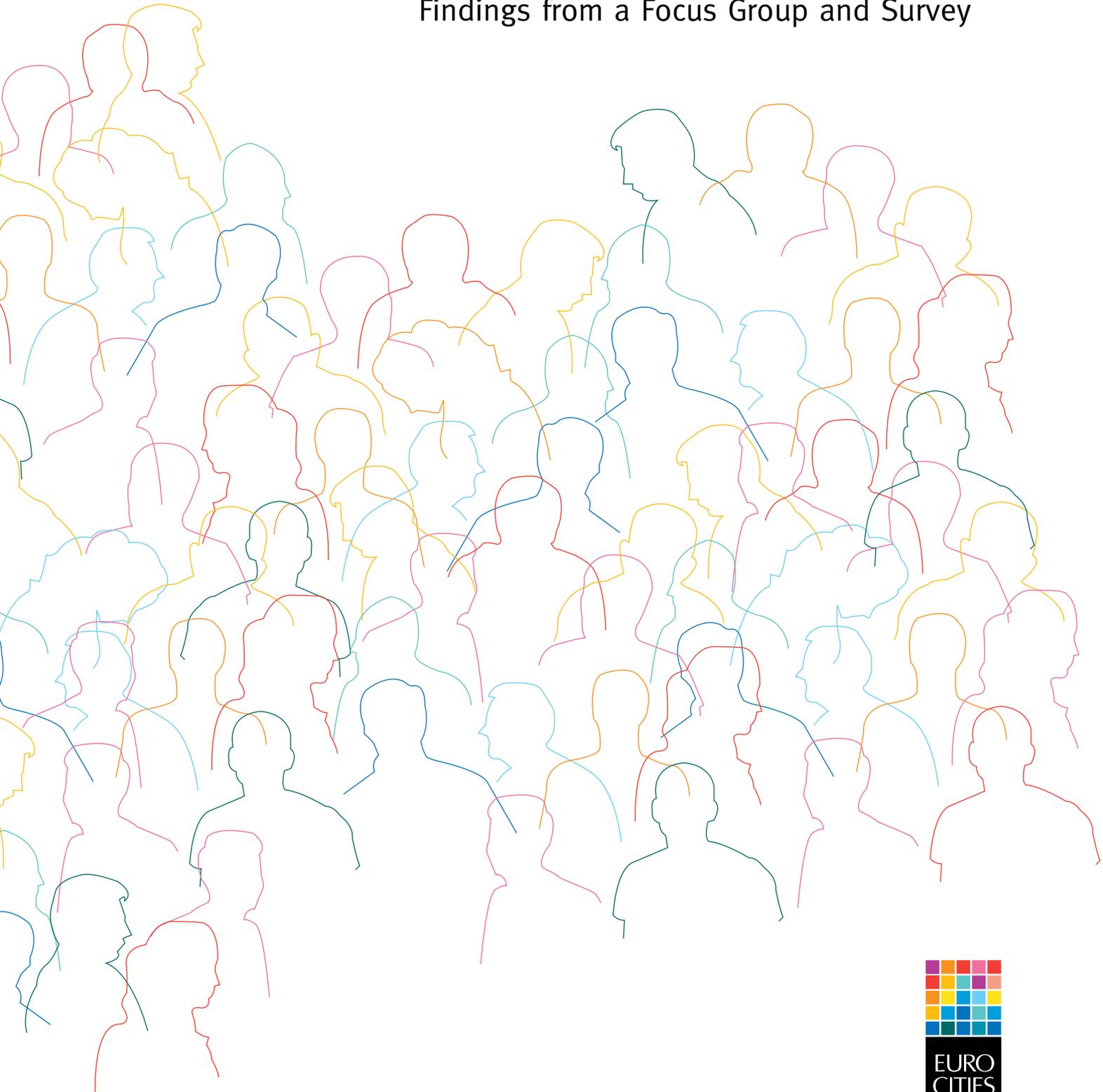




**Network of Local Authority  
Observatories on Active Inclusion**

**CITIES AND ACTIVE INCLUSION:**  
Findings from a Focus Group and Survey





European Commission

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The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.

