

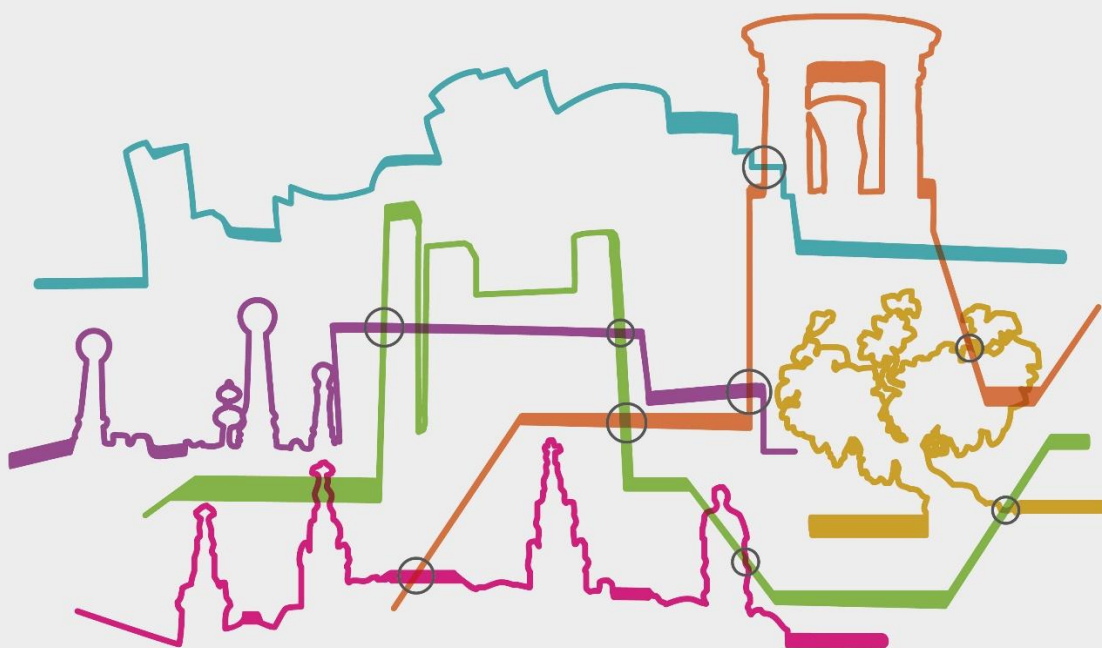
Euskal Hiria kongresua

Edición XXIV. edizioa

2026

**Ber-hazi. Hiria etxebizitzaren
eta iraunkortasunaren
erronken artean**

**Re-crecer. La ciudad entre
los retos de la vivienda y
la sostenibilidad**



2026.11.16 — 2026.11.17
BIZKAIA ARETOA / BILBAO

EUSKO JAURLARITZA



GOBIERNO VASCO

ETXEBIZITZA ETA
HIRI AGENDA SAILA

DEPARTAMENTO DE VIVIENDA Y
AGENDA URBANA



ONU-HABITAT



EUSKAL HIRIA KONGRESUA.

The Euskal Hiria Congress has been held in the Basque Country since 2002 as a platform for promoting debate on cities and territorial development within the Basque context. Through a range of thematic areas, the Congress addresses the challenges and opportunities currently facing urban areas, drawing on the perspectives of diverse stakeholders and different fields of knowledge.

The 24th edition of the Euskal Hiria Congress will take place at Bizkaia Aretoa – UPV/EHU in Bilbao on 16 and 17 November 2026. The Congress is organised by the Department of Housing and Urban Agenda of the Basque Government, with the support of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

CONTEXT

Against a backdrop of growing difficulties in accessing housing, the climate crisis and the need to use land more responsibly, cities face an urgent question: how can affordable housing, services and opportunities be provided without resorting to outward urban expansion models that have intensified car dependency, infrastructure sprawl and territorial fragmentation?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda, together with other global frameworks, highlight the need to move towards more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable urban models capable of linking the right to adequate housing with more efficient and balanced territorial planning. The Basque Urban Agenda, Bultzatu 2050, approved by the Basque Government in 2019, follows this same direction. It serves as a strategic instrument designed to strengthen the coherence of public policies and enhance the capacity of the Basque territory to generate opportunities, sustainability, social cohesion and quality of life.

From this perspective, under the theme **“Re-growing: The city between the challenges of housing and sustainability,”** the Congress seeks to open a renewed debate on urban growth. As an alternative to land-intensive models of urban expansion, it invites participants to explore how the existing city can evolve to meet contemporary needs by redistributing urban quality, expanding access to housing, and strengthening the environmental and social sustainability of territories.



