

Shaping the global urban agenda beyond 2030

EUROPEAN
METROPOLITAN
AUTHORITIES



ANNUAL FORUM REPORT

BARCELONA

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Foreword

As Vice President for International Relations and Digital Metropolis at Barcelona Metropolitan Area, I am pleased to present the outcomes of the 10th European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA) Forum, held from 14 to 17 October 2025 in Barcelona.

On this special occasion marking ten years of EMA's collective effort to highlight the importance of metropolitan perspectives in European policies, the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB), the Barcelona City Council and the EMA network joined forces to organise and host the World Metropolitan Summit (WMS), to enrich the European experience with partners from all over the world.

The event was structured around three main blocks: the EMA Forum, focusing on European metropolitan issues; the Metropolitan Governance Dialogues, gathering partners from across the globe; and the Mediterranean Conference, jointly organised with MedCities, dedicated to tackling the water scarcity crisis in the Mediterranean region.

This international gathering marked a turning point in shaping the post-2030 Urban Agenda, recognising metropolitan areas as key actors in defining global policies and financial frameworks, not merely as consultative voices, but as direct partners in their design, management and evaluation. The forum's main objective was to strengthen multilevel governance as a tool to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to consolidate the metropolitan perspective for the period 2030–2050 and beyond.

The meeting brought together 27 political representatives from major European metropolises, along with 73 international delegations representing metropolitan authorities and institutions from around the globe. Metropolitan leaders discussed policies addressing some of the most urgent challenges of our time: affordable housing, climate adaptation, digital transformation, and water management.

We were honoured to welcome representatives from the European Commission, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and many other international organisations.

Together, we underlined the crucial role of metropolitan areas in driving resilient, inclusive and people-centred policies. This advocacy effort will continue in the coming months, as we will convey our collective demands to the European institutions and international organisations.

According to UN-Habitat, by 2035, 39 % of the global population will live in metropolitan areas, representing 62.5 % of the world's urban population. Almost one billion people will become metropolitan citizens between 2020 and 2035. In Europe, 76 % of the population already lives in urban areas, where most of the challenges facing the European Union are concentrated.

Strengthening metropolitan governance is essential to ensure fairness, service equity and policy coherence in an increasingly interconnected world. In times of global instability, metropolitan areas are uniquely positioned as bridges for dialogue, platforms for peacebuilding and engines of resilient economies. They must therefore play a full and active role in global governance.

To address the major social, economic, ecological and housing challenges of our time, metropolitan authorities need more than a consultative role. They require the autonomy, competences and financial tools to design and implement long-term policies that go beyond administrative borders.

The political declaration adopted during the summit calls on national governments, international institutions and the European Union to recognise metropolitan areas as essential partners. It urges the creation of stable funding mechanisms and greater autonomy in managing EU and international funds. Metropolitan areas must be equipped with adequate competences, financing and fiscal tools to address challenges that transcend administrative boundaries.

Finally, participants agreed that the Bursa Metropolitan Municipality (BMM) will host the EMA Forum 2026 in Bursa, Turkey, a new horizon for keeping up our advocacy work during the following months.

This publication, which includes the political declaration and the main statements delivered during the EMA Forum in Barcelona, stands as a significant contribution to shaping the Urban Agenda beyond 2030.

Jordi CASTELLANA

*Vice President for International Relations and Digital Metropolis,
Barcelona Metropolitan Area*



Barcelona Metropolitan Declaration: Metropolitan future beyond 2023

October 15, 2025 – BARCELONA

On this day, 15 October 2025, we, the mayors, presidents, and political representatives, have convened in Barcelona for the World Metropolitan Summit and the tenth anniversary of the European Metropolitan Authorities Forum. Our collective purpose is to elevate the metropolitan dimension as a cornerstone for advancing global goals, from the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda to the evolving post-2030 frameworks.

This declaration is grounded in the shared vision and frameworks of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement (2015), the Montreal Declaration on Metropolitan Areas (2015), the declarations of the European Metropolitan Authorities (2015–2025), the New Urban Agenda (2016), the Metrex Manifesto (2023), the Brussels Declaration of Mayors (2024), and the UN-Habitat Resolution HSP/HA.2/Res.6 (2023), in which, for the first time, the UN-Habitat General Assembly formally called for the reinforcement of metropolitan governance to advance the SDGs through integrated, cross-sector and multilevel approaches.

We acknowledge this growing global consensus that sustainable development cannot be achieved without considering our urban agglomerations. Approximately 65 % of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) rely on urban settlements. However, our metropolises are not only places for implementing these Goals; they also serve as vital habitats for biodiversity and centres for innovation, leadership and social cohesion. This highlights the urgency of enhancing metropolitan governance as a crucial step in addressing the interconnected challenges we face today, including housing, climate change, significant biodiversity loss, inequality and digitalisation.

CONSIDERING:

- The metropolitan demographic shift
More than half of the global population now lives in urban areas, with metropolitan areas hosting the largest and most dynamic concentrations of people, economies and innovation. According to the UN-Habitat report *Global State of Metropolises 2020*, it is projected that the number of people living in metropolises in 2035 will increase to 3.47 billion,

representing 39 % of the global population and 62.5 % of the world's urban population. Almost 1 billion people will become metropolitan citizens between 2020 and 2035. This rapid growth in many metropolises has made urban planning and the provision of common services more complex, as well as the creation of equitable and inclusive spaces for all people.

- The need for integrated territorial approaches
Traditional administrative boundaries often fail to reflect the functional realities of today's interconnected urban areas. Nowadays, in the vast majority of urban centres, people's daily lives are metropolitan. Supralocal governance enables coordinated action across municipalities, ensuring equitable services, economic cohesion, and strategic spatial planning, key to achieving the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda. Thus, challenges such as housing, sustainable mobility, climate change, energy consumption and security, digitalization, water scarcity or waste management, among others, go much beyond municipal boundaries, making metropolitan areas key players in addressing global issues at the local level.
- Housing scarcity crisis
Our metropolises are facing a housing crisis that restricts access for a large segment of the population. Factors such as globalisation, mass tourism, real estate speculation and gentrification have resulted in a shortage of affordable housing, particularly affecting middle- and lower-class residents. Many individuals are compelled to allocate an unreasonable percentage of their incomes towards housing, which worsens their living conditions and makes it difficult for them to maintain a reasonable quality of life. This issue is especially relevant in metropolises, where inadequate urban planning and insufficient quality housing are compounded by a lack of access to basic services such as drinking water, renewable sources of energy and sanitation. Moreover, 150 million people are still homeless worldwide as per the last World Economic Forum report (2021).
- The climate and environmental emergency
The accelerating climate crisis is intensifying its impacts worldwide. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, sea-level rise,

unplanned urban sprawl and increasing resource scarcity are placing significant pressure on ecosystems, economies and social systems. These effects are not evenly distributed; densely populated urban areas face the greatest risks. Metropolitan areas concentrate many vulnerabilities, making their populations particularly susceptible to the unavoidable consequences of climate change.

Interestingly, as ecosystems become increasingly degraded and fragmented, urban areas are emerging as complementary refuges for biodiversity. This trend necessitates a re-evaluation of metropolitan planning and management. In this context, environmental policies and resilience strategies must be closely aligned, with a particular focus on soft mobility, sustainable energy use, waste reduction and integrated water cycle management, which includes improved access to sanitation services.

- Democracy, geopolitical tensions and their urban effects
The current global scenario is marked by a weakening of democracy in the global narrative, rising geopolitical tensions, re-centralisations of local competences, ongoing armed conflicts and a shift towards protectionism and unilateralism. These dynamics are fragmenting international cooperation, disrupting trade and undermining multilateral responses to global challenges.
Urban and metropolitan areas are on the front lines of these shifts' effects. They are absorbing displaced populations, facing economic instability due to unstable supply chains, and struggling to respond to transnational crises with limited support.
- Humanistic digital transition
In today's rapidly changing global landscape, digitalisation and especially the impact of AI have emerged as a crucial factor in

economic competitiveness, social progress and environmental sustainability. Whether in rural communities or busy urban centres, equitable access to technology and digital literacy is critical for fostering innovation, improving productivity, and ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital age.

WE DECLARE THAT:

- Metropolises are of suitable scale, transcending municipalities' administrative boundaries, functioning as interconnected systems of people, wildlife, infrastructures, goods, information and energy. Thus, metropolitan governance enables coordinated territorial responses to important challenges—whether it is public transport that crosses jurisdictions, housing markets that affect entire regions, or water and energy systems that require shared management. Strengthening metropolitan governance is key to ensuring spatial justice, service equity and policy coherence in a deeply interdependent world.

We acknowledge the importance of polycentric metropolitan structures, in which multiple municipalities form an integrated territorial system. These configurations require tailored approaches to planning, governance and financing that recognise both interdependence and the autonomy of individual urban centres. Enhancing this multilevel governance mechanism should reinforce the role of local authorities as valid interlocutors when it comes to territorial development with a place-based approach.

In this context, the principle of subsidiarity should be applied to ensure that decisions are made as close as possible to the citizens affected by them. Empowering metropolitan areas will lead to more effective governance and improve the services that meet the daily needs of our interconnected communities.

- Metropolitan areas are key actors in accomplishing international and regional agendas. Their scale and diversity position them at the forefront of global change, where policies and investments can have an exponential impact. Thus, it has been proved that the metropolitan scale is essential if we want to accomplish the objectives of

international and regional policy objectives such as the Agenda 2030; the New Urban Agenda; the New Leipzig Charter; EU Cohesion Policy; the EU Green Deal or the European Climate Pact and EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change; 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 initiative; the Barcelona Convention and its protocols; the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development; the EU Ocean Pact or the New Pact for the Mediterranean.

- Housing is a fundamental right critical for living a dignified life and to guarantee basic services and other rights. It represents more than just a physical shelter; it is a cornerstone of social and economic development, especially in metropolitan areas. Consequently, affordable housing has become a top priority in our efforts to support disadvantaged individuals, people living in unplanned communities and to combat homelessness.

We share the vision outlined in the letter from European Mayors for Housing (2024), which calls for a prompt and effective response to the housing crisis in our metropolitan areas. To achieve this, it is essential that metropolitan areas are included in the design and implementation of all national and international housing policies and receive the necessary support and funds.

- Metropolises create and concentrate environmental impacts and risks, but also the capacity to act. Their responsibility in climate issues is matched by their capacity to implement large-scale adaptation and mitigation strategies. From green infrastructure to sustainable mobility and urban resilience plans, metropolitan areas are uniquely positioned to integrate environmental priorities across policy areas and deliver transformative climate action where it matters most.

Metropolises have increasingly become havens and hotspots of biodiversity: this represents a new opportunity for a different approach and dialogue with nature, more connected to it. This should inspire metropolitan planning and cross-cutting management.

- In the face of global instability—marked by conflict, displacement, and economic disruption—metropolitan areas are absorbing the social and economic consequences. Yet their institutional proximity to affected populations, their economic weight and their participation in global networks allow them to remain connected, operational and resilient. In a moment where international cooperation is threatened, metropolises are emerging as pragmatic actors capable of sustaining global commitments through local action and city-to-city cooperation.

In this volatile context, metropolitan areas—due to their diversity, economic weight and international connections—are uniquely positioned to act as bridges for dialogue, platforms for peacebuilding, and engines of resilient, open economies. Strengthening their role in global governance is not only strategic but also essential for building stability from the ground up.

- Metropolitan areas worldwide are creating ecosystems of innovation, facilitating the empowerment of citizens, and contributing to a more prosperous, sustainable and digital future that prioritises inclusivity. In today's interconnected world, where digital networks are blurring borders, all territories need to enhance their digital capabilities. In this collective journey towards digital transformation, **collaboration and cooperation** among governments, researchers, civil society and private companies are crucial for realising technology's **full potential while protecting digital rights, data privacy, the environment and placing people at the centre of the digitalisation process.**

Involving citizens in the digitalisation process is vital for ensuring inclusivity and maximising the benefits of technology. Artificial intelligence must be developed and deployed responsibly to serve the public good. Access to affordable, reliable high-speed internet is

essential for bridging the digital divide and reaching all citizens and territories.

WE COMMIT:

- To lead in this urban century by undertaking transformative actions that create inclusive, equitable, and sustainable metropolises while respecting everyone's human rights and leading the fight against the climate emergency. Our goal is to unlock the full potential of metropolitan areas as hubs for inclusive innovation, cultural creativity, biodiversity and economic opportunity. We will ensure that the benefits of this transformation reach all communities, without forgetting access to essential services, such as clean drinking water, waste management and public transport, among others.
- To strengthen democratic metropolitan governance through deeper institutional cooperation and multilevel and multistakeholder coordination across all territories. We will work to improve representation, transparency and citizen engagement in decision-making processes, making metropolitan governance more responsive and accountable.
- To assume a pivotal role in driving and nurturing the global agenda beyond 2030 and 2050, engaging in strategic collaboration with the United Nations, other relevant international organisations and networks, and our national and regional governments. We will face all global challenges, promote sustainable development, protect and restore biodiversity, and ensure that our collective efforts align with the shared goals of peace, prosperity and equity for all. As discussed at the Metrosolutions International Congress (Cornellà de Llobregat, 2022), metropolitan areas are prepared and equipped to lead innovative solutions that will shape the urban future and address the international challenges of the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

- To implement a bold metropolitan housing policy that guarantees accessibility, affordability and quality living conditions for all citizens. Our metropolises will develop all necessary mechanisms to promote the right to adequate housing. This is an essential policy to transform our metropolises into territories for dignity, social equity, intergenerational solidarity and shared prosperity.
- To enhance collaboration among metropolitan areas by sharing experiences and promoting mutual learning that drives innovation and growth. Peer-to-peer cooperation should be a fundamental aspect of our international efforts, strengthening metropolitan networks as essential platforms for knowledge sharing and the development of joint advocacy strategies.
- To achieve climate neutrality in our metropolitan areas as soon as possible, fostering mitigation and adaptation, regardless of the pace of other global actors. We will mobilise all available resources, scale proven innovations and collaborate across borders to lead a just and ambitious ecological transition. Strong support is necessary during energy and industrial transitions, ensuring a balance between climate goals, social cohesion, economic development and biodiversity protection.

