



Explorative Proposal for an UAEU Thematic Partnership under the Ljubljana Agreement

Cities of Equality

Challenge:

Since its inception, gender equality and non-discrimination have been recognised as fundamental values of the European Union (ex: Articles 8, 19, 153, 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [TFEU]). In addition, the EU and all its Member States are party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The nexus of fundamental rights, gender equality and territorial governance has been explored by academics, activists, experts and policy-makers. A strong case has been made for an active role of local and regional governments in promoting and protecting human rights due to their proximity to people's daily lives and their specific competences in the areas of employment, planning, procurement, and service provision.

However, despite the progress that has been made in protecting the fundamental and social rights of citizens, regardless of their identity and status, inequalities persist based on barriers encountered by persons in relation to, among others, their gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and identity, religion and belief, ethnicity, migration status, etc., thus hampering social inclusion that is a core part of the EU's vision.

Social inequalities – including gender and intersecting inequalities – have impacts across the spectrum of urban policy in the EU: from education to labour market participation, from service provision to urban planning and design – and even safety. According to the 2021 report “Gender equality in the EU”¹ 79% of men were employed compared to only 67.3% of women in 2019. This resulted in a gender employment gap for the EU27 of 11.7 percentage points. Concerning the gender pay gap, women throughout the EU earn an average of 86 cents for every euro a man earns.²

Research carried out by Plan International in 5 major capitals showed that cities are not safe places for girls and young women. They are made to feel uncomfortable, intimidated and unsafe due to their age and gender. Unfortunately, this leads many to avoid going certain places, including the necessary transport to jobs and school because they cannot get around safely.³ The lack of a gender lens in the design of public spaces is a challenge that could be transformed into an opportunity and benefit.

Persons with disabilities and reduced mobility also face barriers when walking, cycling or using public transport; according to experts' estimations⁴ this impacts more than one-third of the European

¹ Eurofound, Living, working and COVID-19, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, p.23-24, data collected in April and July 2020. Available at:

https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20059en.pdf.

² Eurostat, Gender pay gap in unadjusted form, 2020, available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_20/default/table?lang=en

³ Plan International, SUMMARY REPORT: Unsafe in the City: The everyday experiences of girls and young women (2018), available at: <https://www.plan.org.au/publications/unsafe-in-the-city-the-everyday-experiences-of-girls-and-young-women/>

⁴ Access and Inclusion – Improving Transport Accessibility for All, CEMT/CM (2006) 7 FINAL, p. 3

population who do not have access to the city and its services on an equal basis as the rest of the population. This is often due to lack of accessibility of built environment, transport and ICT as well as lack of provision of reasonable accommodation when accessing to services.

Gender mainstreaming seems not entirely effective in its past application in European policies and programmes. In fact, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has found that the performance of EU Member State in gender mainstreaming has been decreasing since 2012⁵. All too often, the mainstreaming of gender (or disability or youth, etc.) is often reduced to “box-ticking” exercises. To tackle the complex challenges our societies face in the green, digital and just transitions, it is time to go beyond gender mainstreaming and engage in gender transformative approaches that address power inequalities and challenge gender norms. On the other hand, the European Commission has also taken important steps to improve inequalities in this context for example by incentivising cities to improve accessibility through the Access City award⁶ or by adopting accessibility legislation on products and services.

Research carried out by Eurocities⁷ shows that the situation of Roma in cities in Europe remains critical. Roma people are generally at greater disadvantage than the overall population in cities because many are trapped in a vicious circle of poverty, exclusion, discrimination facing unequal access to employment, education, housing and healthcare.

Historically cities have attracted the LGBTIQ community and have been the first ones to organise pride marches. Those gatherings were challenged by the COVID-crisis and by some conservative local authorities in some Member states who even declared themselves “LGBT free zones”. However, a survey published in 2020 showed that cities that fly the rainbow flag are also the most innovative.⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions exacerbated inequalities in towns, cities and regions—especially for the most vulnerable. Undocumented migrants for example, experienced discrimination in the access to the vaccination due to their status and most of the times to their invisibility.⁹ Persons with disabilities were also disproportionately hit by COVID and limited accessibility of ICT reduced their opportunities to join activities in society on line. It is critical to tackle root causes of discrimination and disadvantage in resilience and recovery measures and in Europe’s urban and social policies.

