EUROCITIES Social Affairs Forum in Lisbon

Cities reaffirm their commitment to fight against deep-seated poverty and rising inequalities

Highlights

LISBON, 3-4 April 2017 - The EUROCITIES Social Affairs Forum (SAF) in Lisbon attracted 140 representatives from over 40 cities to discuss effective ways to prevent and respond to deep-seated poverty and rising inequalities in cities.

The event was opened by mayor of Lisbon, Fernando Medina and followed by a [video message](#) from MEP Maria João Rodrigues (S&D, Portugal), who called on cities to use their influence to make EU funding post-2020 more accessible to cities.

Through a mix of presentations, debates, workshops, speed networking and a political side event, the forum participants shared local policies and city strategies proven to work in addressing the challenges of urban poverty and rising inequality.

The five key messages from the event were:

1. **Cities play a crucial role in fighting poverty and social exclusion**. Many cities have developed integrated approaches to address urban poverty, which combine prevention and support. Such strategies are based on active inclusion principles combining access to social services such as childcare, healthcare and housing with labour market activation measures.

2. **Cities need better access to EU funding to be able to do more to fight against poverty and inequality.** EU funding support should allow for the integration of ERDF and ESF funding to tackle both territorial and people-based challenges in the same area of a city. Cities need to work together to influence the future of EU funding post-2020.

3. **Cities need better, integrated policies at EU and national level to combine preventative measures with activation measures**. The European Pillar of Social Rights can be a unique opportunity in this regard to link employment and social policies. Cities will do their best to convince national governments and the EU institutions to involve cities in the setting up of the pillar.

4. **Cities want to do more but cannot do it alone**. Multi-level governance is key to effectively combatting poverty. As such, cities need to better cooperate and coordinate with other levels of government. The urban partnerships on poverty and on housing under the Urban Agenda for the EU are a step in the right direction.

5. **Cities call upon the EU to invest more in people and put citizens at the core of policies.** What is needed is a shift from austerity policies to social investment, and from anti-poverty measures to promoting wellbeing of all citizens. Cities believe EU funding should deliver more for social infrastructure and promote long-term social investment.

These points were highlighted in a [video message](#) addressed to the EU institutions and national governments, delivered by the chair and vice chair of the social affairs forum, deputy mayor of Barcelona, Laia Ortiz, and deputy mayor of Malmö, Andreas Schönström.

The next EUROCITIES Social Affairs Forum meeting will take place on 25-26 October in Gothenburg, and will focus on 'Cities for a more social Europe: delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights'.

In detail

All presentations from Lisbon are available here (you need to be logged in). You can look at the photos from the meeting here. A video with highlights from the event is available here.

1. Introduction and keynote speeches

The mayor of Lisbon, Fernando Medina, opened the event by emphasising the urgent need to address rising inequalities and poverty levels. He stressed that new forms of inequality are emerging constantly – i.e. in-work poverty - and they compromise the capacity for growth and progress in society.

"Inequality is the first enemy to growth and progress in our societies […] We need to first solve social cohesion and this will then allow us to grow and progress in our society".

Fernando Medina, mayor of Lisbon

Deputy mayor of Barcelona and chair of the EUROCITIES Social Affairs Forum, Laia Ortiz, delivered a keynote speech in which she presented the poverty situation in Europe. She emphasised that the economic crisis and the EU's political focus on austerity has led to a rise in poverty and inequality.

Currently, more than 120 million people live at risk of poverty in the EU, among which children are the most at risk. Inequality is on the rise in two-thirds of member states. Income of the poorest population decreased by 10% while it increased by 11% for the richest. Housing poverty has an adverse effect on the wellbeing of communities, costing €194 billion per year and up to 15% of Europeans face energy poverty. In Barcelona alone, 1,000 families could not afford to pay their rent and lost their homes in 2015; the cost of rent increased €200 in two years, from 2015 to 2017. Laia called on cities "to play an active role now more than ever, especially in decisions and policies about the social challenges of our people".

The voice of citizens was also heard at the forum meeting in Lisbon. Irene Escorihuela, the director of DESC Observatori, a citizen-led observatory in Barcelona highlighted the importance of bottom-up strategies to fight against urban poverty through joint actions by NGOs, citizens, enterprises and local governments.

