontline of the crisis management and, on many occasions, without the necessary powers and financial resources.

The new Leipzig Charter<sup>2</sup>, signed in November 2020 during the German Presidency, calls for integrated, place-based approaches, multi-level governance, participation and co-creation. Cross-cutting approaches and broad community collaboration are at the heart of metropolitan areas, which are in the best position to set up integrated strategies and projects while ensuring that no one is left behind. The 2030 Territorial Agenda<sup>3</sup> also highlights the enhancement of the role of Functional Regions as one of the six priorities for achieving a Just and Green Europe.

Digital solutions are broad, and include approaches to smart urban mobility, energy efficiency, sustainable housing, digital public services or civic-led governance. The large-scale uptake of these solutions is crucial to help metropolitan areas meet their climate targets and reduce their environmental footprint, while fostering citizen participation and bringing prosperity to business, including SMEs and start-ups. Digital transition must go hand in hand with climate transition and should also lead to better social and "digital cohesion".

1 "My Region, My Europe, Our Future: Seventh Report on economic, social and territorial cohesion"  
[https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion/7/7cr.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion/7/7cr.pdf)

2 [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2020/new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2020/new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good)

3 <https://territorialagenda.eu/library/>

Technologies, digital tools and data analytics capabilities are, to a large extent, already available. However, the integration and collaboration of systems and stakeholders are fundamental drivers to accelerate and scale up the transition. Europe's twin transition towards a green and digital economy requires social fairness and an economy that works for people, as set out in the Commission's priorities for 2019–2024<sup>4</sup>. Managing transitions requires a strategic vision, ensuring investment in innovative solutions while ensuring that transition unfolds in a fair and inclusive way. Leaving no one behind also means leaving no one out of the digital transition.

Widespread use of the internet and mobile technologies are revolutionizing the provision of urban services. Mobility-as-a-service, city platforms, food deliveries and home shopping are more present in our everyday lives. In the future, with the digitalisation of services, the Internet of Things and sensors, as well as flexible and adaptive firms and services, changes will continue in many other areas. The increasing importance of user-oriented services, as well as changing demographics, migration and an ageing population will also shape the provision of new services.

Cities and metropolitan areas are drivers of the green, digital and just transition that Europe needs for its recovery. The push for climate-friendly metropolitan areas is largely linked to their capacity to adapt to the ever-changing economic conditions and to rebuild trust. As mobility becomes more digital, groups at risk of social exclusion might require additional capabilities to fulfil their daily mobility needs. Understanding social and economic vulnerabilities is essential to formulating resilient actions adapted to local needs, with local communities at the centre of these actions. These key transformations might bring more opportunities for future services in metropolitan areas to become more sustainable and efficient.

The three pillars of the EU's Urban Agenda call for better regulation, better funding and better knowledge. Metropolitan areas can significantly contribute to fulfilling these pillars if they take an active role in the implementation of national policies and have access to sufficient funding. In this respect, metropolitan areas should be incorporated into the agenda of future thematic partnerships.

4 [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/priorities\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/priorities_en)

The wide range of climate change mitigation measures and adaptation actions to achieve climate neutrality are local in nature and require implementation at a sub-national level. Cohesion policy envisages European added value as a condition for obtaining funding. As acknowledged by the Committee of the Regions, support to regional and metropolitan authorities not only yields European added value, but also ensures both the EU's global competitiveness and further regional convergence, through spillover effects resulting from such support.

Metropolitan areas provide a good opportunity, with well-prepared projects based on integrated and existing strategies and on the legacy of their well-functioning public administrations, besides their proximity to the territory and stakeholders. Nevertheless, only a few metropolitan authorities have been engaged in the definition and drafting of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, as stated by the EMA network in its political statement of December 2020<sup>5</sup> sent to European institutions.

The ESPON<sup>6</sup> Metro and URBACT RiConnect<sup>7</sup> projects, both managed by EMA members, have highlighted the need for the effective participation of metropolitan governments in the preparation and management of the 2021–2027 Cohesion Policy programmes.

As highlighted by the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions<sup>8</sup>, parallel diplomacy by regional and local authorities at European level is crucial, especially in the drafting stage of the

5 [https://docs.amb.cat/alfresco/api/-default-/public/alfresco/versions/1/nodes/81dc83c6-f3b6-4987-bcd8-83039dd42251/content/EMA\\_POSITION%20PAPER\\_The%20role%20of%20metropolitan%20areas%20in%20the%20RRF.pdf?attachment=false&mimeType=application/pdf&sizeInBytes=1167255](https://docs.amb.cat/alfresco/api/-default-/public/alfresco/versions/1/nodes/81dc83c6-f3b6-4987-bcd8-83039dd42251/content/EMA_POSITION%20PAPER_The%20role%20of%20metropolitan%20areas%20in%20the%20RRF.pdf?attachment=false&mimeType=application/pdf&sizeInBytes=1167255)

6 <https://www.espon.eu/participate/calls/open-calls/role-and-future-perspectives-cohesion-policy-planning-metropolitan>

7 <https://urbact.eu/riconnect>

8 <https://webapi2016.cor.europa.eu/v1/documents/cor-2021-02505-00-00-actra-en.docx/content>

Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes and, therefore, the European Commission should actively involve metropolitan areas in the negotiations on the new programming period in order to obtain more accurate insight into the key challenges of their territories.

Finally, the crisis that has emerged after the takeover of Afghanistan, which closely resembles the situation in Syria and other global crises, deserves our solidarity and an EU call for action. The situation is a setback for human rights and, in particular, a threat to the rights and freedoms of women and children, who are the central victims of this crisis.

#### **Reaffirming that:**

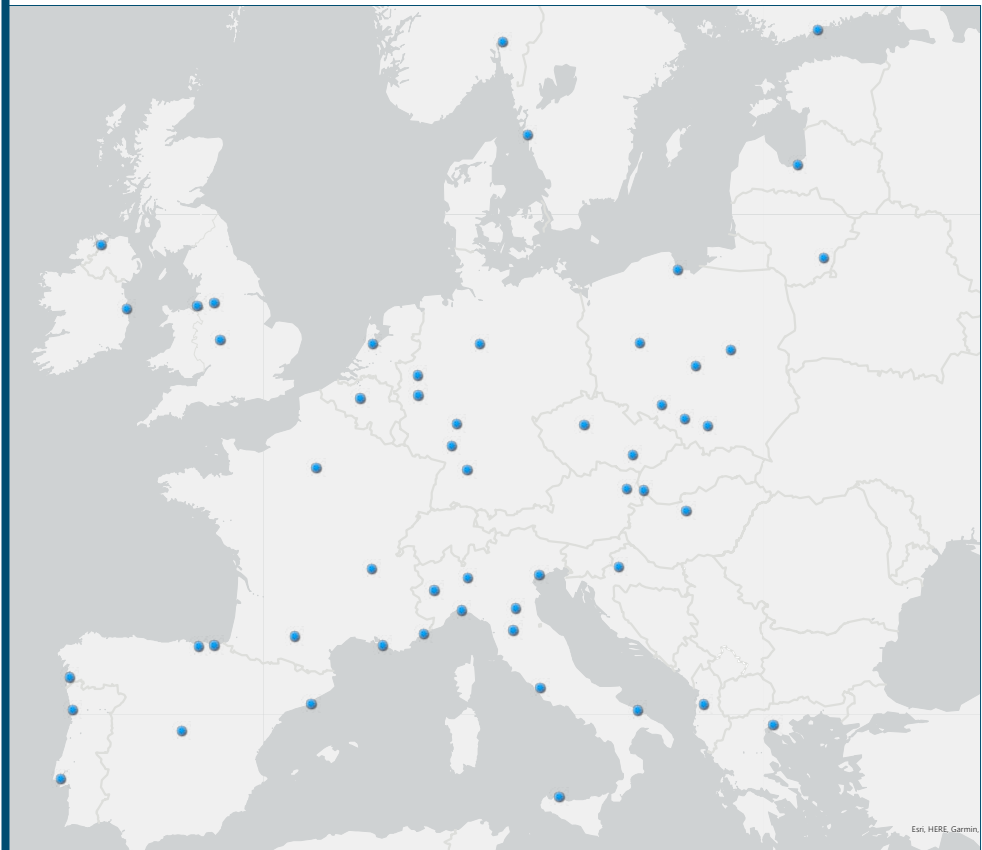
1. Metropolitan areas have made significant headway in confronting the climate crisis through ambitious action and are committed to increasing this leadership with specific measures as demonstrated in the COP26 debates in Glasgow.
2. EMA adopts the main agreements of COP26 and each metropolitan area will work to develop programmes and projects aligned with these agreements in the framework of their competencies.
3. Metropolitan areas cooperating in the EMA network are ready to boost climate neutrality, expressing a strong commitment to being active partners in the execution and achievement of such results.
4. Metropolitan areas are committed to the implementation of integrated and innovative approaches to meet the needs of our citizens, sharing and experimenting the best solutions by being closer to local challenges.
5. Metropolitan areas are called on to take action in a number of areas linked with digital transition, ecological transition, economic recovery and social cohesion. Thus, their level of responsibility should be empowered by the financial capacity to act. The European Financial Framework for 2021–2027 and the Next Generation EU Package support a stronger link between the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the commitments laid down in the European Green Deal and economic recovery.
6. European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA) is ready to implement mature metropolitan proj-

ects using the funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility and REACT-EU, in line with the digital and energy transition, ensuring the involvement of municipalities, regions, academia, as well as economic and social stakeholders.

7. EMA calls on the central administrations and the European Commission for greater involvement of metropolitan areas in the implementation of National Recovery and Resilience Plans, as well as in the preparation and implementation of future Cohesion Policy programmes.
8. EMA urges Member States, the European Union and the United Nations to guarantee shelter and reception, and articulate a shared civilian network between cities and metropolitan areas and Afghanistan, facilitating the channelling of resources and providing human, logistical and economic support to any democratic initiative existing within the country, besides preventing the information isolation and oblivion that Afghanistan may experience.

European Metropolitan Authorities commits to continuing its collaboration in support of a more supportive and united Europe which takes into account the concerns of its citizens.

