

Growing up in cities

Local solutions for children

5-7 November 2025, Ljubljana

Social Innovation Lab



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Background

In November 2025, Ljubljana will host the fifth edition of the Eurocities Social Innovation Lab, focused on local solutions for children. Against a backdrop of growing urban inequalities, mental health challenges, educational and social disparities, and violence against children, cities are increasingly at the forefront of ensuring that every child can thrive. The Lab will serve as a space for cities to co-create innovative, actionable responses that tackle the pressing challenges faced by children across Europe.

The thematic priorities for this year's Social Innovation Lab include:

1. Mitigating child poverty, implementing the **EU Child Guarantee** at local level (including integrated, high-quality education for all) **(Green track)**
2. Combating violence against children and strengthening **integrated child protection systems** **(Yellow track)**
3. Promoting physical **health and wellbeing** among children and youth, including equal opportunities and access to services for children with disabilities **(Blue track)**

The **EU Child Guarantee** is a key tool for cities to reduce child poverty and exclusion. Local authorities are central to ensuring access to free, high-quality services for vulnerable children including education, healthcare, nutrition, housing, and childcare. Coordinated efforts with national governments and stakeholders can enhance the impact and effectiveness of these measures at the local level.

Health, especially mental health is another growing concern, with one in seven adolescents affected by a mental disorder.¹ Cities are responding by embedding support services in schools, increasing access to psychological care, and raising awareness, while also using urban design, mobility, and community programming to support general wellbeing.

Finally, combating violence against children and strengthening **child protection systems** at the local level are often the first line of defence in safeguarding children's rights. Children can be victims, witnesses, as well as perpetrators of violence, starting from their own homes, in school, in leisure and

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

recreational activities, offline as well as online. Experiencing violence in childhood may have long-life consequences. Promoting a culture of zero-tolerance for violence against children requires to close the gap between international standards, political commitments, and action and to mobilise all relevant actors at the local level. Cities must identify and support at-risk children through schools, health services, and social care, while ensuring cooperation with national agencies and civil society to prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Expected outcome

During the Social Innovation Lab, participants will have the opportunity to exchange ideas, share practices, and learn from each other about applying innovative tools to mitigate the urban challenges faced by children and youth. Through co-creation and discussion, participants will build innovative solutions and alternative municipal measures such as policies, projects, and approaches. Eurocities will then use the outcomes of these discussions to collect good practices and showcase the strong role that cities play in the social inclusion and empowerment of children.

Programme overview

DAY 1 – Wednesday 5 November	afternoon	Policy updates Official opening session Learning Labs Informal dinner
DAY 2 – Thursday 6 November	morning	Co-creation workshops
	afternoon	Site visits Marketplace Official dinner
DAY 3 – Friday, 7 November	morning	Expert panel Focus groups Closing session

Contacts:

Eurocities	Solène Molard	solene.molard@eurocities.eu	+32 491 39 38 64
	Henriett Horváth	henriett.horvath@eurocities.eu	+32 491 26 94 98
	Aizhan Mamyrkhanova	aizhan.mamyrkhanova@eurocities.eu	+32 2 552 08 78
Ljubljana	Katja Mežnar	katja.meznar@ljubljana.si	+38 61 306 4054
	Eva Kreslin	evaskreslin@malaulica.si	+38 41 56 56 39

Moderator: Mojca Delač, radio journalist

Journalist and presenter on a national radio station, she uses her background in social and applied psychology to discuss and analyse neuroscience during her show [*Možgani na dlani*](#).

Programme

DAY 1 – Wednesday, 5 November 2025

Venue: Center Rog, Trubarjeva 72 1000 Ljubljana

13.00 - 14.00	Registrations Please don't forget to <u>sign</u> the participation lists.	
13.30 – 14.00	Policy updates Hear about the latest updates that connect to social affairs with the work of cities on children and young people. During this meeting we will share information on the next EU budget, the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.	
14.00 – 14.30	Opening session • Boštjan Koritnik, Deputy Mayor, Ljubljana • Danijela Dolenec, Vice Chair of the Social Affairs Forum & Deputy Mayor, Zagreb (tbc) • Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic, Director, DG EMPL, European Commission (tbc)	
14.30 – 15.00	Keynote speech – Integrated services and multidisciplinary teams Children facing multiple disadvantages (poverty, malnutrition, substandard housing, health and mental health issues, violence etc.) cannot be effectively supported through isolated interventions. The integrated delivery of the municipal services targeting these issues ensures that these services reinforce each other rather than remain siloed. One option for this is to create multidisciplinary teams which bring together professionals from diverse fields under a shared objective. Integrated specialist input through these teams can improve access to services and care, minimising unnecessary repetition and in the case of abuse, re-traumatisation. • Mateja Hudoklin, Director of The Counselling Centre for Children, Adolescents and Parents, Ljubljana • Child representative from Ljubljana	
15.00 – 15.30	Coffee break	

