The power of community across Europe

Research on experiences of the community response to the pandemic across Europe in 2020
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- Gökcen Demiragli, Verband für sozial-kulturelle Arbeit (VskA Berlin)
- Alain Cantarutti, La Fédération des Centres Sociaux et Socioculturels de France (FCSF)
- Franco Uda, ARCS and ARCI
- Eva Bertalan, Wiener Hilfswerk
- Regina Järg-Tärno and Sirpa Pekkarinen, Setlementti
- Ruth Breidenbach-Roe, Locality
- Thijs van Mierlo and Kristel Jeuring, LSA Bewoners
- Staffan Lindqvist, Svenska Settlementförbundet
Introduction

At Locality, we believe in the power of community and in the networks of solidarity that connect this power around the world. For the last four years, Locality have hosted the European Office for the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS), an inclusive global community connecting people who are working locally for social justice. This report brings together findings from the European network about the incredible role of community organisations during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Opportunities for connectivity and exchange of learning have never been more important

Throughout the last year, the IFS network has continued to meet regularly online; indeed, the acceleration of digital platforms has provided a boost to international collaboration. Throughout the pandemic, we have been sharing experiences and learning from each other – from discussing the best ways to open up services after lockdown and support staff and volunteers, to comparing strategies to influence governments.

This report outlines the findings from a short research project carried out by Locality to capture the experience of the community sector in eight European countries during the coronavirus pandemic: the UK, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Finland, and Sweden. In the autumn of 2020, we interviewed local and national infrastructure organisations in these countries, who collectively represent over 8,000 community organisations and social centres in Europe.

Research aims

Through this research we sought to:

- Share lessons learned regarding government policy, and the community sector response

- Explore different community sector business models and how they have been impacted by the pandemic

- Look at common themes and opportunities for international learning networks around these themes
Methodology

In October and November 2020, we carried out eight semi-structured interviews with representatives from:

- Verband für sozial-kulturelle Arbeit (VskA, Berlin) / the Federation for Social-Cultural Work (Berlin, Germany)
- La Fédération des Centres Sociaux et Socioculturels de France (FCSF) / the French Federation of Social Centres (France)
- ARCS and ARCI (Italy)
- Wiener Hilfswerk (Vienna, Austria)
- Setlementti / the Finnish Federation of Settlement Houses (Finland)
- Svenska Settlementförbundet / the Swedish Settlement Association (Sweden)
- LSA Bewoners (LSA) (the Netherlands)
- Locality (England)

A summary of our findings was shared at the IFS Europe Network meeting in November, where we discussed our conclusions and next steps.

We originally designed the research scope and hosted an initial discussion group with IFS Europe members in Summer 2020, when most countries were emerging from lockdown, community centres were reopening, and ‘recovery’ agendas were emerging. However, when we carried out the interviews and further engagement in the Autumn, most of Europe was back in a second lockdown.
Our findings

Our research shows an extraordinary capacity for hope, resilience, and creativity across community organisations in Europe. They have been supporting their neighbourhoods through the hardest of times, pivoting their services, innovating with new digital strategies, and advocating for their communities.

In some countries there have been significant financial threats to the stability of community organisations during this time. In other countries, infrastructure organisations are worried about an economic recession following in the wake of the public health crisis and the impact this will have on access to services in deprived communities.

Community organisations are seeing rising levels of poor mental health, social isolation, and food insecurity across Europe. These are complex challenges that will leave scars on people and communities long after the immediate threats from the virus have abated.

Despite these huge challenges, across all of our interviews we heard about the determination and faith in the power of community to support healthier, happier and more resilient places through the recovery and beyond.
Case study insights

‘Wiener Hilfswerk’ Vienna, Austria

In Austria, we spoke to Eva Bertalan at Wiener Hilfswerk, the organisation representing ten community centres across Vienna. Throughout the pandemic they have been working with the city government, the police and local organisations, coordinating volunteers to support the delivery of food and essentials to isolated households. Volunteers have been shopping, picking up medical supplies, running errands and even taking out rubbish bins for people living in high-rise flats.

