

# Briefing note on the involvement of cities in the preparation of National Recovery Plans and Operational Programmes 2021-2027

## 19 Jan 2021

The new EU budget and recovery package adopted at the end of 2020 provides multiple funding opportunities to cities for the coming seven years. The Next Generation EU, the [Recovery and Resilience Facility \(RRF\)](#), and Cohesion Funds are essential to cities and are expected to boost and ensure a territorially balanced recovery<sup>1</sup>.

Member states are currently preparing their National Recovery Plans (NRPs) that will be the basis of the RRF allocation, which they are expected to submit to the European Commission by the end of April. At the same time, managing authorities are preparing the Operational Programmes for the new funding period of structural funds.

The little time available to member states to prepare the NRPs and the initial lack of specific provision for the involvement of local authorities in the European Commission's proposal for a Regulation 'Establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility' has not facilitated the involvement of cities. Our initial intelligence suggests that the involvement of cities has not been limited.

In addition, the current emergency context and the delayed adoption of the EU budget have also contributed to the risk of centralisation of cohesion funds. This prompted us to look more closely at the application of the 'partnership principle' at an early stage of the development of Operational Programmes for the European Regional and Investment Funds (ERDF) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

Eurocities carried out a network-wide consultation with its members to assess and monitor the involvement of European cities in both the development of National Recovery Plans and to gather initial feedback about the upcoming consultations on Operational Programmes of Cohesion Funds. The insights presented below bring together the main takeaways coming from 45 cities across 18 member states collected in December 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see the Eurocities statement 'An EU Recovery powered by cities' [here](#)

# Insights on the involvement of cities in the preparation of National Recovery Plans

## 1. In most EU countries, cities have not been sufficiently involved in the development of National Recovery Plans

- a) City contributions clearly indicate that the consultations in most EU countries are not sufficient if meaningful involvement of cities in the recovery is to be achieved.
- b) Over 70% of respondents evaluated the process put in place by their government to consult cities as insufficient, with only around 5% evaluating them as 'good' (only Italian cities), around 25% as 'sufficient' and none of them as 'very good'.
- c) In some countries, and generally across most of Eastern Europe, cities have expressed a strong concern that this lack of involvement will have a negative impact on their ability to invest and kick-start recovery.

## 2. The vast majority of cities have been actively seeking direct involvement in the development of National Recovery Plans and are ready to contribute with strategic objectives and projects that can kick-start the economy locally

- a) Around 75% of the cities consulted have contacted their national government to get involved in the preparation of the National Recovery Plans, either directly (39%) or via national city associations (34%). Only a minority of respondents (6%) did not contact their national government or was contacted directly by the national government (6%).
- b) Generally, cities have directly asked to be involved in the plans or for direct allocations of resources, and they have put forward proposals both at the strategic level and with ideas ready to be developed.

## 3. The contributions from cities in most cases have not resulted in a real impact on the draft recovery plans.

- a) Despite the strong willingness to contribute to the development of the National Recovery Plans and various meetings undertaken, very few cities think that the inputs they provided have (yet) had a significant impact on the plans.
- b) Many cities (42%) responded that they were not able to contribute to the draft plans but many also expressed optimism that negotiations are ongoing and that the outcome can still improve.
- c) Only 12% of the respondents were confident that their contributions had been considered and that they would be able to directly contribute to the development of the draft National Recovery Plans.
- d) A more significant proportion of cities (20%) responded that they were able to contribute to the draft National Recovery Plans through national city associations.
- e) While most cities are planning to continue urging their government for more meaningful involvement, some are planning a second round of consultations. At this stage, most of the forthcoming consultations are planned through national city associations.

#### **4. Cities brought forward specific projects on mobility, building renovation, digital innovation and cohesion that can have a systemic impact and that are strongly aligned with the digital and green priorities of the facility**

- a) All cities, and especially many in eastern Europe, brought forward projects that can transform the economy, through soft and hard infrastructure that can enable the EU Green deal locally, with notable differences depending on the financial allocations available in different member states.
- b) Cities often perceived a lack of a systematic approach to align development priorities at different level of governance and synergies developed to tackle urban challenges across sectors and actors.
- c) Nordic cities tended to focus their input on the circular economy and in investments that can lead to transformative solutions at the forefront of innovation.
- d) Southern European cities, as well as putting forward green and digital priorities, have highlighted social and territorial cohesion, essential for an inclusive recovery.