15.30 – 17.30	Learning Labs Interactive session designed to equip city officials with practical skills, new insights, and actionable strategies to tackle urban challenges. These sessions provide a collaborative space where participants can exchange ideas, explore best practices, and engage with experts on key policy areas and offer a hands-on approach to understanding and applying innovative solutions in city governance. Participants can choose to attend one of the parallel Learning Labs.		
	GREEN – Child poverty: Localising the EU Child Guarantee with Eurochild Almost one in four children in the EU are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This workshop will focus on how cities can translate the EU Child Guarantee into integrated local solutions: from providing nutritious meals, healthcare, and housing to supporting parents through family services and direct assistance. Participants will share challenges and strategies to break cycles of poverty and ensure equal opportunities for every child. Hosted by Francesca Pisanu, EU Advocacy Officer, Eurochild	YELLOW – Integrated Child Protection Systems by UNICEF Europe How can cities ensure that every child grows up safe from harm? This workshop will look at practical approaches to safeguarding, prevention, and child protection policies, with a focus on building integrated child protection systems that connect schools, health services, social workers, and communities. The workshop will help cities design effective systems to identify risks early, protect children from abuse and neglect, and build trust with families. Participants will exchange local practices and explore how to turn policies into action. Hosted by Stela Grigoraș, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia	BLUE – Inclusive Classrooms: Supporting Children with Special Needs through Teacher Training and Community Practice with the City of Ljubljana How can cities strengthen support for children with special needs through inclusive education, teacher training, and community-based practices? The Educational Centre Pika will present both the principles of inclusion and practical approaches to implementing them in everyday teaching. Participants will gain insights into how inclusive schools can promote not only academic success, but also children's mental health, social integration, and well-being. Through case-based group work, participants will reflect on dilemmas such as whether a child with developmental delay is best supported in a mainstream or specialised school setting. Hosted by Matej Rovšek and Sara Marn, Centre Janeza Levca, Educational Centre Pika, Ljubljana

SOCIAL EVENT		
19.30 – 22.00	Informal Dinner (at own costs) List of recommended restaurants in the practical information	

DAY 2 – Thursday, 6 November 2025			
Venue: Center Rog, Trubarjeva 72 1000 Ljubljana			
9.00 – 9.30	Registration Please don't forget to <u>sign</u> the participation lists.		
9.30 – 12.30	Co-creation Workshops <i>Including a coffee break</i> Co-creation workshops offer participants the opportunity to work on solutions to real life complex social challenges presented by selected cities. The workshops will consist of guided interactive step-by-step process aiming at creating targeted solutions to a specific case study, representative of issues faced by many cities. Cities interested to present a co-creation challenge can apply by sending this form to henriett.horvath@eurocities.eu and solene.molard@eurocities.eu by 6 October . Participants can choose to attend one of the parallel workshops.		
	GREEN - City challenge on child poverty You can apply for hosting this workshop.	YELLOW – Challenge on preventing and addressing bullying in schools Hosted by Ljubljana	BLUE - City challenge on children's health You can apply for hosting this workshop.
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch Break		

13.30 – 14.00	Transfer to site visits			
14.00 – 16.00	Site visits Participants can choose to attend one site visit. <i>More info on each site visit at the end of the document.</i>			
	GREEN - Flying Dragons: Mobile and Community-Based Youth Work in Ljubljana	YELLOW - Family Centre Mala Ulica	BLUE - Mental Health Centre for Children and Adolescents and LogOut Centre for Digital Wellbeing	
16.00 – 16.45	Transfer back to the venue and coffee break			 
16.45 – 17.30	Market place Exchange with city-representatives about the challenges presented during the parallel co-creation workshops. Learn more about the challenges of the workshops you couldn't join and hear about the inspiring suggestions that were drafted during the workshops.			
SOCIAL EVENT Venue: Ljubljanski grad – Ljubljana Castle, Grajska planota 1, Ljubljana				
19.30 – 22.00	Official Dinner Offered by the Municipality of Ljubljana			