While their centres have had to close to the public during lockdowns, they have adapted their services. For example, they moved their tutoring and language classes online, and shifted the majority of their counselling services to the telephone. They have also created new community initiatives through the pandemic- including telephone befriending and ‘walking buddy’ schemes, and a new ‘flea market’ which sells affordable, recycled clothes. This new venture also provides a source of income to help sustain their centres.

Despite these innovations, Eva is concerned about the long-term impact of the pandemic on community engagement. The lockdown restrictions necessary to control the virus also mean that opportunities to foster connection and relationships have been severely curtailed. While the centres have been creative with online community engagement and meetings in smaller groups in outdoor settings, they are still feeling the loss of being able to bring people together within their community centres.

Community centres have retained their subsidy from the local government during the pandemic. However, they have lost earned income from venue hire as well as donations, which allowed them to reach more people and support more neighbours. This is having an impact on the ability of the centres to plan for the longer term. Local government provides grants for community centres on a yearly cycle. However, it would be highly beneficial to have longer grant cycles, as this would provide the long-term investment needed to strengthen social infrastructure and support sustainable community development.

Eva explains that new centres have been built recently which duplicate the work of the community centres. Eva believes that improved partnership working would strengthen community assets within the city. This could strengthen the role of community centres and support their work in strengthening community cohesion in the city.
‘Verband für sozial-kulturelle Arbeit’ (VskA), Berlin, Germany

VskA in Germany represents 80 member organisations across the country, half of which are based in Berlin representing more than 100 neighbourhoods, communities, and social centres. We spoke to Gökcen Demiragli about how their members have adapted and responded to the pandemic in Germany, with a particular focus on the response in Berlin.

Community centres have been supporting their neighbourhoods throughout the pandemic through food deliveries, education, health and wellbeing services. They also adapted their existing advice services to deliver online or over the phone; they even developed some “window support” counselling, face-to-face individual sessions outside of the community centres. This was particularly important for maintaining contact with people needing support around mental health, domestic violence, isolation, and substance abuse.

Community centres have been able to access additional funding from the government throughout the pandemic. As well as the existing “Kurzarbeit” furlough scheme, additional funding was made available by the national government to cover the funding which social sector organisations would have received had they been open. In Berlin, the senate administration also made funding available to cover lost income – such as through venue hire and room rental.

Gökcen described how the pandemic has resulted in an increased recognition and value placed on the role of the community sector by the government. At the start of the pandemic, local charities and community organisations were able to respond to community need faster than government. While public services were relatively slow to get support and information in place, in contrast the support systems from civil society organisations and local networks were already up and running. Relationships between civil society, local and national government have been strengthened around this.

However, there are still significant concerns for the future of the community sector in Germany. The economic consequences of the crisis will be felt for many years to come, and cuts to public spending will impact the neighbourhood services delivered by community organisations. Despite these concerns, there is also hope that the crisis has increased understanding of the role that strong and established community organisations play in creating a healthy, resilient society:

“Community organisations are like a seismograph: [they are] able to feel the problems and concerns in their places and work with neighbours and government to tackle them.”
‘La Fédération des Centres Sociaux et Socioculturels de France’ (FCSF), France

FCSF represents 1,300 social centres and 50 local federations throughout France. At the start of the first lockdown, all centres were closed for the first week, but since that point nearly 90% have been able to maintain their services and activities – either virtually or face to face.

About a third of social centres developed local food delivery schemes from scratch, having not delivered these kinds of service before. As well as carrying out vital outreach work by phone and with the most vulnerable to tackle social isolation, social centres have also played a key role in amplifying public health and hygiene messages within the local communities. This included tackling ‘fake news’ about the virus, particularly amongst young people.

