



BARCELONA METROPOLITAN DECLARATION: Metropolitan future beyond 2030

On this day, 15 October 2025, we, the mayors, presidents, and political representatives, have convened in Barcelona for the World Metropolitan Summit and the tenth anniversary of the European Metropolitan Authorities Forum. Our collective purpose is to elevate the metropolitan dimension as a cornerstone for advancing global goals, from the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda to the evolving post-2030 frameworks.

This declaration is grounded in the shared vision and frameworks of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement (2015), the Montreal Declaration on Metropolitan Areas (2015), the declarations of the European Metropolitan Authorities (2015–2025), the New Urban Agenda (2016), the Metrex Manifesto (2023), the Brussels Declaration of Mayors (2024), and the UN-Habitat Resolution HSP/HA.2/Res.6 (2023), in which, for the first time, the UN-Habitat General Assembly formally called for the reinforcement of metropolitan governance to advance the SDGs through integrated, cross-sector and multilevel approaches.

We acknowledge this growing global consensus that sustainable development cannot be achieved without considering our urban agglomerations. Approximately 65% of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) rely on urban settlements. However, our metropolises are not only places for implementing these Goals; they also serve as vital habitats for biodiversity and centres for innovation, leadership and social cohesion. This highlights the urgency of enhancing metropolitan governance as a crucial step in addressing the interconnected challenges we face today, including housing, climate change, significant biodiversity loss, inequality and digitalisation.

CONSIDERING:

- **The metropolitan demographic shift**

More than half of the global population now lives in urban areas, with metropolitan areas hosting the largest and most dynamic concentrations of people, economies and innovation. According to the UN-Habitat report *Global State of Metropolises 2020*, it is projected that the number of people living in metropolises in 2035 will increase to 3.47 billion, representing 39% of the global population and 62.5% of the world's urban population. Almost 1 billion people will become metropolitan citizens between 2020 and 2035. This rapid growth in many metropolises has made urban planning and the provision of common services more complex, as well as the creation of equitable and inclusive spaces for all people.

- **The need for integrated territorial approaches**

Traditional administrative boundaries often fail to reflect the functional realities of today's interconnected urban areas. Nowadays, in the vast majority of urban centres, people's daily lives are metropolitan. Supralocal governance enables coordinated action across municipalities, ensuring equitable services, economic cohesion, and strategic spatial planning, key to achieving the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda. Thus, challenges such as housing, sustainable mobility, climate change, energy consumption and security, digitalization, water scarcity or waste management, among others, go much beyond municipal boundaries, making metropolitan areas key players in addressing global issues at the local level.

- **Housing scarcity crisis**

Our metropolises are facing a housing crisis that restricts access for a large segment of the population. Factors such as globalisation, mass tourism, real estate speculation and gentrification have resulted in a shortage of affordable housing, particularly affecting middle- and lower-class residents. Many individuals are compelled to allocate an unreasonable percentage of their incomes towards housing, which worsens their living conditions and makes it difficult for them to maintain a reasonable quality of life. This issue is especially relevant in metropolises, where inadequate urban planning and insufficient quality housing are compounded by a lack of access to basic services such as drinking water, renewable sources of energy and sanitation. Moreover, 150 million people are still homeless worldwide as per the last World Economic Forum report (2021).

- **The climate and environmental emergency**

The accelerating climate crisis is intensifying its impacts worldwide. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, sea-level rise, unplanned urban sprawl and increasing resource scarcity are placing significant pressure on ecosystems, economies and social systems. These effects are not evenly distributed; densely populated urban areas face the greatest risks. Metropolitan areas concentrate many vulnerabilities, making their populations particularly susceptible to the unavoidable consequences of climate change.

Interestingly, as ecosystems become increasingly degraded and fragmented, urban areas are emerging as complementary refuges for biodiversity. This trend necessitates a re-evaluation of metropolitan planning and management. In this context, environmental policies and resilience strategies must be closely aligned, with a particular focus on soft mobility, sustainable energy use, waste reduction and integrated water cycle management, which includes improved access to sanitation services.

