

## Reinforcing Social Europe

The City of Utrecht welcomes this opportunity to express our views on the strengthening of the EU Social Policy to endorse a good recovery. We believe that European policy and funding can strengthen and support the recovery of cities and more importantly the citizens in our cities. Please find our views on reinforcing Social Europe:

### Build back better

The past seven months have been **very challenging for us** as city administrations and for all our citizens. Many people have lost their jobs and their income and some had to close down their business. This is an **unprecedented crisis in Europe that is deepening social inequalities** and putting our European social model at risk. Pre-existing inequalities, like the digital divide, have become now more visible in our cities. Unemployment is increasing, poverty is rising and new groups are at risk of social exclusion. But this crisis has taught us **lessons to strengthen our social Europe**. Cities have **all stepped up in an unprecedented way** with fast and immediate responses to help the most vulnerable. We have all stretched our healthcare and social services sometimes beyond limits to get urgent support to all in need. We can build back better a stronger social Europe, if and only if we work multilevel governance together and join forces.

### EU funding supporting the local social innovations

A **stronger social Europe is about a stronger social investment**. We have all seen in this pandemic **how essential healthcare infrastructure and social services are at local level for our society**. We need to learn from the past financial crisis, and respond very differently, in a more solidarity way to help the most vulnerable immediately. But this does not stop there. We need to learn from the past also for how we come out of the crisis, this should also be different, **a more ambitious, fair and inclusive recovery with a strong social investment at local level**. We need to change the EU approach to social investment by looking at spending for social infrastructure and social services as an essential investment and not a cost, and keeping it outside of strict state aid rules.

**The EU recovery plan must boost investment in local social services and infrastructure**, which is essential for social cohesion. Cities' efforts should be supported financially, including through the **ReactEU** recovery instrument and **the European Social Fund+**, with a clear emphasis on **channelling the funds to where most needed, in cities**. We call for **cities to have a seat at the table when the national recovery plans are developed and priorities are set** for the recovery and resilience facility of the NextGenerationEU. This is the right way to ensure that priorities match the social challenges in our cities.

Through EU funding we believe that cities can be inspired to invest in integrated projects and policies which can both contribute to **equal opportunities, a good start in life and a healthy urban living for everyone. Health can inspire these integrated measures.**

Our strong plea **for integrated measures** also asks national governments and the European Commission to allow for **healthy overlap** between the different funding mechanisms for innovation and concrete results. We need to enable cities to develop **inclusive projects** which do not segregate our citizens but rather connects them. **By dividing funding possibilities too strictly for different target groups this can lead to further institutionalisation of segregation and polarisation in our societies.**

A strong social narrative by integration of social into the green and digital transition

The EU Social Policy with equal opportunities and resilience for all citizens should become more clearly integrated in the Green and Digital Transition. The pandemic has shown us how health impacts our lives, economy, green and digital policies. In times of crisis it is more important than ever to connect and combine our strengths to develop integrated solutions for our shared societal challenges. While we acknowledge the shared governing system and subsidiarity principle of the European Union, we are also convinced that **a strong social narrative from EU institutions can be beneficial to re-focus and reiterate the importance of embedding social policies in the heart of our digital, green transitions and economic recovery.**

Take responsibility as EU

The collaboration of member states in the European Union brought an enormous impact in our economies, welfare and quality of life. This also gives the responsibility that a **stronger social Europe is about finding European solutions to common social challenges** faced by many Europeans is crucial. More than 75% of Europeans live in urban areas and face specific urban challenges, such as the lack of affordable housing, gentrification, homelessness and insufficient places for childcare, among others. **These are urban challenges that need European solutions by reinforcing the EU social agenda with a strong urban dimension:**

- We call for a **place-based approach to poverty** through an **EU anti-poverty framework** that would allow for developing **Local Pacts** to fight poverty in the most deprived urban areas
- The EU should support **local schemes of Child Guarantee with integrated measures** to address the specific needs of children most in need at local level
- We need the EU to support our cities in **tackling the housing crisis**, by enabling more affordable housing and fighting homelessness.
- We need the EU to unlock cities' potential in driving quality jobs and skills training through the Just Transition Fund to support **integrated local plans for upskilling and reskilling**, and by **supporting social economy ecosystems** in cities

- Last but not least, we call on the EU to support **local plans for integration and inclusion** of migrants as well as of Roma people.