Educational support to young people, offering family support services, and tackling digital exclusion have been priorities for social centres. They have been providing IT
equipment, digital training and skills and even facilitating shared access of internet connections between flats in their neighbourhoods.

An important outcome from the pandemic has been improvements in collaboration between other community organisations and local charities, including around volunteer coordination. The pandemic has also supported a better dialogue between the community sector and statutory sector, as the agility and speed of the community response has clearly demonstrated the vital role of social centres.

As the representative body of social centres, FCSF also reported quicker and easier dialogue with national government, and increased recognition from government about the role of civil society as a partner. For example, when it came to lifting lockdown restrictions, the government discussed the reopening guidance in detail with FCSF and it was co-designed with social centre leaders.

Social centres have remained largely financially stable throughout the pandemic; they receive 90% of their income from public funding, predominately through the social security department and local authorities. These income sources have been sustained throughout the crisis. However, there are big concerns about the impact of an economic recession in 2021, and the impact this will have on community services and funding for social centres.
‘ARCI’ and ‘ARCS’, Italy

We spoke to Franco Uda, who is member of the National Board of ARCI and Vice President of ARCS in Italy. ARCI is the national body for social and cultural associations, representing a million individuals and 5,000 community-based associations, called ‘circoli’, throughout Italy. ARCS is the NGO of ARCI, operating in the 20 regions of Italy and 11 other countries, including Lebanon, Cuba, Palestine, and Jordan. ARCI is the biggest cultural organisation in Italy.

During the first lockdown in 2020, Franco explains how local cultural organisations and community centres had to stop their cultural activities, and instead changed their focus to the social needs of their communities. They organised community canteens to provide food to shielding households, focusing particularly on elderly people unable to leave their houses. Particularly in larger cities, cultural organisations coordinated volunteers to support essential public services.

“We knew before [the pandemic] we were a social actor, but from the first period we discovered how to change our commitments in our communities. We are [now] more advantaged to face the needs of our community.”

Many centres also organised a “resistenza virale” of online activities to keep communities connected to cultural activities, including music, webinars, films and online performances.

Throughout the pandemic, civil society and cultural organisations have experienced severe income losses, with some organisations unfortunately having to close completely. However, there was limited support available from government. For example, the furlough scheme did not work at all for civil society organisations initially; this was because many employees did not have contract terms that were recognised by the furlough scheme. Similarly, while some businesses were supported with the costs of reopening, circoli were not eligible for this type of support.

There have been coordinated campaigning efforts from civil society and cultural organisations to get recognition from government about the support these organisations need. Franco explains how this situation led ARCI to organise public demonstrations, and a day of national strikes of their facilities. This resulted in the government listening to their voices, but they are still waiting for tangible outcomes. As Franco said: “Sometimes when you don’t speak out, you don’t get anything.” There is a sense that this has made the movement stronger and united, and fostered renewed solidarity and collaboration between local groups.
‘Setlementti’, Finland

Setlementti is the Finnish Federation of Settlement Houses representing 39 local organisations across Finland. During the pandemic, community organisations were particularly involved in supporting isolated and elderly residents with food, befriending and access to digital connection. As high schools were also closed, many community centres worked with education services to provide support for young people.

We spoke to Regina Järg-Tärno and Sirpa Pekkarinen who told us about the different experiences between rural and urban communities in Finland. In rural areas, there is a particularly strong tradition of self-help and mutual support; many of these communities have a history of resilience and independence, with access to their own heating and water supplies. In urban communities, these networks and social connections were less strong. The national church also had a strong role in coordinating support and outreach.

National government and many municipalities did not provide additional support for civil society organisations during the pandemic; business and industries were the main priority for financial support. Lottery funding, a key source of income for charities, was also curtailed because slot machines were closed during the pandemic.

However, community organisations were able to use existing funding and repurpose contracts to support their activities during the pandemic. Regina explained that the government trusted the settlements to carry on with their work, because they already had a funding relationship with them.

