



gent:

The Ghent Sustainability Report 2021

Focus on People

Voluntary Local Review

Foreword by the Mayor

You have before you the second Ghent sustainability report in a series of five, with the focus on *People*. The 17 United Nations Development Goals are primarily about improving people's lives, i.e., no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education and gender equality.

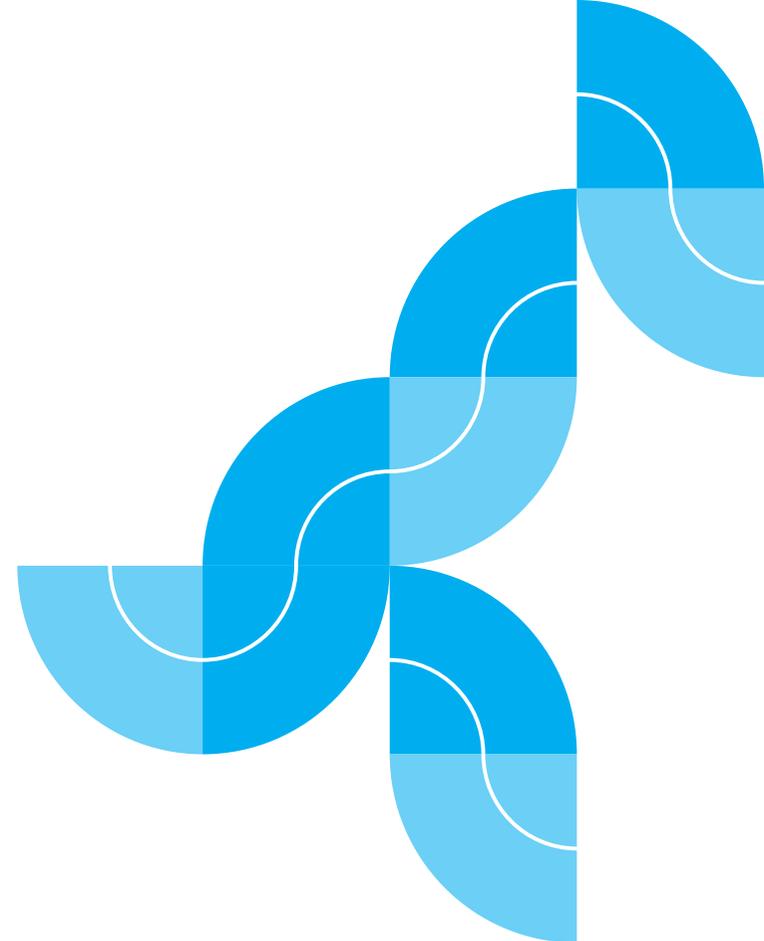
Over the past year and a half, many of these goals have been under pressure. The coronavirus highlighted the gap between rich and poor, made queues at food distribution points longer, showed us that not all children have the option to be home-schooled and that access to good healthcare is critical.

In this sense, these development goals have become even more relevant. It is not only about the sustainability of our planet, but also about the wellbeing of everyone who is part of our society. And the coronavirus has also made it clear that collaboration is key. Never before has there been such intense cooperation in our city as in the recent past. The city as an organisation, civil society, social organisations and entrepreneurs joined forces to guide Ghent through this crisis.

In Ghent, we leave no one behind and together we move our city and its residents forward. I am therefore particularly proud of the many strong projects in this report. Thank you to everyone who has contributed and is committed to our city and the people of Ghent.

Mathias De Clercq

Mayor
City of Ghent



Introduction

You have before you the 2021 Ghent Sustainability Report, the second one in a row. Ghent illustrates how the city works collectively on sustainability. We use the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (the SDGs) as a guiding compass.

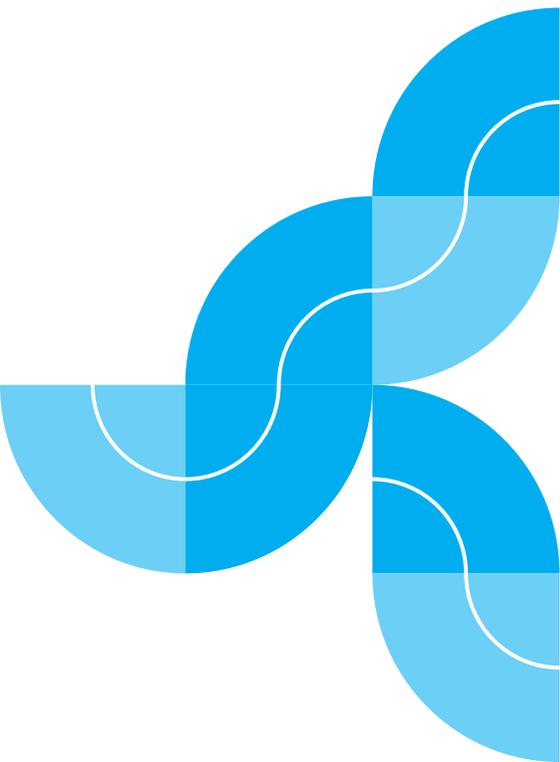
In 2020, we wrote the [first Ghent sustainability report](#), which, based on data for each of the 17 sustainable development goals, provides an update on the situation in Ghent. This report is intended to be a baseline. It shows figures and provides a context: where are things going well and where not so well? Where does Ghent position itself for each development goal? We were rewarded with an [award from the Institute of Chartered Surveyors](#) in the category 'Best Pioneering Initiatives relating to the SDG 2030 Agenda'. With this initial report, we now know the point of departure for our journey towards sustainability. .

With the second sustainability report, we are changing tack. We take the time to sightsee. In Ghent, steps are being taken every day towards a sustainable transition, by the government, by civil society, by large and small companies, by citizens, by educational institutions, etc. With this report, we aim to guide you through various sustainable partnerships in Ghent with a focus on the first 5 SDGs, under the 'People' heading. We elaborate on these topics: no poverty (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5).

When we talk about sustainability, climate or sustainable entrepreneurship comes to mind. But the social aspect of sustainability is equally crucial in a global sustainable transition. 'Leave no one behind' is the central promise made with all international partners to reach the SDGs.