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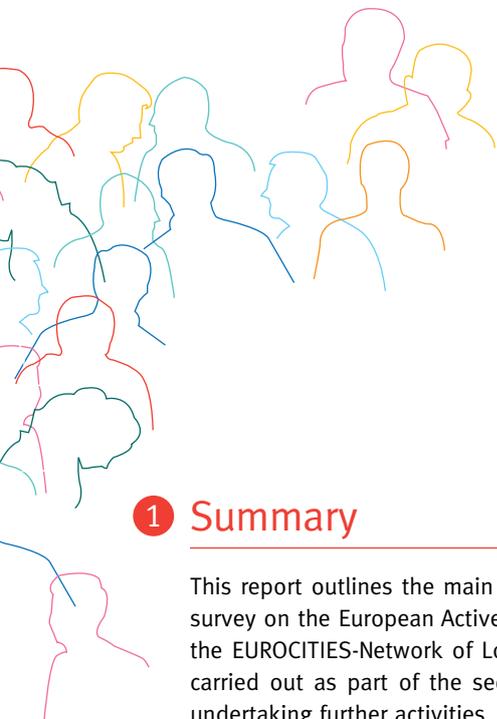
- providing analysis and policy advice on PROGRESS policy areas;
- monitoring and reporting on the implementation of EU legislation and policies in PROGRESS policy areas;
- promoting policy transfer, learning and support among Member States on EU objectives and priorities; and
- relaying the views of the stakeholders and society at large.

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## 1 Summary

This report outlines the main points raised by cities on active inclusion strategies. It is based on a cities' survey on the European Active Inclusion strategy<sup>1</sup> and findings of a focus group made up of members from the EUROCITIES-Network of Local Observatories on Active Inclusion (EUROCITIES-NLAO). These tasks were carried out as part of the second phase of EUROCITIES-NLAO. The aim was to establish the context for undertaking further activities, such as local-level practitioners research on active inclusion, the organisation of awareness-raising seminars in member states, as well as mutual learning on active inclusion.

The main findings of the cities' survey and focus group on active inclusion are:

- **Cities are aware of and have some knowledge of the European Active Inclusion strategy but they are not very familiar with the details.** There is a need to increase communication and awareness raising activities;
- **The European Active Inclusion strategy is in line with cities' priorities on social inclusion.** The principles and objectives of the European Active Inclusion strategy are very relevant for cities. The focus on the three pillars<sup>2</sup> is in line with social inclusion objectives at local level. It is important however to have more emphasis on approaches to preventing social exclusion;
- **The European Active Inclusion strategy has the potential to add value to local level strategies for social inclusion.** The European framework on Active Inclusion has the benefit of providing guiding principles, benchmarking, suggestions for further developments and opportunities for mutual learning. It also gives political legitimacy to implementing active inclusion strategies at the local level in a time of budget constraints, cuts and competing policy priorities. Likewise, experience, information and policy analysis coming from cities are important for feeding into the development of the active inclusion strategy at the European level.
- **Implementing active inclusion strategies at local level is of fundamental importance for social and territorial cohesion.** However there are also a number of challenges that have to be addressed such as: target groups affected by a complexity of issues and multiple disadvantages; the impact of the economic crisis and budget constraints; the need to create highly individualised integration paths; the availability of dedicated funds; and providing well trained and motivated social workers. Social economy, sheltered labour market and working in partnership with NGOs and other stakeholders also play an important part in effective active inclusion strategies.
- **Cities have an important role to play in developing and implementing active inclusion strategies, and EUROCITIES-NLAO is committed to do this.** Through the activities of EUROCITIES-NLAO, cities together with national and European stakeholders, will work on raising awareness, fostering mutual learning and providing practitioner-based research to inform policy development on active inclusion.

<sup>1</sup> The 2008 European Recommendation on Active Inclusion was used as the point of reference to define the European Strategy on Active Inclusion: Recommendation 2008/867/EC.

<sup>2</sup> The three pillars are: sufficient income support; inclusive labour markets; and access to quality services.

## 2 Introduction

The EUROCITIES-Network of Local Authority Observatories (EUROCITIES-NLAO) was launched in July 2010 with ten cities: Barcelona, Birmingham, Bologna, Brno, Copenhagen, Cracow, Lille Metropole - Roubaix, Rotterdam, Sofia and Stockholm. The Observatory builds upon the experience of a pilot phase carried out in five cities between March 2009 and August 2010.

