

# Social Affairs Forum 2026

## Bridging generations: Cities driving inclusive work and skills for all

5-7 May 2026

### Background

The 2026 Social Affairs Forum in Gijón will focus on **Bridging generations: Cities driving inclusive work and skills for all**. The Forum will explore how cities can shape the future of work to be inclusive, sustainable, and family-friendly, ensuring that all residents can access opportunities and thrive in changing labour markets. Rapid technological change, demographic transitions, and new social expectations are reshaping the labour market. Cities must adapt by supporting parents to balance work and family life, creating opportunities for workers of all ages, gender or socioeconomic backgrounds, tackling workplace exclusion, and ensuring that vulnerable groups can access lifelong education, training and employment pathways.

Discussions will highlight how employment and skills policies can address social inclusion at every stage of life:

- **Cities as employers (Union of Skills):** Addressing staff shortages, talent attraction and enhancing the attractiveness of public sector work.
- **Working-age adults:** Advancing fair employment with adequate wages, ensuring diversity and inclusion at the workplace, enabling good work-life balance, through affordable and accessible **childcare** and family-friendly, **gender-responsive employment** policies, with a focus on **single parents**. This includes ensuring access to training and upskilling opportunities within jobs, particularly for workers with caring responsibilities.
- **Young people:** Ensuring access to **training, upskilling** and **reskilling** pathways, as well as entry-level job opportunities and fair and quality internships, while addressing the growing difficulties young people face when entering the labour market. This also includes second-chance **education** and **training** for adults who left education early.
- **Anti-poverty strategies and tackling in-work poverty:** A cross-cutting policy priority underpinning all the above areas and particularly acute in urban contexts. It requires coordinated action across services, including employment, skills recognition, wage-setting, access to **affordable housing**, skills development and social protection policies, as well as access to affordable, quality **care services**. Addressing in-work poverty also means recognising the role of paid and unpaid care work in shaping

labour market participation and career progression, particularly for **women** and people with a **migration background**, and taking into account its intersection with multiple vulnerabilities.

Against Gijón's tradition of innovation, social inclusion, and community engagement, the Forum will combine keynotes, co-creation workshops, site visits, and networking opportunities to co-design pathways for an inclusive future of work in Europe.

## Programme overview

DAY 1	morning	SAF Steering Committee meeting   Newcomer session   SAF Business meeting
	afternoon	Opening session   Keynote speech   Parallel workshops   Informal dinner
DAY 2	morning	Panel Session   Learning Labs Directors of Social Services roundtable   High-level meeting with Politicians
	afternoon	Site visits   Official dinner
DAY 3	morning	Focus group on skills   Parallel co-creation workshops

Please note that all times are Central European Time (CET)

## Contacts

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## Agenda

<b>DAY 1 – Tuesday 5 May 2026</b> Venue: Laboral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial Los Prados, 121, Periurbano - Rural, 33203 Gijón, Asturias, Spain	
<b>09:30</b>	<b>Registration</b> Participants will collect their badge in the lobby. The badge will be valid for all the days of the event. <b>Please don't forget to <u>sign</u> the participation lists.</b>
<b>10:00 – 11:00</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 65%;"> <b>Newcomer's session (Eurocities members only)</b>  <i>Room: Aula Formacion</i>            First time attending the Social Affairs Forum? This session is for you! 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 Social Affairs Forum and the different opportunities that it offers for its members. Additionally, this session will provide a space for participants to engage in discussion with Eurocities' team and voice specific needs and interests of their cities.         </div> <div style="width: 30%; background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 5px;"> <b>SAF Steering Committee meeting (steering group members only)</b>  <i>Room: Biblioteca</i> </div> </div>
<b>11:00 – 12:45</b>	<b>Social Affairs Forum Business meeting (Eurocities members only)</b> <i>Room: Plató</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet the new SAF team</li> <li>Eurocities policy and advocacy update</li> <li>Forthcoming activities and opportunities for Eurocities members (Next Social Affairs Forum)</li> <li>Working Groups updates</li> </ul>
<b>12:45-14:00</b>	<b>Lunch break</b>
<b>14:15 – 14:35</b>	<b>Official welcome</b> <i>Room: Plató</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome remarks by <b>Ángela Pumariega</b>, Vice-Mayor, Gijon</li> <li>Welcome remarks by <b>Myriam Bencharaa</b>, Vice-president for General Administration, Human Resources and Industrial Relations, and European Affairs, Lyon Metropole</li> </ul>
<b>14:35 – 15:00</b>	<b>Political keynote</b> <i>Room: Plató</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Susana Solís Perez</b>, Member of the European Parliament</li> </ul>
<b>15:00-15:30</b>	<b>Coffee break</b>
<b>15:30-17:00</b>	<b>Parallel workshops – Co-learning workshops</b>

