



SOCIAL AFFAIRS FORUM PROGRESS REPORT

JANUARY - MAY 2020

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Introduction

In 2020, we continue in SAF our programme for mutual learning and capacity building with support from the European Commission through the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSi) fund. We will make the most of our campaign 'Inclusive Cities for All: Social Rights in My City' to collect city pledges to the European Pillar of Social Rights and show the leadership of cities on equality and inclusion policies.

We are stepping up our advocacy work to position cities as key partners in building a more social Europe. To achieve this, we seek to bring a city perspective into all key EU policy initiatives for a stronger social Europe for just transitions, especially on skills, employment, equality and inclusion, Child Guarantee, social economy and European Pillar of Social Rights.

We also added a new priority in our work in SAF to respond to the urgent need for mutual learning and capacity building on recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. We are holding a series of webinars and online city dialogues on the impact of and policy responses to COVID-19 as well as about the many changes to EU funding and financial support available for cities.

This note provides a brief update on the main activities we have conducted in the Social Affairs Forum over the period of January to May 2020.

EaSi grant

EUROCITIES has a long-term strategic partnership with the European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) that covers the period 2018-2021. Under this strategic partnership, we apply each year to get an operational grant from the Employment and Social Innovation programme (EaSi). We submit over summer our application in which we propose annual work programme of activities for the following year. This EaSi grant supports most of our activities in the Social Affairs Forum for mutual learning and capacity-building (e.g. SAF meetings and WG policy transfers), collecting evidence and good practices from cities as well as our political campaign and dissemination activities.

The priority of our EaSi work programme, as discussed and negotiated with the European Commission DG EMPL, is to support the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at local level. We do this through our political campaign and mutual learning programme for cities - 'Inclusive Cities for All: Social Rights in My City'. Our programme received very positive feedback from DG EMPL in terms of added value and relevance at EU level as well as the programme's quality and impact both in terms of the city pledges and policy transfers.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak and travel restrictions, we are adapting our work programme by postponing or re-arranging our planned SAF meetings, policy transfers or WG study visits to ensure we can still deliver the work, to the extent possible, even if in new formats. This has been well received by the European Commission DG EMPL.

We are now starting to prepare our EaSi grant application for the SAF work programme for 2021 to be submitted by 24 August 2020 to the European Commission DG EMPL. The decision to confirm the annual grant to EUROCITIES should come before the end of 2020 to allow the timely start of activities in January 2021.

1. COVID-19 related activities

Adapting to a new reality, we revised our EaSI work plan and delivered three webinars in collaboration with the European Commission DG EMPL, informing members about the new flexibility in ESF and FEAD to deal with the COVID-19 crisis (CRII and CRII plus package). Adriana Sukova, Deputy Director General of DG EMPL, listened to the concerns from cities and answered questions on how to access the EU funds made available under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative. Many cities used the information from the webinar to contact ESF managing authorities to discuss how to use the EU funds for urgent needs at local level.

Supporting cities at all stages of the crisis, we have also organised city dialogues on implications for social services and specific strategies for early childhood education and care services in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We exchanged on social measures in cities to provide targeted support to the most vulnerable - the elderly, homeless, migrants - and how to deal with the increasing demand for food aid and social services by the 'new urban poor' (students, young people, freelancers, newly unemployed, low/mid-income families).

We held a series of city dialogues in collaboration with OECD on the territorial impact of COVID-19 crisis and the consequences on local employment and economic development, rising social inequalities and the effect on city finances. We exchanged on how cities are pro-active and innovative in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on businesses and people, and how to use this crisis as an opportunity for 're-building' more inclusive cities, leaving no one behind. This requires more social investment also from national and EU levels.

2. EU policy development and advocacy activities

Poverty reduction and social inclusion

We met in March with DG EMPL Director for Social Inclusion, Katarina Ivanković Knežević, to exchange on the new priorities of the European Commission in the field of poverty reduction and social inclusion. Katarina invited EURO CITIES to contribute with a city perspective to the upcoming EU policy initiatives on the social agenda, in particular the Child Guarantee, the EU Disability Strategy, social economy and the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan. She also informed us that the European Commission is preparing a new initiative on addressing poverty through integrated approaches and combatting housing exclusion.

Katarina welcomed the new city pledges as a valuable contribution to transfer EU principles into concrete actions at local level. She informed us that the city pledges are shared among Commission services and directly with the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit. She invited EURO CITIES and our members to use the pledges as inputs to the EU public consultation on reinforcing social Europe, which will prepare the ground for new EU social policies in 2021 to be announced at the EU social summit in Portugal.

