

19 December 2024

Ms Ursula von der Leyen  
President of the European Commission

## **Letter from European Mayors for Housing**

Dear President von der Leyen,

We, the Mayors of 10 European cities, representing 13,5 million European citizens, wish to congratulate you on the election of the new European College of Commissioners, a strong leading team that will help the European Union to craft comprehensive responses to the multiple challenges it faces.

One of the most pressing challenges we must address swiftly and effectively is the housing crisis affecting our cities and metropolitan regions. While the number of people experiencing homelessness is at a record high despite the widely supported commitment to end homelessness by 2030 at the Porto Social Summit, a growing number of social groups, particularly young people, single-parent households, and other vulnerable groups, are struggling to access and secure adequate housing in major European cities due to a severe shortage of social and affordable housing options, coupled with a dramatic rise in rents and property prices. This shortage has become particularly critical also for key workers and middle-class households, and it risks eroding the social foundation of the European project and undermining cities' ability to attract and retain talent, threatening their competitiveness.

The ecological implications of the housing crisis are equally profound. Urban sprawl driven by the shortage of affordable housing in cities significantly contributes to soil degradation and increases greenhouse gas emissions, further exacerbating the climate crisis. With residential buildings accounting for a substantial share of Europe's carbon footprint, improving insulation and undertaking energy-efficient renovations are key to enhancing community well-being, particularly for year-round thermal comfort for low-income households, while advancing the European Union's climate goals.

The city governments present, along with others at local, regional, and national levels, have taken significant steps to increase the supply of affordable housing by investing in new public, social, and cooperative housing, and to curb rising prices. Cities and local governments, as well as organisations such as Eurocities or C40, with whom we will continue to work side by side, have proposed a series of European policies to collectively address this challenge. However, many cities are still confronted with difficult decisions, such as whether to prioritise investing in new housing construction, the fight against homelessness or improving the energy efficiency of the existing housing stock.

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It is essential to prevent dilemmas such as these, as we must increase housing supply, provide housing solutions for the homeless, and support energy retrofitting, all at the same time. To address these urgent and complex issues, the EU must rise to the occasion, matching the ambition cities have demonstrated with concrete actions.

We warmly welcome your decision to appoint Commissioner Jorgensen as the first-ever Commissioner working directly on housing, and to put forward a European Affordable Housing Plan as well as a pan-European investment platform for affordable and sustainable housing.

We note the appointment of Raffaele Fitto as Executive Vice-president for Cohesion and Reforms, who is in charge of developing an ambitious agenda for cities, under your leadership. In the light of the Draghi and Letta reports, the latter calling for an *EU Task Force on Housing Affordability*, an integrated urban agenda requires recognition of cities as key drivers for innovation and future growth. Such an EU agenda for cities must be reinforced with concrete actions to deliver tangible results in the short term and ensure the social cohesion and welfare of our communities, which will in turn legitimise the European institutions vis-à-vis our citizens.

Our first proposal is for the new task force supporting Commissioner Jorgensen in implementing the housing agenda to establish a direct, permanent, and structured dialogue with cities. To this end, we as mayors, signatories of this letter, aim to serve as your key partner in nurturing such dialogue. As local representatives, we are the closest level of government to citizens and we have extensive expertise in developing and financing social and affordable housing, as well as a deep understanding of housing-related challenges. We therefore strongly believe we should have a seat at the decision-making table.

Secondly, funding is at the forefront of our needs as cities. This relates not only to its availability but also to the speed and efficiency at which it is allocated and disbursed for a specific project. The work of the aforementioned Task Force should lead to taking cities' priorities and needs into account in the European Affordable Housing Plan, the European Strategy for Housing Construction, and also the pan-European investment platform for affordable and sustainable housing. Moreover, this initiative should also articulate a fast track for cities in the granting of EU funds for social and affordable housing, as well as for the fight against homelessness. As you are aware, time is of the essence: citizens need solutions and they need them now.

Finally, we agree with Mario Draghi's recommendation that the Cohesion Policy post-2027 should be structured around macro challenges with a clear urban focus, one of which centred on housing. We celebrate the commitment to double Cohesion Policy investments in affordable and sustainable housing, although this might not be enough in and of itself. Our citizens are eager to see tangible results within a reasonable timeframe. In order to be agile and impactful, part of the EU Cohesion Funds should ideally be directly channelled to local governments.

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We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss these proposals and others in a meeting with you, the Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms, and the Commissioner for Energy and Housing. We hope to develop a joint working agenda that places citizens and cities at the heart of the European Commission's housing priorities. We believe that this new political term should build a new momentum to address one of the most pressing challenges we are facing as a society.

We look forward to maintaining a comprehensive and stable dialogue, and to arranging a meeting with you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Jaume Collboni  
Mayor of Barcelona

Mr Roberto Gualtieri  
Mayor of Rome

Ms Anne Hidalgo  
Mayor of Paris  
Vice Chair of C40

Ms Femke Halsema  
Mayor of Amsterdam

Mr Carlos Moedas  
Mayor of Lisbon

Mr Gergely Karácsony  
Mayor of Budapest

Mr Giuseppe Sala  
Mayor of Milan  
Vice Chair of C40

Mr Burkhard Jung  
Mayor of Leipzig  
President of Eurocities

Mr Matteo Lepore  
Mayor of Bologna

Mr Bruno Bernard  
President of Métropole de Lyon