

Fighting poverty in cities: Delivering change through local action

19–21 October 2026, Athens



Social Innovation Lab

Social Innovation Lab 2026

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Background

The sixth edition of the Eurocities Social Innovation Lab will focus on tackling urban poverty and strengthening cities' role in implementing the first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Lab will explore how cities can develop integrated, people-centred approaches to prevent and reduce poverty, ensuring that all residents can access their rights, essential services and opportunities to participate fully in society.

Poverty remains one of the most persistent and multifaceted challenges in the European Union. Around 93 million people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, one in four of whom are children, while approximately one million people experience homelessness. Rising housing costs, increasing inequalities, and demographic change are placing growing pressure on vulnerable households, particularly in urban areas. Cities are often where poverty-related challenges are most visible and concentrated, but they are also uniquely positioned to deliver coordinated responses across housing, employment, education, health and social services.

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

- **Tackling the housing crisis to combat poverty:** Housing is increasingly at the centre of urban poverty, with rising costs, homelessness, poor housing conditions and energy poverty affecting residents' wellbeing and opportunities. Cities play a key role in developing integrated responses that combine homelessness prevention, social housing, support for vulnerable groups and housing resilience measures, ensuring that the just transition strengthens preparedness, protects those most at risk and reduces rather than deepens inequalities. **(Green track)**
- **Ensuring equal access to essential services and social rights:** Poverty is both a consequence and a driver of discrimination and social exclusion. People experiencing poverty often face unequal access to services and multiple, intersecting barriers linked to factors such as age, disability, gender, migration background, or ethnicity. Cities can help address these barriers by designing services that are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to people's needs, while ensuring that those most at risk can effectively access their rights and participate in decision-making. **(Yellow track)**
- **Breaking intergenerational poverty and strengthening life-course Inclusion:** Poverty experienced in childhood, working age or old age can have lasting impacts across the life course and between generations. Cities can help break these cycles by providing integrated support for children, families

and older people, improving access to essential services and strengthening income security and social inclusion. By coordinating support across different stages of life, cities can create pathways to greater opportunity and reduce the long-term effects of disadvantage. [\(Blue track\)](#)

Expected outcome

The Social Innovation Lab will provide a space for cities to exchange practices, co-create solutions and develop innovative responses to urban poverty. Through workshops, peer learning, site visits and NGO-led training, and exchange with other Eurocities Forums, participants will explore practical approaches to tackling poverty and social exclusion while contributing to Eurocities' work on strengthening the role of cities in implementing the EU anti-poverty strategy.

Programme overview

DAY 1 – Monday, 19 October	afternoon	Business meeting Opening Political interview Speed-networking session Informal dinner
DAY 2 – Tuesday, 20 October	morning	Inspiration session Parallel co-creation workshops
	afternoon	Marketplace Inspiration session Training with NGOs Closing Official dinner
DAY 3 – Wednesday, 21 October	morning	Site visits Cross-Forum exchange Closing

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

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Agenda

DAY 1 – Monday 19 October 2026

Venue: Serafio: 19 Echelidon &, Pireos 11854, 144, Athina, Greece

12:30 -13:30	Registration and lunch Participants will collect their badge in the lobby. The badge will be valid for all the days of the event. Please don't forget to sign the participation lists.
13:30- 14:00	Business meeting (members only) <i>Room: Plenary</i> Hear the latest developments in the fight against poverty. This meeting will cover the EU Anti-Poverty Package, discuss the current state of play of the next EU budget, and explore upcoming activities and opportunities for Eurocities members to engage and contribute. • Robert Ranson, Senior Policy Advisor, Social Affairs Forum • Solène Molard, Head of the Social Affairs Forum
14:00 - 14:30	Opening session <i>Room: Plenary</i> • Mayor Haris Doukas, City of Athens (tbc) • Solène Molard, Head of the Social Affairs Forum
14:30 - 15:00	Updates from the European Commission <i>Room: Plenary</i> • Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion: Interview with Michele Calandrino, Team leader of Homelessness at DG Employment of the European Commission and Coordinator of the European Platform on combating homelessness. (tbc)
15:00 - 15:10	Group photo
15:10 - 15:30	Coffee break
15:30 - 17:30	Speed-networking session on social housing and homelessness <i>Room: Plenary</i> As the conclusion of their learning cycle and preparation for the second phase, selected cities from the EaSI Training Modules Programme will present their action plans on social housing and homelessness. Participants will explore innovative policy measures and transferable solutions through an interactive networking session. Every 30 minutes, participants will move to a new discussion table to exchange experiences, share insights, and reflect on how approaches can be adapted to their own local contexts. The discussion topics are currently being defined. Further details will be shared in the coming days.