2. Panel discussions

The first panel discussed policies to combat poverty and inequalities at city level. The panel included:
- João Afonso, deputy mayor of Lisbon for social affairs
- Andreas Schönström, deputy mayor of Malmö and vice-chair of the social affairs forum
- Sergio Aires, president of the European Anti-Poverty Network

The key points raised in this panel discussion were:

1. Fighting poverty should not be done through projects but through long-term strategies and sustainable programmes.
2. There is a clear territorial dimension to poverty. People move away from poor neighbourhoods when their life situation improves (e.g. when they find employment) meaning the deprivation in the area remains. We need an area-based approach to poverty alongside people-centred solutions.
3. We need to change the model of economic growth by shifting the focus away from investment in hard infrastructure towards investment in social infrastructure. At the same time we need to include a social dimension in all investments, e.g. social impact of EU-funded projects.
4. The most effective strategies at city level are co-created, co-designed and implemented together by citizens, public services and the business community.

"The key is to work with partners. In Lisbon, we have a local strategy involving 430 partners who debate and decide together"

João Afonso, deputy mayor of Lisbon for social rights

"We need to change the rules in which investment in roads is prioritised over investment in children"

Andreas Schönström, deputy mayor of Malmö

The second panel debated city strategies to fight against housing poverty. The panel included:

- Laia Ortiz, deputy mayor of Barcelona and chair of the social affairs forum
- Paula Marques, deputy mayor responsible for housing policy, Lisbon
- Michaela Kauer, coordinator of the Urban Partnership on Affordable Housing, Vienna
- Ruth Owen, policy coordinator at the European federation of national organisations working with the homeless (FEANTSA)

The key messages from the debate were:

1. There is a housing affordability gap in Europe. It doesn't only concern the poor, but the majority of the population. Over 81 million people are overburdened by housing costs.
2. Access to affordable and quality housing should be a basic social right for all.
3. A legal framework against speculation on the housing market is needed together with regulations to protect tenants already in their own homes.
4. EU regulation of the housing market together with a strong housing policy at national level are urgently needed.
5. Improving housing conditions means improving quality of life in general. We need to shift the rhetoric from anti-poverty to promoting the wellbeing of all citizens.

"We cannot do inclusive policies if no one can afford to live in cities", Laia Ortiz, deputy mayor of Barcelona and chair of SAF

3. Workshops

Workshop 1 – Urban Partnership on Urban Poverty: area-based approaches

This workshop illustrated how cities can use area-based approached to tackle urban poverty. Examples of good practice from Birmingham, Athens, Lodz and Ljubljana were presented. A representative from General Commission for territorial equality of France introduced the objectives of the urban poverty partnership and how cities can get involved.

The key lessons learnt from the workshop are:
- A poverty map of Birmingham shows the challenges people face are linked to the area where they live
- Athens runs an integrated social services network (ESTIA) as a one-stop-shop to offer legal and job-finding support, via EaSI-fund.
- Lodz runs a big revitalisation programme with 49 community-led initiatives
- Ljubljana has an integrated approach to tackle homelessness via street-level support
- Overall, integrated approaches combining area-based interventions with people-based actions are the key to tackle urban poverty

Workshop 2 – Child poverty and Child Guarantee

This workshop discussed city strategies to tackle child poverty. Ghent and Riga presented their local strategies while an expert from the Belgian ministry of social integration explained the approach at national level.

The lessons learnt from the workshop were:
- Child poverty is a priority of the action plan of the urban poverty partnership, which calls for an EU-wide Child Guarantee
- Ghent has a city-wide strategy for poverty reduction with a focus on addressing the effect of poverty on children.
- Ghent also has a plan against child poverty, built on a participatory approach and focusing on children's rights.
- For Ghent, success lies in collaboration with partners, e.g. education, youth services, and children and youth organisations.
- Riga uses an integrated approach to support families with children, incl. services of free public transport, free school lunches, housing support, property tax relief and child benefits.
- Riga ran a pilot project which provided services to 174 families and 370 children. The pilot was successful due to the cooperation between the city, NGOs and national authorities. As of 2017, the city fully funds the NGOs to handle the cases.

Workshop 3 – How to best use the ESF for social inclusion

In this workshop, Lisbon, Gothenburg, Vienna and Malmo presented how they use ESF for social inclusion projects. The workshop stimulated a discussion on the changes needed to improve cities' access to ESF funds post-2020.

The key messages from the workshop were:
- Combining different funds is important, but difficult to manage due to the heavy administrative burden involved.
- Some regions cannot access ESF as they have a high GDP on average, but they also have sub-areas with very low GDP needing support. ESF allocation should be done based on social indicators, not only GDP.
- There is a need to radically simplify the application and reporting for ESF.
- More flexibility is needed when implementing ESF-funded projects because situations and objectives can change.
- A multi-level governance approach should guide the design of Operational Programmes
- Investments should not replace funds as cities need subsidies and not only investments.