WE CALL ON:

- National governments, international institutions, and multilateral organisations to recognise metropolitan areas as essential partners in global governance to guarantee the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda, the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Pact for the Future and other international agendas that seek sustainable development worldwide. Not just as consultative stakeholders but also as direct partners in designing, implementing and evaluating policies and funds.
- The introduction of stable funding mechanisms for metropolitan areas, along with an increase in their autonomy in managing international and EU funds. Future international and EU programmes should acknowledge the unique characteristics of metropolitan institutions by providing them

with dedicated resources and tools to support effective investment implementation. This includes promoting participatory, supra-local strategies that reflect the long-term development priorities of each metropolitan area and encourage decentralisation and international local cooperation.

We, the participants of the World Metropolitan Summit and the European Metropolitan Authorities Forum, are united in our commitment to progress, sustainability, the right to a clean and diverse environment, resilience and quality of life for all people. We are eager to drive transformative actions to address the global challenges affecting our societies, especially the housing crisis. Together, we aim to play a vital role in confronting international issues and promoting a sustainable, just and equitable society for current and future generations.



EMA in numbers

60 metropolises

24 countries

123,755,737 inhabitants

EMA Forum 2025 in numbers

27 cities, metropolitan areas or regions

15 countries

168 participants

WMS Forum in figures (EMA included)

51 cities, metropolitan areas or regions

29 countries

242 participants

88 delegations

Participants – Cities, metropolitan areas and regions

EMA:

Akershus County Municipality, Barcelona Metropolitan Area, Bilbao Metropoli 30, CIM Cávado, City of Belgrade, City of Riga, City of Warsaw, Constanța Metropolitan Area, Gdańsk–Gdynia–Sopot Metropolitan Area, Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolia, Helsinki–Uusimaa Region, Kraków Metropolis Association, Lviv Agglomeration Association, Marmara Municipalities Union, Metropolis of Lyon, Metropolitan Association of Poznań, Metropolitan Association of Wrocław, Metropolitan City of Florence, Metropolitan City of Genoa, Metropolitan City of Naples, Metropolitan City of Rome Capital, Metropolitan City of Turin, Metropolitan Region Amsterdam, Metropolitan Region Rhineland, Eurometropolis of Strasbourg, Stuttgart Region Association, Vienna.

WMS:

Antalya Metropolitan Municipality, Bamako Metropolitan Area, Bogotá–Cundinamarca Metropolitan Region, Brikama Area Council, City of Agadir, City of Alajuela, City of Bonifacio, City of Jacareí, City of Maputo, City of Niterói, City of Ramallah, City of Rufisque Nord, City of San José, City of Santiago de Cali, Kanifing Municipal Council, La Libertad Sur Municipality, Marracuene Municipality, Metropolitan Area of Córdoba, Metropolitan Area of El Salvador, Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara, Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, Metropolitan Region of Curitiba, Nairobi Metropolitan Area, People's Municipality of Qamishlo.

Support or participation:

Agència Catalana de l'Aigua (ACA), Avitem, Bable Smart Cities, Barcelona Cicle de l'Aigua (BCASA), Barcelona Regional (BR), Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB), Centro Iberoamericano de Desarrollo Estratégico Urbano (CIDEU), Cetaqua, Ciudadanía Metropolitana, Eurecat, French Network of Urban Planning Agencies (FNAU), Frente Nacional de Prefeitas e Prefeitos (FNP), Gauteng City-Region Observatory, Green Living Projects, Holding Co. for Water & Wastewater (HCWW), ICLEI Europe, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI), Institut Metròpoli, Institut Municipal de l'Habitatge i Rehabilitació de Barcelona (IMHAB), Kurdish Red Crescent, Maputo Metropolitan Transport Agency, MedCities, Mercociudades, Nairobi Trade and Investment Center (NATIC), Pla Estratègic Metropolità de Barcelona (PEMB), Politecnico di Milano, Port Czystej Energii Sp. z o.o. / Clean Energy Harbour, South African Cities Network (SACN), UN-Habitat, Un Ponte Per, Union for the Mediterranean, Unión Nacional de Gobiernos Locales (UNGL), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), Universitat de Barcelona (UB), Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), University of Warsaw, Water, Environment & Beyond (WE&B).

EMA Barcelona 2025 Report

Official welcome



Jaume COLLBONI

*Mayor of Barcelona and President
of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area*

Metropolitan areas gather in Barcelona at a decisive moment for metropolises worldwide. Thirty-six political representatives from twenty-five metropolitan regions convene in the City Council of Barcelona with a shared objective: to affirm metropolises as central actors of twenty-first-century life. Demographic growth in Asia and Africa, ageing societies in Europe, cultural diversity, the digital revolution, the climate crisis and the demand for equitable coexistence all converge in metropolitan territories, where the future of humanity increasingly unfolds.

This summit underscores a core principle: global challenges are addressed locally. Energy, water, poverty, inequality and decarbonisation depend on metropolitan leadership, and global agendas require strong urban counterparts. The connection articulated by the former Mayor of Barcelona Mr. Maragall remains meaningful: improving a neighbourhood's life contributes directly to improving the world.

An acknowledgement is extended to the Mayor of Ramallah, whose presence symbolises the commitment of metropolitan authorities

to peace, dignity, and reconstruction. Barcelona's symbolic District 11, Cities of Palestine, revives a longstanding tradition of solidarity, drawing on the experience of post-war cooperation with Sarajevo and reaffirming the duty of cities to support territories devastated by conflict and to rebuild spaces of life, safety and economic opportunity.

Cities and metropolitan areas are today the true strongholds of democracy, solidarity, rights and freedoms at a time when multilateral consensuses like the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda or the Paris Agreements face unprecedented scepticism. The political declaration adopted at this summit calls for mobilisation at metropolitan scale and for renewed determination to shape the global agenda while improving the daily life of millions of citizens worldwide.

UN-Habitat intervention



Anacláudia ROSSBACH

*Executive Director of UN-Habitat
(video intervention)*

The World Metropolitan Summit, marking the 10th anniversary of the European Metropolitan Authorities Forum, offers a key opportunity to accelerate the Urban Agenda beyond 2030. UN-Habitat's participation in this event builds on its ongoing collaboration with the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB), the Barcelona City Council and its partners in Catalonia.

Through the UN-Habitat Barcelona Office and the City Resilience Global Programme, this joint work focuses on strengthening metropolitan cooperation, risk-informed planning, and resilience. These efforts advance priorities in housing, land management, climate resilience, and basic services, aligning global expertise with regional needs.

This collaboration is especially relevant amid a severe global housing crisis: nearly 3 billion people live in inadequate conditions, over 1 billion in informal settlements and slums, and over 300 million are homeless. Metropolitan areas are heavily affected by rising housing costs driven by speculative investment, short-term rentals and gentrification. These pressures particularly impact low- and middle-income households, underscoring the urgency of placing adequate housing—a fundamental human right—at the centre of metropolitan policy.

Delivering the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda and climate commitments require measurable targets and coherent financing at the local level. Metropolitan authorities, with

their economic weight and governance capacity, are decisive in translating global ambitions into local outcomes and ensuring that no municipality is left behind.

UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan 2026–2029, centred on housing, land and basic services, comes to life through localisation and stronger multilevel governance. This approach is reinforced by the Local 2030 Coalition, the UN-wide platform for SDG localisation, which improves coherence and supports collaboration among local, regional and national actors. Metropolitan leadership remains essential to building resilient, inclusive and sustainable territories.

EMA 10th anniversary: Momentum, achievements and future



Antonio BALMÓN

*Executive Vice President of the
Barcelona Metropolitan Area and
Mayor of Cornellà de Llobregat*

Cornellà de Llobregat is a municipality of 95,000 inhabitants with a GDP per capita of €25,000, with more than 45,000 workers. In a compact territory of seven square kilometres, knowledge, urban growth, and dignity for thousands of residents and workers converge.

Fifteen years ago, the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB) was created: a collective project built to amplify local capacities and to guarantee essential services across a shared territory. The metropolitan contribution becomes evident when imagining its absence. Without the AMB, essential elements as water supply, public transport, social housing, waste management, the maintenance of municipal

facilities, or the protection of the coastline and natural spaces would vanish from our daily lives. The AMB is built on the foundation of consensus. Metropolitan governance ensures continuity, equity, and protection across a shared territory. This role has been consolidated with a budget of initially 1,000 million euros, and currently reaches 3,000 million euros. Today, the AMB is the third largest public administration in Catalonia.

The EMA was born ten years ago in Barcelona, when a group of fifteen European metropolises decided to work together to grow stronger and more influential. Debates such as having a lasting European housing policy are necessary, since housing is the ultimate

space of dignity. Metropolises recognise human beings beyond their origins. The commitment of protecting dignity, avoiding humiliation, and rejecting conflict underpins metropolitan cooperation. Metropolitan governance strengthens this capacity, especially when national or global crises exceed municipal reach. Metropolitan areas are the best communicators of what is happening locally, of the doubts and uncertainties that can be better resolved by working together. The metropolitan area is a necessary driving force for human growth and values; therefore, it is very important to state loudly that what we began ten years ago has brought us to grow, and that in the future we will grow further.

10 years of EMA forum



Official address by the Mayor of Ramallah



Issa KASSIS
Mayor of Ramallah

Palestinian institutions convey profound gratitude to Barcelona, to Spain, and to all citizens who stand for justice and who mobilised in solidarity with Palestine. Support from Barcelona—including the creation of District 11, Cities of Palestine, the commitment shown through the Global Sumud Flotilla, and the Mayor's visit to Ramallah—carries deep meaning and honours the courage of a people facing immense hardship. Justice for Palestine has reached the hearts and consciences of mayors and communities around the world.

The people of Gaza did not choose this war. The suffering of the Palestinian people began in 1948 and continues through enormous destruction and loss. Nearly 300,000 Palestinians are dead, injured, missing, or detained, including 65,000 lives lost in Gaza, where 85 % of the territory is destroyed. In the West Bank, fatalities preceded

recent events and checkpoints increased from 500 to 1,000, with mobility severely restricted in cities like Ramallah. Peace, sustainability and prosperity require the end of the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Ramallah advances a democratic, diverse and resilient urban model built on SDG-aligned planning, social cohesion and sustainable neighbourhoods. Investments such as the fully financed wastewater plant, the innovation hub, and the first sports village in Palestine strengthen daily life and anchor hope. Existing and thriving in this ancient land is an act of resistance for the Palestinian people, as well as the evidence that a better tomorrow is possible.

Metropolitan cooperation, urban development and international partnerships remain essential to rebuild dignity, protect life and ensure that Palestinian communities can live, grow, dream, and govern their own future.

Opening speeches on metropolitan governance and housing



Mustafa BOZBEY
President of the Marmara
Municipalities Union (Istanbul)

The Marmara Region, home to more than twenty-five million residents, and including major metropolitan centres such as Bursa and Istanbul, is one of Türkiye's principal economic and cultural engines. Positioned between Europe and Asia and shaped by a legacy that once connected three Ottoman capitals, the region plays a decisive role in global trade, mobility and production. This strategic relevance also brings responsibilities, exemplified by the 2021 mucilage crisis in the Sea of Marmara, which exposed the transboundary nature of environmental risks and prompted coordinated action by the Marmara Municipalities Union on wastewater, coastal management and ecosystem restoration.

A shared metropolitan vision now guides regional development. The Marmara Region Spatial Development Strategic Framework, the first

of its kind in Türkiye, integrates national and sub-regional strategies to address housing pressures, climate risks, digital divides, and social inequalities. Bursa, the region's second-largest metropolis, reflects this framework through the newly established Bursa Planning Agency, which enforces resilient, human-centred housing and urban policies grounded in encompassing higher human needs such as security, belonging and self-realisation.

Initiatives such as the Marmara Urban Forum, SDG Voluntary Local Reviews and participation in global resilience platforms reinforce the region's commitment to metropolitan cooperation. Reflecting this engagement, the Marmara Municipalities Union will host the EMA Forum 2026 in Bursa, positioning the city at the centre of the forthcoming metropolitan dialogue and joint Urban Agenda.



Yankuba DARBOE

Mayor of the Brikama Area Council

The Brikama Area Council represents 47% of the Gambia's population, encompassing nine districts, 12 parliamentary seats, and 28 elected wards. Rapid population growth presents both opportunities and challenges in infrastructure, service delivery, and local governance. Upon assuming office in 2023, structural inefficiencies and outdated systems hindered transparency and accountability. Reforms have since strengthened governance, improved financial performance, and enhanced citizen trust.

Digital modernisation has been central, including revenue collection systems that enable real-time tracking, reduce leakages, and improve financial management across wards. Waste management coverage has expanded to nearly 75% of households, with initiatives aiming to convert waste into

economic opportunities.

Housing remains constrained by limited resources, requiring public-private partnerships and increased private investment to improve affordability and meet residents' needs.

Collaboration and knowledge exchange are essential.

Platforms such as this summit and the African Governance and Infrastructure Network, with the support of the AMB and the city of Barcelona, promote peer learning, capacity building and resource mobilisation.

Brikama's experience reflects Africa's broader urban transformation: growth driven by youthful populations and creativity, yet requiring transparency, sustainability, and inclusive planning to ensure resilient, equitable and prosperous metropolitan areas.



Celso FLORÊNCIO
Mayor of Jacareí

The National Front of Mayors (FNP) embodies the strength of Brazilian and Latin American municipalism. Founded in 1989, it unites 415 municipalities, representing 61% of Brazil's population and 74% of its GDP.

