



EMA FORUM 2026
DRAFT POLITICAL DECLARATION
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The mayors, presidents and political representatives of the European Metropolitan Authorities gathered in Istanbul for the 11th EMA Forum, hosted by Marmara Municipalities Union with the support of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area.

Governing the metropolitan future: policies, funds, and climate-driven water risks

The EMA network brings together major metropolitan territories across Europe, representing more than 120 million inhabitants, and serves as a platform for political dialogue between metropolitan authorities, European institutions and national governments.

At a time of geopolitical uncertainty, economic transformation and accelerating climate change, metropolitan areas continue to play a decisive role in Europe's future. They concentrate a large percentage of the population, economic activity, innovation and infrastructure, while also facing the most pressing challenges related to climate risks, water stress, affordable housing, energy consumption, commuting and social inequality.

Because these challenges extend beyond municipal borders, they require coordinated and integrated responses at the metropolitan scale. Metropolitan authorities are therefore essential actors in delivering effective, place-based and cross-sector solutions.

I. A European framework in transformation

Europe is entering a new political and financial cycle that will shape its development for the coming decade. The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034, the evolution of EU Cohesion Policy, national and regional partnership plans, the European Affordable Housing Plan and the EU Agenda for Cities will define future investment priorities and governance structures. This represents a key opportunity to strengthen the role of metropolitan areas.

However, current trends towards centralisation risk limiting their contribution. Without stronger involvement on the part of metropolitan authorities, European policies may lose territorial relevance, efficiency and long-term impact. Despite their ability to translate EU priorities into concrete results and to connect urban, suburban and rural areas, metropolitan authorities are still not systematically involved in policy design and execution. This weakens the impact of European investments at a crucial moment for Europe's competitiveness.

In the European context, we also want to express our unwavering support for our Ukrainian partners under attack. Ukrainian metropolitan areas are taking on critical security and civil protection responsibilities while providing essential services such as transport, water and waste management. We reaffirm our solidarity and commitment to strengthening cooperation, which includes enhanced bilateral support and knowledge exchange, as well as coordinated approaches to hosting displaced populations, restoring public services and fostering social resilience.

II. The strategic role of metropolitan authorities

Metropolitan areas play a key role in implementing European policies and programmes. They are a hub for knowledge, infrastructure, research and human capital, and enable integrated approaches across mobility, housing, energy and environmental protection.

Their governance scale, through diverse institutional arrangements, allows them to coordinate policies, investments and risks across sectors and administrative levels. From flexible and voluntary models of cooperation to more institutionalised systems, they enable municipalities to coordinate strategic planning and key services while maintaining their autonomy. This makes them essential drivers of sustainability, resilience and economic transformation. At the same time, increasing climate challenges, particularly in water management and infrastructure, require stronger coordination between European institutions, national governments, regions and metropolitan authorities.

Water governance clearly shows the importance of this coordination. Water systems extend across river basins and administrative boundaries and cannot be managed effectively through fragmented approaches. Metropolitan frameworks facilitate cooperation between municipalities and levels of government, support knowledge exchange and help translate European objectives into locally adapted solutions.

At a time when climate-related challenges risk receiving less attention in international debates, we want to highlight the importance of addressing climate-driven water risks from a metropolitan perspective. This is a clear and specific example of the added value of metropolitan governance, as it requires coordination across administrative borders and cooperation between different levels of government.

III. Climate-driven water risks as a metropolitan challenge

Climate-driven water risks have emerged as one of the most critical and systemic challenges of our time. The rising frequency of droughts, floods and water stress is no longer merely an environmental concern; it is a structural risk affecting economic stability, food systems, public health and social well-being. Water is therefore not an issue limited to one sector or another, but rather a cross-cutting dimension of metropolitan resilience and sustainable territorial development.

Today, 34% of EU territory is affected by water scarcity, and water stress impacts 38% of the EU population and key economic sectors. The European Commission's strategic plan for 2025–2029 recognises water resilience, climate adaptation and territorial competitiveness as central pillars of Europe's future prosperity.

Metropolitan areas across Europe are increasingly exposed to interconnected water-related challenges, including droughts, flooding, extreme weather events, pollution and ecosystem degradation. These risks are amplified by population concentration, infrastructure dependency and growing pressures on natural resources, creating cascading impacts across mobility, energy systems, economic activity and public services.

Because water systems, infrastructure networks and ecological systems extend beyond administrative boundaries, effective responses require coordinated action at the metropolitan scale. Metropolitan authorities are therefore well positioned to connect water management, spatial planning, infrastructure investment and climate adaptation, while supporting more integrated and resilient territorial development.

