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European Urban Charter III (2023): Urban living in the era of transformations

Introduction

The first [European Urban Charter](#), adopted by the Council of Europe's Standing Conference on Local and Regional Authorities of Europe in 1992, was a landmark document which represented a key stage in the necessary recognition of the role of towns and cities in the development of our societies. The Congress complemented the European Urban Charter in 2008 with the [European Urban Charter II – Manifesto for a new urbanity](#). The 2008 manifesto updated the original Congress European Urban Charter and proposed a more contextual approach to urban living, urging the Council of Europe member States to build sustainable towns and cities.

Since then, urban living has gone through a series of transformations linked to the development of smart cities, the protection of urban heritage, deepening social inequalities, democratic innovations and last but not least, the accelerated pace of climate change. The many facets of urban transformations have been accompanied by the urban-rural interplay which entails the needed balance between a development of cities and their surrounding areas. More recently, urban living conditions in Europe have undergone major changes and adaptations dictated by the Covid-19 sanitary crisis. In Europe, towns and cities were at the forefront of the response and were required to rapidly adapt to the pandemic while efficiently delivering basic public services and preventing further spread of the virus. It impacted the way local authorities interacted with national authorities but also challenged the way they envisaged transportation, health, education, participation and elections. It also reaffirmed the need for more sustainable towns and cities. European towns and cities managed to rise to the challenge and to even use a crisis as an opportunity to review their efforts to create more cohesive societies and to further engage urban citizens. In this respect, Ukrainian towns and cities are a particularly relevant example of the incredible resilience and capacity of local authorities together with the citizens to cope with the unprecedented multiple challenges caused by the Russian invasion.

The present text builds on the need to further develop the European Urban Charter in light of these new challenges and the post-pandemic context and support the implementation of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This second revision of the European Urban Charter aims to tie the idea of urbanity/urban society, as it is today, with the Congress priorities of promoting resilient, democratic, cohesive, sustainable and digital societies. As driving forces for local, regional and national development, towns and cities, in their diversity, will remain an asset for our societies confronted with unprecedented challenges. The revised European Charter is an invitation for all those involved in urban development to review their practices and to further implement the principles of ethical governance, sustainable development, solidarity and human rights as enshrined in the European Declaration of Urban Rights and the European Urban Charter, as body of common principles and concepts enabling towns and cities to meet the current challenges of urban societies.

Preamble

The aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress.

The first European Urban Charter, adopted by the Council of Europe's Standing Conference on Local and Regional Authorities of Europe in 1992 and the European Urban Charter II – Manifesto for a new urbanity adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in 2008 are landmark documents in the recognition of the role played by towns and cities in the development of European societies.

Significant transformations and developments of recent years had a considerable impact on urban living, including increased use of digital tools and artificial intelligence, as well as the development of innovations in the democratic, social and technological field.

Urban living has been confronted with multiple challenges including Russia's war against Ukraine, terrorism, exacerbation of inequalities, accelerated pace of climate change, natural disasters and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The current challenges underline the importance of resilient democratic institutions and best practices for the development of European cities and towns.

Urban policies should be guided by the rights and principles enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, the Charter of Local Self-Government and its Additional Protocol on the rights to participate in the affairs of a local authority, as well as the Rule of Law Checklist adopted by the Venice Commission.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular Goal 11 (make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), Goal 16 (promote just, peaceful and inclusive

societies) and Goal 17 (revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development) also provide precious guidance.

[On 17 May 2023, Heads of States and Governments adopted a declaration in Reykjavik on the occasion of the Fourth Summit of the Council of Europe, that specifically highlighted ...] *to be added after the Summit*

The Principles for modern urban living

The following principles for modern urban living are to be read and interpreted in the light of the Council of Europe guiding values of human rights, democracy and the rule of Law. Towns and cities should aspire to streamline these values in all urban policies, programmes and actions. They support the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The principles are grouped under six themes below.