The new EUROCITIES-NLAO has three main aims:

- Disseminating information on and raising awareness of the EU Active Inclusion strategy.
- Research and policy analysis on good practices, challenges and recommendations on the provision of quality services for the active inclusion of the most disadvantaged people, feeding into EU policy developments on this theme.
- Implementing and promoting mutual learning on the European Active Inclusion strategy.

The first action of the Observatory consisted of engaging cities in a broad reflection and analysis of the European framework for active inclusion as well as of local governments' practices for this. To this end, a highly interactive focus group composed of EUROCITIES-NLAO members took place in September 2010 in Brussels. The focus group's aim was to stimulate discussion, in-depth thinking, mutual understanding and cross-fertilisation of ideas on five key topics:

- Awareness of the European Active Inclusion strategy amongst cities;
- The European Active Inclusion strategy in light of cities' active inclusion practices;
- The added-value of having a European Active Inclusion strategy;
- The challenges at local level in delivering a successful active inclusion strategy;
- The overall aim of having an observatory of local governments on active inclusion.

The focus group discussions began with a presentation on the European strategy on Active Inclusion and the findings from a EUROCITIES survey on cities and active inclusion carried out in August 2010. Members of EUROCITIES-NLAO as well as the EUROCITIES Social Affairs Forum were invited to participate to the on-line survey on active inclusion. In total, responses were received from 20 different cities<sup>3</sup>.

The survey was conducted in order to collect quantitative information on the level of awareness and knowledge of the European Active Inclusion strategy amongst social inclusion policies practitioners at city level. It also attempted to assess the relevance of the European Active Inclusion strategy at city level by exploring the extent to which the focus and objectives set out by the European Active Inclusion strategy match cities' priorities.

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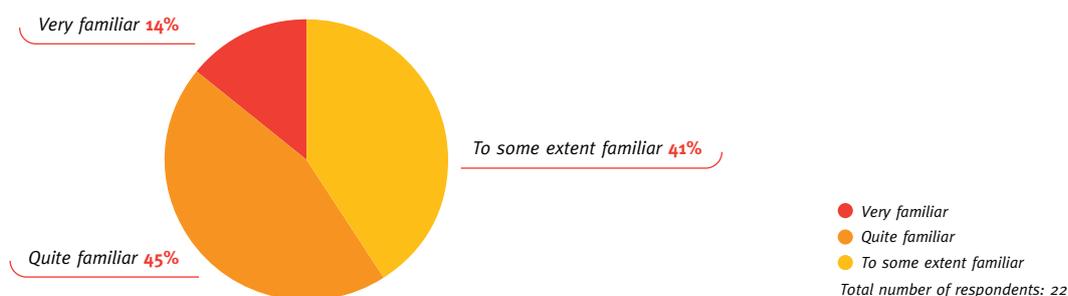
<sup>3</sup> The participating cities in the survey are: Barcelona, Birmingham, Bologna, Brno, Cracow, Lille Metropole - Roubaix, Rotterdam, Sofia, Stockholm (EUROCITIES-NLAO members), and Belfast, Eindhoven, Gateshead, Hengelo, Malmö, Nantes, Prague, Southampton, Tallinn and The Hague (not members of EUROCITIES-NLAO). The overall number of answers was sometimes higher than 20 as in a few cases more than one person per city replied to the survey.

### 3 Main findings from the focus group and on-line survey

#### 3.1. Focus 1: Level of awareness and knowledge of the European Active Inclusion strategy

In the online survey, the vast majority of cities said they are “quite” or “to some extent” familiar with the European Active Inclusion strategy. This is a positive and encouraging finding (see Chart 3.1). However, it should also be noted that only a minority of cities reported being “very familiar”.

Q4 -To what extent are you familiar with the European Active Inclusion Strategy?



When asked how they became familiar with the European Active Inclusion strategy, city officers indicated that this happened through their involvement in European activities, such as participation in the EURO CITIES Social Affairs Forum, European events or other EURO CITIES activities. In some other cases, people were aware of the Active Inclusion strategy because it is mentioned in the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion.

