



Digital Forum 2026



Fostering a People-Centred Digital Tomorrow

15-17 April 2026

Welcome to the Eurocities Digital Forum in Sofia!

Whether in the digital world or on the political stage, we are living in challenging realities. Once again, cities are called upon to act as crucial anchors of stability and decency, trusted by our citizens. More than ever, as cities, we want to work together to ensure that the values of democracy, the rule of law, and human dignity are safeguarded – both online and offline.

We invite you to join us on **April 15-17** for the **2026 Eurocities Digital Forum**, hosted by **Sofia Municipality**, for three days of dialogue and innovation, high-level discussions, hands-on workshops, collaborative sessions, and inspiring site visits, focusing on fostering and safeguarding a people-centred digital transformation in an increasingly connected world. From participatory governance and digital rights to data spaces, local digital twins, cybersecurity and other innovative urban solutions, the Forum will explore the role of cities in advancing an inclusive, resilient and sustainable digital future.

We would like to also invite you to the **Living-in.EU Digital Assembly 2026** “*Key Technologies for Future-Proof Cities: From Data Spaces to Digital Twins*”, which will take place on the sidelines of the **Eurocities Digital Forum 2026** on **15 April 2026**, between **9:30 – 12:30 EET**. For more information, please check [here](#).

Why Join Us?

- Connect with leading European cities, policymakers, and peers from all over Europe
- Share best practices, and explore together challenges and opportunities in digital transformation
- Contribute to shaping Eurocities’ advocacy towards the EU institutions
- Experience Sofia’s dynamic digital and innovative ecosystem

Programme Highlights

Day 1 – Policy Summit: “Digital Democracy: Citizens, Policy, and Participation”

- High-level political discussions on cities’ role in advancing people-centred digital tomorrow
- Strategic dialogue on leveraging data spaces to enhance citizen-centric urban services
- Interactive exchanges on how digital tools and innovations can enhance city services and contribute to higher quality of urban life
- Keynote speeches from European institutional leaders

Day 2 – Technical Innovation & Collaboration: “People, Policies, and Technologies”

- Exclusive breakfast session for CIOs

- Workshops hosted by the Digital Forum Working Groups:
 - Data,
 - Foresight
 - Digital Citizenship
- Sessions hosted by the Digital Forum Lab and the Cybersecurity Community of Practice
- Guided tour: “Discover Sofia: A Journey Through Time”

Day 3 – Collaboration for a Sustainable Digital Future: Real-World Application

- Site visits to GATE Institute – the first Centre of Excellence in Big Data and AI in Eastern Europe, and Sofia Tech Park – home to the Discoverer petascale supercomputer
- Meet with representatives of the local startup and innovation ecosystem
- Digital Forum Business Meeting: look back on the main highlights of the event and discuss upcoming Digital Forum activities

Join the Conversation

Together, we will explore how cities can lead the way in facilitating and ensuring a people-centred digital and sustainable future. We will work to advocate for stronger support at EU level, exchange on how to scale up successful examples of city action, and promote the smart cities of tomorrow. Our discussions will result in actionable strategies for implementing people-centred digital transformation across European cities.

Join us and bring your city’s perspective and experience!

Programme overview

Day 1: Digital Democracy: Citizens, Policy, and Participation		
Wednesday 15 April	Morning	Living-in.EU Digital Assembly <i>not a part of the official programme of the Forum (open to non-Eurocities participants, covered by Living-in.EU) Lunch (offered by Living-in.EU)</i>
Wednesday 15 April	Afternoon	Newcomers’ session Steering Committee meeting (invitation-only) Opening session Plenary Session Dialogue Afternoon Parallel Sessions + Political track
	Evening	Formal Dinner
Day 2: People, Policies and Technologies		
Thursday 16 April	Morning	Parallel sessions: CIO Breakfast Club (<i>invitation-only</i>) Parallel workshops hosted by the Digital Forum Working Groups
	Afternoon	Digital Forum Lab and Cybersecurity Community of Practice Showcase
	Evening	Historical Sofia Tour Informal dinner
Day 3: Collaboration for a Sustainable Digital Future – Real-World Application		
Friday 17 April	Morning	Sofia Tech Park site visit Gate Institute site visit Forum closing remarks

Please note that all times are in Eastern European Summer Time (EEST, UTC+3) and one hour ahead of Central European Summer Time (CEST, UTC+2)