Brazilian municipalities play a central role in governance given the political, administrative and fiscal autonomy they enjoy under the 1988 Constitution. The FNP serves as a platform for dialogue and representation, promoting sustainable, inclusive and resilient urban development. Its thematic vice presidencies coordinate cooperation across government levels and advance metropolitan strategies.

The Latin American Metropolitan Governance Agenda—developed from the 2025 Latin American Metropolitan Governance Meeting—involved representatives from 10 countries, which identified

35 metropolitan challenges and proposed 47 solutions. These solutions addressed legal frameworks, territorial planning, financing, governance, urban mobility, data management, and sustainability.

Through collaboration with the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, this agenda strengthens metropolitan governance, social participation, international cooperation, and regional networks. Cities from El Salvador to São Paulo face shared challenges, and metropolitan cooperation is essential. Global transformation begins locally, where democracy is lived and development takes place.



Pia IMBS

*President of the Eurometropolis
of Strasbourg*

The World Metropolitan Summit and the 10th anniversary of the European Metropolitan Authorities highlight the growing relevance of metropolitan leadership in a geopolitical landscape marked by tension and limited national action. While national governments often struggle to guarantee peace or respond effectively, metropolitan areas continue to provide stability, public service delivery, and long-term vision. The presence of territories facing severe crises underscores the urgency of coordinated metropolitan action.

The Eurometropolis of Strasbourg illustrates how metropolitan governance can lead transformative change. Since 2020, a broad set of instruments—both existing and newly designed—has supported policies on mobility, housing, water management, flood prevention, economic innovation, and access to

sport and culture. Guided by the Sustainable Development Goals, this roadmap aligns local priorities with global commitments. Initiatives such as free public transport for minors, thermal isolation in buildings, urban renewal, and climate-adaptation strategies have reduced emissions, improved air quality and strengthened social equity.

Global metropolitan challenges require shared strategies and strong alliances. The Eurometropolis of Strasbourg reaffirms its dedication to cooperation and to advancing resilient, fair and sustainable metropolitan futures.



Rasaque MANHIQUE
Mayor of Maputo

Metropolitan areas confront shared challenges that call for cooperation, knowledge exchange, and aligned metropolitan strategies. The Maputo Metropolitan Area contributes to this effort through a long-standing partnership with the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB). In this spirit, the municipality of Maputo shares with the AMB the conviction that mobility is more than an act of transportation: it is a right and an instrument of equality.

Since 2017, this collaboration has advanced five strategic pillars: strengthening data and knowledge on differentiated mobility patterns; improving safety perceptions in public space; implementing equitable urban redevelopment, including the pilot project at Maputo Central Hospital; expanding training programmes for women drivers and transport operators; and establishing

metropolitan instruments such as procedure manuals and the STOP Gender-Based Violence protocol. Public campaigns and the annual Sustainable Mobility Week reinforce these principles throughout society.

This shared work informs a metropolitan vision focused on inclusive, sustainable, and people-centred environments. Metropolitan cooperation acts as a bridge between regions and as a driver of sustainable development, cohesion, dignity, and full urban life, guiding Maputo's commitment to an integrated and collaborative metropolitan future.



Diego MIRANDA

Mayor of San José de Costa Rica

The experience of Costa Rica is an example of how peace and national consensus can shape stable metropolitan development. After the 1948 civil war, the country—situated in an area of major geopolitical interest—adopted transformative state reforms: public education, universal healthcare, the abolition of the army, and the environmental protection of more than a quarter of its territory. These decisions consolidated strong democratic institutions and a broad middle class, creating an environment of stability in a historically convulsive region.

This context highlights a key message: cities and metropolitan areas cannot thrive without peace; a reality echoed in the testimony shared about Gaza and Ramallah. Despite its institutional strength, Costa Rica postponed crucial metropolitan debates because of a tendency to

centralise service provision; and only now are structural issues such as territorial planning, housing, water management, and solid waste treatment entering the national agenda.

A renewed political generation is promoting these discussions as matters of national importance, opening dialogue with national authorities to advance coordinated solutions. The Metropolitan Area of San José is emerging as the leader of this effort, guiding the construction of a stronger metropolitan vision for the country.



Berivan OMAR
Co-Mayor of Qamishlo

Northeast Syria has endured more than fifteen years of war, terrorism, and continuous attacks that have burned homes, destroyed schools and hospitals, and reduced entire streets to rubble. In cities such as Qamishlo, Kobani, Hasakeh, and Derik, reconstruction has emerged from within the communities. Through people's councils, women's organisations and local municipalities, a democratic, gender-equal and environmentally conscious model has taken shape, grounded in dignity, survival and self-determination.

Rebuilding is understood not only as a technical task, but as the rebuilding of human life. New schools, women's centres and social cohesion centres have been opened among the ruins, and reconstruction continues despite siege conditions, poverty, and persistent attacks. Throughout Rojava, women are leading a governance

experiment that is transparent, participatory and ecological, demonstrating the capacity of communities to make life bloom again after destruction.

In this spirit, Qamishlo is presented as a city that has risen from its ashes—rebuilt by its inhabitants and led by its women—and has been put forward as a meaningful and symbolic host for a future metropolitan dialogue, as a call for peace, solidarity and shared humanity.

**Oleh VOLSKYI**

*Mayor of Zhovkva and Board Member
of the Lviv Agglomeration Association*

The Lviv Agglomeration, the first metropolitan region in Ukraine, was established one year ago and now unites 13 municipalities. It functions as a social, medical and economic hub despite the absence of national metropolitan legislation.

Work is underway with the Ukrainian parliament on a special law that could become a model for future metropolitan regions. Alongside the war, major challenges include the lack of a unified public transport system, the impacts of climate change and the need for common territorial planning. We seek to learn from global experience while sharing lessons of resilience and recovery forged in wartime.

Every day, thousands of shells, drones and missiles strike Ukrainian cities, taking many lives and targeting civilian infrastructure. Even near homes close to the Polish and NATO borders, missiles pass

weekly, yet our communities continue to stand strong against the occupier.

International solidarity remains essential. The affirmation that "only together we will win" underscores a shared commitment to dignity, democracy and the future of a free Ukraine.

**Jordi CASTELLANA**

Vice President for International Relations and Digital Metropolis at Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Metropolitan areas are the place where global agendas meet the daily lives of residents, and where these agendas must translate into inclusion, opportunities and dignity for all. This room in the Barcelona City Council, the “Saló de Cent”, with its more than seven centuries of history, offers a fitting setting to reaffirm this responsibility and to mark the tenth anniversary of our joint advocacy work within the European Metropolitan Authorities framework.

The political declaration prepared for this summit is presented as a shared foundation built through plenary debates, thematic work and informal exchanges. It highlights metropolitan areas as spaces where population concentration, essential services, mobility, cohesion, and equality converge in an urban reality that cannot be ignored or misunderstood.

This reality must be recognised in the design, management and evaluation of all international and European policies, programmes and funds, especially in the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union.

A heartfelt acknowledgement is extended to Ekrem İmamoğlu, Mayor of Istanbul, for his unfair political imprisonment; to the leaders of San José, Qamishlo and, Ramallah for their commitment to peace and gender equality; and to the Lviv Agglomeration Association for advancing institutional construction under wartime conditions. All of them embody values of resilience, human dignity and peace, and a commitment to public service in a context where, unfortunately, violence, unilateralism and anti-democratic values are increasingly gaining ground. At a moment of global uncertainty, the Summit reaffirms the capacity of metropolitan governance to protect dignity, strengthen coexistence and sustain the hope of a more just and humane future.

Official address from the European Commission



Manuel SZAPIRO

*Director of the European Commission
Representation in Barcelona*

The European Commission reiterates the centrality of metropolitan leadership in addressing Europe's structural challenges, and expresses its clear recognition of Barcelona's leadership, particularly in advancing the housing agenda. This leadership aligns with the Commission's own priorities and reflects the capacity of metropolitan authorities to translate European ambitions into specific improvements for residents.

Housing stands at the forefront of these challenges: a human right, a daily concern for local governments, and a profound social crisis affecting young people, families, older generations, essential workers and students. More than one million people—400,000 of them children—experience serious

housing problems across the EU. This urgency has accelerated the European Affordable Housing Plan, to be adopted by December 2025, with measures including state aid reform, an updated New European Bauhaus initiative and a reinforced construction strategy, designed to complement, rather than replace, national and local competences.

Short-term rental regulation, the expansion of affordable housing, and large-scale renovation are emerging as essential components of a coherent multilevel response. Beyond housing, the Commission is placing cities at the heart of European policy. Under the leadership of Executive Vice President Raffaele Fitto, a renewed Policy Agenda for Cities will serve to advance urban sustainability in Europe.

Current geopolitical tensions—including the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East—are intensifying social pressures and threatening climate and urban development objectives, reinforcing the need for stable, strong local governance. The joint declaration adopted at the summit embodies this commitment, including the shared ambition of climate neutrality by 2030 and the Pact for the Mediterranean, grounded in local ownership and bottom-up cooperation.

The path forward is guided by three structural priorities: expanding investment (public, private, and EU funding), ensuring regulatory stability and strengthening citizen engagement, skills and communication. These priorities define a metropolitan agenda for dignity, sustainability and opportunity in Europe.



EMA political meeting



The EMA Forum hosted the traditional political meeting of EMA members as well. On October 14th, 27 European metropolitan representatives gathered in the Barcelona City Council to share and discuss the metropolitan agenda related to European policies and funds.

Roundtable I

Metropolitan Dimension of European Policies and Programmes



Participants

Hélène DUVIVIER, Vice President of Metropolis of Lyon

Mar JIMÉNEZ, Commissioner for European Affairs at Barcelona City Council

Alessandra INNOCENTI, Metropolitan Councillor of the Metropolitan City of Florence

Jakub MAZUR, Deputy Mayor of Wrocław and President of Metrex

Łukasz SĘK, Vice President of the Kraków Metropolitan Area and Deputy Mayor of Kraków

Paul TANG, Board Member of the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam and Deputy Mayor of Almere

Moderated by **Marta Galceran Vercher**, Senior Researcher in the Global Cities area at CIDOB

Discussants

Anna ALEKSANDRZAK, Managing Director at Poznan Metropolitan Area

Rafael AMORIM, Executive Secretary of CIM Cávado

Najat AZOGAGH, Strategic Advisor for Public Affairs of the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam (MRA)

Martine Matre BONARJEE, Special Advisor for International Relations at County of Akershus

Xavier ESTRUCH, International Relations Officer at Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Pascal l'HUILLIER, Project Manager International Affairs at Metropolis of Lyon

Sandra JABALQUINTO, in charge of institutional relations of the International Relations Department of Barcelona City Council

Marcin KACZMAREK, District Governor of Wejherowo County

Ryszard KALKOWSKI, Mayor of the Szemud Municipality

Rosalie LÉDÉE, Advisor to the President's Office at Metropolis of Lyon

Estelle LOZACHMEUR, Chief of Cabinet in charge of SDGs at the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg

Sophie MAZET, International Service Manager at Metropolis of Lyon

Anna MAZUR, Healthy and Active Society Specialist of the Poznan Metropolitan Area

Jonas ØKLAND, Chief of Staff Akershus County

Idoia POSTIGO, General Director of Bilbao Metropoli 30

Natalia PUCHALA, Head of International Cooperation Division at Gornoslasko-Zaglebiowska Metropolia

Ignacio RADA, Project Manager and International Relations Bilbao Metropoli 30

Alexis ROIG, Professor at Pompeu Fabra University

Agata RYDZEWSKA, PhD Researcher at University of Warsaw

Ruud SCHUTHOF, Deputy Regional Director of ICLEI Europe

Xavier TIANA, General Coordinator of the General Manager Bureau at Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Daniel WRZOSZCZYK, Director of Kraków Metropolitan Area

Mireia ZAPATA, International Relations Officer of Barcelona City Council

Hélène DUVIVIER*Vice President of Metropolis of Lyon*

Europe becomes tangible in the daily activities of the metropolises, where European policies translate into concrete improvements in housing, education, and social inclusion. In Lyon, metropolitan policies align with the core European priorities: Housing First protects access to housing as a fundamental right; the expansion of social housing and action against poor living conditions advance the European pillar of social rights defence; European Social Funds (EPS+) programmes are allowing the implementation of the Cohesion Policy' goals, with 34 million euros managed between 2021 and 2027—nearly a quarter of the social inclusion budget outside welfare allowances—enabling targeted support for local projects, associations, and residents.

Metropolises amplify the impact of European policies through proximity to social crises, housing shortages, and inequalities. Direct access to EU funds enables faster, better-targeted responses than mechanisms filtered through additional national or regional layers. Concern arises where post-2027 budget proposals introduce partnership plans that could reduce municipal autonomy. Europe's strength lies in the diversity of its

territories and in metropolises acting with responsibility, efficiency, and creativity. Therefore, the message is clear and simple: trust the cities.

Mar JIMÉNEZ*Commissioner for European Affairs at Barcelona City Council*

Housing constitutes a European crisis with direct local consequences, requiring coordinated action between metropolitan areas and EU institutions. Most European metropolitan territories face speculation, financialization, short-term rentals, overtourism, and the legacy of the 2008 collapse, creating market failures where supply cannot meet basic social needs.

Cities and metropolitan areas are doing their best, but this is a European problem. The Mayors for Housing initiative has presented a proposal to the European Union, suggesting the identification of stressed housing market areas where the right to housing is no longer guaranteed. This diagnostic capacity should be accompanied by actions at the EU level. To be clear: additional funds are needed, but also a regulatory framework to protect tenants, limit housing as a speculative asset and limit or even eliminate short-term tourist rentals when required, as foreseen in Barcelona by 2028.