Social Event

19:30 - 22:00

Informal dinner (at own costs)

Get together with fellow participants after a busy day of productive discussions to enjoy a delightful meal accompanied by a glass of Greek wine at one of the restaurants in the city center.

For your convenience, we prepared **a list of recommended restaurants** located in the city center of Athens in the practical information.

DAY 2 – Tuesday, 20 October 2026

Venue: Serafio: 19 Echelidon &, Pireos 11854, 144, Athina, Greece

8:30 - 9:00

Registration

Please don't forget to sign the participation lists.

9:00 - 9:30

Inspiration session: The Hague's Schuldenlab070: Building partnerships to tackle financial vulnerability

Room: Plenary

Through Schuldenlab070, The Hague has built a public-private-civil platform bringing together municipal services, creditors, employers, banks, housing partners, education, community organisations, researchers and people with lived experience. Since 2016, this platform has helped scale social innovations that share the same shift in perspective: from the logic of systems to the lived reality of residents.

- **Rutger Schoenmakers**, Strategy & Policy advisor Innovation and Societal Challenges, City of the Hague (tbc)

9:30 - 12:30

Coffee break
from 10:30 -
11:00

Parallel co-creation workshops – Participants will be able to join only one of the following parallel sessions.

Participants will work together in three parallel workshops to co-design solutions to real cases of complex urban social challenges. Through situation-based group work, they will explore each challenge and develop actionable solutions. City experts will then provide feedback and, together with participants, develop an action plan to pilot new policies or projects.

GREEN - Housing exclusion (led by the City of Athens)

This interactive co-creation workshop will present the City of Athens' Energy Poverty Alleviation Office (EPAO) and its integrated approach to supporting energy-vulnerable households through targeted energy advice, technical guidance and social support measures.


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The challenge: *How can cities effectively identify, reach and engage energy-vulnerable households that are often difficult to reach through mainstream services, and build the trust needed for them to access available support?*

Following a short introduction to the EPAO and its experience in Athens, participants will work together on this practical challenge. They will explore how cities can overcome barriers such as lack of information, limited trust in institutions, social exclusion and difficulties in identifying households most in need, while ensuring that support reaches those who may not actively seek assistance.

Through facilitated working groups, participants will exchange experiences from their cities, identify common barriers and successful approaches, and co-develop practical and transferable solutions for improving outreach, citizen engagement and access to energy-poverty support.

The session will conclude with a plenary discussion in which groups will present their proposed solutions and reflect on how the approaches discussed could be adapted to different local contexts.

YELLOW - Bringing services closer to those in need

SUBMIT YOUR CHALLENGE BY 11 SEPTEMBER

Across European cities, people experiencing poverty often face difficulties accessing the services they need, due to barriers such as complex administrative procedures, lack of information, stigma, digital exclusion, discrimination and fragmented support systems. These barriers can be particularly concentrated in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where distance from services and limited local provision further deepen exclusion. Cities play a key role in ensuring that support reaches those who need it most by improving accessibility, affordability and coordination across sectors. They can develop place-based and user-centred approaches through local service points, outreach activities and more coordinated support pathways, particularly for groups facing multiple vulnerabilities, including people with disabilities, migrants, older people, single parents and people experiencing homelessness.