The focus group provided the opportunity for participants to discuss in more detail the level of knowledge amongst local practitioners on the European strategy for Active Inclusion. It emerged that cities tend to be aware of the overall principles of active inclusion, even if they do not know all the details of European policy development. Interestingly, once the European Active Inclusion strategy was analysed in detail, cities felt that they are already putting in place active inclusion strategies, but in most cases these policies are not called ‘active inclusion’. The main challenges concerning the understanding and awareness of the EU Active Inclusion strategy for people working in cities are:

- There is a need for more effective communication between the European and local levels on active inclusion;
- It takes some time and effort for people working at the local level to become familiar with European thinking and policy development;
- National Action Plans for Social Inclusion, as well as Local Action Plans for Social Inclusion are inspired by the principles of active inclusion, but they do not always refer to this concept in an explicit way;

- The European Active Inclusion strategy is not always or not sufficiently visible in key European documents: the principles and objectives of active inclusion are embedded in the Europe 2020 Strategy<sup>4</sup> but there is no explicit reference to the concept of active inclusion<sup>5</sup>. Number 10 of the Integrated Guidelines<sup>6</sup> for the economic and employment policies of the Member States in the Europe 2020 Strategy mentions active inclusion, and so does the flagship initiative ‘Youth on the Move’<sup>7</sup>. Yet the extent to which active inclusion is clearly visible remains questionable.

### 3.2. Focus 2: Relevance: the European Active Inclusion strategy in the light of cities’ active inclusion policies and priorities

The participating cities agree that the objectives and principles inspiring the European Active Inclusion strategy are relevant for the local context. In the survey, respondents confirm that the three pillars of the Active Inclusion strategy (adequate minimum income, inclusive labour market and access to public services) are in line with their local priorities. Likewise, an overwhelming majority (95%) indicate that the aim to integrate these three pillars corresponds to local and national priorities. Even the services listed in the 2008 European Commission Recommendation on Active Inclusion (social assistance, employment and training, childcare, housing support/social housing, long-term care, health care), are considered by the majority of local practitioners to be relevant for the active inclusion of people into society and the labour market.

The focus group confirmed the survey’s findings. In the discussion, participants also suggested that the active inclusion strategy should focus more on preventative approaches. Following from this, some cities claimed that the importance of lifelong learning should be pointed out in a more explicit way in the European Active Inclusion strategy.

### 3.3. Focus 3: The added value of the European Active Inclusion strategy for cities

In the focus group, cities agreed that the European Active Inclusion strategy has significant potential to provide a clear added value to local level practices.

First, it sets out a common framework at European level, with guiding principles and practical suggestions to be used as points of reference in discussions and debates on active inclusion, as well as for comparing and benchmarking local practices.

Second, having a common European framework gives a clear sense of direction to cities’ efforts to further develop and improve their local practices: for example the need to improve the integration of provision of services and coordination of social inclusion policies between different levels of government, cities departments and social service providers; the need to move from passive to active support; and the importance of integrating people into society and not just in the labour market. It can also help to develop new approaches and ideas for policy development. As an example, some cities would be interested in increasing the role of the social economy in active inclusion strategies. In addition, the framework can be used in the preparation of local action plans on social inclusion.

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4 The EU strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth for the coming decade: [www.ec.europa.eu/europe2020](http://www.ec.europa.eu/europe2020).

5 This remark is based upon the state of affairs in September 2010.

6 As at September 2010.

7 The flagship initiative ‘Youth on the Move’ on enhancing the performance of education systems and facilitating the entry of young people to the labour market, mentions active inclusion on page seven. See European Commission Communication (COM 2010) 477 final): [www.ec.europa.eu/education/yom/com\\_en.pdf](http://www.ec.europa.eu/education/yom/com_en.pdf).

Furthermore, the European Active Inclusion strategy gives leverage and more legitimacy to social inclusion policies at local level. This was regarded as a very important element in a time of economic crisis, where the provision of social services is affected by budget constraints and cuts.

Cities also pointed out that to maximise the added value of the European Active Inclusion strategy, local stakeholders should be more engaged in awareness-raising activities and more efforts should be made to demonstrate how active inclusion is implemented on the ground.

### **3.4. Focus 4: Implementation of active inclusion strategies at local level: challenges and solutions**

In the discussions, cities agreed that implementing active inclusion strategies at local level is of fundamental importance for social and territorial cohesion, which can be promoted through the integration of different strategies for employment, access to quality services and minimum income support. However, there are also a number of challenges that have to be addressed.