Working on a sustainable transition is a complex story of cooperation between many different stakeholders who dream of a better world. That is why, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, we are putting ten creative and inspiring projects in the spotlight, together with stakeholders in the city. This report highlights the process and the results achieved. Where are the projects' milestones and successes? What challenges do they face? What is the role of the local government, the City of Ghent, in this story?

The purpose of this report and any future reports is to support policies, help prepare them and fuel debates. But equally, we aim to inspire you and maybe even encourage you to make a fresh commitment. And, of course, show how every day we are taking steps together towards a more sustainable city.



Sustainable Development Goals

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals. Abbreviated the SDGs. The SDGs are a call to action to eradicate poverty and put the planet on the path to sustainability. The deadline is 2030, so we still have 9 years to meet the targets.

The 17 goals are universal and were formulated for all countries across the world, north and south, east and west. Everyone can take part, the goals are aimed at companies, states, civil society, active citizens and ... cities.

The sustainable development goals can be implemented at the local level, but you do not achieve them alone as a local administration. Fighting poverty, water management, resilient infrastructure, transparent institutions, etc. We tackle these challenges with various levels of government or stakeholders. Cooperation and consultation are necessary, in addition to a clear view of the entire (local) policy. Local authorities do not control everything, but proximity to citizens, businesses and knowledge institutions is one of our greatest assets. This advantage of local governments can be found throughout the world. Therefore, they are a crucial link in achieving the sustainable development goals.

Voluntary Local Review

As mentioned, the role of cities is critical. We put local backing behind global goals. The City of Ghent aims to keep its finger on the pulse and even go the extra mile by providing inspiration. We are therefore resubmitting this sustainability report to the United Nations, as a [Voluntary Local Review](#) (VLR). In doing so, we elevate the report unequivocally beyond the city walls.

The interaction between local, regional, national and international levels is crucial in the SDG story and will therefore remain our focus for the coming reports. It is an ongoing process in which we want to see which goals we can set together, which (open) data we can share and which expertise we can exchange.

VLRs are the key to allowing dialogue between the various actors. The creation of such a VLR is not a static process. We learn something new every day. The fact that the City of Ghent has decided to draw up an annual report is a plus. We have already experienced this during international exchanges. The sensitising value of our approach also strikes other cities: we involve stakeholders in the selection of the projects and use the language of the SDGs in different forums in the city. This report is therefore more than a set of statistics. It is a tool and not a goal in itself. It makes Ghent's story about the SDGs authentic, which moreover fits in with the City of Ghent's new brand strategy. By zooming in on projects, we look for the people behind the numbers. We noticed that many stakeholders are already familiar with the SDGs, in terms of communication, the SDGs have successfully completed their mission.

New insights are taken on board for future reports. For example, we saw that a number of other cities already work with targets and colour codes for each SDG. We do not yet, because evolutions at the SDG level cannot be measured annually. We plan to do so with our final report in 2024, at the end of the legislature. In it, we will be able to colour code (positively or negatively) advances towards the sustainable development goals.

International agendas

With this report, we also aim to pay attention to other international agendas, besides the SDGs 2030 Agenda. These agendas either reinforce the SDGs or complement the achieved goals. The SDGs are in fact only one of the frameworks for the sustainable transition of cities. We also briefly explain the other agendas here and link them to the projects in this report.

 **Leave no one behind:** eradicating poverty in all its forms, ending discrimination and exclusion, reducing inequalities and (social) vulnerabilities.

 **Human Rights-Based Approach:** is the approach to each project based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

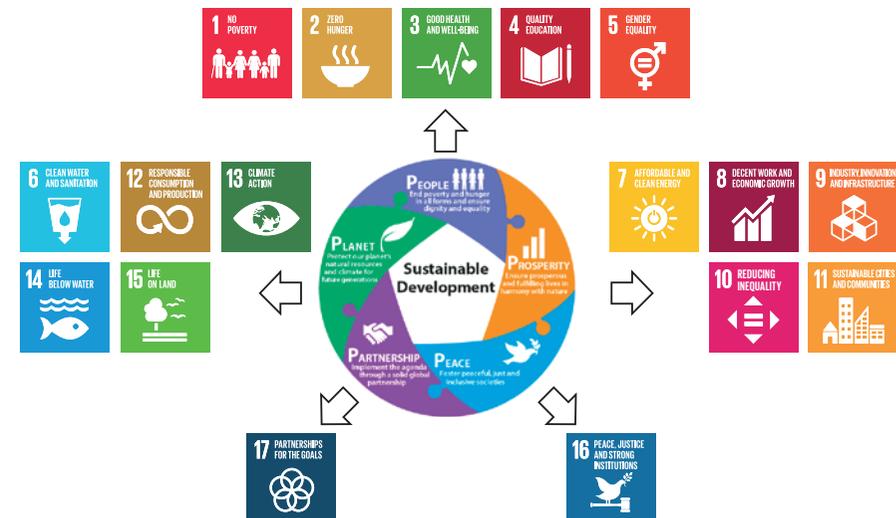
 **Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment:** gender equality and women's empowerment make development more resilient and sustainable.

 **Decade of Action:** mobilising all people, everywhere in the world, to work together to achieve global goals (individually and collectively, locally and globally). Secondly, the ambition to tackle social issues. Finally, turning ideas into solutions, through sustainable innovation, financial investments and technology.

 **New Urban Agenda:** strong link with [SDG 11](#) (sustainable cities and communities). The New Urban Agenda serves as a roadmap for sustainable urban development. It highlights the strengths and opportunities of the city as a driver of prosperity and as a focal point of cultural and social wellbeing, with a focus on environmental protection.

The Ghent SDG approach: an annual sustainability report

The City of Ghent aims to publish an annual sustainability report during this legislature (2020-2025), for a total of five issues. After the [first 2020 sustainability report](#) we will highlight part of the sustainable development goals each year. We rely on the five major SDG topics, i.e., people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership¹. Or also called the 5 Ps: People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnerships & Peace.



¹ United Nations (2015, 21 October). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, consulted at <https://www.sdgs.be/nl/bronnen/publicaties>

If the combination of these 5 Ps is not balanced, the other elements will suffer, is the idea behind the 2030 Agenda. When the element of prosperity is given too much priority, it has a negative impact on people and the environment. Think of our ecological footprint. Conversely, the 2030 Agenda also states that prosperity forms an essential part of a sustainable agenda.