Contacts

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Agenda

Living-in.EU Digital Assembly* Wednesday, 15 April 2026 Venue: Grand Hotel Millennium Sofia (Ivan Vazov, Vitosha Blvd 89B, 1463 Sofia, Bulgaria) <i>*not a part of the official programme of the Forum; open to non-Eurocities participants, covered by Living-in.EU</i>	
09:30 – 09:45	Living-in.EU Digital Assembly Welcome Remarks Welcome remarks by the co-chairs of the Living-in.EU Digital Assembly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ivan Goychev, Deputy Mayor for Digitalisation and Information Systems, Sofia • Emilio Morillas Moreno, City Councillor for Innovation and EU projects, Sant Boi de Llobregat
09:45 – 10:00	Keynote speech The introductory keynote speech will set the scene for the Living-in.EU Digital Assembly, focusing on the EU’s strategic perspective on digital transformation. The speech will explore the EU’s key priority areas in advancing European digital technology, as the EU transitions from the current funding period to the next EU budget, and how the European Commission aims to support cities and regions in developing and using digital solutions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark Smitham, Policy Officer, AI for Societal Good, AI Office, European Commission
10:00 – 11:00	Political debate: Key technologies for future-proof cities The political debate will focus on how to identify the needs and challenges that cities and regions are facing and the right technology for addressing those needs. Following a welcome by the co-Chairs of the Assembly and a keynote speech, local leaders will explore how to link the development of digital solutions to the political priorities of the city. They will discuss topics such as data governance, prioritising investments, strategies to identify the most effective solutions, while ensuring the digital rights of citizens. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ivan Goychev, Deputy Mayor for Digitalisation and Information Systems, Sofia • Emilio Morillas Moreno, City Councillor for Innovation and EU projects, Sant Boi de Llobregat • Felix Sproll, City councillor, Munich • Szabolcs Szilveszter, Deputy Mayor, Târgu Secuiesc Moderator: André Sobczak , Secretary General, Eurocities
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee Break
11:30 – 12:30	Panel discussion: Best practices from cities As cities are working to prepare for and adapt to climate change, they are increasingly using digital twins as part of their climate resilience strategies: Virtual models of the city based on real-time data allow local governments to simulate climate impact and test strategies to adapt to heatwaves and floods, or to manage energy grids, green spaces and low emission zones. However, digital twins rely on high-quality data, which requires collaboration from a complex network of stakeholders. <p>In this session, experts from cities will share examples on implementing data platforms, data spaces and digital twins to become more resilient to climate change, as an overarching challenge that covers environmental, mobility, and social aspects. Following an introduction to the EU digital twins landscape and the digital maturity of local administration, cities will present their use cases about digital twins for climate adaptation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jochem Cooman, Digital innovation officer, Rotterdam

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nadja Riedel, Deputy Head Smart City Unit, Leipzig • Vesna Baltina, Deputy Mayor for strategic development, environment, digitalisation and climate adaptation, Burgas • Dessislava Petrova-Antonova, Research Lead Digital Twins, GATE • Sophie Meszaros, Interoperability Strategy Lead, OASC <p>Moderator: Jordi Ortuno Ribé, Innovation manager, City of Barcelona; Co-Chair of the LDT Citiverse EDIC</p>
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch (hosted by Living-in.EU)

<p align="center">Eurocities Digital Forum Meeting 2026 Day 1: Wednesday, 15 April 2026 <i>“Digital Democracy: Citizens, Policy, and Participation”</i> Venue: Grand Hotel Millennium Sofia (Ivan Vazov, Vitosha Blvd 89B, 1463 Sofia, Bulgaria)</p>			
13:30 – 14:00	<p>Registration</p> <p>Participants will be able to collect their badge in the lobby. The badge will be valid for all three days of the event.</p>	<p>Newcomer Session – Eurocities members only <i>Room: Newton, 2nd floor</i></p> <p>First time attending the Digital Forum? In this session, participants can gain a deeper understanding of Eurocities’ organisational structure and learn about the advantages of being a member. They will learn about the thematic areas of the Digital Forum and the different opportunities that offers for its members. Additionally, the session will provide a space for participants to engage in discussion with Eurocities’ team and voice specific needs and interests of their cities.</p> <p>Chiara Gonzi, Events Coordinator, Eurocities</p>	<p>Digital Forum Steering Committee Meeting (Steering Committee members only) <i>Room: Nobel, ground floor</i></p>
14:00 – 14:15	<p>Digital Forum Welcome <i>Room: Main Ballroom, 2nd floor</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ivan Goychev, Deputy Mayor for Digitalisation and Information Systems, Sofia Municipality • Johanna Laisaari, Deputy Mayor for Urban Environment, Vice-Chair of the Digital Forum, Helsinki (video) • André Sobczak, Secretary General, Eurocities <p>Master of Ceremony: Alexander Katzarski, Expert at the Digitalisation and Innovation Directorate, Sofia</p>		
14:15 – 15:00	<p>Political Dialogue – “People-Centred Digitalisation through Participatory Governance” <i>Room: Main Ballroom, 2nd floor</i></p> <p>Setting the scene of the Digital Form 2026</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ivan Goychev, Deputy Mayor for Digitalisation and Information Systems, Sofia • Johanna Laisaari, Deputy Mayor for Urban Environment of Helsinki, Vice-Chair of the Digital Forum • André Sobczak, Secretary General, Eurocities • Pavel Ivanov, Executive Director, Bulgarian Institute of Public Administration <p>Moderator: Sophie Woodville, Digital Program Manager, Bordeaux Métropole, Eurocities Digital Forum Technical Chair</p>		
15:00 – 15:30	Group Photo & Coffee Break		

