



## Policy Brief

### Principles for Sustainable Just Cities

*A set of principles to foster the integration of justice into EU policy-making on sustainable urban development*

#### Introduction

Our cities are shaped by crises, or perhaps more accurately by the collective and creative responses that we bring to them. Crises bring our cities to the brink, testing their resilience, forcing them to adapt and innovate.

European cities are no strangers to crisis, though they are currently facing the unique challenge of nested crises. They still feel the aftershocks of the 2008 financial crisis and the 2015 migration crisis, while being in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic. The outlook is no less crisis-ridden, with the rapidly intensifying climate and biodiversity crises threatening the very foundations of our cities.

**This situation throws a stark light on a dual imperative if our cities are to meet this barrage of burdens: they must accelerate their transitions to sustainability, and do so in a way that is just.**

As each subsequent crisis teaches us, there is no crisis without costs – whether social, economic or environmental. An even more important lesson is that successful responses are just, meaning that they spread our collective burden equitably, that they provide solutions designed for all communities, and that they foster more inclusive and resilient governance systems.

Ignoring these hard-earned lessons only serves to exacerbate existing inequities and injustices. **Even worse, ignoring them breaks down trust, fuels backlashes and prevents us from engaging in the collective task of building back better.** In essence, we have the collective obligation to move towards **sustainable and just cities** if we genuinely seek to foster the long-term wellbeing of urban Europe.

We believe that **a unique window of opportunity has now opened** with the launch of the EU Green Deal and, *inter alia*, its Just Transition Mechanism, which seeks to ensure that a transition to a climate-neutral Union leaves no one behind.

#### Principles for sustainable just cities

Europe is blessed with a wealth of organizations pursuing the goals of sustainable and just cities. Less fortunate, however, is their tendency to work in isolation from one another: one either pursues sustainable cities, or just ones. Rarely do these two spheres intersect.



Given the importance of transitioning to sustainable **and** just cities, it is crucial to bring these actors together into a coalition for a common purpose. By building a broad tent, it becomes possible to ignite a groundswell of integrated actions for sustainable and just cities.

Accordingly, a set of nine principles for sustainable just cities has been developed, aimed specifically at influencing *EU-level* policy-making on sustainable urban development from the perspective of justice, inclusion, diversity and equity. The principles were developed out of the UrbanA project but with external input from actors from within and beyond the EU framework, including the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the cities of Bristol and Antwerp, and the European Research Executive Agency of the European Commission. As well as the list of principles with specific targets, an annexure is attached to the brief, linking each principle to relevant frameworks, approaches and institutional actors.

The Principles are hosted on ICLEI Europe's new [Digital Platform for Sustainable Just Cities](#), which also includes a set of [17 keys for city-makers](#) to unlock sustainable and just cities.

## The nine principles

- Principle 1:** Integrate justice into sustainable urban development
- Principle 2:** Embrace alternative economic models
- Principle 3:** Formulate policies with and for all citizens
- Principle 4:** Build transformative capacities
- Principle 5:** Integrate diversity, equity and inclusion into urban planning
- Principle 6:** Strengthen communities
- Principle 7:** Enable universal access to the environment
- Principle 8:** Maximize wellbeing within planetary boundaries
- Principle 9:** Put digitalisation at the service of all

## Policy recommendations and specific targets

### 1. Integrate justice into sustainable urban development

As the imperative grows to limit the use of natural resources and the emission of greenhouse gasses in an effort to stem the climate crisis and live within the planet's ecological boundaries, dilemmas surrounding the equitable distribution of and access to natural resources in the context of climate mitigation and adaptation policies or plans become increasingly salient. Urban areas are at once centres of unsustainable consumption; sites of socio-economic inequalities, and spaces for just sustainability to emerge. Yet only a minority of urban development approaches explicitly address the linkages between sustainability and justice in cities. Cities are understood not in isolation, but in relation to their surrounding peri-urban and rural areas. The EU's urban policies should therefore explicitly integrate justice into approaches for sustainable urban development and support local governments by establishing mechanisms to better fund just sustainability.

