

CONGRESS HIGHLIGHTS



Contents

Summary	3
1. Support to Ukraine	4
Assistance with decentralisation reform	4
High-Level Political Dialogue for post-war recovery and reconstruction	4
Register of Damage for Ukraine	5
Building partnerships between local and regional authorities	5
Declarations of the Congress on Ukraine	5
2. Assisting member states to develop good governance.....	7
3. Co-operation with Belarusian democratic forces	7
4. Monitoring local and regional democracy.....	8
Key challenges to grassroots democracy	8
Foreign interference in elections	9
Georgia.....	9
Türkiye.....	10
5. Upholding human rights and the rule of law in municipalities and regions	11
Cities and regions guarantors of the Rule of Law	11
Congress' work on the execution of the ECHR judgments	11
Rights of LGBTIQ+	12
6. Promoting youth democratic engagement.....	12
7. Protecting social rights and building local resilience	13
Preparedness to natural disasters	13
Better local and regional management of water resources	13
Circular economy at local and regional level	14
Improved local care for older people	14
Response to the housing crisis in European cities	14
Action against human trafficking	15
Violence against women in politics and sexual violence in conflict zones.....	15
8. New Congress publications.....	16
European Urban Charter III: Urban living in the era of transformations	16
Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards	16
Culture without borders: cultural heritage management for local and regional development	17
Ensuring the right to housing: what can local and regional politicians do?	17

Summary

In 2024-2025, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe pursued its action to implement the decisions of the Reykjavik Summit, notably in supporting Ukraine, fighting against democratic backsliding, upholding human rights and the rule of law at local and regional level, promoting democratic values and improving social protection in municipalities and regions, and engaging with young people.

The Congress pursued its monitoring, post-monitoring and election observation activities, aimed at strengthening local self-government and promoting multi-level governance and democratic participation, as well as co-operation programmes to assist member States in those areas. It launched the dialogue with local authorities on the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and on strengthening their role in upholding the rule of law.

To mobilise local and regional action in support of Summit decisions, the Congress organised a conference of national associations of local and regional authorities, in Strasbourg in September 2024. Some 60 associations from the 46 member states and Partner for local democracy countries attending the conference reaffirmed their commitment to upholding democratic values in cities and regions and stopping democratic backsliding, supporting Ukraine and expanding partnerships with Ukrainian municipalities, protecting human rights, saving the environment, boosting democratic participation and enabling young people's involvement in democratic action, as well as promoting democratic innovation at local and regional level.



The 4th Conference of National Associations of Local and Regional Authorities held in Strasbourg on 12 and 13 September 2024

1. Support to Ukraine

The Congress has been supporting Ukrainian municipalities and regions in their efforts to resist the aggression of the Russian Federation, protect citizens and provide public



services in wartime. Through grants, expertise and peer-to-peer experience sharing, the Congress has worked with Ukrainian associations of local and regional authorities to strengthen resilience of municipalities and regions as well as their capacities to respond to citizens' needs, and help them to better engage civil society and citizens in

decision making – including through the two first-ever citizens' assemblies established in the country since 2022. In 2024, with Congress support, 10 Ukrainian municipalities (Bilhorod–Dnistrovskyi, Bilshivtsi, Dunaivtsi, Fastiv, Kamianets–Podilskyi, Kyiv, Poltava, Shpola, Ternopil and Zviahel) implemented local initiatives to foster democratic innovations and open government, as well as to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights.

A high-level Congress delegation led by President Marc Cools visited Ukraine in May 2024; the Congress President will pay another official visit in June 2025 on the occasion of the 3rd International Summit of Cities and Regions.

Assistance with decentralisation reform

The Congress continues to assist the Ukrainian national authorities with the decentralisation reform, launched in 2014 and supported by 77% of the population according to a 2024 public opinion poll. A new Ukrainian law on local democracy (law No. 3703), prepared with the Council of Europe support since 2021, came into force on 8 January 2025; the law broadens opportunities for citizens' direct engagement in decision making in their communities even under martial law (integration of IDPs in local affairs, engagement of youth from the age of 14, as well as citizens' participation in local budgets planning, in public consultations and in consultative and advisory bodies under local authorities). The Congress also assisted the Ukrainian authorities in updating the long-term vision for multilevel governance system, with the revision of the country's 2014 Decentralisation Reform Concept.