Beyond national policies and European framework, the urban area is a place where concrete actions can be activated by local and regional governments to ensure the city is truly inclusive: from assessing the accessibility of public transports and public spaces for disabled people, or feeling of security in the streets for all population; to gender-youth-elderly-disability-budgeting, the levers for action in urban areas could really contribute to more inclusive cities, and therefore more inclusive societies.

Addressing these issues and adopting a gender lens in urban policies and in the design of public space requires knowledge, capacities and an enabling framework. There is still a knowledge and data gap, and many local, regional or national administrations also are not aware of the EU gender equality strategy or the existing EU funds and programmes that can help to address equality and

⁵ EIGE, Gender Statistics Database: H3. Gender Mainstreaming, 2020, available at https://eige.europa.eu/genderstatistics/dgs/indicator/genmain_cont_bpfa_h3_bpfa_h3/line/year:2012,2018/geo:EU28/unit:SCORE/indicator:TOTAL

⁶ [Access City Award - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip19_1111)

⁷ Eurocities (2017) https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Roma_mapping_in_cities2017_final.pdf

⁸ Open for business (2020): [Open+For+Business+City+Economic+Case+2020.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](https://openforbusiness.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Open+For+Business+City+Economic+Case+2020.pdf)

⁹ <https://picum.org/covid-19-vaccines-equity-undocumented-migrants/> and also <https://picum.org/covid-19-vaccines-undocumented-migrants-international-guidelines/>

inclusivity issues in the urban areas. It will require new communication tools to reach the most vulnerable populations but also to find an inclusive language that also empowers them. This should also help towards a greater representativity of all inhabitants in local democracies, with the participation of people usually less represented in citizens' assembly.

Opportunity:

Taking fundamental rights and gender mainstreaming to the next level in Europe, in cooperation with the European Commission, Member States and Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) has enormous potential to improve the quality and efficiency of urban policy in the EU. A new Thematic Partnership for the UAEU dedicated to equalities is a promising avenue to share knowledge and develop coherent policies in collaboration with LRGs, MS and the EU.

The current political agenda of the European Commission (Union of Equality) creates a favourable environment to advance in coordinated/connected approaches to mainstreaming rights and anti-discrimination; it is a political objective of the first-order for the current President Ursula Von der Leyen.

There is increasing awareness of fundamental rights and gender equality issues in Europe and role that local and regional governments can play in their effective promotion and protection. In addition to the high-level gender equality strategy adopted by the European Commission in March 2020, all 27 EU Member States have at least one institution or agency at a national level working to combat discrimination and promote gender equality¹⁰.

This Thematic Partnership could focus on specific actions such as (non-exhaustive list):

- gender-youth-elderly-handi-budgeting, and participative budgeting for inhabitant-led initiatives
- accessible and safe public spaces, cycling and walking, public transport
- redesigning inclusive public spaces to ensure equality
- identification and communication with fragile, vulnerable or harder to reach inhabitants and communities
- reinforcing participation of people with diverse backgrounds in local life and democracy
- reinforcing local social fabric and promoting social cohesion
- labour market participation, especially youth employment and precarity
- link with culture and cultural heritage

This thematic partnership could contribute to the clustering approach by building and complementing on gender-oriented actions already developed by the other partnerships. For instance, addressing transversal issues such as just transition towards carbon neutral economy.

Beyond the possibilities for better vertical integration of equality, anti-discrimination and inclusion policy in the EU, the interconnected nature of inequalities requires transversal policy approaches across topic.

¹⁰ Dellenbaugh-Losse, Mary, *Gendered Landscape Action Planning Network Baseline Study*, URBACT (2020)

Mission of the proposed Thematic Partnership¹¹:

The Urban Agenda for the EU lists gender and inclusion as crosscutting themes. However, in practice the extent to which the partnerships have included gender and non-discrimination explicitly in their work plans and partnership themes is varied. Seeing that gender equality, anti-discrimination and inclusion remain key crosscutting themes framing the partnerships, a new Thematic Partnership dedicated to equalities would not only serve as a good in itself, but would create concrete mechanisms to integrate inclusivity in the other partnerships with dedicated knowledge and expertise. While this Thematic Partnership could focus on specific actions (e.g. gender-youth-elderly-disability- budgeting, accessible and safe public spaces, etc.); it could contribute to the clustering approach by building and complementing on gender-oriented actions already developed by the other partnerships.