We started last year with an initial sustainability report, looking closely at figures. Based on the latest available environmental data and context per goal and sub-goal, it provides a baseline, a picture of the city of Ghent in 2020. The report was used for various purposes. For example, the report fuelled ongoing processes within the city organisation in the fields of tourism, sustainable investment, cooperation between higher education institutions, etc. A final report will follow at the end of the term in which we will look at how the figures are evolving.

The Ghent 2021 Sustainability Report: People

This year the spotlight is on People, in 2022 we will zoom in on Prosperity and in 2023 the focus of the report will be on the Planet. The Partnerships & Peace topics are included every year as they are central to achieving the goals. The Peace topic involves strong public institutions, among others. Therefore, for this topic, we always look at the role of the local authorities in the projects. We also consider the importance of national and international cooperation in the projects, under the Partnerships topic.

This report explicitly aims to highlight projects or operations. Depending on the topic per SDG, we engaged with relevant city departments and policy experts. Together with them, we looked at which forum in the city and which consultation method was most suitable. During these forums, we presented the sustainability report's approach and selected the projects together. This is how we came up with ten strong projects in Ghent: each in their own way representative of the way we work together on sustainability.



1 NO POVERTY



7 in 10

people in financial poverty are reached by **Public Centre for Social Welfare**

1 in 5

live in a state of poverty and social exclusion

98,168

food support by **KRAS** in 2018.

1,000 ton

tonnes of food leftovers redistributed

by **Foodsavers** in 2019

57,000

people in poverty reached in this way

2 ZERO HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



72%

choose a regular GP

5 in every 1,000

residents report to a primary care psychologist each year

11%

take antidepressants



97%

preschool participation in Flanders - front runner in Europe

6%

of preschoolers have insufficient half-days in 2018-2019

17%

of school-leavers drop out of secondary education without a diploma in 2019-2020

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



5 GENDER EQUALITY



Gender gap in employment rates (2017 figures)

	women	men
Activity level	70%	77%
Employment rate	62%	68%
Unemployment rate	11%	12%

There is a proportional gender distribution in the municipal council and the college in the City of Ghent in the current legislature

The importance of the SDGs in preventing and controlling pandemics

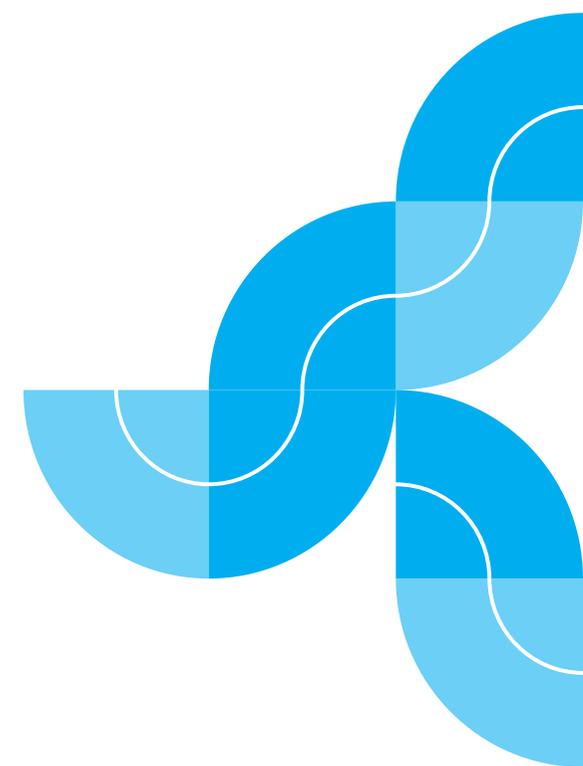
In the previous report, we discussed the coronavirus crisis, which was then in its first wave. This sustainability report was also written in the midst of the Covid crisis. Now, a year later, vaccination campaigns in the West are well under way, which is hopeful news. Global cooperation, on the other hand, is inadequate: the idea was that the most vulnerable people everywhere would be vaccinated  first and not the rich first, as is currently the case².

The coronavirus impact is mapped in various areas and does not paint a pretty picture: Oxfam³ estimates that the crisis could push half a billion people back into poverty. That the Covid crisis will have a negative impact on the achievement of the SDGs is widely believed. It is likely to slow down the process towards sustainable development.

For Ghent we also take stock by describing the main trend shift we see for the first 5 SDGs. The figures presented in this report are a first look at the possible impact of the coronavirus.

Mapping out the impact is one thing, looking at what long-term solutions are available and what lessons can be learned is even more important. The WHO warns⁴ us that unrestricted deforestation, illegal wildlife trade and diseases transmitted from animals to humans are linked.

Therefore, investing in green economies is crucial to restoring the balance between people and planet and helping countries recover (See the 5 Ps). All the more so, we also champion the SDGs as a sustainable compass: achieving the SDG targets can drastically reduce the impact of future crises.⁵ Let us push this compass further forward as a sustainable and hopeful response.



2 Raba, H. & Meindertsma, B. (2020, 19 December). Miljarden vaccins naar het Westen, wat blijft over ontwikkelingslanden? (Billions of vaccines to the West, what is left for developing countries?) NOS News, consulted at <https://nos.nl/collectie/13850/artikel/2361255-miljarden-vaccins-naar-het-westen-wat-blijft-over-voor-ontwikkelingslanden>

3 Ratcliff, A. & Thériault, A. (2020, 9 April). Half a billion people could be pushed into poverty by the coronavirus, warns Oxfam. *Oxfam International*, consulted at <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/half-billion-people-could-be-pushed-poverty-coronavirus-warns-oxfam>

4 World Health Organisation. (2015, 3 June). Biodiversity and Health. WHO, consulted at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/biodiversity-and-health>

5 UNDP. (s.d.). Impact of COVID-19 on the sustainable development goals. SDG Integration, consulted at <https://sdgintegration.undp.org/accelerating-development-progressduring-covid-19>



The 2020-2025 Multi-annual Strategic plan

The multi-annual strategic plan is the elaboration of the administrative agreement that the four majority parties - Open VLD, Groen, Vooruit and CD&V - concluded at the end of 2018. The agreement states that the new coalition aims to govern Ghent with ambition and courage. Ambition to lead as a city in various policy areas. Courage to make bold choices for the challenges ahead.