Mayors for Housing has estimated that 300 billion euros will be needed to overcome housing scarcity; but funding alone cannot resolve the crisis. The effectiveness of resources

depends on governance, rapid allocation, access conditions, and the removal of bureaucratic or political obstacles. Multilevel governance must ensure that financial support reaches cities quickly, including through conditionalities when national governments impede EU funds.

Addressing the housing crisis also safeguards citizens' confidence in democratic institutions and helps prevent the social unrest that could erupt from promises and expectations left unfulfilled. Substantial investment, agile financial instruments, public-private cooperation and a coherent metropolitan strategy are required to protect social cohesion, democratic stability and European competitiveness.

Alessandra INNOCENTI*Metropolitan Councillor of the Metropolitan City of Florence*

Metropolitan cities play a central role in promoting and implementing European policies, particularly in mobility, environment, housing, and shared services. The political declaration adopted at the summit reinforces the commitment to strengthening metropolitan capacities.

In Italy, the Ben Vivere 2025 proposal (Living Well 2025), presented in Florence during the National Festival of Civil Economy, advances a reorganisation of the country's territorial administration. The proposal calls for replacing 107 provinces with 50 larger functional areas capable of acting as effective intermediaries

between regions and municipalities. These areas offer an optimal scale for integrated public transport, urban planning, territorial welfare and coordinated housing policies.

The metropolitan level provides the conditions to counter speculative pressure, ensure balanced social housing interventions and distribute services according to real needs. In Florence, metropolitan housing strategies promote regeneration of existing assets, limit land consumption, and encourage reuse.

The Metropolitan City of Florence's Agenda 2030 aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on combating social exclusion, improving equality in work and education, broadening access to cultural and landscape heritage, supporting the circular economy, mitigating climate change, and ensuring sustainable mobility.

A robust metropolitan framework enables the management of territorial complexity, produces economies of scale for essential services, and supports citizen engagement in addressing major European challenges, including the housing crisis and the climate emergency.

Jakub MAZUR

Deputy Mayor of Wrocław and President of Metrex

The metropolitan dimension forms a key pillar of Europe's competitiveness, resilience, and strategic

capacity. Metropolitan regions across the continent operate under diverse institutional arrangements, yet face a shared need for legal and financial instruments that match their responsibilities. The current negotiations of the Multiannual Financial Framework create a short window of opportunity to secure instruments dedicated directly to metropolitan territories in all member states.

Metropolitan regions hold the required scale to address housing, competitiveness, dual-use infrastructures, demographic pressures, migration management and the urban–rural balance. Housing emerges as a cross-cutting challenge linked to defence readiness, labour markets, demographic decline and social cohesion. Recent migration waves, such as the reception of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees in Polish metropolitan areas, illustrate both the capacity of metropolises to respond and the scale of investment now required.

Long-term structured investment is essential. Cohesion funds, agricultural funds and currently misemployed urban instruments offer opportunities for metropolitan-level investment frameworks that extend beyond operational expenditure. Stable financing enables strategic projects with multi-decade horizons, such as major mobility systems or large-scale housing programmes.

Effective implementation depends on governance arrangements that prevent

excessive centralisation of EU resources by national authorities and allow metropolitan regions to shape and manage strategic investments. Metropolitan regions across Europe are ready to assume this role and call for instruments capable of delivering rapid, coordinated, and future-oriented action.

Łukasz SĘK

Vice President of Kraków Metropolitan Area and Deputy Mayor of Kraków

Metropolitan areas across the European Union operate under highly diverse organisational models, and this diversity influences their capacity to act, cooperate and access European instruments. In the Kraków metropolitan area, cooperation is voluntary rather than mandated by national legislation, which illustrates the need for a minimum standard of metropolitan engagement within future Cohesion Policy frameworks.

Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) have demonstrated the effectiveness of coordinated metropolitan action: more than 15,000 coal heaters have been replaced and over 30 park-and-ride facilities developed, alongside multiple additional projects. These results show that structured metropolitan cooperation can deliver measurable outcomes and provide a solid basis for strengthening the metropolitan role at EU level.

Designating metropolitan areas as intermediary bodies for European funds would ensure

greater stability and continuity, particularly in contexts where political change at national level disrupts access to financing. Strategic investments—such as the future Kraków metro—depend on long-term financial certainty, and direct EU instruments could offer the required stability for projects of metropolitan scale.

Beyond funding numbers, regulatory frameworks and fund-management procedures determine the real impact of European support. Debate among metropolitan territories should focus on effective governance, common regulations and the efficient use of EU resources, rather than competition for amounts. Cooperation on these structural principles offers the most reliable path toward stronger and more resilient metropolitan development across Europe.

Paul TANG

Board Member of the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam and Deputy Mayor of Almere

The European budget operates within structural constraints shaped by the financing architecture of recent EU instruments and by limited flexibility for major expenditure shifts. Significant changes in European priorities have historically emerged only during periods of external disruption, illustrating the need to look for the moment and the momentum when metropolitan priorities can advance. In this context, metropolitan regions require

a combination of long-term vision and tactical awareness.

Housing stands among Europe's most urgent structural challenges. Chronic underinvestment results from fiscal rules, procurement requirements, and regulatory limitations that also affect non-profit housing providers. National budgets frequently reduce public investment first, underscoring the importance of stronger scrutiny within the European Semester and within national fiscal frameworks to secure consistent, long-term funding for housing and urban infrastructure. Given the limited scope of the EU budget, metropolitan regions depend on diversified financial pathways. National expenditure, reduced financing costs through the European Investment Bank and regulatory adjustments that facilitate housing investment form part of this approach.

A further consideration arises from the rapid growth of defence expenditure across Europe. Although not designed with urban policy objectives in mind, this shift creates opportunities for pragmatic alignment. As demonstrated in the metropolitan area of Amsterdam, housing provision for defence personnel can support recruitment needs while enabling metropolitan investment in new housing stock, demonstrating how broader policy trends can be used to the metropolises' advantage.

Metropolitan regions therefore seek instruments capable of

supporting long-term, high-impact projects and reducing dependence on fragmented or politically sensitive funding channels, ensuring that metropolitan action remains effective within an evolving European landscape.

Discussant's contributions

Idoia PÓSTIGO

*General Director of Bilbao
Metropoli 30*

Metropolitan areas worldwide share structural barriers that limit their influence in the EU. Short-term policies often override long-term priorities, while regional inequalities and delayed participation constrain their impact, often relegating them to later stages of decision-making. The experience of Metropoli Bilbao highlights how to gain the influence they deserve.

A long-term perspective is crucial, as it facilitates hard-to-reach agreements and enables a win-win approach to complex and emerging challenges—like migration, inequality, and mental health—which are increasingly central to the EU agenda. These challenges also offer opportunities to boost metropolitan recognition.

The most effective pathway involves a strategic combination of political pressure, channelled through networks like the European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA), and soft-governance mechanisms to secure the leading role metropolitan areas merit in the European Union.

Xavier TIANA

*Coordinator of the General
Manager Bureau at Barcelona
Metropolitan Area*

Housing stands as a metropolitan challenge that requires daily coordination

across functional territories. Population pressures extend beyond core cities, making joint action among surrounding local governments essential. Even without formal housing competences, metropolitan authorities hold decisive powers in planning, mobility, green infrastructure, and local economic development, all directly linked to housing outcomes.

In housing policies, EU funding matters. The Barcelona Metropolitan Area, through the Recovery and Resilience Plan, has invested 100 million euros in the energy-efficient rehabilitation of 7,000 housing units in low-income neighbourhoods, supported by structured dialogue with local communities. However, regulatory barriers persist, including slow permitting processes and tax rules that penalise low-income households receiving renovation support. These constraints limit the full impact of investment, reinforcing the value of metropolitan practices developed within the EMA community.

The debate on the Multiannual Financial Framework exposes a structural gap: national governments continue to overlook metropolitan authorities in the allocation and governance of EU funds. In Catalonia, for example, only 25 million euros of the 800 million of the ERDF Operational Programme 2021-2027 reached small municipalities. Demonstrating such imbalances can strengthen the collective

effort to secure metropolitan recognition in the next European budgetary cycle. It is really important that EMA shows the European institutions our weak participation in the programming and management of Next Generation and the Cohesion Policy 2021-2027.

Ruud SCHUTHOF

*Deputy Regional Director of ICLEI
Europe*

Significant concern arises from the absence of clear metropolitan visibility in the next Multiannual Financial Framework. Ongoing discussions at the European Week of Regions and Cities and the EU Urban Forum, gathering mayors, deputy mayors and MEPs, underline that neither the recovery and resilience plans nor the proposed budget include earmarked funding or dedicated urban chapters for cities and metropolitan areas.

Local governments are also absent from the funding landscape of Horizon Europe and the competitiveness agenda, leaving core urban priorities without structured financial support. This gap creates a critical risk at a moment when metropolitan challenges intensify and when funding remains an essential enabler for effective local action. In response, a coordinated local alliance—bringing together networks such as ICLEI Europe, Eurocities, POLIS, and others—is advancing a unified call for stronger metropolitan recognition within EU financial instruments.

Rafael AMORIM*Executive Secretary of CIM Cávado*

Metropolitan and intermunicipal entities argue that the main challenge with European funds is not the amount, but the capacity for effective local application. Key principles like environmental sustainability and gender equality demand a territorial approach, making local authorities essential. This view, supported by the Mayor of Braga in the European Committee of the Regions, stresses the need for subregional authorities to have the authority to execute projects and collaborate directly

with state institutions, even in areas like defence. The US Councils of Governments working with the Department of Defence exemplifies this approach.

In Portugal, efforts are underway to boost coordination before the next Multiannual Financial Framework. Regional actors, municipal federations, and MEPs are mobilising local authorities—many of which are focused on current programs—to engage in the 2028–2034 cycle. This coordination aims to ensure local entities are prepared to influence future European policy decisions.



Roundtable II

Metropolitan Areas as Drivers of Innovation and Digital Transformation



Participants

Omar AL-RAWI, Member of the City Council of Vienna

Sonia CAMBURSANO, Councilwoman of the Metropolitan City of Turin

Jordi CASTELLANA, Vice President of International Relations and Digital Metropolis at Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Alessia PIERETTI, Metropolitan Councillor for Technological Innovation, Digital Transition, Economic Development, Tourism and Energy at Rome Metropolitan City

Māris SPRINDŽUKS, Deputy Mayor of Riga

Jordi VALLS, Deputy Mayor of Barcelona

Vesna VIDOVIC, Vice Mayor of Belgrade

Moderated by **Eva Garcia Chueca**, Head of Foresight and Strategy at Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Discussants

Mehmet Cemil ARSLAN, Secretary General of the Marmara Municipalities Union

Mikel BERRA, Project Officer of International Relations and Digital Metropolis at Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Mustafa BOZBEY, President of the Marmara Municipalities Union and Mayor of Bursa

Josep CANALS, Secretary General of MedCities

Oscar CHAMAT-NUÑEZ, Policy officer at Metropolis (Global Association of Metropolitan Areas)

Flavio CAPPELLINI, Deputy Metropolitan Mayor's Staff Member at Rome Metropolitan City

Stefano CARTA, Head of the EU Funds and Vocational Training Department at Rome Metropolitan City

Rainer GESSLER, Vice chairman Stuttgart Region Association

Sławomir GRANATOWSKI, Director of the Revitalisation Bureau of the City of Łódź

Oriol ILLA, Director of International Relations at Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Tariq KHAN, Manager Marketing Communications and Spokesperson at Schiphol Area Development Company N.V.

Roman KIZYMA, Executive Director of the Lviv Agglomeration Association

Magdalena LOSIK, Senior Designer at Pomeranian Regional Planning Office

Gianluca LUCIANI, European Office Staff Member at Rome Metropolitan City

Izabela MAŁYCHA, Head of the Social Communication Department of the city of Żukowo

Annabelle MUSUNDI, Programme Management Assistant at UN-HABITAT

Laura PAPAEO, Head of the Digital Strategies, ICT and European Funds Department at Metropolitan City of Genoa

Joan Ramon RIERA, Housing Commissioner at Barcelona City Council

Dietmar SCHULMEISTER, Public Affairs Officer at the Metropolitan Region Rheinland

Burcuhan SENER, Director of International Affairs at Marmara Municipalities Union

Janne TAMMINEN, Senior Advisor of the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region

Aleksandra TRZCIŃSKA, Acting Head of the Housing Programmes Department at the Revitalisation Bureau of the City of Łódź

Laura VALDÉS, Head of Policy at Metropolis (Global Association of Metropolitan Areas)

Marija VRACAR, Deputy Secretary of Secretariat for Information of the city of Belgrade

Mariola Anna ZMUDZIŃSKA, Mayor of Żukowo

Omar AL-RAWI

Member of the City Council of Vienna

The city of Vienna approaches digital transformation as both a technological and an ethical endeavour. As a city and state, Vienna carries extensive responsibilities—from hospitals and social housing to kindergartens and schools—which require a comprehensive and inclusive digital strategy. Since the early days of e-government more than two decades ago, Vienna has understood that digitalisation must go beyond technical modernisation to address social cohesion and fairness, ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital transition.

The Digital Agenda 2030, aligned with the Smart City Strategy, reflects this vision. Vienna does not define a “smart city” by automation or convenience, but by high quality of life, inclusion, sustainability, and ethical technology. Technology is seen as a tool for social progress, not an end itself.

The strategy rests on three pillars. Data excellence ensures that collected data is reliable, interoperable, and responsibly managed, enabling fact-based decisions and reducing inefficiencies. Digital humanism promotes fairness and human dignity, standing between

commercial exploitation and authoritarian control, and ensuring that technology serves people rather than overrides them. Open government guarantees transparency and civic participation, allowing citizens, researchers, and businesses to access and use public data for innovation and evidence-based debate.

