

Our Plea

All over Europe, countries, regions, and cities are facing pressing and interrelated housing challenges. Rising costs, shortages of affordable and adequate housing, spatial inequalities, and growing displacement affect millions of European citizens. These challenges strike at the heart of European values such as social inclusion, equality, cohesion, and the right to decent living conditions. They also have implications across policy areas including climate, mobility, labour, and public health.

We, the participants of the **Brussels Convening***, a coalition of 35 policy makers, planners, designers, architects, tenants' representatives, researchers, developers, and practitioners from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and France, acknowledge and welcome the ongoing efforts by the European Commission to work towards a coherent European Housing Agenda. We recognise the necessity of a transnational perspective that supports and enables local and regional strategies rather than complicating them.

Therefore, we offer our expertise and collaboration to help shape a European Housing Agenda that aligns the ambitions of the European Union with the territorial realities of its diverse regions. We call upon the European Commission, national governments, regional coalitions, and local authorities to act together on —

- 1 Working on the EU-perspective**
We propose to initiate and disseminate a focused agenda on addressing spatial and demographic challenges from a European Union perspective. Rural depopulation, rapid urbanisation, and housing market tensions are not isolated national issues but interconnected, transboundary phenomena. Migration, labour dynamics, and investment flows operate across borders, demanding coordinated EU-level strategies. Tackling these challenges collectively can strengthen cohesion, spatial justice, and long-term resilience across the Union.
- 2 Treat Housing as a system**
Housing is a system, but more importantly: housing is part of a larger system. That is what makes housing a big priority for EU, because other agendas depend on housing. Housing policy must be integrated with spatial planning, mobility, labor markets, health, and sustainability. Fragmentation has failed us; now we must align instruments, institutions, and investments around shared territorial and social outcomes.
- 3 Confront the crisis of spatial mismatch**
Too often, people are pushed far from where opportunities are found, jobs, education, care, and culture, resulting in long commutes, rising emissions, and social isolation. The problem is not just a lack of homes, but a failure to provide the right homes in the right places. We must match housing policy with spatial, mobility, and economic strategies. Prioritize housing where people work, study, and live their lives. Plan for equity, not just quantity.
- 4 Focus on planning not the project**
Shift the emphasis from isolated projects to integrated, long-term planning frameworks. Restore the role of planning as a democratic and creative act—one that shapes not only where we live, but how we live together. Support local authorities in reclaiming long-term planning capacity, especially in underserved territories.
- 5 Support renovation and regeneration, not just expansion**
The housing of the future already exists. Europe's greatest potential lies in its current neighborhoods, and the need to combine growth and improvement together, rather than opposing. We don't have a square meter problem, we have a distribution and utilization problem. Instead of endless expansion, we must unlock the value of what is already built. Invest in retrofitting, densification, and circular construction. Shift the cultural narrative: reuse is not a fallback it is innovation.
- 6 Strengthen the role of local and regional authorities**
Cities and regions are where housing needs are most acute and solutions most tangible. Empower them with the tools, funding, and legal frameworks to plan holistically and act decisively.

- 7 Listen to those most affected**
Involve tenants, residents, and local actors in the design, governance, and evaluation of housing strategies. Participation is not a tick-box it is the foundation of legitimacy, resilience, and justice. Next, we must shift focus toward enabling and incentivising a multitude of small, precise, and community-rooted actions. These decentralized efforts, when supported with the right tools and resources, can collectively drive systemic change and build a more just and resilient housing future.
- 8 Advocate an open dialogue on public instruments and anti-speculation**
Ensure that EU funds and financing platforms benefit those building for the common good. Empowering public, cooperative, and community-led housing providers. Introduce strong social conditionalities to safeguard against financialisation and speculation. Crucially, establish mechanisms to retain capital within the housing system itself, ensuring that returns are reinvested into affordability, quality, and long-term resilience, rather than extracted for private gain.
- 9 Establish mechanisms for procedural feedback and learning**
To enable effective action, cities and regions must not only be empowered but also supported through iterative, transparent processes of feedback and reflection. This includes providing clear procedural guidance from higher levels of governance, fostering peer exchange among territories, and ensuring that local actors can adapt and improve based on real-time insights and evolving needs.
- 10 Reconnect the networks**
We must build a platform where planners talk with designers, where tenants speak alongside developers, where Brussels learns from Bilbao, and Amsterdam learns from Zagreb. Europe must not only legislate but facilitate dialogue, exchange, and experimentation.
- 11 Culture of living and Housing**
When we build living environments, we are not just constructing physical spaces but shaping societies and building for communities. Housing is cultural infrastructure. It reflects who we are, how we relate to one another, and the values we choose to uphold.

