

To EU Member States and Permanent Representations

Brussels, June 2014

Open letter

No decent life for all without European local and regional governments

The European Commission released, on June 2, a Communication aimed at contributing to the EU position in international negotiations on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This Communication lists 17 priority areas and potential targets for the years following 2015, as a step towards establishing the final Sustainable Development Goals. The document highlights that “eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development are fundamental global challenges that require strong political commitment and determined action at all levels and by all stakeholders.”

That same day, Co-Chairs of the Open Working Group (OWG) released a zero-draft introducing and proposing 17 goals and targets on sustainable development for the post-2015 development agenda, which UN Member States are currently discussing.

European local and regional governments, their associations and networks have taken good note of both documents, and wish to emphasise the universal vision of sustainable development presented in both, and to reiterate their plea for a stand-alone goal on sustainable urbanisation (Urban SDG) aimed at building inclusive, safe and resilient cities and territories.

Urbanisation will be the defining trend of the 21st century, while other global challenges such as education, health or climate cannot be properly addressed without the leadership of our towns, cities and regions.

What does this mean for Europe?

Europe has changed over the past 15 years. It has become an urban continent, highly dependent on the development of its towns, cities and regions.

Europe has implemented policies and programmes that promote sustainable *urban* development such as the Covenant of Mayors, the URBACT programme, the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities; and has launched a discussion on an EU Urban Agenda. Europe has also on multiple occasions shown its commitment to governance in partnership for sustainable development.

Europe understands that decentralisation and the empowerment of local and regional governments is a driver of development in partner countries, and in particular in processes that leads to sustainable urbanisation.

An Urban SDG will positively reinforce these trends and choices, and can become a unifying principle for all urban-related policies and programmes at European, national and international levels.

Indeed an Urban SDG is not only about cities. It is anchored in a territorial approach to development with due consideration to regional, peri-urban and rural-urban linkages. As such, it integrates all dimensions of sustainable development in a comprehensive and coherent way.

Furthermore, an Urban SDG places multi-level and multi-stakeholder approaches at the heart of sustainable development. We emphasise here the capacity of local and regional governments to mobilise *all* actors of sustainable development within their territory, and the support that partners of civil society and the private sector have already given to the Urban SDG.

Likewise, the Urban SDG will be able to promote decentralised cooperation, peer to peer learning, municipal international cooperation and other similar means that have helped enhance and build capacity of local governments. With an Urban SDG, these can evolve into a more structured and systematic approach to support counterparts from all over the world to build resilient cities, fight climate change, reduce poverty, support democracy and local governance, and provide basic service delivery to the people.

Local and regional leaders all across Europe are convinced that by giving specific attention to Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements in the new agenda, we will be triggering the type of transformation that will create the basis to integrate economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions of development and address inequalities, productivity, and resilience.

We are pleased to see that Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements remain at the core of both the EC and the OWG priorities. We highly welcome the support of EU Member States to an Urban SDG, and encourage other European governments to join the movement.

Yours sincerely,