#### **5. Most cities were consulted by the ministry responsible for the coordination of the plan but no special attention is given to cities as compared to other actors (e.g. regional authorities)**

- a) Most were consulted by national governments directly. In some cases, consultations had a strong political (affiliation) component, and some got in touch directly with the Prime Minister's office.
- b) Generally, the consultation was carried with the ministry in charge of coordinating the plan.
- c) When consultations with national government were not possible, many cities tried to bring forward their inputs through regional governments. In some countries (e.g. Spain), governments have prioritised dialogue with regional authorities and have not involved municipalities as relevant stakeholders.

## **Benefits of involving cities directly in the recovery plans**

### **1. Bringing the Green Deal to Eastern European cities: Warsaw**

A large number of the projects submitted by Warsaw concerned transport ( the development of the metro system) and environmental protection. In addition, it also submitted proposals in the field of health and e-health, culture, innovative economy, digitisation, e-administration and education. Warsaw did not receive reliable feedback from the national government about whether their inputs will be taken forward. However, of 19 projects submitted, 8 were directly considered by the regional authorities.

### **2. Providing a clear opportunity to cities contribute to the plan: Italian cities**

Italian cities were involved by the national cities association in discussions with the relevant ministry. Following these exchanges, the cities got back directly to the relevant ministry bringing forward concrete projects. Venice, for example, sent a proposal in early September comprising 30 projects, covering all the issues relevant for cities, including sustainable mobility, green transition, social inclusion, economic development, innovation and digitalisation. So far, Venice and the other cities have been notified that

some of the projects proposed will be included in the draft National Recovery Plan and they have started to revise their project descriptions following the instructions received, adding more details, defining the work-plan and timelines.

### **3. Turning the crisis into an opportunity for systemic change: Riga**

In Riga, the discussions over the national recovery plans coincided with a new political leadership that wants to promote an ambitious climate neutrality agenda, defining a systematic approach to the climate goals in accordance with the Latvian National Energy and Climate Plan, as well as EU policies. As well as investment in modern infrastructure to prioritise public transport and implement various micro mobility solutions, the city administration will support recent shifts in people's habits, and respond to the desire for more green areas and bicycle lanes. Other key investment areas that the city hopes to get support for include are energy efficiency of buildings and bio-waste management systems, among others. The city has set up a new Climate Neutrality Committee, which will coordinate climate and emission reduction goals, involving Riga City Council departments and agencies, who are responsible for these areas.

### **4. Proposing projects that can implement solutions at the cutting edge of innovation: Utrecht**

Utrecht presented Green Deal related projects (climate, energy and mobility), such as circular city development, circular construction hubs, heat/cold storage, smart solar charging, and heat networks. In discussion with the government, the city emphasised that the Recovery and Resilience facility is an important opportunity to boost public investments, and that local (and regional) authorities are best position to deliver those investments and develop integrated solutions to address the current societal challenges.

## **Preliminary feedback on the involvement of cities in Operational Programmes 2021-2027**

### **1. Cities are already contacting their relevant managing authorities on an informal level to discuss future Operational Programmes (OPs)**

- a) Most cities responded that they have already been in contact with their managing authorities (MAs) to discuss OPs. Exchanges have mostly been informal and will be taken further in the coming months. Most cities have been in touch about both programmes.
- b) Only 10% of respondents have not yet been in touch with MAs.
- c) Some cities are sometimes finding the consultation put in place by the different managing authorities to be inconsistent and are calling for more structured and targeted methodologies.

## **2. Most of cities reported that the application of partnership principle has remained the same or improved compared to the previous programming period**

- a)** Almost 40% of cities do not see any change in the application of the partnership principle compared to the previous programming period. Almost 30% see an improvement, and 17% see a negative change (mostly in Eastern Europe).
- b)** Consultations with cities are delayed and less effective due to the pandemic, which does not allow for in-person or more informal meetings.