Workshop 4 – The European Pillar of Social Rights and Minimum Income

This workshop discussed the outline of the European Pillar of Social Rights with an emphasis on the concept of a minimum income guarantee. Utrecht and Barcelona shared their experiences with minimum income schemes pilot projects.

The key messages from the workshop were:
- Barcelona and Utrecht recognise the need to redefine social services. Minimum income schemes aim to better align social services with the needs of people in poverty.
- Minimum income pilot schemes in the two cities were carefully designed with universities. They will last two years after which time they will be evaluated with regards to the effects on labour market activation, monetary poverty and the other dimensions of poverty of individuals and communities.
- Upscaling the schemes is a question of governance and availability of financial resources.

4. Site visits

Site visit 1: Community house in Mouraria

In 2008, a resident-led association was set to revitalise the historical neighbourhood of Mouraria, located in the centre of Lisbon. Politicians took part in a site visit to a completely renovated former derelict building in the neighbourhood which hosts literacy education, language courses for immigrants, provides education support for children, legal support services and hosts cultural events. This non-profit organisation implements projects for community development to strengthen the social inclusion of different communities in the neighbourhood and contribute to social cohesion in the city.

Site visit 2: CLDS Alcântara - RedEmprega

This is a project within the scope of the Municipal Programme for Social Economy and Employability Promotion in Lisbon. This project aims to promote support networks for job seekers. It brings together 32 entities in four parishes, to improve the employability levels of the local population. The employability networks have proven to be an excellent way to promote an inclusive labour market. Their integrated approach and connection with local companies means they can establish tailor-made training solutions to best match the needs of local businesses.

Site visit 3: Prodac Sul and Prodac Norte

This is an urban partnership scheme between the residents' association, AtelierMob and the municipality, which aims to regulate the housing situation in some neighbourhoods around the city. It also works to improve public spaces in these neighborhoods. The partnership emphasises the importance of the participatory process by holding residents' assemblies to discuss any proposed changes such as the construction of an amphitheater or the repair of walls and floors.

Site visit 4: NPISA

This is a project to address homelessness. It is a joint effort between 23 different public and private entities, NGOs and social institutions. The aim of the project is to find the best solution for each case, helping people to find their way and plan for their future. It provides help to find accommodation, medical and mental health services, social support, employment support and professional guidance and training.

Site visit 5: Centro Social Da Musgueira

This is a social centre that caters to individuals and families in Lisbon. The centre helps to promote the social inclusion of the residents of the old Musgueira Norte neighbourhood through training courses and personal development services. The centre provides kindergarten services to 100 children, welcomes 60 elderly people daily and offers home support services to 50 people. The centre also has a multimedia library, study rooms and provides multiple non-formal education activities for young people in the neighbourhood.

5. Speed networking

Barcelona: 'Primer la llar' – housing led strategies to fight homelessness

'Primer la llar' is a Housing First pilot project which aims to provide stable housing to homeless people with a history of living on the streets. The city council founded 'Primer la llar' in 2015. The service is provided by two NGOs - Sant Joan de Déu Serveis Socials and Suara Coop - that between them manage 50 apartments. This pilot project is currently undergoing an evaluation to identify weak points and improve the programme. From now until 2019, Barcelona will use 100 more apartments from social housing stock to fight homelessness through Housing First approach.

Birmingham: Unlocking Social and Economic Innovation Together (USE-IT!) project funded by Urban Innovative Actions (ERDF)

This project focuses on the causes of cyclical poverty in Greater Icknield. This new area-based approach links micro-capital (i.e. skills and talents) with macro-assets (i.e. large infrastructure projects) to generate jobs and stimulate the local economy. The aim is to reduce the demand for public services while boosting the supply side through social innovation from citizens. The project will link large capital investment such as the Midland Metropolitan Hospital and Ickneild Port Loop housing development with existing community micro-capital such as the talents and skills of the local community, crowd-funding and endowment. Up to 60 social enterprises (including 15 new start-ups) will receive support from the project and a total of 45 work placements will be created for local people. It is hoped the model can be replicated in other districts and cities.

Leeds: Migrant Access Project (MAP) – a MAP every city needs

Leeds is committed to building a welcoming environment for migrants and refugees. The MAP project helps migrants to understand how public services work in the city and ensures they are directed to the right services first time around. By providing training for members of the community, the community learns how to help itself while eliminating language barriers. This strengthens relations between migrants and settled communities but it is also cost-effective. MAP also creates opportunities for residents to learn from these diverse communities and to share good practices and ideas.

