

METROPOLITAN PERSPECTIVE ON WELL-BEING

Balancing society, economy and ecology

ANNUAL FORUM REPORT

AMSTERDAM 2024

20-21 November 2024

EUROPEAN
METROPOLITAN
AUTHORITIES





Drafting

Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB)

Edition and Design

Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB)

Printed in Barcelona, May 2025

DL: B 11863-2025

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Summary

Foreword

Metropolitan Region Amsterdam Political Declaration

EMA Amsterdam 2024

Welcome and greetings	13
Official address from the EU institutions	16
Keynote speech: Guiding compass in implementing 'broad prosperity'	17
Panel discussion on well-being	18
Roundtable I – Economy	24
Roundtable II – Society	28
Roundtable III – Healthy Environment	32
Wrap up of the interactive roundtables by the moderators	36
Final notes from members of the European Parliament	37
Closure	40

Foreword

We are pleased to share the results of the 9th European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA) Forum, which was jointly organised with the Metropolitan Region Amsterdam (MRA) and took place on 20-21 November 2024 in Zaanstad.

The meeting brought together 23 mayors, presidents, vice presidents and representatives from major European metropolises. The goal was to advocate for a metropolitan perspective at the European level and to discuss policies that promote the well-being of citizens in our metropolitan areas.

This year's meeting occurred after the European elections, and we welcomed members of the European Parliament and the European Commission. Their presence underscored the importance of the metropolitan level in designing and implementing European policies and funding.

The main theme of this year's conference was "Metropolitan perspectives on well-being." The focus was on balancing economic development, social well-being and ecology from a metropolitan viewpoint. While metropolises are home to the majority of a country's population, economic activity, businesses and innovation, they also face significant implementation challenges and social inequalities.

The political declaration resulting from the meeting reiterates the call for greater support and cooperation in several areas, outlined in a list of 10 strategic priorities for the coming years: (1) strategic coordination with EU institutions; (2) affordable and sustainable housing; (3) accelerating the energy transition; (4) clean industry and a healthier living environment; (5) boosting productivity through innovation, lifelong learning and social fairness; (6) scaling up and prioritising the circular economy; (7) sustainable mobility; (8) nature restoration, biodiversity protection and food security; (9) digitalisation as a key factor for competitiveness and inclusivity; (10) Water as precondition for urban quality of life.

Finally, the participants also agreed that the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB) will host the EMA 2025 in Barcelona, coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the forum.

This publication, which includes the political declaration and the main statements of the participants during the EMA Forum in Amsterdam, will also serve as a solid contribution to establishing a metropolitan position during this new European term of office.

Jordi Castellana Gamisans

*AMB Vice President of International Relations and Digital
Metropolis and Councillor of the city of Barcelona*

Hein Van der Loo

*Chair of the Metropolitan Region Amsterdam Assembly
and Mayor of Almere*



Metropolitan Region Amsterdam Political Declaration

The mayors, presidents and political representatives of the European metropolitan areas gathered in the Metropolitan Region Amsterdam for the 9th EMA Forum advocating for "METROPOLITAN PERSPECTIVES ON WELL-BEING: Balancing society, economy and ecology"

I European metropolitan areas as drivers of development in EU policies

European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA) is a forum for mayors, presidents and political representatives from 59 major European metropolitan areas, representing 122 million inhabitants, to address shared goals, challenges and solutions.

Established in 2015, this initiative has evolved into a pivotal platform for political dialogue involving metropolitan areas, cities, European institutions and national governments. EMA promotes a metropolitan perspective in EU policies and collaborates with networks like Metropolis, Eurocities, Metrex and ICLEI.

II Setting out the framework for a new European prosperity plan, together

As we enter a new European legislative period, we are pleased to acknowledge the contribution of the previous European Parliament and Commission in advancing sustainable growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. The European Green Deal, the NextGenerationEU

recovery plan, the digital transformation and the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Rule of Law, which ensures accountability, justice and fundamental rights, have established a robust foundation for a future-proof Europe.

Furthermore, we congratulate the newly appointed members of the European institutions and are confident that they will succeed in their mission to create a more sustainable, prosperous and competitive Europe, as expressed in the new European Council's Strategic Agenda and the Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029, as well as the Draghi report, The future of European competitiveness.

We, the members of the European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA), acknowledge the European Union increasing support and recognition for cities and metropolitan areas over the past years. Our commitment to contributing to the new European objectives, in close partnership with the European institutions, therefore, remains strong.

Faced with new geopolitical realities, economic and demographic challenges and extreme weather events in various parts of Europe, we need to take actions and work in solidarity for the benefit of all EU citizens, businesses, Member States, cities and regions. There are no simple answers to the concerns raised in today's society; we are facing ecosystem degradation, tensions and social unrest, and we need to address these tensions.

Knowing that social justice, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability will be won or lost at the local and regional level, this declaration aims to develop a shared framework for well-being, enabling us to tackle and implement the necessary transformations for both the present and the future.

Finally, we want to underline that peace is the first and basic condition to ensure the well-being of our citizens. Therefore, at the international level, we call for an effort from all relevant stakeholders to bring the conflicts and wars in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon and Sudan to an end, as millions of innocent people are suffering the effects of war and displacement.

III A metropolitan perspective on well-being

As metropolitan areas, we see well-being as a guiding principle that encompasses prosperity in a broader sense. Beyond economic growth, it includes issues that people value, such as housing, environmental quality, education, the labour market, public healthcare, poverty reduction and coexistence. At the same time, we must ensure that our efforts to improve our local quality of life do not endanger that of people in other parts of the world or future generations.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), we believe that the various well-being aspects, and the trade-offs between them, should be considered in public policy and decision-making processes and that resource allocation be based on strong and broad well-being criteria. Economic development must be enhanced from a broader welfare perspective, in which everyone can participate and benefit within planetary boundaries. We must therefore strike a balance between economic development and fostering a sustainable, inclusive society.

The EU is committed to building a sustainable, prosperous and competitive Europe. Metropolitan areas are vital to this process, driving innovation, economic growth, employment, territorial equity, international connections and social cohesion and development. Their progress in smart energy solutions, public transport, sustainable mobility, housing and green spaces proves their potential.

However, metropolitan areas still face significant challenges, including housing shortage, air

pollution, traffic congestion, social inequality and security. Not everyone has similar chances to benefit from favourable economic development. In fact, robust economies do not automatically result in greater "broad prosperity."

Therefore, it is crucial to have a clear vision of the type of society we aspire to become by 2050. Our vision is of cities and regions that are inclusive, prosperous and sustainable, offering a high quality of life for all citizens and facilitating their involvement in every aspect of rural-urban life.

IV How can metropolitan authorities contribute to Europe's goals?

Metropolitan areas are not just large cities, but also include smaller towns and rural areas. This broad spectrum of land use has facilitated successfully developed, ambitious and integrated strategies and projects over the past years (e.g. Integrated Territorial Investments). Based on European legislation, they have stimulated a climate-neutral and circular economy, boosted sustainable energy, promoted the "Renovation Wave" in the building sector, increased the capacity of transport and inland waterways, and introduced measures to address biodiversity loss and waste management.

Metropolitan areas are crucial for the territorial coordination and implementation of European policies and funding programmes for several reasons. Metropolitan areas have the partnership capacity to foster synergy in the exploitation of potential key universities, research centres and innovative companies that create markets for clean industries and jobs for people and strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of Europe and its countries. Their high population density and international connections make them ideal locations for large-scale implementation of sustainable technologies and infrastructure. Through cultural and social centres, they contribute to quality of life and social cohesion. They are also the level of government closest to

European citizens, who can provide local support in implementing European strategies and policies.

The impact of the NextGenerationEU recovery plan and the Cohesion Policy in our territories is immense. Therefore, the voice of metropolitan areas, based on a bottom-up and integrated approach, should be heard. However, in many countries, metropolitan areas have not been part of the decision-making process, as EMA has denounced on different occasions. This cannot happen again in the future.

Only through multilevel governance and metropolitan leadership and collaboration can we enhance the quality of life and livelihoods of citizens, as well as sustainable development of regions, cities, town and rural areas across Europe and beyond.

V What are the metropolitan priorities for the coming years?