DAY 3 – Friday, 7 November 2025

Venue: Center Rog, Trubarjeva 72 1000 Ljubljana

8:30 – 9.00	Registration 
9.00 – 10.30	Expert panel: Investing in Professionals - Strengthening child services through innovation, community, and multidisciplinary teams Cities across Europe have been facing staff shortages in the social and care sectors serving children. This plenary session will explore innovative ways to strengthen existing teams, invest in training, mentoring, and leadership development, and make these professions more attractive long term. This line of work is hard and requires constant training in multiple fields. Children often present with various challenges in different settings: a child might show early signs of mental health struggles in kindergarten or indicators of neglect or maltreatment at an after-school community event. This makes multidisciplinary teams and a strong community of professionals essential so that teachers, social workers, health staff, and community actors can all recognise early warning signs, offer initial support, and bring in the right professionals to address complex problems. Participants will discuss how to maximise impact despite limited human resources across European cities, promote cross-sector collaboration, and involve both professional and non-professional actors to provide holistic, coordinated care for children. Speakers will showcase local innovations such as mentoring schemes, leadership training, and recruitment initiatives alongside the EU's policy initiative on skills, which aims to improve teacher quality, career prospects, professional development, and well-being while addressing digital skills and modern classroom challenges. By highlighting both the professional expertise needed within services and the role of communities in prevention and support, the discussion will give participants concrete ideas on how to strengthen local child services while building long-term capacity across Europe. • Alfonso Lara-Montero, Chief Executive Officer, European Social Network (tbc) • Eva Kreslin, Director, Mala Ulica Public Institution - Centre for Children and Families, Ljubljana • Märta Lindqvist Weddig, Project Manager of the New Recruits Project, Gothenburg • Anica Mikuš Kos, Leading expert on children mental health, Ljubljana
10.30-11.00	Coffee Break 

11.00 – 12.30	Focus group on the Implementation of the Child Guarantee For the City Trends Paper the SAF team is writing, the participants will be asked to talk about their challenges implementing the Child Guarantee at the local level and what kind of support they would require.
12.30 - 13.00	Closing session • Boštjan Koritnik, Deputy Mayor, Ljubljana
13.00 – 15.30	WG Children and Young people business meeting lunch 

Site visits – DAY 2, 6 November, 14.00 to 16.00

1. Greentrack: Flying Dragons – Mobile and community-based youth work in Ljubljana

This two-part study visit offers an in-depth look at both outreach and centre-based approaches to youth engagement through Flying Dragons, an innovative youth outreach programme in Ljubljana that brings creative, flexible, and inclusive activities directly to neighbourhoods with limited access to structured youth programmes. Participants will first explore the Mobile Youth Centre Ljuba & Drago and its street-based youth work approach, learning how the team designs co-created activities – from art workshops to peer-led projects – and tailors them to the needs and ideas of local young people.

The second part takes place at Youth Centre Zalog, where participants will see how a community-based centre builds long-term partnerships with schools, associations, and youth themselves to foster participation, creativity, and inclusion.

2. Yellow track: Mala Ulica

Mala Ulica (Little Street) is the first family centre in Slovenia, opened in 2013. Designed with children's needs in mind, the centre offers a creative and safe environment. Open daily, including weekends and holidays, it welcomes over 36,000 visitors each year and has quickly become a vital meeting point for young families in Ljubljana.

The centre hosts daily creative workshops, storytelling sessions, and weekend programmes for children, as well as morning activities for parents – from baby massage to post-birth exercise classes and parenting discussions. Since 2014, Mala Ulica has also offered The Incredible Years programme, an evidence-based initiative supporting children's social, emotional, and academic development while helping parents manage behavioural challenges. It is an internationally recognised prevention and support programme for parents, professionals and children. It focuses on strengthening positive parenting approaches, improving family relationships and promoting children's emotional and social development. In Mala Ulica prevention activities such as parenting support, individual and group counselling for parents as well as learning social skills and emotional literacy, especially for children with multiple needs or from vulnerable families, are offered for free and in short time.

Mala Ulica is also the largest provider of holiday care in Ljubljana, enabling children who would otherwise be left to fend for themselves to spend their holidays carefree. During school holidays, it runs summer day camps at multiple locations across the city. The holiday care is free for vulnerable children and with small participation from others. Participants will explore the centre, learn about its programmes, and actively join an Incredible Years workshop.

3. Blue track: Mental Health Centre for Children and Adolescents and LogOut Centre for Digital Wellbeing

Mental well-being is an important part of general health, as both physical and mental health affect the way we think, experience, feel and act. This study visit offers a presentation on assistance/support for children and adolescents who are facing mental distress and excessive use or addiction to electronic devices.

Mental Health Centre for Children and Adolescents offers comprehensive and accessible professional help to children, adolescents and families. Centre provides support and treatment, support to family members, programmes for parents and guardians, counselling and education, one-to-one and group psychotherapy.

LogOut is a support centre for the prevention of excessive internet use. Its mission is to improve the digital well-being of all people especially youngsters by providing treatment, help, information, education, and raising awareness on balanced and healthy use of media and technology.