I. Democracy and citizen participation.

- ELECTIONS: ensure that elections comply with the principles of the European constitutional heritage, including universal, equal, free, secret and direct suffrage, and that elections be held periodically; ensure that general conditions for fulfilling the principles be met, namely respect for fundamental liberties and freedom human rights, stability of electoral law and procedural guarantees.
- CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION: support inclusive dialogue between citizens and local authorities; promote citizens' consultation on projects affecting the community; ensure inclusive, responsive and informed forms of participation and decision making; promote direct involvement, in particular through local referendums and citizen assemblies.
- FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: recognise the fundamental value of the freedom of expression for democratic societies; strengthen free, independent, plural and diverse media; ensure safe spaces for public debate and expression for vulnerable and marginalised groups of the population.
- FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION: safeguard the right to peaceful assembly and association; secure interactions between citizens and guarantee safe spaces for individuals to gather in order to collectively express, promote, pursue and defend common interests.
- FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT: ensure that everyone lawfully within the territory of a State enjoys the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose their residence.
- INCLUSION AND NON-DISCRIMINATION: ensure full, equal and effective participation for all, irrespective of race, colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or other status; promote participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

- **GENDER EQUALITY:** accelerate the achievement of gender equality and the full, equal and effective participation of all, irrespective of gender, in public and private life; empower women and girls through education and capacity-building; increase gender equality in political participation by introducing affirmative action measures as quota.
- **YOUTH INVOLVEMENT:** ensure and promote the participation of young people; encourage youth involvement and active citizenship through political education and lowering the minimum voting age to 16; involve the youth in planning, implementation, evaluation and decision-making processes.

II. Social rights, cultural and economic development

- **HEALTH:** safeguard equal access to affordable and quality health care, including preventive healthcare; ensure an environment and facilities conducive to the physical and psychological health; promote proactive behaviours, sports and recreational activities; encourage community-based health initiatives and participation.
- **HOUSING:** ensure adequate, affordable, secure and salubrious housing, including access to water and adequate sanitation; take measures in relation to homelessness; ensure diversity, choice and mobility in housing; create and maintain social housing in towns and cities for disadvantaged groups of citizens.
- **EDUCATION:** develop programmes aimed at engaging various communities in educational activities, including members of vulnerable and marginalised communities; adopt strategies tailored to the needs of various communities, including an interdisciplinary and multicultural approach to municipal educational offers.
- **WORK:** ensure adequate and accessible employment opportunities; ensure equal pay for work of equal value; promote women's economic empowerment and equal sharing of care responsibilities; develop lifelong career guidance and learning opportunities facilitating access to the labour market.
- **SOCIAL SECURITY AND WELFARE:** ensure that social rights are at the forefront of social security systems and that they help the most vulnerable, without discrimination; ensure food assistance measures for those in need to prevent under- or malnutrition; provide the necessary assistance to homeless people.
- **SOCIAL COHESION AND INTEGRATION:** empower marginalised groups, including elderly, children and youth, people with disabilities, national minorities, foreigners and IDPs; mainstream a gender perspective into social policies, programmes and actions.
- **CULTURE AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE:** ensure access to and participation of different ethnic and religious communities in a wide range of cultural and creative activities; promote the peaceful co-existence of all; further intercultural dialogue, promote languages of different ethnic, religious and linguistic communities.

- **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE:** support balanced and forward-looking economic development, taking into account environmental protection; develop urban-rural interplay; develop cooperation between public and private sectors; promote protected heritage as an asset for economic development.
- **ARCHITECTURE AND HERITAGE:** protect urban architecture and heritage; ensure space for arts and culture; ensure design for inclusive cities, taking into account the needs and expectations of various groups for a healthy, safe and stimulating living environment; promote architectural creation and development for a quality urban townscape.
- **SPORT AND LEISURE:** provide a wide range of safe and well-designed sporting and recreational facilities accessible to all, including dedicated leisure and preserved natural areas; ensure that citizens have a right to be able to develop their expertise in sport up to their individual potential.