Equality

Our Social Affairs Forum chair and deputy mayor of Malmo, Sedat Arif, together with EURO CITIES secretary general, Anna Lisa Boni, and senior policy advisor, Bianca Faragau met Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, to discuss how cities and the European Commission can work together to strengthen inclusion and equality in the EU. We seized this opportunity to showcase how cities are leading the way to inclusion and equality. We gave concrete examples of what cities are doing on the ground to tackle discrimination, promote gender equality and support social inclusion of most vulnerable groups, in particular of Roma people, migrant women and people with disabilities. The Commissioner accepted our invitation to visit cities (when the COVID-19 situation will allow for traveling abroad) and learn from good practices for equality and inclusion at municipal level.

Integration of migrants and refugees

We are keeping up the momentum of the solidarity between cities related to refugees' arrivals to Europe. Since the beginning of the year, three new cities, Lucerne, Gaziantep and Munich, have joined our Solidarity Cities Initiative. As part of this initiative and under the Amsterdam leadership, we sent a clear call for the relocation of unaccompanied refugee children to the European institutions which received the attention of the media as well.

We took part in a joint meeting in May with the Commissioner for Migration, Ylva Johansson. The meeting highlighted the key role migrants have been playing as essential workers during the COVID-19 crisis and put a strong focus on their participation in the recovery phase. We underlined the need for an inclusive recovery and the leadership role of cities in ensuring integration services for migrants and refugees during the pandemic and beyond.

Employment and skills

Our engagement with the European Commission on the urban dimension of inclusive labour markets remains strong. We sent a [technical report](#) with examples from cities implementing the Youth Guarantee in view of feeding into the Commission's proposal for reinforcing the Youth Guarantee post-2020. We also provided inputs to the public consultation on the use of ESF by cities for employment and education and took part to a DG EMPL focus group. We made a strong case for skills development in the [EURO CITIES statement on people-centred AI in cities](#) as a response to EU's white paper on AI and data strategy, and to the Committee of Regions' stakeholder consultation on 'A new industrial strategy for Europe'.

Housing and homelessness

Promoting key messages from the urban agenda housing partnership, we are working with MEP Kim Van Sparrentak (GUE/NGL, NL), who is drafting a report on 'Access to decent and affordable housing for all'. We have focused on the concerns related to the revision of State Aid framework, social mix, renovation wave and affordable housing for the lower middle class. We have also met the shadow rapporteur MEP Leila Chaibi (GUE/NGL, FR) with whom we have discussed the challenge of housing affordability in the European Semester. On

homelessness, we highlighted the importance of promoting integrated approaches to support the homeless and the need to involve cities in the debate.

We have contributed together with the Environment Forum to the EU public consultation on energy efficiency in buildings - 'Renovation Wave' initiative. We have provided our input to the [EUROCITIES statement on the EU Green Deal](#), focusing on energy poverty and renovation.

Children

Tackling child poverty and promoting children's rights is getting higher on the EU agenda with several Commission services - DG JUST, DG HOME and DG EMPL - working together to coordinate a proposal for EU Strategy on Children Rights with a focus on tackling child poverty especially for groups at risk (e.g. children from Roma or migrant backgrounds). EURO CITIES is working directly with the officials drafting the Commission proposal, who have welcomed a city perspective to contribute to the EU Child Guarantee. To formulate the EURO CITIES contribution, we will launch a survey and collect inputs and good practices from cities in the Working Group Children and Young People. We already held a webinar on 12 March with the European Commission coordinator for the rights of the child at DG HOME and the programme manager for the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme to inform members about the funding opportunities for cities to work on the rights of the child.

Roma inclusion

We continue our work in collaboration with DG JUST on Roma inclusion. We are working to ensure there is an urban dimension in the post-2020 EU Roma Framework and a better recognition of the work done at local level for Roma inclusion. Our lobbying and advocacy messages from the EURO CITIES contribution put together by the WG Roma inclusion has already borne some fruits. The European Commission roadmap for renewing the EU Roma Framework identifies cities as key stakeholders to be consulted throughout the process of drafting, implementing and monitoring national strategies for Roma inclusion. Another key improvement compared to the current situation is that the new EU Roma Framework will also address the inclusion of EU-mobile citizens who are Roma and move from one EU country to another, which has been a main point for our EURO CITIES advocacy for many years.

Social economy

We are in contact with DG GROW to discuss policy messages from cities to feed into the EU action plan for social economy. To reinforce our advocacy messages, we are working together with the Economic Development Forum on a survey to prepare EURO CITIES response to the public consultation on the action plan for social economy (expected in autumn).