A well-founded debate and a well-considered path are the foundation for this document. Based on the administrative agreement, the college drafted a mission for the city in February 2019:

Ghent is a proud city where people like to live, work and enjoy themselves. A city that lives and lets live. Here everyone is equally different and equally Ghent citizen. Children are given room to grow here. People are given the opportunity to hone their skills. In Ghent, we do business and we experiment. With a view to the world.

We create the city together. And make the transition to an even better Ghent for future generations.

Twenty strategic goals emerge from this mission to prepare Ghent for the future. We combine these goals under 4 topics:

- > City that develops with a view to the future
- > City of opportunities
- > City where we live together
- > City for and by the people of Ghent

The multi-annual strategic plan for the City of Ghent contributes to the sustainable development goals. We link each SDG in this report to Ghent's strategic objective(s).

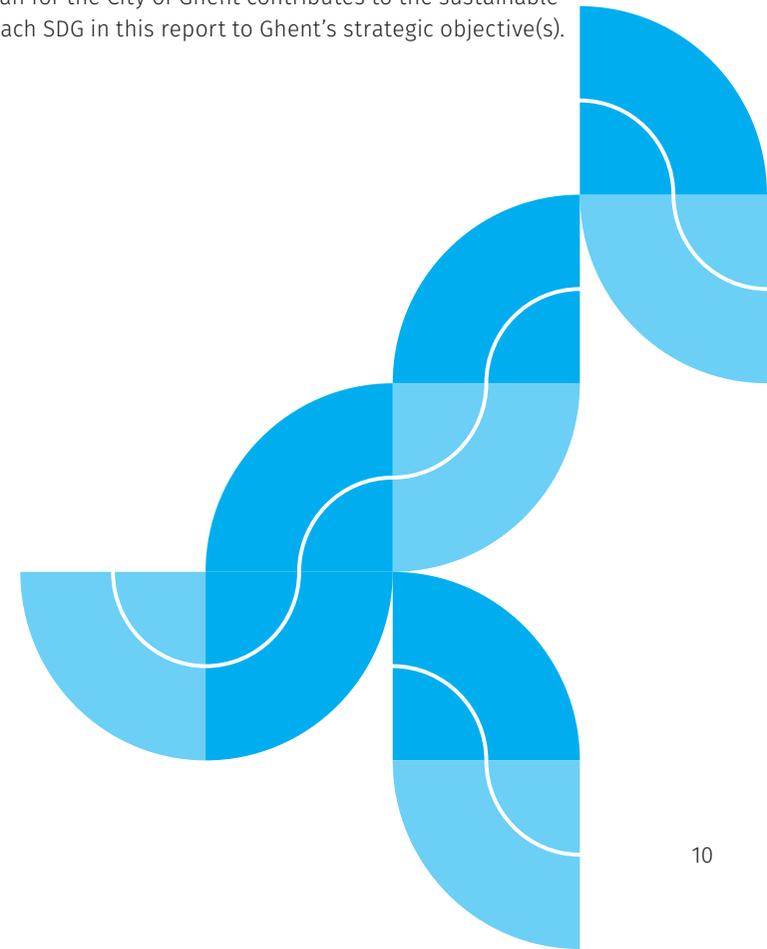


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The City of Ghent's strategy and approach

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The City of Ghent's strategy and approach

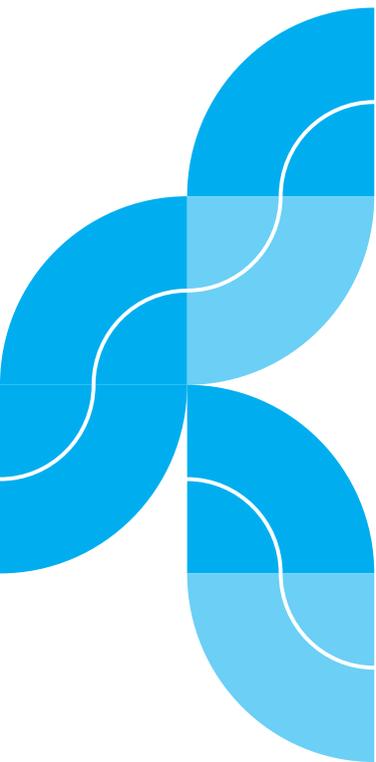
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1 NO POVERTY



SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

SDG 1 topics

We transferred the official sub-goals into topics for each SDG. You can also view the fully written sub-goals [here](#).

Extreme poverty (1.1)

Risk of poverty (1.2)

Social protection systems (1.3)

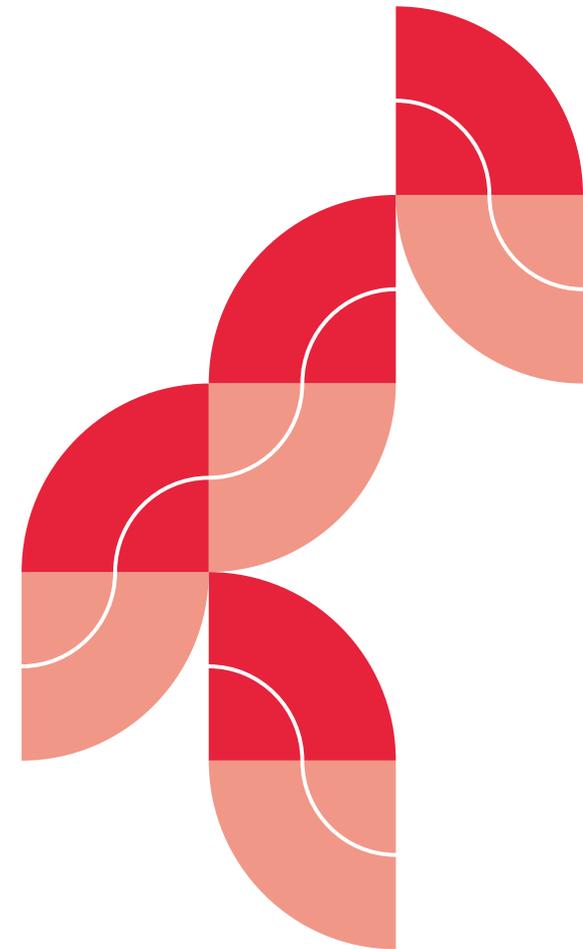
Equal rights (1.4)

Resilience (1.5)

Unequal impact of extreme events (1.5)

SDG 1 in brief

This SDG aims first of all to eradicate all extreme poverty in the world. Poverty should be halved by 2030. In this section, therefore, we discuss the risk of poverty. Reducing that risk involves building strong social protection systems, achieving equal rights and providing access to basic services and economic resources. Poverty reduction focuses on all areas of life. In addition, we are dedicated to the resilience of people in vulnerable situations and to reducing the impact of economic, social and environmental disasters, especially for people in vulnerable circumstances.