The Thematic Partnership on equalities could provide structure and opportunities for improved vertical policy integration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders from all levels with relevant expertise, mechanisms, and innovations in the field of fundamental rights, gender equality, disability inclusion and diversity. Such a thematic partnership would harmonise and boost the complementarity of fundamental rights and gender equality strategies and policy frameworks among all levels.

Participation in the thematic partnership would also increase comparability of indicators used to measure progress and strengthen LRGs/MS/EC knowledge and technical capacity to effectively address discrimination, exclusion and inequalities in ERDF and ESF+ programmes, for example.

A thematic partnership on equalities would be well-positioned and equipped to harness the transformative power of gender equality across sectors and levels.

Contributing to Green, Productive and Just cities and building on good urban governance:

To tackle the complexity of interconnected challenges and the root causes of inequalities, a multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach, and indeed partnership, is necessary.

Fields of action for the partnership to improve the quality of life in urban areas and to push sustainable and inclusive growth could include: strengthened gender mainstreaming in urban planning, gender/youth/elderly/disability/LGBTQI-budgeting, gender-responsive public procurement, assessment of occupation of public space by citizens in their diversity, in particular persons with family responsibilities. In order to make the best use of the above-mentioned initiatives, there should also be evaluation of good quality and affordable care infrastructure, early childhood intervention/education to challenge stereotypes, initiatives to diminish occupational segregation (by increasing the number of women entrepreneurs and women in sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields and in urban planning/design, accessibility following a design for all approach (built environment, transport and digital)), ensuring socially balanced and safe use of public spaces and areas, providing equal opportunities, particularly for the most vulnerable to integrate society, access to services and justice.

As one of the pillars in the new Leipzig Charter states, a common goal is “general welfare, reliable public services of general interest as well as reducing and preventing new forms of social, economic, environmental and territorial inequalities.”

¹¹ Remark concerning the updated explorative proposal: As this exploratory proposal for a new thematic partnership is intended to open ideas and possibilities, it has been purposefully kept broad in scope in order to be further refined by the future partners themselves. Such decisions as to whether it should focus on gender equality specifically or take a broader equality and non-discrimination approach remain open at this stage.

This Thematic Partnership will fully contribute to the objective of a “Just City” through its focus on inclusive and accessible spaces and services, but through empowering the inhabitants in their diversity, it can also contribute to productive cities (e.g. more training and labour opportunities for all) and to green cities (e.g. more accessible green areas, increase feeling of safety for walking, biking or taking public transports). Environmental justice - all actions should be accompanied by policies to mitigate the impact of transition to low carbon economy. For example, through training on skills, counselling and opportunities for people affected and losing jobs because of green transition.

Strong participation and co-creation are key to urban policy for the common good, as mentioned in the New Leipzig Charter. To foster urban services, spaces and governance that are suitably inclusive and reinforce social cohesion, the partnership could develop and build on existing participatory mechanisms and instruments to accompany and involve local people. Collaboration pacts, partnership tables and “time out” discussion methods are examples of how each citizen can feel listened to, valued and able to constructively tackle urban issues around equality and non-discrimination in their community/territory.

Aligning with and supporting EU priorities:

- 2021-2027 EU cohesion policy (priority 4: a more **social** and inclusive Europe & 1: a more **competitive** and **smarter** Europe)
 - New European Bauhaus
 - EU Gender Equality strategy 2020-2025
 - LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025
 - Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 and UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
 - EU Anti-racism action plan 2020-2025
 - EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020- 2030
 - Strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU
 - European Democracy Action Plan
 - European pillar of social rights
 - European Action Plan for the Social Economy and the Transition Pathway for the Proximity & Social Economy industrial ecosystem
 - EU gender action plan (GAP) III
 - European Child guarantee
 - Charter of fundamental rights of the EU
 - Race equality directive
 - Employment equality directive
 - European Accessibility Act
 - Gender goods and services directive
- Relevant Commission DGs: JUST, REGIO, EMPL, HOME, EAC, INTPA ...
- Relevant EU funding; CERV, ERDF, ESF+ (regulation article 6 & article 28¹²), Horizon Europe, Recovery and Resilience Facility, AMIF, URBACT (action planning network “gendered landscape”)

¹² REGULATION (EU) 2021/1057 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013 - <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32021R1057&from=EN>

Recent EU strategies recognise *intersectionality*, the “studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege”¹³. Such an approach would be appropriate in the proposed partnership which seeks to promote gender equality as good for the whole of society—not just a women’s issue and broader rights of individuals in the city.