## EMA 2021 in numbers



Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS; Esri, HERE

151 participants

12 countries

20 cities/metropolitan areas/regions

20 signatories to the Declaration in November 2021

### **PARTICIPANTS:**

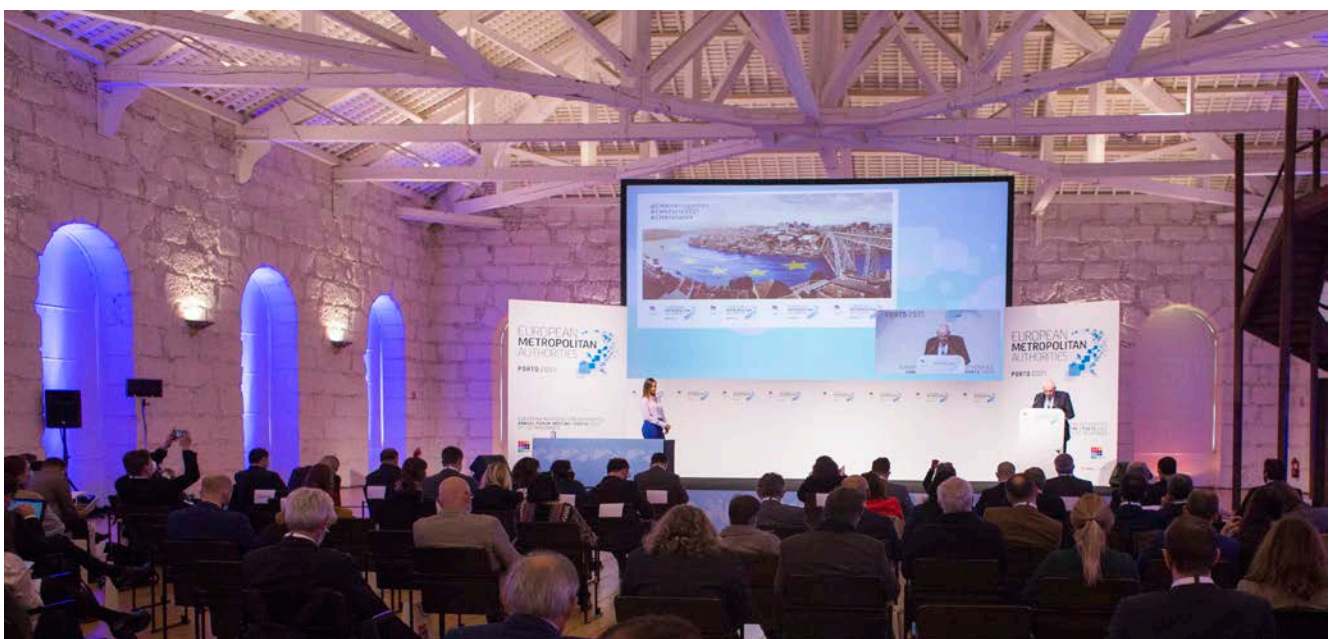
**Metropolitan areas** of Amsterdam, Barcelona, Bratislava, Brussels, Gipuzkoa, Helsinki, Katowice, Kraków, Lisbon, Lyon, Porto, Toulouse and Viken (Oslo).

**Cities** of Brno, Dublin, Madrid, Prague, Vienna, Warsaw and Wrocław.

**Institutions** and **networks** involved (European and global): European Commission, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, Metropolis, Metrex, UN-Habitat, EMTA, INTA.



**Signing of the declaration, from left to right: Thijs Kroese, Juha Eskelinen, Roger Ryberg, Eduardo Vítor Rodrigues, Jakub Mazur, Kazimierz Karolczak, Omar Al-Rawi, Alexandra Leitão, Elzibeta Burtan, Michał Olszewski, Elisa Ferreira, Ernest Maragall i Mira, H  l  ne Dromain, Pascal Smet, Jiř   Sn  izek, Tomas Kolacny, Juraj Droba, Rafaela Romero.**



# EMA Porto 2021 Report

## Welcome and greetings



**Rui Moreira**  
Mayor of Porto

Welcome to the city of Porto. When we look at what is happening in metropolitan areas throughout Europe, in recent years – and not only because of the pandemic – we have seen that cities play a vital role in change. The Anthropocene is bringing change, which is unstoppable. We know that, especially in Europe, whatever happens with climate change, there will be scope for decarbonisation and digital transition in cities. But each city standing alone will not be able to respond to the challenges it will encounter as rapidly as needed, because we have already been slow to respond.

Most of us live and work in cities, and what is not city we

must maintain. We want to live as humans, not as ants; we want to have the capacity to generate new opportunities; and we want to have the chance to meet some of the threats that we currently face, such as migration or waste generation and management.

Five years ago, we were thinking about and discussing where to buy electricity for cities; now we are asking ourselves where to produce this electricity within cities. In a way, we are fortunate to be in charge because these are unpredictable times and today we must be able to exchange views in an atmosphere of optimism.

It is obvious that, whenever we face up to these challenges, there will be those that fear, those that think the world is ending or that disaster is imminent, while others like us think that these challenges can only make us better. I expect this forum to be a place for us to exchange ideas and come away from it with an optimistic view.

## Welcome and greetings



**Eduardo Vitor Rodrigues**  
*President of the Porto Metropolitan Area*

Dear colleagues, thank you for visiting the Porto Metropolitan Area. This metropolis deals with a problem it shares with all metropolitan areas: the difficulty of managing the different realities within itself. A balanced development of rural and urban areas is the goal, basing our efforts on welcoming diversity and not prioritising the power of big cities over less powerful areas.

As metropolitan areas, we are here because we wish to be fundamental partners in the development of Europe, its cities and its people. Within the metropolitan areas of Europe we find immense potential and new challenges, such as the capacity to generate wealth, generate innovation, usher in the digital transition, and rethink cities as green.

At the same time, we are seeing problems of unemployment, poverty, devaluated territories, social exclusion and COVID-19 impacts.

We must work within the context of these challenges, participating in European efforts to recover from the pandemic, developing innovative policies and deepening exchanges between European areas, growing together.

In order to succeed, it is important to clarify our metropolitan agenda already defined in 2019 in Lyon. We must assume the role of social partners of national governments and European authorities. We must recognise the vital importance of the EU and consider the intelligent management of forthcoming EU funding as a challenge and a responsibility. In doing so, we will effectively enhance our citizens' quality of life and the stability of our planet.

## Welcome and greetings



**Ernest Maragall i Mira**  
 Vice-President of  
 International Relations  
 and Cooperation of the  
 Barcelona Metropolitan  
 Area

It is pleasing to observe the constant expansion of our boundaries and greater participation year on year within the framework of this European network. We represent the willingness of metropolitan institutions to play a key role in the implementation of Next Generation EU funding and Cohesion Policy.

Up to now, Member States have been reluctant to involve metropolitan areas in the preparation of their respective national plans. However, the EMA network is opening up a real space in the institutional architecture of our European Union and this is excellent news. We are also pleased to announce that EMA has been selected to participate in expert group dialogue with

other partners at EU level in the area of Cohesion Policy. We believe this is a recognition of our hard work and of the increasing importance of metropolitan areas in tackling contemporary society challenges.

The ongoing double emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis places us in a situation of simultaneous hope and disillusionment, as shown at the COP26 conference, where the idea of the impossibility of turning back the clock on climate change also flourished. This is something that we, as metropolitan areas, are familiar with and it is one of our priorities.

Moreover, we must remember that our efforts to tackle the challenges we face by expending our time, dedication and resources must be complemented with EU funding. We have dedicated all our efforts to accomplishing and developing our work in accordance with Next

Generation EU funding, designing plenty of concrete projects that contribute to diminishing the effects of the climate crisis and advancing the implementation of the digital transition.

We are the best evidence of the principle of subsidiarity in the context of the EU. We perceive this principle as clearly established, but not yet fully applied. Consequently, we wish to be included in the European Map of Public Institutions, with the corresponding functions and political responsibilities. Given that we actually live the everyday reality of cities, we believe we present a more representative, democratic option that is better placed to deliver than other institutions.

The political declaration of EMA is not merely a declaration, it is a political commitment. It is a document to be read, adopted and transformed into real action.

Our main statements relate to a willingness for greater involvement and the showcasing of our suitability and preparedness to assume a key role in the EU decision-making process. Following this idea, we will work today and continue to work in the years to come.

## Welcome and greetings



**Alexandra Leitão**  
*Portuguese Minister of  
State Modernisation and  
Public Administration*

Metropolitan areas and local governments play a key role in the lives of citizens. This has been further evidenced throughout the COVID-19 crisis, during which local governing bodies have played a fundamental role in managing the pandemic.

We must remember that the goals of the European Green Deal, and the commitment made by EU Member States to achieving those goals, will only be achievable with the support of cities and local governing bodies.

Three main aspects must be highlighted: digital transformation and improvement of public services, decentralisation, and the promotion of civic participation in decision-making processes. All these factors will be key to the development of "smart cities". Throughout this development, social inclusion must be taken into account, as we work towards the creation of better and more sustainable cities in the future.

## Keynote speech

### Boosting climate-neutral metropolitan areas: green, smart and resilient



**Elisa Ferreira**  
European Commissioner  
for Cohesion and  
Reforms

It is a great pleasure to collaborate with the EMA forum at this great event. In fact, another event with an impact on our lives is currently taking place in Glasgow at COP26, and many of the stakeholders that should be there as key players are here at EMA. Clearly, metropolitan areas are on the frontline of climate change and are key to this endeavour. The characteristics of cities demonstrate the central nature of their role. Cities in Europe account for around 75 % of its population and 70 % of its greenhouse gas emissions. The influence of cities goes beyond the weight of numbers, since cities in fact play a key role as leaders and examples, and this is especially true in the case of metropolitan areas. The scale and strengths of metropolitan areas make them fit to be central examples and pace setters of the green transition. Today's conference shows that metropolitan authorities take these

challenges very seriously, and cities really do play a key role as centres for services supporting the green transition.

Contemporary life is marked by complex and integrated systems, and a change to one element, whether for better or worse, will have an effect on the rest of the systems. These systems include energy networks, transport, mobility, land use, construction, renovation, circular economy, education, health care, production and consumption.

In the green transition, these systems are expected to change simultaneously, but where do they interconnect? Clearly, in urban areas that act also as service centres for surrounding areas.

If we are to lead successful and effective transitions, we must begin by transforming cities. The European Union is willing to support cities to do this through the following initiatives:

#### **1. Post-pandemic recovery funds to improve the resilience of metropolitan areas**

The Recovery and Resilience Facility is a once-in-a-generation investment opportunity for recovery along fair, green and sustainable lines, for a recovery that builds back better.

Regional metropolitan authorities should be involved in the preparation of the national plans and we are putting a lot of effort into convincing Member States to ensure that this dialogue takes place when building the strategy.

As metropolitan areas, you carry weight which I urge you to use, sharing your expertise and using your influence for the benefit of your cities as well as their surrounding areas.

## **2. New cohesion programmes**

In 2021 programmes, we expect an investment of over one hundred billion euros for green transition, part of which will be invested in cities. We are also rethinking buildings and public

spaces under the New European Bauhaus initiative.

Cities are also expected to deliver on their role as service centres for the city and neighbouring areas, for example, as the hub of green mobility networks or circular economy systems and recycling networks. In this service centre role, new investment planning needs to consider the wider urban area from a functional perspective, considering neighbouring municipalities and building rural-urban linkages. We also expect that metropolitan areas share their experiences to encourage learning from best practices.

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## Panel discussion I

### The new metropolitan agenda: (re)think, (re)design, (re)act



First panel session, from left to right:

(in person)

**João Paulo Lourenço,**

**Juha Eskelinen,**

**Thijs Kroese,**

**Juraj Droba;**

(remotely)

**Jean-Claude Dardelet,**

**Alison Gilliland.**

**Alison Gilliland**

*Lord Mayor of Dublin*

In Dublin, we think that the priority must always be to build a city where people live, and for this reason we want to enhance well-being but also support the improvement of our public services and cultural experiences. If it works for our citizens, it will work for our economy and for tourists.

In our submission to the recovery and resilience fund, we focused on tricky areas, for instance, energy efficiency projects. We are aware of the increasing levels of energy use and the need for a shift towards renewables. We have designed pilot projects to enable circular economy, and we are working towards increasing the green spaces in our public realm and our biodiversity footprint.

We are now focusing on the creation of what we call “well-being hubs” in local communities.

These hubs are focusing on communities where there is a high ratio of migration or socioeconomic disadvantages, trying to generate synergies and make them work closely together with us.

We are trying to work and support artists who have suffered hugely the consequences of the pandemic, trying to promote culture and proposing projects to them.

One of our main priorities is also the cycling infrastructure, following the Green Agenda and the Health and Wellbeing Agenda. We have created new bicycle lines and enabled new car-free areas so as to promote a more liveable city.

All of which does not mean that we do not have challenges. One of our main challenges is vacancy at the commercial and residential level. Fewer people live in the city centre than we would like and we want to reverse this situation.

We do not have an adequate supply of social housing. We give "housing assistance payment" to help those who are on our social housing waiting lists and must rent privately. We

have started asking the markets to collaborate with us on their own lands so as to develop more social housing projects. They would design and build, then hand over the keys to us.