There are a wide variety of target groups in need of active inclusion strategies in cities. These groups tend to change according to local circumstances, economic outlook and wider societal trends (e.g. migration). Some examples of target groups provided by cities include: unemployed, children/young people, NEET (people not in education, training or employment), elderly people, the alcohol and drug addicted, homeless, ethnic minorities, including second generation immigrants and irregular immigrants, disabled people, single parents, victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, prisoners, and people with mental health problems. These people are the most vulnerable in society, affected by a complexity of issues and multiple disadvantages, and thus they are the most difficult to integrate into the labour market or into society. Unless a specific strategy is set out for the integration of and support of these people, the temptation is to focus on users of social care services that offer better prospects for re-entering the labour market. Participants also clearly pointed out that well-designed and tailor-made programmes are necessary to deal with the specific needs of each category of people.

Cities highlighted that the current situation is particularly difficult as the full social impact of the economic crisis is still unfolding. On one hand, it is clear that the number of people in need of active inclusion is likely to rise in the near future; on the other hand, cities are facing budget cuts that will have a negative impact on their ability to maintain similar levels of providing social services.

In some cases, the implementation of active inclusion requires a cultural change for all actors involved. For example, new working practices, based on better communication, coordination and partnership, are necessary to ensure the integration of different policies (such as training, social assistance and employment). The provision of services, such as housing, child-care and health, is essential in dealing with people affected by complex and multiple-disadvantage. In other cases, a new attitude is required from local practitioners, especially social workers working directly with target groups, to move from the simple provision of passive support, to empowering, motivating and enabling socially excluded people to take fully part into society.

Several city representatives pointed out that the principles, objectives and new working practices necessary for the successful implementation of active inclusion in their city are not always adequately known by the stakeholders. For these reasons, specific training on active inclusion is seen as crucial.

Furthermore, a number of cities pointed out that it is not always clear how existing EU funds can be used for promoting active inclusion. For example, the European Social Fund is often perceived as being very focused on the labour market, while active inclusion has a wider perspective. A further problem is that there are not always adequate funding mechanisms available to support the innovative and experimental approaches that are sometimes required within the European Active Inclusion strategy. In the past, the EQUAL fund allowed for testing innovative ideas and pilot projects. Currently, there is no EU fund that is ring-fenced for innovative actions to promote active inclusion at local level.

In the focus group, cities also explored some of the factors that can enable successful implementation of active inclusion strategies:

- The social economy has proven to be a viable way to help people that are most excluded from society and are very hard to integrate into the mainstream labour market. However, in the case of one city it was noted that the economic crisis is impacting negatively on the social economy as well, with less employment opportunities being available for people working in cooperative and social enterprises.
- Measures for sheltered employment<sup>8</sup> have shown positive results for the active inclusion of people with a very low employability profile. However, in the discussions, the point was made that in some cases these programmes have mixed results, with participants not being able to move on into the mainstream labour market.

Another point raised is the importance of quality human resources. Social workers and front-line officers of social services need to be highly skilled to better respond to people's needs and to devise personalised integration paths, mentoring and shadowing programmes. Working cultures have to encourage flexible and innovative solutions to include people at risk of social exclusion, as well as working in partnership with NGOs.

More funding opportunities given specifically to local active inclusion strategies will further help to implement these strategies. The rationale to make more money available for active inclusion is that, by helping people to integrate into the labour market and society, the strategy should be considered as a pay-off investment. If people are successfully integrated into the labour market and society, the demand for unemployment benefits decreases and productivity increases. Moreover, the integration of services, as highlighted in the European Active Inclusion strategy, can increase efficiency and thus diminish costs for public authorities. Successful active inclusion strategies have an impact on strengthening social, territorial and economic cohesion.

A final comment highlighted the importance of having an explicit reference to active inclusion in National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPs). When this reference is made, the objective of implementing active inclusion filters down into Regional and Local Action Plans for Social Inclusion.

### **3.5. Focus 5: The aims and added value of having a Network of Local Observatories on active inclusion**

Cities have an important role to play in developing and implementing active inclusion strategies. All cities agreed on that in the on-line survey (see box 3.5.1).

#### **Box 3.5.1**

**To what extent do you agree with the following statement:  
Cities have an important role to play in developing and implementing active inclusion strategies?**

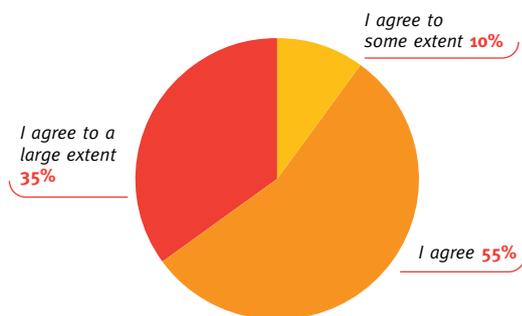
- 45% (9 persons) agree to a large extent
- 55% (11 persons) agree

<sup>8</sup> Sheltered employment schemes provide employment in a protected environment which is not exposed to normal competition.