High-Level Political Dialogue for post-war recovery and reconstruction

Through the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance, and in partnership with the Verhovna Rada, the Congress is also taking the lead in organising the High-Level Dialogue between the Council of Europe and Ukrainian national and local authorities on good democratic governance in Ukraine including in respect of the transition from military to civilian administration – and for a clearer division of competences between tiers of government.



Signature of the joint declaration during the High Level Dialogue meeting (Strasbourg, July 2024)

At its March 2025 session, the Congress adopted a [Declaration](#) stressing that local and regional authorities will play a crucial role in decentralised recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine. The Declaration was welcomed by Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Communities and Territories Development Oleksii Riabykin who participated in the debate, and

endorsed by Davide La Cecilia, Italy's special envoy for the reconstruction of Ukraine in charge of the Ukraine Recovery Conference to be held in Rome in July 2025, who announced that it would become a deliverable of the Conference – where the new decentralisation concept, developed with the Congress support, is to be presented.

Register of Damage for Ukraine

In partnership with the Register of Damage for Ukraine (RD4U), the Congress provided an outreach to Ukrainian local and regional authorities, through their national associations, to raise their awareness for the submission of claims and develop their capacities to support citizens in this process; as a result, RD4U had received more than 10,000 claims from 621 cities, towns and villages across 20 regions in Ukraine under the category of damage and destruction of residential housing.



Building partnerships between local and regional authorities

The Congress has been promoting partnerships between Ukrainian municipalities and regions and local and regional authorities in other European countries, including through the Cities4Cities online matchmaking platform which it launched in March 2022 (now the Cities4Cities/United4Ukraine initiative).

Declarations of the Congress on Ukraine

At each session since March 2022, the Congress adopted a [Declaration](#) in support of Ukraine and its national, regional and local authorities; it repeatedly called for the immediate release of local officials abducted by Russian forces, and condemned the organisation by Russia of illegitimate so-called elections and referenda in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

In March 2024, the Congress deplored in particular the impact of the war on the children of Ukraine, including those who have been internally displaced, forced to flee Ukraine, separated from their families and/or forcibly deported by the Russian

authorities, and called on local and regional authorities where these children are presently living to take comprehensive action to protect them. The [Declaration](#) adopted in October 2024 deplored the Russian Federation's continued attacks on cultural heritage sites in Ukraine, with more than a thousand such sites damaged or destroyed since the beginning of the war, through a systematic policy of targeting and looting of cultural sites aimed at erasing Ukraine's historical and cultural identity; the Congress called on local and regional authorities throughout Europe to step up their efforts to help Ukraine by setting up genuine cultural heritage partnerships that could address not only the current need for restoration and urgent protection but also damage and risk assessments.



*Signature of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ukrainian Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities (AATC)
(24 March 2025)*

2. Assisting member states to develop good governance

In 2024, [the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance](#) at the Congress implemented **18 projects** in **21 member states**, for a combined value of **€13 million**. In capacity-building activities organised by the Centre, more than **2 000 people** developed knowledge and skills related to Council of Europe standards. **16 legal opinions and policy advice** documents were delivered at the demand of seven member states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Serbia and Ukraine). A new Accreditation Platform for the [European Label of Governance Excellence \(ELoGE\)](#) was established under the aegis of the Congress Bureau, and the Label was awarded to 31 municipalities in **Finland, Italy, Spain and Türkiye**.

The Centre provided expertise to support the preparation of a new draft Law on Local Self-Government in **Armenia**. In **Malta**, the Centre contributed to the development of a National Training Strategy and the establishment of a National Training Council. In **Bulgaria**, Centre support led to the adoption of a Roadmap for Fiscal Decentralisation, while in **Hungary** the Centre facilitated a local finance working group to promote data-driven reform of local government finances. In **Albania**, the Collaboration Platform has been relaunched with Centre support to facilitate multilevel governance cooperation across public administration. A multilateral, multi-stakeholder approach to enhance the capacities of local public authorities to manage migration was implemented in **Poland, Republic of Moldova and Romania**, and a new project to strengthen human resource management in local authorities was launched in **Serbia**.