For us, the recovery and resilience funds will be really useful to help Dublin scale up many of the projects we have initiated across the city.

**Juha Eskelinen**  
*Deputy Regional Mayor  
of Helsinki-Uusimaa  
Region*

We are doubtful whether the recovery and resilience funding plan can directly influence city politics because it is a very state-led operation, and this means that it is in the hands of the national administration to deliver the resources.

In our area, we have the country's major universities and we assume that our task will be more geared towards innovation. For this reason, our focus will be mainly supporting innovative projects and young enterprises working on green and digitalisation projects.

During the COVID-19 crisis, Finland had the largest proportion of people teleworking, and the situation will not return to the previous normality. Especially now, more and more people will be able to work from anywhere. This means

that there is less need for and pressure on transport systems, because the amount of people travelling to their workplace every day will be reduced. We no longer need so much space for offices and mobility. Inevitably, the paradigm is changing and old doctrines are no longer relevant.

This change reinforces the importance of looking to the suburbs, where most people live, in a profound change to traditional city planning strategies.

**Jean-Claude Dardelet**  
*Vice-President for  
International Relations  
of the Toulouse  
Metropolitan Area*

On the subject of mobility, we are undergoing a gigantic paradigm shift. All the trends that we predicted and that began before the crisis have been significantly accelerated. In France, almost 10 % of the population wishes to change their life and follow healthier routines, be more physically active and spend more time in the countryside. People are willing to have one place for living and another for working. Better, healthier, simpler.

The pandemic has also triggered an ecology explosion, and we are now entering an era of ecology and digital transition. Many enterprises are redesigning the way they structure in-person work, sometimes prioritising remote work. In this regard, mobility has been crucial for Toulouse and we have invested a considerable amount of our budget on that.

We have been focusing on three items:

1. Protection: for the economy, for vulnerable groups
2. Proximity: offering more public services as close as possible to the citizen
3. Mobility: making cities more sustainable, healthier and more connected.

With the help of the EU funding, we are trying to balance our work between long-term benefits and short-term measures because, in the middle of a crisis, we must envisage a bright, ambitious future while simultaneously making the present safer.

We have not observed an increase in either the cost of rental housing, or people relocating outside the city. On the contrary, we have seen the need for a reorganisation of the city to include access to work, leisure, shopping and living amenities in every area.

On the subject of proximity, we hold regular discussions with citizens and currently have more than 200 recent proposals to further improve the lives of citizens. Indeed, mobility and housing are crucial elements that are intrinsically linked.

Toulouse is presently transforming its mobility pattern in order to respond to new sociological changes and the duty of adaptation to climate change.

We are therefore investing strongly in low-emission modes of transport and infrastructure. We are also making significant investments in health and associated technologies (agro- and digital technology, nutrition, artificial intelligence, etc.).

We are proud of having the best hospitals in France, and we are developing a stronger health system through purposeful investments in domains of excellence in academia, research and industry.

Finally, the crisis has facilitated interconnections between EU, national, regional and local partners and funds.

**Juraj Droba**

*President of the Bratislava Region and member of the European Committee of the Regions*

Some of the problems we are facing are very specific and require structural funding from the EU. The Bratislava region produces approximately 30 % of the nation's GDP but, because of the taxation system, does not receive taxes in proportion to its production. Moreover, due to large numbers of unregistered inhabitants, taxes are flowing to other regions. The Bratislava region is the capital region, with 65 % of its population living in the capital itself and the remaining 35 % in the three rural areas.

It is important to assume that capital cities and large metropolitan areas are providing a significant proportion of the resources for the entire country. The Bratislava region is now placed 13th in a recent ranking of the wealthiest European regions, with a GDP of 173 % of the EU average. Despite this, we still need to invest in basic infrastructure. I think the GDP indicator does not always give a true picture of the level of development and, therefore, we prefer to look at the social progress index. When we compare our region with neighbouring Vienna, it is clear that the Austrian region is far removed from us in terms of quality of life and quality of public infrastructure, especially in the area of sustainable mobility. It is vitally important to take this reality into consideration when allocating EU funds.

With regard to mobility within our region, we have too many people driving their own cars and we are trying to convince them to use public transport, which is more sustainable.

The pandemic has taught us a number of lessons, and what we are finding out is that the functioning of certain companies and public institutions is not necessarily dependent on physical attendance at work. City planners are trying to transform administration and office buildings into housing. Of course, this involves challenges in terms of rapidly rising property market prices in Bratislava over the last ten years.

**Thijs Kroese**

*Board Member of the  
Amsterdam Region  
Metropolitan Area*

When it comes to Amsterdam and its tourism, long before COVID-19 we were aware that one-sided visitor economy in highly urban areas puts pressure on the liveability of our city. For this reason, we have an ongoing debate about making the city attractive to different kinds of visitors, rather than one particular group.

With this in mind, we started to protect our local business owners from losing their premises and having yet another souvenir shop on the same street. We tried to impose some restrictions on short-term rentals. We began to invest in developing tourism in other parts of the region, away from the centre of Amsterdam. In short, we are trying to develop the concept of a city and a region with more than one urban core, according to a polycentric development model. However, this is expected to come from a process of infrastructure development and a series of measures that may make it viable to, for instance, create new areas of tourism within the Amsterdam Region, without putting pressure on scarce open spaces.

We view urbanisation as a multi-centred, more diverse urban model. We are investing in the midsize areas in our region, trying to further urbanise them and, within limits, allowing them to create their own identity and economic profile. We are eager to create an interconnected metropolitan area where, within 15 minutes, citizens can be in a beautiful natural environment, or at the supermarket, the kindergarten or a govern-

ment building. We think this close proximity is one of our main strengths and added values for visitors to our region as well as those that live and work in the metropolitan area.

Parks and other natural environments gained importance during the pandemic. People realised how much they valued those areas, which were somewhat underestimated before. For this reason, we plan to reinforce and expand these spaces.

To sum up, we are trying to create a metropolitan area that is more liveable and more attractive to visitors because of the natural environment that we have.

## Panel discussion II

### Green and smart mobility: there is no turning back



Second panel session,  
from left to right:

**Abel Coentrão,**  
**Federico Rosa,**  
**Roger Ryberg,**  
**Omar Al-Rawi.**

**Federico Rosa**  
*Vice-President of the  
Lisbon Metropolitan  
Area*

Historically, transport infrastructure has always been concentric infrastructure, bringing people to the centre. In recent years, we have experienced a boom in tourism in Lisbon and many people went to live in the suburbs, generating a need for a concentric connection. Then, with the pandemic, we saw the trend of the office out of the office. This phenomenon has mitigated the problem of bottlenecks, but at the same time has generated fear or reluctance to use public transport. Now, with the “new normal”, our priority is to improve quality of life. We want to spend less time

on public transport and more time living. In this regard, we have augmented the bus network to avoid the concentric view and interconnect the outskirts.

We see the 15-minute city as a redefinition of urbanity and going back to the basics of neighbourhood life. The city has invested in the bus network in an effort to make it more extensive, diverging from the concentric model, which for intercity connections is still fundamental.

Information technology and digitalisation have accelerated the capability of changing cities during the pandemic, and this is expected to continue. However, we must not forget the significant social asymmetries that exist in our metropolitan area, and make the most of this opportunity to address them.

Investing in data services is essential for a seamless intermodal system, and the city is doing sterling work in embracing the “new normal” and preparing for the future of mobility.

**Roger Ryberg**

County Mayor of Viken

Our main challenge is the loss of income resulting from reduced numbers of passengers on public transport. The level of use is currently at around 80 % compared with the level of users in 2019. Car use, on the other hand, is now at the same level as before the pandemic. In addition, even though the national government should compensate us more for this loss in mobility income, we are making the effort of investing in public transport with our own funds.

Oslo and the Viken region are joint owners of the public transport and, because of the lack of compensation, our main discussions today revolve around where to spend our own funds. We have also come to understand that we must be patient and that we cannot build public transport networks for more passengers than we actually have. Now we are monitoring the situation and waiting for the "new normal" to settle before drawing conclusions. Public transport use will probably increase again when offices return to in-person work, and it is im-

portant to continue delivering a good service for other groups that need the service, such as students.

Moreover, we see the new system and more flexible working life as a positive step forward. The challenge is to have enough time and resources for planning to increase the use of public transport and reduce the use of private cars. One key question to be resolved is how we respond to the new trend of working more at home, and how this will impact the lives of our inhabitants. A further challenge is to continue to deliver a quality public transport service for a pre-pandemic level of commuters at least three days a week, with limited resources.



Second panel session,  
from left to right:

**Federico Rosa,**  
**Hélène Dromain.**

**Hélène Dromain**

*Vice-President  
for European and  
International  
Cooperation and Tourism  
of the Lyon Metropolitan  
Area*

**W**e have experienced changes in mobility trends since the COVID-19 pandemic. We have assimilated the idea that people are getting about on bikes more often, and that cycle paths help to prevent traffic congestion. For this reason, we have increased the number of cycle paths.

As a metropolitan institution, we have augmented our mobility budget and now we are not only investing in the city centre, we are also creating linkages between peripheral areas to give an alternative to private mobility or mobility by car.

In addition, we risk the continuation of the urban sprawl and the perpetration of long-distance daily commutes. For this reason, we must work to ensure that people are able to live, work and play within a 15-minute area.

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**Omar Al-Rawi**

*Member of the Regional  
Parliament and the City  
Council of Vienna*

One of Vienna's problems is that, outside Vienna, everything is in another state, and many of the people that come into the city on a daily basis do not live there. Another challenge we face is that of rebuilding confidence in public transport after a pandemic that has made people aware of the necessity of social distance. Use of public transport currently stands at around 80 % compared with pre-COVID-19 figures, but our goal is to improve on this.

The challenge of the distribution of public space is important because many people began to walk and cycle more. In urban planning, we must start thinking differently as people demand to spend more time outside and have more outdoor interconnections, while a great amount of public space is dedicated to roads and cars. For this reason, one of our main projects is to extend our green areas.

One trend that will remain is working from home, though at what level remains to be seen. The trend towards making more leisure than commuting trips, as well as more home delivery and e-commerce, is expected to remain. We have observed that the implementation

of real resilient cities is possible.

It is important that we do not lose social life, urbanity and city living. A few years ago, for example, we saw a trend for moving from rural to urban Vienna, then after that for moving from urban to rural, and what would be interesting would be to find a balance between the two.

## Panel discussion III

### Recovery & resilient metropolises: the financial challenge



Third panel session,  
from left to right:

**Luisa Pinto, Ernest Maragall i Mira, Pascal Smet, Michał Olszewski, Eduardo Vítor Rodrigues.**

**Eduardo Vítor Rodrigues**  
*President of the Porto Metropolitan Area*

In some of the metropolitan areas, the president is elected by popular vote, but in Porto the president is appointed by the votes of the 17 mayors of the Porto metropolitan area. This means we must be cautious, as we do not have the same legitimacy to decide where to invest the money as other metropolitan governments. For this reason, we think that success or failure in the implementation of policies at the metropolitan level also depends on the structure of the government in the metropolitan area. As a group of municipalities, we have a large budget, and many more

resources than the city itself in terms of funds and human capital (talent and labour force), but we also have bigger problems.

Perhaps these different realities among metropolitan areas, such as different types of governance or different social realities, make it difficult to assume that a common solution for metropolitan areas and similar growth are possible.

If we look into the reality of Porto, we perceive a problem of polarisation between two powers: the state, and cities. For this reason, we strongly believe that metropolitan areas are the missing linkage that ensures multilevel governance. Strong metropolitan areas will help to ensure the continuance of strong cities, regions and countries.