	<p><b>1. Inclusive employment for people facing barriers to labour market participation - The Hague</b>  <i>Room: Aula Escuela</i>          How can cities better support individuals facing structural barriers to employment? Join this workshop to learn from the city of The Hague, home to a vibrant ecosystem of social impact and innovation initiatives. Through its municipal InnovationLab, the city coordinates and supports a range of inspiring pilot projects that test new approaches to inclusion and employment. One such initiative is the Entrepreneurs’ Testing Ground. This neighbourhood-based, two-year pilot operates in an area affected by persistent socio-economic inequalities and long-term unemployment. By creating a protected entrepreneurial environment, the project supports residents impacted by poverty and social exclusion to develop and test entrepreneurial activities in a safe and structured way. The workshop explores concrete pilot examples developed by the city to implement innovative, place-based solutions to structural barriers to employment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Rutger Schoenmakers</b>, Strategic policy advisor &amp; <b>Marja Pelzer</b>, Innovation manager, The Hague</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Family-oriented services for (single) parents and informal caregivers to access employment - Gijón</b>  <i>Room: Aula de Formación</i>          How can cities reduce care-related barriers to employment? Join this workshop to learn about Gijón’s 11x12 programme and how it supports residents balance work and family life. By keeping 16 schools open 11 hours a day for 12 months a year, the programme provides children with entertainment, cultural and sporting activities as well as schoolwork support. While supporting families’ work-life balance, initiative contributes to employment promotion pathways to guarantee the delivery of the services offered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Manuel Ángel Gonzalez Rodriguez</b>, Head of Promotion, Development and Innovation, Gijón &amp; <b>Alejandro González Lopez</b>, CEO, Vita Evans</li> </ul> <p><b>3. An age-sensitive job-first approach for people living with addictions - Gothenburg</b>  <i>Room: Chill-out</i>          How do cities adopt a generational approach to employment and age-centred labour market strategies? Join this workshop to learn more about Gothenburg’s low-threshold, job-focused approach for individual placement to foster labour market accessibility. The initiative, with a focus on vulnerable individuals with addiction and living in social-service housing, advances a flexible, ‘job-first’ perspective to accessing employment with a generational lens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Sanela Eminovic</b>, Project manager &amp; <b>Sofia Olsson Quist</b>, Development manager EU, Gothenburg</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social Event</b>  <b>Venue:</b> Sidrería Tierra Astur Poniente (C/ Mariano Pola, 10-14, 33212, Gijón, Asturias)</p>	
<p><b>20:00-22:00</b></p>	<p><b>Informal dinner (at own costs)</b></p> <p>Join fellow Eurocities members for an evening of food and networking at the typical <a href="#">Sidrería Tierra Astur Poniente</a>. Located on the promenade of Poniente Beach in Gijón, its interior is an authentic Asturian cider house.</p> <p>Please note that this evening is at participants own cost (around 30€ per person).</p>

## DAY 2 – Wednesday, 6 May 2026

Venue: Laboral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial  
Los Prados, 121, Periurbano - Rural, 33203 Gijón, Asturias, Spain