Under the **Lithuanian Presidency** of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, the Centre co-organised a conference on "Multilevel Governance for Ensuring Democracy and Strengthening Resilience at all levels of governance", held in Vilnius in September 2024. Citizens Assemblies organised by the Centre in Banja Luka and Mostar (**Bosnia and Herzegovina**) have led to action plans to promote youth entrepreneurship and local economic development being prepared for discussion by the respective local councils. Citizen Assemblies were also organised in **Georgia**, where a [curriculum on human rights and anti-discrimination](#) was developed with the National Association of Local Authorities in Georgia (NALAG). [A guide](#) on how to organise a citizen assembly was also published and is being promoted in a regional project across South-East Europe.

3. Co-operation with Belarusian democratic forces

The Congress, as an active member of the Council of Europe's Contact Group on Cooperation with Belarusian Democratic Forces and Civil Society, has been entrusted to implement **activities** in 2024–2025 **focusing on political support to the Belarusian democratic forces** and on the **provision of capacity development and expertise to support the preparation of reforms and related legislation on local democracy, good governance and decentralisation of power**, based on the principles enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

In January 2024, Congress members attended the [Helsinki Dialogue](#), and in March 2024, the leader of the Belarusian democratic forces Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya [addressed](#) the Congress at its 46th plenary session.

In late 2024, Congress experts reviewed the “Local Self-Government Concept for a New Belarus” prepared by the Belarusian democratic forces and organised [a series of online workshops](#) to discuss about concepts and principles of local self-government, dimensions of decentralisation, and transition stages toward a free and democratic Belarus. Another 3-day workshop was organised in Strasbourg in April 2025, with the participation of some 30 representatives.



President Marc Cools, Secretary General Mathieu Mori and representatives of Belarusian democratic forces (26 March 2025)

Following the Congress Bureau's decision in February 2025, representatives of Belarusian democratic forces participated for the first time in the 48th Congress' session in March 2025. On this occasion, their delegation met Congress President Marc Cools to outline the priorities of their Co-ordination Council for

co-operation with the Congress, including strengthening the capacities of Belarusian democratic forces in local democracy and local self-government, advancing preparations for legislative reforms in this field, and increasing internships and professional opportunities for Belarusians in European local and regional authorities. Also in March 2025, the Congress Bureau appointed Cecilia Dalman Eek (Sweden, R, SOC/G/PD) as its Rapporteur for a democratic Belarus.

4. Monitoring local and regional democracy

Since March 2024, the Congress has adopted recommendations following its monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in [Andorra](#), [Croatia](#), [Finland](#), [France](#), [Iceland](#), [Italy](#), [Latvia](#), [Liechtenstein](#), [Malta](#), [Montenegro](#), [Norway](#) and [San Marino](#).

The Congress also adopted recommendations following its observation of local and regional elections in [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [Republic of Moldova](#), [Podgorica](#) and [Türkiye](#). In addition, the Congress observed elections for the State Parliament of [Hamburg](#) in March 2025 and the municipal and county elections held throughout [Finland](#) in April 2025.

Key challenges to grassroots democracy

These monitoring and election observation missions are part of the early warning mechanisms of the Council of Europe to measure the state of local democracy and therefore democracy as a whole. At its October 2024 session, the Congress debated a [report](#) by Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom, R, ILDG) and Thibault Guignard (France, L, EPP/CCE) on the key findings

from its monitoring and election observation missions over the last five years. The Congress noted with concern that inadequate financial resources for local and regional authorities, a restricted scope of local self-government, and insufficient consultation processes – all factors weakening local democracy and therefore democracy as a whole – had persisted or worsened. Virulent online hate speech and disinformation towards local and regional elected representatives, as well as physical and verbal aggressions against them were on the rise, which created a hostile environment for the execution of their mandates. This pattern, particularly evident during elections, had become more pronounced in recent years, exerting paralysing effects on European democracies and political life at the local and regional levels. In particular, they were detrimental to local democracy as they challenged the conditions of office required for elected representatives to be able to freely exercise their local mandates, and had a chilling effect on future candidates in elections.