The City of Ghent's strategy and approach

Strategy

In the Ghent Multi-annual Strategic plan 20-25, we find the following goals that contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals:

'Less poverty in Ghent through a proactive and integral poverty policy':

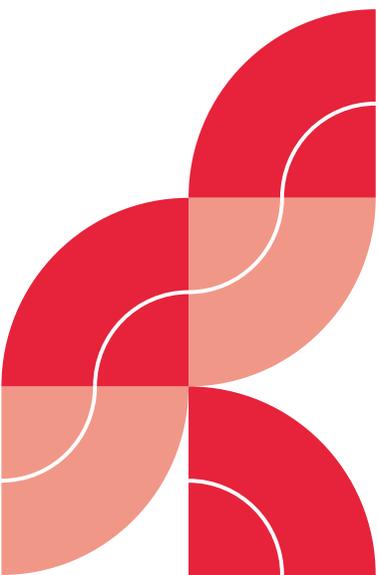
- > Helping the homeless with their reintegration.
- > Strengthening the poverty policy in all policy areas and raising awareness about poverty.
- > All families with underage children and all young people living in poverty receive appropriate support.
- > Ensuring tailored integral assistance for the vulnerable population and its growing issues.
- > Ensuring that people can meet their basic needs and exhaust their most important rights.

City of Ghent approach

Obviously, the projects in this report only provide a limited view of how the City of Ghent operates with respect to poverty. The City of Ghent and Public Centre for Social Welfare Ghent are joining forces to help people living in poverty, based on the vision that every Ghent citizen is entitled to a dignified life. Everyone should be able to take part in life in our city and that is why we are fighting poverty, helping the people of Ghent to progress financially and to implement their social rights. We support them where necessary in all areas of life: living, working, education and learning, health, energy, leisure, etc. We pay special attention to opportunities for children.

The major actions in the fight against poverty are bundled in the [Ghent Poverty Policy Plan](#). This plan is the result of close collaboration with numerous organisations fighting poverty. An annual report on what happened to implement the plan is submitted to the city council's welfare committee.

If you would like to know more about the approach to poverty in Ghent, please go to [this link](#).



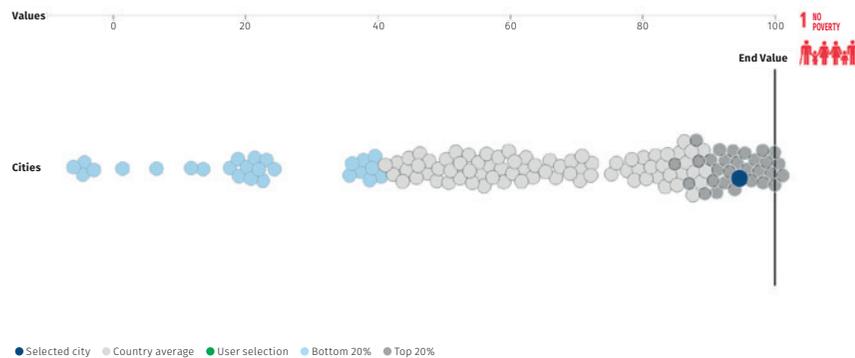
SDG 1 International

International benchmark by OECD SDG Index⁶

To allow for an international comparison for SDG 1, ‘no poverty’, the [OECD SDG Index](#) suggests the following indicator: the share of the population (in percentage) living on a disposable income below the poverty line⁷. This corresponds with the AROP indicator⁸, the risk of monetary poverty. The data for this indicator in the SDG index dates back to 2016, but already gives an initial idea of where Ghent is positioned compared to other cities with respect to this goal.

The SDG Index provides a score of 1-100, where a score of 100 is the indicator’s proposed final value to achieve the target by 2030.

Figure 1 OECD SDG-index – SDG 1



Ghent = ‘selected city’
Source: OECD⁹

International Projects

Every year, the City of Ghent supports international projects with the ‘Ghent citizens without borders’ project subsidy. Several SDGs are at the centre of this. SDG 1, ‘no poverty’, is reflected in several proposals and approved projects. However, we specifically focus on the project ‘[Africa in Flanders](#)’, to set up vocational training for seamstresses and workshops on conflict management in Congo. Job creation is one of the most successful ways to lift families out of poverty, especially when it comes to projects in difficult regions. In addition, Ghent signed the [Eurocities pledge on homelessness](#) and is the leader of the [Urbact project ROOF](#) (‘housing first’).

Impact of the coronavirus crisis

Poverty increases on many fronts

Although poverty affects many areas, everything starts with a lack of financial resources. Those who benefit from a living wage often still live below the poverty line, because the federally determined living wage limits fall below it.

Since Covid, the number of living wage recipients has been rising: in December 2019 there were 5,035 living wage recipients, in December 2020 there were as many as 5,471. The monthly figures also show that the downward trend until July 2019 has turned into an upward trend in 2020.

⁶ OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

⁷ The poverty line is equal to 60% of the national average disposable household income.

⁸ STATBEL (s.d.). Risico op armoede of sociale uitsluiting (Risk of poverty or social exclusion), consulted at <https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/huishoudens/armoede-en-levensomstandigheden/risico-op-armoede-sociale-uitsluiting#documents>

⁹ OECD. (2020). Measuring the distance to the SDGs in regions and cities, consulted at <https://www.oecd-local-sdgs.org/index.html>.

