

IAP
REPORT

BREAKING ISOLATION

URBACT NETWORK OF EUROPEAN CITIES TACKLING SOCIAL ISOLATION

January 2026 – by Christophe Gouache,
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URBACT



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Interreg

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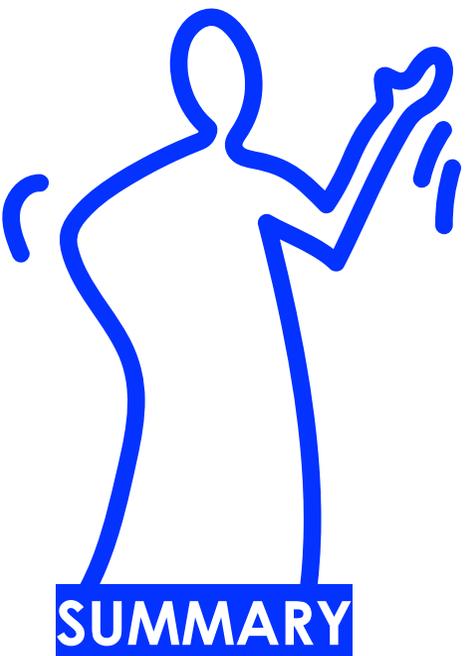
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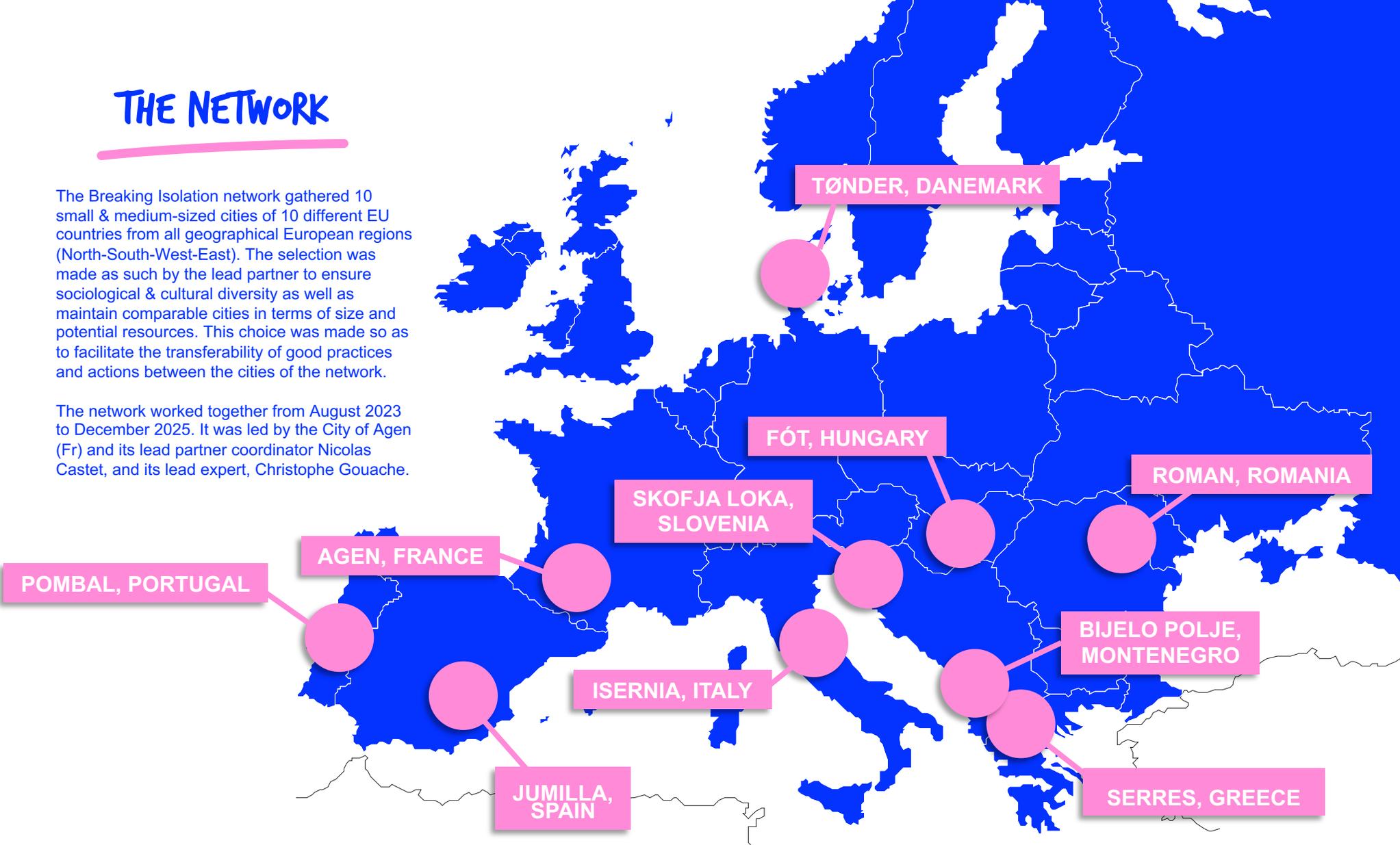
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THE NETWORK

The Breaking Isolation network gathered 10 small & medium-sized cities of 10 different EU countries from all geographical European regions (North-South-West-East). The selection was made as such by the lead partner to ensure sociological & cultural diversity as well as maintain comparable cities in terms of size and potential resources. This choice was made so as to facilitate the transferability of good practices and actions between the cities of the network.

The network worked together from August 2023 to December 2025. It was led by the City of Agen (Fr) and its lead partner coordinator Nicolas Castet, and its lead expert, Christophe Gouache.