On the positive side, the report pointed out the strengthening of participatory and consultation rights of associations of local and regional authorities as well as measures aimed at enhancing citizen participation in local public affairs. On electoral matters, the report highlighted progress made on the inclusivity of elections and on more professional and transparent electoral procedures.

Foreign interference in elections

At its March 2025 session, the Congress addressed the issue of foreign interference in local and regional elections, based on a [report](#) by Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom, ILDG) who warned that “through a wide range of corrosive actions, external actors can undermine



confidence in democratic institutions and weaken social cohesion, a trend that is clearly visible today”.

The Congress called on local, regional and national authorities to adopt a comprehensive and multilayered strategy to address this growing threat, which could take the shape of illicit financing, information manipulation — including disinformation campaigns, targeted propaganda, and the

amplification of divisive narratives – as well as electoral cyberattacks, among others. Subnational and national authorities, civil society and the media should work together to raise awareness about foreign interference, promote media literacy and voter education, and foster civic engagement to empower citizens and enable them to better recognise external manipulation.

Georgia

The Congress has been following with great concern the development of the political situation in Georgia following general elections there in October 2023. At its 48th session in March 2025, the Congress debated a [report](#) by Cecilia Dalman Eek (Sweden, SOC/G/PD) and Bernd Vöhringer (Germany, SOC/G/PD) following a visit by the Congress presidential delegation to

Georgia in February 2025. The Congress noted with concern that the rapid democratic backsliding observed in Georgia over the past two years had increasingly affected local democracy in the country. It urged Georgian authorities to resume inclusive political dialogue at all levels of government. The Congress recommendation called specifically to restore the conditions of a democratic environment ahead of the 2025 local elections, in accordance with the Venice Commission code of good practice on electoral matters and previous recommendations. It called in particular to repeal the December 2024 amendments to the electoral code, and to reinstate the gender quota applicable for candidates in local elections.

The March 2025 [recommendation](#) followed earlier statements, in particular those adopted by the Congress Bureau on 10 February 2025 and on 5 December 2024, and the [Declaration](#) adopted by the Congress at its October 2024 session following a debate under urgent procedure on the situation in Georgia. In those statement, the Congress and its Bureau repeated called on the Georgian authorities to return to the path of democratic consolidation and recommit to democratic principles. The Congress' Monitoring Committee, meeting in Tbilisi in July 2024, also adopted a statement to this effect.

Türkiye

The Congress, its Bureau and its President have repeatedly condemned dismissals of mayors in Türkiye and their replacement by appointed government trustees. In his statements in November 2024 and January 2025, Congress President Marc Cools condemned the escalating practice of dismissing and replacing elected mayors in Türkiye, a measure that both the Congress and the Venice Commission consider as undermining the very nature of local democracy. In February 2025, David Eray (Switzerland, EPP/CCE) and Bryony Rudkin (United Kingdom, SOC/G/PD), Congress co-rapporteurs on local democracy in Türkiye, expressed their grave concern at the dismissal of Abdullah Zeydan, Mayor of the Metropolitan municipality of Van and a member of the Turkish delegation to the Congress, and his replacement by an appointed official. In March 2025, the President and the co-rapporteurs strongly condemned the arrest of the democratically elected Mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem Imamoglu, which “bears all the hallmarks of the pressure on a political figure considered as one of the main candidates in forthcoming presidential elections”. They deplored the decision to place Mayor of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu in detention, calling it an “assault on democracy”, and demanded his immediate release.



Mayor of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu at the conference of national associations (Strasbourg, 12 September 2024)

At its 48th session in March 2025, the Congress held an urgent debate on the dismissals of mayors in Türkiye. In the adopted [Declaration](#), the Congress noted that 13 mayors elected during the 2024 local elections had been dismissed and replaced by appointed administrators, meaning that over 4 million citizens now live in municipalities governed by people they have not elected. The Congress called on the authorities of Türkiye to release current detainees, including Mr İmamoğlu, and abolish the practice of dismissing mayors and appointing trustees.

Given the magnitude of current concerns, the Congress organised a fact-finding visit to Türkiye on 5-6 May 2025, met with Mayor İmamoğlu in detention, and engaged in a dialogue with the government.