#### Targets:

- *EU urban sustainability policies explicitly address justice in their core and make it a requirement rather than an add-on.*
- *New funding schemes are provided or existing ones reinforced to integrate justice into efforts targeting sustainable cities.*

### 2. Embrace alternative economic models

Cities can only become sustainable and just if supported by local and regional economies for the people. They foster the wellbeing of communities and their common good within the planet's boundaries through appropriate and fair financial mechanisms and business models. This requires the adoption of economic models that question the primacy of GDP growth and embrace concepts such as regeneration, circularity, cooperation, care, solidarity, wellbeing, prosperity, and community wealth creation. Underpinning this shift lies the reconfiguration of welfare and fiscal systems towards a framework that taxes the (mis)use of natural resources instead of labour and guarantees the equitable redistribution of wealth. In taking up these alternatives, issues surrounding material inequalities need to be explicitly addressed, including not only the gap between rich and poor, but also more subtle imbalances in mobility, health, housing, job opportunities and more, in order to secure no one is excluded from the future decarbonized economy. The EU's urban policies should build on economic models beyond growth at the local level as a means of rebalancing the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

#### Targets:

- EU policies support alternative non-growth oriented economic and financial models.
- Fiscal systems tax the (mis)use of natural resources rather than labour, and wealth is equitably redistributed.

### 3. Formulate policies with and for all citizens

Urban policies are disproportionately shaped by those holding economic and political power, which can put them at odds with the common good. New modes of policy-making are therefore needed for citizens to be better included in formulating sustainability policies and in ensuring that these do not reinforce existing patterns of inequality or exclusion, or create new ones. Locally-rooted participation offers a means to do so, especially when implemented as a co-creative process that accompanies all stages of the policy cycle. The failure to empower citizens through meaningful participation and to foster a form of participation that supports the voice and decision-making of historically marginalized or invisible/invisibilized groups lead to sub-optimal outcomes, as only part of the local reality

will be captured and only part of the intellectual capital to generate innovative ideas will be used. It also risks further eroding civic trust in local government and public action and creating greater distance and power hierarchies between elected groups and diverse groups of citizens. The EU should therefore support urban policies and regulations that respond to citizens' and stakeholders' diverging priorities, considering their concerns and needs, and building on everyone's proposals.

**Targets:**

- *The EU supports people-centred urban policies that address diverging needs and interests.*
- *The enhanced representation of historically excluded communities is ensured in all stages of the policy cycle.*

#### **4. Build transformative capacities**

Cities are the laboratories of the future, playing host to continuous social innovation and giving rise to path-breaking and sustainable solutions. These are, however, deeply embedded within their specific contexts and disciplines, potentially constraining their visibility and impact. Translocal learning – i.e., learning between and across localities – is therefore a means of enabling transformative change for sustainable and just cities by untethering local solutions from their original geographical or institutional contexts and opening them to up- and out-scaling. EU sustainable urban development initiatives should therefore promote translocal peer learning mechanisms, as well as rural-urban partnerships, multi-stakeholder and multi-level collaboration. They should build on existing translocal networks and initiatives for just and sustainable cities providing them with resources and tools to help integrate and connect them.

**Targets:**

- *The EU provides greater support for inclusive peer-learning programmes across localities building on existing translocal networks.*
- *The EU backs multi-actor, multi-level, interdisciplinary and synergistic projects for supporting a just transition.*

#### **5. Integrate diversity, equity and inclusion into urban planning**

Cities are diverse, but this diversity is not inclusive by default. Many European cities have faced exclusionary urbanization processes based on ethnicity, religion and other factors. Planning for inclusive, people-centred and carbon-neutral cities requires localized solutions resulting from a comprehensive analysis of the real and diverse needs of all citizens, adopting an intersectional approach. The EU should place the inclusion of social, age, gender, racial and cultural diversity at the heart of its sustainable urban development policies, in a way that these recognize the need for tailored approaches.

**Targets:**

- *The EU provides tailored diversity, equity and inclusion frameworks for sustainable urban development policies.*
- *The EU supports cities in integrating intersectionality into their urban planning activities.*

#### **6. Strengthen communities**

Injustice (e.g. through marginalization) and unsustainability (e.g. through a lack of green spaces) isolate and disempower residents, preventing them from transforming their neighbourhoods into more sustainable and just environments. Vibrant communities play a key role in overcoming these issues by fostering individual and collective wellbeing through a sense of belonging, acting as levers for change. Communities, however, largely rely on voluntary or unpaid service, and their ability to deliver positive social and environmental impacts is contingent on the availability of sufficient and continuous human and financial resources. The EU should recognize the value of community-based

initiatives, and support joint endeavours between local governments and their communities for sustainable just cities. Legal frameworks should be adapted to enable the shared governance of urban commons, and easy-to-access funding schemes should support community initiatives working towards sustainable and just cities.