Together with our municipalities and connected rural areas, metropolitan governments have successfully coordinated and stimulated ambitious, integrated strategies and projects in Europe. By balancing economic growth, social well-being and environmental protection, we address current challenges while preserving resources and opportunities for future generations. In achieving this, we are establishing partnerships with business, knowledge institutions and civil society to ensure that all relevant local parties take ownership of the transformation. Through this transformation, we enhance smart, sustainable and socially inclusive societies, and strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of Europe and its Member States.

In our post-2027 planning, we aim to leverage the bottom-up and collaborative potential of metropolitan areas. We call upon national governments and European Union institutions to cooperate with us and develop the metropolitan well-being framework conditions we need, to implement the transformation together in the following areas:

1. Strategic coordination with EU institutions

Enhancing the implementation of local and regional actions in support of European policy

requires strategic coordination between the EU institutions and metropolitan areas. In particular, we should guarantee shared governance, integrated investments and a cohesive transition.

2. Affordable and sustainable housing

The growing demand for housing in urban areas is placing a significant strain on housing construction, leading to rising housing prices and shortages, especially in social and affordable housing. It is crucial to innovate in the construction sector and scale up innovative housing solutions via targeted European funding to provide future-proof, energy-efficient and affordable housing.

Access to decent and affordable housing is a fundamental right, essential for human development and fulfilment. It is crucial that the European Union supports metropolitan areas in regulating the housing market, which, as a common good cannot be treated as an investment. Therefore, reinforcing the supply of affordable housing and support services for the most vulnerable has to be supported.

Moreover, housing renovation with criteria of energy efficiency and accessibility is a major challenge in metropolitan areas. Existing buildings have to be improved but, at the same time, residents should be safe during these processes. To some extent, public and private cooperation has helped to meet housing needs, but metropolitan areas should get more support and be able to develop land policies and implement other conditions to ensure affordable housing for all.

3. Accelerating the energy transition

The transition to sustainable energy is a complex process, particularly in densely populated areas, and requires careful planning and execution. The large-scale implementation of renewable energy sources in metropolitan

regions offers a unique opportunity and challenges for significant investment and technical support to reduce prices and ensure households, companies and transport benefit from the lower production costs of clean energy.

4. Clean industry and a healthier living environment

The challenge of balancing economic growth with environmental protection is a key issue for urban industries. While these sectors provide employment opportunities, they also give rise to pollution and health problems. Metropolitan areas with innovation clusters (such as hydrogen valleys) have the potential to develop cleaner technologies, but this will require significant financial support. European funds can support the greening of urban industries and improve the living environment.

5. Boosting productivity through innovation, lifelong learning and social fairness

We need to tackle labour shortages in key sectors, including education, healthcare, technology and engineering. Investment in innovative and lifelong learning and training is vital. This is also related to the demographic challenge and migration, and European support can and should create high-quality jobs and demand-driven lifelong learning policies, with a special focus on equal opportunities, fair wages, human health, good working conditions, training and vocational education, and fair transitions from one job to another for employees and the self-employed.

Knowledge and innovation are conceived and applied in universities and businesses, but it is created and fostered through healthy conditions in primary, secondary and vocational education, and training. This strong, continuous link between types of education is present in metropolitan areas. It is therefore essential to give the fields of education and

healthcare the prominence they merit and place them at the core of our social and economic structures. To do this, the EU must support metropolitan areas in reinforcing education and healthcare facilities and ensuring their accessibility, while providing affordable housing for staff and students.

In line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, we will seek to strengthen social dialogue, uphold equal opportunities and reduce inequalities.

6. Scaling up and prioritising the circular economy

Metropolitan areas have emerged as hubs for circular initiatives, but the successful implementation of these projects requires significant financial and technical support to further accelerate and scale up the initiatives across the European Union. It is crucial that European financial support and green tax policy are maintained to make sustainable products the norm on the EU market.

7. Sustainable mobility

We need to continue to make improvements in sustainable cross-border, urban and metropolitan mobility and transport. We must tackle mobility poverty and invest in accessible public transport, cycling and international rail connections with integrated booking and ticketing systems. This will reinforce metropolitan areas as transport hubs and reduce reliance on polluting transport. Metropolitan areas are making huge efforts to make their transport fleets greener and are investing, also through public-private partnerships, in creating a dense network of charging facilities (batteries, smart grids) for electric vehicles in the public space.

8. Nature restoration, biodiversity protection and food security

Nature-based solutions can play a role in climate adaptation, food security, biodiversity and the water supply. It is essential that European grants and technical support are made available to enable metropolitan food security and nature restoration initiatives and address the challenges of food security and biodiversity loss.

9. Digitalisation as a key factor for competitiveness and inclusivity

Digitalisation has become a crucial factor in economic competitiveness, social progress and environmental sustainability. Metropolitan areas around the world are establishing innovation ecosystems to empower citizens and contribute to a more prosperous, sustainable and digital future that prioritises inclusivity. Digitalisation is an opportunity as well as a threat for people who cannot get along well with the fast pace of developments. Digitalisation has also revealed social vulnerabilities, even affecting democracy, that require our attention. Metropolitan institutions can play a fundamental role in ensuring digitalisation reaches all territories and citizens, extending beyond municipal borders. In order to make Europe fit for the digital age, we ask the European institutions to partner with metropolitan areas and provide the necessary tools to help achieve the digital transition in our territories.

10. Water as a precondition for urban quality of life

Frequent floods, droughts, pollution and other water-related threats make water a strategic priority for metropolitan areas. Climate change, urbanisation, agriculture and industrialisation have created immense pressure on our water resources. The EU and metropolitan areas jointly need to take immediate action. We therefore call on the European institutions to make water a strategic priority for its next term of office and adopt a holistic European Water Strategy that restores the water cycle and mainstreams water into all EU policies through concrete measures and a clear timeline.

We, the members of the European Metropolitan Authorities, embrace these challenges and

accept our responsibilities to lead transformative actions and solutions that balance society, economy and ecology.

Hence, we call upon the European Commission, Parliament and Committee of the Regions to engage in a genuine and structured collaboration with us and to recognise metropolitan areas as significant partners who can contribute to European policies for a sustainable, prosperous and competitive Europe that enhances citizens' well-being.

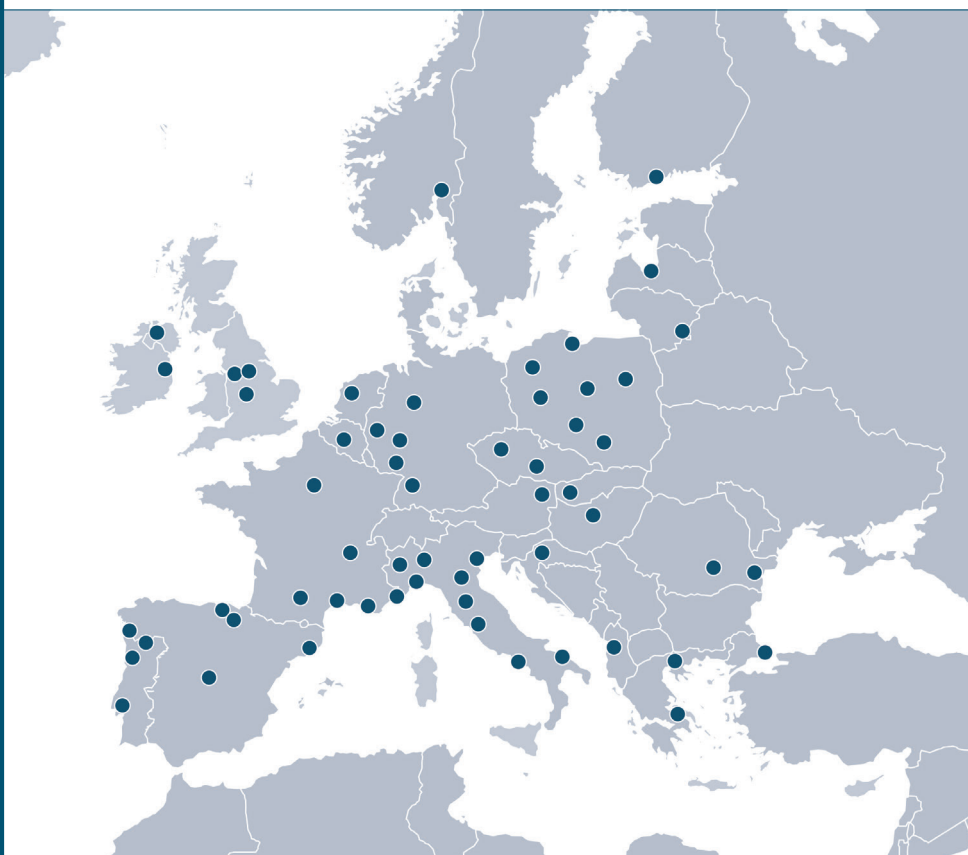
Members of the European Metropolitan Authorities
Zaanstad, 21 November 2024