The survey findings also indicated that the majority of cities feel that it is important to have more information on the European Active Inclusion strategy (see chart 3.5.2) as well as to raise awareness with stakeholders on active inclusion (see chart 3.5.3).

**Chart 3.5.2**

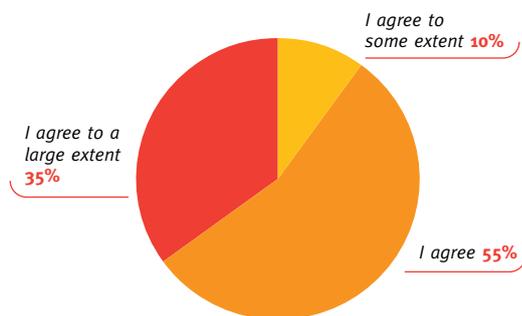
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: It would be important to have more information on the European Active Inclusion strategy



● I agree to a large extent ● I agree ● I agree to some extent Total number of respondents: 20

**Chart 3.5.3**

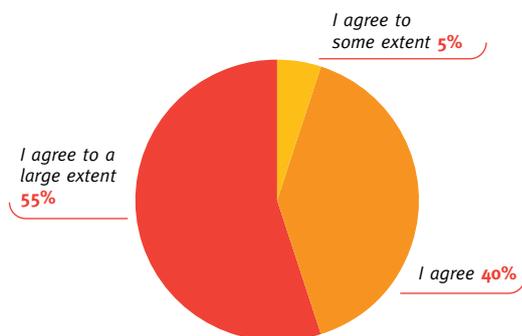
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: It would be important to raise awareness with stakeholders on the European Active Inclusion strategy



Likewise, an overwhelming majority of cities agreed that it is important to create more opportunities for mutual learning amongst cities (see chart 3.5.4).

**Chart 3.5.4**

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: It would be important to create more opportunities for mutual learning on the Active Inclusion Strategy amongst cities



● I agree to a large extent  
● I agree  
● I agree to some extent

Total number of respondents: 20

These points were further investigated in the focus group. Cities that participated in the pilot phase of NLAO felt that the Observatory contributes to a deeper understanding of the active inclusion strategies and thus to improving their practical implementation. To achieve this, as it was clearly pointed out by all ten cities, the EUROCITIES-NLAO has to aim to increase stakeholders' awareness of active inclusion and to support activities of mutual learning.

These are cities' suggestions on the activities that EUROCITIES-NLAO should carry out:

