

The Just City Dimension

Breaking the cycle of poverty for a more social and inclusive Europe

*Regional and
Urban Policy*

This article is part of a series of articles based on the 14 Partnerships of the Urban Agenda for the EU. Structured around the three city dimensions of the New Leipzig Charter (the Productive, the Green, and the Just City), the articles link Partnerships' actions and activities with other relevant EU projects and initiatives supported by Cohesion Policy (including Urban Innovative Actions, URBACT, or Article 7 cities benefitting from ERDF). The articles demonstrate the key role of cities in the Urban Agenda for the EU, and focus on specific actions they have led and implemented. Overall, the articles aim at showcasing practices and experiences on how different tools and funding support can help cities face their challenges in a strategic way towards sustainable urban development.

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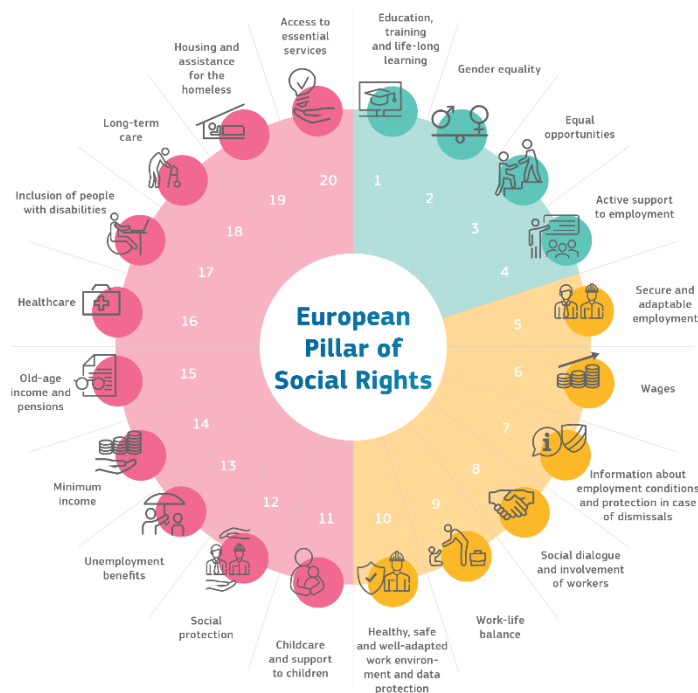
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Breaking the cycle of poverty for a more social and inclusive Europe

The fight against urban poverty and social exclusion of migrants and refugees

Poverty is caused by many factors, such as unemployment, low educational attainment, discrimination, or low levels of participation in community and public life. In many EU cities, poverty is also concentrated spatially and can affect entire neighbourhoods. This article highlights two understandings of urban poverty: the area-based approach, which sees urban poverty as a spatial phenomenon, and the people-based approach, which sees urban poverty as a phenomenon affecting some groups of people in particular, regardless of where they live. Among the most vulnerable groups are, for example, children, migrants and refugees.

To fight urban poverty and the related social/spatial segregation of vulnerable groups, we need policies for improving the labour market opportunities of disadvantaged groups and policies for reducing the constraints on spatial integration. These key priorities of the European Commission are clearly embedded in the European policy framework and are at the heart of the **2021–2027 EU Cohesion Policy** and its fourth policy objective related to ‘a more social and inclusive Europe’.



The European Pillar of Social Rights

is the EU's strategy to build a fair and inclusive social Europe. Tackling urban poverty and (educational) desegregation is closely related to several of its principles, especially those related to equal opportunities and access to the labour market. Educational desegregation and fighting urban poverty are also in line with many principles related to social inclusion and protection. Educational segregation keeps disadvantaged children away from social networks, jobs, and better salary opportunities.

Figure 1: European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

Cities' focus on child poverty and inclusion

Urban poverty affects cities in many important ways. The spatial segregation of marginalised and vulnerable groups, such as migrants and refugees, which often comes together with urban poverty, affects social cohesion by creating social exclusion. Poverty also significantly influences local budgets, for example, through support services and local tax returns. To tackle these problems and find solutions that work, an integrated multi-stakeholder approach at the European, national and local level is crucial. The **Urban Agenda for the EU** provides important guidance on how to promote cooperation between these different stakeholders and how to tackle the challenges faced by cities.

Policymaking related to the inclusion of marginalised groups, as well as education policy, is mostly the responsibility of Member States. Nevertheless, urban policy at the city level also plays an important role in tackling these issues. One of the key principles of the [New Leipzig Charter](#), for example, highlights the just city – a city that provides equal opportunities and environmental justice for all, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, age and origin, and leaves no one behind. Cities can heavily influence social cohesion by combating poverty and spatial segregation of marginalised groups. Neighbourhood boundaries very often perpetuate ethnic and socioeconomic segregation. These issues are closely interlinked, and to tackle them, cities need to combine several strategies.

