COTAF

CONNECTED TOWNS
FOR A SHARED FUTURE

Project: 101249763 — COTAF – Connected Towns for a Shared Future Programme: CERV-2025-CITIZENS-TOWN-NT

WP23 Online Policy Lab 1

Local Focus

Local Policy Labs: results and recommendations
21 October 2026

Co-funded by
the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union

Project:
101249763 — COTAF – Connected Towns for a Shared Future
Programme: CERV-2025-CITIZENS-TOWN-NT

ANNEX A7 - EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

(To be filled in and uploaded as deliverable in the Portal Grant Management System, at the due date foreseen in the system.

⚠ *Please provide one sheet per event (one event = one workpackage = one lump sum).)*

PROJECT	
Participant:	[1] – Fondazione Yunus Italia ETS (YFI)
PIC number:	878313273
Project name and acronym:	Connected Towns for a Shared Future — COTAF

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	23
Event name:	Online Policy Lab 1 (Local Focus)
Type:	Policy Lab
In situ/online:	*Online*
Location:	Online
Date(s):	21 October 2026
Website(s) (if any):	https://www.cotafeuproject.info/
Participants	
Female:	74
Male:	42
Non-binary:	0
From country 1 [Italy]:	27
From country 2 [Spain]:	15
From country 3 [Czech Republic]:	19
From country 4 [Latvia]:	21
From country 5 [Hungary]:	18
From country 6 [Greece]:	13
From country 7 [Ireland]:	1

From country 8 [Morocco]:	1		
From country 9 [The Netherlands]:	1		
……			
Total number of participants:	116	From total number of countries:	9

Description

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

The Grant Agreement foresaw a single three-hour online Policy Lab for WP23, with around 130 participants. In agreement with the Project Officer, the consortium organised it as local events, one per partner, held online on the same day, 21 October 2026, in each country's language, with the aim of exceeding 101 participants overall. This allowed each territory to discuss the findings with its own stakeholders.

Each partner engaged three stakeholder groups: public institutions, private and philanthropic actors, and civil society. Partners worked either in three one-hour sessions, one per group, or in a single group. All sessions followed the same run-down. It opened with a welcome, the ground rules and the privacy notice, followed by the findings of the COTAF Living Libraries (twelve events in seven countries, with 422 participants). A discussion guided by seven common questions came next (what are we observing, why does it matter, what already exists, what is missing, what could change, who should act, what can start in the next 6–12 months). Each session closed by validating two or three recommendations, drafted in advance from the Living Library findings. The common agenda and methodology are attached.

116 people from nine countries took part, including 70 policymakers. The discussions produced 27 recommendations, listed below by target group, each with the proposed measure, the responsible actors and a first step feasible within 6–12 months. They will be discussed at the Transnational Policy Lab (WP24, March 2027, led by IH Liepāja). In some territories they already have a local follow-up: in Emilia-Romagna, for example, an in-person meeting on 20 November 2026 to turn them into joint projects. Evidence of participation (platform attendance records and screenshots taken with participants' consent) is kept by each partner and available on request.

Recommendations For Institutions

1. Build a verified referral and coordination network

Measure: A regular multi-stakeholder network linking public bodies, social departments, specialist services, NGOs and pro bono professionals such as lawyers and accountants. The network maintains verified referral routes that are accessible to people of all genders. It keeps an up-to-date contact list with a named owner and shares information on the systems its members work with. The people concerned are regularly asked about their needs.

Responsible actors: Municipalities, social departments and specialist services, with support organisations, interested service providers and local public bodies.

First step (within 6 months): Verify eligibility, availability and referral arrangements. Assign an owner to a dated contact sheet. Hold a follow-up meeting with Policy Lab participants, including affected people and pro bono providers, to agree on a simple shared referral process.