In this regard, in the coming years, we believe it wise to invest our funds bearing these constraints and potentialities in mind, and always aiming to contribute to improving the quality of life of our citizens.

We are in an unprecedented moment because we have funds available, but their investment is less clear. Moreover, our concern is the lack of open dialogue with other institutions like EMA to decide through cooperation where we wish to invest EU money.

**Ernest Maragall**  
*Vice-President for  
International and  
Cooperation of the  
Barcelona Metropolitan  
Area*

For us, the problem is insufficient funding from our national government and therefore the EU is our hope. We have dealt with a period of great austerity and are now starting to see real funding and real implementation as a result, thanks to the European funding programme. We have a clear vision of the main challenges currently facing us. However, we are still dealing with a double deficit in resources and governance.

Local governments manage 11.7% of Europe's GDP. However, countries like Denmark, with not three but two levels of governance, allow local authorities to manage around 30% of its GDP. In Germany, the figure is around 9%, while in Spain and Portugal we manage approximately 6.6% of GDP. This sheds light on our inability to spearhead change and generate real innovation and implementation. For this reason, we state that EU assistance is, right now, a representation of wishful thinking, but unfortunately not yet a reality that will enable us to deliver the real potential of our capabilities.

In Barcelona, we have a powerful metropolitan institution with a budget of almost 1 billion euros and are the competent authority in transport, waste management, housing, infrastructure and urban planning. However, it is important to say that we receive no funding from either the state or our regional government. Our budget derives from the contributions of our 36 municipalities.

At this stage, we have been waiting for European funds for a long time and this is demonstrated in the 36 projects that we have meticulously presented, waiting for acceptance in the European application process. For us, it is important that EU funds are managed by cities rather than invested in cities, because our reality is determined by our own day-to-day experience, which can change very rapidly.

**Michał Olszewski**  
*First Deputy Mayor of  
Warsaw*

I must say that nowadays we are having difficulty trying to show, not only the reality of Warsaw, but the bigger picture of cities in Poland. For instance, in the case of values, we have a general consideration based on the common values of the EU, but some states have a different vision. As partners of many common EU projects, we feel that we are accepting some values, and working on implementing them (e.g. green transition and participation), because there is a will among our citizens advocating for changes in new mobility and water management, despite the fact that, at national level, these values are not a priority.

According to the Multiannual Financial Framework and recovery plan, the state is the only actor negotiating with the European institutions. This means that, once again, the state will determine the line in which this money will be invested. In our case, the state can decide to invest the entire amount of the funding in rural areas, excluding the big cities and metropolitan region. This is totally incoherent, considering the numbers of people living in

big cities and the corresponding challenges that arise. We have also been affected by a drop of 5 % in the income we receive from the state, as a result of the pandemic, and a further 5 % due to the new national investment and taxation plan.

This is the problem we are up against: the risk involved in giving the state the right to distribute the funding. Currently, we feel that the Polish government is interested only in remaining in government and holding on to power, rather than delivering real action through the implementation of policies.

To sum up, it is evident that the model created at European level for distribution of the funding is not working and the Polish example must be taken as a reference. For this reason, we advocate for a more inclusive way to discuss how the funding is distributed.

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**Pascal Smet**

*State Secretary in Charge of International Relations and Urban Planning of the Brussels-Capital Region and Regional Vice-President for Europe in Metropolis*

In comparison to the recent past, we should recognise that the EU has recently moved on from austerity policies and is now allowing more investment, financed by new mechanisms such as a common European Union debt. This is very positive for EU construction and development.

Belgium has a federal state and three regions, one of which is the Brussels-Capital Region. Every region develops its own spending programme and distribution of funds is managed through close cooperation between institutions. However, we believe that the way in which the European construction has been shaped, with only states as subjects, is a potential problem. We are aware of ongoing discussion around giving money directly to local and regional authorities, but it is a thorny issue as states are reluctant to hand over their power – largely derived from economic resources – to local institutions. Our hope is that, if experts and main actors continue to reiterate that metropolitan areas are fundamental to the development of the future Europe, the states will, at some point, realise that

some financial shift might be needed. Cities and metropolitan areas should be recognised as full partners.

We are convinced that, in terms of funding right now, the lines we need to prioritise in the current post-COVID-19 scenario are more open public spaces, green spaces, affordable high-quality housing and a powerful first-response medical system at local level.

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## Cities, metropolitan areas and the twin transition in Europe



**Manuel Pizarro**  
*Member of the European Parliament*

The form of a city changes faster than the heart of a person. Cities have a shifting identity. It is true that we prefer the word transition to the word change. Nowadays we talk about the green transition and the digital transition, which are evidently interconnected, as President Ursula Von Der Leyen says.

At other moments in history, changes occurred abruptly through wars and catastrophes. Today, however, changes are generally accelerated to

achieve technological, climatic, socioeconomic, working, and anthropologic transformations. For this reason, change is an imperative for our society and one which requires global synchronisation.

Cities and metropolitan areas have two options: they can be the active shapers of change, or they can be the passive observers of this change. Historically, cities have been hubs of innovation and knowledge and act as laboratories where pilot solutions are tested. For this

reason, when we talk about sustainability, the decarbonisation of economy or the Green Deal, we must look to cities and metropolitan areas as the places where these ambitions will be achieved. Two-thirds of the European population live in these areas, and 80 % of energy is consumed there. Consequently, the future of Europe will be closely linked to the future of metropolitan areas, and this indicates that Europe should observe as well as take care of these crucial areas.

Progress has been made in this area, and recent strategic approaches of European Authorities have been defined by the need to give more power to local institutions. This idea is represented in recovery and resilience programmes and the Multiannual Financial Framework.

For instance, the New European Bauhaus initiative aims at leveraging funds directed at renewing housing stock to go the extra mile and actually improve quality of life through energy efficiency, aesthetics, sustainability and social cohesion.

The smart cities of the future, heavily reliant on digitalisation, will allow for optimisation of processes and energy consumption and be allied to remote working, and may even have a significant impact on the reduction of fossil fuel dependency.

Finally, it is important that the twin transition process of individual cities does not take place in isolation, given the wide amount of intercity traffic flows. Instead, cities should cooperate with each other to ensure the success of the twin transition, cooperating to optimise systems and processes among themselves. In addition, the transition will need to be backed up by stakeholders across society, including citizens, companies and public authorities, as the transition will only be achieved through working together towards a common goal.

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## Conclusions



**Antonio Cunha**  
*President of the North  
 Regional Coordination  
 and Development  
 Commission*

**T**erritories need to evolve into greener electrical urban contexts and foster decarbonisation as well as creativity and human inclusion. Metropolitan regions can be at the forefront of this change and provide historical examples of this endeavour. But challenges are not overcome by regions or metropolitan areas alone. They should be tackled within large and participative partnerships and dialogue between several ecosystems (e.g. cultural and in-

dustrial ecosystems). In order to thrive, urban territories should be a place for integration that provides better quality of living for its inhabitants. A contemporary, more decentralised governance model, with higher levels of participation and closer to citizens and their actual needs, is required in order to improve agility of response to emerging problems.

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**João Pedro Matos Fernandes**  
 Minister for the  
 Environment and Energy  
 Transition

Day-to-day human activities take place in cities. This is exactly what a city is. A city is always having to reinvent itself. If we think of Athens, London, Vienna or Paris, none of those cities have ever been famous for the same reason. Therefore, it is important to understand that creative and innovative cities are those with the longer future. How do we merge this with the climate action emergency? To answer this question, we need to understand the case of Portugal. Portugal was the first country to adopt the challenge of carbon neutrality by 2050, and 60 % of our energy comes from renewables, reducing our carbon emissions by 32 %. To become carbon neutral, we must reduce 85 % of our emissions by 2050 and, in just one third of that time, we have already reduced one third of our emissions. Hence, we must ac-

celerate our efforts, but we have already achieved a reduction to be proud of.

Cities are key to this transformation, both in Portugal and worldwide. There can be no transition without the involvement of local mayors, because they are the only politicians that can be simultaneously concerned about their country and the world, and about improving the day-to-day life of citizens in one specific place. Since two-thirds of the world's population live in urban areas, it is clear that metropolitan areas may be even more important than cities.

My biggest concern regarding cities is mobility. It is my observation that public transportation systems nowadays are failing, not due to the systems themselves, but because no one seems able to change their own behaviour in order to accept collective transport as part of a lifestyle. In some places, we considerably reduced ticket prices on public transport, but we did not experiment any significant change in occupancy, currently

standing at around 60 % of its capacity. We continue to see massive traffic jams in the cities of Porto and Lisbon and this is the most important issue we have. Ten years ago, mobility was an issue of interest for national politics and businesses. Today the story is completely different, and mobility is one of the main concerns for mayors, alongside housing and water supply. A big boost has been received in the form of investment from public institutions and it is now impossible to find mobility options cheaper than public transport. This means there is no longer an economic incentive for people to use private modes of mobility, so we must do better at convincing people to use public transport. It is a key issue because emissions from transport are growing and currently represent 28 % of our total emissions. This is where we must concentrate our efforts if we are to succeed.

We must look at cities as a great blaze of disruption. Cities are home to more people. Centres of knowledge and the most astute people are found in cities. I do believe that, if mayors get together and share their knowledge and experience, they can do better than governments in bringing about a carbon-neutral world, one which understands that economic growth must rely on the regeneration of resources, without the use of fossil fuels, respecting the natural limits of our world and leaving no one behind. None of this will be possible without the efforts and involvement of mayors and metropolitan areas.



*“If urban areas are where COVID-19 impacts have been the most severe, it also means that interventions in cities and towns can have the biggest impact [...] this also means they are the key to climate sustainability and where green investments will have the biggest outcomes.”*

**Sameh Wahba,**  
Global Director of the World Bank’s Urban, Disaster Risk  
Management, Resilience and Land Global Practice

# Boosting climate-neutral metropolitan areas: green, smart and resilient

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## INTRODUCTION

TIS.PT has been contracted by the Porto Metropolitan Area (AMP) to provide support to the organisation of the European Metropolitan Areas (EMA) conference to be held in the city of Porto, including the development of policy briefing documents that could leverage greener, smarter and more resilient metropolitan areas.

The main goal of this Policy Brief is to offer an overview of the role European Metropolitan Areas, and EMA as its representative network, can expect to play in terms of boosting climate neutrality in metropolitan areas. Its purpose is also to guide the debates that will take place during the next EMA Forum in Porto, on 11–12 November, 2021.

This briefing is mainly supported by desk research, covering both policy and practices, including commitments and challenges. The Policy Brief will be updated once the conference has taken place, with new materials derived from the debates that will be held at the EMA Forum, where a number of metropolitan areas will be represented. Results and new commitments emerging from COP26 will also be taken into consideration.

From Lyon in 2019 to Porto in 2021, metropolitan areas have had to respond to significant challenges, and have had to react rapidly with new policies and initiatives in response to a number of disruptive events:

- the COVID-19 pandemic challenged (and continues to challenge) the resilience and adaptability of authorities to a new reality;
- the adoption of the European Green Deal announced by the European Commission in 2019 entailed a wide range of policy initiatives towards a climate-neutral European Union (EU) by 2050<sup>1</sup>, including the Fit for 55 package<sup>2</sup>, which cements the EU's global leadership through action and the European Climate Law<sup>3</sup>;
- the EU's 2020 Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy<sup>4</sup> and accompanying action plan, with its "flagship" areas of action to promote the reduction of greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions from the EU's transport sector by 90 % by 2050;
- the adoption of a bold initiative to deliver 100 climate-neutral and smart cities as an EU Mission<sup>5</sup> coordinated by the Commission in the framework of the new Research and Innovation Programme, Horizon Europe;
- the EU recovery strategy, commonly known as the Next Generation EU<sup>6</sup> Fund, and the finalisation of the associated negotiations.