Regina also outlined how the operating context for community organisations in the future is changing. There are changes underway to review lottery funding which many community centres benefit from, and there are also concerns that reforms to contracting in public services are likely to bring about changes which will impact community centre finances. This means it will be important for community organisations to consider new business models and ways to diversify their income sources to create greater independence.

‘LSA Bewoners’, the Netherlands

LSA Bewoners represents 200 community organisations in the Netherlands. Many community organisations have played an important role in keeping people connected during the pandemic – from door-to-door flower and cake deliveries, to organising online neighbourhood choirs.
We spoke to Thijs van Mierlo and Kristel Jeuring at LSA Bewoners about some of the challenges which community organisations have faced in adapting during the pandemic. Many mutual aid groups formed very quickly to support immediate social needs in neighbourhoods during the pandemic; however, it was harder for more established organisations to adapt service delivery to digital platforms. In addition, many local authorities did not develop partnerships with community organisations during the early days of the pandemic, which would have supported greater coordination.

One-off grants were made available by the national government to support closed venues, which some community organisations were able to access. However, we also heard that the criteria for eligibility for the furlough scheme was restrictive; while around a quarter of community organisations accessed the scheme, funding to cover lost income was based on the size of turnover, which did not work well for smaller organisations.

The role which community organisations have played during the pandemic has, however, increased awareness of their important role in society. LSA will continue to advocate for this vital role, and support community organisations to adapt and thrive in the recovery from the pandemic.

‘Svenska Settlementförbundet’, Sweden

Svenska Settlementförbundet is the Swedish Settlement Association representing 158 community centres across Sweden. We spoke to Staffan Lindqvist about the community response to the pandemic, which focused primarily on education, wellbeing, and social isolation.

Sweden avoided many of the lockdown restrictions which other European countries experienced, as the predominant government strategy was to keep as many things open as possible. Many high schools were, however, required to close and therefore community organisations pivoted to deliver additional youth work. This included setting up homework groups, IT access, mental health support and outdoor activities. Some community centres even worked with young people to make masks and other PPE.

Community centres receive core funding from local government, and their income sources have remained relatively stable throughout the pandemic. However, other charities and social businesses which rely on fundraising and trading have experienced financial challenges. There is also a concern that the economic impact of the pandemic will lead to public spending cuts which will likely impact the funding available to community organisations too.
The pandemic has demonstrated the opportunities for community centres to work more closely with youth services and develop youth participation programmes in the future. Staffan reflects that there are opportunities for the community sector to work more closely with municipalities to develop more holistic community centres, and to employ community coordinators that can be embedded in communities and support community development.

‘Locality’, the UK

Locality is the national membership network representing over 1,300 community organisations across England. Since the beginning of the pandemic, community organisations have been mobilising to support their neighbourhoods, coordinating volunteering efforts, delivering emergency supplies, and supporting isolated groups.

Often community organisations were able to play this role because of the community resources, assets and networks that have been built up over a number
of years. This was a key finding of Locality’s recent national research “We Were Built for This.”¹

For example, Manor House Development Trust in London were able to tackle digital exclusion by working with local retailers and a housing developer to launch a crowdfunding appeal to buy phones and internet dongles for older and younger people on their estate. Another example is Levenshulme Inspire in Manchester who had been working with older people in their neighbourhood for many years, so when crisis hit they already knew who might be vulnerable and could get to them quicker than anyone else.

At the same time as responding to community need and pivoting existing services, many community organisations faced significant income reductions and threats of closure. In recent years, many Locality members have sought to reduce grant dependency through an increased focus on trading income, such as through venue hire, tenant organisations or community cafes, shops, or leisure centres. This year, it has been these organisations that have been most exposed to income losses.