- > An increase in digitalisation was observed through homeworking, distance learning, reliance on digital offerings in care and services, preference for electronic payments (and in some cases a ban on cash payments)¹².
- > The increase in digitalisation is taking place against the background of an already existing digital divide. In 2019, before the coronavirus crisis, 29% of Belgian households with an income of less than 1,200 euros had no Internet connection, compared to 1% for households with an income above 3,000 euros. Not being able to use the Internet to send forms to the administration, despite the need for it, was a problem for 56% of the former, compared to 30% of the latter¹³.
- > During lockdown, public spaces with Internet access are not open either.
- > There are also implications for privacy: video calls sometimes allow for unwanted insight into someone's home circumstances.

Homeless counted for the first time

Due to loss of income and rising costs, rent arrears are building up and the already existing issues with tenants in the private rental market are getting worse. Clearing accrued rent arrears is not a matter of course, so more evictions are imminent. There are fears of an increase in the number of homeless people during the summer of 2021.¹⁴

In Ghent, the homeless were counted for the first time: 1,873 homeless people, 401 of whom were children. In total, 314 people or 21% of all adults counted are acutely homeless in Ghent. These are people who stay in public spaces, emergency shelters, garages, squats, cars or tents. Slightly less than half of them have been homeless for more than two years¹⁵.



12 Myria. Fiche 42: Droit aux services bancaires pour étrangers (Sheet 42: Right to banking services for foreigners).

13 Brotcorne, P. & Mariën, I. (2020). Barometer Digitale Inclusie 2020. Brussel: Koning Boudewijnstichting (Barometer Digital Inclusion 2020. Brussels: King Baudouin Foundation).

14 Steunpunt tot bestrijding van armoede, bestaansonzekerheid en sociale uitsluiting (2021). Interfederale nota over de impact van de COVID-19-crisis in situaties van armoede en bestaansonzekerheid (Support centre for combating poverty, insecurity and social exclusion (2021). *Interfederal note on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in situations of poverty and livelihood insecurity*. <https://www.armoedebestrijding.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Interfederale-nota-impact-COVID-19-april-2021-NL.pdf>

15 Hermans, K., Vermeir, E. & Samyn, S. (2021). Telling dak- en thuisloosheid. Lokaal rapport Gent. KULeuven (*Homelessness census. Local report Ghent*. KULeuven).



Photographer: Thomas De Boever

Children First

Children First



Children First reaches out to families who have difficulty finding appropriate assistance and does so through the presence of social workers from PCSF Gent in the schools. Close cooperation between welfare and education provides an answer to the many questions parents or young people ask the schools. Parents often ask welfare questions of schools, but they do not always find their way to the right welfare partners. Within this accessible and proactive operation, we reach families that we would otherwise not reach.

With Children First we cooperate with the schools in three ways:

1. In schools with the most vulnerable population, there are open days. The social workers are there at set times.
2. In other schools we work with consultations: an appointment is made with the social worker at the school.
3. Thirdly, there is a clear point of contact for all schools in Ghent.

Children First has the following goals:

- > Entitlements (e.g., application for a subsistence allowance, application for a medical card, study grant, etc.).
- > To unburden schools, to raise awareness of poverty in schools and to provide support in their poverty policy (e.g., training). Better knowledge of deprivation, child and generational poverty¹⁶ enables schools to create opportunities and support children and their families.
- > Guaranteeing appropriate assistance for each child/family: improving access to services for people in poverty, with priority attention to parents, children and their families; improving cooperation between the sectors/partners involved across life domains. In this way, we bridge the gap between assistance, leisure and school.
- > Support families in the most vulnerable conditions by paying for school meals.



In practice

Children First's social workers use the schools as a source. In schools with open days, the social worker is available at school at a fixed time. Parents can drop by without an appointment. This is communicated to parents through leaflets and posters. The liaison officer, pupil guidance, the care team, the administration, the school social worker will refer to Children First's social worker. They will look at the family's or young person's question, what barriers to assistance there are, help with the question itself or put the inquirer in touch with other services.

In schools where we have consultations, we work by appointment. The consultation takes place at school or during a home visit. Other than that, everything else is like an open day.

We work in an approachable and proactive way and reach families we would otherwise not reach. Schools primarily act as the referring party for children and families. Because of their proximity and involvement, they are often the first point of contact for parents. Therefore, they are a privileged partner. The close cooperation, consultation and sharing of knowledge between the school team and the Children First staff ensure sustainable solutions: income (living wage, child benefits, unemployment benefits), material assistance (food parcels, emergency medical care), administrative assistance, debt mediation, access to (mental) health care. Children First also increases knowledge about poverty in schools, including through consultations with teachers and through training. In this way, we create more opportunities to better support children in precarious situations.

¹⁶ By deprivation we mean the situation in which people are deprived of opportunities to participate adequately in socially valued goods: education, labour, housing. This is not a one-off event, but a lasting state of affairs that occurs in different areas - tangible and intangible. In the case of generational poverty, we see exclusion in a single family in successive generations, whether financial, social or other.



Collaboration in the city

Children First is an initiative of PCSF Ghent in conjunction with the Education Centre Ghent. The following partners are critical to the operation:

- > The social workers at Children First with their head social worker, head of department and the relevant psychologist from the Psychological Service of PCSF Ghent make up the core team.
- > Ghent schools and their school teams (such as pupil guidance, care coordinator, school social worker) are the central partners at Children First.
- > In addition to the members of the school team, the [liaison officer](#) between school, parents and neighbourhood is essential. A child has most opportunities if it can develop in a context where school, family and neighbourhood are partners in creating a broad and challenging learning and living environment. Children and young people learn both inside and outside school walls/hours if all the learning prerequisites are satisfied. Think about housing, income, food, health, safety.



Evolution

In 2015, PCSF Ghent and the House of the Child launched a pilot project in the primary school **De Toverberg**. A social worker was available at the school twice a week. This approach caught on. Parents found it easier to get help, and teachers and liaison workers also felt supported.

The pilot project was extended to five schools in the 2016-2017 school year. In 2017-2018, the operation became structural: from then on two social workers worked in quite a few schools with a fixed open day, including part-time and special education schools. In addition, they involved a consultation function in many schools. In the school year 2020-2021, the team of social workers was doubled again. As of September, the four social workers were able to work in nearly 35 open day schools and almost 40 other schools. Within the renewed operation of the welfare centres, each school can quickly and directly contact the social worker at the welfare office in the neighbourhood in which the school is located.