EMA in numbers

59 metropolises

23 countries

122 million inhabitants



Amsterdam EMA Forum in figures

90 participants

13 countries

23 cities, metropolitan areas or regions

PARTICIPANTS

Amsterdam Metropolitan Region, Barcelona Metropolitan Area, Bilbao, Brussels-Capital Region, Budapest, Cavado Intermunicipal Community, Genova Metropolitan City, Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolia, Guipuzkoa Province, Hannover Region, Krakow Metropolitan Area, Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Madrid, Milan Metropolitan City, Porto Metropolitan Area, Poznań Metropolitan Area, Rheinland Metropolitan Region, Rome Metropolitan City, Rotterdam–The Hague Metropolitan Area, Strasbourg Metropole, Torino Metropolitan City, Uusimaa-Helsinki Region, and Warsaw Metropolitan Area.

EMA Amsterdam 2024

Welcome and greetings



Jan Hamming
Mayor of Zaanstad

Zaanstad has long been a centre of trade and craftsmanship, drawing people from around the world. While this rich historical background, the focus is now on the future, prioritising well-being and collaboration to improve residents' daily lives. A key challenge is ensuring equal opportunities for all, regardless of background.

The eastern and western sides of Zaanstad suffer from high socioeconomic and educational disparities that affect the future and well-being of the population. Statistics show alarming trends in Eastern

Zaanstad, including high child poverty, obesity and youth crime rates, affecting well-being. This disparity highlights the need for a broader definition of prosperity—beyond economic growth—to include housing, education, healthcare and social cohesion. These issues are not unique to Zaanstad, as they can be seen across Europe. Addressing them requires collective action, embracing uncomfortable truths and fostering collaboration.

To create real change, solutions must be rooted in core values: making space for new ideas, having the courage to make bold decisions, appreciating each other's contributions and building trust among residents, partners and institutions. By working together, leaders can turn ambitious goals into concrete actions, ensuring that every child—regardless of where they are born—has access to the same opportunities. The choices made today will shape a future where prosperity is shared and children can become the leaders of tomorrow.



Elisenda Alamany

AMB Vice President of International Relations and Digital Metropolis and Councillor of the city of Barcelona

The Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB) established the European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA) Forum in 2015 in Barcelona. Since then, it has become a platform for political dialogue among metropolitan areas and cities, European institutions and national governments. The EMA currently brings together 59 metropolises, from 23 different European countries, representing 122 million inhabitants. Through the EMA, the AMB is pleased to collaborate with different European institutions and different networks, and international agencies such as UN-Habitat and the OECD.

The different metropolises represented in this year's forum have different territorial, social and economic realities, as well as different institutional frameworks and powers. Despite these differences, all metropolises share one

common trait: that their citizens inherently embrace a metropolitan life. Therefore, the AMB's approach is to align itself with a reality that is already shaping the lives of its citizens.

Doing so requires building a cohesive metropolis that addresses challenges beyond municipal boundaries, ensuring not only efficiency but also equitable wealth redistribution. Despite facing local impacts from global challenges, metropolitan areas often lack institutional recognition and sufficient funding. While European institutions acknowledge their importance, stronger support is urged to integrate them into EU strategies, policies and funding. The EMA Forum plays a key role in fostering collaboration and the AMB remains committed to leveraging its potential to advance shared metropolitan goals.

All participants are invited to Barcelona next year, as the city will be hosting the 10th anniversary of the EMA. This milestone event will serve as a prominent gathering to strengthen commitments—both among metropolitan areas and with Member States, European institutions and UN-Habitat.



Hein Van Der Loo

*Chair of the Metropolitan Region
Amsterdam Assembly and Mayor of
Almere*

As Martin Luther King said: "We have all come on different ships, but we are on the same boat now". It is important to stress the significance of unity and collaboration in pursuing common goals of prosperity and well-being. Despite progress, social injustice continues to persist globally, from conflicts like those in Yemen and Ukraine to local tensions in cities like Amsterdam. These challenges highlight the need for cooperation that goes beyond personal interests, borders and individual concerns, focusing instead on shared objectives of peace and prosperity, especially as Europe faces the impact of war.

Criticism is drawn to the European Union's bureaucratic processes, referencing the Draghi report, which points out that there have been 13,000 pieces of EU legislation since the Union's inception. Instead

of this, the EU should focus on fewer, more impactful initiatives and move away from excessive red tape. While political declarations and ambitious goals are important, real change occurs at the local, regional and metropolitan levels, where decisions directly affect people's lives. Delays in implementing legislation will hinder progress and highlights the need for quick action. Ultimately, leaders at all administrative levels are called on to collaborate, putting aside their personal interests and prioritising social cohesion and the well-being of individuals, in line with Martin Luther King's vision of collective action beyond individual or national concerns.

Official address from the EU institutions



Nicola De Michelis

*Acting Deputy Director-General
for Regional and Urban Policy,
European Commission*

The transition within the European Union (EU) is progressing, with metropolitan areas playing a crucial role in shaping EU priorities. Local involvement is essential for the success of European goals, as many initiatives from Brussels need to reach local levels effectively. The establishment of a Commissioner dedicated to delivering an EU agenda for cities marks a significant step in addressing the lack of coherence among over 50 initiatives, 10 platforms and various networks at the EU level. The challenge is now to consolidate these efforts into a unified, ambitious agenda for European cities and metropolitan areas.

A central element of the EU agenda should be integrating economic sustainability with social justice. While

the EU's current focus is on competitiveness, there is a risk that social issues like poverty and inequality will be sidelined. The Draghi report, influential in shaping the EU agenda, emphasises competitiveness but overlooks social aspects that contribute to rising discontent in economically declining regions. Addressing these issues is critical for political stability and continued support for the European project, especially in declining regions.

The EU's focus will include housing, climate change, sustainable mobility, social inclusion and digitalisation. For these policies to succeed locally, metropolitan areas must contribute with ideas, tools and capacity-building efforts. There must be a streamlined approach to initiatives to ensure coherence

in EU efforts. The impact of EU legislation, particularly on local planning and budgets, must also be considered, as well as the challenge of funding, given competing priorities like defence and migration. Balancing these demands while managing the debt repayment from NextGenerationEU will complicate future budget discussions.

Looking ahead, the EU's future budget and investment policies must integrate a local perspective. Place-based, territorial policies need to be seen as contributing to overarching EU goals and funding systems may need to be reformed to focus on performance-based outcomes. Local authorities will need to consider reforms to ensure investments are impactful and the connection between reforms and investments, as seen with NextGenerationEU, is likely to be strengthened. Thus, this moment is critical for metropolitan areas to engage in discussions that shape the EU's budget and investment priorities.

Keynote speech:

Guiding compass in implementing 'broad prosperity'



Henri De Groot

Professor in Regional Economic Dynamics at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and Crown-appointed member of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER)

It is important to move beyond GDP as a measure of prosperity, in order to advocate for a broader focus on well-being and broad prosperity. A balance is needed between economic, social and sustainability goals, acknowledging that achieving this balance requires confronting unavoidable trade-offs. Metropolitan areas are celebrated as one of humanity's greatest inventions, playing a central role in driving economic growth and innovation despite challenges such as unemployment, crime, unaffordable housing and environmental sustainability. Rural and peripheral areas also face their own issues and addressing disparities between regions is essential for collective prosperity.

The concept of broad prosperity encompasses not only economic indicators but also social and environmental dimensions. Policymakers have a critical role in managing these trade-offs and shaping policies that foster both economic growth and social cohesion. The importance of building trust among regions is emphasised, especially as geopolitical tensions and the rise of populism threaten to deepen existing divisions.