<p><b>9:00</b></p>	<p><b>Registration</b></p> <p>Participants will be able to collect their badge in the lobby. The badge will be valid for all the days of the event.</p> <p><b>Please don't forget to <u>sign</u> the participation lists.</b></p>
<p><b>9:25-9:30</b></p>	<p><b>Introduction: Adapting to a new world of work</b> <i>Room: Plató</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Alicia Homs Ginel</b>, Member of the European Parliament, Rapporteur of the Traineeships Directive – Video message from the plenary in Strasbourg</li> </ul>
<p><b>9:30 – 9:45</b></p>	<p><b>Keynote</b> <i>Room: Plató</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lukas Kleine-Rueschkamp</b>, Head of the Local Employment and Skills Unit, OECD</li> </ul>
<p><b>9:45 – 10:25</b></p>	<p><b>Panel debate - The role of cities in fostering and supporting quality employment</b> <i>Room: Plató</i></p> <p>The EU Quality Jobs Roadmap, building on the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, represents a key political commitment to promote fair wages, secure employment, safe working conditions, access to skills, and inclusive labour markets. Its success, however, will depend largely on effective implementation at local level.</p> <p>This panel will feature representatives from the EU institutions, a representative from the trade union movement, and a city representative. The panellists will discuss how cities can support the implementation of the quality jobs roadmap and set the scene for the later high-level meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ignacio Doreste</b>, Senior Advisor, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)</li> <li>• <b>Lieve De Bosscher</b>, Director of Childcare Services, City of Ghent</li> <li>• <b>Ann-Marie Soyinka</b>, Assistant Director for Skills and Employment Policy, City of London</li> <li>• <b>Lukas Kleine-Rueschkamp</b>, Head of the Local Employment and Skills Unit, OECD</li> </ul> <p>Moderated by <b>Nathalie Guri</b>, Project &amp; Knowledge Sharing Director, Eurocities</p>
<p><b>10:25 - 10:50</b></p>	<p><b>Coffee Break &amp; Group Photo</b></p>

<p><b>10:50 – 12.45</b></p>	<p><b>Parallel workshops – Learning Labs</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>1. Mainstreaming Diversity &amp; Inclusion training in the workforce – Porto</b>  <i>Room: Aula Escuela</i></p> <p>Join this Lab to learn from the city of Porto on their initiatives to support Diversity &amp; Inclusion training in employment pathways, with a specific focus on persons with disabilities. Through the presentation of a pilot initiative from the city on new methodologies for socio-professional inclusion and independent living, the session will foster interactive discussions how cities can contribute to help persons with disabilities enter career paths and strengthen their integration in the community while also supporting families and local stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Claudia Costa</b>, Head of the municipal division of social network management, &amp; <b>Filipa Rocha</b>, psychologist, Porto</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Social public procurement - Haarlem</b>  <i>Room: Plató</i></p> <p>How can cities effectively engage with social public procurement? This workshop will provide insights into Socially Responsible Public Procurement (SRPP), showcasing how cities can bring the social dimension to public procurement and align it with wider local strategies such as employment, inclusion, and sustainable development. Through the testimony from a city expert from Haarlem and interactive discussions, participants will explore how to ensure cities play a central role in contributing to a sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous local future when it comes to the practice of public buyers, aware of the social impacts of goods and services. This session is organised in collaboration with a</p>	<p><b>High Level Meeting: Funding Social Services, Building Futures – Politicians &amp; Directors of Social Services Community of Experts (invitation only)</b>  <i>Room: Aula Biblioteca</i></p> <p>The dedicated session for politicians and Directors of Social Services provides a crucial space to consolidate knowledge and exchange priorities of political and technical level experts that will guide Eurocities’ political positioning on the EU social funding agenda. It provides a space for city leaders to share their knowledge, identify emerging trends, and highlight the most pressing social challenges they observe on the ground, particularly in relation to inclusive workforce and skills development across generations. Their perspectives are essential for shaping a shared understanding of social developments across Europe and for informing future debates on how cities can be better supported in delivering high-quality services to their residents.</p> <p>The discussions will inform the SAF Pulse – Social Urban Insights Report, one of Eurocities’ key tools for shaping European policy and funding decisions, as well as reinforce the Directors of Social Services Community of Experts.</p>
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	<p>member of the Eurocities Economic Development Forum (EDF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Rudie de Vries</b>, Senior policy advisor, Haarlem</li> </ul>	
<b>12.45 – 14.00</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>	
<b>14:00 – 14:30</b>	<b>Transfer to site visits</b>	
<b>14:30 – 16:30</b>	<p><b>Parallel site visits</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Gijon Local Agency for Economic Development and Employment &amp; Second Chance School of Gijon:</b> Municipal agency for employment, training and inclusion (by bus)</li> <li>2. <b>Botanical Garden &amp; employment workshop:</b> youth training and employment (by bus)</li> <li>3. <b>Science and Technology Park and the Mile of Knowledge + overview from the Laboral tower:</b> innovation ecosystem and business hub (walking tour)</li> <li>4. <b>Jovellanos Maritime Safety Centre:</b> Centre of maritime rescue, strengthening skills and employment in the maritime sector (by bus)</li> <li>5. <b>Collaboration with the University of Oviedo:</b> Upskilling opportunities for Graduates. International Outreach and Employment (walking tour)</li> </ol> <p><i>More info on each site visit at the end of the document.</i></p>	<p><b>Site visit dedicated to political representatives only</b></p> <p><b>Laboral City of Culture:</b> originally a worker training hub in the 50s, it is the biggest building in Spain and now it hosts education, arts, and professional development.</p>
<h2 style="background-color: #006680; color: white; padding: 5px;">SOCIAL EVENT</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">Venue: Colegiata San Juan Bautista (C. Colegiata, Centro, 33201 Gijón, Asturias)</p>		
<b>19.30 – 22.00</b>	<p><b>Official Dinner</b></p> <p>After a second day of sessions and site visits, join fellow participants for an evening hosted by the city of Gijon at Colegiata San Juan Bautista. Dress code is business casual.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome remarks</li> </ul>	