BLUE - Breaking cycles of poverty

SUBMIT YOUR CHALLENGE BY 11 SEPTEMBER

Poverty is often transmitted across generations, with risks increasing during key life transitions such as childhood, entering the labour market, forming a family or moving into retirement. Cities play a key role in breaking these cycles by ensuring access to essential services and developing integrated, life-course approaches to prevention and inclusion.

Option 1: Child poverty: Strengthening local action through integrated support

In the EU, one in four children is at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with poverty in childhood affecting children's wellbeing, development and future opportunities. Children growing up in disadvantaged households are more exposed to barriers in accessing essential services, including early childhood education and care, healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing. Cities play a key role in implementing the [European Child Guarantee](#) locally by coordinating services across sectors, supporting families and ensuring that children most at risk, including those facing multiple vulnerabilities, receive accessible and effective support.

Option 2: Poverty in old age: Supporting dignified ageing



	In 2025, 18.8% of people aged 65 or over in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with older women particularly affected (21.2% compared to 15.8% of men). Poverty in later life is often linked to lower lifetime earnings, unequal career paths, increased care needs, health challenges and social isolation. Cities play an important role in preventing old-age poverty by improving access to healthcare, long-term care, social services and opportunities for participation, while supporting older residents to remain active and connected within their communities.
12:30 - 13:45	Lunch break
13:45 - 14:45	Marketplace <i>Room: Plenary</i> Exchange with city-representatives about the challenges presented during the three parallel co-creation workshops.
14:45 - 15:15	Inspiration session: Tackling old-age poverty through a life course approach <i>Room: Plenary</i> • Philippe Seidel, Policy Manager on Social Protection and European Parliament Liaison, AGE Platform Europe (tbc)
15:15 - 15:45	Coffee break
15:45 - 17:15	What cities can learn from NGOs: Community-led approaches to tackling poverty and exclusion <i>Room: Plenary and break out rooms</i> An interactive exchange on how NGOs' frontline experience can help cities develop more inclusive responses to urban poverty and social exclusion. Participants will explore practical approaches to reaching people left behind by mainstream services, addressing discrimination and intersecting vulnerabilities, involving people with lived experience in shaping solutions, and strengthening cooperation between cities and civil society. Topics for discussion (tbc): 1. Intersectionality – understanding and responding to overlapping vulnerabilities; 2. Discrimination – addressing discrimination and stigma as barriers to services and rights; 3. Experts by experience – incorporating lived experience and community knowledge into policy and service design; 4. Reaching people who are left behind – identifying, approaching and engaging people outside mainstream services. This session will be hosted by Athens-based NGOs: DCI Greece, EAPN Greece, Terre des Hommes Greece, Melissa Network and Action Aid Greece (tbc)
17:15 - 17:45	Wrap up and closing <i>Room: Plenary</i> • Elissaios Sarmas, CEO Develop Athens SA • Nathalie Guri, Eurocities Projects and Knowledge Sharing Director

SOCIAL EVENT

Venue: Rhoé: Ermou 92-94, Athens 105 54

19.30 - 22.00

Official dinner

DAY 3 – Wednesday, 21 October 2026

Venue: Serafio: 19 Echelidon &, Pireos 11854, 144, Athina, Greece

8:30 - 9:00

Registration at Serafio

Please don't forget to sign the participation lists.

9:00 - 9:30

Transfer to site visits

9:30 - 12:30

 Coffee break
 from 10:30 -
 11:00

Parallel site visits - Participants will be able to join only one of the proposed site visit. Each site visit will be followed by a discussion on developing an integrated approach to urban poverty, jointly organised with Eurocities Environment, Mobility and Digital Forums. The workshops will address the role of cities in facilitating access to essential services:

- Environment Forums (for energy), site visit 1
 - Digital Forum (for digital communications) site visit 2
 - Mobility Forum (for transport), site visit 3.
- (Tbc)

GREEN - Athens Energy Poverty Alleviation Office

This site visit will showcase the Energy Poverty Alleviation Office (EPAO)'s integrated policy approach to ensuring a fair and inclusive energy transition, linking climate action with social cohesion and energy justice. Drawing on the experience of the EU-funded POWERPOOR project, participants will explore innovative, transferable solutions to address energy poverty and empower energy-vulnerable households. Recognised as a best practice at both national and European levels, EPAO's multi-stakeholder governance model demonstrates how cross-sector collaboration can support local implementation of the European Green Deal and contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

This site visit will offer participants an overview of EPAO's role, policies, and initiatives in promoting social inclusion and energy transition. The programme includes a presentation and analysis of EPAO's key actions, policies, and projects, a showcase of its measures and benefits, meetings with stakeholders and beneficiaries, and interactive discussions to encourage knowledge exchange, peer learning, and participant engagement.