## **Concluding remarks**

The evidence gathered clearly shows that more needs to be done by national governments to involve cities in the recovery. The role of cities needs to be better considered so that vital mobility, building renovation, digital innovation and cohesion projects can have a systemic impact and contribute to the digital and green EU priorities of the recovery.

With the political agreement in December on the Recovery and Resilience Facility, EU institutions acknowledged that local authorities are important partners in reform and investment, and that they should be appropriately consulted and involved.

Eurocities will continue to help cities contacting their national government and with relevant Commission services, including the Recovery and Resilience Task Force (RECOVER), to ensure that National Recovery Plans across Europe have a strong urban dimension and that the role of cities in its implementation is well recognised. Eurocities will continue to monitor the involvement of cities across Europe, providing a platform for cities to discuss and exchange on priorities and projects.

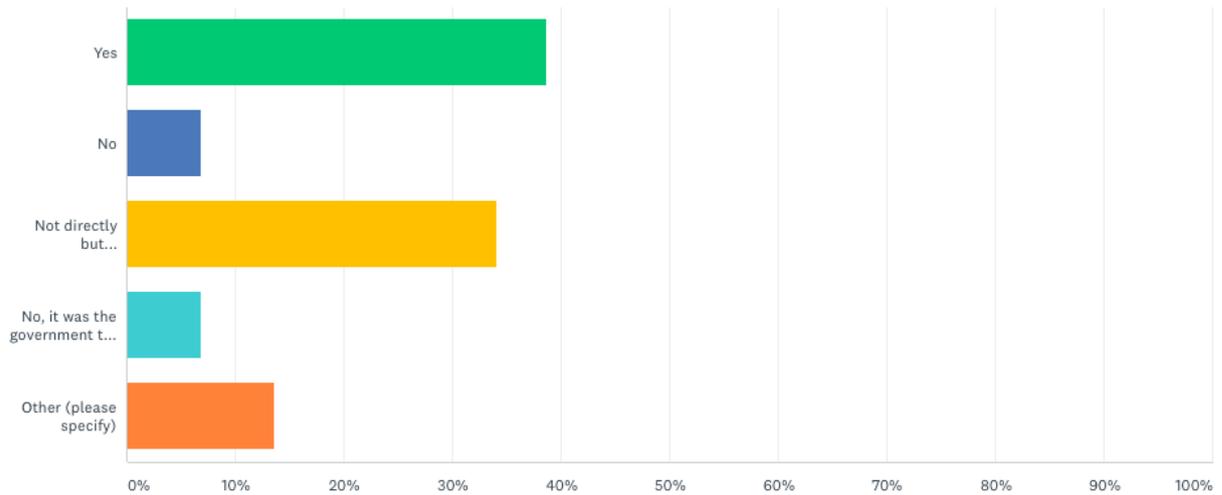
On the side of Operational Programmes for cohesion policy, Eurocities acknowledges that despite the emergency situation, most consultations are ongoing. We will continue to monitor the application of the partnership principle in the next phases amidst widespread fear of centralisation and will also continue to advocate for strong synergies between cohesion policy and National Recovery Plans.

