



Making the Social Investment Package a reality



The contribution of European cities

In February 2013, the European Union launched the Social Investment Package for Growth and Cohesion (SIP), setting out wide-ranging recommendations for improving the effectiveness, efficiency and adequacy of social policies, and for equipping people with the skills to be able to fully participate in society.

Cities play a crucial role in developing and delivering effective social policies. As EURO CITIES, the network of major European cities, we are fully committed to working on the implementation of the SIP.

Achieving the SIP objectives will, to a great extent, depend on cities and their cooperation and working in partnership with national, regional and EU level governments.

In March 2014, at the EURO CITIES Social Affairs Forum in Barcelona, European mayors and vice-mayors discussed ways to ensure the implementation of the SIP and to strengthen the role of cities in this process.

Over a year has passed since the SIP was adopted. During this time, cities have continued to develop and deliver social policies that are contributing to its recommendations. We would like to draw attention to some of the important issues that have emerged so far:

1. A strong focus on fighting social exclusion and maintaining social cohesion should remain at the core of the Social Investment Package.

The SIP calls for improving the efficiency of social policies. This is an important policy objective. However, given austerity policies and the rising numbers of unemployed people and people at risk of poverty, the principal goal of the SIP should be to support and maintain social cohesion in Europe by helping people to participate fully in society and in the labour market. The SIP should be a tool to initiate a reverse trend: from cutting social expenditure towards investing in people and human capital, and ensuring an adequate level of social protection for all, especially the most vulnerable people and those affected by multiple disadvantages. Keeping this focus is also essential for maintaining social policies grounded in the objectives of the inclusive growth pillar of Europe 2020.

2. Cities should be recognised by the national and regional levels as full partners in the implementation of the Social Investment Package.

It is in cities that social and economic inequalities are often the starkest, regardless of the overall wealth of the city, region and member state. Current governance structures and the allocation of responsibilities and resources often fail to capitalise on cities' potential to implement SIP recommendations. Cities can play a key role in maintaining social cohesion and making European and national social policies more effective and efficient. Furthermore, city authorities have experience in testing and implementing innovative ideas, creating integrated services that offer individualised paths to social and labour market integration, and in engaging with NGOs, civil society and the business sector. By being closer to people, we also have a clear understanding of poverty trends, people's real needs, new forms of poverty and social exclusion. For all these reasons, the national and regional levels of government should work in full partnership with cities. Such cooperation will create synergies within policies and improve the overall coherence of welfare intervention.

3. Cities should be stronger partners in shaping European social policy governance, especially in preparing and assessing National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and in working more closely with the European institutions.

Cities can provide essential input for the preparation of NRPs, by giving feedback on the performance of social protection systems and recommending areas for improvement. We can also supply evidence of the impact of social intervention, and recommend ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of social policies by identifying bottlenecks and suggesting policy improvements. Cities' contributions to NRPs will enrich the analysis of the social situation in member states and help to identify actions needed to achieve the Europe 2020 objectives. NRPs should address the issue of how to increase social policy efficiency and effectiveness by improving the cooperation between different levels of government. Likewise, country specific recommendations should suggest ways for national, regional and local governments to better work in partnership.

Cities can also work closely with the European institutions. For example, the European Platform against Poverty should strengthen its focus on the role of local governments in delivering SIP recommendations. It should have clear proposals on how to improve the vertical and horizontal coordination of social policies.

The European institutions should underline the importance of the right governance process to achieve adequate social policies. This could be done, for example, by organising EU peer reviews on how to improve the allocation of resources and responsibilities in a multilevel governance system, and good practice study visits on this topic bringing together local, regional and national stakeholders.

4. EU funds, and in particular the ESF, should be channelled to address these priorities and challenges in cities.

European funds offer an excellent opportunity to develop innovative and effective solutions that help people participate in the social and economic life of our cities. However, to maximise the effectiveness of EU funds, city authorities must be able to deliver the EU funding programmes that address social inclusion at local level according to their specific local priorities, challenges and needs. Therefore, cities must be given a direct role in developing and implementing national or regional operational programmes, as these are the frameworks for strategic programming and priorities for EU funding.

The European Commission should monitor the engagement of cities in the preparation and implementation of the Partnership Agreements for European Structural and Investment Funds (2014-2020).