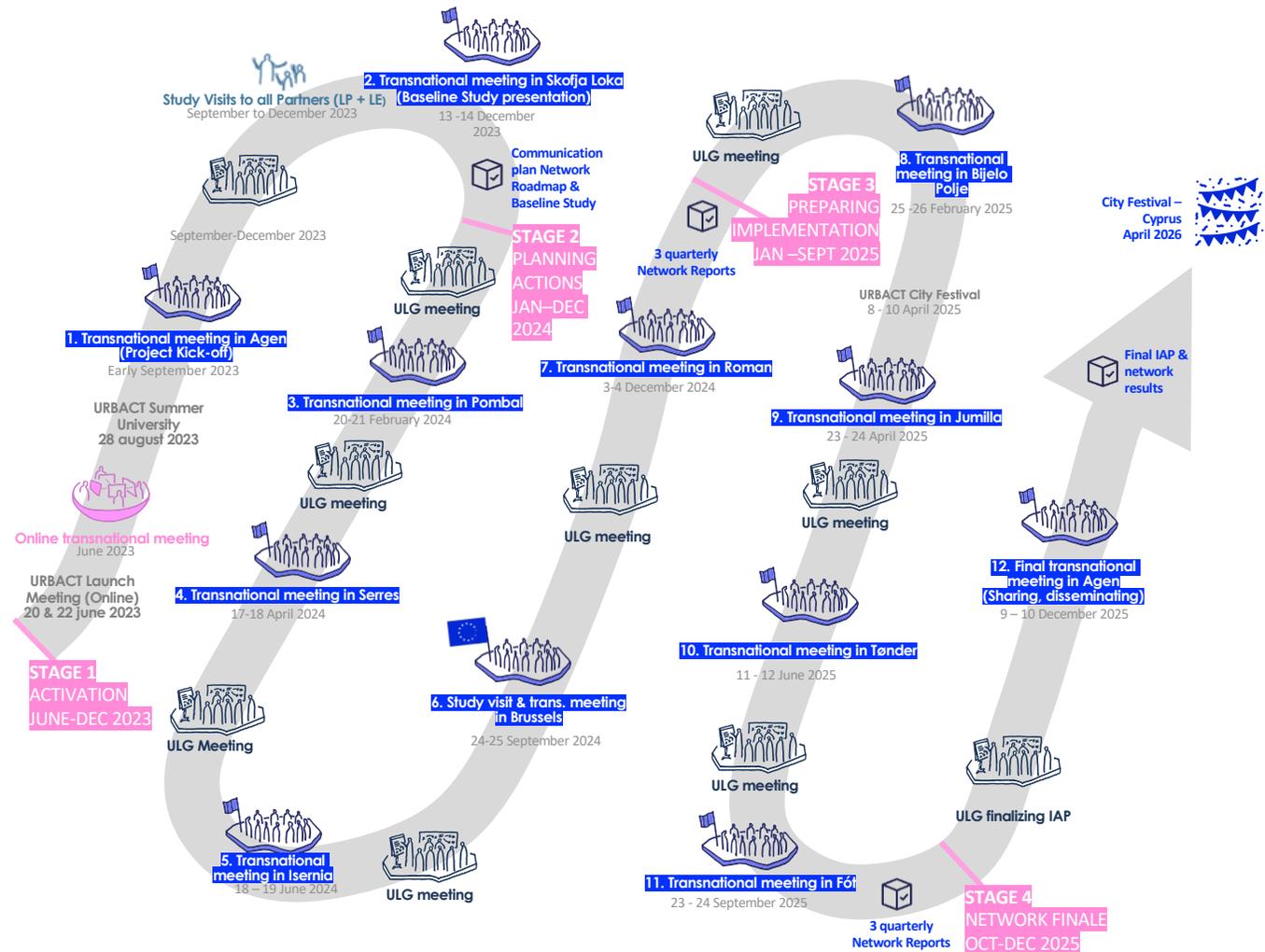
A COLLECTIVE JOURNEY

The Breaking Isolation journey is structured around a series of collective rendez-vous called Transnational Meetings (TNM). These TNM gather, systematically, the 10 cities of the Breaking Isolation network and is the most precious exchange & learn space for the network. Indeed, during those TNMs, each city presents the results of their work at local level with their URBACT local group, then the hosting city showcases inspiring practices (through on site visits), Lead Partner checks up administrative and communication matters while the Lead Expert explains the next steps of the journey as well as presents the ad-hoc tools that cities will have to use with their ULGs.

In between each TNM, cities organize their URBACT Local Group (ULG) meetings, in order to share their results to the next TNM.

Alongside ULG meetings and TNMs, the network also punctually organizes online meetings as well as webconferences on specific issues/topics.

This report summarizes what happened during the first semester of 2024 (between January 2024 and June 2024).



IS SOCIAL ISOLATION A POLICY TOPIC?

10 CITIES WORKING TOGETHER
YET STARTING FROM
DIFFERENT GROUNDS

When investigating the topic of social isolation for the Baseline Study it was quite striking to realize that social isolation is not so much a policy topic. Whether it was at local, national or EU level, it seemed that isolation was not a public problem as no dedicated policy strategy could be found. Many policies could be found on social exclusion, on discrimination, on social integration eventually, but not explicitly on the topic of social isolation and the growing phenomenon of loneliness.

Yet, when looking into scientific studies, it was rather clear that the problem was rapidly amplifying and needed policy attention, if not yet policy response. After a few months, the network got confirmation that the challenge it selected was a good choice because the World Health Organization (WHO) announced in November 2023 the launch of a special international commission on loneliness and lack of social connections. This meant the network was on the right track and even part of the first explorers of the topic (through policymaking at least, as it was already a topic of interest in the scientific world).

Anyway, when investigating locally, in all 10 cities, what was done already that

could reduce, prevent or eliminate social isolation, we found many really good practices! Most of them were not explicitly described as policy tools against isolation but as a matter of fact, in practice, that's precisely what they were doing.

The Baseline Study mentions a lot of those pre-existing policies/cases so don't hesitate to have a look at it here: <https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/2025-05/Baseline-study-v2.pdf>

It is worth mentioning that some cities, from the study visits, appeared to be more advanced than others on the topic (or at least had more social policies than others). Amongst the cities with the best policy practices, we can cite:

- Pombal, Portugal
- Agen, France
- Toender, Denmark
- Jumilla, Spain

Some cities were less advanced regarding the social isolation topic, and in particular the municipalities of:

- Roman, Romania
- Isernia, Italy
- Bijelo Polje, Montenegro

TRANSFERRING EXISTING PRACTICES BETWEEN CITIES



Since the study visits revealed many very interesting practices, it is worth noting that three things happened:

- Some cities decided to integrate in their action plans, already existing practices from other partners
- Some cities decided to conduct testing actions based on others' existing practices

This is interesting and worth mentioning because this is precisely what URBACT is about. Indeed, an action-planning process is not only about inventing new actions to carry on but also transfer practices when they've proven to work. Just like a Transfer Network, some actions got transferred or copied from one city to another. To cite a few examples:

- The solidary taxi (Prostofer programme) of Skofja Loka in Slovenia (in which volunteers give free rides to elderly in need using municipality cars) or the On-demand-Transportation of Pombal in Portugal, got copied by Fot in Hungary and inserted into their IAP.

- The neighbourhood festival of Serres, Greece is a direct inspiration from the french national 'Fête des voisins' (Neighbours' Parties).

- The Center for socialization of Isernia or the Center to fight isolation of Agen are both direct inspirations from Jumilla's Daycare center for elderly (Centro de Dia de Personas Mayores).

- The Thematic Socialization days of Isernia were inspired by Tønder's nature school but also Pombal's Sports for all programme.

- The *Let's go to culture together* action from Skofja Loka, Slovenia, is a direct inspiration from Brussels' case of *Culture on prescription* that was presented by the City of Brussels during our special TNM there.

- And *Social Prescribing* in Pombal, Portugal, is a direct inspiration of the Testing Action of the City of Heerlen, Netherlands from the URBACT III Sib-Dev network

CARRYING OUT TESTING ACTIONS

The opportunity of conducting testing actions was largely appreciated by all partner cities as it provides the opportunity to 'make' things, 'to create concrete & operational things', to turn some ideas and intentions into actions.