At the same time, Vienna recognises that digital transformation is increasing pressure on energy systems, and the growth of artificial intelligence will intensify this demand. Therefore, the city prioritises energy-efficient digital infrastructure, like the new eco-certified IT headquarters that monitor consumption and use innovative cooling methods, such as outside air and groundwater. This approach reflects a broader commitment to ensure that digital progress and the energy transition advance responsibly and sustainably.

Sonia CAMBURSANO

Councilwoman of the Metropolitan City of Turin

The Metropolitan City of Turin views digital transformation as a collective process that requires coordination, cooperation, and a shared vision. Metropolitan areas bring together municipalities of very different sizes, resources, and realities—each contributing to a broader system, much like instruments in an orchestra. Yet, as in an orchestra, harmony can only emerge under effective

guidance. Conduction, rather than control, is essential to align local initiatives into a coherent metropolitan strategy and to transform multiple local efforts into a shared digital symphony.

With 312 municipalities, ranging from large cities to small mountain and valley communities, digitalisation is not a luxury but a fundamental tool for development and inclusion. The Metropolitan City has only recently begun implementing a comprehensive strategic plan to coordinate and support local administrations by promoting shared data systems, offering specialised training, and enabling access to digital tools and innovation that smaller towns could not afford on their own. This approach reflects the conviction that digital transformation must reduce inequalities, empower local governments, and serve citizens more effectively.

Two flagship initiatives illustrate this approach. The Smart School Management System integrates artificial intelligence to anticipate demographic trends and guide fair and efficient investment in education. At the same time, the digital twin of the road network, powered by data collected from sensor-equipped vehicles, enables predictive maintenance and more efficient use of public resources.

This vision of digital transformation focuses on turning complexity into clarity and technology into equity, ensuring that metropolitan innovation makes the future

visible before it arrives and guarantees that it belongs to everyone.

Jordi CASTELLANA

Vice President of International Relations and Digital Metropolis at Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Digital transformation in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area aims to ensure that citizens across municipalities of very different sizes receive public services of the same quality. Barcelona has 1.7 million residents, while smaller municipalities such as Santa Coloma de Cervelló and Cervelló have around 2,500 residents. Despite these differences, services must be equitable and accessible to all. Metropolitan authorities support smaller municipalities by helping them modernise administration, share data, train staff, and access innovations that would otherwise be unavailable.

Technology is transforming all aspects of life, including education, socialisation, and public services. Many metropolitan services use technology intensively: urban planning relies on BIM (Building Information Modeling) and GIS (Geographic Information System) platforms, while public transportation can be consulted through the SmartAMB mobility application. Artificial intelligence is applied to adjust bus line frequencies, allowing flexibility and responsiveness to real situations. Water supply, urban planning, public transportation and waste management all rely on

technological and AI tools, yet a comprehensive digital roadmap to coordinate these services is still lacking. The importance of planning is also related to combating the climate crisis, which specially impacts Catalonia in the shape of increasingly intense droughts. In this sense, new technologies can also provide the flexibility factor that is needed so that planning can meet reality in the most sustainable way.

Metropolitan areas are places where global agendas meet the daily life of citizens, and authorities are responsible for implementing them clearly and encouraging engagement. Digital transformation is therefore not only about technology, but also about ethics and data. Personalised information must be handled carefully, and technology must be applied responsibly to ensure services are fair and equitable. Ethical considerations, combined with coordinated planning and careful use of AI, are central to the metropolitan approach, making technological innovation an instrument for inclusion and public value.

Alessia PIERETTI

Metropolitan Councillor for Technological Innovation, Digital Transition, Economic Development, Tourism and Energy at Rome Metropolitan City

The Rome Metropolitan City encompasses 120 municipalities, many of them small and located in mountainous areas. A key priority has been to ensure that all municipalities, regardless of size, can access the funds

of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan dedicated to digital development. The metropolitan authority continues to support them in addressing digital gaps and reducing operational costs, allowing local governments to reinvest saved resources in other essential priorities.

One of the main initiatives in this process is the Smart Metro project, which promotes collaboration among municipalities and provides cloud-based digital services. Through shared platforms, infrastructures, and digital management tools, municipalities—particularly smaller ones—can modernise their public administration systems. This includes facilitating digital payment systems between citizens and public institutions, simplifying procedures, and improving service efficiency while optimising local spending.

Support is also directed toward schools through the Scuole Connesse (Connected Schools) project, which monitors and optimises energy and water consumption, as well as air quality, in educational buildings. These measures not only foster sustainability but also bring technological awareness to younger generations.

Recognising the gap in digital skills between younger and older citizens, the metropolitan city also trains middle and high school students to assist elderly people in using online public services. In addition, peer education activities on

responsible technology use, bullying, and cyberbullying are carried out with the participation of Olympic and World Champions—promoting ethical awareness and responsible use of artificial intelligence among the youth.

Māris SPRINDŽUKS
Deputy Mayor of Riga

The city of Riga and its metropolitan area are advancing digital transformation through a data-driven approach that redefines how municipalities manage and share information. Traditionally, data has been departmentalised—owned by separate agencies and largely inaccessible to the wider public. The current effort focuses on changing this administrative culture, making public data accessible, standardised, and usable across different sectors.

The goal is to transform municipal data into a public resource that can be reused for multiple purposes, including commercial innovation, thereby generating additional economic and social value. One of the notable projects in this effort is Geo Riga, a platform providing geographical and spatial data on properties, buildings, and city areas, aimed at supporting transparency and informed decision-making for both citizens and institutions. Another major initiative focuses on improving connectivity between national and municipal registers. This is particularly relevant for the reconstruction of Riga's public transport

system, designed to better serve the surrounding metropolitan municipalities. The new system will automatically identify passengers and link their social status to the state or municipal agency responsible for subsidising their transport.

Finally, the city is preparing for a wider application of artificial intelligence. If data becomes accessible, AI tools can generate significant value for society. Data confined to departmental use or hidden on servers cannot serve the public good, so public entities are ensuring that data is structured, accessible, and ready to be used responsibly to maximise social benefit. As artificial intelligence boosts electricity demand, it will also require renewable-energy expansion and grid upgrades as societies adapt to a new energy-intensive reality.

Jordi VALLS
Deputy Mayor of Barcelona

While digital transformation is essential for modern governance, the real challenge lies in ensuring that investment is both adequate and sustainable. Since the creation of the Municipal Institute of Informatics in 1983, the objective of the Barcelona City Council has been to modernise city management through technology. Its transformation into Barcelona Innovation and Technology (BIT) in 2025 reflected a broader ambition: not only to digitalise the administration, but to integrate innovation and

technology across all areas of public service. Nevertheless, the fundamental issue continues to be the level of financial commitment required to make this transformation effective.

Currently, 3.5 % of the municipal budget is allocated to technology, with a strategic target of 4 % by 2027, in line with comparable global cities such as London and Seattle. This represents an annual investment of 175 million euros—a significant effort amid competing public priorities such as housing, infrastructure, and social services.

This investment is justified by three key objectives: strengthening economic competitiveness and diversification, reinforcing Europe's digital and strategic autonomy, and promoting better governance through secure, data-driven, and participatory platforms such as Decidim (We Choose). Barcelona's approach also emphasises collaboration with its vibrant startup ecosystem, which acts as a driver for innovation and creative problem-solving in areas ranging from mobility to smart city solutions. Innovation can help resolve this contradiction, as smarter grids and new technologies improve efficiency and resource use, supporting metropolitan areas in meeting rising energy and water needs more sustainably.

Priority areas include cybersecurity, responsible data management, and the development of technological

partnerships that support a more sustainable and inclusive model of urban governance—ensuring that Barcelona continues to be a smart, resilient, and forward-looking city.

Vesna VIDOVIC
Vice Mayor of Belgrade

Digital transformation in Belgrade is conceived not merely as a technological process but as a way to improve quality of life, enhance access to public services, and strengthen trust between citizens and institutions. As one of the fastest-growing cities in Southeastern Europe, Belgrade views digitalisation as the foundation for sustainable and inclusive urban growth. Integrated systems are being developed to collect and analyse

data from traffic, energy, and public utilities, supporting informed and responsible decision-making.

Open digital platforms enable citizens to follow city projects, budgets, and activities transparently. A welcome service allows residents to report issues, propose solutions, and track progress in real time. Collaboration with schools, municipalities, and NGOs promotes digital literacy, ensuring that no one is left behind in the transition. Artificial intelligence is already applied in traffic management and urban planning, with strong attention to ethics, transparency, and privacy protection.

A key achievement is the installation of advanced video surveillance systems in all

elementary schools—soon to extend to preschools—capable of detecting dangerous objects in real time and alerting safety services. Investment continues in digital infrastructure, from fibre optic networks and 5G technology to future urban data centres for secure information exchange.

Among the city's most symbolic projects is the revitalisation of the former steam locomotive depot, Lozionica, now transformed into a modern hub for innovation and creative industries. As the host of Expo 2027, Belgrade aims to demonstrate how digital transformation, innovation, and collaboration can create a city that is smart, green, inclusive, and humane.

Discussant's contributions

Laura PAPALEO

Head of the Digital Strategies, ICT and European Funds Department at Metropolitan City of Genoa

The Metropolitan City of Genoa, which includes 67 municipalities with the central city accounting for approximately 70 % of the population, serves as a model for digital transformation in Italy. Smaller towns rely on the metropolitan authority for support and coordination. Genoa is advancing a three-year ICT plan that incorporates a key policy for the use of Artificial Intelligence by its employees. The objective is to encourage staff to adopt AI and other innovative technologies as instruments for boosting efficiency and public value, moving past any initial concerns. This policy is intended to be shared with the smaller municipalities to establish a consistent, sustainable metropolitan strategy.

Supported by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, capacity-building initiatives have been funded, allowing employees from the smaller municipalities to gain practical experience with AI and digital innovations. With AI already subtly integrated into services such as cybersecurity, the development of clear guidance and policies is vital. This structured approach ensures that these technologies are used responsibly to enhance operational efficiency and

strengthen the delivery of public value across the entire metropolitan area.

Oscar CHAMAT-NUÑEZ

Policy officer at Metropolis (Global Association of Metropolitan Areas)

Digital transformation, including the integration of AI, is a central challenge for the more than 160 members of Metropolis, the Global Association of Metropolitan Areas. New technologies like Gemini, Cloud, or Tropic will certainly be adopted by city administrations, just as previous tools were.

However, a critical, often neglected issue is data collection. The way cities gather and structure data fundamentally determines the questions asked and the decisions made. Collecting only basic demographics like age or gender is insufficient; data must provide a much broader and more realistic view of diverse urban life.

If cities fail to adopt this comprehensive data strategy, they risk embedding existing physical-world inequalities into their digital systems. This could result in urban solutions that disproportionately benefit a narrow demographic group, such as white men who use private cars, rather than effectively serving all citizens. This global experience underscores the urgent need to reframe and introduce new, more inclusive questions regarding metropolitan data strategies.

Josep CANALS

Secretary General of MedCities

Digitalisation offers significant opportunities for metropolitan areas to tackle both technological and environmental challenges, especially amid the climate crisis. Although technology is a vital component, effective environmental policies depend fundamentally on individual behavioural change and the collective actions by citizens.

Digital tools can help bridge social gaps, offering educational and cultural resources to rural and disadvantaged communities. They empower authorities to promote sustainable behaviours, such as reducing consumption, limiting private vehicle use, and enhancing water and energy efficiency. Simple, accessible, and targeted communication is crucial to ensure that sustainability messages reach the wider population, not just experts, but also the individuals whose daily choices impact the environment.

The core challenge for public administrations is designing digital strategies that seamlessly blend technological innovation with robust citizen engagement and clear environmental objectives. By integrating digitalisation with awareness campaigns, metropolitan authorities can effectively use technology as a powerful catalyst for achieving sustainable urban development and climate goals.

Site visits

Site visit 1: Housing



The Barcelona Metropolitan Area and the Barcelona City Council promote housing policies that support high-quality, affordable, sustainable and innovative public housing, taking into account social, environmental and gender criteria. Three housing developments were visited in the municipalities of Barcelona, Sant Just Desvern and Molins de Rei.

Site visit 2: Digital metropolis – ALBA Synchrotron and Barcelona Supercomputing Center (BSC)



This visit showcased two of the most advanced research infrastructures in Europe, highlighting the digital and technological capabilities of the metropolitan area of Barcelona. The ALBA Synchrotron is an electron accelerator that produces synchrotron light to investigate the atomic and molecular structure of matter. With 14 beamlines and over 2,500 users annually, ALBA drives innovation in biology, materials science, sustainability, and healthcare.

The BSC hosts one of Europe's most powerful supercomputers, which supports advanced research in climate science, life sciences, AI and engineering, offering vital infrastructure to address global challenges through high-performance computing and data analysis.

Closing session



Jordi CASTELLANA

Vice President of International Relations and Digital Metropolis at Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Metropolitan areas are where the century's major global challenges converge: energy, water, poverty, inequality, the climate emergency, the digital transition, and democratic resilience. These pressures materialise in daily life, concentrating in cities where 20% of the global population generates 60% of global GDP and urban emissions dominate. Sharply rising inequalities reinforce the need for coordinated metropolitan responses to improve citizen life.

The World Metropolitan Summit in Barcelona centred on this reality. As a network, EMA functions as a necessary platform to consolidate a collective metropolitan agenda and ensure political

protagonism at European and multilateral levels. The summit highlighted the capacity of metropolitan governance to address housing, digitalisation, climate adaptation, and social cohesion through shared action for tangible community improvements.

Two mechanisms emerged as essential. First, metropolitan leadership must be present at all stages of global and European agenda-setting, including the design of the post-2030 frameworks. Second, the commitments in the political declaration require concrete implementation. The imperative to move "from words to action" defines EMA's next phase, especially in securing instruments within the next Multiannual Financial Framework that translate commitments into real impact.