III. Sustainable development, protection of environment and climate change

- **PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE:** protect environment from air, water, ground and noise pollution; protect, restore and manage natural habitats; adopt multi-dimensional policies and streamline environmental protection and fight against climate change; mitigate the consequences and reduce the impact of climate change.
- **NATURAL WEALTH AND RESOURCES:** ensure responsible management of natural wealth and resources to the benefit of all citizens; manage urban waters in a sustainable manner; promote renewable energy and energy efficiency; further green technologies.
- **SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY:** promote and improve attractiveness of climate friendly means of mobility; ensure affordable and adequate public transportation aimed at reducing the use of private cars; support the sharing of roads and public space; ensure access to the various urban services in the immediate vicinity.
- **ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION-MAKING:** engage in awareness-raising and information campaigns to strengthen the participation of citizens, including of resident foreigners, in environmental decision-making; based on disaggregated data and intensify scientific research on various effects of climate change on different segments of urban population.

IV. Integrity and prevention of corruption

- **INTEGRITY POLICY AND ETHICAL RULES:** introduce and implement integrity policies, with adequate risk management, organisational ethics management and control mechanisms; draw up and promote codes of conduct; promote ethical leadership; provide counselling and advice on ethical dilemmas and integrity risks; ensure adequate and transparent financial compensation of local elected representatives and local officials to lower the risks of corruption; ensure fair recruitment and adequate training; establish and promote protection of individuals who report and disclose corruption and wrongdoing (whistleblowers).
- **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** promote proactive disclosure and timely resolution of conflicts of interest; define clear procedures to identify, manage and solve conflicts of interest; enhance transparency in recruitment and promotion processes; promote the introduction of reporting channels to identify potential occurrences of favouritism or conflicts of interests.
- **PUBLIC PROCUREMENT:** assess different corruption risks involved in procurement; set-up internal controls and evaluation mechanisms; enhance transparency by publishing data and procurement details at all stages of the process; embed human rights and sustainability considerations into procurement standards.
- **TRANSPARENCY AND OVERSIGHT:** adopt and implement open data standards; encourage public participation in decision-making processes; publish key documents and information, promote public consultation processes; support the monitoring and implementation of transparency measures.

V. Security and crime prevention

- **SECURITY:** ensure a secure and safe city, free from all forms of violence, crime, delinquency and aggression; take measures against gender-based violence, harassment, sexual and domestic violence; provide and support services for victims of violence; promote cybersecurity in line with international standards and best practices; develop mechanisms against cyberattacks and ransomwares.
- **CRIME PREVENTION:** ensure that crime prevention involves all members of the community, through efficient, cost-effective and inclusive crime prevention strategies based on a cooperative relationship between communities and law enforcement authorities.
- **RESILIENCE:** provide effective and adequate responses to crises and emergencies as natural disasters (e.g. heats and droughts, earthquakes, floods etc.), terrorist attacks or wars; develop contingency plans based on risk and needs assessments to strengthen resilience, including measures on rescue, food and energy security, water as well as essential services.

VI. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence

- **SMART CITIES AND E-GOVERNANCE:** further the development of smart cities; promote e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making mechanisms; improve provision of public services through digital and artificial intelligence tools; adopt and implement open government standards; ensure compliance with human rights, democracy and sustainable development goals.
- **DIGITAL EQUITY:** promote digital equity and access to affordable Internet and technology; provide sufficient digital literacy training; address the risk of a digital gap; establish clear mitigation strategies and maintain in-person support.
- **ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION OF RISKS:** identify, assess, prevent and mitigate risks and adverse impacts resulting from the application of new technologies and artificial intelligence tools system in relation to human rights, democracy, rule of law and sustainable development; ensure continuous evaluation and oversight of the use of new technologies, paying special attention to artificial intelligence.
- **PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA AND PRIVACY:** take measures to protect individuals in the processing of personal data; ensure that users maintain control over their data; consider a distributed data architecture to secure sensitive data bases.