2. Create a shared space for knowledge and learning

Measure: A stable space, both physical and online, where professionals from different organisations analyse data and cases together. It would also host an open repository of project documentation, guides, referral pathways and lessons learned. The aim is to check which interventions worked and why, so that new programmes build on earlier experience instead of starting from scratch.

Responsible actors: Municipalities, metropolitan and provincial authorities, municipal social services, health services, schools, NGOs and research organisations, with the support of project funders.

First step (6–12 months): Agree which data to share and in what simple common format. Set up a joint editorial group and publish a first set of materials and case studies on recurring challenges.

3. Close the loop on participation

Measure: Participatory processes should reconvene participants within a short time. They should state clearly what can be done now, what cannot, and what needs more time, and keep participants informed from proposal to decision. Existing participation opportunities should be reviewed to remove linguistic, cultural and organisational barriers. Migrant and racialised communities, and women in particular, should have a meaningful role in designing local policies and services.

Responsible actors: Municipal administrations and the departments responsible for social inclusion and participation, with migrant and community organisations.

First step (within 6 months): Choose one participatory process already under way and hold a feedback meeting with its participants. In parallel, review access barriers together with underrepresented communities and propose practical improvements.

4. Ensure discreet and accessible access to help

Measure: Review web and printed information so that people can find help and request a private conversation without having to disclose their situation publicly.

Responsible actors: Municipalities and public service providers.

First step (within 6 months): Review existing information and options for private conversations. Assess usability within 12 months.

5. Prepare staff for the first conversation

Measure: Scenario-based learning on sensitive enquiry, listening, privacy and referral for staff who are likely to be first points of contact. This goes beyond one-off training.

Responsible actors: Municipal leadership, with a specialist partner.

First step (within 6 months): Pilot a short scenario-based programme with one team or department.

6. Support young people in the transition to adulthood

Measure: Identify and involve families, companies and other actors who support young people when they turn 18, especially unaccompanied foreign minors. Those who volunteer should receive structured support.

Responsible actors: Municipal social services, with third-sector organisations and companies.

First step (6–12 months): Map existing experiences and design a pilot project with available organisations.

7. Remove legal barriers to self-employment

Measure: Amend the personal scope of the relevant law so that temporary-protection holders can register as sole entrepreneurs.

Responsible actors: The relevant ministries, with joint advocacy led by local support organisations.

First step (6–12 months): Send a joint letter signed by several organisations to the competent ministries and request a meeting.

8. Provide gender-responsive access to education and language

Measure: Expand flexible language courses, reception classes and preparatory programmes, so that women, girls and vulnerable groups can participate. Childcare should be included where needed.

Responsible actors: National education authorities, refugee education coordinators, municipalities and educational institutions.

First step (6–12 months): Map educational barriers, including gender-specific ones. Pilot a flexible language programme with childcare.

9. Secure stable funding for integration structures and grassroots initiatives

Measure: Move from short-term project funding to sustained institutional support for local integration services and community-led initiatives. This covers collaboration, visibility and access to resources.

Responsible actors: National, regional and municipal authorities, migrant integration centres and civil society organisations.

First step (6–12 months): Map existing community-led initiatives. Develop a joint proposal for sustainable municipal integration services, informed by consultations with refugee communities in which women participate meaningfully.

10. Promote co-designed community spaces and intercultural dialogue

Measure: Create or strengthen community meeting spaces where migrant and local residents share experiences, identify needs and jointly develop small-scale initiatives. Lived experience should shape both design and implementation.

Responsible actors: Local public institutions, community organisations and people with lived experience of migration and exclusion.

First step (6–12 months): Identify one or two existing spaces to strengthen and launch a first co-designed activity.

Recommendations for Private and Philanthropic Actors

1. Build work-readiness pathways before job placement

Measure: Prepare people before they start work. Training should start from their language skills and expectations and explain clearly how the local labour market works. People should be helped to obtain required documents such as social security numbers and bank accounts before recruitment begins. CV support should present skills accurately and state the target role.