Ljubljana: outreach to the homeless

This project addresses homeless people on the streets of Ljubljana. The project aims to reach out to homeless people with multiple needs to encourage them to participate in support programmes. The main innovation of this project is the target group is made up of the most alienated, excluded and under-privileged who often do not fit into already existing programmes in the city.

Innovations in social housing in Italy by Fondazione Housing Sociale

Fondazione Housing Sociale (FHS), started in Milan in 2004, developed the Fondazione Cariplo's first funding programme to address the right to social and housing assistance. FHS is a private, non-profit entity that experiments with innovative solutions for social housing initiatives, which are economically sustainable and grant independent. One of the main innovations of the project was to generate a new, effective and sustainable business model based on real estate ethical funding dedicated to social housing. This funding platform named Integrated Funds System (SIF) has raised a total of €3 billion since it started and wants to construct 20,000 social housing units at affordable prices by 2018. SIF projects contribute to reducing inequality in two ways: by providing access to the housing market and responding to the new housing demand emerging in cities. FHS also follows Fondazione Cariplo's mission to pay close attention to the social dimension of place-making, providing tenants with tools to build supportive and collaborative neighbourhoods and communities.

Munich: inclusion through education using local education centres

The aim of the project is to reduce discrimination and inequality in education. The project focuses on community and education governance-based approaches. With the participation of all local stakeholders, it aims to convince stakeholders to take responsibility for citizens' civic development and support their efforts to integrate into society. The project runs centres in certain city districts to offer basic education to lower-income residents. This non-formal educational infrastructure is a good practice example of social integration through education.

Nantes: 5Bridges – bridging the gap between the homeless and local community

The 5Bridges project, which is currently in its experimental phase, is a new way to respond to the needs of the homeless in Nantes and to connect them to the wider community - 'integration through participation'. Through the participation of homeless people in the project, which tackles bigger environmental and social challenges in the city, it is hoped public perception of homeless people will improve and reduce stigma while increasing social inclusion. The project aims to empower the target group but also make the link between jobs, health, housing and social cohesion.

Ostend: 'Kansen voor Kinderen' - opportunities for children in education and leisure

The objectives of 'Kansen voor Kinderen' is to allow children from low-income families to participate in school activities and sports clubs by giving them financial support and informing families of their rights to government assistance. It also aims to support schools and sport clubs to adjust their policies to avoid dropout. The city provides a service called 'Wegwijzer' (Signpost), which helps parents choose a school and fill out application forms for financial support. Low-income families are also entitled to support from the city and parents can receive 'school cheques', which cost €4 but entitle them to spend €20 on books, excursions etc.; a 'sports chance'; an 'art chance' or a 'UIT-pas'offer reductions in registration prices to sport clubs, art/music academies and a reduction in the price of cultural activities in the city. This project is a collaboration between the education department, sports department, social services, schools, sports clubs and parents.

Turin: CO-CITY - the collaborative management of urban commons to counter poverty and socio-spatial polarisation

The CO-CITY project addresses how to end segregation, marginalisation, and exclusion. CO-CITY wants to create project communities, which would carry out economic and inclusion activities in deprived neighbourhoods. One of the goals is to reinforce social bonds in communities and between communities and institutions. The project aims to make urban care of empty public and private spaces a collective task. CO-CITY supports the development of an innovative 'commons-based urban welfare' made up of communities which generate low-cost service co-production, social mixing and care of public spaces by using common urban spaces. The project wants citizens to be able to become producers and consumers thanks to social markets and urban farming.

EUROCITIES: CITIES-GROW project - Integration of refugees and migrants through economic activity in cities

The CITIES-GROW project, started in February 2017, is a successor of the ImpleMentoring project. The project involves three expert partners and 16 cities. It is based on pairing cities in a city-to-city mentoring. The aim is for mentor cities to share their experience and offer support to implementing cities, who want to change the way they integrate refugees and migrants in economic activities. CITIES-GROW will shift the focus from peer reviews and standard-setting towards policy-making and actions to address gaps and exchange know-how, expertise and good practices between cities. Four toolkits will be produced with the participation of all project members. Cities will benefit from the knowledge in these toolkits and it will help them implement local actions on refugee and migrant integration.

6. Business meeting

Members were informed of the SAF strategy and work plan for 2017. An update on key EU policy developments related to social affairs (including the European Pillar of Social Rights, Urban Agenda for the EU, and future of EU funding post-2020) was provided as well as an update about the EaSI grant. Updates from all eight working groups of SAF were provided in thematic clusters. The business meeting ended with the announcement that next SAF will be hosted by Gothenburg in October.