Congress Secretary General Mathieu Mori, Congress Standing Rapporteur on Human Rights Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC/G/PD), Congress Rapporteur on the situation of local democracy in Türkiye, Bryony Rudkin (United Kingdom, SOC/G/PD) and Congress President Marc Cools (Marmara prison, Istanbul, 6 May 2025)

5. Upholding human rights and the rule of law in municipalities and regions

Cities and regions guarantors of the Rule of Law

At its March 2024 session, the Congress debated a [report](#) by Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom, R, ILDG) on “Local and Regional Authorities as Actors and Guarantors of the Rule of Law”. It invited to comply with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and implement Congress [recommendations](#) in order to guarantee good democratic governance. Member States were also encouraged to include local authorities in promoting the rule of law by enforcing the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights at local level. “To help sustain democracies, the rule of law must be respected also at local level,” stressed the Congress Rapporteur.



Congress’ work on the execution of the ECHR judgments

In June 2024, Congress Standing Rapporteur on Human Rights Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC/G/PD) carried out a visit to Bulgaria to hold a political dialogue with local authorities on the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in the country at local level. In this context, in April 2025, she made a statement following the demolition of Roma houses in Sofia despite an order to suspend it issued by the Court under

interim measures. The Standing Rapporteur urge the Mayor of Sofia and the Bulgarian national authorities to take all appropriate measures to protect the affected Roma families from homelessness, including by providing them with alternative housing or temporary accommodation. She referred in this regard to on-going dialogue on the execution of the Court's judgments related to Roma issues, and the work on a Roadmap on the implementation of the Court's judgments at the local and regional level in Bulgaria.

Rights of LGBTIQ+



In March 2025, Deputy Standing Rapporteur on Human Rights Peter Drenth (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) made a statement expressing concern at the negative impact of a new law in Hungary banning the organisation of Pride and similar events. He stated that the law infringed on the right of LGBTIQ+ persons to their private and family life without discrimination, as well as on the freedoms of expression and of assembly; it also impacted the

decision-making autonomy of local authorities when authorising public demonstrations, as they will have to choose between the respect either for the new law or for human rights and fundamental freedoms of their communities. In April 2025, in another statement, the Deputy Standing Rapporteur regretted the adoption of a constitutional amendment in Hungary that enshrined this new law, and its implications for Hungarian local and regional authorities. "Where local and regional authorities are asked to enforce these laws, they, in turn, are being asked to violate people's human rights. This is not how a democracy should work," he stated.

6. Promoting youth democratic engagement

In line with the Reykjavik declaration and principles for democracy, the Congress continues to promote youth participation in democratic decision-making processes. October 2024 marked ten years since the Congress became the first European assembly to involve youth delegates – one from each member state – in its work and allow them to speak at its sessions and committee meetings. Since 2014, 419 young people took part in this "Rejuvenating Politics" initiative of the Congress; in between sessions, they implemented 274 projects in some 343 municipalities in their home countries across Europe, aimed at promoting young people's participation in democratic life.



At March 2025 session, the Congress welcomed a new cohort of 45 youth delegates from member states and – for the first time ever – a youth delegate from Morocco, a Partner for Local Democracy country. Aged between 18 and 30 years old, they were selected from a record number of 445 applications to participate in the sessions, committee work and election observation missions of the Congress in 2025, injecting young people's perspectives on the issues discussed.

The Congress also joined forces with Council of Europe youth bodies to carry out a new revision of the European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life,

adopted in 1992 and revised for the first time in 2003. In 2024, the Congress conducted a survey and held consultations with youth organisations and other stakeholders on ways of adapting the Charter to the current challenges faced by young people in Europe and increasing its impact as a European reference instrument. The new revision of the Charter is to be adopted under the Committee of Ministers' Presidency of Malta (May-November 2025).

7. Protecting social rights and building local resilience

The Congress continued to address the challenges faced by municipalities and regions, to improve governance, build local resilience and strengthen social protection of citizens.

