



# KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EUROCITIES' CAMPAIGN DURING THE 2010 EUROPEAN YEAR FOR COMBATING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

## Background

In 2010 EUROCITIES organised a campaign as part of the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Our aims were to analyse and examine the challenges that cities face in combating poverty and social inclusion, to raise awareness on solutions and good practice examples implemented at city level, as well as to develop recommendations to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The campaign included seven seminars and has been organised across the entire EUROCITIES network, with contributions from each of our thematic forums. We examined the issue of social exclusion in different policy areas, such as economic development, environment, culture, knowledge society and mobility. Such a wide perspective led us to develop our knowledge on the complexity of poverty as well as to identify successful approaches implemented at local level to alleviating this.

## Key challenges

Three-quarters of the EU population lives in cities, and poverty and exclusion are most acutely felt here. These problems tend to concentrate in neighbourhoods suffering from multiple problems such as a high rate of unemployment, low education levels, poor health, poor quality housing and high levels of child poverty. These neighbourhoods pose a significant challenge for city governments and their partner agencies in coordinating both policies and service delivery.

Poverty and exclusion are multidimensional phenomena cutting across several different policy fields. People living in deprived urban neighbourhoods are less likely to have access to certain services, such as quality housing, health and education facilities, public transport, cultural activities and green spaces. They often face difficulties in accessing public transport, they are less likely to take part in cultural activities and face barriers to using new technologies. Many of these problems often occur together, with one factor causing or aggravating another.

## Key findings

Tackling these complex problems requires an integrated approach that connects social, economic and environmental actions. Through our activities in 2010, EUROCITIES demonstrated the impact of such coordinated action:

- Successfully regenerating a deprived area depends on addressing the full range of issues experienced by its inhabitants. We need to link people-based approaches, such as employment or education programmes, with place-based approaches, such as improving housing and public infrastructure. Political back-up from elected politicians and working with the media are also important to give visibility to the initiatives and promote a positive image of the neighbourhood, challenging stereotypes and misperceptions.
- Tackling long-term unemployment requires a complex and individualised approach to working with people who experience multiple problems. Such an approach often goes beyond employment and professional training support to include social skills training, empowerment, improving social networks and people's community involvement.
- Addressing health inequalities requires interventions across the entire socio-economic spectrum and should not be targeted only at those most disadvantaged. Cities have considerable influence on some of the key determinants of health through their planning policies, especially in such fields as housing or public infrastructure (green spaces or leisure and sports facilities). Since health depends on many factors, a health perspective should be included in all policy areas and at all levels of governance. Health is an important element for the successful implementation of social inclusion policies at local level.
- Reducing child poverty needs to take into account many different policy areas impacting on the situation of children and families, as well as the places where they live. Cities implement many preventive actions, such as family and parenting support, improving access to healthcare for mothers and improving access to childcare facilities and pre-school education. These interventions are often linked to employment and education support for families.
- Urban public transport has an important role to play in promoting social inclusion. Integrated planning ensures better connectivity between the core city and deprived areas. Social pricing schemes make public transport more affordable and accessible to low-income groups. Moreover, the promotion of walking and cycling is a good way to tackle exclusion as it is accessible and has a positive impact on one's health and environment at the same time.
- Digital inclusion programmes contribute to social inclusion through activities aimed at improving access to new technologies and improving digital skills. These activities are often complemented by gathering data on groups that have problems in accessing and using new technologies and on local problems. Identification of groups at risk of digital exclusion then helps to design better targeted support programmes. It also helps avoid overlapping activities and as a result contributes to savings in local public spending. City administrations can also act as 'inclusion platforms' to coordinate and support different organisations working in the field of digital inclusion.
- Environmental programmes, when linked to social programmes, can improve the situation of people on low income and living in deprived areas. Actions targeted at improving the energy efficiency of housing and social tariffs for

energy consumption have a real impact on domestic energy use and spending. This is especially important for poorer households. At the same time, such programmes contribute to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