#### **Awareness Raising**

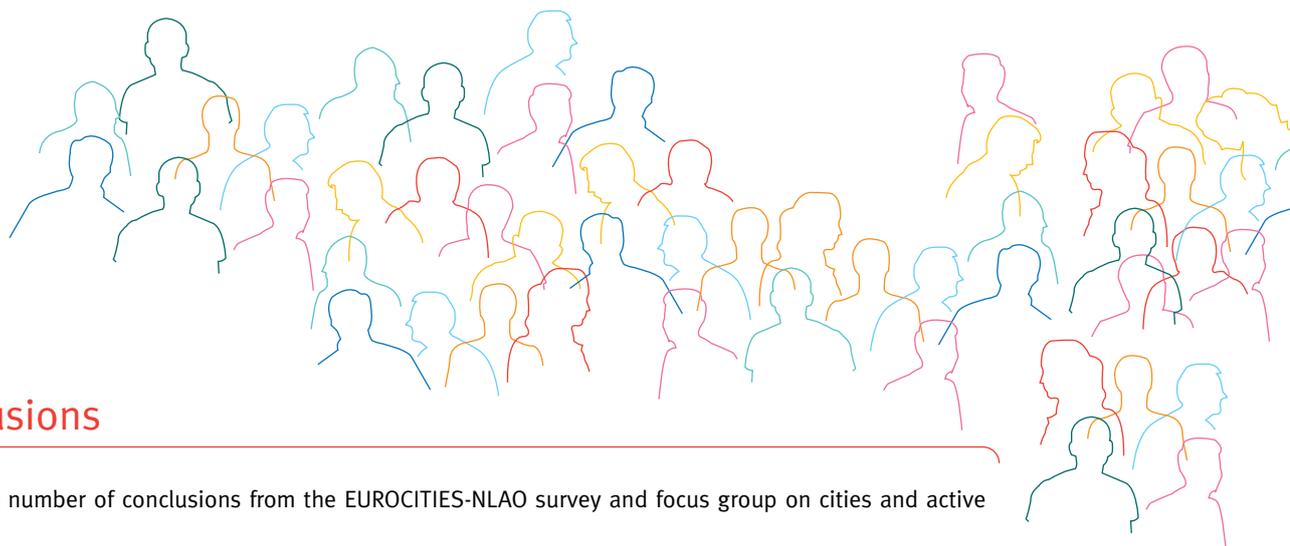
- Promote and facilitate events such as seminars, workshops, and roundtable debates to engage stakeholders from different levels of government (including decision-makers and practitioners) and from different policy departments and organisations working with people who are socially excluded;
- Engage with the European institutions and national governments to ensure a stronger focus in official documents and policy-debate on the European Active Inclusion strategy and the 2008 Recommendation<sup>9</sup>;
- Disseminate information on active inclusion strategies from the local level amongst stakeholders at all levels (other cities, regions, national governments, NGOs, European institutions and associations). This should include material on good practices, innovative solutions, and ways to overcome the challenges in implementing active inclusion strategies, as well as information on European policy developments and funding opportunities.

#### **Mutual Learning**

- Organise peer-reviews and study visits for city practitioners;
- Undertake practitioner-based research on active inclusion at local level. Findings from the research should be presented and discussed with other cities and stakeholders;
- Develop tools for more effective dissemination of good practices, such as an interactive web-based portal, discussion corner for open and interactive discussions between practitioners, and a one-stop-shop for collecting and showcasing innovative actions from the local level for active inclusion;
- Organise coaching and training amongst practitioners on active inclusion strategies.

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<sup>10</sup> The 2008 European Recommendation on Active Inclusion was used as the point of reference to define the European Strategy on Active Inclusion: Recommendation 2008/867/EC.



## 4 Conclusions

There are a number of conclusions from the EUROCITIES-NLAO survey and focus group on cities and active inclusion.