Preparedness to natural disasters

In March 2024, the Congress adopted recommendations for local and regional authorities to be better prepared to natural disasters and climate hazards, based on a [report](#) by Jean-Paul Bastin (Belgium, EPP/CCE) and Christian Debève (France, ILDG) which drew on case studies carried out in Belgium, Spain and Türkiye. The Congress called for developing a



comprehensive crisis response at local and regional level well before a catastrophe has arrived; this response should combine short-term emergency interventions with long-term planning aimed at preventing the most serious consequences of natural disasters, and building on local, regional, national and international partnerships to make that happen. Congress recommendations were

subsequently published in the form of guidelines outlining the action that local and regional authorities can take both to prepare and respond to crisis situations.

Better local and regional management of water resources



In March 2025, the Congress addressed the issue of water management in a worsening climate context, with a growing lack of access to quality drinking water and water for agricultural and industrial needs. Acting on a [report](#) “Water resources under stress: towards better local and regional governance” by Teuvo Hatva (Finland, ILDG) and Heiða Björg Hilmisdóttir (Iceland, SOC/G/PD), the Congress recommended action aimed at

combating the twin challenges of water waste and pollution, stressing that local and regional elected representatives were central to ensuring the sustainable governance of water thanks to their planning responsibilities and their proximity to private users and businesses.

Circular economy at local and regional level

In October 2024, the Congress urged a shift towards circular economy in municipalities and regions, whereby resources were conserved, reused and recycled, with a focus on the use of local supplies. Acting on a [report](#) by Linda Gillham (United Kingdom, ILDG) and Kristoffer Tamsons (Sweden, EPP/CCE), the Congress stressed that by promoting equitable resource distribution, the circular economy fosters inclusive participation in economic opportunities, and supports healthier environments; such type of economy is already fully endorsed by the young generation.



Improved local care for older people

Also in October 2024, the Congress called for investing in more age-friendly communities, as local and regional authorities faced the challenges of an ageing population – with a growing need for more accessible public spaces, more elaborate social services and active ageing policies. Acting on a [report](#) by Carla Dejonghe (Belgium, ILDG) and Joanne Laban (United Kingdom, ECR), the Congress stressed the importance of ensuring older people's autonomy and quality of life at the level of local communities, fostering volunteering work and community-based initiatives and improving the working conditions and skills of formal and informal carers, often women. National governments were invited to develop specific support programmes for local and regional authorities, which are often responsible for providing, commissioning or overseeing long-term care services. Older people themselves should also be engaged in improving the design of services for their generation and in making use of innovative measures, such as IT-based solutions, to preserve their independence.

Response to the housing crisis in European cities

At its March 2025 session, the Congress held a debate to address the growing problem of homelessness in European cities, noting that the number of homeless people had doubled in a number of European countries in recent years, particularly between 2010 and 2023. The debate focused on the need for local and regional authorities to adopt the Housing First



strategy, which consists of providing people with decent housing before dealing with other problems. The debate informed the preparation of a report on social housing innovations, by James Moloney (Ireland, ILDG) and Doris Kampus (Austria, SOC/G/PD). The report aimed to propose a multilevel response to the problem based on some existing tools for local authorities to deal with homelessness (including urban planning

tools, zoning regulations and building inventories, the increased production of affordable housing units and the protection of tenants – for example, through rent control or stronger regulations against evictions).

Presenting the outline of the report to the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)'s Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, in Geneva in October 2024, and at the Conference on addressing homelessness through social investment, organised by the Council of Europe Development Bank in Strasbourg in December 2024, the

co-rapporteurs underlined that the current crisis was partly due to the retrenchment of welfare states and the decline in social housing, and highlighted the imperative of strengthening public, social, community and co-operative housing as possible responses supporting both the European middle class and the most vulnerable groups (such as older people, youth, national minorities or migrants and refugees) in their access to affordable housing.

Action against human trafficking

In March 2025, the Congress called for providing cities and regions with the means to combat ‘modern slavery’ in Europe, stressing that local and regional authorities were on the front line in the fight against human trafficking. Acting on a [report](#) by Cecilia Dalman Eek (Sweden, SOC/G/DP) and Martine Dieschburg Nickels (Luxembourg, ILDG), the Congress emphasised the need for the active involvement of local and regional



authorities in a multi-level and multidisciplinary approach that provides for locally and regionally trained referents and also involves NGOs; it recommended action aimed at improving the identification of victims and the eradication of practices of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation. Member states were asked to consult with local and regional authorities and their associations, present in the field, when developing national strategies to combat trafficking in human beings.

