



Social rights for all

Cities are committed to deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights

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EUROCITIES welcomes the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) as a much-needed EU initiative to deliver new and more effective social rights to EU citizens as well as third-country nationals with legal residence status in the EU. We believe a stronger Europe is only possible if people are at the centre of it. Social rights should be guaranteed for all in the EU, both in eurozone and non-eurozone countries, to build a more inclusive and cohesive Europe shaped by solidarity.

City authorities are committed to contributing to the effective implementation of the EPSR at local level. We are keen to continue designing and delivering employment, social inclusion and welfare measures and services for all, to enable people to access social rights otherwise not available to them. This is now more urgent than ever given the rising poverty and inequality across European cities, putting our European social model at risk.

We welcome the active inclusion approach in the principles and rights enshrined in the EPSR, in particular the emphasis put on access to quality services such as childcare, housing and healthcare. It is essential to implement the active inclusion approach by connecting social and employment policies and services. At local level, we invest efforts to ensure equal access to and enjoyment of social rights by all, including the most vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities like Roma, long-term unemployed, people with physical and mental disabilities, older people and young people, while taking into consideration the gender dimension of social and economic inequality across all groups.

Our actions

City authorities can lead the way in delivering some of the principles of the EPSR:

- making it possible for EU citizens as well as refugees and asylum seekers to access their right to quality and inclusive education (principle 1) by giving them opportunities to attend formal and informal education, vocational training and adult education, which is inclusive for all
 - working for many years to ensure equal opportunities and access to the labour market by reaching out to those furthest away from the labour market and providing active support to employment (principle 4). We have taken action, under the EUROCITIES Declaration on Work, to create the conditions for more and better jobs, and to make the labour markets more inclusive. We are also combatting long-term unemployment and youth unemployment in line with the implementation of Youth Guarantee at local level. We also work for a better reconciliation of work and private life for all. In particular, we
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address the discrimination still faced by women on the labour market due to their caring responsibilities.

- putting reforms in place to maximise social investment and implement preventive strategies to address social risks at an early stage. We have improved availability, accessibility and affordability of services, such as childcare, healthcare and long-term care (principles 11, 16 and 18)
- developing integrated approaches to fight child poverty (principle 11), which combine access to social services with labour market activation measures
- experimenting with minimum income schemes at local level to ensure a life in dignity for all (principle 14)
- adapting their local services to improve access for and inclusion of disabled people (principle 17)
- implementing measures to fight against the increasing feminisation of poverty, especially concerning women with low education levels, older women and single mothers, and to improve gender equality and work-life balance (principles 2, 9 and 15)
- improving access to affordable housing for all (principle 19), aiming at social diversity, committing to preventing homelessness and ensuring long-term public and private investment in housing
- ensuring that all residents have access to essential services, such as water, sanitation and energy (principle 20) through targeted actions to support access to basic services for those most in need

Our recommendations

We are ready to do more to make social rights a reality on the ground, but we need more support from all levels of government. We recommend that EU and member states:

- Change the economic model to include spending for social policies and social services as an investment and not a cost. Economic policies (fiscal and budgetary) should support social policies, replacing austerity programmes with social investment measures. EU policies must be coherent in their economic and social objectives to support social sustainability of reforms. The social impact of all EU policies, especially economic policies, should be assessed in advance.
- Adopt initiatives to enforce the rights enshrined in the EPSR. We need a Council recommendation to reinforce the right to affordable and accessible housing for all. We are facing a critical shortage of affordable housing, which creates new forms of inequality and vulnerability. The current regulation of the housing market considers housing as a speculative asset, which aggravates residential exclusion in our cities. We need changes to EU and national legislation, for example the limitation restricting access to social housing to citizens from disadvantaged groups should be withdrawn from the Decision on state aid rules for Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI decision). Without a strong Council recommendation, access to affordable housing will remain a problem that will continue to increase the risk of poverty, exclusion and homelessness.

- Allocate sufficient resources to implement the EPSR. Without earmarking EU funding, the implementation of the principles and rights under the EPSR will remain mere political rhetoric. The ESIF should support the implementation of the EPSR and the ESF should channel resources directly at local level. In general, the EU funding should be more flexible enabling support to reach anyone in need, not just certain target groups. Long-term social investment at local level should be made a priority of the next Multiannual Financial Framework post-2020. In addition, investment in social infrastructure should be increased in the European Fund for Strategic Investment and channelled to where it is most needed at local level. Future cohesion policy post-2020 should respond to people's needs where they live.
- Strengthen the open method of coordination for social protection and social inclusion (social OMC) by introducing a local OMC to implement the EPSR and monitor its implementation. Mutual learning and peer reviews between cities should be added to the social OMC to support the EPSR implementation and feed the results back into EU social policies. The local OMC could monitor progress in the EPSR implementation at local level. It is also important to make sure that any new social indicators in the social OMC and the European Semester capture the diverse social situations within member states. Aggregate figures at macro-level based on national averages are not sufficient to reveal complex social problems as divergences exist not only between member states, but also within the same member state. The social scoreboard indicators, such as income inequality and impact of social transfers on poverty reduction, should improve the monitoring of social policies by adding micro-level data from local level.
- Link the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights to the Urban Agenda for the EU. The multi-level governance approach used in the urban agenda and the structures already in place to apply this approach - the urban partnerships - may be instrumental in transferring the EPSR's objectives into concrete initiatives. Therefore, the EPSR should also be implemented through the urban partnerships on poverty, migration, affordable housing, jobs and skills, and public procurement.
- Ensure meaningful participation of cities in decision-making linked to the EPSR. Considering that most social policies are implemented at local level in line with the subsidiarity principle, city authorities should be strongly involved in the design and monitoring of these policies. A stronger social Europe can only be achieved by creating a space for meaningful and wider participation of cities in the EU policies. For example, having cities represented at the EU Social Summit on 17 November in Gothenburg would be a good opportunity to engage cities in the debate with member states and the EU institutions about the EPSR and the future of a social Europe.

We are ready to work with the EU institutions and member states to make the principles in the EPSR enforceable and tangibly improve people's lives. We are ready to lead the way towards a stronger social Europe, but we need the means to do it. We are the level of government closest to people and can engage our citizens in the debate about the future of Europe. We will work hard to bring the EU closer to citizens while bringing citizens and their concerns to the centre of the EU's agenda.