For whom

Children First aims to reach all school-age children who grow up in vulnerable situations (from toddler to adolescent) and their families. 🇳🇱 In Ghent, it is estimated that 1 child in 5 grows up in poverty. This means approx. 10,000 children. Poverty threatens children's rights as they experience more stress and anxiety. Child poverty also increases the risk of poverty and social exclusion in adult life. Children First has a greater impact: we step in early and break through (generational) poverty. The presence of an PCSF staff member in the school takes into account the SES (socio-economic status) of the pupils in the school. Children First is closest in schools with the highest SES rates, where the greatest number of children in vulnerable situations attend school. With the expansion of Children First, we are also present in schools that are interested in helping to shape a poverty policy and, for example, want to work on proactive rights.



Proud of

A unique cross-domain cooperation takes place between education and welfare within the school. By being present at school we work better and in a more integrated way and we bridge the gap between help and service, leisure time and school.

We work in an approachable manner by transferring the PCSF services to the school. Young people can be helped anonymously and personally in the school environment. We provide administrative and financial support so that young people can focus on learning. Support is also close at hand for parents and teachers. We catch questions and needs more quickly. And schools experience this as support for the complex (welfare) questions they are faced with.

Keeping in touch with schools and liaison workers leads to a relationship of trust. This is bearing fruit and leads to the effective granting of rights and support to families and young people.



Klaske, social worker:

‘After our assessments, it appears that most schools are enthusiastic about the Children First operation. Because we provide support on an administrative level and are well acquainted with the network of organisations in Ghent, we take over a workload from the teachers, liaison workers, grade coaches and student counsellors. We refer people immediately or find out what support is possible on an administrative, financial or emotional level. We have the knowledge to provide the necessary help.’

An additional bonus is the embedding in the bigger picture of our PCSW work: we exchange and share knowledge.



Results

The Children First team doubled to four social workers in 2020. The number of schools with open days and consultations expanded to nearly 35 open day schools and almost 40 schools with consultations. In the 2019-2020 school year there were 362 social workers for families or young people. Of this group, 64% did not receive support from PCSF Ghent at the time. Some 100 people received further guidance from a regular social worker at PCSF Ghent (e.g., for the allocation of the living wage, social guidance, debt assistance) and 93 families received a refund for school meals.

Lastly, we would like to point out that in spite of the coronavirus, the social workers continued to work in the schools, with an adjusted working method.



Ambitions

We strive for the growing awareness of the topic of poverty and poverty policy in schools. We want to encourage schools to take a 'poverty look'. We are collaborating with Education Centre Ghent and are concentrating on cost-conscious education and poverty awareness training tailored to the needs of the schools.

We are reinforcing the link between welfare and education: together with [Education Centre Ghent](#) and [TOPunt Ghent vzw](#), we are organising an exchange day: school teams, social workers and CLB staff meet at neighbourhood level and get to know each other's work even better.

We are looking into how we can reach even more families and young people. The Childcare Department (City of Ghent) shows interest in connecting childcare initiatives with the work of social workers in the welfare offices. And we are looking at how this approach provides opportunities in other areas of life: for example, by deploying social workers to sources in other sectors, such as material assistance initiatives.

We aim to evolve further towards a more structural approach to school poverty, with a strong poverty policy in the Ghent education system. Also in schools where there are currently no Children First social workers or liaison officers.

In the coming years, Education Centre Ghent will, together with PCSF Ghent, focus even more on poverty awareness and policy in schools. We are working on three aspects: support for a more conscious poverty and cost policy at school; striving for affordable education in Ghent through lower and transparent school fees; reducing financial stress among parents and at school.

By joining forces, both in terms of education policy and poverty policy, we aim to remove (financial and other) barriers to education in Ghent. Pupils in poverty should have the same opportunities as everyone else. The collaboration between Education Centre Ghent and the PCSF supports schools in forming a poverty-ready school team and reducing financial stress for both school and parents. We are committed to lower, more transparent school fees. In addition, we are working to reduce the digital divide. Over three years, actions will be taken by the e-inclusion working group Digitaal.Talent@Gent, Education Centre Ghent, Education Ghent and the various education umbrella organisations.



Challenges

We notice **major differences between schools** with respect to the awareness of poverty at school.

Children First **cannot always immediately take care of the (distressing) requests for help**. In our city, too, there are waiting lists and we cannot always provide appropriate assistance.

Resources to support children and families in **paying for school meals** are limited. Demand exceeds supply. Although we aim to support as many children/young people as possible in the most vulnerable situations, some people/schools fall by the wayside.

Finally, it is not easy to make a separate room available in some schools. This was certainly the case during the coronavirus crisis. Social workers showed a lot of creativity in continuing to reach out to families and young people.



Role of the City of Ghent

Children First is part of PCSF Ghent's operations. The social workers at Children First form a team within the PCSF. In addition, signals and findings from the Children First social workers are included and fed back to other City of Ghent departments through the head social worker and the head of the department. Education Centre Ghent cooperates with the PCSF based on the supporting educational policy to give shape to the poverty policy at school.



Importance of partnerships

Cooperation between different cities and at the Flemish level is appropriate for taking sustainable steps in the area of affordable education and raising awareness about poverty in education. Sharing knowledge and good examples will help us reach our goal of accessible Ghent education with sufficient bridges to welfare more quickly.

We have also noticed a great deal of interest in Children First from other cities and are keen to share knowledge with other cities in Flanders. Through platforms such as Eurocities (Workgroup Children and Young People), this is also happening internationally.



Further info

- > Info on Children First: <https://stad.gent/nl/samenleven-welzijn-gezondheid/ocmw-gent/gent-tegen-armoede/kinderarmoede/kinderen-eerst-welzijn-op-school>
- > Info on Ghent's poverty policy: <https://stad.gent/nl/onderwijscentrum-gent/armoedebeleid>



The associations where people in poverty speak up



The associations where people in poverty speak up



In the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the associations where people in poverty speak up are full partners. We give people with experience with poverty a voice in policy. In addition, we create safe and energising meeting places for people with and without experience with poverty. We make people stronger in the fight against poverty.