Furthermore, the crisis that has emerged since the takeover of Afghanistan marks a setback for global human rights to which metropolitan authorities are not indifferent.

1 European Commission, 2019. The European Green Deal. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0640&from=E>

2 European Commission, 2021. Fit for 55: delivering the EU's 2030 Climate Target on the way to climate neutrality. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0550&from=EN>

3 European Commission, 2021. Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1119&from=EN>

4 [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/other-pages/transport-highlight/european-sustainable-and-smart-mobility-strategy\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/other-pages/transport-highlight/european-sustainable-and-smart-mobility-strategy_en)

5 European Commission, 2021. EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/missions-horizon-europe/climate-neutral-and-smart-cities\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/missions-horizon-europe/climate-neutral-and-smart-cities_en)

6 European Commission, 2021. Recovery plan for Europe. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe\\_en#documents](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en#documents)

# 1.

## INTRODUCTION

All in all, metropolitan authorities have had to respond to unprecedented levels and new forms of social and economic problems, and have been on the front line of crisis management, often without the necessary powers and financial resources.

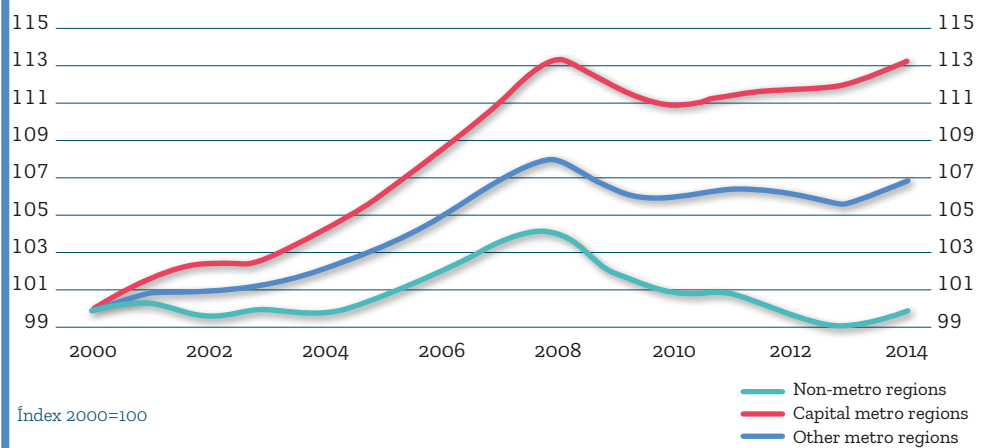
The Financial Framework for 2021–2027 and the Next Generation EU package open up opportunities to empower metropolitan areas to address these universal challenges and provide them with the financial capacity to act. However, preliminary analysis shows that such empowerment has not yet been achieved, with only a few countries highlighting a close involvement of metropolitan authorities in the design of National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRP).

# 2.

## METROPOLITAN AREAS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Metropolitan areas are home to the largest share of the EU population. The Seventh Cohesion Report <sup>7</sup> highlights that, in 2014, nearly two-thirds of the European population lived and worked in metropolitan areas, and these areas were responsible for generating 67 % of the GDP and 61 % of employment in the EU.

**Figure 1. Evolution of total employment (number employed) in metro regions, 2000-2014**



Metropolitan areas are typically vibrant regions, hosting the major economic, employment and cultural activities of a region. Therefore, they can be key players in identifying solutions to current challenges and their impacts on the lives (and quality of life) of millions of citizens and visitors. Moreover, metropolitan areas can simultaneously be innovation hubs for researching and piloting solutions and initiatives, attracting capital and investment and improving conditions for all who live in or visit these areas. Nonetheless, this potential can only be fully realised if policy responses with a strong territorial element and coordinated approaches are

<sup>7</sup> European Commission, 2017. My Region, My Europe, Our Future: Seventh report on economic, social and territorial cohesion. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion7/7cr.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion7/7cr.pdf)

put in place. Different studies and publications from the European Commission, European Parliament, CoR, and even studies by the ESPON European Grouping on Territorial Cooperation have acknowledged this potential. Thus, metropolitan areas are well placed to be the natural actors to envisage and implement integrated place-based strategies, with the engagement of their local communities. The recent coronavirus crisis provided a perfect demonstration of this.

## 2.1. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic raised new challenges in our society, uncovering the contradictions and vulnerabilities of traditional management models. Metropolitan areas were confronted with unprecedented levels of friction and had to deal with new forms of social and economic issues. They were also on the front line of crisis management, and often without the necessary powers and financial resources. The SLOCAT Transport and Climate Change Global Status Report<sup>8</sup> highlights how the pandemic has transformed transport and mobility patterns in every corner of the world. In Europe, prolonged periods of lockdown and travel restrictions contributed to a 61 % reduction in public transport demand in 2020. Inversely, increases in cycling were recorded in many cities across Europe. A study<sup>9</sup> carried out by the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) on temporary cycling measures adopted in 106 European cities showed that, in the first three months after opening a temporary bike lane, there was an average increase in cycling of 7 % over the average recorded for the 12 months prior to the opening, with an estimated EUR 3 billion (USD 3.5 billion) in annual health benefits due to the implementation of pop-up cycle lanes. This study provides insights into the extent to which provisional COVID-19 infrastructure (the rollout of pop-up cycle lanes) can induce significant, rapid growth of active modes of transport, contributing to make people healthier and creating a wide range of additional social and environmental benefits.

Organisations that connect major EU cities, such as EUROCITIES<sup>10</sup> or POLIS<sup>11</sup>, have collected examples of measures taken by metropolitan areas during the pandemic. EMA also promoted a set of targeted meetings during which members shared and discussed examples of measures taken, as well as any difficulties experienced in their adoption and roll-out. Overall, transport and mobility measures occupied the largest share of the total interventions. However, these also showed evidence of metropolitan coordination in economic matters or in housing and social issues. In this respect, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) 2021 Barometer<sup>12</sup> acknowledges that Local and Regional Authorities (LRA) have played a major role in improving the economic and social resilience of their territories, rapidly developing policies and actions to limit the spread of the virus, dealing more directly first with the health emergency, and later on with the vaccination campaign. Thus, they were able to offer support and practical solutions to those affected, ranging from

8 SLOCAT, 2021. Transport and Climate Change Global Status Report. <https://tcc-gsr.com/>

9 ECF, 2021. If you build it, they will come. <https://ecf.com/news-and-events/news/if-you-build-it-they-will-come-new-study-shows-impact-covid-19-cycling>

10 EUROCITIES COVID-19 live updates. [https://covidnews.eurocities.eu/?s=metropolitan+area&orderby=relevance&order=DESC&post\\_type=post](https://covidnews.eurocities.eu/?s=metropolitan+area&orderby=relevance&order=DESC&post_type=post)

11 POLIS, COVID-19: keeping things moving. <https://www.polisnetwork.eu/document/covid-19-keeping-things-moving/>

12 2021 EU Barometer: Local & Regional authorities for recovery. <https://reneweurope-cor.eu/2021eubarometer/>

## 2.

METROPOLITAN  
AREAS IN  
UNCERTAIN  
TIMES

unprecedented social support schemes for vulnerable groups, to grants and loans assigned to local businesses.

Simultaneously, the CoR has raised awareness of how the crisis has weakened the financial firepower of public institutions such as LRA because of a so-called "scissor effect" that combined falling revenues and rising expenditures. Overall, the CoR estimates an unprecedented budget pressure of approximately EUR 180 billion for all EU LRA, despite significant (though uneven, according to the CoR study) national and EU support for LRA budgets to mitigate this effect.

## 2.2. CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is one of the most complex and critical global challenges humankind has ever faced. Climate science and clear evidence from increasingly frequent and dramatic weather events emphasise that reduction of greenhouse gases (GHG) is not only necessary, it is extremely urgent. Science and technology will be powerful instruments in making this reduction possible through new processes and products, though these alone will not be enough. It is therefore no surprise to see COP26 strongly reinforcing further commitments on the part of all countries to coming forward with ambitious 2030 emissions reductions targets or nationally determined contributions (NDC) that align with reaching net zero by the middle of the century and keeping 1.5 degrees within reach. Working together to deliver on these targets requires collaboration and the active engagement of governments, business, industry and civil society. Metropolitan areas and cities are also required to take an active role.

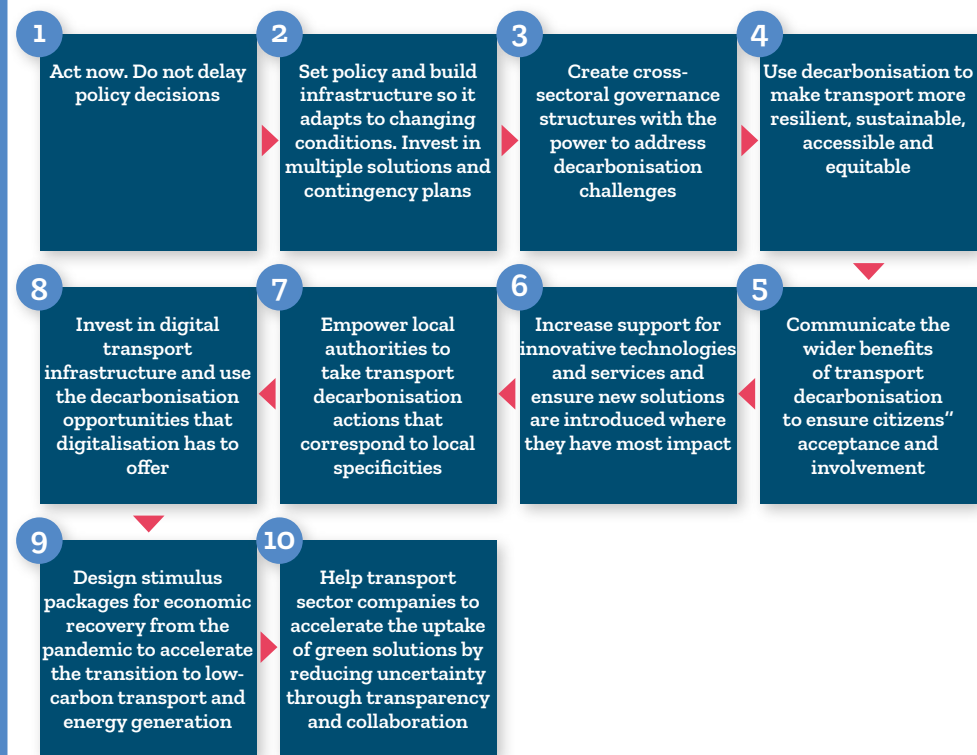
In December 2019, an ambitious strategy package was announced for Europe to become the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050: the European Green Deal. Accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility is one of the key pillars needed to "transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use".<sup>13</sup>

However, OECD/ITF<sup>14</sup> argues that "transport decarbonisation policies currently in place or in the pipeline in the EU (the Current Ambition scenario) will not suffice remotely to reduce Europe's transport emissions sufficiently to meet the target of 90 % less transport CO<sub>2</sub> by 2050. With policies based on current ambitions, the EU will never reach this target". In the same vein, ITF argues for stronger political leadership and accelerated technological development to achieve the pathway of the High Ambition scenario, and raises ten recommendations for transport decarbonisation in Europe (Figure 2).