Furthermore, the need to address demographic challenges, such as aging populations, is discussed alongside the importance of investing in education, innovation and labour productivity. The discourse about the potential risk of relying too heavily on immigration to alleviate labour

shortages is also touched upon, arguing that the focus should instead be on increasing participation in the workforce and investing in innovation.

The housing market, especially in metropolitan areas, is identified as another area requiring urgent attention, with high demand driving up prices and creating tensions within society. Despite the challenges, there is still optimism regarding the potential metropolitan areas offer in driving innovation and prosperity, while there is a need of stronger leadership and cooperation to address the complex issues facing regions today.

In conclusion, a "Europe of metropolitan areas" is envisioned, with a future where regional collaboration and leadership guide Europe towards prosperity. This is framed as the speaker's ultimate dream, a vision where metropolitan areas, as the best invention of mankind, play a central role in shaping a balanced and sustainable future. Moving beyond GDP, addressing trade-offs and fostering cooperation are seen as essential steps in realising this vision.

Panel discussion on well-being

Best practices



Participants

Henri De Groot, Professor in Regional Economic Dynamics at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and crown-appointed member of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER)

Elisenda Alamany, Vice President of International Relations and Digital Metropolis, Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Jos Wienen, MRA board member and Mayor of Haarlem

Syamak Agha Babaei, Vice President and Deputy Mayor of Metropole Strasbourg

Nicola De Michelis, Acting Deputy Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission

Moderated by **Carolien Gehrels**, European Cities Director at Arcadis

Elisenda Alamany

The Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB), composed of 36 municipalities, faces significant challenges arising from global phenomena such as mass tourism, rising housing costs and the frequent displacement of residents. As local society becomes increasingly global, these issues require a metropolitan perspective that transcends municipal boundaries. The struggle for affordable housing and the transformation of Barcelona into a global city emphasise the need for coordinated governance. AMB recognises the importance of learning from other metropolitan experiences and ensuring that citizens understand the impact of metropolitan policies on their lives. Effective communication, through concrete examples, is crucial to fostering trust and engagement within the community.

To address these urban challenges, governance at the metropolitan level must move beyond traditional institutional approaches and embrace collaboration across sectors. This includes engaging with social movements, economic stakeholders and various

levels of government. Issues like housing affordability, urban mobility and climate change demand a coordinated response that involves not only local governments but also European institutions, national authorities and civil society. The AMB's participatory process in the development of its Master Urban Plan serves as a model, ensuring that all stakeholders have a voice in shaping the future of the metropolis. The goal is to create cities that prioritise public well-being, ensuring that policies balance short-term economic growth with long-term social equity.

A central aspect of these discussions is the need to redefine the concept of freedom in urban spaces. Freedom is not simply the right to move or consume without constraints but the right to access safe, inclusive and liveable public spaces. Streets overrun by cars, where people cannot walk freely or gather, do not embody true freedom. Urban policies should focus on creating pedestrian-friendly environments, expanding public transportation and increasing green spaces that promote social interaction and well-being. This ideological shift in the use of public space is a core responsibility of metropolitan governance, which requires ongoing dialogue with citizens to ensure that policies meet collective needs and foster a truly inclusive

urban experience. The future of metropolitan governance depends on its ability to adapt to these challenges while upholding the principles of democracy and social justice.

Nicola De Michelis

In Europe, metropolitan areas must go beyond administrative borders to address complex challenges, ensuring that policies and resources serve all citizens effectively. The European Union recognises that economic competitiveness and social cohesion are inseparable — prosperity cannot exist without stability. At the heart of this balance is the freedom to stay, the ability of people to remain in their communities by choice rather than necessity. This freedom is only possible when public institutions provide the essential services that create the conditions for a dignified life. Without access to housing, education, healthcare and transportation, individuals are not truly free but are instead forced into displacement, widening social divides and deepening inequality.

Across Europe, dissatisfaction and economic disparities are reshaping the political landscape, particularly in large metropolitan areas where inequality is most visible. The erosion of trust in institutions stems from the fear that they are no longer capable of protecting citizens from the pressures of globalised economies. When basic public services decline, people are left vulnerable, fuelling political instability and social unrest. The freedom to

stay is not just a social issue but also a fundamental democratic one—if individuals cannot afford to live in their cities, urban areas risk becoming exclusive spaces for the privileged. Ensuring that public services remain a priority is therefore essential, not only for individual well-being but for the cohesion and long-term stability of metropolitan societies.

With over 100 million people living in metropolitan regions across Europe, these areas hold significant political power and must actively shape European policies to safeguard social justice. The role of governance is not just to manage resources but to ensure citizens have real agency over their future. Strengthening democracy requires collaboration across local, national and European levels to ensure that policies prioritise people's well-being. The future of metropolitan areas depends on reaffirming that staying in one's community is not a privilege, but a right—one that must be protected through strong public institutions and a commitment to inclusive, sustainable urban development.

Syamak Agha Babaei

The Metropole Strasbourg, like many metropolitan areas, faces significant challenges related to inequality, public health and urban mobility. With 26% of the population living below the poverty line and a high number of premature deaths caused by air pollution, the city grapples with stark social and health disparities. In response, Strasbourg is focusing on redefining freedom within its urban context. Rather than viewing freedom as the unrestricted use of all resources, Strasbourg advocates for a new understanding where freedom is linked to access to quality public spaces, health and sustainable mobility. The city's efforts to fight inequality include prioritising investment in neglected neighbourhoods, expanding public transportation and reducing car dominance in urban areas. By redefining public space and emphasising sustainable mobility, Strasbourg aims to create a more equitable urban environment for all citizens.

One of the key approaches to addressing these challenges

is through collaboration and citizen involvement. Acknowledging the limitations imposed by France's centralised political structure, Strasbourg emphasises the need for a more participatory governance model. The metropolis is working to engage citizens through consensus conferences, where policymakers, activists and residents collaborate on key issues such as air pollution, housing and energy transition. This approach is intended to build trust and foster policies that reflect the collective will of the community. Additionally, Strasbourg is focusing on increasing the availability of affordable housing by investing heavily in social housing and utilising city-owned companies to compete with the private sector. Addressing vacant housing and combating the negative impacts of tourism and gentrification are also part of Strasbourg's strategy to promote housing equity and stability.

Strasbourg's efforts are informed by a broader European vision of cooperation, sustainability and social justice. The city recognises the need for a new legal framework that provides local autonomy, improved funding mechanisms and public services that are more effective. With a focus on participatory urban planning

and citizen engagement, Strasbourg seeks to build a future where policies are shaped by the collective input of all stakeholders, not just political or administrative elites. This inclusive approach, combined with innovative solutions for social housing and sustainable urban mobility, reflects Strasbourg's commitment to fostering a more just and resilient metropolitan area that aligns with European values of democracy, equity and environmental stewardship.

Jos Wienen

Haarlem is a densely populated city that faces mobility challenges, necessitating investment to develop a sustainable transport system to provide an alternative to the increasing dominance of cars. However, addressing mobility concerns requires collaboration beyond city boundaries, as residents commute to and from surrounding metropolitan areas. Coordinating transport networks with neighbouring regions is essential to prevent congestion and ensure efficient connectivity.

Beyond mobility, Haarlem faces significant urban challenges, including housing shortages, climate change and social inequality. As one of the most populated cities in the Netherlands, Haarlem must balance the need for new housing developments with sustainability and quality of life. The city's strategy includes urban densification while preserving green spaces, ensuring affordability and promoting social integration. Economic disparities between different city districts highlight

the importance of mixed-income neighbourhoods, fostering social cohesion. Sustainable initiatives, such as energy transitions and innovation in construction, further contribute to a holistic urban development approach, aiming to exceed European sustainability targets. Additionally, the city actively engages its residents in sustainability projects, allowing them to take the lead in local energy transitions. By facilitating, rather than imposing, Haarlem increases public trust and participation, making policies more effective and widely accepted.