Responsible actors: Training providers, foundations and NGOs, with public employment services, municipal services and companies.

First step (6–12 months): Design a language and job-orientation module to add to existing programmes. Run a pre-season document clinic linked to employers' recruitment calendars.

2. Bridge the financial gap before the first salary

Measure: A small transition grant (around €100–150, plus travel costs) to cover basic needs and the journey to the workplace before the first salary arrives.

Responsible actors: Philanthropic funders and NGOs, with employers co-contributing.

First step (6–12 months): Pilot the fund with one funder and a small group of partner employers.

3. Provide childcare so that women can take up work

Measure: Childcare solutions for single mothers, especially in seasonal work, so that caring responsibilities do not exclude women from employment.

Responsible actors: NGOs, employment support services, employers and municipal childcare services.

First step (6–12 months): Map available childcare near employer sites. Test shared-care arrangements with two or three employers.

4. Involve companies directly in reskilling and placement

Measure: Training that updates the skills of people returning to work, including those over 50. Projects should involve companies directly in placement rather than ending at the training stage.

Responsible actors: Companies and training providers, with regional authorities and public employment centres.

First step (6–12 months): Involve at least one company in a reskilling and placement pathway.

5. Support women leaving violence for longer

Measure: Longer support pathways, with regular contact after a project ends. These should be combined with actions that help people recognise violence, including economic violence.

Responsible actors: Foundations and anti-violence centres, with employment services.

First step (6–12 months): Design regular follow-up contact for women who have completed a pathway, and an awareness action on economic violence.

6. Make workplaces a safe first point of contact

Measure: Organisations should take several steps:

- define a contact role, with time for private conversations, confidentiality arrangements and clear limits of support;
- prepare managers and customer-facing staff through short first-response scenarios;

- agree a referral route to a specialist service, publish discreet contact information and arrange consultation for staff;
- address gender stereotypes that can hide domestic violence.

Responsible actors: Leadership and HR, or a designated contact person, with a specialist partner.

First step (within 6 months): Define the contact role, pilot first-response scenarios and verify referral arrangements. Review use within 12 months.

7. Open school access to foreign minors arriving after 16

Measure: Allow enrolment during the school year and provide gradual entry pathways. These start with more language and catch-up lessons in small groups, followed by increasing time in class.

Responsible actors: Regional school offices, upper secondary schools and vocational training centres, with the services responsible for the young people.

First step (6–12 months): Start from a pathway already tested locally and propose it to at least one other school.

8. Co-design programmes with the communities they serve

Measure: Involve migrant associations and community representatives in the design of new programmes and initiatives. Community members who can act as bridges between groups should play a central role.

Responsible actors: Private organisations, foundations and programme managers, with migrant associations and community representatives.

First step (within 6 months): Identify bridge organisations and representatives, and hold initial consultations to understand diverse needs.

9. Strengthen welcoming practices

Measure: Simple, accessible welcoming plans that address linguistic and cultural barriers, encourage interpersonal support and make participation easier.

Responsible actors: Private organisations, associations, foundations and community networks.

First step (6–12 months): Review existing welcoming practices and draft a first welcoming plan.

10. Recognise and sustain community networks

Measure: Give visibility, resources and sustained support to community-led initiatives. Promote positive local examples of intercultural collaboration and migrant participation to challenge stereotypes and strengthen social cohesion.

Responsible actors: Foundations, philanthropic organisations and local institutions, with community associations and local media.

First step (6–12 months): Map existing community-led initiatives and identify where support would have the most impact.

Recommendations for Civil Society

1. Build connected service networks with referral feedback

Measure: Create dedicated opportunities for organisations to really get to know each other's services, access rules and methods. Agree shared referral arrangements with a simple feedback system, so that the referring organisation learns the outcome. On employment specifically, a standing local working group should link NGOs, funders, public employment services and the municipality. Staff should have access to consultation with specialist services.

Responsible actors: Third-sector organisations, specialist services and local public services, including public employment services and the municipality.