- **Democracy, geopolitical tensions and their urban effects**

The current global scenario is marked by a weakening of democracy in the global narrative, rising geopolitical tensions, re-centralisations of local competences, ongoing armed conflicts and a shift towards protectionism and unilateralism. These dynamics are fragmenting international cooperation, disrupting trade and undermining multilateral responses to global challenges.

Urban and metropolitan areas are on the front lines of these shifts' effects. They are absorbing displaced populations, facing economic instability due to unstable supply chains, and struggling to respond to transnational crises with limited support.

- **Humanistic digital transition**

In today's rapidly changing global landscape, digitalisation and especially the impact of AI have emerged as a crucial factor in economic competitiveness, social progress and environmental sustainability. Whether in rural communities or busy urban centres, equitable access to technology and digital literacy is critical for fostering innovation, improving productivity, and ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital age.

WE DECLARE that:

- **Metropolises are of suitable scale**, transcending municipalities' administrative boundaries, functioning as interconnected systems of people, wildlife, infrastructures, goods, information and energy. Thus, metropolitan governance enables coordinated territorial responses to important challenges—whether it is public transport that crosses jurisdictions, housing markets that affect entire regions, or water and energy systems that require shared management. **Strengthening metropolitan governance is key to ensuring spatial justice, service equity and policy coherence in a deeply interdependent world.**

We acknowledge the importance of polycentric metropolitan structures, in which multiple municipalities form an integrated territorial system. These configurations require tailored approaches to planning, governance and financing that recognise both interdependence and the autonomy of individual urban centres. Enhancing this multilevel governance mechanism should reinforce the role of local authorities as valid interlocutors when it comes to territorial development with a place-based approach.

In this context, the **principle of subsidiarity** should be applied to ensure that decisions are made as close as possible to the citizens affected by them. Empowering metropolitan areas will lead to more effective governance and improve the services that meet the daily needs of our interconnected communities.

- **Metropolitan areas are key actors in accomplishing international and regional agendas.** Their scale and diversity position them at the forefront of global change, where policies and investments can have an exponential impact. Thus, it has been proved that the metropolitan scale is essential if we want to accomplish the objectives of international and regional policy objectives such as the Agenda 2030; the New Urban Agenda; the New Leipzig Charter; EU Cohesion Policy; the EU Green Deal or the European Climate Pact and EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change; 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 initiative; the Barcelona Convention and its protocols; the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development; the EU Ocean Pact or the New Pact for the Mediterranean.
- Housing is a fundamental right critical for living a dignified life and to guarantee basic services and other rights. It represents more than just a physical shelter; it is a cornerstone of social and economic development, especially in metropolitan areas. Consequently, **affordable housing has become a top priority in our efforts to support disadvantaged individuals, people living in unplanned communities and to combat homelessness.**

We share the vision outlined in the letter from European Mayors for Housing (2024), which calls for a prompt and effective response to the housing crisis in our metropolitan areas. To achieve this, it is essential

that metropolitan areas are included in the design and implementation of all national and international housing policies and receive the necessary support and funds.

- **Metropolises create and concentrate environmental impacts and risks, but also the capacity to act.** Their responsibility in climate issues is matched by their capacity to implement large-scale adaptation and mitigation strategies. From green infrastructure to sustainable mobility and urban resilience plans, metropolitan areas are uniquely positioned to integrate environmental priorities across policy areas and deliver transformative climate action where it matters most.

Metropolises have increasingly become havens and hotspots of biodiversity: this represents a new opportunity for a different approach and dialogue with nature, more connected to it. This should inspire metropolitan planning and cross-cutting management.

- In the face of **global instability**—marked by conflict, displacement, and economic disruption—**metropolitan areas are absorbing the social and economic consequences.** Yet their institutional proximity to affected populations, their economic weight and their participation in global networks allow them to remain connected, operational and resilient. In a moment where international cooperation is threatened, metropolises are emerging as pragmatic actors capable of sustaining global commitments through local action and city-to-city cooperation.

In this volatile context, metropolitan areas—due to their diversity, economic weight and international connections—are uniquely positioned to act as bridges for dialogue, platforms for peacebuilding, and engines of resilient, open economies. Strengthening their role in global governance is not only strategic but also essential for building stability from the ground up.

