



THE NETWORK  
OF MAJOR  
EUROPEAN  
CITIES

## **EUROCITIES Charter on Rights of Citizens in the Knowledge Society**

# Introduction

## On the Knowledge Society

EUROCITIES recognises the profound changes to our living and working environment resulting from the fast development and widespread use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), accompanied by social, economic, organisational and legal innovations. Society, today, is defined as the 'Information Society' or as the 'Knowledge Society', to stress its most valuable asset: the intangible, human and social capital, defined by knowledge and creativity.

EUROCITIES is aware of the opportunities that these changes bring with regard to social welfare, education & training, jobs, easier access to public services & new forms of governance. We are also aware of the risk of new inequalities affecting overall cohesion in Europe that these developments can bring. EUROCITIES is committed to the development of a Knowledge Society for all citizens.

## The role of cities in the development of the Knowledge Society

EUROCITIES firmly believes that the establishment of the Knowledge Society should be closely accompanied and encouraged by all spheres of government. Now more than ever, the public sector must become the catalyst for the use of ICTs among citizens, while ensuring their full rights. EUROCITIES recognises several functions that cities should cover:

### *a Regulatory function*

- Implement European and national legal guidelines
- Consider adequate telecommunications infrastructures as a universal service of general interest, which adapted to the local situation offers the conditions for the development of new services for all citizens

### *a Promotional function*

- Ensure the deployment of adequate telecommunication infrastructures within their territories
- Stimulate sectorial development
- Identify priorities (education, health) and foster sectors of excellence
- Provide essential services and information
- Increase efficiency and transparency
- Foster cultural changes inside and outside public administration following the development of the Knowledge Society

### *a Democratic function*

- Guarantee transparency of public administration throughout the decision-making process
- Commit to ensuring citizen participation and the strengthening of civil society

## GUARANTEEING THE RIGHTS OF CITIZENS IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

EUROCITIES wishes to ensure the effective recognition and protection of rights of all citizens in the Information and Knowledge Society by introducing the “European Charter of Rights of citizens in the Knowledge Society”. EUROCITIES is convinced that this instrument will help cities and local governments to ensure the rights of citizens & to maintain a competitive and competent society in the digital age as well as ensuring social and territorial cohesion.

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By committing of progressively guaranteeing to all citizens specific individual and social rights in the field of the Knowledge Society, EUROCITIES is responding to potential threats, such as the digital divide and other forms of inequalities, and benefits such as new resources generated by technologies and the Knowledge-based economy. EUROCITIES recognises citizens as the most significant element in the Knowledge Society. Defining their rights brings the Knowledge Society closer to citizens and also determines the model of Knowledge Society that is best suited to each individual European city. By defining these rights cities can develop and deliver truly citizen centred services.

EUROCITIES identifies four groups of rights to be distinguished:

### The Right to Access

The “Right of Access to technological equipment & infrastructure” will identify the necessary conditions for the effective use of technology, trust of citizens in technology and public services based on new technologies.

The availability of adequate telecommunications infrastructures is fundamental in giving equal opportunities to all citizens. Local government must play an active role in guaranteeing access to such infrastructures. In areas lacking these, specific public efforts are essential to ensure access meeting the demands of citizens. This will contribute to real competences in services and content delivery.

Given the different levels of infrastructure available in European cities, as well as the diversity of factors - such as age, income and cultural background - the risk of digital divide remains obvious. An effective telecommunications policy, with adequate financial resources, should be defined addressing, among others, issues of inclusion. Such a policy should make the best possible use of public and private financing mechanisms. It should promote accessibility through public internet access points in, for instance, libraries and schools.

Privacy and user protection should be ensured on the Internet in order to generate & maintain citizen’s levels of confidence in ICT and increase the take up of ICTs. To increase confidence, cities must be engaged in the definition of frameworks that protect users from new forms of fraud. Furthermore, actions need to be developed to regulate and facilitate common security systems and to delegate responsibility and authority to independent organizations.

## The Right to Education and Training

EUROCITIES considers it essential to support the development of lifelong learning to allow all citizens to take part in and benefit from the development of the Knowledge Society.

Learning and working can no longer be considered as two separate areas and new technologies offer people the possibility to continue learning anytime and anywhere. The development of a Knowledge Society can only be ensured by developing policies & actions that will give citizens the opportunity to update and redefine continuously their skills and competences in order to be more mobile and better prepared for the labour market.

Cities recognise the need to respond to the citizen's requests for specific competences and skills, and to offer all citizens the possibility to acquire the content and knowledge needed. eLearning initiatives will offer high returns in terms of employability and human capital. This means that public institutions have to identify potential opportunities for this by gathering personalised information about the learning needs of individual citizens. Cities will also need to ensure educational possibilities which meet citizens' needs, paying special attention to specific groups such as immigrants, seniors and disabled persons. The empowerment of teachers, as promoters of change in any educative environment, will contribute to effectiveness of these efforts.

