

Pledge to the European pillar of social rights

Principle 3: Equal opportunities

Cities have been the hardest hit by the COVID-19 health crisis. During the pandemic, cities have dealt with unprecedented urban challenges. The local level is where the need to tackle poverty, inequality and discrimination is the most urgent. Together we have to ensure the wellbeing of all our citizens, leaving no one behind. It is key for the recovery of the current health crisis and economic crisis that the rising trend of inequalities will not continue. We have an opportunity to use this crisis as an incentive for positive change for a stronger social Europe, where all citizens are treated equally and have equal opportunities. Our cities have shown leadership and are committed to continue to do so and cooperate with all relevant stakeholders during the recovery of the crisis.

Principle 3: Equal opportunities

Regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, disability, physical or genetic characteristics, religion or philosophy, age, wealth, civil and residence status, political and trade union conviction, birth and social origin, everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities regarding employment, social protection, education, and access to goods and services available to the public. Equal opportunities of under-represented groups shall be fostered.

We commit to principle 3 on equal opportunities because we believe that especially in this crisis and during the recovery, everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities. Before the crisis social inequalities in our society were already growing, looking at growing poverty, youth unemployment and differences between higher and lower educated citizens. Now we see that certain groups are hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis, namely elderly, migrants, children, women and low-paid workers. We also see that new groups of people became victims of the crisis, to be called 'the new urban poor', such as students and young people, freelance workers and undocumented minors. If no action is taken now, inequalities will increase on the long term. This results in less strong and less competitive cities with a risk of an increasing level of unsafety. We want our cities to stay attractive to the middle class, among others, in order to stay a diverse city and not become cities of major differences.

Besides social inequalities, territorial inequalities are also deepening, with deprived urban neighbourhoods being more heavily affected than other areas. This requires of us, cities, a focus on place-based approach in our policy responses to respond to the local needs. Throughout the recovery we continue our work to counteract inequalities and aim to ensure that all our citizens will be able to profit from the recovery and receive the support that is needed.

Message to the European Commission, Member States and the European Parliament

We are committed to work together with the European Commission to push the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights forward. We are more determined than ever to build more inclusive cities and drive a fair and inclusive recovery, leaving no one behind, but we cannot do it alone. The recovery will require an unprecedented level of social investment in local services and social infrastructure that cannot be done by cities alone. We need urgent support from the EU and national level to ensure we have the necessary resources to continue to help all people in need.

We call on the EU and member states to:

- Strengthen the urban dimension in the EU recovery plan by recognising the key role of cities in dealing with this crisis and acknowledging the specific social challenges we are facing in cities.
- Ensure EU financial support to boost social investment at local level by channelling resources from the ESF+, ERDF and InvestEU to sustain our commitment to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and match the funding priorities with the increasing demand for social infrastructure and social services in cities
- Making the urban dimensions an integral part of the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan by engaging in a regular and direct dialogue with city leaders on how to fully implement the Pillar and strengthen social Europe

Which actions are cities taking?

City of Helsinki

The Covid19 has affected the young adults city of Helsinki by interrupting their work and education paths. Many young adults are not able to access working life, which may have long term implications. The unemployment situation was already relatively worrying before the covid-19 outbreak in Helsinki. Feelings of loneliness, mental health care challenges and lack of future positive prospects were increasing among youth during spring 2020. Social impact of the covid-19 on the youth needs proper assessment and evaluation.

Helsinki is preparing a Recovery Plan (updated regularly) which includes 3 themes: 1. citizen activity and trust; 2. enhancing entrepreneurship and 3. sustainable and agile city organization. The plan includes 10 baskets, one of which is on employment and education.

In terms of activating the unemployed youth, the city of Helsinki will

- activate new methods for youth and unemployed in the business sectors that were severely hit by covid 19 (creative industry, service sector, restaurants)
- shorten unemployment periods and hinder long term unemployment by guidance pilots
- strengthen the skills of unemployed youth for the needs of the labour market

Although the State authority has an overall responsibility of the provision of employment services in Finland, the employment and guidance services of the city of Helsinki completes the measures provided by the State. The investment of the city of Helsinki for enhancing the current youth employment situation is worth 6 million euros.

City of Gijon

In the framework of the COVID-19 crisis, Gijón Municipal Government and the economic and social agents concluded a Social Agreement that proposes measures in the areas of economic promotion; employment and tourism aimed at mitigate the consequences of the pandemic. In the first phase, a call for aid is established for self-employed people and micro-SMEs with the main target of supporting the reopening of the companies and the reinstatement of their staff. Social measures have been reinforced, especially for those in situations of greater vulnerability. Emergency aid; housing and canteen scholarships for boys and girls haven been expanded.

New aids have been created to facilitate family and work reconciliation, trying to mitigate the negative gender impact of the consequences of COVID 19 are generating on the rates of women's work activities. A plan of advice, training and awareness to companies will be developed to promote the employment of women in equal opportunities and the social clauses in public contracting remain in force. The lines of work with women victims of gender violence will be strengthened in terms of endowment and improved coordination of resources for their recovery and promotion of their autonomy.