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, 2019. The European Green Deal: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

<sup>14</sup> OECD/ITF, 2021. Decarbonising transport in Europe: The way forward: <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/decarbonising-transport-europe-way-forward.pdf>

**Figure 2. OECD/ ITF's 10 recommendations for transport decarbonisation in Europe**

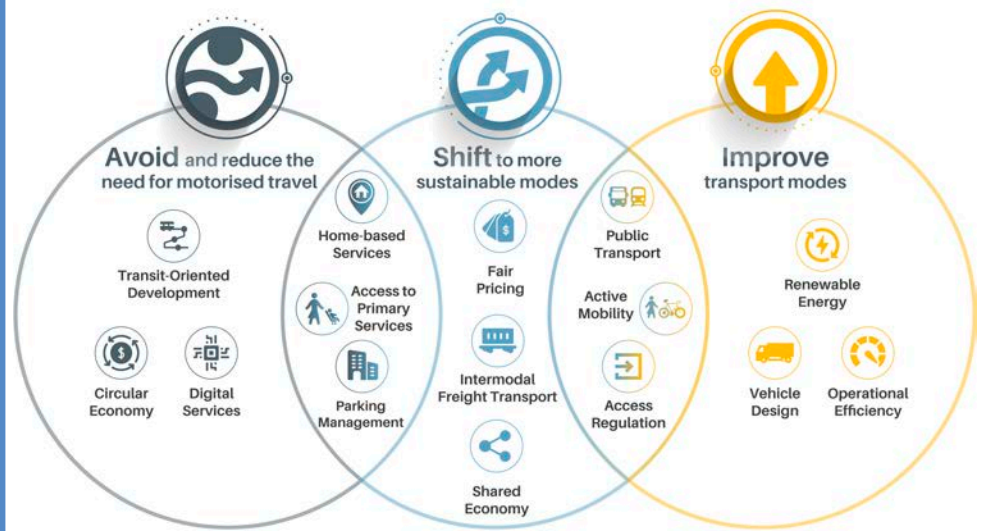


Source: Adapted from OECD/ITF, 2021. Decarbonising transport in Europe: The way forward

The previously mentioned SLOCAT report supports these statements, arguing that the ambitious Paris Agreement targets and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) will not be met unless radical action is taken. The report emphasises that, in order to pick up pace, a combined "Avoid-Shift-Improve" approach is needed:

- Avoid unnecessary motorised trips based on proximity and accessibility
- Shift to less carbon intensive transport modes
- Improve vehicle design, energy efficiency and clean energy sources

## 2.

METROPOLITAN  
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TIMES**Figure 3. Avoid-Shift-Improve approach**

Source: SLOCAT, <https://tcc-gsr.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Slocat-Global-Status-Report-2nd-edition.pdf>

Arguably, the authors emphasise that a number of uncertainties – many of them heightened by the pandemic – have the potential to enhance, accelerate or reverse the positive impacts of climate action in the transport sector. As such, they advocate for a more attentive role for authorities in anticipating and addressing uncertainties, while capitalising on emerging opportunities and addressing looming threats and loopholes. In this way, positive outcomes for sustainable, low carbon transport can be maximised.

Cross-cutting approaches and broad community collaboration are expected to be increasingly present at the heart of metropolitan areas, which are well placed to set up integrated strategies, engaging stakeholders in “quintuple helix”<sup>15</sup> participatory schemes and ensuring that no one is left behind. Such integrated, place-based approaches, multi-level governance, participation and co-creation have been reinforced in the new Leipzig Charter<sup>16</sup> signed in November 2020, and in the 2030 Territorial Agenda<sup>17</sup>. Both policy strategies highlight the need to enhance the role of Functional Regions as one of the six priorities to achieve a Just and Green Europe. Nonetheless, a clear reference to metropolitan areas and their role ahead of Functional Regions is absent. Such non-definition is perceived as an important setback for metropolitan areas.

Achieving a climate-neutral economy by 2050 requires decarbonisation actions Europe-wide. The economic, environmental and social costs of this transition are particularly high for territories and populations more heavily dependent on fossil fuels and industries emitting significant greenhouse gases. Radical action, as argued in the SLOCAT report, will require taking unprecedented risks and creat-

<sup>15</sup> Franc, Sanja and Karadžija, Deniza, 2019. Quintuple helix approach: the case of the European Commission. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338475799\\_Quintuple\\_helix\\_approach\\_The\\_case\\_of\\_the\\_European\\_Union](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338475799_Quintuple_helix_approach_The_case_of_the_European_Union)

<sup>16</sup> European Commission, 2020. New Leipzig Charter: The transformative power of cities for the common good. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2020/new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2020/new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good)

<sup>17</sup> European Commission, 2020, Territorial Agenda 2030, a future for all places. <https://territorialagenda.eu/library/>

ing positive (and creative) disruption. In this regard, it will be necessary to anticipate and embrace short-term turbulence to ensure a fairer transition in the long term and prepare for potential future shocks. The same document emphasises that making systemic changes to reduce transport emissions can enhance rather than diminish citizens' quality of life. In practical terms, this means that sustainable urban mobility plans can lead to economic prosperity, personal well-being and decoupling of transport emissions.

In this respect, it is worth considering that the objective of a just transition, as foreseen by the EU, is to ensure that progress towards a climate-neutral economy is made fairly, leaving no one and nowhere behind, and delivering a high quality of life for all. Investment will be needed, particularly in territories negatively affected by the transition process, to enable regions and people to address the social, economic and environmental impacts of the transition towards a climate-neutral economy by 2050.

### 2.3. OTHER TRENDS AND CHANGES

The above-mentioned 2021 CoR barometer reinforces the hypothesis that, regardless of the pandemic crisis, other trends and changes will continue to shape the coming years, citing in particular: (i) exogenous technological trends such as the digital transition; (ii) the environmental and climate challenge; and (iii) social change including migration, ageing or fluid social institutions. The SLOCAT report also acknowledges that, while the pandemic has dominated recent policy and funding discussions, this has delayed urgent global action against a growing climate crisis. In addition, the crisis has actually broadened inequalities that the United Nations 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development seeks to address.

Ageing, and domestic and intra-European migration, including depopulation, pose challenges to Europe's welfare systems as well as to local and regional development. These demographic dynamics have severe social implications, such as increased social exclusion and greater inequality, as well as challenges for public service provision, labour markets and housing. Moreover, these documents argue, ageing and migration lead to increased density in urban areas, along with the depopulation of rural and peripheral areas. This especially concerns remote areas that lack access to public services and economic and social opportunities. Extra-European migration flows, including out-migration of young, talented people and immigration of refugees, may further exacerbate these challenges.

The previously mentioned SLOCAT report also argues that, in order to leverage COVID-19 recovery packages towards green and equitable transport financing, it is necessary to build on trends that proved successful during the pandemic (e.g., tactical urbanism measures) and ensure that positive changes become permanent (e.g., reduced congestion and improved urban air quality). This includes expanding opportunities for sustainable, low-carbon transport and will require the adoption of measures that support the SDGs, such as decent work and economic prosperity, as well as affordable and clean energy (for instance, through the deployment of electric freight vehicles powered by small-scale renewables).

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In the context of the URBACT programme<sup>18</sup>, different projects have been promoted to share experiences and address the identified challenges, including the RiConnect project<sup>19</sup>, led by the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, and the Urb-En Pact<sup>20</sup>, led by the Clermont Auvergne metropolitan area in France, each of which involves collaboration with another seven metropolitan areas.

**Figure 4. URBACT projects involving metropolitan areas**



#### 2.4. LAUNCHING THE EMA PORTO ANNUAL FORUM

The three pillars of the EU's Urban Agenda<sup>21</sup> call for better regulation, better funding and better knowledge. The Agenda further recognises that metropolitan areas are the engines that drive the Member States' economies<sup>22</sup>.

Metropolitan areas also have to cope with specific challenges associated with transport, the environment and social inclusion, as well as an ever increasing demand for services coupled with limited financial resources to provide these. How these challenges are handled will have a significant impact on the population's overall quality of life.

Framed by the overall theme "Boosting climate-neutral metropolitan areas: green, smart and resilient", the panel sessions at the EMA Porto Annual Forum have been designed to cover different areas of intervention by metropolitan areas.

- **Session 1. The new metropolitan agenda: (re)think, (re)design, (re)act**

Metropolitan areas are home to the largest share of the EU population, hosts to the country's main economic, employment and cultural activities, and key players in the identification of solutions to new challenges and their impacts on the lives of millions of citizens and visitors.

The fallout from the COVID-19 crisis and the changes it brought to every aspect of our everyday lives will have lasting consequences in the "new normal", reshaping

<sup>18</sup> European Commission. URBACT: Driving change for better cities. <https://urbact.eu/>

<sup>19</sup> URBACT: Rethinking infrastructure. <https://urbact.eu/riconnect>

<sup>20</sup> URBACT: Together towards net zero energy cities. <https://urbact.eu/urb-en-pact>

<sup>21</sup> European Commission, 2017. Urban Agenda for the EU. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/news/2017/03/22-03-2017-a-new-dedicated-interactive-website-for-the-urban-agenda-for-the-eu-is-launched](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2017/03/22-03-2017-a-new-dedicated-interactive-website-for-the-urban-agenda-for-the-eu-is-launched)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/TO13%20-%20Evidence%20for%20a%20European%20Urban%20Agenda.pdf>

the way we live, work and travel in metropolitan areas. Nonetheless, the pandemic also creates tremendous opportunities to (re)think and (re)design our cities and recover the economy in order to “bounce back” or return to a societal equilibrium.

Metropolitan areas are potential game changers for the new sustainable, smart, resilient and green recovery: urban public spaces, tourism and social life are all pieces that can be transformed as we imagine the metropolitan areas of the future. The key question is simply to ask policymakers whether they wish to return to the “old normal” or use this moment to define a new agenda for metropolitan areas.

Moreover, metropolitan areas, inversely to cities and regions, are not currently represented as such in the organisational configuration of the European decision-making process, notably as a recognised member of the CoR. Efforts towards such recognition should be prioritised under the future metropolitan agenda.

• **Session 2. Green and smart mobility: there is no turning back**

Transport is one of the sectors hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. New Mobility-as-a-Service products (MaaS), urban logistics and green deliveries, tourism, shared mobility, city information platforms, e-governance and other emerging solutions are increasingly present in our everyday lives.

This session will discuss the extent to which it is possible to find pathways out of the crisis and boost sustainable mobility in metropolitan areas. It will also provide insights into the format of policy responses which can be provided at the metropolitan level, questioning whether digital transformation is the solution to restoring the confidence of the general population in the mobility system, for passengers and logistics chains alike, or whether it may in fact exacerbate persisting inequalities, particularly among the most vulnerable segments of society.

• **Session 3. Recovery & resilient metropolis: the financial challenge**

The quest for climate-friendly cities is largely connected to the capacity to become increasingly adaptive to changing economic conditions, and to rebuild social trust (at community and institutional level). The new multiannual financial package and Recovery and Resilience Facility funds create considerable opportunities for such adaptation while challenging current financial and business models.

While EU funds provide a boost to the economy, they are only part of the solution and key challenges persist. How can the financial gap be bridged at the metropolitan level? Which financial model should metropolitan areas pursue or adopt? How can citizens be actively involved in the preferred model? Is financing the real game changer for green, smart and resilient metropolises? These and other questions will be launched during the session in order to promote common understanding of the financial challenges that confront metropolitan areas and inspire the audience to forge the economic resilience of their territories.

