

Cities invest €15bn to strengthen social rights – but need more EU support



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Europe's cities have invested over €15 billion in the past six years to boost social inclusion, reduce inequality and improve essential services. These efforts have enhanced housing, healthcare, childcare and employment support, directly benefiting over 100 million people.

Yet, rising costs, ageing populations, the housing crisis, and growing skills shortages are putting city budgets under pressure. City leaders are calling for stronger, targeted EU backing to sustain and scale up their efforts, including direct funding and a central role for cities in shaping the next EU Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).

Today in Brussels, Sara Funaro, Mayor of Florence, signed the 100th city pledge, committing to act on the principles of the European Pillar for Social Rights, as part of Eurocities Inclusive Cities 4 All campaign.

Florence is committed to improving access to essential services, so no-one is left behind,

said Sara Funaro. “We are investing in affordable housing, driving digital inclusion, tackling energy poverty and setting up a new municipal Housing Agency to strengthen access to affordable housing for those most in need.

But cities cannot do this alone. Social priorities must remain at the top of the EU agenda. Investing in people is not just the right thing to do, it's the smartest investment Europe can make.

Since the EPSR was adopted, cities have reported major investments, including:

- €97 million for education and skills training, benefiting over 50,000 people

- €323 million for employment, housing, and minority rights
- €1.8 million for gender equality and women's employment
- €528,000 for local employment programmes, supporting more than 120,000 people
- €184 million for urban anti-poverty strategies, including minimum income schemes
- €558 million for childcare, creating 525 new centres
- €32.9 million for healthcare and mental health services
- €20 million for elderly care, benefiting 75,000 people

Representing the City of Ghent, a champion of children's rights, Mathias De Clercq, Mayor of Ghent, said: "Cities are at the forefront of social policy, we must ensure that no child is left behind. We need the EU to match cities' ambition, giving us the direct funding required to improve people's lives and recognising our central role in the development of effective social policies.

Strengthening collaboration between cities, member states and the EU institutions can help build a future where every child has equal opportunities to grow and thrive.

In a new Eurocities report, city leaders are calling for the EU's next EPSR Action Plan to be more ambitious and responsive to the needs of city governments, including:

- A place-based EPSR Action Plan: Cities must be co-creators of the plan, which should include indicators such as energy poverty, transport poverty and housing affordability.
- Ending homelessness by 2030: The EU must scale up support to help cities achieve this goal, introducing a clear EU Council recommendation and renewing the mandate of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH).
- Tackling the housing crisis: The EU's upcoming affordable housing initiative must align with EPSR objectives, including reforms to state aid rules and more investment in social and affordable housing.

- Reinforcing the EU Child Guarantee: The Child Guarantee's national plans must actively involve cities, and a more ambitious EU target to end child poverty should be adopted.

- Ensuring better skills for inclusive cities: The EU should work together with cities to implement an ambitious Union of Skills that tackles critical labour and skills gaps in local economies and services.

1. City leaders outlined their calls to national and EU leaders at the Eurocities Cities' Social Summit in Brussels. The event highlighted how cities are tackling Europe's social and economic challenges and advancing the European Pillar of Social Rights (ESPR). They also called for the EU and national government to work with cities to ensure a strong social Europe.

2. Over the past six years, the Eurocities' political campaign Inclusive Cities for All has made a tangible contribution to the European Pillar of Social Rights' implementation, by securing around 100 concrete political commitments (city pledges) from 62 cities across 23 countries. This initiative has enhanced social rights for over 102.4 million citizens by effectively implementing the EPSR principles at the local level.

3. At the Eurocities Social Summit, Eurocities presented its new report – A new Urban Compass for the European Pillar of Social Rights– which outlines Eurocities recommendations to the EU and national leaders to improve the role and impact of city governments when it comes to implementing the targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

4. Eurocities wants to make cities places where everyone can enjoy a good quality of life, is able to move around safely, access quality and inclusive public services and benefit from a healthy environment. We do this by networking more than 200 larger European cities, which together represent some 150 million people across 38 countries, and by gathering evidence of how policy making impacts people to inspire other cities and EU decision makers. Connect with us at <https://eurocities.eu/> or by following our Bluesky, and

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