* This is being submitted in response to the European Commission's Housing Task Force: Call for Evidence for the European Affordable Housing Plan.

As a group of experts and networks, we offer to support for developing instruments at the EU level, not only funding but regulatory clarity, guidance on land use, and the scaffolding for regional and metropolitan coordination. Spatial planning must be re-legitimized, supported, and resourced, especially at the levels where projects are delivered and lives are lived.

We want to build a European-wide framework for renovation, regeneration and densification. This includes funding streams that favour the reuse of existing buildings, digital permitting systems to reduce delays, and incentives for energy-efficient upgrades that do not displace residents or increase rents. We ask for a clear stance on conditionality. Public/EU investment should come with social safeguards: permanent affordability, non-speculative use, and tenant protections particularly in the context of renovation.

We urge the Commission to support us for initiating and maintaining a knowledge-sharing platform. We are willing to initiate and curate a space where experts from design, planning, legal innovation, finance, and governance can interact and document the best practices for all the European states.



Organisers and experts of Brussels Convening - 15 April 2025

Who are we?

1	Rene Hogenboom	Altera Vastgoed
2	Rene Meyboom	Bouwend Nederland
3	Esther Agricola	BPD (Bouwfonds Gebiedsontwikkeling)
4	Erik Pasveer	City of Amsterdam/SURE network
5	Vera Manouilov	Citydev Brussels
6	Barot Somesh	Citydev Brussels
7	Benjamin Cadranel	Citydev Brussels
8	Paul Gerretsen	Deltametropolis Association
9	Eva Kuiper	Deltametropolis Association
10	Alankrita Sarkar	Deltametropolis Association
11	Leen Verbeek	Former President of the Congress of the Council of Europe and Chair of Board Deltametropolis Association
12	Tatiana Marquez Uriarte	European Commission
13	Lucía Caudet	European Commission DG GROW
14	Maurits Schaafsma	Gemeente Haarlemmermeer (Board member VDM)
15	Sorcha Edwards	Housing Europe
16	Marieke Kuijer	Randstad Provinces
17	Mees Tesselaar Ferrari	Randstad Provinces
18	Claudio Acioly	IHS-Institute Erasmus University
19	Emiliano Rocchetti	International Union of Tenants
20	Reimar von Meding	KAW
21	Sofie Troch	Labo Ruimte/Departement Omgeving
22	Henk Bouwman	METREX
23	Tayfun Cinar	Metropolitan Region Amsterdam
24	Gewa Gieseler	Northrein Westphalia
25	Guy Vloebergh	Omgeving/ISOCARP
26	Alfredo Corbalan	Perspective Brussels
27	Sandrine De Meyer	Perspective Brussels
28	Yves van de Castele	Perspective Brussels
29	Frank Dirks	Platform31
30	Jonas Guignonat	Platform31
31	Stan van de Berg	Province Noord Holland
32	Floris Schiferli	SuperUse Studios
33	Julie Mabilde	Team Vlaams Bouwmeester
34	Daniele Zurigo	International Union of Tenants
35	Marie Hanna Deketeleare	Urbact
36	Charlotte Meulenbelt	Ymere
37	Sander Aelvoet	ORG Permanent Modality

Deltametropolis Association (VDM)

Deltametropolis Association coordinates independent design research on issues relating to the growing metropolitan areas in the Netherlands and the Eurodeltametropolis, addressing the global and European agendas. We explore opportunities and challenges surrounding current tasks with a metropolitan, interregional, national or international character.

International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP)

IFHP is a global NGO which unites leading, international thinkers and doers in the area of housing and planning. IFHP was founded in the UK in 1913, originating from the Garden City Movement and its strong belief in creating human settlements offering people a decent housing & home and a worthy place to live.

Randstadsamenwerking

The four provinces in the Randstad, Noord-Holland, Zuid-Holland, Utrecht en Flevoland have a cooperation on European Affairs in Brussels and make a special program for each year. The cooperation is part of the cooperation in the House of the Dutch provinces.

Reach us at:

email:
alankrita.sarkar@deltametropool.nl

paul.gerretsen@deltametropool.nl

eva.kuiper@deltametropool.nl

phone:
+31 (0)10 737 0340

website:
deltametropool.nl

Vereniging Deltametropool
Museumpark 25
3015 CB Rotterdam

Postbus 600
3000 AP Rotterdam

vereniging
delta ———
metropool

In collaboration with:

IFHP International Federation for Housing and Planning

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