## The Right to Online Information

The right of citizens to online information refers not only to the Internet accessibility of information. Equally important is the quality of information provided in terms of its completeness, its user-friendliness for all citizens and its timeliness. Interpreting the right to online information in this way demonstrates the commitment of cities to transparency of their administrations.

In this sense, cities will have to be a main source of content, especially content related to the information generated and owned by its administration. This is not a matter of public registers only, but of all content produced by public administrations.

Cities value the importance of all administrative information, available personal data (with appropriate and sufficient guarantees of privacy, security and confidentiality), to everyday life, social and cultural agendas and heritage in all its expressions. The latter will reinforce the fundamental right of citizens to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

Citizens will be able to select information most useful to them, and personalize their relation with public administrations. In addition to increasing internet use, these measures will also promote content, services and the applications development sector.

## The Right to Online Participation

Ensuring the citizen's right to participation calls on cities to be transparent at each stage of their decision-making process. Ensuring this right also requires cities to actively respond to requests for participation and strengthening of Civil Society.

Increasing citizen participation in the decision-making & policy-making processes is a main goal of eDemocracy, but is not only a matter of services and technologies. The concept of eDemocracy as a new way for citizens to participate, calls for new ways of true interaction. In order to facilitate effective participation, citizens must be able to easily relate to their local governments and understand its processes and procedures. Citizens should be informed on the decision making processes in an understandable way. This assumes that the whole administrative flow must be clear and its outcome, whether definitive or intermediate, must be public and available. We recognize that this operation will often require re-engineering of the procedures now in place. Rationalisation, re-engineering, transparency and access are fundamental prerequisites for the development of participative citizenship.

New technologies offer new forms of relationships between citizens and cities. Cities should consider all technical options that allow citizens to receive effective responses to their enquiries. Monitoring these responses allows cities to further improve their services to citizens. Using multiple communication channels allows them to stimulate the participation of citizens and encourage them to express opinions, make suggestions for future service improvement and complaints about current levels of service.

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# European Charter of Rights of Citizens in the Knowledge Society

## Preamble

European Cities are:

RECOGNISING the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as the essential framework for this charter,

AWARE that the advent of the Knowledge Society brings new opportunities for social welfare but also new risks of inequalities, the consequences of which may affect the cohesion expected by European societies,

ADHERING to the idea that local public administrations must adopt citizen-focused strategies in the field of the Knowledge Society to efficiently ensure equal opportunities and continuously provide better quality public services,

CONVINCED that local governments must play an active role in developing Internet use to stimulate local democracy and social utility, aiming at supporting our cities work towards the Lisbon Goals,

DETERMINED to improve local governance and reinforce the relationship between European citizens and Local Authorities to achieve a competitive and competent society.

## Signatory

I, the undersigned <name, city>, represented by <name and position of person signing> having authority, decision-making power or a mandate to represent, and, in this capacity having a share of the responsibility for the Knowledge Society in the European Union.

## Objectives

Undertake, within the sphere of my responsibility and activities, to promote the creation and delivery of the services aimed at achieving the following local objectives, i.e.,

1. Promote Internet access for all and foster the effective use of and the public's trust in technologies and public services based on new technologies
2. Strengthen the fundamental right to education in the Knowledge Society, enabling people of all ages and sectors to take part in and benefit from the development of the Knowledge Society
3. Provide access to user-friendly and understandable public information
4. Ensure transparent public administration

I wish to progressively ensure the effective recognition and protection of particular and measurable rights of all citizens in the Knowledge Society needed to overcome any possible threat of the digital divide and to ensure social and territorial cohesion. I wish in particular, within the bounds of my responsibility and specificities, to recognise and progressively protect the following rights:

## Rights

### CHAPTER I. Rights to Access

1. Every citizen of the European Union will have access to the Internet through Public Internet Access Points, preferably via a broadband network
2. Every citizen of the European Union must be guaranteed the security and privacy of any personal data managed through online public services

### CHAPTER II. Rights to Education and Training

3. Every citizen of the European Union will have the right to acquire the basic skills for an effective use of services and information through ICT
4. Every citizen of the European Union will have access to personalised assistance when accessing public and ICT-based equipment and facilities
5. Every citizen of the European Union will have access to lifelong e-learning platforms to benefit from all the available resources generated by communication-technology facilities and thus take part in the knowledge society

### CHAPTER III: Rights to Online Information

6. Every citizen of the European Union will have access to the best quality information produced by public administrations
7. Every citizen of the European Union will have access to online information regardless of disabilities

### CHAPTER IV: Rights to Online Participation

8. Every citizen of the European Union will be ensured the right to participate through ICT platforms in the decision-making processes of his or her local government
9. Every citizen of the European Union will receive public administration feedback on any online consultation results

Signed on 2005

<Signature>

<Name & surname>

<City>