



## **METROPOLITAN REGION AMSTERDAM POLITICAL DECLARATION**

November 21, 2024 – ZAAANSTAD

*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 fifty-nine major European metropolitan areas, representing one hundred twenty-two 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 go into 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 Next Generation EU Recovery Plan, the digital transformation, and the European Pillar of Social 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 EU competitiveness report*.

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.

Despite the considerable progress achieved, the international context is unstable, and this generates concerns in our societies. Simplistic responses to ease fears fail to address the real issues, undermining a cohesive, democratic transformation. This can lead to ecosystem degradation, tensions and social unrest, resulting in greater demand for rapid, often poorly prepared, and unjust solutions

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 the present and for the future together.

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 put the conflicts and wars in Ukraine, Gaza, and Lebanon to an end, as millions of innocent people are suffering the effects of war and displacement.

### **III A metropolitan perspective on wellbeing**

As metropolitan areas, we see wellbeing as a guiding principle that encompasses prosperity in a broader sense. Beyond economic growth, it includes aspects 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 of future generations.

In alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), we believe that the various wellbeing aspects – and the trade-offs between them, should be considered in public policy and decision-making processes and that resource allocation is based on strong and broad wellbeing 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 benefits equally 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 uses allows successfully developed ambitious and integrated strategies and projects over the past years (e.g. Integrated Territorial Investments). Based on European legislation, they have stimulated 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 taken 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 Next Generation Recovery Plan and 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, we can 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 up on national governments and the European Union institutions to cooperate with us and develop the metropolitan wellbeing framework conditions we need, to implement the transformation together in the following areas:

1. *Strategic Coordination with EU Institutions*

To enhance the implementation of local and regional actions in support of European policy, strategic coordination between the EU institutions and metropolitan areas is necessary. In particular, we should guarantee a 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 increased 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 assimilated to 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 great challenge in metropolitan areas. Existing buildings have to be improved but, at the same time, residents should be safe during these processes. Public and private cooperation has helped to respond to some extent to housing needs, but metropolitan areas should get more support and be able to develop land policies and 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 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 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 the need for 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 built up under good healthcare 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 accord the entire field 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 and affordable housing for staff and students.

6. *Scaling up and prioritizing 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 continued 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 and polluting transport. Metropolitan areas are undergoing huge efforts to make their transport fleets greener, and are investing, also with public-private partnerships, in creating a dense network of charging facilities (batteries, smart grids) for electric vehicles in public space.

8. *Nature restoration, biodiversity protection and food security*

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

9. *Digitalization as a key factor for competitiveness and inclusivity*

Digitalization 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 prioritizes inclusivity. Metropolitan institutions can play a fundamental role in ensuring digitalization 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 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, urbanization, 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 mandate 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 recognize metropolitan areas as significant partners who can contribute to European policies towards a sustainable, prosperous, and competitive Europe that enhances citizens' well-being.

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November 21, 2024 – ZAAANSTAD  
**Signatories**

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