Within the network, all partners made testing actions, yet with different intensity. Indeed, some partners made 2-3 testing actions while others, such as Fót (Hungary) or Serres (Greece) made 4 or more. All in all, dozens of testing actions were made and proved the added value of such exercise. Also, it is interesting to note that many testing actions made their entry as full actions in many Integrated Actions Plans. And that several cities got inspired by each other's testing actions ideas and decided to carry out similar ones:

- Jumilla (Spain), Roman (Romania) and Fot (Hungary) conducted similar testing actions regarding

communication campaigns

- Serres (Greece) and Fot (Hungary) conducted similar actions regarding Neighbourhood festivities, which inspired other cities for their IAPs

To only cite a few of testing actions that made their way to the final versions of some IAP:

- The Breaking Isolation Café & chat corner in the public library of Fot (Hungary)
- The Bench of Friendship of Agen (France)
- The Establishment of a "Neighborhood Festival» in Serres (Greece)
- The Intergenerational "Youth-Elderly" activities in Bijelo Polje, Montenegro
- The Citizens College (Three-Day Peoples College Experience between isolated people) in Toender (Denmark)
- The public campaign of digital posters to raise attention in the streets: Can we talk? in Jumilla (Spain)



Serres, Greece



Mesa Camilla, Jumilla, Spain



Bench of friendship, Agen, France





Neighbourhood fest, Serres, Greece



Psychology lectures, Fót, Hungary



Community Music events, Fót, Hungary



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Living streets, Pombal, Portugal



Herbs/mushrooms picking as pretext to socialize, Tønder, Denmark

IAP ACTIONS OF OUR 10 CITIES

AGEN, FRANCE

0. **Municipal Centre for the fight against isolation**
1. **Shocking communication campaign on social isolation & guideline with self-test**
2. **Contact number and app to alert on isolated person**
3. **Benches of friendship**
4. **AI support to identify isolated people**
5. **Neighbor's support**
6. **Experts Unit**
7. **Training sessions added to mental health sessions**
8. **Bereavement follow-up**
9. **Local citizen teams**
10. **Intergenerational projects**
11. **"Active retirement" process**

ISERNIA, ITALY

1. **Observatory on Social Isolation (OIS)**
2. **Information and training workshops**
3. **Community Information and Awareness-Raising Events**
4. **Meetings for families and schools**
5. **Intergenerational workshops**
6. **Thematic days for socialization**

Additional Ideas:

Community facilitators

Augmented human

Center for socialisation and mutual support

TØNDER, DENMARK

1. *Activity co-ordinators*
2. *One-on-one*
3. *Citizens college*
4. *Robots*
5. *Information campaign*

ŠKOFJA LOKA, SLOVENIA

1. *Assessment tool for early recognition of social isolation*
2. *Active database of relevant organisations and programmes*
3. *Let's go to culture together*
4. *Meeting place – Srečevalnica (upgrade)*
5. *Public "Garage"*
6. *"Slovenske Urice" - Introduction to slovenian language for newcomers*
7. *Peer support for at risk groups*
8. *Holiday activities for at risk kids*
9. *Protocols for high risk situations*
10. *Social isolation awareness campaign*
11. *Postmen as social workers*
12. *Mobile social workers*

JUMILLA, SPAIN

1. *Digital posters – Can we talk?*
2. *2x7 (elderly care service)*
3. *La hucha del tiempo (Time Bank)*
4. *Mesa Camilla (Brazier Table)*
5. *Communication channel*
6. *Isolation local action group*

ROMAN, ROMANIA

1. *Soul connections - Helpline for seniors*
2. *Roman Community Garden*
3. *Living Library*
4. *“Connected Roman” Platform*
5. *Community Café*
6. *Neighbour’s Day*
7. *Inclusion Ambassadors*
8. *Happy Faces*
 - I. *Intergenerational volunteering network*
 - II. *Activate the Neighborhood– Urban Animation and Community Events Programme*
 - III. *Psychological and social support programs for isolated individuals*
 - IV. *Social Lab North-East — Pilot Model in Roman*

BUELO POLJE, MONTENEGRO

1. Roma mediation and access to services
2. Telecare and home-based support for elderly
3. Intergenerational “Youth-Elderly” solidarity programme

FÓT, HUNGARY

1. Lectures by psychologists
2. Anti-bullying workshops
3. Live music in the local market
4. Social Cafe and Chat Corner
5. Easy Retirement Years Programme
6. Connect to Fót Festival
7. Community greening & gardening
8. “Knock on your neighbour’s door”
9. Solidarity Taxi
10. Happy Mothers & Happy Kids
11. Fitt Fót
12. City Mobile App

SERRES, GREECE

1. *Development of a tool/app for diagnosis*
2. *Incorporation of a dedicated sub-site for social structures into the official website*
3. *Development of a unified platform/registry for managing vulnerable groups*
4. *Strengthening/improving the one stop shop social service*
5. *Establishment of advisory board (ULG 2.0), appointment of designated representative as co-ordinator*
6. *Creation of collaboration map*
7. *Collaboration with stakeholders for targeted events*
8. *Establishment of the “Neighborhood Festival”*
9. *Volunteering: Operation of platform under the relevant municipal department*
10. *Creation of communication material and information campaigns*

POMBAL, PORTUGAL

1. *Municipal Telephone line – SOS Isolation & Loneliness*
2. *Platform/website on social isolation*
3. *Skills training program for technicians*
4. *Online form*
5. *Social Prescribing*
6. *Sharing glances through art*
7. *Librarycoffee*
8. *Awareness campaign on social isolation*
9. *Seminar/Conference on social isolation & loneliness*
- I. *Social Radar*
- II. *Living Street / Meeting Point*
- III. *Sports for all*
- IV. *Senior spaces*
- V. *On-demand transportation*
- VI. *Retirement preparation program*
- VII. *Municipal Neighborhood Promotion Program*

LOOKING
ACROSS ALL
ACTION PLANS



7 CHALLENGES

FOR CITIES TO FOCUS ON AND CHOOSE FROM

The challenge of social isolation is large and has systemic causes and implications. The reflex would be to tackle this challenge by targeting sub-groups of people such as 'the elderly', 'the young ones', etc. But, doing so would not be correct. Why? First, because a lot of causes of social isolation are not necessarily age-related. Second, because targeting specific groups always lead to siloed policy approaches. 'It's not in our scope. It's the Youth Department's job'. Therefore, we recommended to our cities in the network not to work on the subject of isolation through the age lense but rather 7 focus points that they could choose from:

1. We need to better identify socially isolated people
2. We need to better diagnose those at risk of isolation (early signs)
3. We need to develop direct answers to help out those already isolated
4. We need to reinforce and multiply solutions to prevent isolation of those at risk
5. We need to raise awareness on social isolation, how to recognize it and its effects
6. We need to develop city-wide answers by partnering within municipality departments and with local stakeholders, and in particular, local NGOs
7. We need to reinforce a culture of mutual community care





TRANSVERSAL ANALYSIS

It is interesting to observe IAPs not just individually but also at network level to identify similarities and eventual differences. While all cities have developed some adhoc actions, they also have many similar types of interventions such as:

- The need for **actual data** on isolation through observatory/monitoring/data systems/social radar etc.