<p>15:30 – 17:00</p>	<p>Data Spaces for Citizen-Centric Urban Services <i>Room: Newton, 2nd floor</i></p> <p>This interactive session will present concrete case studies and best practices from cities deploying federated data spaces to enhance their public services, while fully safeguarding data sovereignty.</p> <p>Participants will share insights on emerging approaches and lessons learned, and exchange perspectives on how data spaces can unlock smarter, more citizen-centric urban solutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jordi Ortuno Ribé, Innovation manager, City of Barcelona; Co-Chair of the LDT Citiverse EDIC • Arnis Gulbis, Director of Riga Digital Agency, Riga • Zuzana Šefčík Aschenbrennerová, Digital Twin Coordinator, Bratislava • Ari Saine, Smart City Manager, Oulu • Timo Sillander, Technology Director, Forum Virium, Helsinki <p>Moderator: Ljubo Georgiev, Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning and Development, Sofia</p>	<p>Digital Solutions to Improve City Services and Quality of Urban Life <i>Room: Main Ballroom, 2nd floor</i></p> <p>This interactive session will explore how digital tools and innovations can enhance city services and contribute to more inclusive, efficient, and citizen-responsive urban environments.</p> <p>Through practical examples and peer discussions, it will provide a platform for representatives of cities and the European institutions to exchange on challenges, opportunities, and best practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yordanka Chobanova, Head of the Representation in Bulgaria, European Commission • Ana Carneiro, CEO and Board Member, Porto Digital • Anni Orttenvuori-Ganter, Lead Data and Knowledge Architect, Espoo • Sofia Yovcheva, Junior Expert, Projects and Digitalisation Policies Department, Sofia • Valery Buchinsky, Author and Maintainer of OboApp • Boyan Yurukov, Open Data and Transparency Advocate, Founder of GovAlert.eu <p>Moderator: Joro Penchev, Policy and Tech Development Lead, Team Sofia (Ekipat na Sofia)</p>	<p>For Political Representatives only: High-level Political Meeting <i>Room: Nobel, 1st floor</i></p> <p>This high-level political meeting will bring together political representatives to foster discussion and collaboration on strategic aspects shaping Europe’s rapidly evolving digital transformation.</p> <p>The session will provide space for participants to exchange views on key digital policy priorities, reflect on shared challenges and opportunities, and explore strategic actions to strengthen cities’ voices in EU digital policymaking.</p> <p>Moderator: André Sobczak, Secretary General, Eurocities</p>
<p>Social event</p> <p>Venue: Grand Hotel Millennium Sofia (Ivan Vazov, Vitosha Blvd 89B, 1463 Sofia, Bulgaria)</p>			
<p>20:00– 22:00</p>	<p>Official Dinner <i>Room: Main Ballroom</i></p> <p>Hosted by Sofia Municipality, featuring local cultural experiences. Dress code is casual.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People of Eurocities 		

Day 2: Thursday, 16 April 2026

"People, Policies, and Technologies"

Venue: Grand Hotel Millennium Sofia (Ivan Vazov, Vitosha Blvd 89B, 1463 Sofia, Bulgaria)