Governance and civic engagement play a crucial role in addressing these complex challenges. While Haarlem benefits from a prosperous economy, collaboration with the national government is necessary for large-scale investments. Political cooperation at the urban level is often more effective than at the national level, as city leaders recognise the need for pragmatic solutions. Social stability is also a priority, with proactive community engagement helping to prevent tensions and unrest. Haarlem's strong ties with diverse social, religious and migrant communities have fostered a sense of shared responsibility and ownership among residents. This approach

proved effective in preventing unrest during crises, as community representatives worked with authorities to maintain order and prevent conflicts. By prioritising inclusivity, collaboration and innovation, Haarlem has created a resilient urban environment that promotes long-term stability and sustainable progress.

Henri De Groot

The transition to a sustainable and equitable economy requires bold leadership and a re-evaluation of economic priorities. Cities like Rößnitz in Germany and Bilbao in Spain exemplify how industrial restructuring can drive broad prosperity. The concept of “creative destruction” is essential for overcoming entrenched interests, yet implementing such change remains complex. Moving forward, metropolitan areas must adopt forward-thinking policies that balance economic growth with sustainability while ensuring governance structures align with functional urban areas. Strong and visionary leadership is crucial in making decisions that prioritise long-term societal well-being.

Beyond economic restructuring, redefining the balance between public and private interests is essential. Market-driven policies, particularly in housing, have led to unintended consequences, underscoring the need for strong public investment. While efficient markets generate prosperity, they cannot replace essential public goods and

services that promote social cohesion and stability. Europe has historically prioritised solidarity and public investment, ensuring economic progress benefits society as a whole. Expanding economic measures beyond GDP, by incorporating indicators of well-being and sustainability, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of progress.

Inclusive governance is key to achieving these goals, requiring cooperation between governments and active citizen participation. Henri de Groot highlights the importance of enlightened leadership—not in the sense of authoritarianism but as decision-makers who act in the collective interest within democratic structures to maximise social welfare. Effective leadership must also engage with society, ensuring that different societal groups, including younger generations, have a voice in shaping the future. Future policymaking should prioritise direct engagement with youth rather than merely discussing their future in absentia. By fostering inclusive governance, public solidarity and innovative economic policies, metropolitan areas can navigate modern urban challenges while securing long-term prosperity for all.

Roundtable I – Economy

How can we collaborate in (multilevel) coalitions to build a future-proof economy?



Participants

Elisenda Alamany, Vice President of International Relations and Digital Metropolis, Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Ernesto Nebot, EU-Councillor for Region Hanover and member of the Regional Assembly and Deputy Mayor of the city of Laatzen

Łukasz Sęk, Deputy Mayor of the City of Kraków

Tuija Telén, Regional Mayor Helsinki-Uusimaa Region

Moderated by **Jessica Peters-Hondelink**, Executive Director at Amsterdam Economic Board

Discussants

Anna Aleksandrak, Poznań Metropolitan Area

Sérgio Araújo, Porto Metropolitan Area

Margarida Belém, Porto Metropolitan Area

Christine Chang, Helsinki-Uusimaa region

Andrzej Czajkowski, Warsaw

Jose Herrera, Madrid City Council

Małgorzata Kucińska, Warsaw

Cees Loggen, Amsterdam Economic Board

Peter Pol, Rotterdam-The Hague Metropolitan Area

Natalia Puchała, Metropolia GZM

Carlota Rosés, Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Thomas Schauf, Metropolregion Rheinland

Janne Tamminen, Helsinki-Uusimaa Region

Daniel Wrzoseczyk, Kraków Metropolitan Area

Elisenda Alamany

A collaborative governance model involving government, businesses, academia and civil society drives economic growth in Barcelona. The metropolitan structure of 36 municipalities ensures coordinated decision-making, while initiatives like the circular resources' platform support sustainable business partnerships. Additionally, the metropolitan economic development agency attracts investments beyond Barcelona, promoting balanced regional growth. Academia contributes to assessing metropolitan policies and promotes innovation through partnerships with research institutions and think tanks, advancing smart city and sustainable governance initiatives.

Civil society participation is ensured in all our policy-design processes to balance economic growth with sustainability and well-being. Moreover, the AMB enforces accountability through structured reporting mechanisms.

Key initiatives, such as the Metropolitan Investment Plan 2024-2028 provide financial and technical support to municipalities, fostering cohesion and inclusive development. The AMB's long-term planning approach, supported by political stability

across different parties, allows for consistent innovation and goal setting. However, recognising the limits of metropolitan authority, the AMB adopts a systematic approach, ensuring tailored solutions that address the evolving needs of diverse local communities.

Ernesto Nebot

Building a future-proof economy in the metropolitan region of Lower Saxony requires collaboration across multiple levels of governance while respecting the principle of subsidiarity. The region's economic strength is built on three key sectors: automotive mobility, healthcare and technology. Major industries such as Volkswagen and Continental drive economic activity, while a strong healthcare network of 10 community hospitals serves thousands of patients annually. Additionally, the region is home to 20 universities and 60 research institutions, fostering advances in areas like electromobility. Given the region's size and diversity, a systematic approach to policy implementation is necessary, integrating local needs into broader economic strategies.

Despite legal constraints on direct municipal-industry collaboration, efforts are being made to facilitate idea exchange through platforms that connect businesses and local governments. Mental health is recognised as a crucial factor in economic sustainability,

particularly as aging populations face increasing challenges. Benchmarking initiatives compare regional well-being indicators with those of other nations to improve public health strategies. Looking ahead, multilevel governance in Europe will be essential to addressing critical challenges such as water management, waste reduction and energy efficiency. A gradual, adaptive approach that combines ambitious long-term visions with incremental progress is seen as the most effective way to foster resilience and sustainable growth across the region.

Łukasz Sęk

Kraków engages in multilevel collaboration between local authorities, businesses and citizens to build a future-proof economy based on structured dialogue and shared responsibility. Governance is based on five key principles: listening, analysing, collaborating, discussing and acting. Initiatives such as the Dialogue Bench allow open discussions between the mayor, citizens and the private sector, while partnerships with major companies facilitate data collection and smart city innovations. The Kraków Entrepreneurship Council fosters cooperation between businesses, academia and local authorities, while international collaborations—such as the Milan Urban Platform on food security—address global challenges. The city is also part of the European Mission for

100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, committing both public and private sectors to green transformation goals.

Kraków emphasises measurable outcomes in policy implementation, using air pollution reduction as a key indicator of environmental and economic progress. Efforts such as corporate-sponsored tree planting and pollution control have significantly improved air quality, benefiting tourism and business sectors. Looking forward, the city plans to introduce a Happiness Index to assess well-being beyond economic metrics. Local governments play a crucial role in regulating large corporations and negotiating long-term strategies. Political responsibility is essential to avoid short-term populist decisions that can lead to negative long-term consequences, as seen in past failures in water management. Sustainable economic development requires informed decision-making, public engagement and leadership that prioritises future resilience over immediate political gains.

Tuija Telén

Effective collaboration in multilevel coalitions is essential for building a future-proof economy, as demonstrated by Helsinki's strategic approach. As Finland's largest and most innovative region, Helsinki plays a key role in national economic growth, competitiveness and social progress. Collaboration between government

bodies, municipalities and stakeholders ensures a unified approach to decision-making. The region's strategic goals focus on sustainability, competitiveness and well-being, with clear roadmaps outlining responsibilities and actions to achieve targets such as carbon neutrality by 2030 and an 80% employment rate. A key element of Helsinki's approach is its emphasis on two clear assets for collaboration: analysing—using data-driven insights to assess challenges and opportunities—and deciding—implementing strategic actions based on these analyses. Despite legislative constraints, Helsinki leverages its small size as an advantage, facilitating direct engagement among key players while maintaining a significant impact at both the national and European levels.

Helsinki fosters innovation through its "Place-based Innovation Ecosystems", which bring together universities, research institutions, businesses and public bodies to develop new solutions. Municipalities play a direct role in supporting businesses by creating an environment conducive to growth, even though they cannot provide direct financial assistance. The region ensures progress is measured through quantitative and qualitative indicators, particularly in emissions reductions and economic performance. Collaboration at the regional level is crucial, as local governments address immediate challenges while the regional scale provides a broader

strategic perspective. Helsinki advocates for stronger regional representation in European decision-making, emphasising that metropolitan areas are the most innovative and should unite to influence EU policies. Strengthening interregional cooperation through structured analysis and decisive action will enhance resilience, drive innovation and ensure a more sustainable and competitive future for European economies.