Jordi VALLS

Deputy Mayor of Barcelona and Vice President of Social and Economic Development at Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Metropolitan areas are central to this century's global transformations, concentrating demographic growth, economic production, and environmental pressure. The 500 most dynamic cities host one-fifth of the global population, generate 60% of global GDP, and cities over 300,000 inhabitants cause 70% of greenhouse gas emissions. With inequality sharply rising, global challenges like energy, poverty, and climate change are fundamentally materialised in the metropolitan environment.

Urbanisation creates deep structural dependencies, as cities rely on external territories for resources while concentrating knowledge and



democratic life. This duality highlights a tension between individualism and community, which demands not just efficient administration, but genuine political capacity and collective metropolitan responsibility.

Therefore, collaboration is an indispensable pillar of metropolitan governance. The congress emphasised that the power of cooperation lies in jointly developing solutions to shared challenges, such as sustainability and social cohesion. The metropolitan alliance launched in Barcelona shows the potential of coordinated action across diverse territories.

A new era of fair prosperity, true democracy, and effective sustainability hinges on strong, interconnected metropolitan areas capable of

shaping solutions together. This collective ambition is the core legacy of the meeting and the foundation for future metropolitan leadership.

Conceptual framework for the World Metropolitan Summit 2025

Author: EQU - Estratègies de Qualitat Urbana

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**THE WORLD
METROPOLITAN
SUMMIT 2025.
SHAPING
THE GLOBAL
URBAN AGENDA
BEYOND 2030**

From 14 to 17 October 2025, Barcelona will host the World Metropolitan Summit (WMS), a landmark international event marking a turning point in defining the global urban agenda as the United Nations' 2015–2030 cycle closes and the post-2030 stage begins.

Coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA) Forum, the summit will bring together mayors, metropolitan leaders and political representatives from around the world to forge a shared vision for the future of metropolitan areas.

At a time when urban challenges transcend borders and demand collective action, the WMS will serve as a strategic platform for the elevation of metropolitan governance to a cornerstone of global cooperation. Through high-level political dialogue, thematic sessions and immersive visits, participants will co-create solutions to some of the most pressing issues of our time: affordability, sustainable mobility, climate resilience, digital transformation and water management.

The need to rethink cities and metropolitan areas will be a guiding thread throughout the summit, within a context of the apparent fracturing of grand consensus on multilateral agendas including the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Such a reappraisal is essential to align metropolitan strategies with global agendas and prepare for the post-2030 framework, consolidating the role of metropolises in multilevel governance as well as the provision of global public goods.



The summit will highlight the critical role of metropolitan areas in driving inclusive, resilient and sustainable development. As engines of innovation and hubs of diversity, cities are uniquely positioned to lead the charge towards a more equitable and interconnected world. The WMS aims to catalyse this leadership by fostering mutual learning and strategic alliances that will shape international policy frameworks well beyond 2030.

In addition, the summit will showcase pioneering policies on metropolitan governance, housing and water, as well as digitalisation and artificial intelligence, and will present successful public initiatives across these themes, offering participants the opportunity to engage in in-depth policy debates and on-the-ground learning. The WMS will not only address immediate needs but also lay the foundations for long-term systemic change, ensuring that metropolitan realities continue to be places of opportunity, dignity and belonging for all.

In view of the above, this conceptual framework aims to act as an introduction to the WMS's key themes and as a tool to help specify the content that will underpin strategic alliances.



1.

MAJOR METROPOLITAN TRANSFORMA- TIONS

Metropolitan areas across the world are undergoing transformations that are reshaping their functional space and the demands of governance. This section offers a concise, policy-oriented analysis of five vectors of change—demographic, technological, infrastructural, economic and social—and explicitly connects them to alignment with global agendas and the post-2030 horizon.

The speed and scale of change intensify metropolitan transformations. This acceleration requires “evolving metropolitan management and strengthening intermunicipal collaboration” alongside strong supra-municipal governance, stable financing, and coherence with the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda.



Demographic transformations

Demographic trends are redefining the metropolitan map. Urbanisation is accelerating in Asia and Africa and stagnating or declining in some advanced metropolises, with uneven effects on services and land.

The main demographic trends affecting metropolises include:

- **Urbanisation and metropolitan growth.** A large share of population growth continues to be concentrated in large cities and their peripheries. The 200 largest metropolises increased their population by an average of 46 % between 2000 and 2014 and are expected to continue growing by around 2.5 % annually in the coming years, especially in Asia and Africa.[4] [5] This growth is driven by push factors such as agrarian crisis, conflicts and natural disasters, as well as pull factors including better employment opportunities, services and urban infrastructure.[6][7] Many metropolises in the Global South are experiencing intense rural–urban migration that expands their functional extent, whereas some metropolises in advanced economies show very low or negative growth.
- **Population ageing:** Low fertility and longer life expectancy are pushing many metropolises—especially in Eastern Europe, East Asia and North America—towards older demographic structures.[8][9] Europe is the only continent where, on average, more people die each day than are born; hence, accommodating migration to the old continent is not only an ethical obligation but also a demographic and economic necessity to sustain welfare systems and labour markets. This reality requires metropolitan planning to address migrant reception and integration, and recognition of qualifications to harness migrant talent. In the immediate future, a growing number of cities will face a sharp increase in older people, with major implications for urban infrastructure and services such as healthcare, accessible mobility and social care.[10] Conversely, regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa or parts of South Asia maintain very young populations (a “demographic dividend”) that will also age rapidly over the coming decades as health improves and

fertility falls.[11][12] This duality requires metropolises to plan for both active and ageing populations simultaneously.

- **Migration and human mobility:** Metropolises are magnets for international as well as internal migration from rural areas and small towns. Metropolitan regions usually host a higher share of immigrants than other regions; indeed, a higher percentage of metropolitan population is associated with a significantly higher share of foreign-born residents.[13][14] People move to large cities seeking economic opportunities, or fleeing conflicts, rural poverty or climate-change impacts in agrarian areas.[15][16] While this inflow contributes to growth and cultural diversity, it also creates challenges for social inclusion and increases demand for housing. In parallel, some developed metropolises are witnessing out-migration towards medium-sized cities or peri-urban areas (e.g., young families seeking affordable housing), which can moderate growth in central core areas.

Demographic transformations are expanding metropolitan areas and demand supra-municipal governance capable of ensuring housing, mobility and basic services. Faced with growth, diversity and ageing—with 30 % of urban populations in developing countries living in informal settlements—integrated management is essential for inclusive and sustainable development.

The metropolitan demographic approach must align with SDG targets 3, 10 and 11, and with frameworks for safe, orderly and regular human mobility, strengthening international cooperation.

Technological transformations

The digital revolution is remodelling metropolises, with impacts on the economy and daily life. Technological innovation is concentrated in cities, which become laboratories for applying data and automation, with examples including urban sensors, big data and online services.[18] This transformation offers enormous opportunities—greater efficiency, sustainability and participation—but also significant risks: digital divides and new forms of social exclusion,[19] mass surveillance and algorithmic bias that can erode citizen trust.[20][21]



Metropolitan administrations are central actors in this transformation: they must internalise innovation (including generative and predictive AI, workflow automation, open data and data spaces, digital identity, and digital public infrastructure), re-engineer processes, revise public procurement of algorithms, and strengthen the digital capacity of staff. This implies data governance, ethics committees, algorithmic impact assessments and public-sector innovation labs.

In response, metropolitan governments need comprehensive, people-centred digital strategies that guarantee digital rights and their protection (equity, privacy and algorithmic transparency),^{[22][23]} invest in robust and inclusive infrastructure (fibre-optic networks, 5G, public Wi-Fi),^[24] and promote training and labour-market innovation. In short, public leadership is needed to govern digital transformation in an inclusive way, ensuring that technology serves the urban common good rather than reinforcing inequalities or infringing rights.^{[22][20]}

Infrastructural transformations

Metropolises are undergoing a profound transformation of their infrastructure. They must simultaneously expand basic services for growing populations, modernise obsolete assets, and reorientate investment towards sustainability and climate resilience. In many regions, urbanisation outpaces the expansion of public transport, sanitation and safe drinking water: around 2.4 billion people currently lack access to improved sanitation, and 1.9 billion remain without access to safe drinking water.^[25] In developed countries, part of the existing infrastructure—bridges, roads and supply networks—is ageing and requires reinvestment. This deficit affects health, social cohesion and quality of life, and demands the mobilisation of large volumes of public and private finance.



Mobility is a key domain. Metropolises are moving beyond car-centric models towards integrated, clean, multimodal systems. Priorities include expanding mass transit (e.g., metro, urban rail systems and electric buses) and active mobility (e.g., cycle lanes and pedestrian zones), while promoting the transition to electric vehicles. Yet the scale of the challenge is huge: to meet global climate goals, public transport use must double by 2030,[26] since the shift to electric vehicles, while necessary, is insufficient to limit warming to 1.5°C.[27][26]

In parallel, energy and environmental infrastructure is undergoing profound changes. Metropolises are deploying smart solar, wind and storage grids that integrate distributed renewables and cleaner district heating/cooling. Green infrastructure and nature-based solutions such as green corridors, urban forests and constructed wetlands are also gaining ground, improving environmental quality while strengthening resilience to floods, heatwaves and sea-level rise. International estimates suggest that the investment gap in essential urban infrastructure could reach billions of dollars unless commitments accelerate between now and 2040.

These transformations place rising demands on metropolitan governance. Infrastructure often transcends municipal borders—a metro line or ring road, for instance, can affect multiple municipalities—, and strong cooperation mechanisms and the creation of metropolitan authorities are required to manage transport, water or waste in a unified way. Resilience criteria must be embedded across all investments and benefits distributed equitably, avoiding imbalances between well-connected neighbourhoods and under-served peripheries.

Finally, these shifts require technical and financial capacity to plan, implement and maintain complex infrastructure. Qualified personnel and access to finance are essential to ensure that modernisation contributes to economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability and improved quality of life.

Investment priorities must align with the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda, incorporating territorial equity in project selection and climate adaptation criteria.

Economic transformations

Today's metropolises are the engines of the global economy: they concentrate 60–70 % of the world's GDP and structure the main networks of production, trade and advanced services.[28][29] Urban density enables agglomeration economies that foster innovation, entrepreneurship and efficiency, bringing together firms, talent and institutions. Many metropolitan areas have thus become poles of financial, technological and creative services, as well as leading logistics and university centres.[30]

This economic centrality generates major opportunities as well as growing inequalities. Globalisation has boosted the most connected metropolises, which attract investment and prosperity, while others have been left behind. Within each metropolis, income and opportunity gaps have widened: high living costs and polarised labour markets—where automation has displaced

highly qualified, well-paid employees and precarious workers alike—erode the middle class and widen social divides.[31][32][33][34][35] Recent studies show that in more than two-thirds of metropolises, internal economic inequality has grown, often above the national average.



Housing is a field where this tension is especially visible. Economic success has fuelled the financialisation of real estate and rising property prices, making metropolitan core areas inaccessible to large segments of the population. The result is expulsion and gentrification: elite, tertiarised central areas with middle- and low-income households relocated to the more affordable peripheries. Although the COVID-19 pandemic introduced new factors—such as remote working practices and moves to lower-density environments—the structural pressure on residential markets remains one of the chief economic challenges for metropolises.

Metropolitan governance must therefore meet a dual challenge. On the one hand, global competitiveness must be maintained by promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, attracting responsible investment, strengthening strategic infrastructure and drawing in talent. On the other, inequalities must be corrected to prevent the emergence of a “two-speed” metropolis, through land-use policies and affordable housing, training and upskilling aligned with emerging sectors; support for social and circular economy in vulnerable districts; and redistributive mechanisms that guarantee resources for all the municipalities in the territory.[36] Urban planning must also promote mixed uses and incomes, avoiding extreme segregation.

In summary, economic transformation offers metropolises opportunities for prosperity but also risks social fragmentation. Only a collective strategy capable of combining competitiveness with social equity can translate metropolitan economic strength into inclusive, sustainable, long-term development.

Metropolises that set objectives and indicators consistent with SDGs 8, 9, 10 and 11 territories can steer their economic policy towards shared prosperity.

Social transformations

Twenty-first century metropolises are the stage for deep social transformations that affect coexistence, values and urban needs. A prominent feature of these metropolises is their growing cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. International migration and mobility have turned many metropolitan areas into multicultural mosaics, enriching creativity, gastronomy and the arts, while posing significant challenges for cohesion and coexistence. Managing this diversity requires inclusive policies and sensitive public services, as well as determined action against discrimination and segregation.

At the same time, social and territorial inequalities have increased. In numerous metropolises, neighbourhoods with high-quality services and opportunities coexist alongside vulnerable areas with chronic deficits in education, health or facilities. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) estimates that over one billion people still live in informal settlements or substandard housing and, despite relative progress, the absolute figure continues to grow with urbanisation. This fragmentation generates intergenerational poverty, hinders social mobility and can translate into high youth unemployment, insecurity and distrust in institutions.

Urban value systems and citizen demands are evolving. New generations, more educated and digitally connected, demand greater transparency, participation and effective responses to global problems such as the climate crisis or gender equality. In recent years, metropolises have been the stage for major social movements—on issues such as inequality, housing rights, racial justice and climate action—which have pressured local and metropolitan governments into rethinking governance beyond purely technocratic models.



Metropolitan governance must respond in two directions. First, by ensuring equity and cohesion through redistributive policies such as priority investment in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, affordable housing, accessible public transport and guaranteed social services. This requires an integrated metropolitan vision capable of tackling challenges that cross municipal borders, such as residential segregation or insecurity. Second, by strengthening citizen participation and the democratic legitimacy of metropolitan institutions, which are often not very visible, through inclusive metropolitan councils, participatory budgeting or broad social compacts.