Locality’s 2020 membership survey shows that between March 2020 and July 2020, 46% of members lost at least a quarter of their income and 26% lost at least half of their income. However, for members most reliant on trading (i.e., over half of their income is earned through trading activities) 62% have lost at least a quarter of income, and 37% lost over half of their income.²

Despite these challenges, the findings from Locality’s membership survey show the determination of community organisations to continue to weather the storm, find enterprising and innovative new ways to meet the needs of their communities and develop resilient models for the future.

¹ Locality, 2020. “We Were Built for This” Available at: https://locality.org.uk/policy-campaigns/leading-the-coronavirus-recovery/
Key findings

More in common

Our research findings tell a common story of incredible community power across Europe during 2020.

When crisis struck, community organisations, social centres and local charities mobilised to support their communities through the darkest of times – from providing food and essentials to shielding households, to helping children and families access digital equipment and education packs to support home-schooling.

Across all this incredible work, what stands out is a determination to keep communities connected at a time when people have been kept physically apart. From local cultural centres in Italy hosting online musical performances for the community, to community centres in the Netherlands delivering flowers and cake to isolated residents – it is these interactions and feelings of togetherness which have been a lifeline to many.

Digital innovation

We also heard how core services – from counselling to debt advice – transitioned to digital delivery often without missing a beat. Digital innovation was embraced quickly in order to make sure that people did not miss out on vital support. In France, for example, we heard about the key role social centres played in getting people connected by distributing IT equipment and facilitating shared internet connection. In England, we heard how some community organisations fundraised for IT equipment and portable Wi-Fi devices to make sure that no one, young or old, was digitally excluded within their communities.

Rising demand and new pressures

Throughout the pandemic, community organisations have been maintaining their core delivery, often experiencing rising demand for these services – such as for mental health and domestic violence services. They have also been taking on new roles within their communities – from combating ‘fake news’ with accurate public health messages, to delivering homework support packs and managing food delivery and support schemes.

While we found a lack of consistent data capture on volunteer mobilisation during the pandemic, the insights across our interviewees told a similar story. While many organisations developed new relationships with new volunteers during this time,
other existing volunteers were unable to continue due to the restrictions and shielding requirements. We also heard how new collaborations and networks have been built, as more people and local businesses have sought to get involved in their local community.

A common experience from our interviewees was unfortunately a story of increasing mental health challenges and anxiety for communities, including for those staff and volunteers involved with the frontline of support. The crisis has shown how staff and volunteers in community organisations are creative and resourceful, ready to adapt and respond flexibly to the needs of their communities. But the ongoing crisis has been a huge strain for many community leaders, who often faced their own experiences of grief and loss.

Many community organisations did not receive additional government financial support to carry out this vital role. However, in countries with a high proportion of public funding for community organisations, either through grants or contracts, this funding was sustained during the pandemic. We examine these different contexts further in our exploration of some of the key differences below.

Overwhelmingly, our findings show the responsiveness and resilience of community organisations across Europe who have adapted their services, managed restrictions and constraints on income, and sought creative ways to support their communities through the hardest of times.
Key Differences

Managing different restrictions

The type of restrictions and lockdown measures which have been in place to combat the virus have varied across Europe, as has the impact of these restrictions on community organisations and their services.

In Sweden, for example community centres have remained open almost consistently. However, in all other countries, restrictions meant that community organisations were required to close, at least in part, for extended periods of time throughout 2020. When centres were allowed to reopen at different points, there were differences in the types of restrictions that remained in place. In Finland, for example, when community centres were allowed to reopen, they were able to bring larger numbers of people together than in other countries where limits on numbers have been tighter.
Variations in financial support

There were wide differences in the types of funding available in different countries for social centres and community organisations to support them through the crisis. Often this varied depending on the different funding models for community organisations between countries, and therefore the extent of their exposure to income losses during lockdown.