The debate around “**re-growth**” is particularly relevant, as it invites us to reconsider how existing cities can accommodate new housing, services and activities through rehabilitation, regeneration, adaptive reuse, infill development and balanced intensification. The central question is how to achieve better growth within already consolidated urban boundaries, ensuring that responses to the housing shortage also contribute to climate action, territorial efficiency and social cohesion.

Within this framework, **Euskal Hiria Kongresua 2026** proposes a critical reflection on re-growth as a strategy for advancing towards more sustainable, inclusive and balanced urban development. The central question is how, where, for whom and under what conditions the existing city can re-grow to provide **more housing, more green space and greater inclusion**, without compromising urban quality, social cohesion or territorial balance. From this perspective, the Congress invites participants to envision a new phase of urban development capable of bringing together housing, sustainability, architectural quality, social justice and territorial balance.

SESSION 1.

Governing re-growth: limits, land, planning and financing

“Governing re-growth entails establishing rules, instruments and financing mechanisms that can unlock the potential of the existing city, generate affordable housing and ensure that the value created benefits the wider community.”

Re-growth involves identifying the capacity of consolidated urban areas to accommodate new housing, activities and services through rehabilitation, regeneration, adaptive reuse and balanced intensification. To achieve this, urban planning must be equipped with instruments capable of intervening in the existing city with greater agility, precision and redistributive capacity. These may include amendments to urban plans, the transfer of development rights, mixed-use development, the regulation of vertical extensions, the conversion of commercial premises, the transformation of existing structures into housing units, the activation of vacant urban sites, and the redevelopment of obsolete land, among others.

Governing re-growth also requires the coordination of financing, regulation and territorial cooperation. Public-private partnerships, rehabilitation grants, European funds, green finance, public rental housing, cooperatives and surface rights



arrangements can help make these transformations viable while linking them to social and environmental objectives.

Likewise, increases in development rights can become a tool for financing improvements to buildings, public facilities and public spaces, as well as climate adaptation measures, provided that clear mechanisms are established to ensure that the value generated translates into collective benefit.

At the same time, re-growth must be addressed at the metropolitan scale by developing the institutional capacity to coordinate decisions across municipalities, balance costs and benefits, and prevent housing production from leading to excessive real estate pressure, displacement or a decline in urban quality for existing neighbourhood residents.

Questions for discussion:

- + ¿Qué instrumentos urbanísticos permiten activar la capacidad de la ciudad consolidada para acoger nuevas viviendas, usos y servicios?
- + ¿Cómo pueden regularse operaciones como los remotes, la transformación de estructuras existentes, la reconversión de locales, la activación de vacíos urbanos o la transformación de suelos obsoletos para garantizar calidad urbana y beneficio público?
- + ¿Cómo puede el incremento de edificabilidad contribuir a financiar mejoras en la edificación, los equipamientos, el espacio público y la adaptación climática?
- + ¿Qué mecanismos financieros pueden hacer viable el re-crecimiento y, al mismo tiempo, asegurar vivienda asequible, rehabilitación y mejora del espacio urbano?

SESSION 2.

Designing re-growth with what already exists. Circular architecture: reuse, extend and transform

“Densification does not necessarily mean building higher, but rather making more intelligent use of what already exists”

This thematic area addresses re-growth at the scale of specific architectural and urban projects, focusing on how to intervene in existing buildings, plots, rooftops, ground



floors, courtyards, shared spaces and underused urban areas. The central question is which types of intervention can generate new housing from the existing city without undermining urban quality, overburdening neighbourhoods, or losing sight of environmental and social sustainability.

From this perspective, the built city is not merely the setting for re-growth, but its primary resource. Infill development, the redesign or subdivision of large dwellings, the conversion of commercial premises and ground floors, rehabilitation combined with extensions, the adaptive reuse of underused buildings, and the addition of new storeys or rooftop extensions offer ways to create housing without starting from scratch. These interventions require careful assessment of habitability, accessibility, structural conditions, comfort, the relationship with public space, and the capacity to integrate into the existing urban fabric.

Designing re-growth also entails incorporating circular architecture principles, carbon reduction, lightweight industrialised construction, timber and demountable building systems. These approaches align with a more sustainable, inclusive and high-quality architectural culture rooted in the principles of the New European Bauhaus. Examples such as proposals for “housing above housing” in the Basque Country, the conversion of ground floors, rehabilitation to improve accessibility, and the transformation of former industrial areas provide a particularly relevant basis for discussing how design innovation, technical feasibility, urban quality and affordable housing can be combined.

