

## Explorative Proposal for a Thematic Partnership under the Ljubljana Agreement

### *Cities of Equality / Equalities in the City*

#### **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]). The nexus of human 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 characteristics such as gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and identity, ethnicity, migration status, etc., thus hampering social inclusion that is a core part of the EU's vision.

Additionally, Europe and indeed societies the world over are witnessing well-organised backlash to human rights, gender equality, freedom of expression, democracy, etc. The political instrumentalisation of identities and scapegoating of marginalised groups is also worrying and poses a threat to the hard-earned advances in the pursuit of equality.

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”<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

Research carried out by Plan International in 5 major capitals (including Madrid) 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.<sup>3</sup>

Persons with disabilities and reduced mobility also face barriers when walking, cycling or using public transport; according to experts' estimations<sup>4</sup> this impacts more than one-third of the European population who do not have access to the city and its services on an equal basis as the rest of the population.

The usual refrain of “mainstreaming gender” seems somehow shallow and 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20059en.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat, Gender pay gap in unadjusted form, 2020, available at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg\\_05\\_20/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_20/default/table?lang=en)

<sup>3</sup> Plan International, SUMMARY REPORT: Unsafe in the City: The everyday experiences of girls and young women (2018)

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

mainstreaming has been decreasing since 2012<sup>5</sup>. All too often, the mainstreaming of gender (or handicap or youth, etc.) is reduced to a couple of lines of text and half-hearted “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.

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.<sup>6</sup> 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-handi-budgeting, the levers for action in urban areas could really contribute to more inclusive cities, and therefore more inclusive societies.

### **Opportunity:**

Taking human rights/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 human rights/gender equality issues in Europe and the 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 equality<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, 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 topics.

### **Mission of the proposed thematic partnership:**

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 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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](https://eige.europa.eu/genderstatistics/dgs/indicator/genmain_cont_bpfa_h3__bpfa_h3/line/year:2012,2018/geo:EU28/unit:SCORE/indicator:TOTAL).

<sup>6</sup> <https://picum.org/covid-19-vaccines-equity-undocumented-migrants/> and also <https://picum.org/covid-19-vaccines-undocumented-migrants-international-guidelines/>

<sup>7</sup> Dellenbaugh-Losse, Mary, *Gendered Landscape Action Planning Network Baseline Study*, URBACT (2020)

integrate inclusivity in the other partnerships with dedicated knowledge and expertise. While this Thematic Partnership could focus on specific actions (eg. gender-youth-elderly-handi- 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 human rights, gender equality and diversity. Such a thematic partnership would harmonise and boost the complementarity of human rights/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 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: gender/youth/elderly/"handi"-budgeting, gender-responsive public procurement, assessment of occupation of public space by citizens in their diversity, care services, early childhood interventions/educations to challenges stereotypes, initiatives to diminish occupational segregation: increase women entrepreneurs and women in sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields and in urban planning/design, universal design for accessibility (built environment and digital), ensuring socially balances- mixed 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."

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 (eg. more training and labour opportunities for all) and to green cities (eg. more accessible green areas, increase feeling of safety for walking, biking or taking public transports).

### **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)
- EU Gender Equality strategy 2020-2025
- LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025
- Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030
- 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

- ERDF
- ESF+ (regulation article 6 & article 28<sup>8</sup>)

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”<sup>9</sup>. 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 resolution<sup>10</sup>, 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.”

### **Building on previous TPs:**

*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 data 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 human 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...).

*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 LGBTQI+ 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.

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<sup>8</sup> 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>

<sup>9</sup> 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>

<sup>10</sup> 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](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0276_EN.html)