- **Metropolitan areas worldwide are creating ecosystems of innovation, facilitating the empowerment of citizens, and contributing to a more prosperous, sustainable and digital future** that prioritises inclusivity. In today's interconnected world, where digital networks are blurring borders, all territories need to enhance their **digital capabilities.** In this collective journey towards digital transformation, **collaboration and cooperation** among governments, researchers, civil society and private companies are crucial for realising technology's **full potential while protecting digital rights, data privacy, the environment and placing people at the centre of the digitalisation process.**

Involving citizens in the digitalisation process is vital for ensuring inclusivity and maximising the benefits of technology. Artificial intelligence must be developed and deployed responsibly to serve the public good. Access to affordable, reliable high-speed internet is essential for bridging the digital divide and reaching all citizens and territories.

WE COMMIT:

- **To lead in this urban century** by undertaking transformative actions that create inclusive, equitable, and sustainable metropolises while respecting everyone's human rights and leading the fight against the climate emergency. Our goal is to unlock the full potential of metropolitan areas as hubs for inclusive

innovation, cultural creativity, biodiversity and economic opportunity. We will ensure that the benefits of this transformation reach all communities, without forgetting access to essential services, such as clean drinking water, waste management and public transport, among others.

- **To strengthen democratic metropolitan governance** through deeper institutional cooperation and multilevel and multistakeholder coordination across all territories. We will work to improve representation, transparency and citizen engagement in decision-making processes, making metropolitan governance more responsive and accountable.
- **To assume a pivotal role in driving and nurturing the global agenda beyond 2030 and 2050**, engaging in strategic collaboration with the United Nations, other relevant international organisations and networks, and our national and regional governments. We will face all global challenges, promote sustainable development, protect and restore biodiversity, and ensure that our collective efforts align with the shared goals of peace, prosperity and equity for all. As discussed at the Metrosolutions International Congress (Cornellà de Llobregat, 2022), metropolitan areas are prepared and equipped to lead innovative solutions that will shape the urban future and address the international challenges of the 2030 Agenda and beyond.
- **To implement a bold metropolitan housing policy** that guarantees accessibility, affordability and quality living conditions for all citizens. Our metropolises will develop all necessary mechanisms to promote the right to adequate housing. This is an essential policy to transform our metropolises into territories for dignity, social equity, intergenerational solidarity and shared prosperity.
- **To enhance collaboration among metropolitan areas by sharing experiences** and promoting mutual learning that drives innovation and growth. Peer-to-peer cooperation should be a fundamental aspect of our international efforts, strengthening metropolitan networks as essential platforms for knowledge sharing and the development of joint advocacy strategies.
- **To achieve climate neutrality** in our metropolitan areas as soon as possible, fostering mitigation and adaptation, regardless of the pace of other global actors. We will mobilise all available resources, scale proven innovations and collaborate across borders to lead a just and ambitious ecological transition. Strong support is necessary during energy and industrial transitions, ensuring a balance between climate goals, social cohesion, economic development and biodiversity protection.

WE CALL ON:

- **National governments, international institutions, and multilateral organisations to recognise metropolitan areas as essential partners in global governance** to guarantee the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda, the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Pact for the Future and other international agendas that seek sustainable development worldwide. Not just as consultative stakeholders but also as direct partners in designing, implementing and evaluating policies and funds.

- **The introduction of stable funding mechanisms for metropolitan areas**, along with an increase in their autonomy in managing international and EU funds. Future international and EU programmes should acknowledge the unique characteristics of metropolitan institutions by providing them with dedicated resources and tools to support effective investment implementation. This includes promoting participatory, supra-local strategies that reflect the long-term development priorities of each metropolitan area and encourage decentralisation and international local cooperation.

We, the participants of the World Metropolitan Summit and the European Metropolitan Authorities Forum, are united in our commitment to progress, sustainability, the right to a clean and diverse environment, resilience and quality of life for all people. We are eager to drive transformative actions to address the global challenges affecting our societies, especially the housing crisis. Together, we aim to play a vital role in confronting international issues and promoting a sustainable, just and equitable society for current and future generations.

Barcelona, 15 October 2025