**Targets:**

- *The EU supports shared governance arrangements and co-responsibility for urban commons.*
- *Greater funding is made available for community-led initiatives targeting sustainable just cities.*

## **7. Enable universal access to the environment**

A growing number of local and regional governments are embarking on ambitious sustainability transitions. Climate adaptation, climate mitigation and biodiversity protection are key pathways in this regard, including the implementation of nature-based solutions and green infrastructure in urban areas. However, those efforts and their impacts are rarely equitably distributed across all settlements. Marginalized and vulnerable communities live disproportionately in less safe, resilient and green neighbourhoods, and face a greater exposure to human and natural hazards, including pollution, flooding, heat and noise. These communities also encounter additional barriers (e.g., financial, spatial) to access environmental public goods (e.g. low-carbon affordable energy, biodiversity, clean water and air). Last, they are those most at risk of exclusion from green gentrification. The EU should support cities to design sustainability interventions that benefit all residents by guaranteeing the accessibility and equitable enjoyment of environmental public goods in line with residents' right to place and right to a clean and healthy environment.

**Targets:**

- *The EU supports shared governance arrangements and co-responsibility for urban commons.*
- *Greater funding is made available for community-led initiatives targeting sustainable just cities.*

## **8. Maximize wellbeing within planetary boundaries**

Guaranteeing all inhabitants have their basic needs covered is the sine qua non of sustainable and just urban development. This includes fundamental human rights such as decent and affordable food, health, housing and education. Beyond this minimum, wellbeing requires an empowering environment that provides equal opportunities to all inhabitants to develop their full potential. Crucially, the provision of these services and the support of individual and collective development must occur within global planetary boundaries. This can be achieved by combining top-down (e.g., public regulations) and bottom-up (e.g., social innovation) approaches, as well as by better integrating the functions performed by urban, peri-urban and rural territories (e.g., food production, eco-tourism). The EU should support cities to employ a concept of care and develop people's capabilities to secure the psychological, physical and financial wellbeing of their inhabitants with specific attention to vulnerable populations (e.g., elderly, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, youth).

**Targets:**

- *All available resources are activated to ensure coverage of basic needs for all inhabitants.*
- *Equal development opportunities are guaranteed whilst reducing resource use towards globally just shares.*

## **9. Put digitalisation at the service of all**

Digitalisation in cities needs to be put at the service of societal challenges and needs, rather than the profit of private entities with limited public accountability. In essence, this translates into a move from a supply-driven – companies offer tools to local governments – to demand-driven – local governments commission tools for specific problems – approach. This is crucial as unbridled digitalisation risks amplifying existing inequalities by excluding groups facing

barriers to digital technologies and embedding unconscious biases into tools, including AI. Nevertheless, digitalization has the potential to accelerate sustainable consumption (e.g. by enabling sustainable lifestyles including waste reduction through sharing approaches) and production (e.g. by enabling distributed and responsive production), as well as to provide new means of including citizens in deliberative and participatory decision-making processes. An effort should therefore be made to reorient digitalization towards sustainable and inclusive development by supporting ethically-grounded AI, securing open data and open source tools and standards, as well as promoting appropriate business models such that respond to diverse social groups' needs, including the elderly.

**Targets:**

- *The EU supports ethical digitalisation that responds to local needs and priorities.*
- *The EU activates programmes to bridge the digital gap of vulnerable groups, including the elderly and low-income communities.*

## Building a longer-term process

The Principles were formulated with the core working group in the spring of 2021. They were then shared with a second circle of organizations (e.g., OECD, EUKN, ESDN, ECOLISE, etc.) on 2 July 2021. During this meeting, the participating organizations not only became more familiar with the Principles, they also reflected on how they could link their work to the Principles (see Annex 2 for the outcomes of this discussion).

Initially, a public launched was planned for the autumn of 2021, but the COVID-19 situation prevented this from taking place. A backup launch at COP26 was also cancelled, due to the inability to bring in all speakers. As of now, the intention is to launch the Principles to the broader public in the spring of 2022, once COVID-19 restrictions are eased.