Contributions from discussants

Daniel Wrzosczyk

Building a future-proof Economy requires a collaborative effort between the private, social and public sectors, emphasising a bottom-up approach. However, traditional administrative structures may not yet be equipped for this type of dialogue, raising the need for new tools to manage such processes. Metropolitan areas, given their interconnected challenges—such as housing and public transportation—may have the capacity to address these complex issues. While each metropolitan area operates within its own governance framework and faces unique challenges, common tools can be developed and applied to support the implementation of a resilient and sustainable economy.

Natalia Puchala

The gradual, step-by-step approach taken by officials and decision-makers is often misunderstood by citizens, who expect immediate results. This challenge has been present since the metropolitan area's establishment seven years ago. A key issue, as highlighted by Ms Alamany, is the need to effectively educate citizens on the role and benefits of metropolitan institutions. GZM unites 41 municipalities to improve public transportation services. Within a couple of years it managed to unify the ticket

tariffs for these 41 municipalities while its German institutional partner, the Ruhr metropolitan area, is still working on it. This example shows how such projects can be time-consuming. However the question still remains: How can institutions such as metropolitan areas maintain public trust despite slow progress and how can they effectively engage small businesses within the quadruple helix model?

Jose Herrera

Madrid is emerging as a highly attractive region to live and work, with its population reaching 3.5 million in the city and 7 million in the region. It has become Spain's leading regional economy, attracting companies, investments and events. The City Council supports this growth, fostering a multicultural and cooperative environment. Major projects include the Metropolitan Forest (a green infrastructure covering 11 municipalities with 1 million trees), Madrid Nuevo Norte (Europe's largest urban development, creating a new financial centre) and an open data model for a public-private partnership using big data.

Roundtable II – Society

How can we secure livelihoods and ensure more people work in suitable jobs under decent conditions?



Participants

Leendert De Lange, Board member, Rotterdam-The Hague Metropolitan Area, and Mayor of Wassenaar

Jan Hamming, Mayor of Zaanstad

Idoia Postigo, Director General, Bilbao Metropoli 30

Jorge Sequeira, Vice President Porto Metropolitan Area and Mayor of São João da Madeira

Thijs Reuten, member of the European Parliament

Moderated by **Henri De Groot**, Professor in Regional Economic Dynamics at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Discussants

Rafael Amorim, CIM Cávado

Henk Bouwman, Metrex

Alberto Costa, Porto Metropolitan Area

Miguel Crespo, Diputación Foral de Guipuzkoa

Maria Cruz, Porto Metropolitan Area

Suse Marlene Cunha, Porto Metropolitan Area

Xavier Estruch, Barcelona Metropolitan Area

Janos Kenderney, Budapest

Tariq Khan, Schiphol Area Development Company, Amsterdam

Yoan Kostadinovski, Metrex

Agata Koszek-Pyka, Metropolia GZM

Sara Lobão, Porto Metropolitan Area

Marco Martins, Porto Metropolitan Area

Julie Noorman, Metropolitan Region Amsterdam

Lennert Onvlee, Rotterdam-The Hague Metropolitan Area

Ariana Pinho, Porto Metropolitan Area

Jorge Sequeira

The metropolitan area of Porto faces limitations in establishing broad economic policies to directly improve workers' working conditions. However, it plays a crucial role in planning and managing EU funding. A notable example is Porto's Public Transport Reduction Programme, launched in 2019, which significantly lowered public transport costs. The programme, funded through a combination of national environmental funds and municipal budgets, returned money to residents while supporting decarbonisation goals. In a country where the minimum wage is €820, this initiative had a major impact on affordability and mobility, demonstrating the importance of metropolitan areas in influencing national policies and securing resources for regional development.

Alongside these economic measures, Portugal is also facing demographic challenges, including declining birth rates and emigration of young professionals, which pose long-term concerns for the labour supply and essential services.

To address political disengagement, some municipalities in Portugal have launched programmes to involve young people in

democracy and human rights education. One example is a municipal Erasmus initiative that sends underprivileged students to Strasbourg for political training, including visits to the European Parliament and human rights institutions.

Another initiative, the Local Use Programme, organises school elections where students act as MPs, debate with the mayor and visit national political institutions to learn about law making and Portugal's history of dictatorship. These programmes aim to cultivate civic awareness, engaging youth in local politics and fostering a culture of democracy and cooperation. While such efforts are localised, they contribute to a broader societal shift, emphasising the importance of creating a democratic mindset to ensure long-term political stability and social cohesion.

Idoia Postigo

The Bilbao model offers valuable insights for the revitalisation of metropolitan areas through a collaborative approach that involves both public and private sectors. Born from a period of crisis in the 1970s and 1980s, Bilbao Metropoli 30, a public-private partnership with over 114 members, led the region's transformation from industrial decline to growth. The model's focus on shared values, collective action and community involvement helped foster public-private partnerships

that contributed to the city's competitiveness. Key to its success was the realisation that infrastructure alone is no longer the determining factor in a city's appeal. Instead, intangible values such as innovation, security, creativity and tradition are crucial for attracting people, investment and visitors. However, the model also faces challenges, particularly in addressing the unsustainability of current economic systems and the need to redefine prosperity, competitiveness and wealth in a more inclusive and sustainable manner.

To confront future challenges, the Bilbao model stresses the importance of long-term thinking, values-based decision-making and reflection before action. While metropolitan areas often react more readily to urgent problems, they are less prepared to address long-term, non-urgent issues. The approach emphasises the need for collaboration, trust and generosity, particularly in the face of crises. It also calls for more attention to ethical principles in both public and private actions. The example of Valencia, where citizens organised to help each other during a flood, demonstrates the potential of bottom-up initiatives. These collective efforts should be harnessed to ensure that metropolises remain human-centred, where people actively contribute to their communities and future generations are considered in decision-making processes. This model encourages critical optimism and the belief that

transformative change, though challenging, is possible with the right values and collective will.

Leendert De Lange

Demographic shifts, particularly ageing populations, present significant challenges to healthcare systems in the Netherlands. Meeting future healthcare demands may require one in four workers to be employed in the sector by 2040, an unrealistic target that highlights the need for innovation and preventative health measures. Ensuring access to clean air and water, along with policies promoting healthy living, is crucial in reducing healthcare burdens. Moreover, labour market issues, including the exploitation of migrant workers, remain a concern. Despite European Union directives on minimum wage and workers' rights, migrant workers are often exploited and discouraged from asserting their rights. This situation highlights the importance of ensuring equal treatment and protection for all EU workers to avoid exploitation and competition based on nationality.

Emerging labour market models, such as platform work, present additional challenges, particularly for young workers who often lack legal protection. Efforts to establish minimum standards for platform workers are underway to ensure fair compensation and working conditions. Effective governance

plays a critical role in addressing these challenges, though issues are frequently misattributed to the wrong level of authority, leading to inefficiencies.

Metropolitan areas, as key drivers of economic and social change, require stronger representation at the European level to influence policy effectively. The election of more local leaders to the European Parliament would help bridge the gap between metropolitan realities and EU decision-making. In addition, initiatives like youth parliaments and student involvement in municipal governance, as seen in the Metropolitan Region of Rotterdam-The Hague, are essential for fostering democratic engagement and empowering younger generations to participate in shaping the future of their communities.

Jan Hamming

There is a need for enhanced cooperation between local, national and European governments to address exploitation in various sectors. Efforts to reduce criminal activity, such as the implementation of legislation around cash and online payments, are critical in curbing the involvement of vulnerable individuals in illegal practices and reducing whitewashing. Such cooperation between different levels of government highlights the importance of a united approach to combat human trafficking and

exploitation, ensuring that people from other countries are not taken advantage of.

In addition to tackling exploitation, it is essential to involve both young people and children in shaping policies and decision-making processes. In Amsterdam, for instance, the position of "Mayor of Children" allows children to have a meaningful voice in the city's affairs. This initiative underlines the importance of listening to the perspectives of younger generations, as they have valuable insights that contribute to creating a more inclusive and just society. Engaging children and young people in such ways ensures their concerns are addressed, ultimately fostering a more equitable and compassionate community.