## DAY 3 – Thursday, 7 May 2026

Venue: Laboral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial  
Los Prados, 121, Periurbano - Rural, 33203 Gijón, Asturias, Spain

<p><b>9:00 – 9:30</b></p>	<p><b>Registration</b></p> <p>Please don't forget to <u>sign</u> the participation lists.</p>
<p><b>9:30 – 12:15</b></p>	<p><b>Parallel sessions</b></p> <p>Participants will be able to join only one of the following parallel session.</p>
<p>Coffee break from 10:30 – 11:00</p>	<p><b>Shaping Skills in Cities: From Policy to Practice - Focus group on skills</b></p> <p><i>Room: Chill-out</i></p> <p>This session takes the form of a focus group, bringing together city representatives to gather evidence on how cities implement Principle 1 on Education, training, and lifelong learning of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the Union of Skills initiative (aiming to help people build basic and advanced skills, regularly upskill and reskill throughout their careers, make skills more portable across EU countries, and attract and retain talent). The discussion will inform Eurocities' 2026 Social Monitoring Report on skills, which examines the role of cities in delivering EU social policies and shaping effective, locally grounded solutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Marta Rodrigues</b>, Policy &amp; project officer, Eurocities</li> </ul> <p><b>Co-creation workshop 1: Skilling, upskilling and reskilling - Fuenlabrada</b></p> <p><i>Room: Aula Escuela</i></p> <p>How can cities effectively develop skilling and upskilling initiatives for vulnerable groups in job market? Join the workshop to support Fuenlabrada addressing this challenge and hear about its current strategy to increase employability and social cohesion through collaborative mechanisms between local inhabitants and migrants. The strategy aims to link learning directly with market-driven 'business challenges' with the involvement of a multidisciplinary consortium. Discussions will focus on skills development pathways for vulnerable groups in relation to educational gaps, gender lens, and private sector partnerships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Eva Lopez Coronado</b>, Business Development and Employment Area Coordinator- CIFE, Fuenlabrada</li> </ul> <p><b>Co-creation workshop 2: Linking employment support with key services to promote long-term quality jobs and social inclusion - Turku</b></p> <p><i>Room: Aula de Formación</i></p> <p>How can Turku better identify and act on early signals in young people's pathways to employment through stronger cooperation across services? Join this workshop to support Turku in addressing the challenge of linking employment with education, housing, healthcare and other key services to better support young people's transition into work. The city will share its experience in tackling</p>

youth unemployment by strengthening connections between employment services, education and social support, with increased emphasis on earlier intervention. With Turku exploring more integrated approaches to support young people’s transition from education to work life, discussions aim to identify innovative practices to develop effective, multi-level governance models.