Integrated approach to urban poverty: Cross Forum exchange with the Environment Forum (tbc)

YELLOW - Building an inclusive local support ecosystem – The Migrant Integration Centre (KEM) and the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrants and Refugee issues (ACCMR)

How can cities ensure that migrants and refugees can effectively access essential services, exercise their rights and participate in local life? The City of Athens has developed a multi-actor approach that brings together municipal services and civil society organisations to support integration and address the complex and interconnected needs of migrant and refugee communities.

The site visit will take place at the Migrant Integration Centre (KEM) in Maizonos Street, which hosts front-desk services and a range of integration activities, with the participation of the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrants and Refugees Issues (ACCMR). Participants will have the opportunity to visit the facilities and explore how the two structures contribute to a coordinated local approach to migrant inclusion.

A particular focus will be placed on the cooperation between the City of Athens and civil society organisations, and on how this partnership is translated into concrete integration measures for third-country nationals. The visit will showcase the methodologies, services and practical tools used to bring support closer to people, improve access to information and services, and create pathways towards social inclusion and participation.

It will provide an opportunity to discuss how cities can move beyond fragmented service provision and develop more integrated, accessible and people-centred local support ecosystems, particularly for people facing multiple barriers to accessing essential services and social rights.

Depending on the final programme, the visit could also include an introduction to the Municipal Roma Branch, located at the same premises, or to the 1st Community Centre, located approximately five minutes away at the Liosion building. This would offer participants a broader perspective on how different municipal services can work together at neighbourhood level to respond to diverse forms of vulnerability and exclusion.

Integrated approach to urban poverty: Cross-forum exchange with the Digital Forum (tbc)

BLUE - Athens Multidisciplinary Health Centres

The [Municipal Multidisciplinary Health Centres](#) of the City of Athens provide an integrated, community-based model of primary healthcare and social support, with a particular focus on ensuring access to essential services for vulnerable and socially excluded groups.

The centres provide free primary healthcare and preventive health services, alongside psychosocial support, social counselling, legal and employment advice, information on social benefits, and referrals to other public services and civil society organisations. This integrated approach aims to address not only people's immediate health needs, but also the wider social and economic factors that can contribute to poverty, exclusion and inequalities in access to essential services.

This approach is particularly relevant when considering children and families experiencing vulnerability, as health inequalities can be closely interconnected with wider social and economic challenges affecting the household. By bringing healthcare, psychosocial support and links to social services closer to residents, municipal structures can contribute to earlier identification of needs and to more coordinated pathways of support for vulnerable individuals and families.

The site visit will provide participants with the opportunity to explore how a city can bring health and social services closer to residents through local, accessible and people-centred structures. It will showcase the experience of Athens in addressing barriers to healthcare and social support, particularly for vulnerable groups, and in connecting medical care with wider social services and pathways to support.

The visit will include a presentation of the Municipal Multidisciplinary Health Centres, a tour of the facilities (at the **6th Municipal Health Centre, Chaniou 4, Athens 112 57**) and an exchange with health and social care professionals on how the centres identify local needs, provide integrated support and connect residents with other services.

The visit will offer an opportunity to discuss how municipalities can strengthen inclusive access to essential services, address health and social inequalities at neighbourhood level, and develop integrated, family- and community-centred responses to poverty and social exclusion.

Integrated approach to urban poverty: Cross Forum exchange with the Mobility Forum (tbc)

12:30 - 13:00

Transfer back to venue