It is within this framework that **the Urban Agenda for the EU** has been established as an integrated and coordinated approach to deal with the urban dimension of the EU and national policies and legislation. It seeks to improve the quality of life in urban areas by focusing on concrete priority themes through dedicated partnerships. In this article, we present two of these partnerships – [Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees](#) and [Urban Poverty](#).

Child poverty

The Urban Poverty Partnership, which aimed to reduce poverty and improve the inclusion of people living in poverty, was established in 2016. The partnership focused on four priorities in its 12 actions: child poverty, regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods, homelessness, and vulnerability of Roma people. As [Eurostat shows](#), children are at a greater risk of poverty or social exclusion than the rest of the European population. This article, therefore, highlights the action clusters aimed at fighting child poverty.

The Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration in Belgium is in charge of the two actions (Actions 4 and 5) on fighting child poverty. Action 4 advocated for the adoption of a Child Guarantee at the European level, whose objective is to prevent and combat the social exclusion of children in need by guaranteeing access to a set of key services. It puts into practice Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights on ‘childcare and support to children’. Action 5, complementary to the Child Guarantee, aimed at strengthening the legislative body at the EU level to promote the effective implementation of children’s rights in all EU Member States. Both actions relate to Pillars 2 and 3 of the Commission recommendation [Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage](#).

The Council adopted a recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee in June 2021, an EU-level policy instrument which focuses on helping to uphold children’s rights by combating child poverty and fostering equal opportunities. The recommendation is on the national level and stipulates that each Member State should nominate a national Child Guarantee Coordinator. The coordinator ensured that the European Child Guarantee is implemented in line with the action plans. They should also submit to the Commission an action plan covering the period until 2030 within nine months of the adoption of the recommendation.

Josée Goris from the Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration in Belgium said:

In Belgium, we use what is coming from Europe to obtain a good policy. We are going to use the European Child Guarantee now so that we can have a more coordinated policy for services for children. It is a policy rooted in a feasibility study, on indicators, figures and assessment of good politics and, therefore, a good evidence-based policy.

Children affected by poverty are less likely to do well in school, enjoy good health and are more likely to become unemployed, poor and socially excluded later in life. For children and adolescents, the neighbourhood environment is especially important. According to Jaap Nieuwenhuis and Pieter Hooimeijer who conducted a systematic review of 88 academic research articles, the relation between neighbourhoods and individual educational outcomes is a function of neighbourhood poverty, the neighbourhood's educational climate, the proportion of ethnic/migrant groups, and social disorganisation in the neighbourhood. These academic findings are in line with one of the other first pilot partnerships, which started its activities in 2016.

Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees

The Urban Agenda Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees has been coordinated by the City of Amsterdam and the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) of the European Commission. So far, it has helped to identify central integration bottlenecks regarding education, housing, labour market, reception, and the cross-cutting topic of vulnerability.

The eight actions of the partnership included the creation of a Migrant Advisory Board, an Urban Academy on integration, the development of recommendations on the protection of children in migration and on better access to EU funds for cities, the improvement of data collection for more evidence-based policies, and the enhancement of micro-credits for migrant entrepreneurs. The Migrant Advisory Board advised the partnership on the actions, produced a report, and provided feedback to the cities where they were based. The Migrant Advisory Board has been so successful that now DG HOME uses it as its own policy instrument. The directorate-general has established its own expert group on the views of migrants in the field of migration, asylum and integration. 'This means that one of the outcomes of our partnership is now embedded and is a success,' said Mark Boekwijt, Representative to the EU, City of Amsterdam, and Coordinator of the Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees.

Another successful action was the Urban Academy, a three-day thematic expert workshop. Cities had the opportunity to present relevant policy dilemmas, and those who got selected participated in thematic workshop lectures where they received feedback on their specific dilemmas from experts in the field. The Urban Academy has also become a structural instrument of DG HOME.

An overall appreciation of the cooperation within the partnership, and the findings of an external evaluation led to the decision to continue the partnership for at least two more years (2020–2021). The new partnership, with its **new action plan**, is now independent and has its own

secretariat. The partnership is working on improving the availability of integration-relevant statistics and data collection at the local and regional level. It also provides recommendations on the protection of children in migration.