- The need for **awareness raising** and communication about the phenomenon of isolation (as it is largely unknown)

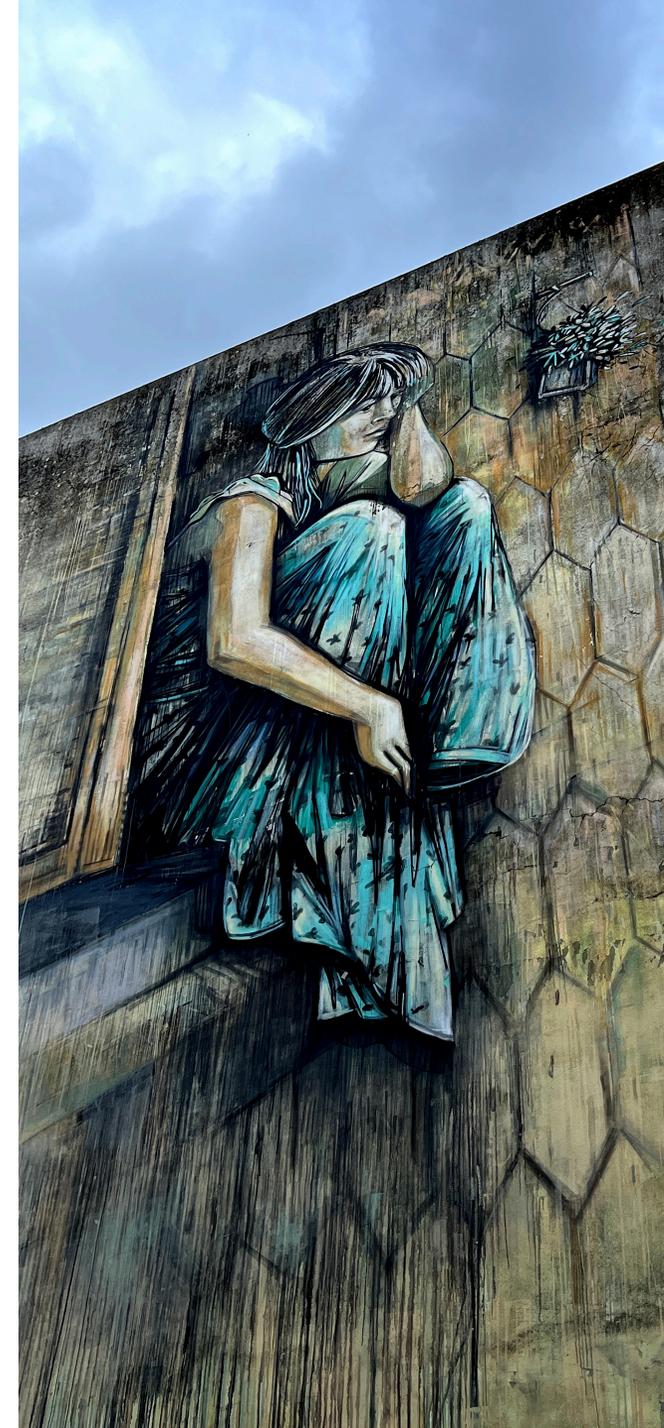
- The need for **training and capacity building** of those who may provide help and support such as social workers, health professionals but also family caretakers, NGO volunteers, etc.

- The need to make use of **digital tools** and modern technology (inc. AI or robots) to explore new ways to identify isolated people and break isolation

- The need to **provoke social interactions** through intergenerational programs, volunteer peer to peer support, community spaces, meeting occasions, cultural opportunities or nature-based and sport ones

- The need to **bring on the table the topic of isolation** at school but also to those about to retire

- The need to develop **dedicated responses** to specific targets such as the elderly, LGBTQI+ communities, Roma people, etc.



AWARENESS AND COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS

"People don't know much about isolation. It's not a topic of discussion. Even inside municipality councils."

Every city in the network recognizes that the first essential step in combating social isolation is **making the invisible visible**. This consensus demonstrates that **awareness-raising is foundational** to all other interventions especially since the topic of social isolation is largely unknown.

The approaches will vary significantly—from Agen's intentionally "shocking" campaign with bold visual messages to Fót's educational lectures by psychologists, to Pombal's combination of campaigns with professional seminars.

Despite format differences, all will share common goals: de-stigmatizing isolation, educating communities about warning signs, providing self-assessment tools, and mobilizing collective responsibility. The campaigns will utilize multiple channels—traditional media, social media, public events, educational materials— **to shed light and bring attention** to this public problem of isolation.

1. ***ISERNIA: Community Information and Awareness-Raising Events***
2. ***AGEN: Shocking communication campaign on social isolation & guideline with self-test***
3. ***TØNDER: Information campaign***
4. ***JUMILLA: Communication channel***
5. ***ROMAN: Community awareness through events***
6. ***BIJELO POLJE: Awareness is mentioned as a focus***
7. ***FÓT: Lectures by psychologists***
8. ***SERRES: Creation of communication material and information campaigns***
9. ***ŠKOFJA LOKA: Social isolation awareness campaigns***
10. ***POMBAL: Awareness campaign + Seminar/Conference on social isolation***

OBSERVATORY/ MONITORING/ DATA SYSTEMS

"We can't know what to do and where to intervene, if we don't have data, if we don't have information."

Half of our cities plan to establish **systematic approaches to collecting, analyzing, and monitoring data on social isolation**. These will range from comprehensive observatories serving as central coordinating structures to digital databases and assessment tools.

The common thread is recognition that combating isolation effectively requires **continuous data collection and the ability to track changes over time**. Isernia's Observatory will conduct annual surveys and participatory planning workshops. Pombal will integrate national programs like Social Radar with locally-developed online diagnostic tools.

These monitoring systems will enable cities to identify at-risk populations proactively, track the evolution of isolation phenomena, and **adjust strategies based on evidence**, not just impressions or feelings.

1. ***ISERNIA: Observatory on social isolation (OIS)***
2. ***POMBAL: Social Radar, Online form to diagnose, Platform/website***
3. ***SERRES: Dedicated sub-site architecture, Registry and monitoring system***
4. ***ŠKOFJA LOKA: Assessment tool development, Peer support***
5. ***FÓT: Monitoring and evaluation components across actions***

TRAINING & CAPACITY BUILDING

" If professionals are not trained or made aware of isolation, its impacts, and symptoms, they are unlikely to recognize it."

Seven cities plan to train professionals, volunteers, and community members to recognize isolation and respond appropriately. This represents recognition that good intentions alone are insufficient—effective intervention requires **specific skills and knowledge**, especially with such an unknown public problem.

The training programs will target municipal staff, healthcare professionals, social workers, educators, and volunteers. Isernia will offer two annual workshop cycles using a co-design approach. Agen will integrate mental health training with standard sessions. Common training content will include: identifying early warning signs, understanding risk factors, appropriate communication techniques, and knowing when to refer to specialized services.