# 3.

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Europe's twin transition towards a green and digital economy requires social fairness and an economy that works for the people, as set out in the Commission's priorities for 2019 - 2024<sup>23</sup>. The Cohesion Policy 2021–2027<sup>24</sup> aims to channel EU investments into building a "smarter Europe" through innovation, digitisation and economic transformation. The European Data Strategy<sup>25</sup> outlines a vision of data-enabled sustainable development. The promotion of smart cities powered by digital technologies and generating massive streams of data creates extensive opportunities for entrepreneurship. It is therefore no surprise to see a growing number of cities and regions adopting smart technologies for efficiency, sustainability and economy, with examples targeting energy efficiency, waste management, transportation, civic engagement, public health or safety.

Key technologies such as 5G networks, the internet of things (IoT), cloud computing, big data analytics and next-generation geo-information systems are being piloted or implemented in real applications to meet different needs and, predictably, enabling smart governance. The World Bank's World Development Report 2021<sup>26</sup>, for instance, underscored that a data infrastructure policy is one of the building blocks of a good data governance framework, which fosters the local data economy at the same time as it promotes digital inclusion.

Accessibility and mobility-related disadvantages have become focal points and issues for discussion. These issues are referred to as mobility poverty, as evidenced in the contrast between the unevenness of services among urban, peri-urban and rural areas, as well as in the disparity between the way in which the services provided cater to the needs of the general public on the one hand, and to the differentiated needs of the socially disadvantaged or vulnerable segments of the population on the other. Indeed, as mobility becomes more digital, with rising levels of automation and connectivity, the most disadvantaged social groups may require additional capabilities to be able to fulfil their daily mobility needs.

Numerous studies have addressed aspects relating to citizens more prone to experiencing mobility exclusion due to their age, income, disabilities, or level of education or digital literacy, among other factors. Although these studies specify user groups with specific needs for mobility or for interacting with mobility services, there is still a knowledge gap on the subject, and its quantification and impacts are yet to be fully defined. Some Horizon 2020 projects, such as HiReach<sup>27</sup> and Inclusion<sup>28</sup>, show that transport poverty is not restricted to physical infrastructure and transport offerings. The lack of digital access and skills experienced by some population groups may also hamper the efficient roll-out of solutions.

Another important aspect is that of high commuter inflows of workers from surrounding regions that typically converge on metropolitan areas, raising a different set of challenges for both environmental and transport development. This rein-

23 European Commission, 2019. Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019–2024. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/political-guidelines-next-commission\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en_0.pdf)

24 [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/2021\\_2027/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/2021_2027/)

25 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-data-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-data-strategy_en)

26 <https://wdr2021.worldbank.org/>

27 HiReach, 2017–2020. Innovative mobility solutions to cope with transport poverty. <https://hireach-project.eu/>

28 INCLUSION, 2017–2020. Towards more accessible and inclusive mobility solutions for European prioritised areas. <https://www.theinclusionproject.com/>

forces the relative position of better-off places and further perpetuates imbalances with respect to access to markets, disparities in quality of governance or public services. Moreover, as pointed out in the RiConnect project, challenges related to social inclusion, ageing population, homelessness, crime, in-work poverty and affordable housing cannot be disregarded.

Developing and implementing integrated place-based strategies and investment requires cross-sector cooperation policies and adequate levels of government and governance, as well as the engagement of local communities. Continuous capacity building at all levels is particularly important to enhance participatory implementation of the strategies. The Avoid-Shift-Improve paradigm requires looking beyond infrastructure and technology and focusing on behavioural change.

While teleworking, video conferencing and other remote collaboration methods have long been seen as potential solutions for reducing transport demand, their extensive use during the crisis may result in a greater proportion of employers and employees continuing to adopt such practices. Hybrid working arrangements with work-from-home or in-office days and flexible working hours may become more common and contribute to reducing rush hour congestion. However, e-shopping and food deliveries, which boomed during the pandemic, are likely to remain in high demand. The ITF study of decarbonisation argues that the pandemic will have significant short-term and possibly medium-term impacts. The extent of these impacts is still uncertain, but the pandemic has reinforced the need to choose mobility policies that create resilient transport systems. A broader offering of mobility services – and deeper integration of these – will help build resilience by creating modularity and adaptability by fostering cohesion among mobility system stakeholders.

The ITF has explored alternative scenarios that could deliver considerable decarbonisation of the transport sector. These scenarios suggest that, besides electrification, integrated land-use planning and transport-oriented development are particularly effective at reducing emissions by shifting shorter trips away from private cars. They also assume strong growth in shared mobility and public transport, as well as in active modes such as walking and cycling. The pathway towards lower emissions will largely build on increases in load factors and fuel efficiency, which will contribute to halving emissions by 2050.

In their modelling exercise, the ITF points out that new forms of shared mobility services have considerable potential to reduce the need for private cars and reduce emissions. These shared modes also enable more rapid adoption of clean technologies. Integration of services is an important component of successfully achieving a lower carbon future for urban transport, as shown in the exercises conducted by ITF in Lisbon and Helsinki.

Mobility as a Service (MaaS), with its user-centric perspective and modal integration, is expected to further contribute to the accessibility of cities and regions, leading to more sustainable transport systems and promoting the vitality of metropolitan areas. By facilitating multimodality, MaaS is expected to make important contributions to the general sustainable social development goals. However, this potential will not be realised without the implementation of the proper policies,

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notably at regulatory level. An overview of MaaS from a transport authorities perspective was recently published by European Metropolitan Transport Authorities (EMTA)<sup>29</sup>. The report defines the societal megatrends that have acted as preconditions for the recent surge in new mobility products, and outlines the underlying potential for “public value” in the deployment of MaaS solutions.

Other major actions envisaged by metropolitan areas with respect to improving the effectiveness of climate change adaptation measures and increase territorial resilience is through the design and development of so-called nature-based solutions (NbS).

The LIFE Metro Adapt project<sup>30</sup>, funded by the EU’s LIFE programme, has developed a set of guidelines aimed at providing public authorities with knowledge to facilitate the implementation of NbS using four types of tools: (i) strategies and plans, (ii) cognitive tools, (iii) regulations and technical guidelines, and (iv) public-private agreements. A catalogue of solutions with a set of practical examples of deployment of NbS measures across water management, built environment and green spaces was also produced. Examples provided include green roofs, green walls, urban forests and alternative rainwater management systems.

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Local measures and adaptation actions are needed to address the challenge of climate neutrality. As acknowledged by the CoR, support provided to regional and metropolitan authorities yields European added value and ensures the EU’s global competitiveness as well as further regional convergence through spillover effects resulting from such support.

In their role as drivers of Member States’ economies, metropolitan regions must respond to multiple challenges associated with transport, environment, housing, migration and social inclusion, as well as to an ever-increasing demand for services coupled with limited financial resources to provide these. How these challenges are handled will have a significant impact on the population’s overall quality of life. As pointed out in the Working Document produced by the CoR Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget<sup>31</sup>, metropolitan regions are considered the economic engines of the EU. However, the public services they deliver are costly, and own budgets do not always suffice. The report acknowledges that the resource reallocation method used by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) is primarily based on a single indicator – GDP per capita/purchasing power parity – and does not include social, territorial and environmental aspects in Europe’s regions. Hence, it does not give a full picture of their level of development.

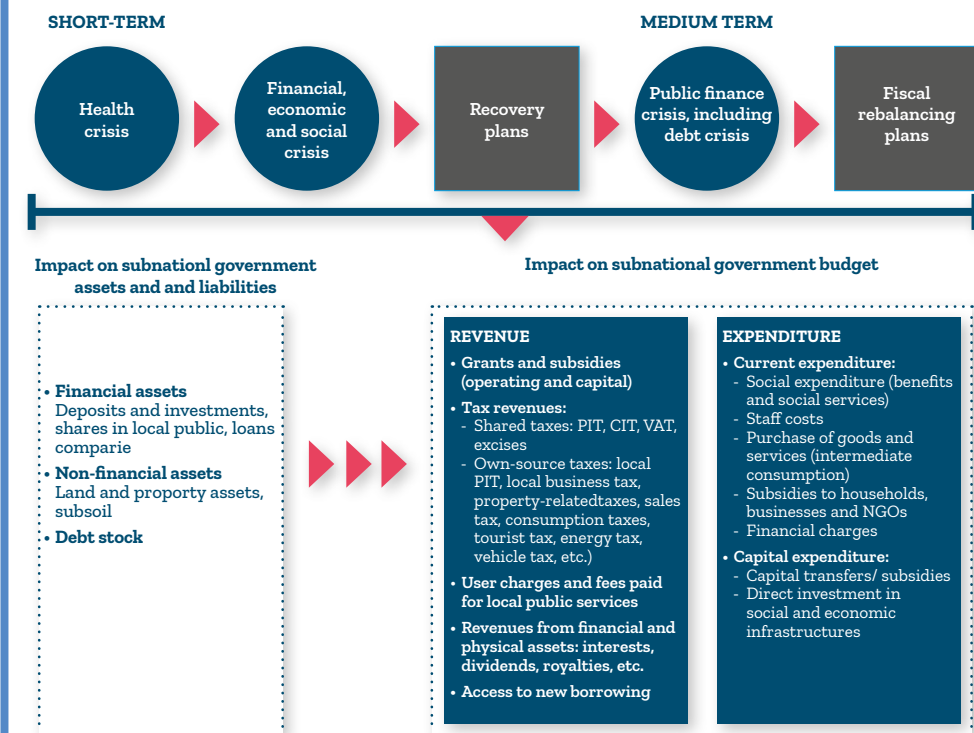
<sup>29</sup> EMTA, 2019. A perspective on MaaS from Europe’s metropolitan transport authorities. <https://www.emta.com/spip.php?article1319>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.lifemetroadapt.eu/en/2020/05/19/nature-based-solutions-in-metropolitan-areas-characteristics-and-benefits/>

<sup>31</sup> European Committee of the Regions, 2019. The challenges of metropolitan regions and their position in the future Cohesion Policy post-2020.

Another study from OECD<sup>32</sup> analysing the territorial impacts of the pandemic crisis highlights the cascade effects on sub-national government finances, as shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5. How the cascade effects of the crisis may affect sub-national government finances (OECD)**



Source: OECD, The territorial impact of COVID-19: Managing the crisis across levels of government. 2020

The EU's COVID-19 recovery plan focuses on implementation of the European Green Deal to provide safe and healthy conditions and restore economic growth in a sustainable, fair, strong and inclusive manner. The plan includes Next Generation EU, an emergency allocation of EUR 750 billion to help repair the immediate economic and social damage from the pandemic, by boosting rail travel and clean mobility in cities and regions, for instance. Together with other targeted funding for 2021–2027, the Next Generation EU plan will bring the total financial firepower of the EU budget to EUR 1.85 trillion. To access this funding, Member States must submit National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRP) based on Next Generation EU's six priority areas: green transition; digital transition; smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; social and territorial cohesion; health, economic, social and institutional resilience; and the next generation, children and young people.