## Annex 1. Charts

### National Recovery Plans:

**Has your city contacted the National Government/Relevant ministries on the draft National Recovery Plan?**

Answered: 44 Skipped: 1

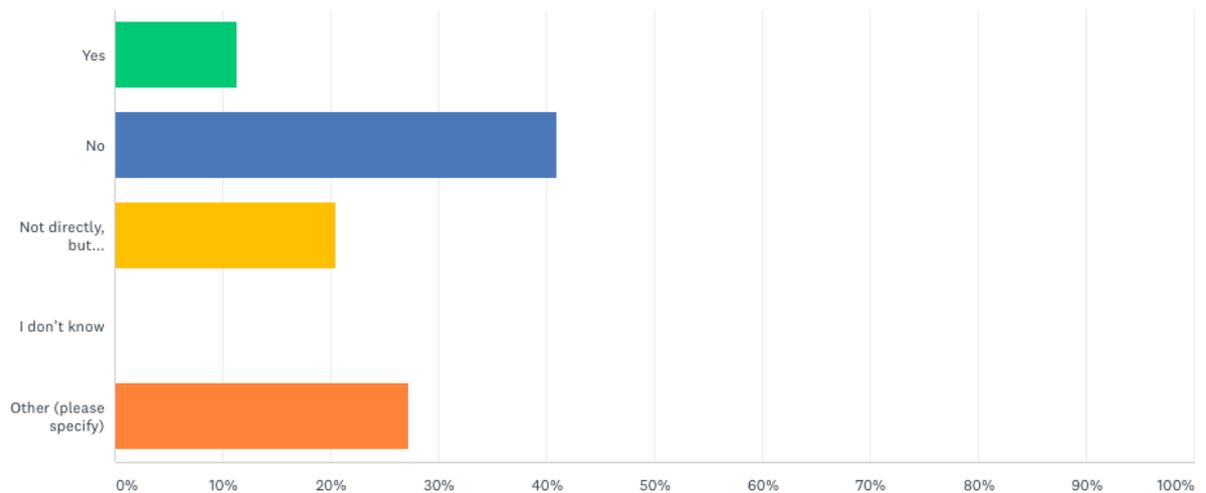


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**Has your city been able to contribute to the development of the draft National Recovery Plans?**

Answered: 44 Skipped: 1

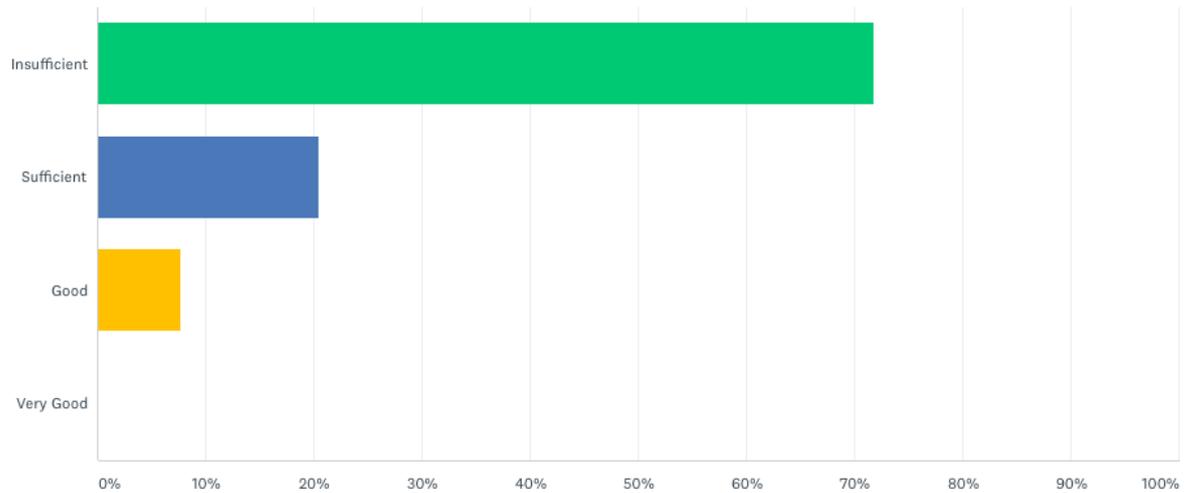


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### How do you evaluate the process put in place by your national government to consult cities?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 6



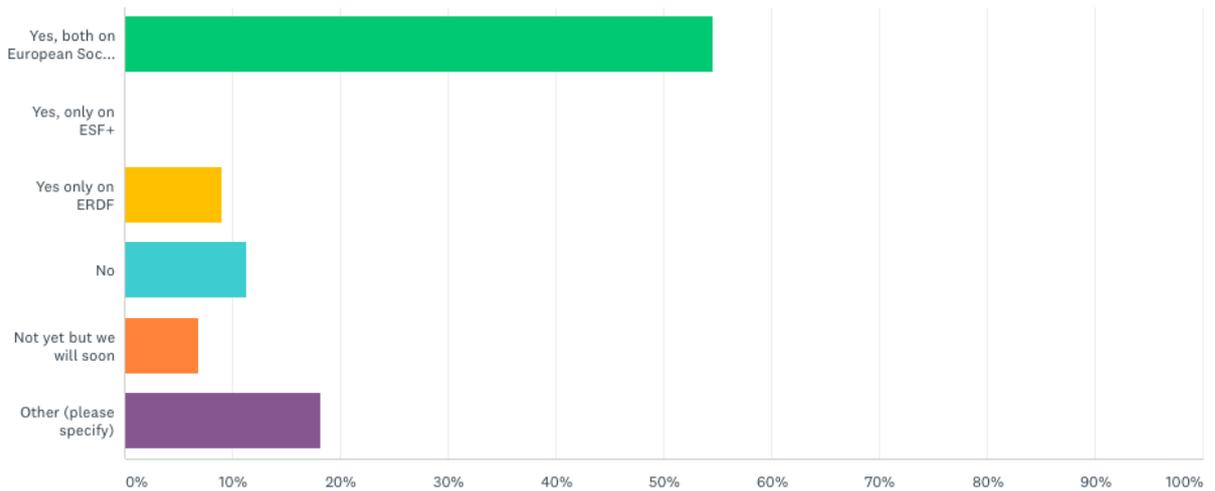
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## Operational Programmes 2021-2027:

### Has your city been already in touch with the respective Managing Authority for consultations on the next Op...

Answered: 44 Skipped: 1

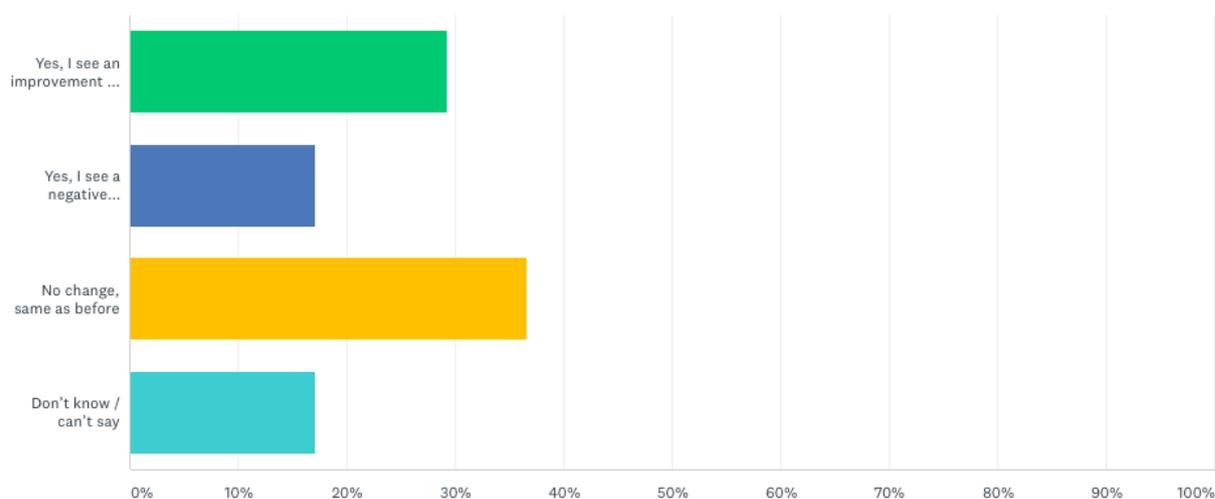


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### Have you noticed any changes (positive or negative) in the way the partnership principle is applied to involv...

Answered: 41 Skipped: 4



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## Annex 2. Cities involved in the consultation

**Austria** Vienna

**Belgium** Antwerp, Ghent

**Bulgaria** Varna

**Cyprus** Nicosia

**Czech Republic** Brno

**Finland** Helsinki, Oulu, Turku

**France** Lille Metropole, Nantes, Pau Bearn Pyrenees

**Estonia** Tallin

**Germany** Cologne, Dortmund, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt am Main, Hannover, Karlsruhe, Kiel, Leipzig, Mannheim, Munich

**Hungary** Budapest

**Italy** Bologna, Florence, Venice

**Latvia** Riga

**Netherlands** Rotterdam, Utrecht

**Poland** Lodz, Warsaw

**Portugal** Braga

**Slovenia** Ljubljana

**Spain** Barcelona, Bilbao, Gijon, Madrid, Terrassa, Zaragoza

**Sweden** Gothenburg, Karlstad, Nacka, Solna, Stockholm