We are in contact with DG ECFIN and DG EMPL to discuss opportunities for capacity building of cities to develop social outcome contracting and social impact bonds. We are also working with the European Investment Bank to exchange views on innovative financing models and potential support (training for capacity-building and financing feasibility studies) for cities.

Education

We have invited the European Commission DG EAC to our city dialogue on early childhood education and care (ECEC), to reflect on the challenges and measures implemented in cities in the period of COVID-19. To make sure everyone has access to quality and inclusive education in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Education Area objectives, we will develop policy messages from cities in WG Education and advocate to EU institutions on key issues such as ensuring pedagogical continuity and measures to prevent further educational and social inequalities arising from the COVID-19 crisis.

Ageing

We have liaised with the European Commission on the forthcoming Green Paper on Ageing, highlighting the role of cities in the context of urban ageing. While the paper is set to have a strong focus on the urban-rural divide, the current crisis revealed a strong need to enhance public health measures for elderly people in urban areas. We launched a new partnership with the World Health Organisation (WHO) to better address health-related measures in an urban preparedness context. We will also use the next WG Urban Ageing meeting to prepare key policy messages from cities to the European Commission with regard to long-term care and the well-being of the elderly in the context of COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath.

3. Political campaign of city pledges to European Pillar of Social Rights

We continue our political campaign ‘**Inclusive Cities for All**’ to strengthen the case for the role of cities in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). We want to show the leadership from cities in employment, social inclusion and equality policies and our commitment to be partners of the EU in reinforcing a more social Europe. In return for cities, we seek to get a better access for cities to EU funding (ESF+) in the next period 2021-2027.

To date, we have reached 36 pledges related to local action on the specific areas of the EPSR from 30 cities benefitting over 35 million citizens and securing a total investment of over €6 billion for 2019-2024. So far in 2021, new pledges came from Rotterdam, Gijon and Besiktas covering active support to employment, gender equality and inclusive education.

Our campaign with city pledges received recognition at EU level on various occasions. The European Commission has named EURO CITIES as an official ‘ambassador’ of the European Pillar of Social Rights, recognising that cities are pro-active actors and trusted partners of the EU in social policy and in reinforcing a more social Europe.

Cities that already got involved in the campaign also found many benefits for themselves. They consider the pledges to be a powerful tool to show that cities can be part of an important EU process, to promote the role of cities as pro-active actors in tackling social challenges, to demonstrate what is happening at local level and also useful for cities to get key actors to cooperate at local level in implementation of cross-cutting policies.

What next?

- collect new city pledges and announce via strategic communication to Commissioners
- submit the pledges as inputs from cities to the consultation on reinforcing social Europe
- use the city pledges as basis to formulate a EURO CITIES contribution to the action plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights to position cities as key partners in this process
- June-July: organise an online event with the European Commission DG EMPL to present the process behind our campaign of city pledges and show leadership from cities
- September: political event at the European Parliament presenting new city pledges
- November: new city pledges will be announced at the SAF business meeting in Zagreb
- 2021: take part in the EU social summit in Portugal when EPSR action plan is announced

How to join?

Choose one or more of the 20 principles of [the European Pillar of Social Rights](#) as the focus of your pledge and formulate a political message backed by policy actions, in one page. Be specific as you can to what changes you want to bring to your city, whom to benefit and which budget you will use to put in place the policy actions. The pledge should be signed by your mayor or deputy mayor in charge of social affairs. More information about the campaign [here](#). All pledges will be made available on a new website we are currently developing to support our campaign: www.inclusivecities4all.eu

4. Mutual learning and capacity building

SAF Steering Committee

We are investing more efforts than ever to coordinate our work in SAF and build synergies across working groups and work closer with other Forums on cross-cutting topics. This is to help us better implement the new EURO CITIES strategic framework 2020-2029 and to better position us to contribute to overarching EU agenda on EU Green Deal and Digital Europe.

The SAF steering committee met in early February in Brussels for a capacity building event. We defined the SAF workplan for 2020 and had two workshops with European Commission DG EMPL Heads of Unit on European Semester 2020 and the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan, with a focus on how cities can contribute to these two EU processes. We agreed on a common approach to involve inputs from SAF working groups into both processes.

We also held two online meetings, on 25 March and 28 April, to discuss how to adapt our SAF activities in spring and to include a focus on COVID-19 in our on-going work to support mutual learning and capacity building on response measures from cities to this unprecedented crisis. We agreed on an updated calendar for SAF activities with spring WG meetings moved online and study visits postponed to autumn (to be confirmed if international travel is possible).