Finally, it is essential to consider the impact of technological and climate change on social transformations. Public policy must facilitate digital capacity-building to prevent the emergence of new divides, while establishing resilience plans for climate emergencies that protect vulnerable groups. Social cohesion is both a goal and a precondition: an inclusive metropolis is more just and liveable, while community trust strengthens the capacity to respond to crises.

In conclusion, social transformations require the placing of inclusion, justice and participation at the centre of the metropolitan agenda. Only those metropolises that succeed in turning diversity into a strength and reducing social fractures will be able to guarantee a sustainable and prosperous future in which economic and technological progress translates into well-being for the majority. Metropolitan social cohesion must align with SDGs 1, 5, 10, 11 and 16, incorporating digital capacity to avoid new divides and resilience plans that especially protect vulnerable populations.

2.

METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE

Diagnosis of the main challenges

In order to tackle the major challenges they face, metropolitan areas must equip themselves with a governance system capable of managing the interdependencies among the different actors involved.

Such a governance system must necessarily be open and flexible to address the following identified challenges:

- **There are many more metropolitan realities than metropolitan systems of government.** Functional urban areas—comprising a central municipality or city and the surrounding municipalities that make up its functional environment—are numerous, making it impossible to establish political-administrative organisations for them all. Nonetheless, it is evident that the most significant of these areas should have a governance system, whether institutionalised or based on cooperation between public and private actors.

A governance system must be able to respond to the territory's specific challenges and be suited to the institutional context of the administrative architecture of the state in which it is embedded.

- **Urban and metropolitan territories establish changing interdependencies among metropolitan municipalities within their functional environment.**

Demographic, social, economic, technological and infrastructural transformations—and the new challenges they bring—generate shifts in the interdependencies among metropolitan municipalities and in the territorial organisation within which they operate.

- **The executive or management offices of metropolitan governments and sectoral agencies are often dissatisfied with the territorial scope, competences and financing of their systems of governance.**^{[41][42]} As a result of the continued expansion of metropolitan areas worldwide, political and professional leaders perceive metropolitan governments as lacking in sufficient service competences, appropriate territorial scope, adequate financing and the necessary tax responsibilities to ensure social balance across metropolitan territory.
- **In a global economy and society, metropolitan areas are the nodal points.** In an increasingly global economy and society—where flows of information, knowledge, people and goods traverse ever larger and more differentiated spaces, creating a planet that is more interdependent—metropolitan areas operate as nodal points that develop and organise these flows.

Accordingly, a country's quality of life and its leadership role in economic, social and cultural spheres depends increasingly on the number of metropolitan cities that are articulated and play a leading role in the macro-regional and international organisation of global flows.

- **It is not territories that define strategies, but rather strategies that define territory.** Traditional government logic assumes that each population centre within a territory requires a political and administrative body for its governance, and that public strategies and policies should be defined according to the administrative territory. If a broader strategy is needed, another administration should be created or a higher-level administration should assume it.

However, in more complex and interactive territories, a different perspective is required: to ensure the quality of life of a metropolitan population, action must be taken through strategies that define fields of intervention across different territorial scales. For example, ensuring compulsory mobility may require action at the metropolitan level, disaster-risk reduction at the regional level, and sustainable tourism management at the macro-regional level, while certain social services are best delivered at the neighbourhood level.

In conclusion, an urban and metropolitan government will need to act through strategies and public policies at different territorial scales if it is to meet the challenges of its population. Today, addressing urban and metropolitan challenges requires agreements and commitments to develop strategies and projects among a plurality of administrations and other actors across different territorial levels.

- **Difficulties in applying the principle of subsidiarity and in creating institutionalised metropolitan areas vary across countries.** Avoiding the proliferation of institutional tiers and competition between regional and metropolitan governments often underpins these difficulties. Failure to apply the subsidiarity principle typically results in weaker governance and management capacity in metropolitan areas.

- **The variety of metropolitan governance systems reflects their complexity.** As a result of the complexity of these territorial challenges, different metropolitan areas are adopting many different forms of governance to meet metropolitan challenges. Moreover, even within a single country we can find multiple forms that include, according to level of institutionalisation, metropolitan governments; sectoral agencies for metropolitan services; metropolitan services dependent on a federal or state administration; and municipal cooperation services such as consortia and joint authorities (or similar bodies).

Alongside these institutionalised formulae, inter-municipal and public–private collaboration mechanisms are being developed based on shared strategies and projects, as well as collaboration spaces or associations of municipal governments with private and social initiatives. These recent experiences arise in response to the difficulties of institutionalising metropolises.



Possible action criteria

Based on the identified challenges, the following action criteria are recommended:

- **Explore horizontal collaboration systems: inter-municipal and public–private.** Analyse, evaluate and promote the inter-municipal and public–private collaboration formulae currently being developed, with the aim of endowing them with greater management capacity and legal certainty.
- **Reinforce and promote complementary forms of collaborative governance within metropolitan governments.** Under the leadership of existing metropolitan governments, deploy non-institutionalised collaboration among local governments and public and private actors, thereby extending collaborative metropolitan governance to currently existing metropolitan areas through strategic projects that lie beyond the direct competences of metropolitan service portfolios.
- **In decentralised states, define central and regional governments as enablers of metropolitan governance.** Federal and decentralised states should promote flexible metropolitan governance spaces, whether institutional or based on cooperation, in their metropolitan areas.

Territorial articulation should strengthen the urban zones within their territory and ensure that all municipalities are integrated into the various metropolitan areas. Institutional articulation should be seen as an opportunity, not as a political or competence conflict among territorial governments.

- **Multilevel and horizontal governance: the keys to metropolitan governance.** Combining intergovernmental governance with the management of interdependencies across territorial tiers is a necessary condition for good governance of metropolitan areas.
- **Develop metropolitan agendas for 2030 and 2050.** Deployment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in metropolitan cities is advisable so that new modes of collaborative metropolitan governance can be established, based on a shared strategy and high-consensus structuring projects.

Establishing urban agendas for 2030 and 2050 is necessary but insufficient, as such agendas often fail to take into account the interactions of the wider metropolitan environments. It will therefore be necessary to encourage international organisations, in particular UN-Habitat, to advance dedicated metropolitan agendas.

- **Regulatory flexibility to adapt metropolitan governments: composition, competences and services, and financing.** The institutionalisation of metropolitan governance in a metropolitan government should be designed with flexibility so that it can readily adapt to changes in territorial extent and the complexity of sustainable development within its territory.
- **Establish an efficient, consolidated and equitable tax system.** To address social inequalities and territorial imbalances, redistributive policies implemented by institutionalised metropolitan governments are crucial to counter the unequal distribution of resources among metropolitan municipalities.
- **Strengthen international relations and alliances among metropolitan areas and their role as interlocutors with global actors.** Institutionalised metropolitan areas, as well as those with soft governance or cooperation-based spaces, should build strong international relations and alliances in order to learn and derive effective action criteria from good and bad practices in metropolitan governance and service operation. And, as nodal points in an increasingly global economy and society, contribute to the articulation of an international system of metropolitan cities better aligned with sustainable development.

Given their importance in the global economy and society, the role of institutionalised metropolitan areas as interlocutors with international bodies—such as the European Union (EU), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the United Nations (UN) and others—is key to contributing to global governance.

In this sphere, networks such as European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA) are noteworthy: launched in 2015 by the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB), EMA has become a platform for political dialogue among metropolises, European institutions and national governments.

3.

HOUSING IN METROPOLITAN TERRITORIES

Diagnosis of the main challenges

The international community has formally recognised the importance of addressing these challenges: SDG 11.1 sets the target that “by 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums”.^[17] To achieve this goal in metropolitan territories requires profound transformations in housing policy across all levels of government. Recent global initiatives such as the Mayors for Housing network are worthy of mention in this regard, as they foster municipal commitments to guarantee the right to housing.



- Metropolitan expansion places housing at the heart of urban challenges.** Rapid urbanisation complicates planning and equitable access to basic services, exposing the gap between needs and provision capacity. According to the United Nations, nearly 96,000 homes would need to be built each day until 2030 to meet global needs,^[3] a stark illustration of the structural deficit. Meanwhile, in many metropolises, the saturation of developable land exacerbates tensions. In developing countries, this pressure stems mainly from accelerated urban growth, whereas in developed countries it is driven primarily by changing household structures (smaller households and more single-person and single-parent households).
- Insufficient access and supply.** The supply of housing is failing to keep pace with urban growth: by 2030, nearly 60 % of the world’s population will live in cities, and around 3 billion people will require new housing and basic urban infrastructure.^[2] Meeting this demand would require the construction of the above-mentioned 96,000 units per day until 2030.^[3]
- Affordability and cost crisis.** Purchase and rental prices have risen by over 40 % in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in the last decade, significantly surpassing incomes,^[4] while growing numbers of households devote more than 30 % (even over 40 % for vulnerable households) of their income to housing.^[5] Rising financing costs and investor concentration aggravate the problem,^[5] while financialisation treats housing as a speculative asset and fuels price escalation in large cities.^[14]

- **Poor quality and informal housing.** More than 1.1 billion people live in informal settlements or inadequate housing,[6] and in absolute terms the figure continues to grow; by 2050, it could exceed 3 billion.[7] Lack of water, sanitation, quality materials and secure tenure increases vulnerability to disasters and health crises. New housing developments are also often characterised by isolation from services, low connectivity and sprawling patterns that accentuate territorial segregation.
- **Spatial segregation and socio-economic polarisation.** Metropolises exhibit income inequalities above national averages[8] and stark territorial divides. In Europe, the gap in housing expenditure between capitals and cheaper regions can exceed seven percentage points of income,[9] fuelling cycles of residential segregation.
- **Gentrification and displacement.** The revaluation of working-class neighbourhoods and market pressures drive the expulsion of lower-income residents to the peripheries, a widespread phenomenon aggravated by ineffective regulation of rents and large real-estate actors.[10]
- **Neighbourhood impoverishment.** Poverty and social exclusion tend to be concentrated in specific municipalities and neighbourhoods within the metropolis, and are closely linked to gentrification processes.
- **Residential vulnerability and homelessness.** Tenure insecurity, evictions and homelessness have become chronic: in OECD countries, over 2 million people are homeless,[11] while conflicts and climate risks increase forced displacement towards cities, further straining housing systems.[12]
- **Housing and uneven urban dynamics.** Reduced public investment in social housing has diminished affordable housing stock,[13] while financialisation and global capital drive projects that are disconnected from local needs. [14] Without redistribution or balanced planning, patterns of “winners and losers” consolidate within the metropolis.[15][16]

Against this backdrop, SDG 11.1 sets a clear horizon: by 2030, guarantee adequate, safe and affordable housing and upgrade slums. Profound reform and a paradigm shift that frames housing as a right and a pillar of social cohesion and metropolitan sustainability are required to achieve this goal. In this regard, the different tiers of government play an equally important role: although the challenge has a clear metropolitan dimension, housing competences often lie with states or other administrations, calling for coordination mechanisms and multilevel governance.

Possible action criteria

Given the magnitude of the challenge, a comprehensive, metropolitan approach is required to guarantee the right to housing and to inclusive cities. Action is oriented around guiding principles, axes of intervention, and general lines applicable to different contexts.

- **Place housing at the centre as a human right that is above speculative logic.** Align land, urban planning, taxation and finance with the social interest.[14] Prioritise inclusion and equity, paying attention to vulnerable groups and territorial divides under the principle of “leave no one behind”.

Integrate sustainability and resilience (e.g., energy efficiency, climate adaptation and connection to sustainable transport). Promote cooperative multilevel governance and public–private–community collaboration to ensure coherence of actions.[12]

- **Strengthen metropolitan capacity to align housing with land, mobility and economic development.** Plan for the long term (demography, ageing) and reserve well-connected land for affordable housing, limiting dispersed expansion and fostering polycentricity. Harmonise regulations (land use, standards and taxation) to avoid internal competition and distribute responsibilities for affordable housing. Metropolitan agencies and authorities can coordinate planning within national frameworks that incentivise cooperation and integration with infrastructure and facilities.[19] It is worthy of note that the metropolitan dimension in housing policies is, in most contexts, practically non-existent, thus reinforcing the need to build specific instruments and give visibility to this scale of government.
- **Increase the supply of affordable, adequate housing.** Revive the public and social housing stock (social and affordable rental) and mobilise vacant housing. Promote inclusionary zoning (affordable quotas in new builds and major retrofits), incentives and public–private partnerships with safeguards for the public interest. Support cooperatives and community land trusts to ensure permanent affordability. Facilitate credit for low-income and informal-economy households (e.g., microcredit, guarantees and funds).[20] Reduce costs through affordable serviced land, streamlined permits and industrialised construction systems; require quality, energy efficiency and universal accessibility.[21][22] Objective: sustainably increase the number of new units to approach the globally required pace.[3]
- **Regenerate deprived areas and integrate informal housing.** Prioritise in-situ upgrading over evictions: water, sanitation, energy, access and basic facilities, with gradual regularisation of tenure. Retrofit existing public and private stock while avoiding “green gentrification” and preserving neighbourhood affordability. Integrate informal neighbourhoods into the urban network and the formal market with instruments that ensure legal security. All of this should be done with community participation to legitimise and sustain interventions, aligned with SDG 11.1 on upgrading precarious settlements.[17]
- **Social cohesion against segregation and displacement.** Promote socio-economic and land-use mix in plans and projects; apply affordable quotas and diverse typologies to avoid residential monocultures. Rebalance investment (e.g., transport, green areas, schools and safety) in under-served neighbourhoods to break cycles of depreciation. Curb gentrification and displacement through rent regulation in stressed zones, control of short-term tourist rentals, limits on large landlords and anti-eviction protections. Create monitoring units to detect speculative operations and activate pre-emption and first refusal rights or support to cooperatives to preserve affordability.[16]
- **Protect tenure security and support vulnerable groups.** Strengthen the legal framework for the right to housing through metropolitan ombudspersons and legal assistance. Stabilise rents through lease terms, regulated increases and targeted subsidies, and provide mediation or moratoria in cases of

mortgage foreclosure. Deploy Housing First (a model that prioritises immediate, stable access to housing as the starting point for social inclusion) and provide dignified rehousing for people experiencing homelessness; provide transitional housing for refugees, survivors of violence, young people, older people, etc.[23] Prepare emergency responses to climatic or social crises with temporary accommodation and activation protocols.