First step (within 6 months): Hold a first convening to agree terms of reference and a shared referral pathway. Test referral feedback between at least two organisations, and review usability within 12 months.

2. Equip organisations with a first-contact guide

Measure: A concise first-contact procedure for staff and volunteers. Schools should have a separately reviewed child-protection component.

Responsible actors: Organisational leadership, with a specialist service.

First step (within 6 months): Draft the procedure and test it in at least one organisation.

3. Reach people where they already are

Measure: Bring organisations into informal meeting places such as community clubs and neighbourhood association spaces. Municipalities should be asked to recognise the social role of these spaces. Information, including employment information, should reach groups who are usually left out, especially women. This means using women-led community channels, multilingual and non-stereotypical materials, and listings that flag childcare-compatible and part-time roles. People should be able to access these materials without disclosing their situation.

Responsible actors: Civil society organisations, associative networks, schools and public employment services, with municipalities and funder support.

First step (6–12 months): Identify one or two association spaces in which to open a help desk or first-contact activity. Co-design an outreach pilot with refugee women and test it with one programme.

4. Strengthen intercultural mediation and language support

Measure: Improve access to intercultural mediation in educational, healthcare and other public services. Use language facilitation and non-verbal forms of communication. Increase the visibility of migrant and racialised role models.

Responsible actors: Civil society organisations, public service providers, local institutions and community communication initiatives.

First step (6–12 months): Map existing mediation resources and role-model initiatives, and identify gaps in access.

5. Use schools to rebuild trust and challenge stereotypes

Measure: In schools, provide education on relationships, consent and citizenship, together with youth associations for 14- to 18-year-olds. Create facilitated opportunities to share lived experience and challenge stereotypes, for example through the Living Library methodology. In institutions, listening should always come with feedback on what will and will not be done.

Responsible actors: Schools, youth associative networks, community organisations, Living Library organisers and public administrations, with migrant associations and intercultural facilitators.

First step (6–12 months): Link at least one school with a youth association. Pilot an adaptation of the Living Library for an educational setting.

6. Ensure meaningful participation in project design

Measure: Migrant and racialised people should contribute directly to defining, designing and implementing the initiatives that affect them. Co-design and representation criteria should be included in relevant funding calls.

Responsible actors: Civil society organisations, community associations, project promoters and funding bodies.

First step (within 6 months): Review current project development practices and propose co-design criteria for at least one funding call.

7. Agree a shared impact data framework

Measure: Common indicators on outcomes, starting with refugee employment and broken down by gender. These would let civil society and government track what works and make the case for public investment.

Responsible actors: Civil society data and impact specialists, with funders and the municipality.

First step (6–12 months): Agree a minimum set of gender-disaggregated indicators and collect baseline data across partner organisations.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).

Co-funded by the European Union

COTAF
CONNECTED TOWNS FOR A SHARED FUTURE

Project: 101249763 — COTAF – Connected Towns for a Shared Future
Programme: CERV-2025-CITIZENS-TOWN-NT

WP23 – Common Materials for the Local Policy Labs

Document 1 – Common WP23 agenda

All seven Local Policy Labs run on 21 October 2026, 10:00–13:00 CEST, as three one-hour focus groups, one per stakeholder category. Each slot addresses gender equality and migrant inclusion through the same four steps, so results stay comparable and feed WP24 – Transnational Policy Lab.