This event will feature the core members of the working group, as well as the following organizations:

- JPI Urban Europe
- European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN)
- European Network for Community-Led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability (ECOLISE)
- European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)
- European Youth Forum
- World Enabled
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

The longer-term plan is to focus less on the Principles themselves, and more on actions that can be taken in relation to them. A series of regular monitoring meetings would then be planned.

Moreover, the Just Transition / Sustainable Just Cities space is evolving rapidly and synergies are being sought with other emerging initiatives, such as the European Alliance for a Just Transition, to which ICLEI Europe has recently acceded.

## Project Overview

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### Project websites

<https://urban-arena.eu/> and <https://sustainablejustcities.eu/>

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January 2019 to March 2022

### Consortium



## Annex I. Relevant frameworks, approaches and actors per principle

Principles	Frameworks	Approaches	Actors/Processes
<b>Principle 1</b>	SDGs, New Leipzig Charter, EU Green Deal, EU Pillar of Social Rights, Porto Declaration		EEB ICLEI Basque Declaration & Mannheim Message
<b>Principle 2</b>	SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production), EU Pillar of Social Rights, European Green Deal Investment Plan and Just Transition Mechanism, European Industrial Strategy, Circular Economy Action Plan, Leipzig Charter (Common Good)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time-banking</li> <li>• Ethic banking</li> <li>• Green and social bonds</li> <li>• Cooperatives for urban commons</li> <li>• Environmental taxation, regulation, legislation</li> <li>• Circular financing and business models</li> <li>• Sustainable procurement</li> <li>• Beyond GDP indicators</li> <li>• Gender-responsive budgeting</li> </ul>	EIB, EBRD, EESC, OECD, EC, SMEs European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform ICLEI Basque Declaration & Mannheim Message
<b>Principle 3</b>	SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals), SDG16 (Peace, Justice and strong institutions), New Leipzig Charter, New Urban Agenda, European Climate Pact, Horizon Europe Missions (100 Climate-Neutral Cities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen (climate) assemblies</li> <li>• Participatory budgeting</li> <li>• Common Good approach</li> <li>• Experimentation Labs</li> <li>• Crowdsourcing</li> <li>• Feminist urbanism and linked practices of citizen engagement</li> </ul>	EC, EESC, CoR, European Youth Forum, European Migration Forum ICLEI Basque Declaration & Mannheim Message
<b>Principle 4</b>	SDG11 (Sustainable cities and communities), SDG16 (Peace, Justice and strong institutions), Pillar of Social Rights, Porto Declaration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arenas</li> <li>• Co-learning and knowledge brokerage</li> <li>• Innovative partnership models (e.g. quintuple helix model, Heritage Innovation Partnerships, etc.)</li> </ul>	EC, CoR, OECD CEMR, Eurocities, FearlessCities, Right to the City platforms, Solidarity Cities, Rainbow cities network, Human Rights Cities, Sustainable Cities platform, European Green Cities
<b>Principle 5</b>	SDG 5 (Gender), SDG 10 (Inequalities), EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, EU Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030, the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025; the EU Strategy for the Rights of People with Disabilities 2021-2030; the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan, the New EU Roma Strategic Framework, Renovation Wave, New European Bauhaus initiative, Pillar of Social Rights, Porto Declaration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory/Critical Mapping</li> <li>• Universal Design</li> <li>• SUMP with a gender-sensitive and inclusive perspective embedded in the planning process</li> <li>• Adaptive reuse (of cultural heritage)</li> <li>• Sustainable households</li> <li>• Right to the city</li> <li>• Feminist urbanism and linked practices of citizen engagement</li> </ul>	European Council of Spatial Planners (ECTP-CEU), International Disability Alliance