For example, in countries where community organisations received high proportions of grants and contracts from the public sector, these income sources were reasonably stable. In France, social centres are 90% funded by public funding predominately through the social security department and local authorities; the only activity not funded in this way are leisure activities. In Finland while no new support schemes were put in place by the government to support community work, there was flexibility for organisations to repurpose existing government grants and contracts.

Some governments made specific additional funding available to community organisations to account for lost income during the pandemic. In England, for example, a £750m fund for charities was made available from the Treasury; £350m was distributed to community organisations and charities involved in local responses to the coronavirus pandemic. While this didn’t cover the extent of income losses for all organisations (and funding awards were significantly delayed in many cases) it did provide a buffer against the worse financial impacts for the sector. In Germany, budget was also made available to support the social sector – alongside businesses – and local authorities like Berlin also decided to cover lost funding from trading during periods of closure.

However, in other places we heard how the community sector was missed out of crucial funding and support, particularly in relation to access to the furlough scheme. In the Netherlands, for example, while one off grants were available to some community organisations, criteria on the furlough scheme was restrictive. While around a quarter of community organisations accessed the scheme, funding to cover income losses were based on size of turnover, so the scheme did not work well for smaller organisations. In Italy, the furlough scheme did not work at all for civil society organisations initially as many employees did not have contract terms that were recognised by the furlough scheme.

In contrast, interviewees in Vienna, the UK, Finland, France and Germany reported that the furlough scheme worked reasonably well. In Finland, employees not able to work were furloughed on full pay, although part-time workers were not as well protected. Predating the pandemic, Austria and Germany already had a
“Kurzarbeit” system in place, to provide top-up support from government to people on low wages, and this was used during the pandemic.

**Relationships with government**

We heard from our interviewees about how the relationships between civil society and local and national government changed during the crisis.

In France, the FCSF reported quicker and easier dialogue with national government, and increased recognition from government about the role of civil society as a partner. For example, when it came to lifting lockdown restrictions, the government discussed the reopening guidance in detail with FCSF and it was co-designed with social centre leaders.

In Germany, we heard how local charities and community organisations were able to respond to community need faster than government. At the start of the crisis, public services were relatively slow to get support and information in place; in contrast, the support systems from civil society organisations and local networks were already up and running. We heard how this led to an increased recognition and value placed on the role of the sector.

Similarly, in the UK, Locality have heard from councils and community organisations alike that the crisis has accelerated a ‘culture shift’ in relationships between the public sector and community organisations. Often this was because the community response was up and running before the council, and power relationships have been equalised. Successful local authorities have not sought to create or control, but to develop and shape what’s already there.3

In Italy we heard about the coordinated campaigning efforts from the civil society and cultural organisations to get recognition from government about the support these organisations need. Volunteers from local cultural and community organisations in Italy had been supporting the pandemic response in their communities from the beginning, at a time when their traditional income streams from trading and fundraising were squeezed; however, while the government had put in place measures to support businesses, they had ignored the financial support required to civil society.

We heard from Franco Uda, ARCS and ARCI in Italy, how this situation led them to organise public demonstrations, and a day of national strikes of their facilities. This resulted in government listening to the voice of civil society and cultural organisations but they are still waiting for tangible outcomes. As Franco said:

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3 Locality, 2020. “We Were Built for This.” Available at: https://locality.org.uk/policy-campaigns/leading-the-coronavirus-recovery/
“Sometimes when you don’t speak out, you don’t get anything.” There is a sense that this has made the movement stronger and united, and fostered renewed solidarity and collaboration between local groups.

The future

Looking to the future, we asked all our interviewees about their biggest hopes and concerns for their communities.

The long-term effects of crisis

All countries are still in the grip of the public health crisis and facing massive economic uncertainties. Community organisations are concerned about the long-term impacts of the pandemic and lockdowns, which will be felt for many years to come. They are concerned about worsening health inequalities and mental health, increases in unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence.