#### **Improve EU social governance by working with cities**

- Finally, a stronger social Europe means a Europe that is inclusive in its governance of social policy. **Cities are allies in pushing social Europe forward. We have already proven our commitment to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights by taking real action and earmarking social investments for this purpose. I am happy to announce that the Eurocities campaign ‘Inclusive cities for all’ collected so far 60 city pledges, representing over 51 million people, pulling together financing for social investment worth of over 14.2 billion EUR.**
- Many cities have pledged to do their best to ensure all people can access and enjoy their social rights, leaving no one behind. In turn, we expect you the European leaders to engage us as key partners. **We are calling for a new pact between the EU and city leaders to shape together the action plan for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights and that it will actually help and support the local work for a better quality of life for all citizens. Based on this pact, cities should be engaged as essential partners in the design, implementation and monitoring of social policies that directly impact people on the local level.**

## Utrecht's pledge to the EU Pillar of Social Rights

Everybody is able to live happy and healthy in a growing city. Therefore we pledge to **principle 11 on Childcare and support to children**:

Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality.  
Children have the right to protection from poverty.  
Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities.

Utrecht aims to be a city where everyone feels at home, can participate and can be themselves. We embrace the growth of the city as the opportunity to ensure a healthy and pleasant living environment for everyone. Together we work on a healthy and pleasant city: Utrecht belongs to all of us.

### Our long term ambitions:

**Growing up healthy and safely:** Our ambition is that **every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and to develop optimally**. All children are able to participate and to develop their talents in a safe and stimulating environment. For the coming phase we will focus on a healthy start for young children from minus 9 months (conception) to 6 years old and we will focus on their parents.

**The Voice of Children:** We are a Children Rights City and let the voice of children be heard in making policy. Children have been involved poverty policy, public art and the making of healthy playgrounds.

**Peaceful City Council:** Children learn about **democracy and citizenship** in the Peaceful Children City Council. It starts in the classroom at school where children are asked what their peaceful school or neighbourhood looks like and what they can contribute to it themselves.

### Our actions during the Covid-19 crisis:

No child is left behind during the Covid-19 crisis:

While day care was closed because of crisis measures, we let children in vulnerable families and children from parents that are essential workers in the crisis **go to day care**.

Together with the schools **we provided internet and we supplied computers/laptops/pads** for families with a lack of resources.

We **support initiatives of learning by citizens together** to not let children be left behind.

Maarten van Ooijen

Deputy mayor Social Affairs for the City of Utrecht  
Vice-Chair of the Social Affairs Forum of EURO CITIES



## Utrecht's pledge to the EU Pillar of Social Rights

Leave no-one behind. Healthy Urban Living for Everyone. Those are the goals for Utrecht. Therefore as a city we pledge to **principle 16 on Health care: Everyone has the right to timely access to affordable, preventive and curative health care of good quality.**

The City of Utrecht always works together **with citizens** and professional partners for a Healthy Urban Living for Everyone. We developed a new strategy to work on a healthy city for all our citizens. We defined priorities in our Public Health Note to encompass health equity in all policies.

- Growing up healthy and safely
- Healthy income
- Healthy employers
- Healthy behaviour
- Healthy living environment

### Our actions:

**Growing up healthy and safely:** Utrecht's ambition is that **every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and to develop optimally.** Utrecht is a children's rights city and has the ambition to be a city where children get equal opportunities for a good start in life, grow up healthy and safely, to participate and to develop their talents in a safe and stimulating environment. For the coming phase we will focus the local effort on a healthy start for young children from minus 9 months (conception) to 6 years old and their parents.

**Healthy income:** Utrecht's ambition is that **all Utrechters can make a healthy living.** Work – paid and unpaid – adds meaning and structure to everyday life and generally leads to confidence and more social contacts. In our action programme Utrecht Debt Free we work on a Utrecht without debts.

**Healthy employers:** Healthy employment: Utrecht's ambition is that **employers in Utrecht are partners in working on healthy urban living for everyone.** Having a job has a major positive impact on people's health, and working conditions affect health of employees. In a continuous dialogue with employers we explore how to define and implement the principle of being a healthy employer for all employees.

**Healthy behaviour:** Utrecht's ambition is that **for every Utrechter the healthy choice becomes easier.** We address healthy lifestyles in a tailor made, behavioural and environmental perspective.

**Healthy living environment:** Utrecht's ambition is that **the living environment of Utrechters is designed in such way that healthy life is easy, the pressure on health is as low as possible and people feel comfortable.** We aim to protect, improve and develop healthy living environments including space for care facilities, sports, schools, parks, play areas, shops, meeting places, healthy food and more.

**Health Hub Utrecht:** In the Utrecht Health Hub we work in a multiple helix way with the cities' stakeholders. Our goal: a Happy and a Healthy life for all our citizens in 2030.

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#SocialRights #Health #Cities