Fixed parameters

Item	Common choice
Date	21 October 2026 (required by the Project Officer)
Time window	10:00–13:00 CEST; Partners can fix their local time accordingly
Format	Online, one local event per partner, in the local language
Structure	Three sequential one-hour focus groups, grouped by stakeholder category
Themes	Gender equality and migrant inclusion in every slot, with non-discrimination and intersectionality as cross-cutting lenses
Evidence base	Findings of the first 12 Human Library / Living Library events
Output	2–3 recommendations per slot on the common template (Document 2)
Participants	At least 15 per partner; at least 101 for the consortium

Agenda at a glance

Time (CEST)	Slot	Stakeholder category	Who it convenes
10:00–11:00	Slot 1	Institutional and public stakeholders	Municipalities, provinces, regions, public bodies, academic

Time (CEST)	Slot	Stakeholder category	Who it convenes
			representatives
11:00–12:00	Slot 2	Private and philanthropic sector	Employers with D&I, CSR or sustainability functions, cooperative banks, foundations, donors
12:00–13:00	Slot 3	Civil society	NGOs, associations, community hubs, schools, active citizens and networks

Standard run-down for every slot

Minutes	Step	Content
~5	Welcome and COTAF framing	Purpose of WP23 and of this group, ground rules including privacy, the two themes as the frame
~10	Evidence snapshot from the Human Libraries	3–5 local findings most relevant to this stakeholder category
~35	Facilitated focus-group discussion	The seven common questions, with prompts tailored to the group's own levers
~10	Priority recommendations capture	2–3 recommendations on the common template, each with a responsible actor and a first step in 6–12 months

Slot objectives

Slot 1 – Institutional stakeholders. Map the policy levers, competences and existing measures at municipal, provincial and regional level. Identify gaps and coordination bottlenecks between governance tiers, and where institutional action can do most for both themes. Municipalities that signed a Letter of Support for COTAF are the first people to invite.

Slot 2 – Private and philanthropic sector. Examine how employers and philanthropic actors advance workplace inclusion. Map effective D&I and CSR practices, inclusive recruitment and career pathways, and grant-making levers, and name the persistent gaps. This slot also explores future funding and sustainability options for COTAF approaches.

Slot 3 – Civil society. Bring grassroots and lived-experience perspectives: everyday barriers, service gaps and community-engagement practices that work with young people, women and migrant residents. This slot also looks at who services never reach, and why.

Local variants agreed within the framework

- **Blended Slot 1 (Hub Mladá Boleslav, possibly IH Budapest):** municipal participants join together from one connected room; slots 2 and 3 stay fully remote. Recommended wherever mayors or officials are unlikely to connect individually.
- **Shorter evidence input (IH Liepaja):** the evidence snapshot may be folded into the opening of the discussion (5 + 45 + 10 minutes), provided at least one Human Library finding opens the discussion.
- **Separate online links per slot:** recommended for all partners, to track attendance per category and manage transitions.
- **Slot order:** partners may reorder the slots to suit stakeholder availability, as long as each slot keeps one category.

Staffing per slot

Each slot needs one facilitator, one rapporteur and one technical host who manages the platform, links and attendance record. The same people may cover all three slots. A short evidence presenter can be the facilitator.

Co-funded by the European Union

Document 2 – Focus-group methodology and common guiding questions

Every focus group brings together one stakeholder category, works through the same seven questions on both themes, and leaves with 2–3 recommendations on the common template. This design, agreed on 16 September, keeps discussions operational in one hour and makes the seven events comparable.

Principles

- **Same category, several themes.** Participants share a type of responsibility, so they can name the levers they actually control.
- **Evidence first.** Discussion starts from Human Library findings and lived experience, not general descriptions of national policy.
- **Local and realistic.** Proposals should sit within municipal, regional, corporate or community competence rather than national reform.
- **Comparable.** The seven questions and the recommendation template are not changed locally; partners add prompts under them.
- **Theme emphasis follows evidence.** Where a partner's Living Library covered one theme only (Hub Mladá Boleslav: gender; IH Donostia and IH Budapest: migrant inclusion), the group leads on that theme and the report says so.

Roles

Role	Responsibility
Facilitator	Opens the slot, presents or introduces the evidence, keeps time, guides the seven questions, protects a safe tone
Rapporteur	Captures key points and fills the recommendation template live, then translates it into English
Technical host	Runs the platform and links, records attendance, takes consented screenshots

The seven common questions

The left column is fixed for all partners. The prompts merge the refinements proposed by YFI, IH Donostia, IH Budapest and Hub Mladá Boleslav; IH Istra and IH Liepaja asked to keep the questions as they are.