Thijs Reuten

It is crucial to engage with EU Parliament members from one's own country, ensuring they are familiar with the specific needs of the metropolitan areas, neighbourhoods and municipalities they represent and vote for. Progress cannot be achieved in isolation; it requires collaboration. The culture of compromise, essential for moving both Europe and our metropolises forward, remains vital. By embracing this spirit of cooperation and focusing on the future, urban areas can provide the solutions needed to address the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Contributions from discussants

Rafael Amorim

Global unemployment is projected to rise in 2024, with over two million additional job seekers and increasing income inequality. Youth unemployment and the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) phenomenon remain major concerns, particularly in Europe, where the highest unemployment rates are seen in Spain, Greece and Sweden. Addressing these challenges requires proactive policies promoting employment, entrepreneurship and social inclusion.

Public procurement plays a crucial role in economic growth, as it represents 14% of the EU's GDP. Ensuring fair labour standards in procurement processes is vital, with the European Commission considering revisions to procurement rules to strengthen ethical business practices, sustainability and European preference policies. Key recommendations include professionalising procurement, centralising purchases at regional levels and integrating decent work criteria into contracts.

Janos Kendernay

The Budapest Global Association addresses critical issues such as sustainability, talent retention and smart city development,

with particular emphasis on reversing the trend of young talent leaving the metropolis for opportunities abroad. Research has identified the need for targeted programmes to both retain local youth and attract international workers to strengthen the labour market. This exodus is a significant concern for the country's future, as it affects both political and economic stability. However, efforts are underway to understand and address the reasons behind this departure, with the aim of creating solutions that encourage young people to remain in Budapest.

The challenges of multilevel governance, including tensions between municipalities, national governments and the European Union, further complicate these efforts, but collaboration and cooperation remain key to overcoming these obstacles and ensuring the region's future success.

Agata Koszek-Pyka

The sudden arrival of 10,000 Ukrainian refugees in a municipality with only 50,000 inhabitants highlighted the importance of bottom-up responses in crisis management. The rapid onset of the situation, triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, overwhelmed local institutions, leaving the community to quickly organise and provide essential support, such as food and clothing. This experience highlighted the need for

bottom-up action in times of volatility, uncertainty and complexity. Moving forward, fostering an open-minded approach, allowing people to act, make mistakes and learn from them, is crucial for effectively navigating such unpredictable challenges.

Roundtable III – Healthy Environment

How can we better promote and implement circularity for resilient energy and infrastructure?



Participants

Syamak Agha Babaei, Vice President and Deputy Mayor of Metropole
Strasbourg

Sonia Cambursano, Councilwoman of Metropolitan city of Turin

Hugo M. Luis, Vice President Lisbon Metropolitan Area and Deputy Mayor of
Mafra

Pierluigi Sanna, Deputy Metropolitan Mayor of Rome

Robert Van Asten, Deputy Mayor, The Hague

Moderated by **Oscar Chamat-Nuñez**, Metropolis Policy Officer

Discussants

António Gomes, Porto Metropolitan Area

Joseph Azevedo, Lisbon Metropolitan Area

Najat Azogagh, Metropolitan Region Amsterdam

Tonatiuh Belderbos, Rotterdam-The Hague Metropolitan Area

Tiziana Biolghini, Metropolitan City of Rome

Flavio Cappellini, Metropolitan City of Rome

Antonella Contin, Metro-Hub, UN-HABITAT

Alfredo Corbalan, Brussels-Capital Region

Joep Ebus, Rotterdam-The Hague Metropolitan Region

Maria Giovanna Lonati, Metropolitan City of Genova

Gianluca Luciani, Metropolitan City of Rome

Emanuela Martelluzzi, Metropolitan City of Rome

Laura Papaleo, Metropolitan City of Genova

Ana Maria Rodrigues, Porto Metropolitan Area

Ruud Schuthof, ICLEI

Wouter Van Der Heijde, Metropolitan Region Amsterdam

Cristiana Viana, Porto Metropolitan Area

Marie Villien, Strasbourg Métropole

Jos Wienen, Metropolitan Region Amsterdam

Syamak Agha Babaei

Addressing global challenges such as climate change, inequality and ecological issues requires a comprehensive framework that integrates health, circularity and sustainability. Local actions, such as public procurement initiatives, can drive economic, ecological and social change by prioritising criteria such as resource reuse and social inclusion. For example, in France, metropolitan areas have adopted procurement rules ensuring that providers meet these standards. Additionally, tools like public-private partnerships, debt management and taxation are essential to financing initiatives, with some metropolitan areas leveraging European funding for large-scale projects, such as public transportation. Although managing financial debt is inevitable, prioritising ecological and social investments over financial debt is seen as critical for future generations.

In urban planning, particularly in the context of social housing, the focus should not only be on constructing new units but also on maintaining and improving existing ones. Efforts to address housing shortages can include transitory urbanism, such as repurposing vacant properties for short-term use, like housing refugees. Collaboration between metropolitan areas can also

foster innovative solutions, such as using industrial waste heat to provide energy across borders, as demonstrated in Strasbourg's initiative.

Additionally, there is a growing need for shared indicators and decision-making tools across Europe to improve policy outcomes and guide metropolitan areas toward more sustainable futures. These collective efforts, underpinned by collaboration and innovative financing, can help cities and regions tackle present and future challenges effectively.

Sonia Cambursano

The metropolitan city of Turin, comprising 312 municipalities, faces the challenge of fostering resilient communities, especially given the small size of many of these municipalities. To build a sustainable future, Turin is working to integrate economic, social and environmental sustainability. This includes investing in small and medium businesses by providing financial support for them to adopt sustainable practices that create measurable social impacts, such as reducing the gender gap, promoting environmentally friendly models and employing vulnerable populations. These initiatives are designed to encourage circular economic growth, benefiting both the businesses and the broader community. Despite these efforts, Turin struggles with underfunding due to an imperfect national legal

framework for metropolitan cities, forcing the region to seek creative solutions. For instance, European projects are a useful tool to find innovative solutions to regional challenges.

In addition to economic challenges, Turin faces a significant housing crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The shortage of social housing has become more apparent, with many old buildings in small municipalities being too expensive to repair or unsuitable for habitation. In tourist-heavy areas, the rise of short-term rentals has worsened the availability of affordable housing, especially for students and low-income populations. To address this, Turin has begun large-scale social housing projects funded by the NextGenerationEU initiative. However, the city acknowledges that it needs the courage to experiment with new policy approaches to overcome these persistent issues. While Turin has a vision for addressing these challenges, it must be bold to implement innovative solutions, especially in areas like housing and economic sustainability.

Pierluigi Sanna

The metropolitan area of Rome is working to achieve a 70% separate waste collection rate by 2025, a challenging target considering the city still produces around 1 million tons of unsorted waste annually. Economic support for municipalities has been provided to improve waste

management, with smaller municipalities showing better adaptation to waste separation initiatives than larger ones. Recognising the cultural dimension of environmental issues, the metropolitan area has introduced a reward system for communities actively participating in waste separation.

In parallel, water scarcity is a significant concern for Rome, with the city's reliance on ancient aqueducts to supply water. Through NextGenerationEU funding, it has been possible to achieve a significant reduction in leakages and to ensure an equitable distribution of water services to over 4.5 million citizens through a public company, while also implementing welfare measures, such as reduced tariffs, to economically disadvantaged households. Additionally, Rome is exploring water purification processes that could not only support water reuse across sectors but also address waste from treatment plants, potentially turning it into an opportunity for better waste management. Despite challenges related to funding and administrative inefficiencies, the metropolitan area of Rome has benefited from national funding instruments and regional mechanisms based on taxation for local development projects.

The assembly of 121 mayors, despite its difficulty in reaching agreements, has consistently voted unanimously to support these initiatives, displaying the importance of local consensus in advancing projects. However,

large projects with minimal citizen support and inefficient funding continue to be a problem. Bureaucracy and the lack of up-to-date data also hinder progress, particularly for projects requiring accurate and timely information. To address these issues, streamlined instruments for popular consultation are needed, as crucial tools for improving public administrative governance.

Robert Van Asten

In the Netherlands, water scarcity has become an increasingly urgent issue, with cities like The Hague facing the potential of the Meuse River, which serves as a crucial source of drinking water, drying up by 2050. The region is already grappling with pollution from surrounding industries and agriculture, which exacerbates the challenge of ensuring clean, accessible water. As a member of the European Committee of the Regions, the difficulty of raising awareness on this issue at the European level is acknowledged, highlighting the need to prioritise the circularity of fresh drinking water.

