

The European Union needs strong cities

Only with the help of cities can the European Union achieve its objectives. The green transition will be implemented in cities, economic growth and technological progress in Europe comes largely from cities, and the well-being and integration of the European population are being implemented in cities. Cities generate innovations that change the world. Cities are closest to citizens and serve as the driving force behind democracy.

By 2050, 80% of the population of Europe will be living in urban areas.

The Helsinki Metropolitan Area serves not only as the driving force of the development of Finland as a whole, but also as a creator of future solutions in Europe. Recognising this, Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa have four key EU objectives in common.



The objectives summarised:

1) Urban policy needs to be higher on the EU agenda and integrated into EU policy areas

- There needs to be more extensive and systematic dialogue between the EU and cities and between the Finnish Government and cities about EU matters.
- Urban policy must be better coordinated and integrated into the EU agenda.
- The European Commission must appoint a Vice-President responsible for urban policy.

2) A renewing and competitive EU

- The preconditions for competitiveness and solutions for the green transition are created in cities – the development efforts of cities must be supported.
- Cities, geopolitics and security of supply must be taken into account in transport solutions.
- Resources must be devoted to ensuring the functioning of the single market.
- The regulatory burden of businesses and municipalities must be reduced.

3) A democratic and healthy EU

- Cities must be provided with support for reducing inequalities, preventing social exclusion and promoting good relations between different population groups.
- More developed regions also must be provided with EU support to improve housing and transport in order to prevent segregation and urban poverty.

4) A carbon neutral EU that promotes the energy transition

- Cities must be provided with support for systemic change, which creates preconditions for sustainable development, for example.
- Cities need support to improve the energy efficiency of buildings.
- Cities need sensible policies and sufficient support for reducing transport emissions.
- Cities' tools and know-how for responding to the energy transition must be strengthened.

More information on the common EU objectives of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa

1. Urban policy needs to be higher on the EU agenda and integrated into the EU's various policy areas

There needs to be more extensive and systematic dialogue between the EU and cities and between the Finnish Government and cities about EU matters

- Both the EU and cities and the Finnish Government and cities must create structures for active dialogue so that the needs of different cities are taken into account at the different stages and levels of EU decision-making and preparation.

Urban policy must be better coordinated and integrated into the EU agenda

- The European Commission must appoint an Executive Vice-President responsible for urban policy and for coordinating urban issues in different EU policy areas.

2. A renewing and competitive EU

The EU needs strong cities where new technologies are created and utilised and business activities that improve productivity are developed

Cities must be supported in creating the preconditions for competitiveness and solutions for the green transition

- The EU's competitiveness should be strengthened by investing in research, product development and innovation activities with an emphasis on competitive criteria. It is important for the Helsinki Metropolitan Area that the funding for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) is increased and allocated to cities as well. The funding must be distributed on a competitive basis and the bureaucracy of the programme must be reduced.
- Cities should receive more direct EU funding than before, and this funding should be increasingly allocated to activities that promote expertise, the energy transition, the digital transition, research, product development and attracting international talent. Cities are frontrunners in the implementation of new digital and green transition solutions.
- The capacity of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area to support the EU's strategic autonomy must be promoted. The Helsinki Metropolitan Area has strong potential to develop quantum technology, semiconductor manufacturing and service business operations that strengthen the private sector (e.g. the Kvantinova project) and to serve as an EU-level business cluster, so it is important to secure development funding for the future as well.

Cities, geopolitics and security of supply must be taken into account in transport solutions

- The security and competitiveness of the EU must be strengthened by investing in the accessibility and security of supply of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. For example, due to the geopolitical situation Finland has increasingly become an island with the deterioration of accessibility. Maintaining flight connections and developing a railway connection between Helsinki and Rail Baltica would support Finland in this situation.

Resources must be devoted to ensuring the functioning of the single market

- The capacity for renewal of the EU and European businesses must be promoted while taking into account the agreed rules of the single market. A well-functioning single market and fair competition in Europe are important prerequisites for the growth and competitiveness of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and Finnish companies.