1. ***ISERNIA: Information and Training Workshops***
2. ***AGEN: Training sessions added to mental health session***
3. ***FÓT: Training components in multiple actions (anti-bullying teacher training, volunteer training)***
4. ***SERRES: Staff training components***
5. ***ŠKOFJA LOKA: Training for coordinators and tools***
6. ***POMBAL: Skills training program for technicians***
7. ***BIJELO POLJE: Roma mediator training***

DIGITAL TOOLS & TECHNOLOGY

"We have to make use of the modern tools available, otherwise we might miss people that need help and even miss out some possible solutions."

Seven cities will leverage technology to extend reach, enable easier reporting, and identify at-risk individuals.

The solutions span a spectrum: dedicated telephone hotlines (Pombal, Agen), mobile applications (Agen, Fót), information websites and platforms (Pombal, Serres, Škofja Loka), and advanced analytics (Agen's AI system will cross-reference population data to proactively identify high-risk individuals). Bijelo Polje's telecare system will provide remote monitoring for elderly. While the danish robots of Tønder will try to stimulate conversation and interaction with isolated people.

These digital tools will serve multiple functions: lowering barriers to seeking help, extending professional reach, enabling citizen participation, and providing data for monitoring. All cities balance technology with human contact—digital solutions will complement but never replace face-to-face interaction.

1. ***AGEN: Contact number and app, AI support to identify individuals***
2. ***FÓT: City mobile app, Solidarity Taxi***
3. ***BIJELO POLJE: Telecare and home-based support for elderly***
4. ***POMBAL : Municipal telephone line, website on social isolation***
5. ***SERRES: Development of a tool/app, development of a platform***
6. ***ŠKOFJA LOKA: Active database of relevant organisations, Assessment tool***
7. ***TØNDER : Robots***

INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

"Young people and elderly can suffer from isolation, building links can help them both."

Four cities will develop explicit intergenerational programs recognizing that isolation affects both young and elderly, and that bringing these age groups together can address isolation at both ends while creating mutual benefits.

Isernia will create structured socialization processes through organized meetings where elderly and youth exchange knowledge. Agen will focus on practical activities—digital workshops, gardening, reading, and heritage sharing. Roman's "Living Library" will allow people to serve as "books" sharing their life stories in structured conversations.

These programs will give purpose and connection to elderly who may have retired or lost partners, provide young people with mentorship, and facilitate skill transfer in both directions.

1. ***ISERNIA: Intergenerational Workshops***
2. ***AGEN: Intergenerational projects***
3. ***BIJELO POLJE: Intergenerational "Youth–Elderly" solidarity programme***
4. ***ROMAN : Living library***

VOLUNTEER VISITING / (CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT)

"There are a lot of kind people out there who actually care and could provide help if they were given the opportunity."

Five cities will develop structured systems for volunteers and citizens to visit, support, and monitor isolated individuals, representing a shift from professional-only services to community-wide mobilization.

Agen will create organized pairs of volunteers, municipal agents, and civic service members who will conduct regular visits, plus designate one "caring neighbor" per street to watch for isolation risks—creating a granular neighborhood-level safety net. Roman will deploy Community Patrols and Inclusion Ambassadors. Fót will encourage residents to "Knock on the neighbour's door!"

These systems will share features: systematic recruitment and training, structured protocols defining roles, pairing approaches, and coordination through municipal structures.

1. ***AGEN: Local citizen teams / NINAA system, Neighbours' support***
2. ***ROMAN: Roman Community Garden, Neighbour's day, Inclusion Ambassadors***
3. ***FÓT: "Knock on your neighbour's door! », Community greening and gardening***
4. ***JUMILLA: Neighbour engagement component***
5. ***POMBAL: Citizen engagement throughout actions***

COMMUNITY SPACES & MEETING OCCASIONS

"To socialize, you need spaces and occasions to do so. The more opportunities you have the higher your chances of socializing are."

8 cities will create or enhance physical spaces designed to facilitate spontaneous encounters and regular gathering.

These will range from simple yet powerful interventions like Agen's "Benches of friendship"—clearly marked benches signaling openness to conversation—to more elaborate community hubs. Roman, Fót, and Pombal will establish community cafés combining beverage service with informal gathering spaces. Fót will also create community urban gardens providing outdoor meeting spaces. Pombal will activate "Living Streets / Meeting Points" throughout the municipality. While Serres and Isernia will create event-based socialization opportunities. Tønder intends to organize Citizens College in which small groups of isolated people (or at risk) get to socialize and meet up by spending 3 days together doing activities.

What unites these spaces is intentional design for social interaction—comfortable arrangements encouraging conversation, low or no-cost access, and strategic locations.

1. ***AGEN: Benches of friendship***
2. ***ROMAN: Community Café***
3. ***FÓT: Breaking Isolation Café & Chat Corner, Community urban gardening***
4. ***SERRES: Neighbourhood Festival***
5. ***ŠKOFJA LOKA: Meeting place – Srečevalnica , Public "Garage"***
6. ***POMBAL: Library-coffee, Living Streets / Meeting Points***
7. ***ISERNIA: Thematic days for socialization and the Center for Socialization and Mutual Support (to be confirmed)***
8. ***TØNDER: Citizens college***

CULTURAL, MUSIC, ART ACTIVITIES

"Culture, music, art, dance, all of those offer moments of sharing, of meeting, of experiencing things together."

Five cities will use cultural programs, music, and art as vehicles for bringing isolated individuals into social settings. Roman's "Living Library" will allow people to serve as "books" sharing their life stories in structured conversations. Fót will bring free concerts with local bands into public markets. Pombal will use artistic projects to foster connection. Skofja Loka will prescribe cultural activities to people who would benefit from socialization activities. Serres would celebrate the culture of the people with neighbourhood festivals.

Cultural activities offer unique advantages: they're emotionally engaging, inherently social, accessible across barriers, and combat depression. The emphasis on local performers will strengthen community ties.

1. ***ROMAN: Living Library***
2. ***FÓT: Live music in the local market***
3. ***POMBAL: Sharing Glances Through Art***
4. ***SKOFJA LOKA: Let's go to culture together***
5. ***SERRES: Establishment of the Neighbourhood Festival***

NATURE, GREEN OR SPORTS ACTIVITIES

"Walking in nature or doing sport doesn't have to be a solo activity. It can be a pretext to walk and discuss."

Three cities will incorporate nature-based activities into anti-isolation strategies, aligning social goals with environmental sustainability. Tønder's nature walks facilitate conversation while exercising in outdoor settings. Fót's community urban gardening will add practical purpose—growing food provides goals while regular care ensures repeated interactions. Nature-based activities are particularly appealing to populations who might resist overtly "social service" programs, and align with the network's commitment to green transition.

Two cities will offer sports and physical activity programs combining physical health benefits with social connection. Fót's "Fitt Fót" will be a free community exercise program—the "free" element is crucial as isolation and poverty often intersect. Pombal will pursue Sports for All as it is already a long-standing successful policy.

Group exercise naturally creates camaraderie, provides regular scheduled touchpoints, and improves physical and mental health. For some populations—particularly men and younger adults—sports provide more appealing entry points than explicitly social programs.

