

Draft EUROCITIES statement for consultation with the Social Affairs Forum 'Making Social Investment Package a reality: The contribution of European cities' Barcelona, March 2014

We welcome the Social Investment Package as a step forward in strengthening and further developing Europe's social policies.

As the network representing Europe's over 140 major cities, we are concerned about the deep and long-lasting impact of the crisis on social cohesion and economic well-being. The resulting changes to our welfare systems are often affecting the most vulnerable disproportionately. This is felt by many cities across Europe as the demand for welfare services and social support increases, whilst the economic recovery is still slow.

As a European framework for coordinated action and investment, we believe that the Social Investment Package (SIP) has the potential to deliver change on the ground. By offering a strategic guidance on how to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and adequacy of social policies, the SIP can instigate a shift from austerity policies to investing in people that helps deliver long-term growth.

In implementing the SIP, the Commission and member states should make sure that cities are able to adequately invest in the necessary infrastructure for preventative measures and in comprehensive approaches to reach those with multiple disadvantages.

Cities/local governments have a duty to address the challenges of poverty and exclusion in an efficient, effective and comprehensive way. They governments are the most important providers of social services and, ultimately, the key resource for those in need. Safeguarding and developing adequate social inclusion policies in cities are necessary to maintain social cohesion and the European social model and to restore public trust both in governments and in Europe.

European Commission should continue and increase its support of mutual learning activities and promote the exchange of good practices between the European cities.

Many of our cities have already put into practice the actions that can underpin the implementation of the SIP. We can, therefore, show what can be done to increase the efficiency of public spending and at the same time to improve effectiveness, which means achieving better results for our citizens. These include designing and delivering innovative and integrated programmes, such as one-stop-shops, which we consider as one of the best responses to the recommendations of the Social Investment Package.

Part of the Social Investment Package's success will depend on how strongly Europe's cities are involved in its implementation.

It is in cities that the social and economic inequalities are often the starkest. This is despite the overall wealth of the city. In many of our cities, poverty and exclusion are concentrated in some urban neighbourhoods thus posing a great governance challenge.

To have a real impact on the ground, the EU policy processes, such as the European Semester, with its National Reform Programmes and Country Specific Recommendations, must reflect the specificity of the urban dimension of poverty and exclusion and the integrated local actions to tackle them. Cities can demonstrate and share our in-depth understanding of the interplay of factors that contribute to social disadvantage. Moreover, our strategic position as the governance level closest to the citizens allows us to address these challenges faster and in a more effective way. Cities want to be involved in the EU social policy making and in particular:

- in preparing the National Reform Programmes;
- in managing and delivering the EU programmes to the citizens; and
- in sharing experience from local level through the EU-level peer reviews

Also, to have a desired change at local level, cities must be able to design and deliver the EU funding programmes according to their priorities. To achieve it, Europe's major cities must have a direct role in the partnership agreements and national or regional operational programmes, which will set the framework for strategic programming and priorities for spending of the EU funds.

Every City faces challenges and hurdles in providing a comprehensive response to the future delivery of services for their citizens. There is not a "one size fits all" solution but each city has an in depth knowledge of their own needs and those needs are exactly the same all across Europe; no matter what country or city is addressing the problems.

People across all cities want to achieve the same outlook; better housing, better health, greater employment opportunities, improved education, a clean environment, better care for the elderly, improved skills training, more efficient transport and a cohesive method of dealing with regeneration and inclusion; especially the young unemployed

There are only three methods of addressing these problems and providing solutions;

1. Public finance.
2. Private investment.
3. Combination of both.

The Social Investment Package provides an opportunity to bring these methods together to create a template that can be used across all cities; with each city still retaining their individual focus on their greatest problems. Most of the social difficulties occur within cities so it is only logical that they are a major part of providing solutions to those problems. City governance has a great deal of experience, talent and innovation in working with the private sector and communities in providing good practice and effective engagement in seeking solutions.

Therefore, in its assessment of the Partnership Agreements, the Commission should take due account of the role of local authorities in managing, delivering and evaluating the European Structural and Investment Funds. Furthermore, the Commission should monitor the implementation of the Partnership Agreements, and in particular the involvement of local authorities in managing and delivering the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The successful, effective and tailored implementation of SIP will require well-coordinated and intensified efforts at local, national and European levels.