Survey of European mayors: Housing crisis calls for urgent EU action

PUBLISHED JUN 11, 2025
BY EUROCITIES

European mayors are sounding the alarm over the spiralling urban housing crisis, a major new survey from Eurocities has revealed.

As the new EU institutions set their future direction, mayors responding to the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2025 call for greater EU action to address rising social inequalities in cities and deliver the affordable housing urgently needed across Europe.

Based on responses from 86 mayors in 26 European countries, the third edition of the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey offers key insights into the main challenges, priorities and achievements shaping Europe's urban landscape in 2025.

For the third consecutive year, climate action remains the top concern for Europe's mayors, with more than twice as many selections as any other issue. At the same time, access to affordable housing has surged in urgency – up into second place this year, from fifth place two years ago – with mayors emphasising the need to increase affordable and social housing.

Only 14% of mayors say housing is still affordable in their city. For 39%, housing is already unaffordable, and 47% say it is at serious risk. The main drivers are rising demand, increasing construction costs, and limited land availability.

> The housing crisis in our cities is spiralling out of control," says Mathias De Clercq, President of Eurocities and Mayor of Ghent. "The EU must work with cities to create an effective European Affordable Housing Plan, with a dedicated fast-tracked EU housing fund to support affordable housing, support for public-private partnerships, and help for sustainable, innovative building solutions.

Mayors' biggest priorities in 2025 are:

- 63% climate action: Despite reduced support at EU and national levels, mayors are investing in green infrastructure, clean mobility and adaptation measures.

- 40% access to affordable and social housing: Mayors call for more EU and national support to invest in high-quality, affordable housing.

- 35% social inclusion and equity: Mayors are working to reduce inequalities, support marginalised groups and expand access to education, jobs and culture.

- 30% urban planning and infrastructure: Mayors' priority is to implement urban infrastructure projects and promote sustainable urban planning.

While 64% of mayors are positive about the economic outlook of their city, only 31% of mayors are positive about their country's economy. A third of mayors report persistent budget pressures, driven by high inflation and global instability, especially Russia's war in Ukraine, with many having to scale back investments in housing, infrastructure, and climate action.

As the EU prepares its next long-term budget and a new policy agenda for cities, mayors call for more direct access to EU funding and a stronger role in policymaking. The survey finds that EU funding remains the hardest to access, with only 33% of mayors saying it is easy to access, compared to 44% for national funding and 55% for regional funding.

> If the EU is serious about its new policy agenda for cities, it must work directly with city leaders and cut through the complex, over centralised bureaucracy," says André Sobczak, Secretary General of Eurocities. "City governments need direct EU funding, a real say in EU policies, and stronger EU investment in cities to drive innovation, tackle the climate and housing crises, and power Europe's economy.

In a year marked by political uncertainty and rising populism, mayors reaffirm their commitment to defending Europe's democratic values. Over 70% are optimistic about the EU's future, compared to much lower trust in national governments.

> Democratic values in Europe and across the world are under threat, but cities are holding the line," says De Clercq. "From Russia's war in Ukraine to the unlawful imprisonment of Ekrem İmamoğlu, Mayor of Istanbul, we've witnessed increasing attacks on our democratic values and the creeping normalisation of injustice. Cities will continue to stand up for democracy, rejecting discrimination and giving people a real voice in shaping their future.

Strikingly, in contrast to mayors' optimism about the EU, less than half of mayors say they are confident in their national authorities.

> Mayors are deeply worried about the trend of ongoing centralisation in Europe and its impact on democracy," says Sobczak. "Only one in four mayors feel their city has high fiscal autonomy. Despite cities being the level of government closest to their people, spending decisions have been taken out of their hands.

Sustainable transport is one of the special focuses of this year's Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey and another key priority for mayors, who are working to expand networks, keep services affordable, and improve connectivity. However, over half of mayors cite funding gaps and high costs to be major barriers.

The top unexpected challenges faced by mayors in 2024 were:

- 34% Budgetary pressures: Budget shortfalls and rising costs forced cities to delay or scale back vital investments in housing, infrastructure and climate action.

- 24% Geopolitical instability: Ongoing global conflicts, particularly Russia's war in Ukraine, brought economic and social pressures, from hosting displaced people to absorbing economic shocks.

- 19% Bureaucracy and governance: Complex processes and limited local competences slowed city action.

1. The third edition of the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey is based on research conducted among mayors from the 204 member cities of the Eurocities network. Between December 2024 and February 2025, mayors were invited to reply to an online survey. The survey consisted of nine open-ended and thirteen closed questions, available in the

annex. For the closed questions, the results are presented at an aggregated level with no further manipulation. For some of the questions, such as top challenges and top priorities for 2025, Eurocities used open-ended questions to allow mayors to respond freely without predetermining their response.

2. You can download a .pdf of the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2025 here: Eurocities-Pulse2025-WEB-pages.pdf

3. An infographic featuring the main messages from the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey 2025 is available here: https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Eurocities-Pu...

4. The Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey is a major element of the Eurocities Monitor, which presents all the most interesting data and insights gathered throughout the year by Eurocities' Brussels-based staff, and via input from our network of more than 6,000 city officials from all over Europe. The Eurocities Monitor therefore presents all the results of the Eurocities Pulse, as well as other information presented via essays on each of Eurocities working areas. It is available online here: Home – 2025 Monitor Eurocities.

5. Eurocities recently submitted a contribution to the European Commission's Call for Evidence on the new policy agenda for cities, launched in May by Raffaele Fitto, European Commission Executive Vice President for Cohesion and Reforms. The contribution builds on the priorities and ideas put forward by mayors in the Eurocities Pulse Mayors Survey and provides a detailed proposal for the agenda and calls for a mission-oriented agenda with improved delivery tools. Read the full contribution here: FINAL-Eurocities-contribution-to-the-call-for-evidence-on-a-new-policy-agenda-for-cities.pdf

6. 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 BlueSky, Youtube accounts.

2. The third edition of the

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Press release distributed by Wire Association on behalf of Eurocities, on Jun 11, 2025. For more information subscribe and follow us.

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