- Cultural activities and events, when accessible and affordable, are an important means to promote social inclusion and community cohesion. Culture plays a crucial role in promoting inclusion in our societies: namely by increasing self-esteem, asserting one's identity, overcoming cultural differences and fostering dialogue between individuals and communities. Cultural participation also contributes to the development of new skills and creation of new jobs.
- Implementing integrated approaches requires local authorities to work across different departments and engage with a wide number of stakeholders. These include regional and national authorities, public and private service providers, local communities, NGOs and businesses.
- Local actions cannot be delivered in isolation but have to be linked to wider development strategies at city, regional, national and European level. It is important to ensure coherence between the goals set at local and national level, as well as synergies with other programmes and funding priorities. This is necessary to avoid working in isolation on a single neighbourhood or with individual client groups. To this end, the integration of different funding mechanisms, such as ESF (European Social Fund) and ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), has proven to work well at city level.

### Recommendations

1. **Actions to tackle poverty and exclusion need to be backed by political commitment at all government levels, including the EU.** Investing in social inclusion policies pays off not only by improving the well-being of individuals and groups but also by savings to public spending in the long term and prevention of transmission of poverty through generations. Social inclusion policies should not be perceived as costs but rather as an investment in human capital.
2. **Complex problems of exclusion can only be solved by an integrated approach that combines social, environmental and economic actions and combining people and place-based approaches.** An integrated approach must be underpinned by cooperation and dialogue between stakeholders responsible for a wide range of policies such as employment, social inclusion, culture, environment, transport and ICT.
3. **Better coordination between different levels of governments is necessary for the successful implementation of integrated approaches for wider social inclusion.** Consultation of local governments should be mandatory for the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Reform Programmes and National Action Plans on Social Inclusion. Guidelines on consultation should also be developed at European level. Improved coordination will also lead to the development of national policies that better reflects the complexity of social exclusion at local level.

4. **Implementing integrated approaches must be facilitated by better linking policy and funding, including combining ESF and ERDF in comprehensive programmes.** This approach will enable strong synergies across different policy areas, such as social welfare, urban transport, environment, culture and economic development.
5. **Cities' practices and experience should be reflected in key EU and national level policies since they can offer evidence and practical examples on how policies operate on the ground.** Many cities already carry out tailor-made and integrated programmes. Cities are also the closest level of government to citizens and key provider of public services.
6. **Policy and funding available should support mutual learning and exchange of experience and good practice.** These activities have a considerable impact on improving policy-making by enabling transnational exchange and learning between different stakeholders, including cities and local governments.
7. **The new Platform against Poverty should support the development of the evidence base for social inclusion policies,** especially by including information coming from the local level. There is a strong need for more evidence on how EU policies operate on the ground and how effective they are. Policies that are based on problem analysis and needs assessment produce better results. Cities are well-placed to identify challenges and provide information on innovative approaches and good practices. EUROCITIES could be a valuable partner of the Platform as a channel to the big cities. Likewise, our EUROCITIES NLAO (Network of Local Authority Observatories on Active Inclusion) could be a useful source of evidence from the local level.
8. **The new Platform against Poverty should have a comprehensive approach to poverty and social inclusion, acknowledging and investigating the impact of a variety of policies on poverty and social exclusion.** Such recognition will prompt policy-makers at all levels to expand their policy approaches to social inclusion and will lead to developing synergies between different policy areas such as education, training, housing, transport, ICT and culture.
9. **The momentum that social inclusion has gained during the European Year against Poverty and Social Inclusion must be maintained.** The European Year has played an important role in investigating and raising awareness on the different dimensions of poverty and social inclusion. The initiative also helped to identify some solutions to tackle these issues. It is of fundamental importance that the years to come are dedicated to the implementation of concrete actions to bring people out of poverty and social exclusion.

## **Conclusion**

The 2010 European Year has allowed us to draw attention to the complexity and severity of poverty and social exclusion in our cities. Through our campaign we have demonstrated that integrated policies and concerted actions at all levels of governments are fundamental to tackle poverty and social exclusion. The results of the 2010 European Year must be sustained in the future years.