How European cities are fighting urban poverty, reducing (educational) segregation, and supporting new educational tools

Urban Innovative Actions is an EU initiative that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Below, we provide examples of how cities can fight urban poverty, reduce (educational) segregation, and support new educational tools.

Lessons from Lille's TAST'in FIVES (Transforming Areas with Social Talents: Feed, Include, Value, Educate, Share)

In Lille's TAST'in FIVES neighbourhood, the closure of the metallurgic company Fives-Cail-Babcock in 2001 has led to a dramatic neighbourhood decline. With a long-term unemployment rate of more than 20% and few job opportunities for young people, half of the population is at risk of poverty. To tackle these issues, the City of Lille has proposed food-related activities as leverage against urban poverty.

The city has created a collective kitchen that provides a shared space where people can cook, eat, socialise, and make new experiences. Workshops against waste and malnutrition are also organised, together with training and job opportunities as well as meetings with employers. There are also restaurants and food processing activities. The kitchen is run by collective governance and is financially autonomous, while receiving part of the benefits from private activity operating in the vicinity.

The physical space (*L'Avant-goût*) has provided a meeting and socialising area with possible cultural encounters, where participants can learn more about each other. The project also has health benefits, due to the consumption of cooked food (as opposed to processed food) and general tips on 'lighter food'. Some of the workshops have also focused on reducing food waste and making the most out of existing products to improve family budgeting. Finally, visitors who wish to set up a professional activity in the food sector can benefit from help in finding job opportunities.



Figure 2: © Cécilie Dagmey

Cécilie Dagmey, project manager of TAST'in FIVES at the City Council of Lille, said: 'One of the biggest challenges and, at the same time, biggest successes has been the collaboration of 14 different partners within the project, ranging from public institutions to NGOs and private companies.' The partners have had the opportunity to experience new ways of working, while using a new space for carrying out activities and using food as an entry point to address a wide array of issues.

Lessons from Bergamo's CAPACityES (Children Against Poverty Awake the CITY Education System)

Bergamo, a North Italian city with about 121 000 inhabitants, has been affected by urban poverty, particularly after the economic crisis of 2008. The city aimed at addressing this challenge mainly by focusing on the most deprived peri-urban areas, children (as the most vulnerable group), and educational poverty.

As part of this project, Bergamo has built a co-housing facility for families with children with private and shared spaces to live in. The low-income families that are now part of the co-housing facility are very different from each other in many aspects, such as religion or culture. Thus, co-designing a common space has been an important challenge, embedded in the design of the project. One challenge that could not have been foreseen was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. 'The families that were chosen at the beginning of the project are very different from who they are now, two years after the pandemic. For example, their economic situation has changed and often worsened, as some of them lost their jobs,' explains Manuela Armati from the European Project Management Office at the Municipality of Bergamo.



Figure 3: © CAPACITyES

Apart from the co-housing facility, the project has also set up the HubForKids – a creative hub whose focus is on improving children’s cognitive and non-cognitive skills by organising artistic, sportive, musical and cultural activities and performances targeted at different age groups. One of the main challenges has been having a place to accommodate children of different ages to create a space that can be shared between mothers with babies, young children, and teenagers. Manuela Armati stressed:

For the CAPACITyES project, we always had to think about how to work together with several municipal administration services and local partners at the same time in order to implement different project activities. Normally, we are used to working separately, but the project has helped us to work together. It might even be that bringing together local partners has helped them to appreciate the European value more.

Changes in cities’ housing policy that eliminate urban socio-economic segregation, together with the revitalisation of more disadvantaged neighbourhoods, can positively affect urban poverty and children’s educational segregation. In addition, the solution proposed by Bergamo was an integrated approach focused on the child perspective, with a temporary co-housing structure for families and children and a new children’s hub. Both facilities are co-designed and co-managed by the project beneficiaries in cooperation with the neighbourhood to enhance social participation, integration, and cohesion.

Lessons from Brno's OnStage (Music Schools for Social Change) project

Brno, the second largest city in Czechia with a population of 370 000, located in the South Moravia Region, has sought to bring together new methods and tools for social cohesion. Although the incidence of early leaving from education and training is relatively low in the region, it is estimated at around 78% for Roma children – the city's largest minority – compared to the 2.7% regional average. Moreover, even though music education in Brno is generally very accessible, children from vulnerable backgrounds do not usually enrol in it.

This can possibly be attributed to the perception that traditional music institutions – although open to everyone – are rigorous institutions that prepare their pupils for music school or a professional career. They also only offer individual music lessons. Brno, on the other hand, has embarked on a journey of teaching music to enhance social cohesion, which is a little known and explored concept in Czechia so far.