Violence against women in politics and sexual violence in conflict zones

At its March 2025 session, the Congress held a debate on violence against women in politics, highlighting the vulnerability of women mayors and local councillors who suffered daily harassment and physical and verbal abuse, particularly via social media – a growing trend that discourages women in Europe from embarking on political careers. The testimonies during the debate, and the report “Women in politics: local and European trends” presented by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), showed that around 1 out of 3 women in politics had been subjected to violence, particularly cyberviolence – a scourge that poses a severe threat to democracy. Several speakers drew attention to the worsening violence against women politicians and public figures amid the growth of AI and digital platforms capable of producing deep-fake content to discredit female elected officials. Many speakers emphasised that defending women in politics against violence is a duty shared by both men and women.



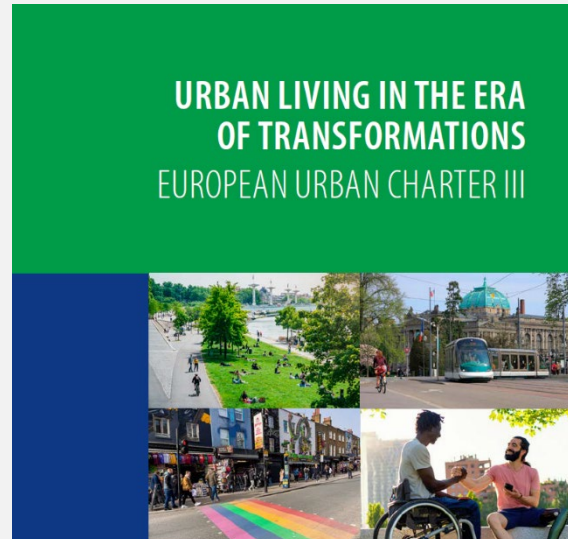
H.R.H. The Grand Duchess of Luxembourg speaking at 48th Congress session (25 March 2025)

Speaking before the debate, H.R.H. the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg advocated for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, reaffirming her commitment to making their voices heard and highlighting the crucial work in this regard of *Stand Speak Rise Up!*, an association she founded in 2018 to support survivors of sexual violence in conflict zones.

8. New Congress publications

European Urban Charter III: Urban living in the era of transformations

The European Charter III, adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in October 2023 and published in December 2024, underscore the Congress's keen focus on the evolving urban phenomenon in Europe, providing principles for modern living in response to transformative challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and growing demands for democratic participation. The Charter is composed of six thematic sections – democracy, social rights, environmental protection, integrity, security and digitalisation – each with the aim of guiding local and regional authorities in an era of transformations.



Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards

Published in December 2024, this guide presents insights from the 2023 work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, which examined how local and regional actors respond to crises and build long-term resistance. Drawing on cases in Belgium, Spain and Türkiye, our guide outlines key recommendations to strengthen multilevel responses in the face of climate and disaster-related challenges, whilst emphasising the importance of upholding human rights, democratic governance and the rule of law in times of crisis.



Culture without borders: cultural heritage management for local and regional development

Published in January 2025 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, this guide examines the dual nature of cultural heritage – as both tangible heritage objects and intangible practices – and its pivotal role in fostering sustainable development, urban regeneration and tourism. It highlights the responsibility of local and regional authorities to safeguard cultural diversity by supporting, promoting and investing in cultural heritage. By integrating cultural heritage into local policies and initiatives, this guide advocates for a long-term, sustainable approach to preserving and celebrating cultural identity in Europe.



Ensuring the right to housing: what can local and regional politicians do?

In this leaflet (published in March 2025), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe highlights the key role of local and regional authorities in promoting and protecting the right to housing, by implementing innovative policies that foster inclusive and resilient communities. It explores current challenges – including affordability, discrimination and gentrification – by presenting real-world solutions from across Europe. With inspiring case studies from Vienna, Barcelona and Freiburg, the Congress calls upon local and regional authorities to turn the right to housing into a reality for all.