1. ***TØNDER: Outdoor experiences and activities***
2. ***FÓT: Community urban gardening ("Connect to Fót") and Fitt Fót (free community exercise program)***
3. ***POMBAL: Green spaces component in Living Streets and Sports for All***

SCHOOL & YOUTH INTERVENTIONS

"More and more young people are isolated, so it's essential to work on the topic at school."

Four cities will implement school and youth-focused interventions designed to address social isolation, bullying, and vulnerability through early engagement and community-based action.

Isernia will have structured meetings that bring together families and schools to improve communication and early identification of challenges. Agen plans to have "benches of friendship" installed in schools to encourage peer connection and dialogue. Whereas, Educational anti-bullying workshops to raise awareness and build empathy are being proposed in Fót. Meanwhile, in Škofja Loka, Inclusive holiday activities will provide safe, supportive environments for children at risk during school breaks.

Together, these initiatives aim to create safer, more inclusive school environments, and strengthen social bonds. All these cities are prioritizing interaction, trust, and mindfulness as the foundation for meaningful and lasting impact.

1. ***ISERNIA: Meetings for Families and Schools***
2. ***AGEN: Benches of friendship (in schools)***
3. ***FÓT: Anti-bullying workshops***
4. ***ŠKOFJA LOKA: Holiday activities for kids at risk***

PRE-RETIREMENT PROGRAMS

"While for many, retirement can be a joy, it's also a big life change that may mean 'social death' for some as it often means losing work-related social relations."

Three cities will develop programs targeting the retirement transition, recognizing that retirement represents a high-risk moment for developing isolation (due to the loss of work-related connections).

Agen's program will allow municipal employees six months before retirement to spend time working with associations during paid work hours, gradually transitioning social connections from workplace to community. Fót will offer informational materials for navigating the transition. The six-month pre-retirement timing is strategic, providing enough time to establish new routines before the abrupt change. Pombal has in place a retirement preparation programme to support a smooth and healthy transition into retirement to enable seniors to remain active participants in the community.

Together, these retirement-focused initiatives aim to reduce isolation, promote active aging, and support the physical and emotional well-being of older adults.

1. ***AGEN: "Active retirement" process***
2. ***FÓT: Easy retirement years – handbook/leaflet***
3. ***POMBAL: Retirement preparation program***

ELDERLY-SPECIFIC SERVICES

"There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to isolation, and the elderly have particular needs and constraints that require tailored responses."

Four cities will develop services specifically designed for elderly populations, recognizing both their heightened isolation risk and unique needs.

Jumilla will offer elderly care service and traditional social gathering spaces. Bijelo Polje will provide telecare. Tønder will implement an "Open door policy in nursing homes" and "Community table" initiative making institutional settings more accessible. Pombal's "Senior Spaces" will be a decentralized program suggesting distributed neighborhood-level gathering points.

These elderly-specific services acknowledge that generic programs often fail elderly due to mobility barriers and particular challenges of late-life isolation.

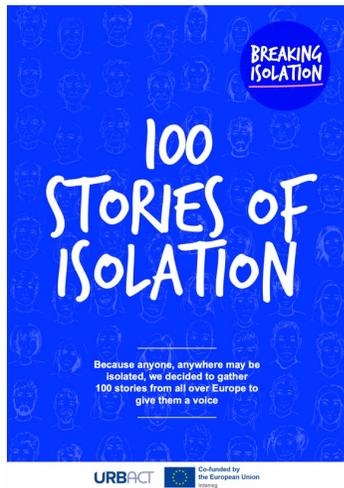
1. ***JUMILLA: 2x7 (Elderly care service), Mesa Camilla (brazier table)***
2. ***BIJELO POLJE: Telecare and home-based support for elderly people***
3. ***TØNDER: Open door policy in nursing homes, "Community table" initiative***
4. ***POMBAL: Senior Spaces (decentralized socialization program)***

NETWORK PRODUCTS





**NETWORK
PRODUCTS**



**100 STORIES
OF ISOLATION**
- book



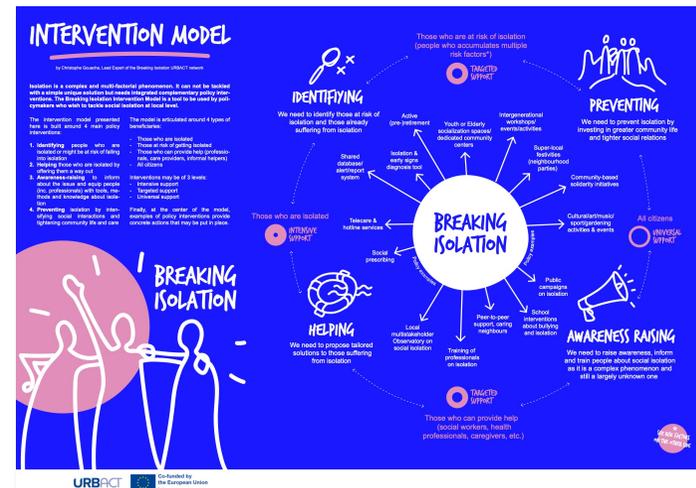
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**HOW SOCIAL
ARE YOU?**
- tool



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**THE BREAKING ISOLATION
INTERVENTION MODEL**
- poster



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INTERVENTION MODEL

by Christophe Gouache, Lead Expert of the Breaking Isolation URBACT network

Isolation is a complex and multi-factorial phenomenon. It can not be tackled with a simple unique solution but needs integrated complementary policy interventions. The Breaking Isolation Intervention Model is a tool to be used by policymakers who wish to tackle social isolation at local level.

The intervention model presented here is built around 4 main policy interventions:

- Identifying** people who are isolated or might be at risk of falling into isolation
- Helping** those who are isolated by offering them a way out
- Awareness-raising** to inform about the issue and equip people (inc. professionals) with tools, methods and knowledge about isolation
- Preventing** isolation by intensifying social interactions and tightening community life and care