The challenge is not simply to add development capacity or produce more square metres, but to create better ways of living. This thematic area therefore proposes a discussion on how each intervention can improve the quality of streets, courtyards, rooftops and shared spaces, as well as accessibility, comfort and the relationship between buildings and their neighbourhoods, ensuring that re-growth contributes to a more liveable, circular and better-integrated city.

Questions for discussion:

- + Which types of architectural intervention can generate new housing from the existing city without undermining urban quality or overburdening neighbourhoods?
- + What lessons can be drawn from initiatives such as vertical extensions, the conversion of ground floors, rehabilitation to improve accessibility, and the transformation of former industrial areas?



- + What role can circular architecture, lightweight industrialised construction, timber and low-carbon building systems play in urban re-growth strategies?
- + How can we ensure that these interventions do more than simply increase development capacity, and also improve the quality of streets and shared spaces, accessibility, comfort and everyday life?

SESSION 3.

Re-growing to adapt: climate action, public space and urban metabolism

"Every urban re-growth intervention is an opportunity to deliver climate and urban benefits"

Every urban re-growth intervention also represents an opportunity to strengthen the city's adaptive capacity. In a context of rising temperatures, extreme weather events and increasing pressure on urban resources, housing provision cannot be addressed as an isolated issue. Re-growing means considering how each intervention can simultaneously enhance thermal comfort, reduce emissions, renaturalise consolidated neighbourhoods, optimise existing infrastructure and improve everyday life.

From this perspective, housing provision must be linked to broader urban systems, including water, vegetation, energy, mobility, health, public space, community facilities and local services. Energy-efficient rehabilitation, urban heat island mitigation, green-blue infrastructure and neighbourhood facilities are essential to ensuring that re-growth improves the environmental and social performance of the existing city.

Questions for discussion:

- + How can the provision of new housing also contribute to climate adaptation, urban renaturalisation and improved thermal comfort in consolidated neighbourhoods?
- + What conditions must be met for urban re-growth to reduce emissions, make better use of existing infrastructure and decrease car dependency?
- + How can public space, green-blue infrastructure, sustainable urban drainage and active mobility be integrated into re-growth strategies?



SESSION 4.

Communities and re-growth: affordability, permanence and the right to the neighbourhood

“Every re-growth process should contribute to a more inclusive city by ensuring affordable housing, social cohesion and residents’ ability to remain in their neighbourhoods”

Urban re-growth can also help protect existing residents and ensure that the benefits of urban transformation are distributed equitably. Without appropriate regulation, urban improvement processes can lead to rising property values and prices, the displacement of residents, and the loss of neighbourhood identity and everyday ways of life.

At the same time, although urban densification is a key strategy for optimising land use, improving territorial sustainability and containing urban expansion, it frequently generates significant tensions within consolidated urban areas. These tensions largely stem from public perceptions that densification may reduce urban quality and disrupt existing balances.

First, opposition from local residents often emerges when new residents are introduced into previously consolidated areas. This opposition may be based on objective factors, such as increased density, added pressure on existing infrastructure and services, or the potential overcrowding of public spaces. It may also stem from subjective concerns related to neighbourhood identity, the preservation of established social dynamics, or the perceived loss of residential comfort.

Second, densification often involves developing vacant or residual plots, or land previously allocated to other uses. This can generate conflict when residents regard these areas as potential reserves for open spaces or public facilities. In many cases, although such sites are not formally designated as public facilities or green spaces, they function in practice as urban breathing spaces, reinforcing resistance to their conversion to residential use.

These interventions can also intensify the debate surrounding the urban development model by bringing the need to produce housing—particularly subsidised housing—into tension with demands for better-quality public spaces, greater access to green areas and the provision of local facilities. This perceived competition between uses can make it more difficult to secure public support for densification processes.



The absence of effective participatory processes or appropriate communication strategies can further intensify conflict. When residents' concerns are not adequately incorporated into the design of interventions, local opposition may grow and the implementation of planned actions may be delayed.

Questions for discussion:

- + How can re-growth processes improve neighbourhoods without generating opposition, displacement, rising prices or the loss of neighbourhood identity and everyday ways of life?
- + Which instruments can ensure affordable housing, public rental housing and the right of residents to remain in their neighbourhoods in contexts of rehabilitation, regeneration and urban intensification?
- + How can participatory mechanisms move beyond consultation to enable shared responsibility, negotiation and trust among public authorities, local communities and other stakeholders?
- + How can re-growth policies improve social cohesion in densified areas, promote social integration and foster a greater social mix?
- + How can the opportunities created by re-growth be better harnessed to strengthen local neighbourhood economies?