#	Common question	Facilitator prompts
Q1	What are we seeing?	Which issues emerge from citizens' and Living Books' experiences? Which Human

#	Common question	Facilitator prompts
		Library evidence illustrates them? Ground it in concrete local cases.
Q2	Why does it matter?	Who is affected, including people not usually expected to be affected? What are the consequences for inclusion, equality and civic participation?
Q3	What already exists?	Which services, programmes, policies or community initiatives already respond, within this group's own remit? Where do people get referred today?
Q4	What is missing?	Where is the gap between people's lived experience and the current response? What do people still need?
Q5	What could change?	What specific, realistic local action would improve the situation?
Q6	Who should act?	Who has the mandate and capacity? Which other stakeholders must be involved? Name identifiable actors, including the people in the room.
Q7	What can start in 6–12 months?	What concrete first step is feasible within the group's remit and budget, not the perfect long-term solution?

Suggested timing within the 35-minute discussion

Minutes	Questions	Aim
~10	Q1–Q2	Agree the 2–3 issues that matter most for this group

Minutes	Questions	Aim
~10	Q3–Q4	Map what exists and the main gaps
~15	Q5–Q7	Turn gaps into actions, actors and first steps

Additional questions

Two additions are built into the recommendation capture for everyone, because they fill fields of the common template:

- **What concrete role can your own organisation play in the next 6–12 months?** (YFI) – turns discussion into commitment.
- **How will we know whether the action has made a difference?** (IH Donostia) – gives each recommendation an indicator.

Three more are optional, to use if time allows:

- Which of today's proposals could be transferred to another territory or country? (YFI)
- What would make a real difference to people? (IH Budapest)
- Who did we not invite to this discussion, and why did it not occur to us? (Hub Mladá Boleslav)

From discussion to recommendation

Each recommendation follows one chain, which the rapporteur applies consistently: citizen experience → problem → existing response → gap → proposed measure → responsible actor → feasibility → expected change → indicator. The indicator step was added on IH Donostia's proposal.

The rapporteur records each recommendation on the common template (Working Grid, Sheet 2, section 8):

Field	Content
Context	Country/territory, slot, topic
1–3	Citizen experience or evidence, problem identified, groups affected
4–5	Existing response, gap identified
6–8	Proposed measure, responsible actor(s), partners to involve
9–11	Implementation level, timeframe (0–12 months, 1–3 years, 3+ years), feasibility with explanation
12–14	Expected result, possible indicator, transferability

Assessment criteria

Before closing, the group checks its 2–3 recommendations against seven criteria.

Criterion	Test
Relevance	It responds to a need documented in the Human Library events
Local relevance	It fits the territory's social, institutional and territorial conditions
Feasibility	It is within the real competences of the actor named
Responsibility	An identifiable actor is named, not "the institutions"
Timeframe	A first step is possible in 6–12 months, or the longer horizon is justified
Inclusion	It reflects the voices of those directly affected, in particular women and migrants
Transferability	It is flagged if it could work in other COTAF territories

Language and reporting

Each event runs in the local language with no interpretation. Rapporteurs capture recommendations in the local language and translate the template into English, which is the consortium language for synthesis and for WP24. Partners send the Coordinator the completed templates, attendance evidence and a short summary per slot, using the reporting template to follow.

Privacy and evidence of participation

Each partner applies its national GDPR rules and the sensitivity of its participants. Full video recording of discussions is not required. Acceptable evidence includes platform attendance records, attendance lists and screenshots taken with consent. Automatic transcripts may support the report where legally possible and announced in advance. The format of the WP23 video will be set by the Coordinator by 30 September, with a preference for a summary or collective video rather than recorded focus groups.