In a recent resolution¹⁴, the European Parliament stressed “the role played by the cities and regions that have long been at the forefront of working towards gender equality, as well as European urban development initiatives, such as the Leipzig Charter [... and that ...] cohesion policy should contribute to reducing widespread urban inequalities by better integrating women in policy planning for regional and urban development in order to design gender-inclusive cities and communities that work for all.” It also underlined that “gender-sensitive urban planning can ensure fairer and more equal access to urban goods; stresses further that regions and local governments have a key role to play in the promotion of social inclusion, and that gender-sensitive territorial planning can contribute to making advancements in this process.”

DG Justice will soon launch an award for European Capital(s) of Diversity and Inclusion in order to recognise, give visibility, and to highlight best practices of a town, a city or a region that can be a source of inspiration for other European cities in creating more diverse and inclusive environments for their citizens. It sets out to award best practices that promote diversity (on the ground of sex, age, disability, LGBTIQ, religion and ethnic/racial discrimination) as a source of richness and innovation, contribute to inclusive policies and fostering a feeling of belonging of its citizens.

The Committee of the Regions has launched a webpage for the initiative "[For more women in politics](#)"¹⁵ and SEDEC adopted in June 2021 "Gender Equality Actions in consultative works". Additionally, there's also the new CoR "Mayor Paweł Adamowicz Award for courage and excellence in promotion of freedom, solidarity and equality".

Building on previous Thematic Partnerships:

Partnership on Housing: The coordinator of this partnership was proactively engaged on having a strong focus on the gender dimension in urban policy. Indeed the Action plan includes a specific action on gender issues (action n°10 Recommendations on the improvement of EU gender-poverty-energy nexus data). The new proposed partnership could expand on work with sex-disaggregated data¹⁶ in urban policies and produce more pertinent evidence to inform policy development.

Partnership on Security in public spaces: This partnership has been active since 2019 and has a light focus on gender and fundamental rights. One action (Action 5.1.) aims to create a common method for local security managers to measure the impact of existing local social cohesion, taking into account other variables (gender, age, religion, disability, ethnicity, race, LGBTIQ...).

Partnership on Inclusion of migrants and refugees: This partnership has been active since 2015 and it is deeply interconnected with the issue of gender equality, not only related to women but also to

¹³ AWID, Intersectionality: A Tool for Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice - <http://www.intergroupresources.com/rc/Intersectionality%20-%20a%20Tool%20for%20Gender%20&%20Economic%20Justice.pdf>

¹⁴ European Parliament resolution of 9 June 2021 on the gender dimension in cohesion policy (2020/2040(INI)) - https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0276_EN.html

¹⁵ <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/gender-balance.aspx>, see also CEMR 2019 Study “Women in politics: Local and European Trends”, available at: bit.ly/2JJmi6X

¹⁶ It would be interesting to have disaggregated data on the different grounds mentioned in the treaties (sex, age, disability, ethnicity/race, religion and LGBTIQ)

LGBTQI and migrants. The identification of the challenges that those migrants experienced on a daily basis and the bias they have when confronting with the society and the state is the main objective of one of the Working Groups in the Partnership. The new Thematic Partnership on Cities of Equality could definitely take stock of what has already been done and widen the impact of the actions by presenting those issues in different arenas. Reaching common policies that recognize the importance of the gender equality when talking about all kind of social issues is a foremost milestone of the new proposed Partnership.

Partnership on Urban mobility: accessibility of public transport, encouraging active mobility for all.

Innovative and responsible public procurement: The new partnership could consider exchanges with public procurement partnership for inclusive public procurements, or developing tools or trainings with examples from cities having developed public procurement with focus on social inclusion and equality.

Exchanges could also be organised with **Urban poverty** and **Climate adaptation** partnership to exchange on their results and potential synergies or collaborations.