

Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

Geneva, 1-2 March 2018

High-Level Policy Segment

Statement by the Council of Europe

By definition, our philosophy is that most, if not all, of the Council of Europe's activities are relevant and contribute to the implementation of Agenda 2030.

The unique added-value of the Council of Europe is a combination of:

- its pan-European membership;
- its standards: a comprehensive measurable normative framework which can be used as indicators/benchmarks;
- its multi-stakeholder dimension: in addition to its intergovernmental bodies, the Council of Europe's unique structure includes the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Conference of International NGOs, as well as the European Court of Human Rights;
- its monitoring/follow-up bodies and processes;
- its technical support provided to individual countries for capacity-building; and
- its global outreach: most of the organisation's legally-binding conventions and activities are open to participation by non-member States.

With regard to the topic of this high-level policy segment, which broadly corresponds to SDG 11, local authorities are key players in achieving this and indeed other goals. However, to be efficient in fulfilling their tasks, local authorities need to be empowered – through decentralisation policies, and enabled – through capacity-building tools. The Council of Europe offers assistance to its member States in both areas.

The Council of Europe is the leading international organisation in respect of strengthening local government with, in particular, its unique international treaty on decentralisation, the **European Charter of Local Self-Government**.

The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe** brings together local and regional elected representatives from the 47 member States. As the voice of municipalities and regions, it works to advance local and regional democracy and foster dialogue between national governments and grassroots authorities. It also monitors the application of the Charter.

Other instruments promoted by the Congress include the European Urban Charter, local youth councils, councils of foreign residents and the right of foreign residents to vote and be elected at the local level,

based on the **Council of Europe Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at the Local Level**.

The Council of Europe's **Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform** offers practical support to central governments intent on reforming their legislation, institutions or polices, as well as to local authorities interested in improving the quality of their governance and public services.

Another salient example of the Council of Europe's contribution is its **Intercultural Cities Programme**, which has pioneered a new policy framework for inclusion and sustainable diversity management at the local level, supporting local authorities in the building of cohesive culturally diverse cities which are resilient to conflict. Today, over 120 cities in Europe and beyond are applying the intercultural integration approach. They represent a powerful voice for the recognition of diversity as an asset for societies' development and a rich source of experience and know-how which can help shape policies at other levels of governance.

Finally, a few words about the **Council of Europe Development Bank**. Through the provision of financing and technical expertise for investment projects with a high impact on people's lives, the Bank actively promotes social cohesion across Europe.

The Bank's mandate – promoting social cohesion in Europe – makes it a natural partner for inclusive cities seeking to diversify their financing. In recent years, the Bank has stepped up its cooperation with municipalities in member countries to lend its full support to their social investments.

In the last ten years, the Bank invested €1.5 billion for municipal social infrastructure through loans directly contracted and implemented by cities. During the same period, the Bank approved €17.7 billion in loans to support social projects across Europe which improve people's daily lives.