<p>09:00 – 10:00</p>	<p>CIO Breakfast Club (invitation-only) <i>Room: Einstein 1, 2nd floor</i></p> <p>This session will bring together CIOs from European cities to provide a platform for fostering strategic discussion and collaboration, exchanging insights, discussing common challenges, and exploring emerging trends in digital transformation, innovation, and people-centred digital governance.</p> <p>Chair: Ivan Goychev, Deputy Mayor for Digitalisation and Information Systems of Sofia Municipality</p>		
<p>09:30 – 10:00</p>	<p>Registrations & Coffee Participants will be able to collect their badge once they arrive at the main venue.</p>		
<p>10:00 – 12:30</p> <p>Coffee break between 11:15 – 11:45</p>	<p>Workshop hosted by Working Group Data <i>Room: Einstein 2, 2nd floor</i></p> <p>As cities navigate a fast-evolving technological landscape shaped by generative AI and emerging data spaces, many are moving from experimentation to real-world deployment. In this context, WG Data will host an interactive two-part session: cities will have the opportunity to contribute to the development of a common AI Implementation Framework, to support the development of effective, ethical and legally compliant solutions, and participate in an open exchange on key trends, opportunities and challenges represented by the roll-out of AI technologies and the relevant data needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pau Balcells, WG Data Chair; Program Manager, Municipal Data Office, Barcelona • Pieter-Jan Pauwels, WG Data Vice-Chair; AI Program Manager and International Policy Advisor – District09, Ghent • Ari Saine, WG Data Vice-Chair; Smart City Manager, Business Oulu, Oulu • Arnis Gulbis, WG Data Vice-Chair; Director of Riga Digital Agency, & Alekss Vecvanags, Data Analyst, Riga Digital Agency • Sophie Meszaros, Interoperability Strategy Lead, OASC 	<p>Workshop hosted by Working Group Digital Citizenship <i>Room: Newton, 2nd floor</i></p> <p>This interactive workshop will explore the implications of AI for digital citizenship, wellbeing and participation in cities. As AI-driven systems increasingly shape online environments, public services and everyday decision-making, cities are navigating questions of trust, inclusion, safety and skills. Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on key AI trends and exchange on how AI skills can strengthen civic capacity, support ethical and inclusive approaches, and contribute to safer, fairer and more human-centred digital transformation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anni Orttenvuori-Ganter, Lead Data and Knowledge Architect, Espoo • Sophie Woodville, Digital Program Manager, Bordeaux Métropole, Technical Chair of the Digital Forum • Pavel Ivanov, Executive Director, Bulgarian Institute of Public Administration and Tanya Ivanova-Chikova, "Training, International Activities and Projects" Directorate, Bulgarian Institute of Public Administration • Nadja Riedel, Deputy Head Smart City Unit, Leipzig • Daniel Stendahl, EU Development Officer, Linköping • Michael Stam, Senior Policy Advisor European Affairs, The Hague <p>Moderated by Pedro Campos Ponce, WG Digital Citizenship Chair; Coordinator Team EU & International, Amsterdam & Sherelle Fairweather, WG Digital Citizenship Vice-Chair; Digital Strategy Lead, Manchester</p>	<p>Workshop hosted by Working Group Foresight <i>Room: Da Vinci 1, 3rd floor</i></p> <p>Join WG Foresight in Sofia for an energizing workshop, where we will explore together the key developments shaping the digital future of cities and learn how to navigate uncertainty with explorative scenario planning. Discover how futures thinking can strengthen your city's strategic edge and inspire smarter long-term decision-making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jochem Cooman, WG Foresight Co-Chair; Innovation Officer, City of Rotterdam • Tanguy De Lestré, WG Foresight Co-Chair; Advisor Innovation & Smart City, Paradigm Brussels, Brussels Capital Region