To address broader sustainability goals, The Hague follows a dual approach: general policy and community actions. On the policy side, strict regulations are in place for building construction, promoting modular designs that ensure long-term reuse of materials and encouraging urban mining to recover resources like copper

from old buildings. Community efforts focus on engaging citizens in recycling and reusing household items, including electronics, to reduce waste and support the local circular economy. These initiatives align with the city's commitment to meeting the Paris Agreement and contributing to the EU's climate-neutral and smart city goals.

However, the complexity of urban development in The Hague underscores the challenges of balancing sustainability with affordability. Builders are required to allocate significant portions of new buildings for affordable and mid-rent housing, making it financially unviable to develop entirely profit-driven projects. The national government's support is crucial in this context, particularly for infrastructure investments in green spaces, roads and parks around new developments. While building within existing urban areas is deemed more efficient, the funding for these essential amenities must come from broader governmental support. Additionally, for circular initiatives to succeed, public participation is key—without citizen cooperation in waste separation and recycling efforts, the potential for resource recovery is lost. Thus, while ambitious sustainability policies are in place, their success depends on active engagement from both the government and the public.

Contributions from discussants

Alfredo Corbalan

Brussels-Capital Region, a city region comprising 19 municipalities, initially implemented a circular economy plan in 2016, but in 2022, the government expanded its focus to incorporate environmental and social dimensions. This broader approach is supported by €200 million in subsidies aimed at helping companies achieve environmental and social impact, with construction being a key priority. Efforts are underway to promote sustainable building practices by encouraging renovation over demolition and ensuring buildings are designed with future adaptability in mind. Additionally, the region is working on an Interreg project in collaboration with other European cities to address the space management challenges posed by circular economy initiatives. Meanwhile, the Brussels-Capital Region successfully simplified its administrative system in 2022, focusing on citizen-centred assistance and directing €110 million towards vulnerable communities. Pilot projects are also being explored through Interreg to scale sustainable business models across cities.

Tiziana Biolghini

The circular economy in Rome is fostering a new model of governance, emphasising collaboration between public administrations, third-sector organisations and other stakeholders. Since 2017, Italy's reform of the third sector has introduced co-programming and co-planning, enabling projects that promote health, well-being and social inclusion. Through circular economy initiatives, Rome is addressing poverty and integrating marginalised groups, including immigrants, by supporting cooperatives that focus on disadvantaged populations. This approach aims to address key social issues, such as labour, housing and dignity, through sustainable, community-driven solutions.

Wrap up of the interactive roundtables by the moderators

Jessica Peters-Hondelink

Roundtable I – Economy

Collaboration between regions is essential to build a future-proof economy, requiring cooperation among companies, knowledge institutions, civil organisations and governments. A clear vision, shared goals and long-term plans with measurable KPIs are necessary for success. Effective communication of progress is critical, as is finding legislative pathways to foster innovation. Governments must continuously engage in education and transparent communication to avoid populism. Ultimately, addressing challenges and solutions at the metropolitan level is key, necessitating stronger regional representation within European institutions.

Henri De Groot

Roundtable II – Society

Developing social policies at the metropolitan level is challenging due to constraints imposed by national and European legislation. This issue can only be addressed if Europe supports such transformations. Those under social pressure in metropolitan regions often contribute significantly to public services vital for regional vitality, highlighting the importance of prioritising social policies. Additionally, leveraging bottom-up initiatives, particularly those involving youth, is essential for fostering creativity and driving social change, with urban areas playing a crucial role in advancing these initiatives.

Oscar Chamat-Nuñez

Roundtable III – Healthy Environment

Cooperation and creativity are essential in leveraging existing legislation and developing new approaches to urban development. Rather than focusing on constructing new housing, metropolises should prioritise repurposing existing buildings to address the housing crisis. This involves managing vacant properties and tourism effectively. To resolve the crisis more efficiently, simplifying legislation and reducing bureaucratic barriers are crucial. Additionally, metropolitan areas and policymakers must embrace experimentation to foster innovation and advance circularity solutions.

Closing session and final notes from members of the European Parliament



Brigitte van den Berg

Member of the European Parliament

Addressing local and metropolitan challenges requires European legislation and policy, with a strong focus on competitiveness, sustainability and social equality. The Clean Industrial Deal is key to making Europe a global leader in clean industries, while the Draghi report highlights the necessity of investing in clean energy to achieve lower energy prices and economic growth.

Considering how China and the U.S. are advancing in the new economy, Europe must follow suit while leveraging its strong regional networks. The EU already supports this through initiatives like the Just Transition Fund, which helps regions transition to sustainable economies, and Centres of Vocational Excellence,

fostering collaboration between entrepreneurs and educational institutions.

Effective governance requires cooperation beyond governments, involving entrepreneurs, students and regional stakeholders. Metropolitan areas, with their complexity and dynamism, should demonstrate to Brussels how collaboration could solve major challenges like clean energy, air quality and housing. Policymaking must align with real-world dynamics, avoiding reliance on legislation alone. A more unified Europe is essential, as borders often hinder progress. Forums like EMA play a crucial role in demonstrating shared regional challenges and fostering cross-border learning, making borders increasingly irrelevant in addressing Europe's future.

Thijs Reuten

Member of the European Parliament

Strengthening the connection between metropolitan areas and the European level is crucial for effective governance. The presence of former mayors and local authorities in the European Parliament brings a valuable perspective, ensuring that policymaking remains centred on citizens' needs. Defending Europe's values from external and internal threats requires maintaining equality, fair labour markets and protections for workers, as seen in legislation such as the Minimum Wage Directive and regulations for platform workers. Europe's strength lies in its commitment to stability, freedom and inclusivity, expanding from six founding nations to 27. To remain the world's most competitive and sustainable

economic zone, metropolises play a vital role in innovation and implementing green initiatives.

Citizen engagement is essential in solving modern challenges, as demonstrated in Poland's grassroots response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. A bottom-up approach fosters new solutions within existing legislative frameworks, allowing for creativity without the need for regulatory changes. Legislators must maintain the trust of the people they serve, ensuring inclusivity in decision-making while demonstrating political courage.

Europe's future depends on supporting Ukraine, protecting its democratic values and embracing new technologies to achieve full sustainability. Mobilising political will is essential, particularly among younger generations who seek to drive positive change. Regardless of political differences, collaboration beyond election cycles is necessary to unify efforts and create a resilient, forward-thinking Europe.

Marcos Ros

*Member of the European Parliament
(video message)*

The 10th legislature of the European Parliament and other European institutions must drive forward a renovated built environment, addressing present-day challenges such as digital transformation and sustainable development. Building on the legacy of the 9th legislature, which saw the adoption of the Energy Efficiency Directive for buildings, the promotion of the European Territorial Agenda and the establishment of the New European Bauhaus Initiative, this term must focus on urban and metropolitan policies.

A key priority is implementing the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) to promote large-scale building renovations, affordable housing and innovative urban design rooted in the principles of the New European Bauhaus. Additionally, preparations must begin for the post-2030 European Territorial Agenda, in coordination with the European Commission and the Horizon Europe 2025-2027 Strategic Plan.

The creation of the New European Bauhaus Facility will further drive research, innovation and social inclusion while fostering synergies across different policy programmes to address climate challenges. Given the significant social, environmental and economic impact of buildings, prioritising action in vulnerable areas, phasing out fossil fuel boilers and ensuring minimum energy

efficiency standards are essential to tackling energy poverty and achieving the EU's 2050 climate goals. The successful transposition of the EPBD, adopted in April 2025, will be a critical step in this transition. Achieving these objectives requires the active involvement of all stakeholders, particularly metropolitan areas, to create a built environment that reflects contemporary needs—one that is more sustainable, inclusive and aligned with Europe's long-term vision.

Jan Hamming

Mayor of Zaanstad

Sincere gratitude is extended to all participants of the EMA Forum for their valuable engagement. It is always a privilege to address shared challenges and strengthen collaboration as we look toward the future.

The next edition of the EMA will be hosted in Barcelona, coinciding with the forum's 10th anniversary.





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