The regulatory burden of businesses and municipalities must be reduced

- Bureaucracy must continue to be dismantled and overregulation must be avoided. EU institutions must strike a balance between regulation that supports competitiveness and administrative burden.
- EU financial instruments must facilitate concrete action and investments, not increase the administrative burden.
- EU reporting requirements related to the achievement of various objectives must not impose an excessive administrative burden on companies or municipalities.

3. A democratic and healthy EU

The EU needs cities that uphold good relations between different population groups, equality, integration, safety and security

Cities must be provided with support for reducing inequalities, preventing social exclusion and promoting good relations between different population groups

- More of the support provided by Structural Funds must be allocated to cities in order to prevent social exclusion and regional disparity. Regions should be examined at a significantly smaller scale than at present.

- Assessments related to segregation must be better supported. Improving the identification of disadvantaged areas, residents and resident groups and the targeting of measures intended to improve their well-being prevents and mitigates segregation.
 - The education and well-being of children and young people must also be promoted with EU support, as children and young people are the future of the European Union.
 - The education sector must be provided with help for employee retention and attraction. Finnish cities have extensive educational responsibilities compared to the rest of Europe.
 - Hopelessness among children and young people must be prevented by supporting the well-being of children, which is also a prerequisite for effective learning.
 - Stronger education and employment measures are needed to support families with children. Low income is a risk factor for the favourable growth and development of children and young people and increases well-being disparities.
- Integration and immigration take place in cities. Financial instruments related to integration must be developed so that they address the needs of cities to develop good relations between different population groups and to improve integration.
- For the sake of democratisation and safety, cities must be supported in preventing hopelessness, gang formation, and radicalisation.
- The more developed regions must also be provided with EU support to improve housing and transport in order to prevent segregation and urban poverty.
- Measures to build housing and pleasant residential environments are central to preventing regional segregation. Support is needed to improve the energy efficiency of buildings in accordance with EU legislation so that households do not incur unreasonable costs and become disadvantaged.
- Funding is needed for rail projects to develop the internal transport solutions of cities as well, as they promote equality between city districts.

4. A carbon neutral EU that promotes the energy transition

In order to meet its emissions reduction targets, the European Union needs cities that lead the way in climate change mitigation and the promotion of the energy transition

The cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa aim to become carbon neutral by 2030. In addition to this, Helsinki aims to zero emissions by 2040 and be carbon negative thereafter. Key measures on this path towards carbon neutrality include measures to improve the energy efficiency of buildings, low-emission transport solutions, reducing road transport performance and increasing the share of emission-free energy in heating and electricity production.

The systemic change of cities must be supported

- The EU must support the development of markets by developing procurement legislation and strongly connecting it to climate issues.
- EU funding should be directed to where it is most effective and enable cities to not only develop new solutions, but also scale already piloted technologies and change operating models, structures, and their interactions. This would increase the effectiveness of existing solutions developed with EU funding.
- The structure of EU Missions should be clarified, and the participation and funding opportunities of cities should be improved.

The energy efficiency of buildings must be improved

- Improving the energy efficiency of cities' own building stock and utilising renewable energy in both new construction and renovation requires EU support for innovative and cost-effective technologies.

Cities need forward-looking policies and sufficient support for reducing transport emissions

- Cities need EU-wide support and policies for electric cars, the construction of charging infrastructure for passenger cars and heavy transport, and the availability of affordable electric cars.
- Improving mobility within and between Member States requires a special green transition funding channel based on urban nodes, which bring together different modes of transport and efficiently mediate traffic – rail transport solutions will play an important role in these.
- EU-level support and policies are needed to mitigate emissions from freight transport in port cities.
- Emissions trading is expected to play an increasingly important role in transport in the future. This will be a major challenge that cities must respond to proactively.

More expertise and tools for cities to respond to the energy transition

- The competitiveness of the EU in terms of attracting talent and companies must be ensured by developing the single market and assessing regulatory impacts, for example.
- The circular economy of construction must be further developed and supported (e.g. through removal of barriers to the re-use of materials, regulatory development, and product standards for re-use).
- The EU needs to provide more tools for the development of energy production and the hydrogen economy, sector integration, and the utilisation of digitalisation opportunities, among others.