Education

We have collected inputs from our WG Education members and organised an exchange between cities about safe and coherent school reopening in the context of COVID-19. All members agreed upon the importance to implement sanitary protocols and hygiene measures in the context of schools re-opening across all educational pathways. This is complemented by measures such as limiting group sizes, working in shifts, and using more learning activity organised outdoors. Where distance learning is still ongoing, many cities are providing materials, equipment, and free access to operating systems such as MS Office. Outreach to more vulnerable pupils has proven to be difficult in the period of school closures and several cities are liaising with community services to reach out to the most affected families while also collecting data on the situation and emerging vulnerabilities related to COVID-19.

Many cities have expressed the necessity to keep services such as free school lunches functional throughout this period. Finally, cities expressed the need for strengthening support to teachers and to provide training on the use of online tools, while paying specific attention to children coming from low-income families and neighbourhoods, children with special needs and learning difficulties. Ensuring these measures is also considered as essential in a context of contingency planning and a possible second wave of COVID-19.

Employment

We finalised a set of [city guidelines on innovative solutions to address long-term unemployment](#) to inspire city practitioners to find new ways for labour market integration. Based on the lessons learnt, the guidelines set out steps for creating an innovation mindset.

Housing

On housing, the working group has collected information on cities' responses to COVID-19 crisis to protect vulnerable groups. The findings will go into our report on EPSR principle 19 on housing, which will be published over summer. We exchanged with the chair and vice-chair of the working group in charge of air quality climate change and energy efficiency from the EUROCITIES Environment Forum on the joint activities for the renovation wave and we will contribute to their compilation of good practices and an upcoming policy paper.

Homelessness

Our working group on homelessness met online on 28 April to discuss the latest updates on the topic. We launched the [city guidelines on supporting new groups at risk of homelessness](#). Based on the inputs provided during our last policy transfer in Poznan, these guidelines set the context on homelessness in cities and identify key steps in preventing homelessness. Concrete examples from cities are presented as first-hand experiences in this document.

Members exchanged on how to formulate a policy contribution to the possible upcoming EU initiative on combatting housing exclusion. Members also shared inputs and feedback to the first findings of the report on the implementation of principle 19 of the EPSR in cities. They also exchanged on how the pandemic is likely to impact their work in the future.

Roma inclusion

The working group Roma inclusion published a set of [city guidelines on developing an integrated city plan for Roma inclusion](#). The exchanges held in Braga during the critical friend review were used to identify essential activities and success factors that should be considered to develop integrated city plans for Roma inclusion. Recommendations include mapping and monitoring of the situation, developing an inclusive participatory approach, establishing an integrated framework of action and securing a long-term vision for Roma inclusion in the city. Concrete experiences from cities are also outlined in the document.

Migration and integration

The working group met online in early May to discuss the impact of the pandemic on the integration of migrants and refugees and the policy responses from cities. Key learning points from the exchange include the need for an inclusive approach to communicating about the virus and containment measures, adapting accommodation structures with migrants' health in mind, a greater investment of resources for previously unknown undocumented migrants, and the need to make education accessible for potentially disadvantaged migrant children.

Our EU funded project RESOMA, through which we have been able to influence the focus of research on migration and asylum to raise the visibility of the importance and needs of cities in this field, successfully concluded in March. We will continue to suggest topics to be explored by migration research experts, expanding our evidence based for advocacy work.

Within our VALUES project - Volunteering Activities to Leverage Urban European Social inclusion of migrants - our 16 partner cities organised virtual study visits with city staff and volunteer exchanges to share knowledge and present good practices on the role of volunteers and civil society for migrant integration. Within the context of VALUES project, we also organised a city dialogue on volunteering on 18 May with over 30 cities joining the online discussion and actively sharing their knowledge and good practices at local level. The dialogue focused especially on the role played by volunteers during the COVID-19 crisis in several sectors, including food distribution, health, support to the elderly and most vulnerable (e.g. refugees, migrants, youth, homeless people).

A new project, CONNECTION - CONNEcting Cities Towards Integration action - kicked off on 31 March, with EURO CITIES as lead partner, Migration Work as expert partner and 14 cities involved, grouped in 4 communities of practices. Each community focuses on a specific topic, such as developing an integration strategy at city level or setting up a one-stop shop for all migrants. Since then, our cities have been busy in identifying the needs of each local context and organising the first community of practice workshops.

On 30 January, we submitted a new proposal for an Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) grant to continue the mutual learning activities on integration with our members. The European Commission will communicate the evaluation results in July 2020.



Smart social inclusion

We are preparing a survey together with the Economic Development Forum (EDF) to gather good practices from cities on social economy. We are also working with the WG SMEs in EDF to organise a city dialogue on the role of SMEs, social economy and entrepreneurship in the economic recovery from COVID-19 crisis.



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