In some countries, community cohesion was flagged as a particular concern due to the loss of opportunities for communities to come together during lockdowns. There is also concern about how the virus has contributed to greater polarisation in society; in Germany, for example, there have been protests against lockdowns which have been associated with right-wing activism.
A moment of change – a fairer society?

Our interviewees spoke about whether the pandemic will bring about opportunities to tackle deeply rooted inequalities. In Sweden, for example, we heard how the impact of the coronavirus on care home residents has prompted more national discussion about the lack of quality standards in privately-run institutions. There is also hope that the disproportionate impact of the virus on immigrants and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic populations will lead to long-term change in how we recognise and tackle racial inequalities.

There is hope too that the pandemic has demonstrated to governments the importance of investing in more deprived communities and supporting community development as a route to greater resilience in these communities. There is hope that a greater recognition of the role of prevention will strengthen policy agendas seeking to create stronger, healthier communities.

Alongside this, interviewees reflected that our sectors need to seize the ‘community moment’ that emerged from the pandemic and advocate for greater investment in social infrastructure. In Sweden, for example we heard how there is ambition from the sector to work more closely with local governments to develop more holistic community centres, and to employ community coordinators that can be embedded in communities and support community development.

In the Netherlands, we heard how even though government funding for community organisations has not been sufficient, throughout the crisis support has grown from the public and politicians around the vital work of community organisations. In Germany too we heard how the recognition of the role of community organisations has been strengthened by the crisis:

“Community organisations are like a seismograph: [they are] able to feel the problems and concerns in their places and work with neighbours and government to tackle them.” – Gökcen Demiragli, Federation for Social-Cultural Work

Our interviewees highlighted the importance of advocacy work to demonstrate the impact of community organisations and their role in supporting a resilient society in the recovery from the pandemic. However, some of the infrastructure bodies also
reported concerns about the lack of capacity to prioritise campaigning and influencing work.

**Financial picture – big uncertainties**

Community organisations and social centres across Europe have experienced reductions in income throughout the pandemic, although the severity of this has varied. The majority of infrastructure organisations that we spoke to are concerned about the impact of the crisis on their members.

In France, for example, even though the current crisis has not significantly damaged the financial stability of social centres, we heard from a representative at FCSF about concerns for how the wider economic crisis will impact their sector: “[The] Economic crisis will be really hard in 2021. Income will go down for public services. Social centres have showed their usefulness but could have lots of income losses for social centres”.

Similarly, in Germany, while the sector is reasonably stable for now, there are concerns about the cuts to public services which will result from a worsening economy, and the impact this will have on community organisations. In Sweden, similarly there is concern that because community centres are not statutory services, cuts will be likely; due to devolution, these impacts will vary between regions.

In Finland, we also heard how there are already reforms underway to review lottery funding which many community centres benefit from. There are also concerns that reforms to contracting in public services, will also likely bring about changes for local community organisations.

Across many countries, community organisations are looking at how to diversify income sources in a changing economic landscape, particularly those who are currently highly reliant on government funding.
Conclusion

Across our research the message is clear: despite big challenges ahead, the community sector is here to stay. The essential role of strong and successful local community organisations has been proven time and time again throughout the crisis. From all of our interviewees, we heard about the determination and faith in the power of community to support healthier, happier and more resilient places through the recovery and beyond.

There is no doubt there is strength in sharing experiences, successes, and challenges within the IFS Europe network. As a network of 40 organisations across Europe, we are committed to continuing to work together as we all seek to adapt to an uncertain future and campaign for a fairer, greener recovery across Europe.

The network is actively undertaking projects which support influencing and increasing representation of their members, such as through the Erasmus+ funded Fostering Social Justice exchange and learning programme, and upcoming policy work to create recommendations for the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

In the face of shared challenges, we are determined to find opportunities to work together, foster connections and continue to champion the power of community across Europe.
Locality supports local community organisations to be strong and successful.

Unlock the power in your community with us

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