Despite the major boost that the EU's recovery plan represents, another CoR study<sup>33</sup> raises concerns that the involvement of regional and local authorities in its

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-territorial-impact-of-covid-19-managing-the-crisis-across-levels-of-government-d3e314e1/>

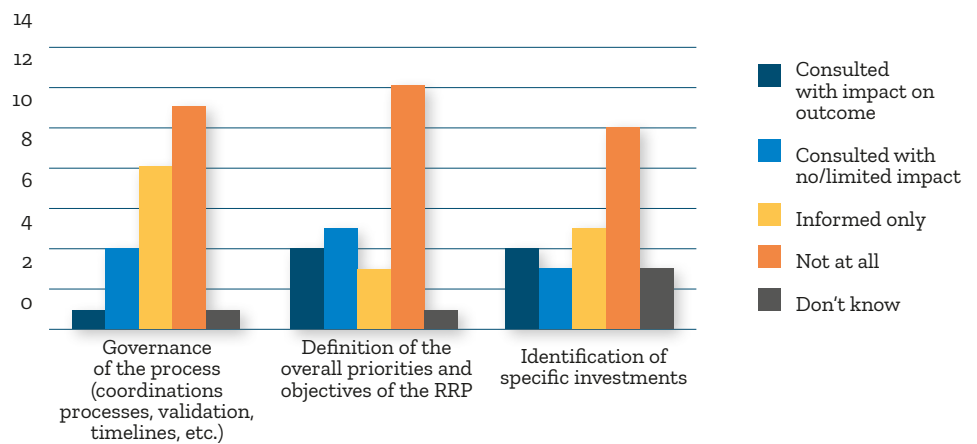
<sup>33</sup> CoR, 2021. Study: Local and regional finances in the aftermath of COVID-19. [https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/Local\\_and\\_regional\\_finances\\_in\\_the\\_aftermath\\_of\\_COVID-19/CoR\\_Local\\_and\\_regional\\_finances\\_after\\_Covid-19.pdf](https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/Local_and_regional_finances_in_the_aftermath_of_COVID-19/CoR_Local_and_regional_finances_after_Covid-19.pdf)

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governance and implementation – particularly in relation to its main component, the Recovery and Resilience Facility – is relatively limited. A survey conducted as part of the study highlights that only a minority of Member States consulted their regional authorities in the early preparation of their National Recovery and Resilience Plan. An even lower number actually incorporated their input and suggestions into the plan. The study highlights the insufficient territorial dimension of these plans (and the asymmetric territorial impact of COVID-19) with respect to designing measures adapted to and able to cope with the challenges ahead.

**Figure 6. Involvement of LRA by National Governments in the preparation of NRRP**



Source: CoR, 2021. Regional and local authorities and National Recovery and Resilience Plans.

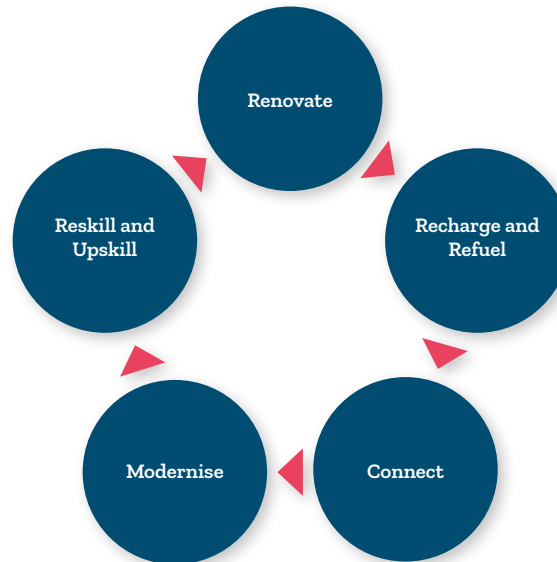
Arguably, this runs contrary to growing awareness on the part of EU citizens<sup>34</sup> in terms of their perception of EU regional policy and the subsidiarity principle. Indeed, the majority of respondents believe that decisions about EU regional policy projects should be taken at sub-national levels, with 32 % opting for the regional level and 23 % for the local level.

The lack of participation of metropolitan areas in the preparation of NRRP has been extensively discussed in the context of EMA, culminating with the presentation of a political statement<sup>35</sup> to the main representatives for the European institutions in December 2020.

In that statement, EMA calls attention to the fact that metropolitan areas can offer well- designed projects based on integrated and existing strategies as well as on the legacy of their well-functioning public administrations and their proximity to the territory and local stakeholders. In particular, EMA reinforces that metropolitan area priorities, if included in those plans, could make a significant contribution to the fulfilment of the EU strategic goals expressed in its seven Flagships, among which the following are particularly relevant (Figure 7).

34 European Commission, 2021. Flash Eurobarometer 497 survey report: Citizens' awareness and perception of EU regional policy.

35 [https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/EMA\\_POSITION%20PAPER\\_The%20role%20of%20metropolitan%20areas%20in%20the%20RRF.pdf](https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/EMA_POSITION%20PAPER_The%20role%20of%20metropolitan%20areas%20in%20the%20RRF.pdf)

**Figure 7. Most relevant EU Flagships (2021 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy)<sup>36</sup>**

# 5.

## METROPOLITAN AREAS AND THE RUSH TO CLIMATE NEUTRALITY: FURTHER REFLECTIONS

It will not be an easy ride. The transition of our societies into a climate-neutral operating mode will impact on many of our habits and interests. Some companies will not be able to adapt their processes and products, corresponding jobs may be lost, and the perpetuation of certain lifestyles and consumption patterns will no longer be possible. Therefore, public resistance will need to be overcome, and this can only be achieved within a framework of participative processes.

In a global market-oriented economy, multiple commitments are necessary to seize competitive advantages. A key possible first step could be a new legal framework (such as an international treaty) recognising a stable climate as a common heritage of humankind, from which new ways for market economic transactions to internalise both negative and positive contributions to climate stability would derive.

However, the fact that increasingly large parts of the world's population and economic activities are located in metropolitan areas make these the main stages on which the drama and great events of the transition will be played out. Tensions will be most visible there, and practical solutions and new realities will also emerge there. The diversity of situations across multiple metropolitan areas can provide a powerful learning basis for this collective endeavour which requires us all to evolve rapidly.

The challenges are immense and multidimensional, and a number of increasingly important factors of interactions in society must be taken into account in designing what could be a successful policy approach to address those challenges.

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.europeansources.info/record/annual-sustainable-growth-strategy-2021/>

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**The digital factor:** most citizens worldwide (and certainly in Europe) currently live under a system that is rapidly approaching full digital integration, which provides a wealth of new capabilities for acquiring, processing, integrating and interpreting all kinds of data. Monitoring and predictive management of multiple systems are being put in place, and a new type of evidence-based operational decision-making is emerging, significantly reducing wear-and-tear disruption risks. Citizens are at the core of this new policy factor, as they are able to easily access information about many issues that affect their lives as well as generate data (voluntarily and involuntarily) about their actions and points of view through, for instance, crowdsourcing mechanisms.

**The governance factor:** partly as a reaction to globalisation, and partly based on feelings of legitimacy and capacity, an increasing desire for agency in matters of public interest is visible across society, involving not only the various levels of government but also multiple types of stakeholders: some formally constituted, and others arising spontaneously around issues of common interest. Multiple forms and timings of engagement of these various agents are possible, and the most appropriate option in each case will depend on the issue and on local circumstances, but currently command-and-control governance is virtually impossible across the EU.

**The equity and social cohesion factor:** besides income and wealth inequality, inequality looms large and worrisome in other dimensions, such as physical access to jobs, health, education and other social functions, and interaction with friends and family, among other issues. Significant differences of access to all these activities exist across metropolitan territories, particularly for those who depend on public transport. Thus, equality of access is an important element of social cohesion. Perceptions of equity and fairness by the public at large, as well as by minority groups, are of critical importance to allow smooth transition in periods of significant change, as the period of adaptation to climate change will undoubtedly be in the coming decades.

**The resilience factor:** digital embedded and twin systems are increasingly a part of the sophisticated technological devices that ensure the smooth and efficient performance of so many components of contemporary life, providing significantly increased reliability against internal failure. At the same time, the risk of disturbance and even disruption of many of these components as a result of external factors is growing. Very recent evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic and extreme weather events in multiple regions show that system resilience against these shocks is necessary and can only be provided at system level, rather than individually for each component. Thus, resilience must be built into not only the technical systems but also society itself.

Given the uncertainties regarding the precise nature and timing of availability of the forthcoming technical solutions, and the complexity of social and economic systems in metropolitan areas in particular, it is not possible to have a clear vision (or even a number of alternative visions) of life in our metropolitan areas once society is fully decarbonised. Politically, the greatest challenge is not determining the "end point", but rather the navigation of the transition required to reach that point, given the risk of public protests at different moments and for different reasons. Uncertainties concerning the technologies and the reactions of different social groups along the way make the preparation of these transitions even more challenging.

All in all, the greatest effort must be invested less in defining the desirable societal configuration and more in preparing and discussing transition plans (roadmaps) towards a broad space of desirable configurations, covering a range of scenarios along the way, and preferably:

- including in that preparation identification of the data acquisition and analysis necessary to enable smart monitoring of the evolving level of progress towards decarbonisation, not only with respect to GHG emissions, but also the rearrangement of social processes that may impact on equity of access levels;
- involving in those discussions multiple groups of stakeholders, ensuring that the level of uncertainty and abstraction of the information provided to each group is compatible with its capacity to digest it, and contributing positively to the discussion by offering suggestions for adaptation and not only protest and threats.

Regarding mobility, a keystone of progress towards climate-neutral metropolitan areas, the higher efficiency of electric motors and lower taxation of electricity lead to much lower operating costs for electric rather than fossil fuel-powered vehicles, thus generating a risk of traffic induction and even greater congestion. Hence, fleet electrification is far from a panacea for the provision of good quality metropolitan mobility systems.

Scheduled public transport is essential for the major transportation relationships, though it is unable to attract many car owners, given the advantages of the car in terms of flexibility of use in time and space. A significant component of demand-responsive, shared mobility (car sharing) is needed, providing levels of personal flexibility and time efficiency similar to those of the private car, and public space usage efficiency similar to that of scheduled public transport. Given the high level of expected usage of vehicles in these shared mobility systems, their total ownership costs will be lower if they are electric.

A significant shift from private cars to soft transport modes (walking, bikes and especially e-bikes) is also necessary. However, public space is required for these to operate safely, and this space must be acquired mainly from what is currently allocated to parking of private cars.

For urban logistics, electrification is also necessary and is already highly cost-competitive in various segments, but new organisational schemes must also be adopted. These should be based on networks of micro-hubs receiving direct deliveries from suppliers, with each micro-hub serving businesses located in their proximity, and shipment collection (last mile) carried out by each client's business, preferably with e-cargo bikes.

The call for urgent decarbonisation comes at a time when a significant number of business agents in metropolitan areas are in a fragile financial situation and seeking recovery from the loss of business during the pandemic. Hence, private investment capacity is lower than usual and, in many cases, these agents can only assimilate the (initially) higher costs associated with decarbonising their business processes if they receive targeted financing with favourable conditions. Metropolitan authorities can be powerful advocates of this need in dialogue with national authorities supervising the financial sector.

Moreover, it is important to recognise that some businesses will no longer be viable, while others will have to make substantial changes to their processes, which in both cases may lead to job losses. The density and diversity of economic activities in metropolitan areas create an environment in which some businesses flourish while others are in crisis. This is an important resilience factor as it helps reduce the impact of job losses. However, for some people, decent jobs will be harder to find. Specific requalification and financial support schemes will therefore be necessary. The EU's Just Transition Fund was created in December 2020, precisely with this in mind.

Overall, metropolitan authorities may provide vital support to companies and workers in distress as a result of the decarbonisation process, given their first-hand knowledge of the economic issues in their territory and their capacity to help these agents navigate the application rules of the different EU financial packages.

#### ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AMB	Barcelona Metropolitan Area
AMP	Porto Metropolitan Area
CO <sub>2</sub>	carbon dioxide
CoR	Committee of the Regions
EC	European Commission
ECF	European Cyclist Federation
EU	European Union
EMA	European Metropolitan Areas
EMTA	European Metropolitan Transport Authorities
ESIF	European structural and investment funds
ESPO	European Grouping on Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EUR	euro
GDP	gross domestic product
GHG	greenhouse gases
ITF	International Transport Forum
LRA	Local and Regional Authorities
MaaS	mobility as a service
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plans
OECD/ITF	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SLOCAT	SLOCAT Partnership on Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport
USD	United States dollar



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