12:30 – 14:00	Lunch break
14:00 – 15:00	<p>Digital Forum Lab and Cybersecurity Community of Practice showcase <i>Room: Einstein 1 & 2, floor 2</i></p> <p>The Lab and Cybersecurity Community of Practice (CoP) are two member-driven formats for knowledge exchange and joint work within the Digital Forum. This session will provide members with the opportunity to learn about the latest developments around the cybersecurity conversation, the Lab proposals for this year, and to ask any questions to the Lab Ambassadors and leaders of the Cybersecurity CoP.</p> <p>Part 1 of the session is dedicated to the Lab: the Ambassadors introduce the Lab work and concept, followed by presentations from the two cities that have pitched an idea for the 2026 edition. Part 2 is dedicated to the Cybersecurity CoP, whose leaders briefly introduce the work done so far and the priorities that they propose for joint work during the year. Each part includes a Q&A for members’ questions and comments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wim de Kinderen, Co-Chair of the Digital Forum Lab; Programme Director European Affairs, Brainport Eindhoven EU Office • Chiara Venturini, Head of Digital Transformation and Economic Development, Eurocities
16:30 – 19:00	<p>Historical Tour of Sofia: “Discover Sofia: A Journey Through Time” <i>Meeting point: Grand Hotel Millenium Sofia</i></p> <p>Step into the heart of Bulgaria’s vibrant capital and uncover Sofia’s fascinating layers of history. From ancient Roman ruins to stunning Orthodox churches, Sofia offers a unique blend of past and present. Wander through cobblestone streets lined with neoclassical buildings, explore centuries-old landmarks and hear the stories that shaped this remarkable city. Highlights of the tour include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Alexander Nevsky Cathedral – A masterpiece of architecture and one of the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedrals in the world. • The Roman City of Serdica – Walk among the remains of the ancient city of Serdica that tell the tale of Sofia’s Roman origins. • The National Palace of Culture & Vitosha Boulevard – Discover the city’s modern pulse alongside its deep history. <p>Join us on this journey to experience Sofia not just as a city, but as a living chronicle of culture, history and present.</p> <p><i>Please note that there will be a bus bringing attendees from Grand Hotel Millenium to the first stop of the walking tour. The last stop of the tour will be the venue of the Informal Dinner.</i></p>
<p>Social event</p> <p>Venue: Sofia City Art Gallery, Gen. Gurko street N1, 1000 Sofia (entrance from Knyaz Al. Batenberg street)</p>	
19:00 – 21:30	<p>Informal Dinner</p> <p>Hosted by the Sofia Municipality. Join fellow participants for an evening of networking and more! Dress code is business casual.</p>

Eurocities Digital Forum Meeting 2026

Day 3: Friday, 17 April 2026

“Collaboration for a Sustainable Digital Future – Real-World Application”

Venues: Sofia Tech Park, GATE Institute

8:30 – 8:45	Meeting point for site visits : Grand Hotel Millenium Sofia	
8:45 – 9:15	Transfer to site visit (approximately 30 min)	
9:12 – 11:00	<p>Site Visit 1 Visiting GATE Institute – The Big Data for Smart Society Institute <i>Venue: GATE Institute, 5 James Bourchier Blvd., 1164 Sofia [Google Maps]</i></p> <p>The visit will start with a welcome from the GATE team and a brief introduction to the GATE Institute mission and research (Big Data for Smart Society), the first Centre of Excellence in Big Data and Artificial Intelligence in Eastern Europe, established in 2019.</p> <p>GATE’s planned programme will include presentations and live demonstrations showcasing the Institute’s expertise in AI, Digital Twins, data spaces, and data-intensive systems, and highlighting how these technologies are applied to real-world city challenges, offering a direct look at how data-driven solutions support smarter cities.</p>	<p>Site Visit 2 Visiting Sofia Tech Park – the first science and technology park in Bulgaria <i>Venue: Sofia Tech Park, 111 Tsarigradsko shose Blvd., 1784 Sofia [Google Maps]</i></p> <p>Sofia Tech Park is the first science and technology park in Bulgaria. It focuses on key areas such as information technologies, life sciences, and green energy. The Park brings together interconnected units that work in synergy to support innovation, technology development, scientific research, and entrepreneurship.</p> <p>The visit will start with a tour of key facilities, including the Supercomputer and selected laboratories, followed by meetings with representatives of the local startup and innovation ecosystem. It will also showcase how the Park’s units work together to support research, technology development, and entrepreneurship.</p>
11:00 – 11:30	Transfer to Gate Institute for all & Coffee break <i>Participants who are already at GATE Institute will have a slightly longer site visit. All the participants will gather at GATE for the Business meeting/closing session.</i>	
11:30 – 12:30	<p>Digital Forum Business Meeting <i>Venue: GATE Institute</i></p> <p>This session will look back on the main outcomes of the event, and how they will inform the work of the Digital Forum for the remainder of 2026. We will also discuss the forthcoming activities and opportunities for Digital Forum members, highlighting the key insights, takeaways and best practices that cities can bring back home, and how the inspiring discussions from the three days will help us refine our advocacy messages for the new European Commission and Parliament.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key takeaways and next steps • Forthcoming activities and opportunities for Digital Forum members • Next Digital Forum – call for hosts 2027 • Closing words from the Forum Chair, Vice-Chair, and Host City 	

The official programme of the Digital Forum 2026 will conclude at 12:30