City of Utrecht

Utrecht invests in a Debt Free City. In Utrecht it is important that everyone has equal opportunities for a healthy and enjoyable life. We want to prevent excessively large differences and reduce difference between people and communities in terms of income, health, training and living environment. We are offering help and support to people that need it. Problematic household debt leads to poverty, social exclusion and deteriorating health. The city of Utrecht invests 6 million euros to free 20.000 households of problematic debts. We do that by employing former debtors to help current debtors, actively breaking taboos on discussing financial problems and developing a Corona Crisis Pardon for debts due to lockdown-measures.

City of Frankfurt

The city of Frankfurt promotes the social development of urban development and the participation opportunities of people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods with the Frankfurt Programme – Active Neighbourhood. This social-spatial approach responds to local needs by providing human and financial resources for projects and networking through district management. The neighbourhood support systems and aid networks that have been set up in this context have been successfully used and expanded in the context of the crisis. For different target groups, different new offers have been developed in different formats. For example, there were new digital offerings for children and young people, for needy families the supply of fresh food and activities for the home, for different target groups in the event of quarantine additional accommodation in hotels, for seniors and seniors low-threshold contact offers and also additional places in women's shelters.

City of Ghent

“Everybody is different, everybody is Ghent” is the baseline of the equal opportunities policy of the city of Ghent. Ghent wants to be a ‘safe space’ for everybody, regardless of gender, sexual

orientation, origin, language, age, disability or social background. First of all, this means that the city of Ghent aims to be an accessible city. Therefore, Ghent launched an action plan to improve the accessibility of its infrastructure, its public domain, its communication and its city services, starting from the concept of Universal Design. Universal Design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation. Secondly, the city of Ghent prevents and tackles discrimination. Situation testing of the housing and labour market to actively detect and fight risks for discrimination, is one of the strategies the city of Ghent is known for. Lastly, the Ghent equal opportunities policy focuses on strengthening the social rights of people who are most at risk for exclusion. Starting from the concept of intersectionality, we focus our attention to people most in need, like LGBT's with a foreign background, persons with a disability who are at risk for poverty, illegal migrants, etc. A budget of 5,830,373.36 euros has been linked to the implementation of Ghent's equal opportunities policy in 2020.

City of Amsterdam

The COVID-19 crisis put an edge on the already existing inequality in Amsterdam. Job losses, educational disadvantages, the avoidance of care and stress as a result of COVID-19 have a major effect on vulnerable residents. We also see new vulnerable groups emerging, such as young people, flex workers and middle incomes. Amsterdam has developed an integrated approach to reduce inequalities. Part of this is the establishment of the knowledge center for Inequality, in which science, policymakers and social partners work together to reduce the wicked problem of opportunity inequality with effective approaches. The starting point in the Amsterdam approach is "unequal investment", so that the resources and effort are deployed where it is most needed. The Amsterdam approach exists, among others, of the following elements and priorities:

- Education and youth:
 - We aim to provide equal opportunities in education
 - Focus on preschool education
 - A six weeks program for children and youth from vulnerable families was organized in the summer of 2020. Thousands of children have participated in a broad program with activities in sports, culture and education
 - Programs on low literacy. We have an integrated approach in the field of education for children and adult education
 - Integral and intensified services for young unemployed people (up to 27 years) to guide them back to school, let them stay in work, accompany them to (other) work or offer them an apprenticeship trajectory.
- Work and income:
 - Early identification approach towards poverty. Citizens in a vulnerable position have been affected the most by the crisis and the risk of payment arrears is high. Amsterdam is committed to identify this at an early stage to prevent poverty and debts.
 - There is a bigger focus on preventing unemployment and establishing arrangements on from-work-to-work possibilities. Through a regional partnership between public and private stakeholders a Regional Work center has been established to promote job-matching between places where employment is disappearing to places where employment is offered.
 - Approach to counteract labour market discrimination
 - Stimulation and provision of more opportunities for Life Long Learning (also for unemployed) as reaction to the strongly changing labour market and labour market requirements.

- Health and care:
 - Amsterdam Healthy Weight Program: a long-term program to offer a healthy life and environment to children and to achieve a healthy generation in 2033 in cooperation with many stakeholders in the city
- Social housing: we build our city with 40% social housing 40% middle rent housing and 20% high priced housing
- We have a place-based approach in our actions to make a difference. Each neighbourhood has its own needs and therefore we look at each neighbourhood individually.

Conclusion

With this joint city pledge, we are proving our commitment to the European Pillar of Social Rights with real actions on the ground. In turn, we expect European and national leaders to engage cities as key partners in reinforcing social Europe and to ensure a strong urban dimension in the EU recovery plan. A stronger social Europe is a Europe of inclusive cities.

We are convinced that together we can become stronger after the crisis while fostering solidarity among each other with all levels of government and relevant stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,



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City of Amsterdam

**✘ City of
✘ Amsterdam
✘**

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