Figure 4: © OnStage Brno

Brno became a partner in the OnStage Action Planning Network, which is led by L'Hospitalet de Llobregat and financed by the **URBACT** programme. This project seeks to give everyone equal opportunities to access music courses, provides group music lessons, involves primary schools, and creates a space for social cohesion. Adopting a different approach than traditional music schools, the project seeks to tackle local issues, such as exclusion, youth unemployment, and school dropout.

Following the good practice of the music school EMMCA (Municipal School of Music and Arts Centre) in L'Hospitalet, the city launched its own group music activities in primary schools in Brno's disadvantaged areas. By engaging with people living on the margins of society through

music, the city aimed at tackling social exclusion and encouraging disadvantaged children to participate in music classes.

Pavla Lukešová from Brno City Council and coordinator of the OnStage project said:

Even on this little scale we saw big results. The kids were so excited that they are good at something. Suddenly, they could see that they can play the guitar and show it to their classmates and parents. They felt success, maybe for the first time in their life.

Based on this positive experience, Brno's participation in the OnStage project opened the door to many other possibilities in the future. For example, Brno started a collaboration where they want to make future teachers aware of this new methodology and its possibilities. 'The possibilities are endless,' concluded Pavla Lukešová.

What is ahead

Education is a powerful inclusion strategy for socio-economic and political integration and social cohesion of marginalised groups. Segregated education, in addition to denying disadvantaged children equal opportunities, creates prejudice among majority children. Nevertheless, many European schools are still highly segregated based on children's immigration background and their parents' income. Changes in cities' housing policy that eliminate urban socio-economic segregation, together with the revitalisation of more disadvantaged neighbourhoods (as done in Bergamo's CAPACITYES project), can therefore also positively affect educational segregation.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds **tend to attend local neighbourhood schools**, while more affluent parents may choose schools based on their academic reputation. This results in low integration between different segments in society and weak social cohesion. One of the possible solutions to fight educational segregation is to give more support to magnet schools, which use special themes (such as arts or sciences) and teaching approaches to attract more privileged families into schools in minority and high-poverty neighbourhoods¹. When properly structured, these magnet school programmes can be effective in promoting diversity and improving outcomes for students. This is the case of Brno's OnStage project, which offers a unique approach to teaching music.

The tie between minority and economic segregation has widened the educational gap between rich and poor students and between native students and students with a migrant background. Education systems have often not been able to address specific problems of children with migrant background (for example, language difficulties). There is a pressing need for continued commitment to research, policy, teacher education and training to ensure that children from low socio-economic and migrant backgrounds are appropriately supported². There should be a shift in perspective to recognise individual needs and resources for which existing procedures

¹ Rossell, C. H., 'Magnet Schools: No Longer Famous, but Still Intact', *Education Next*, 5(2), 2005, pp. 44–49, <https://www.educationnext.org/magnetschools/>.

² Hamilton, P. L., 'It's not all about academic achievement: supporting the social and emotional needs of migrant worker children', *Pastoral Care in Education*, 31(2), 2013, pp. 173–190.

may not always be sufficient or appropriate. This is vital not only for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, but also for Europe's goals of social solidarity and equity.

Educational segregation has links to other sectoral and spatial problems of cities. The problem often stems from spatial segregation when low-income families and minorities reside in specific deprived neighbourhoods. Children who live, and attend schools, in neighbourhoods which are ethnically and socio-economically segregated are much more likely to develop racial and ethnic stereotypes. Being exposed to peers with different backgrounds and becoming more comfortable with them leads to a dramatic decrease in discriminatory attitudes and prejudice. The resulting increased tolerance and relationships and friendships across group lines are beneficial for civil society. According to one study, students who attend racially diverse secondary schools are more likely to live in diverse neighbourhoods five years after graduation³. This is highly in line with the [EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020–2025](#).

Finally, desegregation efforts and positive interethnic interactions can also contribute to the self-esteem and pride of disadvantaged groups. This has been the main focus of Lille's TAST'in FIVES project. Integrated neighbourhood environments are a cost-effective strategy for promoting achievement and preparing young people for work in a diverse global economy and multicultural environments. Neighbourhood desegregation promotes more equitable access to resources and reduces disparities in access to jobs and well-maintained facilities.

³ Phillips, K. J. R., Rodosky, R. J., Muñoz, M. A. and Larsen, E. S. 'Integrated schools, integrated futures? A case study of school desegregation in Jefferson County, Kentucky', *From the Courtroom to the Classroom: The Shifting Landscape of School Desegregation*, 2009, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Education Press, pp. 239–270.