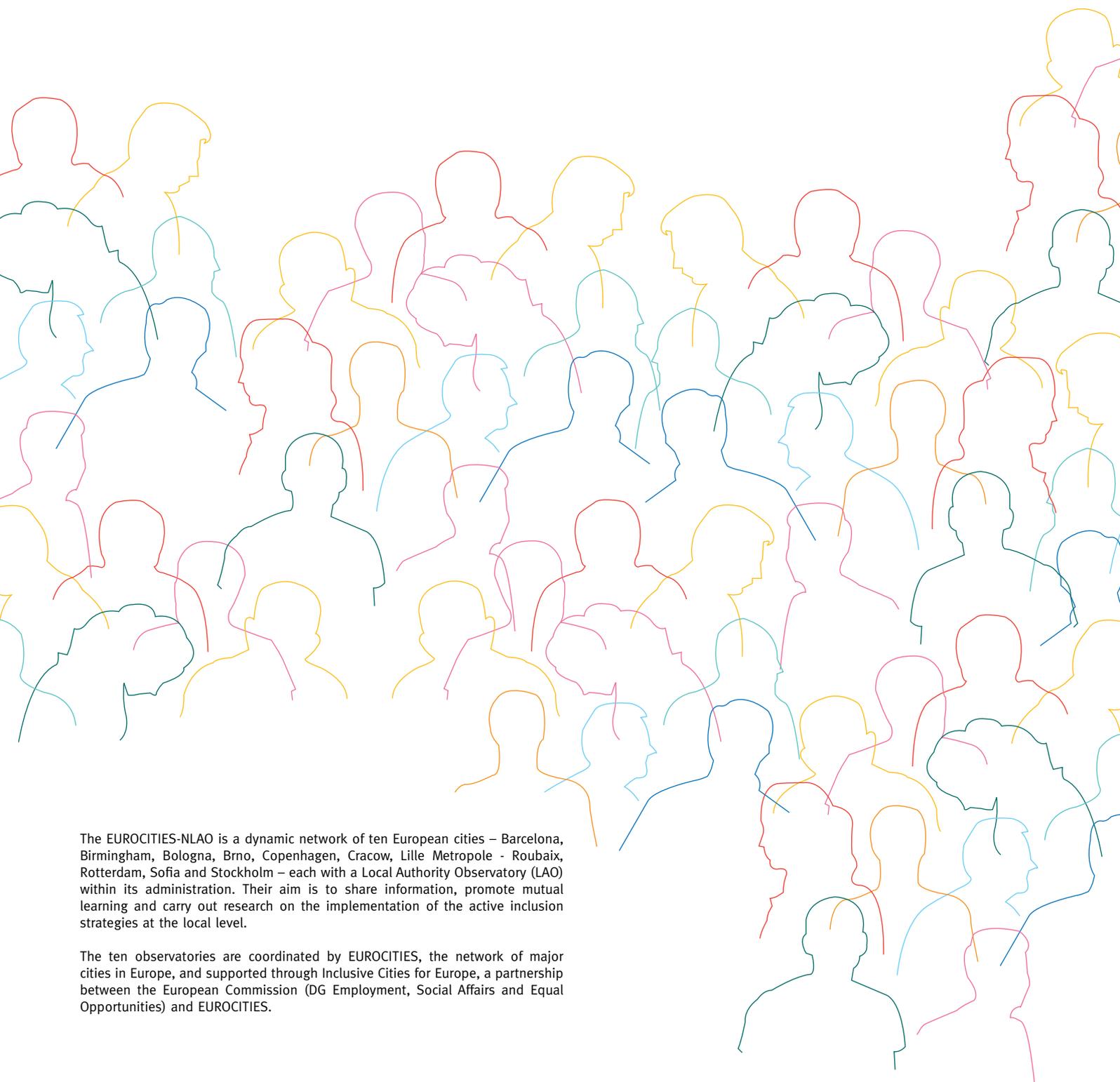
**Cities are aware of and have some knowledge of the European Active Inclusion strategy. However they are not familiar with all the details.** There is a need for the EU level to better communicate with the local level on active inclusion. The principles of active inclusion – as outlined in the 2008 European Commission Recommendation on active inclusion - are not always explicitly mentioned in relevant documents on social inclusion. Higher visibility and a stronger focus on active inclusion principles in European, national and local official documents and debates would help to increase the level of knowledge amongst local practitioners and local level policy-makers.

**The principles and objectives of the European Active Inclusion strategy are very relevant for cities and the focus on the three pillars is in line with social inclusion objectives at local level.** In addition, it is important to include a stronger focus on approaches for preventing social exclusion, for example by making life-long learning a more visible priority.

**The European Active Inclusion strategy has the potential to add value to local level strategies for social inclusion.** The European context provides guiding principles for actions, suggestions for further developments, benchmarking for comparison as well as opportunities for mutual learning. Even more important, the European strategy on active inclusion gives political legitimacy to implementing local actions in a time of budget constraints, cuts and competing policy priorities. Likewise, information and policy analysis coming from the local level is important for the European level in further developing active inclusion strategies.

**Implementing active inclusion strategies at local level is of fundamental importance for social and territorial cohesion. However there are also a number of challenges that have to be addressed** such as: target groups affected by a complexity of issues and multiple disadvantages; the impact of the economic crisis and budget cuts; the need to create highly individualised integration paths; the availability of dedicated funds; and well trained and motivated social workers. The social economy, partnerships with NGOs and sheltered labour market play an important part in active inclusion strategies.

Cities have an important role to play in developing and implementing active inclusion strategies, and EUROCITIES-NLAO is committed to doing this. Through the activities of EUROCITIES-NLAO, cities together with national and European stakeholders, will work on raising awareness, fostering mutual learning and providing practitioner-based research to inform policy development on active inclusion.



The EUROCITIES-NLAO is a dynamic network of ten European cities – Barcelona, Birmingham, Bologna, Brno, Copenhagen, Cracow, Lille Metropole - Roubaix, Rotterdam, Sofia and Stockholm – each with a Local Authority Observatory (LAO) within its administration. Their aim is to share information, promote mutual learning and carry out research on the implementation of the active inclusion strategies at the local level.

The ten observatories are coordinated by EUROCITIES, the network of major cities in Europe, and supported through Inclusive Cities for Europe, a partnership between the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) and EUROCITIES.