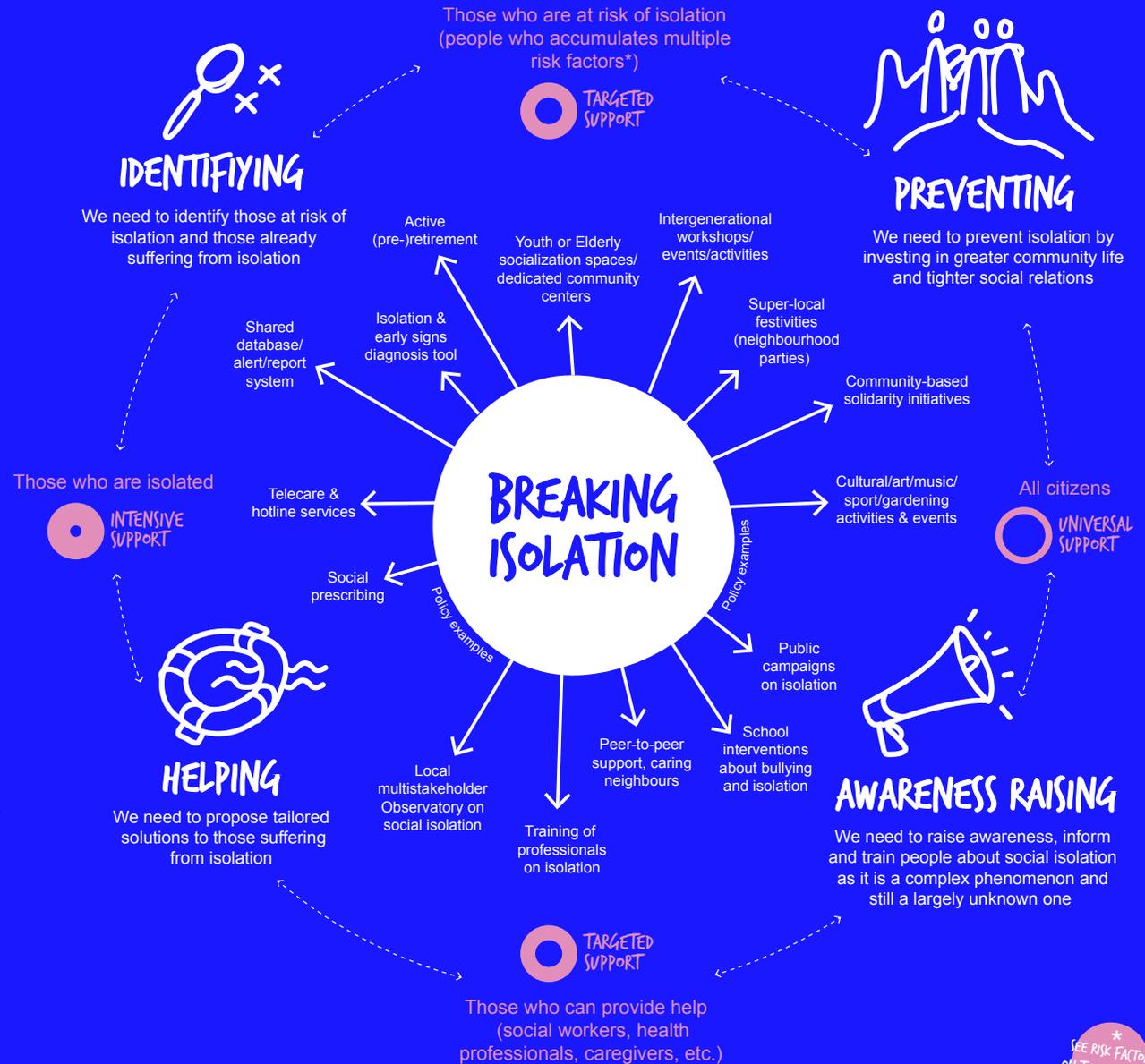
The model is articulated around 4 types of beneficiaries:

- Those who are isolated
- Those at risk of getting isolated
- Those who can provide help (professionals, care providers, informal helpers)
- All citizens

Interventions may be of 3 levels:

- Intensive support
- Targeted support
- Universal support

Finally, at the center of the model, examples of policy interventions provide concrete actions that may be put in place.



* SEE RISK FACTORS ON THE OTHER SIDE

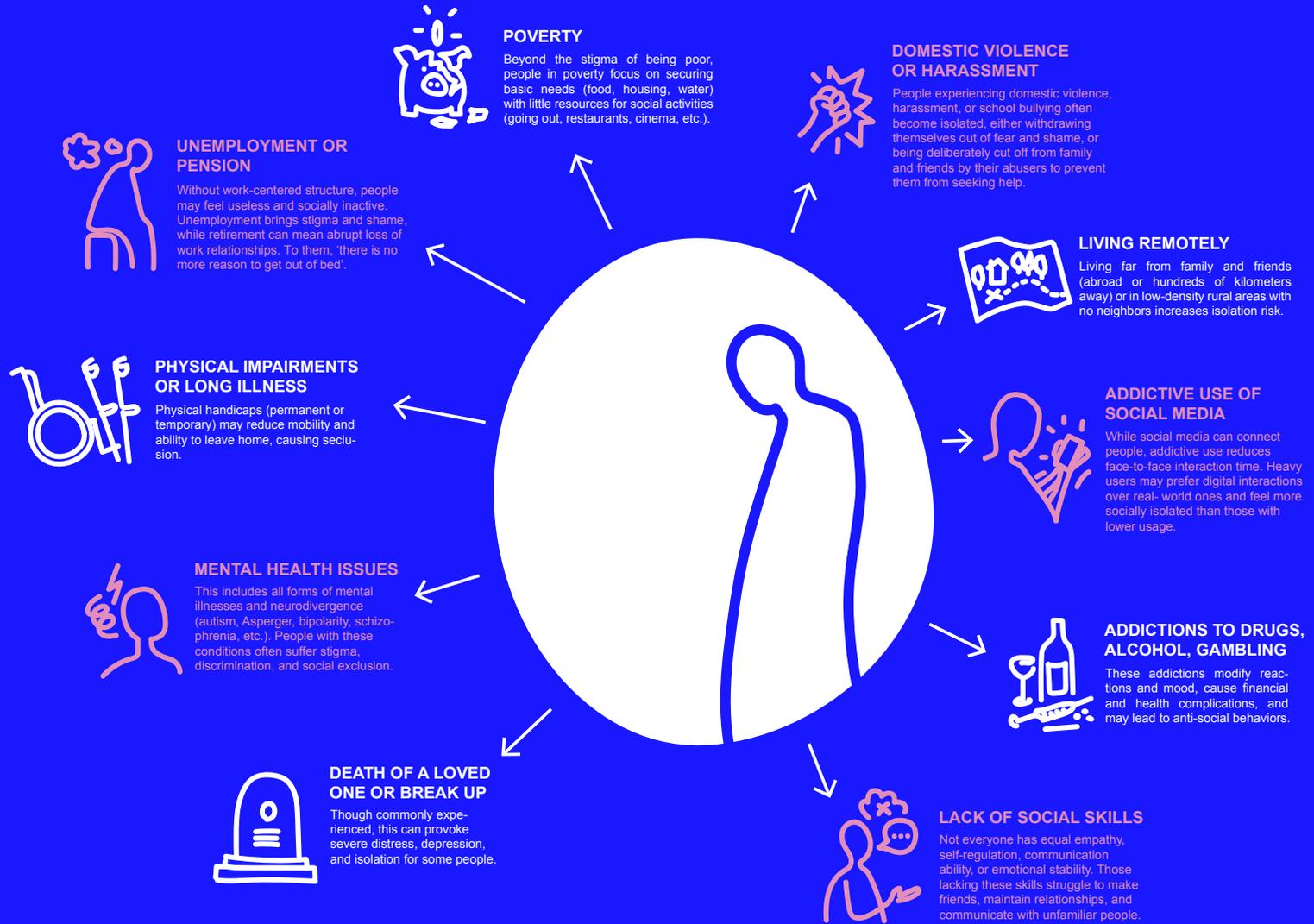
RISK FACTORS OF SOCIAL ISOLATION

Anyone can experience social isolation, but certain factors increase the risk. Research and interviews with practitioners from the 10 Breaking Isolation network cities allowed us to identify 10 key factors.