- **Regulate the market and manage land in the public interest.** Apply corrective taxation to, for example, vacant housing and speculative retention, and capture land-value uplift to finance affordability. Create land banks and reserves (e.g., acquisitions, surface rights and community land funds) to channel scarce land to social aims. Promote transparency (e.g., metropolitan observatory of prices, transactions and ownership) and early-warning systems. Consider structural legal tools such as affordable quotas in master planning, and declaring housing a strategic good, to anchor public policy.[16]
- **Mobilise resources and foster multilevel collaboration.** Provide the metropolitan scale with stable financing and clear competences; treat housing as critical social infrastructure. Activate innovative sources, such as metropolitan bonds, green funds and impact investment, with public-private partnerships under public control and audit. Empower the third sector and communities (cooperatives, non-governmental organisations and residents) in management and needs detection. Promote inter-metropolitan and international cooperation—Metropolis, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), UN-Habitat, OECD—to share methodologies and projects aligned with SDG 11.1 and the New Urban Agenda.[25][26] Moreover, consider whether funds should be not only metropolitan in scope, but respond to the housing challenge at all territorial levels. This includes the role of multilateral development banks, bilateral cooperation, country networks and the EU, which can provide resources and stable support frameworks.

4.

WATER: SANITATION, SUPPLY, TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Water management has consolidated itself as one of the top priorities on the global agenda. SDG 6 of the 2030 Agenda sets the goal of ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, while the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement underscore its importance for climate resilience and social cohesion. At the same time, the Mediterranean region aptly illustrates the complexity of this challenge: while among the areas most exposed to recurrent droughts and structural water stress, it also has a high concentration of urban density and is subject to the pressures of tourism. The Mediterranean context highlights the urgency of addressing water governance through a metropolitan and multilevel lens.

Diagnosis of the main challenges

- **Global water scarcity and rising demand.** Pressure on water resources is increasing: a 40 % global shortfall is projected by 2030, and more than 40 % of the population already lives in water-stressed areas. By 2040, one in four

children will live in areas of extreme scarcity.[1][2] Without appropriate management, this tension could undermine development and fuel conflict.

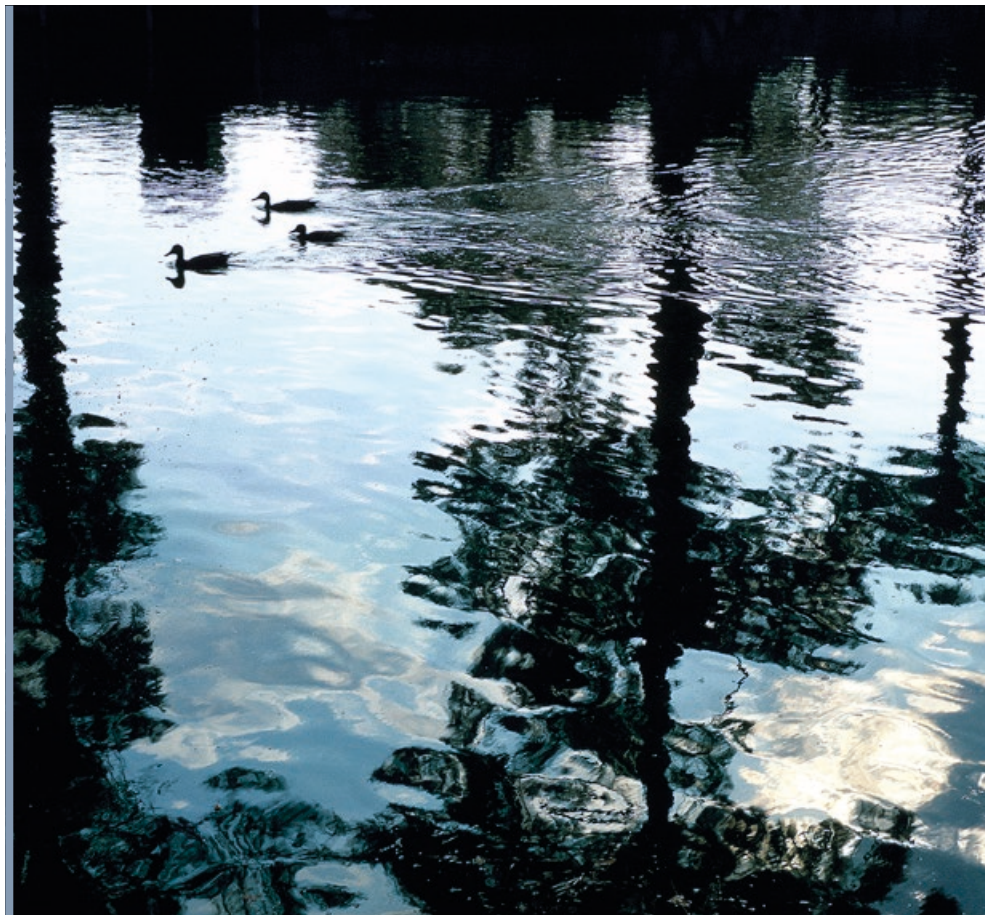
- **Territorial inequalities and unequal access.** In many metropolises, especially in the Global South, poorer populations live in precarious settlements without safe water or sanitation, and billions still lack safely managed services; vulnerable groups suffer discrimination in access.[3][4][5] This translates into neighbourhoods with insufficient supply, with impacts on public health and social cohesion.
- **Climate-change vulnerability: droughts and floods.** Global warming intensifies the water cycle, leading to longer droughts and extreme rainfall.[6] Water-related disasters already account for around 70% of disaster-related deaths,[7] and monsoon basins, deltas and densely populated coastal zones are particularly vulnerable.[8] Hydrological uncertainty puts urban system resilience to the test.
- **Water pollution and over-extraction of aquifers.** In many cities, untreated wastewater degrades rivers and ecosystems.[9] Worldwide, aquifers suffer over-abstraction and pollution, causing falling water tables, saline intrusion and land subsidence.[10] Chemical and biological agents compromise the clean water supply and limit sustainable availability.
- **Fragmented governance and institutional constraints.** Management is often fragmented: multiple entities share competences with little metropolitan coordination.[11] The same logic appears internationally, with 276 transboundary river basins.[12] Weak metropolitan frameworks, unreliable data and limited technical capacity hinder integrated planning that balances social, economic and environmental needs.[13]

Possible action criteria

- **Human right to water and equity in access.** Recognise water as a human right and guarantee affordable access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all, prioritising vulnerable groups and eliminating territorial inequalities. Treat access as a basic public good with institutional accountability.[4][14][5]
- **Fair and affordable tariffs.** Balance financial sustainability and social justice with progressive structures (e.g., a basic lifeline tariff and increasing block tariffs), support for vulnerable households, clear definitions of affordability, and transparent tariffs that incentivise efficient use.[15][16]
- **Investment in resilient and sustainable infrastructure.** Renew and expand networks and sanitation, reduce losses, and deploy climate-resilient infrastructure (e.g., reservoirs, stormwater systems, coastal protection and desalination where appropriate). Combine grey and green solutions (e.g., wetlands, floodplains and aquifer recharge) to boost resilience and avoid future costs.[17]
- **Cooperative governance and metropolitan integration.** Create stable cooperation mechanisms (e.g., consortia, metropolitan agencies) to manage the water cycle at basin and region scale, with vertical coordination among

state, regional and local actors. Strengthen integrated governance to overcome fragmentation and ensure territorial justice.[18][11]

- **Circularity and water reuse.** Embrace the circular economy: reuse of reclaimed water (for irrigation, industrial uses, aquifer recharge and indirect drinking water reuse), rainwater harvesting, viable desalination, and grey-water regeneration. Place water and sanitation at the heart of urban circularity to meet climate and service objectives.[19]
- **Protection of sources and aquatic ecosystems.** Conserve rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers through headwater forests, discharge control and land-use planning in recharge areas. Prioritise prevention through monitoring, contaminant regulation and strong institutions; and maintain ecological flows and healthy ecosystems as the basis of water security.[20][21]
- **Demand management and water efficiency.** Implement Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), reduce network leakage, promote saving technologies, in industry and urban agriculture, and through public campaigns to moderate consumption. Use individual metering and tariffs that discourage waste; promote compact urbanism and native landscaping to reduce needs.[23][24][25]
- **Integration with urban and environmental policies.** Coordinate water with land use, housing, waste, energy and climate planning (avoid flood-prone areas, green corridors, etc.). Include the water dimension in public health and territorial equity; align with the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda.[26]



5.

DIGITALISATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN METROPOLITAN AREAS



Diagnosis of the main challenges

- **Transformation: opportunities and risks.** Digitalisation is rapidly redefining urban life: due to their density and activity, metropolises act as laboratories of disruption with automated services, massive data production, and new forms of participation.[1][2] This opens up significant opportunities but requires adequate regulatory and policy frameworks to avoid social and institutional risks.[3]
- **Digital divide and inequality.** Without connectivity, devices or skills, people and neighbourhoods are excluded from basic rights such as education, work and services.[4] The divide is most acute among vulnerable groups and in peripheral urban areas, reinforcing territorial inequalities.[5][6] In 2023, 2.6 billion people still lacked access to the Internet—a clear indicator of the urgency to act.[7]
- **Technological and data sovereignty.** The proliferation of sensors generates large volumes of personal data that, without regulation, can violate the privacy and rights of individual citizens.[8] The hegemony of global platforms in urban services limits local decision-making capacity, hence many metropolises promote technological sovereignty (open software and public leadership), data sovereignty (privacy and control) and transparency (audits and democratic oversight).[9]
- **Artificial intelligence: potential and risks.** Artificial intelligence (AI) can optimise services and planning (e.g., mobility, energy). However, if it is trained on biased data it can perpetuate discrimination and reduce transparency in sensitive domains such as social benefits, surveillance, and public-sector human resources.[10][11] Unequal technical capacities among metropolises may open up a new urban digital divide; without oversight, traceability and redress mechanisms, public trust may diminish.[12][13]
- **Institutional capacity.** Innovation advances more rapidly than legal frameworks, and many administrations act in a fragmented manner (e.g., smart city, e-government, open data) without integral digital rights.[14][15] It is necessary to strengthen technical, financial and regulatory capacity—with proactive leadership, multilevel coordination and people at the centre—in order to render digitalisation and AI equitable and inclusive.[16][17]

Possible action criteria

To address digital challenges, metropolises need principles and lines of action that ensure an inclusive, ethical and sovereign transformation.

- **Guarantee digital rights and technological sovereignty.** Metropolises must recognise digital rights as human rights in the urban environment.[18] This implies local charters that guarantee universal connectivity, privacy, and citizen control over data. Networks such as the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights establish common principles of equity, inclusion and transparency. [19] Metropolitan areas can reinforce technological sovereignty with free and open software, open standards, and data as a common good, reducing dependence on large platforms and orienting digitalisation towards the public interest.[15]
- **Establish ethical, transparent algorithmic governance.** The use of AI and big data in public services must be fair, auditable, and non-discriminatory. Impact assessments are needed prior to deploying automated systems, and public registries of algorithms should be maintained to ensure transparency.[20] Principles of “responsible AI” require safety, traceability, and privacy protection (i.e., privacy by design, anonymisation),[21] as well as oversight by ethics bodies or digital rights offices.[22] Automated decisions should not replace human deliberation and accountability.
- **Invest in inclusive public digital infrastructure.** Digital connectivity must be treated as basic infrastructure. Metropolises should ensure fibre-optic and 5G networks across the entire territory, including peripheries and rural areas.[23][24] This should be complemented with affordable tariffs, public Wi-Fi, and digital skills programmes.[25][26] Investment is also needed in public digital platforms and open data (e.g., integrated e-government, secure digital identity, Internet of Things laboratories) that strengthen local sovereignty and foster community innovation.[22] Given the high cost, it will be necessary to build public–private partnerships and mobilise international finance to achieve universal Internet access by 2030.[27]
- **Strengthen institutional capacity and the governance of public-sector innovation.** Metropolises should invest in talent and digital training within the administration, creating teams with expertise in data, AI, cybersecurity, and innovation. Roles such as chief digital officers and specialised units for data governance or AI ethics provide leadership.[28] Internal coordination should also be reinforced and open-innovation spaces established (laboratories, advisory councils and citizen consultations) to legitimise policies.[28][22] Cooperation among metropolises and with other tiers of government is essential to share resources and define a coherent regulatory framework.[30] Ultimately, sound digital governance rests on transparency, participation and accountability.[29][31]

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, metropolitan cities are the nodal points—demographic, economic, social, and environmental—upon which an increasingly interconnected planet rests.

The interdependent nature of contemporary problems demands a holistic approach. Metropolitan areas, with their complex network of government, businesses, and civil society, have the capacity to pilot innovation and sustainability projects at a scale that other territorial entities cannot match.

The way metropolitan challenges are addressed will determine the future of humanity. The deployment of agile, flexible and efficient forms of metropolitan governance to tackle the issues examined at this summit—water, housing, and the management of digitalisation, together with economic and territorial development, mobility, the waste cycle, pollution, and the reduction of social inequalities and territorial imbalances—is an inescapable requirement for the advancement of sustainable development.

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