Principles	Frameworks	Approaches	Actors/Processes
<b>Principle 6</b>	SDG11 (Sustainable cities and communities), SDG16 (Peace, Justice and strong institutions), EU-directive on renewable energy communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture-based solutions for empowerment</li> <li>• Social entrepreneurship</li> </ul>	Local community networks, ECOLISE, Cultural sector
<b>Principle 7</b>	SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), Convention on Biological Diversity, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 & Urban Greening Plans, European Climate Pact, Green City Accord	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature-based solutions</li> <li>• Participatory pollination</li> <li>• Transnational environmental justice</li> <li>• Justice-driven Urban Greening Plans</li> <li>• Green gentrification maps and associated risk maps</li> </ul>	UNFCCC, IPBES, EEB, IUCN Europe, IEEP, Climate Alliance
<b>Principle 8</b>	SDG1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and wellbeing), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG5 (Gender equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Affordable and clean Energy), SDG 12 (Sustainable consumption and production), UN Habitat New Urban Agenda, UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, European Pillar of Social Rights, Porto Declaration, “Farm to fork” strategy, Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic Income</li> <li>• Local Food Council/Food Policy Council</li> <li>• Social food movements (e.g., Food sharing, Slow Food...)</li> <li>• Community gardens and food</li> <li>• Sustainable food supply chain</li> <li>• Right to the City</li> <li>• Alternative housing practices (e.g. co-living and co-housing)</li> <li>• Energy cooperatives</li> </ul>	UN CESCR, European Energy Union, Council of Europe, Energy cities, European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), Housing Europe
<b>Principle 9</b>	SDG4 (Education), New Leipzig Charter, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, EU Web Accessibility Directive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smart Cities</li> <li>• Digital Fabrication (Fab Labs and Fab Cities)</li> </ul>	Revision of EU Web Accessibility Directive AGE Platform Europe

## Annex II. Potential Collaborative Actions linked to the Principles

CEMR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link with Covenant of Mayors (incl. ICLEI, Eurocities, Climate Alliance, etc.)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities</a> (CEMR, URBACT)</li> <li>• <a href="#">European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life</a>, signed by 200 European cities</li> <li>• Recently published SDG report: <a href="#">European Territories Localise the SDGs</a></li> </ul>
ECOLISE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open to help advocate for the implementation of the Principles</li> <li>• Ongoing: Policy Paper and Pathways developed by ECOLISE members and citizens</li> <li>• <a href="#">Communities for Future Policy Week</a> (20-28.09.2021): Regional events of ECOLISE members with MEPs and other policymakers</li> </ul>
EC-EREA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During Launch, organizations (e.g., EYF, World Enabled) could give examples of what individual Principles mean to them in practice</li> <li>• Horizon Europe Missions: Smart communities. Co-creation debate. Citizens should not be understood as only one entity, very diverse.</li> <li>• EWRC: event confirmed (Post-COVID Ecosystem) where the Principles could be presented</li> <li>• Think about having City Ambassadors (e.g., City of Umea for Principle 5 – cf. <a href="#">Gender Equal Cities</a>)</li> </ul>
ESDN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interested to promote the Principles internally: <a href="#">Yearly Conference</a> in Nov/Dec 2021 and organised by Slovenia (current Presidency). Theme: European resilience and recovery plans</li> </ul>
EUKN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform Members (including Presidencies of the EU)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Policy Labs</a> with Members: potential to collaborate in next event</li> <li>• <a href="#">CONEXUS</a>: Project on NBS, also with ICLEI Europe</li> <li>• Side-event at WUF11 Katowice</li> <li>• 2/3 events proposed for EWRC</li> <li>• Policy Brief for Ministries under Slovene presidency (focus: green)</li> <li>• Next phase of the Urban Agenda for the EU</li> </ul>
EYF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">European Youth Capital</a>: how principles could apply at the judgement criteria</li> <li>• Joint side-event at COP</li> <li>• Week of Action linked to fiscal policy (last week of September)</li> </ul>
ICLEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinating the long-term development of the SJIC Initiatives, including online presence, regular meetings, monitoring and evaluation of actions, etc.</li> <li>• Organizing sessions, side-events, etc. at key events (e.g., COP26, WUF11, ICLEI World Congress in May 2022, etc.)</li> <li>• Integrating the Principles into ICLEI's strategic programmes (e.g., Local Green Deals)</li> </ul>
JPI Urban Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential call topics and content for Programming</li> <li>• <a href="#">Urban Lunch Talks</a> (once per month)</li> <li>• Joint workshop at WUF11</li> <li>• <a href="#">The Agora</a> community (workshop every other month)-&gt; linked Policy Paper to be developed</li> </ul>
World Enabled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tools oriented organisation; ongoing work on data collection</li> <li>• <a href="#">Cities for All</a>: Global Campaign on Inclusive and Accessible Cities</li> </ul>