IV. Metropolitan priorities for climate resilience and water-related risks

In the coming decade, metropolitan authorities will play a decisive role in strengthening Europe's resilience, competitiveness and sustainability. We therefore call upon European institutions, national governments and relevant stakeholders to cooperate with metropolitan authorities in advancing the following priorities:

- 1. Integrated water resilience and climate adaptation:** Climate-driven water risks increasingly transcend administrative boundaries. Water management, climate adaptation, anti-flooding measures, spatial planning and infrastructure investment should therefore be coordinated across metropolitan territories, ensuring greater policy coherence across levels of government and sectors.
- 2. Investment in resilient and future-proof infrastructure:** European and national funding frameworks should support metropolitan-scale investments addressing water-related risks that cut across municipal boundaries, both in urban and rural areas. Dedicated and place-based funding should enable integrated projects on drought resilience, flood protection, water supply and efficiency, ecosystem restoration, digital monitoring systems and critical infrastructure adaptation.
- 3. Nature-based and hybrid solutions:** Public policies and funding programmes should accelerate the implementation of nature-based and hybrid solutions at the metropolitan scale, including wetland restoration, sustainable urban drainage systems, urban forests, green-blue infrastructure and ecosystem-based adaptation measures that strengthen resilience while generating environmental and social co-benefits.
- 4. Data, innovation and preparedness:** Decision-making on climate-driven water risks at the metropolitan level should be supported by strong data systems, digital technologies, early warning mechanisms and integrated monitoring tools. To achieve this, European and national programmes should strengthen metropolitan capabilities in areas such as artificial intelligence, digital twins, open data platforms and interoperable data systems, while fostering cooperation between public authorities, research institutions and service providers to improve preparedness, risk management and the efficiency of public services.
- 5. Water justice and inclusive resilience:** Climate-related water risks disproportionately affect vulnerable groups and communities. Policies and investments should therefore promote equitable access to water services, strengthen social resilience and ensure that adaptation

measures contribute to greater social inclusion and territorial cohesion across metropolitan areas.

6. **Resilient housing and land-use planning:** Housing and land-use policies in metropolitan areas should reduce exposure to water-related disaster risks by integrating flood risk, drought vulnerability and long-term climate projections into spatial development decisions. They should also promote water-smart and circular solutions, such as greywater reuse, rainwater harvesting, permeable surfaces and smart building technologies.

V. A call for stronger partnership with European institutions

Building on a decade of collective advocacy and the momentum of the Barcelona Metropolitan Declaration (2025), we reaffirm metropolitan areas' central role in shaping European and global agendas beyond 2030. Metropolitan authorities are not only implementers but also essential political actors, operating at the scale needed to address complex, cross-sector challenges, particularly climate-driven water risks.

Effective governance requires integrated, multilevel and place-based approaches with strong metropolitan leadership. Unlocking Europe's full potential depends on fully engaging metropolitan territories.

Metropolitan authorities stand ready to contribute to Europe's future. However, addressing global issues such as climate change, water risks and territorial inequalities requires stronger cooperation across all levels of governance.

We therefore call upon the European Commission, European Parliament, European Council and European Committee of the Regions to:

- Recognise metropolitan authorities as strategic actors in European policymaking, ensuring their meaningful involvement in the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes, – particularly in the MFF 2028–2034 and related Cohesion Policy instruments – *to include dedicated, place-based metropolitan funding windows that enable large-scale, integrated housing strategies, urban regeneration, sustainable mobility, digital transition, social services, and access to essential services, such as water supply or waste management.*
- Strengthen multilevel governance frameworks that reflect metropolitan realities and mobilise public and private investments for green, digital and resilient transitions.
- Improve access to European funding through more direct, simplified and place-based instruments.
- Support metropolitan innovation, especially in climate adaptation and water management through integrated and nature-based approaches.

Only through stronger cooperation between European, national, regional and metropolitan levels can Europe respond effectively to present and future challenges.

We, the members of the European Metropolitan Authorities, reaffirm our commitment to working together towards a resilient, inclusive and sustainable future, and call for the political recognition, governance frameworks and financial instruments needed to make this vision a reality.

October 8, 2026 – ISTANBUL

Signatories

Metropolitan Area	Name, surname and position	Signature
Marmara Municipalities Union	Ahmet AKIN President of the Marmara Municipalities Union and Mayor of Balıkesir	
Barcelona Metropolitan Area	Jordi Castellana i Gamisans Vice-president for international relations and digital metropolis	
City of Vienna	Omar AL-RAWI Member of the City Council	
Torino Meropolitan City Strambino	Sonia CAMBURSANO Councilwoman Mayor	
Verband Region Stuttgart	Rainer GESSLER Deputy Chairman	
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Milan Metropolitan City METREX	Marco GRIGUOLO Vice-president President	
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