Future urban challenges and cities' capacities:

How can EU best support cities in times of uncertainty and change?

Wednesday, 30 September 2026

#URBACTfest

urbact.eu/city-festival-2026

URBACT CITY FESTIVAL
29-30 September 2026 - Nicosia, Cyprus

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Δήμος Λευκωσίας
Nicosia Municipality

How does the EU support cities?

A wide range of possibilities – highlight on 3 initiatives

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About URBACT

- European Territorial **Cooperation** programme (Interreg) for cities
- **525 partner cities** in 66 networks
- Promoting integrated and sustainable urban development
- Budget **EUR 110 million** (2021-2027)
- Shared management (36 countries)

Support for cities

- **Networking and transnational collaboration**
- Transferring good practices & innovative approaches
- **Local participation and impact** (URBACT Local Groups)
- Building capacity and developing knowledge

About EUI

- **Coherent and comprehensive offer** to EU cities in support of Sustainable Urban Development through Cohesion policy
- Budget **EUR 395m**
- Managed by the European Commission under **indirect management** by the Haut-de-France Region.
- **1850 cities supported** across 2 strands
- **Coordination and collaboration** with other initiatives and programmes
- Delivery of first activities **EU Agenda for Cities**

Support for cities

- Innovative actions
- Capacity building
- Knowledge activities
- Urban Agenda EU

About ESPON

- **European Territorial Cooperation** programme (INTERREG), in service for 20 years
- 60 M EUR overall budget in 2021-2027, 31 countries
- Much **demand-driven** (evidence and knowledge gaps)
- No grants to public authorities but **policy support through territorial research and knowledge transfer** (via procured expertise or in-house)
- **No need for co-funding** by the recipients (but time and interest)
- Hosted by Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg
- Daily operations by ESPON EGTC

Support for cities

- **Granular research for cities, metro areas and FUAs** (LAU, if data available)
- Policy events **translating research to local policy contexts**
- Close dialogue with umbrella networks for cities and regions
- Support to TA 2030 pilot actions (with UA partnerships)

How do we work together?

Successful collaboration across programmes

Programmes working hand in hand for cities

Driving innovation – exchanging experience – developing knowledge

- Innovative actions & Innovation Transfer Networks
- EU City and Policy labs
- PORTICO knowledge platform
- National URBACT Points & Urban Contact Points, ESPON Contact Points
- Capacity building tools and methods
- Enlargement
- Research & urban foresight, dedicated territorial analyses
- Territorial Impact Assessment
- Best practices and peer learning
- Communication and dissemination activities







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Future urban challenges and cities' capacities

What is ahead?
How do we prepare?

ESPON – Cities' future needs and challenges

- Bracing for global trends and emerging risks (preparedness, resilience)
- Benchmarking (how do I fare against my peers?)
- Effective multi-level governance and territorial cooperation (functional area approach)
- Building capacities for absorption of policy advise

Ambition/challenge for the future

- Drive development that combines competitiveness and cohesion
- How to ensure that no territory is left behind – that cities of all sizes, types and areas are addressed?

EUI – Cities' future needs and challenges

- Responding to global challenges
  - Security – Energy – Climate – Digital – Competitiveness and innovation…
- Responding to local needs
  - Data collection and analysis, strategic planning – Citizen engagement and multi-stakeholder governance – Access to and combining of public funding sources…

Ambition/challenge for the future

- Ensure global transitions are using the full potential of local communities – listen to cities to empower them
- How to ensure that grass-roots and local insights help shape higher-level policies?

URBACT – Cities' future needs and challenges

- Growing complexity of multiple and intertwined issues
- Gowing uncertainties and global threats – with local impact (climate change, geopolitics, economy, energy, health, democracy)
- Institutional capacity

Ambition/challenge for the future

- Address the new needs of cities across Europe and ensure a coherent approach
- How to make more use of partnerships with other programmes?

Future of EU funding for cities

Panellists

Marcos ROS SEMPERE (online)
Member of European Parliament

Karen VAN DANTZIG
Urban Envoy, Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Kingdom of The Netherlands

Hugo SOBRAL (online)
Director-General at Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy

Kieran MCCARTHY
Member of Committee of the Regions, Member of Cork City Council

Elena-Alexandra CALISTRU
Member of European Economic and Social Committee