

Social Challenges in Cities



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The urban population in the European Union is fragmented and polarised; deprived neighbourhoods can be found in any capital of an EU Member State, and in many other cities. The pandemic has placed additional pressure on vulnerable groups (e.g., Roma, migrants and youth) and on the institutions that work to support them. The local policy capacity to respond to the crisis has differed across cities and institutional settings. Participatory and integrated policy efforts have often failed to meet the expectations of urban citizens and stakeholders, regardless of the challenges they are facing.

Main observations

These are some of the key social challenges in cities highlighted by the study:

The study

explores social challenges and policy responses in EU cities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The marginalised groups have become more vulnerable during the pandemic, due to the limited economic, social, institutional, educational, psychological, physical and natural resilience capacities of the cities they live in.

- From the perspective of European cohesion policy, the key challenge is how to better support local governments in drafting strategic action plans and mainstreaming innovative local approaches. It is vital that urban stakeholders engage with the managing authorities in collective planning processes and the tailoring of funding objectives to local needs.
- Widespread discrimination against ethnic and racial minorities, as well as xenophobic sentiments, continue to divert EU funding away from 'unpopular' groups. This issue is compounded by a lack of meaningful participation by excluded and marginalised groups in local decision-making processes, and their lack of organisational and administrative capacity to effectively compete for funding.

- Absorption rates of EU funding vary in relation to the type of intervention. The highest absorption rates are usually observed in the category of 'basic infrastructure'. Stakeholders struggle to use integrated territorial investment and grassroots initiatives to access funding due to complex regulations, stiff competition within calls for tenders, and rigorous eligibility requirements.



At the local level, the ability and capacity of policymakers to support vulnerable groups and solve social challenges is limited by constraining multi-level governance settings and relationship with the national governance, path dependencies, disengagement with local policymaking and lack of comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder processes. To move towards urban resilience and to better respond to the needs of vulnerable groups, EU-level funding needs to become more accessible and focused on long-term transformations, as well as improving policy dialogue with those cities most limited by ineffective local governance structures and historical legacies.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

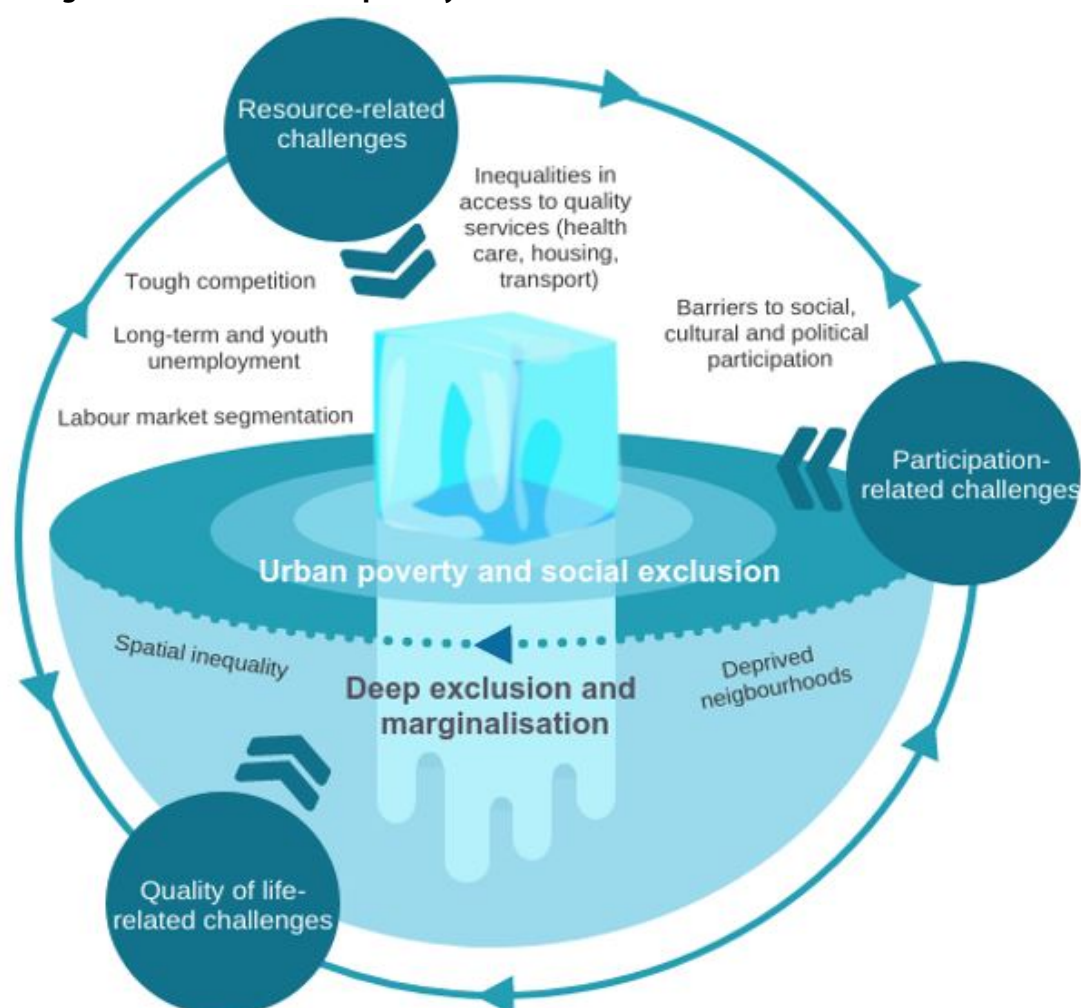
In light of the lessons, the study proposes a number of recommendations for more robust action at the local, national and EU levels to foster urban resilience and their social support systems, such as:



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- Building the capacity of local citizens to participate – namely, civil-society bodies, communities, public services – and long-term residents.
- Including representatives from neighbourhood councils and groups in monitoring committees and intermediary bodies and embedding them in accordance with the partnership principle.
- Further promoting projects coupled with an emphasis on continuity and the longevity of projects so that cities can apply and use funds more effectively.
- Introduce recurring, immovable property taxes, stricter regulation of collaborative economy platforms for short-term accommodation and more holistic neighbourhood development strategies for avoiding gentrification effects.
- Promote policy learning among beneficiary local authorities and strengthen the capacity-building of local and national authorities.
- Strengthen the monitoring of minority inclusion programmes and data reporting at the NUTS-3 levels to better understand the challenges in deprived neighbourhoods.

Social challenges in cities that relate to poverty and social exclusion



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