- **Noora Orvasto**, Lead Specialist, & **Niina Haukioja**, Program Director, Turku

12.15 – 12.30

**Closing session**

*Room: Plato*

- **Guzmán Pendás Molina**, Deputy Mayor of Social Affairs, Housing and Cooperation, Gijón
- **Solène Molard**, Head of Social Affairs, Eurocities

## Afternoon session only for WG Employment, Education, and Children members

Venue: Laboral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial  
Los Prados, 121, Periurbano - Rural, 33203 Gijón, Asturias, Spain

12:30-14:00

**Lunch (only for WG Employment, Education and Children members and Eurocities staff)**

14:00-16:30

**Joint WG Meeting: Employment, Education, Children**

*Room: Chill-Out*

20:00-22:00

**Informal dinner (at own costs)**

Please note that this evening is at participants own cost.

## Parallel site visits

### Site visit 1. Gijón Local Agency for Economic Development and Employment & Second Chance School of Gijón (bus transfer; capacity 25)

Get a concise overview of Gijón's integrated employment policies. The Local Employment Agency coordinates training, career guidance, inclusion and entrepreneurship in close partnership with local businesses (est. 1996). The visit also features the **Second Chance School**, a flagship programme for young people (14–29) that strengthens motivation, core skills and employability through tailored guidance, transversal skills training and socio-educational support with a European dimension.

### Site visit 2. Botanical Garden & employment workshop (bus transfer; return on foot; capacity 25)

This visit combines an employment programme with a unique learning setting. Start at the **“La Casina” workshop school**, which offers up to 18 months of training and work for unemployed young people (16–30): 3 months subsidised training followed by a 15-month training-and-work contract, with 24 places in gardening, carpentry and bricklaying, supporting services at the Garden. Then tour the **Atlantic Botanical Garden**, a specialised “vegetation museum” focused on North Atlantic flora, conservation, and scientific, educational and cultural outreach. Please wear comfortable walking shoes.

### Site visit 3. Science and Technology Park and the Mile of Knowledge & overview from the Laboral tower (walking; capacity 30)

Explore Gijón's innovation corridor. Established in 1999, the Science & Technology Park, Spain's first locally promoted park, anchors the city's triple-helix model and serves as a testbed for entrepreneurship policy. As the hub of the **Mile of Knowledge**, it hosts nearly 200 companies and about 5,500 jobs, linking firms with technology and R&D centres and the University to accelerate research and technology transfer. The visit concludes with a panoramic view from the Laboral City of Culture tower's **Mirador**, overlooking the Park, the Atlantic Botanical Garden and the Asturian coast.

### Site visit 4. Blue Economy: Jovellanos Maritime Safety Centre (by bus; capacity 25)

Explore Gijón's **blue-economy skills base** at a flagship maritime safety training hub (est. 1993). The Centre delivers training in maritime, port and industrial safety, occupational risk prevention and pollution control on a 140,000 m<sup>2</sup> campus. The visit showcases core assets: ship-handling simulators, aircraft/industrial fire modules, helicopter-ditching and abandonment trainers, chemical-spill scenarios, and a large wave pool reproducing 16 sea states with waves up to 4 m, illustrating courses in survival at sea, firefighting and marine-pollution response.

### Site visit 5. University of Oviedo: Upskilling opportunities for Graduates. International outreach and Employment (walking; capacity 40)

Reinforcing the triple-helix, this visit shows how the University of Oviedo upskills graduates and connects them to the labour market. Since January 2023, the University has joined the **INGENIUM** alliance, expanding

mobility, training and knowledge-transfer opportunities. You'll tour the **Jovellanos Faculty of Commerce, Tourism and Social Sciences** at Laboral City of Culture, offering programmes in business management, tourism, public administration and social work. Learn about employment pathways supported by the University of Oviedo Foundation calls, the Employment Forum and the **TalentUO** platform, alongside the University's internationalisation strategy.

### Site visit for politicians - Laboral City of Culture

Originally a mid-20th-century Labor University, **Laboral** is today Spain's largest civic building (270,000 m<sup>2</sup>) and a mixed public campus. Since 2001, the Principality of Asturias has reactivated the complex to host an arts centre, the regional public broadcaster, vocational training facilities, the University of Oviedo's Faculty of Commerce, Tourism and Social Sciences, the Professional Conservatory of Music and Dance, the Higher School of Dramatic Art, and creative companies, showcasing the effectiveness of political decision turned into a successful city project.