City innovation needs stronger political recognition and long-term investment

Europe's city governments are increasingly recognising the essential need to innovate the way they work to tackle urgent challenges such as climate change and social inequalities, a new survey from Eurocities has found.

However, to truly overcome these unprecedented challenges, city government innovation experts highlight their need for more political recognition and ambitious political plans that will strengthen their work across the government structure and ensure long-term investment in government innovation.

The latest Eurocities Pulse Survey, developed with LSE Cities and based on responses from 65 cities in 27 European countries, provides unique insights into local government innovation across Europe.

> The survey shows that Europe's cities are leading the charge to reimagine government in a way that meets the urgent needs of their residents,

says André Sobczak, Eurocities Secretary General. "Discussions on innovation currently focus on making the private sector more competitive, but city governments are showing that public sector innovation is just as valuable, by investing in digital services and strengthening partnership with citizens, universities and businesses.

> However, to address major challenges like climate action and sustainable mobility, innovation in city governments must be fully recognised as a political priority, with dedicated long-term resources. The work of officials in city governments should be recognised as a political opportunity to develop ambitious solutions that will strengthen their internal capabilities, ensure more targeted funding, and create transformative impact.

The latest Eurocities Pulse survey finds:

- Most city administrations recognise the need to improve their capacity to innovate. Over half of the cities surveyed have formal innovation strategies, while more than a third of cities have specific innovation teams. This reflects the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2024, in which 87% of mayors stated that government innovation is one of their top priorities.

- However, cities say they face several major barriers which limit their capacity to innovate, including funding constraints, rigid HR structures and a lack of long-term strategies and processes.

- Cities state that having ambitious leaders who prioritise innovation is the most important way to improve the capacity of their administrations. This is followed by improving their internal organisation, boosting their data analysis, and strengthening their private and public partnerships.

- EU funding comes out as the major funding support, with 82% of cities indicating they rely on it for innovation. While some cities see clear benefits, others suggest that EU policies and funding programmes could better align with local needs.

- When it comes to prioritising policy areas for innovation, cities are focused on digitalising services, addressing climate action, economic development and mobility. However, housing, social inclusion, and migration integration receive less focus despite being top mayoral priorities.

A new report – Public Innovation: Building Capacity in Europe's cities– developed by LSE Cities in partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies and Eurocities, draws on the data from the Eurocities Pulse survey to further analyse the landscape of city government innovation across Europe, including what cities can learn from each other, and where they need more support.

The report, which explores six in-depth city case studies (Bologna, Vienna, Leuven, Istanbul, London, Cluj-Napoca, Espoo), sets out action points for city governments that want to build their innovation capacity, emphasising the need to take a focused approach to embedding creativity and investing in organisational factors like innovation budgets and innovation teams.

It also calls on the EU, national governments, city networks and philanthropic foundations to do more to support cities' ability to develop new solutions to the challenges ahead.

1. View an infographic showing the Eurocities Pulse Survey's main findings on innovation in city governments.

2. The new report – Public Innovation: building capacity in Europe's city governments– has been developed by LSE Cities, in partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies and Eurocities. It draws on the results of a new Eurocities Pulse Survey of 65 European cities and explores six deep-dive case studies.

3. The report was presented at an event in the European Parliament, hosted by Italian MEP Pierfrancesco Maran. This high-profile event brought together academics, experts, EU representatives and city leaders to discuss city government innovation across Europe.

4. Eurocities wants to make cities places where everyone can enjoy a good quality of life, is able to move around safely, access quality and inclusive public services and benefit from a healthy environment. We do this by networking more than 200 larger European cities, which together represent some 150 million people across 38 countries, and by gathering evidence of how policy making impacts on people to inspire other cities and EU decision makers. Connect with us at https://eurocities.eu or by following our Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts.

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