Warning: These causes don't automatically lead to isolation, but when combined, they increase risks.

It is also worth noting that the EU Loneliness Survey (which covers 27 EU countries) identifies 4 types of demographic and socio-economic characteristics that are significantly associated with a higher risk of feeling lonely:

1. Poorer people and the unemployed
2. Minority groups (migration background, LGBT, disabled)
3. People who moved places recently
4. Young adults (16-24)



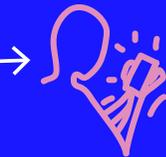
POVERTY
Beyond the stigma of being poor, people in poverty focus on securing basic needs (food, housing, water) with little resources for social activities (going out, restaurants, cinema, etc.).



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR HARASSMENT
People experiencing domestic violence, harassment, or school bullying often become isolated, either withdrawing themselves out of fear and shame, or being deliberately cut off from family and friends by their abusers to prevent them from seeking help.



LIVING REMOTELY
Living far from family and friends (abroad or hundreds of kilometers away) or in low-density rural areas with no neighbors increases isolation risk.



ADDICTIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
While social media can connect people, addictive use reduces face-to-face interaction time. Heavy users may prefer digital interactions over real-world ones and feel more socially isolated than those with lower usage.



ADDICTIONS TO DRUGS, ALCOHOL, GAMBLING
These addictions modify reactions and mood, cause financial and health complications, and may lead to anti-social behaviors.



LACK OF SOCIAL SKILLS
Not everyone has equal empathy, self-regulation, communication ability, or emotional stability. Those lacking these skills struggle to make friends, maintain relationships, and communicate with unfamiliar people.



DEATH OF A LOVED ONE OR BREAK UP
Though commonly experienced, this can provoke severe distress, depression, and isolation for some people.



MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES
This includes all forms of mental illnesses and neurodivergence (autism, Asperger, bipolarity, schizophrenia, etc.). People with these conditions often suffer stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion.



PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENTS OR LONG ILLNESS
Physical handicaps (permanent or temporary) may reduce mobility and ability to leave home, causing seclusion.



UNEMPLOYMENT OR PENSION
Without work-centered structure, people may feel useless and socially inactive. Unemployment brings stigma and shame, while retirement can mean abrupt loss of work relationships. To them, there is no more reason to get out of bed.



Find more info about the Breaking Isolation network by visiting urbact.eu and downloading the baseline study: *Social Isolation - A discreet epidemic*

WORDS FROM THE LEAD EXPERT

The Breaking Isolation network is a really interesting network as it has been exploring a **topic that was largely overlooked and unknown**. In a way, we can consider the Breaking Isolation a **pioneer network**. Indeed, whether during the investigation phase of the study visits and the literature review done for the baseline study, it appeared quite clearly that isolation was not so commonly mentioned in policies, whether we were looking at local, regional, national or EU level (or beyond).

This means that the network included a **learning curve** that was higher than other networks who might have worked on more well known policy topics and challenges. This made the start of the journey particularly rich intellectually speaking, as we all became more knowledgeable on the issue.

After 2,5 years, we can even say that we have, at local levels, in 10 EU cities, dozens of people who know about isolation, who can talk about it and who even have some clues about what to do about it. That's precious. In terms of impact of the network, it adds up to the 10 Integrated Action Plans that our cities have developed. The impact we had on people is sticky.

It is also worth mentioning that the network has

been **robust and remained together all along**, losing no partner along the way. It might sound obvious but it's not always the case.

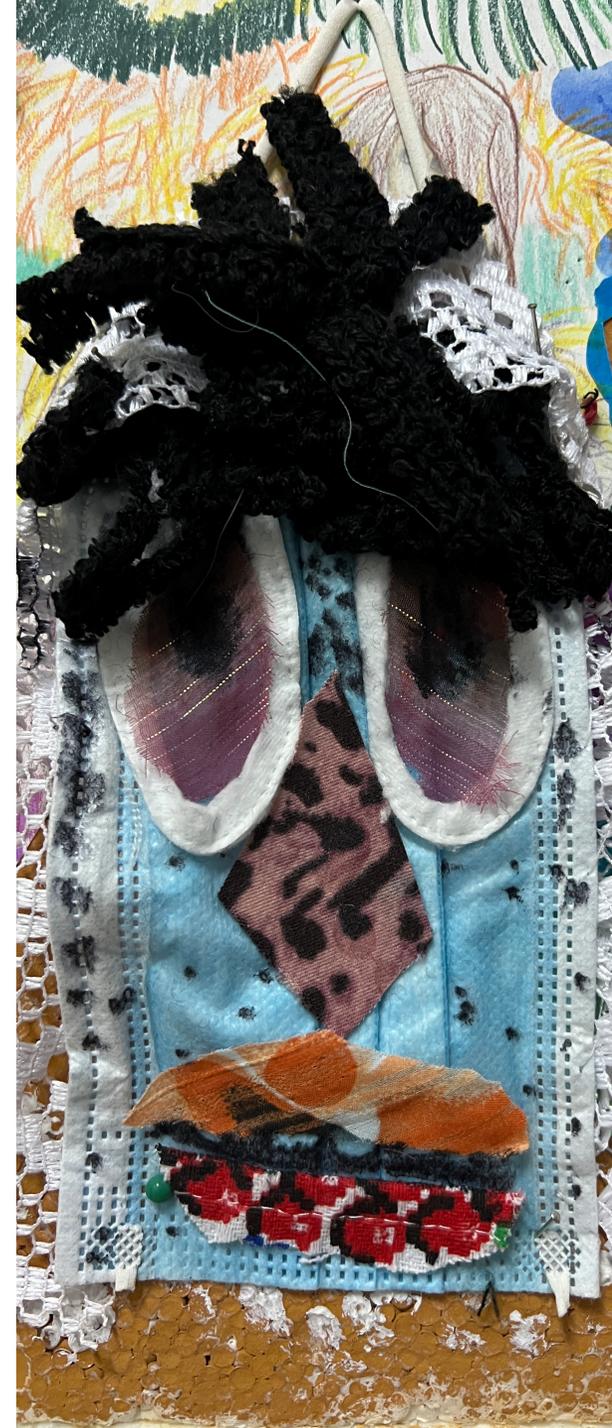
In Breaking Isolation, the network members have been **fully committed to the task**, and have repeatedly participated to all Transnational Meetings (which were demanding in terms of traveling and time spent). And doing so, despite some staff change or even political change.

Finally, the **connection made by the network with the World Health Organization (WHO)** has been a highlight of how valuable the work of Breaking Isolation is. I, therefore, hope that the network will keep in contact and continue exchanging about the topic and making noise about their actions to come. As it matters. It really does.

As a lead expert, I have been proud to participate to this network and explore with those 10 cities this critical topic of social isolation. I hope it will inspire policymakers and cities to do the same.

—

Christophe Gouache, Lead Expert of the Breaking Isolation network





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