We noticed that a large heterogeneous group of people is living in poverty in cities. Some groups are difficult to reach. They include non-Dutch-speaking Ghent residents and single parents with young children.

In very concrete terms, we go the extra mile to reach a broader target group of people living in poverty and to build and share knowledge and experience in the area of participation by people living in poverty.



In practice

Firstly, the associations are actively working on broadening the target group. This creates more diversity in the group. Together with the associations, we actively track down under-reached groups, such as non-native speakers, single young parents, lonely elderly people, the homeless. And we motivate them to take part in the work of the associations. To this end, we establish links with civil society organisations who are in contact with these groups.

In addition, we are committed to building and sharing expertise. To this end, we work together with the Policy Participation Department of the City of Ghent. The three associations act as the Ghent Collective against Poverty and represent a knowledge centre in the area of policy participation for people in poverty. With

the establishment of the Collective, we build a bridge to the newly established Participation Point of the City of Ghent (Policy Participation Department). This Participation Point now represents the support for city services and employees, and also aims to focus more broadly on cooperation with citizens' initiatives, associations and businesses. In this respect, the acquired knowledge within the associations adds considerable value.



Collaboration in the city

The associations where people in poverty speak up¹⁷ are the project's initiators, in cooperation with the City and PCSF Ghent. City services and other partners also contribute to the project.

- > Movement for people with a low income and children vzw¹⁸ ([BMLIK](#)), [SIVI vzw](#), [De Zuidpoort vzw](#), [Jong Gent in Actie](#), [KRAS Gent](#), [Samenlevingsopbouw Gent](#).
- > City of Ghent services: Policy Support Staff of the Local Social Policy Department, Policy Participation/Social Management Department, Housing Department, Urban Renewal Department, Cultural Affairs Department.



Evolution

The associations where people in poverty speak up have been fighting poverty and social exclusion for a long time, together with people living in poverty. The Movement of People with Low Incomes and Children was founded in 1983. Vzw SIVI and vzw *de Zuidpoort* were founded in the mid-1990s.

In the meantime, the City and the PCSF have been collaborating for years with the associations where people in poverty speak up. The associations can count on financial support in this. In 2015, the associations concluded grant agreements with the City, with a view to eventually concluding structural cooperation agreements in the 2020-2025 policy period.

¹⁷ These are BMLIK, SIVI vzw and De Zuidpoort vzw

¹⁸ vzw = non-profit organisation

In these cooperation agreements (2020), we emphasise:

- > Broadening the target group, so that we speak on behalf of all persons living in poverty, irrespective of their origin.
- > Policy participation with and for people in poverty and development of expertise: over the years, we have acquired expertise in methodologies, in reaching out to groups, and in specific topics that lead to greater participation in the policy by people in poverty. This makes for a more efficient and qualitative policy dialogue. This expertise is actively shared with the relevant city services (Social Services, Policy Participation and any other services involved).



For whom

People with experience with poverty who live and/or stay in Ghent. Special attention is paid to groups that the associations have had difficulty reaching so far, or have had limited access to.



Proud of

Together with the city services, the associations ensure greater visibility of the knowledge and expertise of the associations, and, in particular, of people personally experiencing poverty.

They focus more on joint expertise development, among others on creating more impact, bringing more diversity to the voice of people in poverty, or attracting new people in poverty to the operation. In short: innovate to achieve better results.

The associations found a good balance between standing up for and representing people in poverty and their loyalty to the local policy (city and PCSF). They are clearly fighting a common battle against poverty and social exclusion.

During the coronavirus crisis, we managed to continue to reach people in the target group. The circumstances were challenging, but by focusing more on an individual

approach and working in very small groups, we were able to reach that very vulnerable group.

Some examples of completed creative, innovative or surprising initiatives:

- > Best Citizen: A group of people living in poverty (*De Zuidspreekers*) developed a 'recipe book' to make policy participation accessible to every citizen.

- > Within the framework of the neighbourhood budgets, the vzw SIVI listed the needs in the neighbourhood together with residents and supported them in elaborating the ideas and showing their projects in the neighbourhood. Using innovative methods, we entered into a dialogue with other residents with similar ideas, in order to potentially work together. These actions allowed people with experience with poverty to use their own resources and, as active citizens, to help determine the future of the neighbourhood;

- > Since January 2020, the vzw SIVI has been holding 'table discussions' with people awaiting their turn in the food distribution. Vzw SIVI translates their experiences and perceptions into signals for policy.

- > In the spring, two major projects were underway: housing and mobility. In mid-March, the coronavirus crisis threw a spanner in the works, eliminating the host's meeting function. Public consultations were temporarily suspended. During that period, issues were perceived that are related to the coronavirus crisis. As soon as safety measures allowed, the table discussions were worked out in a corona-proof environment (mid-May 2020). These topics were dealt with in 2020: waste and cleanliness, housing, poverty, coronavirus crisis, a second project on mobility, digitalisation, emergency aid, tap water and leisure time. In 2020, SIVI conducted a total of 318 table discussions.





Ann, coordinator of vzw SIVI:

'Being part of the creation of projects such as Dampoort knapT OP and seeing the project grow gives me an incredible sense of satisfaction.'

Marlies, coordinator at De Zuidpoort:

'I am proud of my colleagues' flexibility during the coronavirus crisis.' For example, they translated the complicated measures into simple diagrams that could be understood by a lot of people. Fantastic!



Results

In recent years, we have been setting up collaborations with, for and by people with experience with poverty. Examples are dialogue tables, [Stressweg](#), [De Zuidsprekers](#), working groups on education, [day of resistance against poverty](#), culture, dignified funerals, youth work Jong Gent in Actie, experimental gardens for leisure time, setting up the Sociale Kruidenier, [Gent Knapt Op](#).

City services and the associations where people in poverty speak up made agreements in order to better streamline and structure the participation of people living in poverty. This involves the drafting and evaluation of policy plans, large long-term projects (e.g., urban renewal), bottom-up signals and ad-hoc issues. We will continue this exercise in the coming period and it may land in the Midfield Parliament to be set up.

The social midfield and the associations in particular, are an essential partner in shaping Ghent policy and in taking on board the voice of people in poverty in policy decisions.

With the ‘change coach’ project, the associations are supported in broadening the target group and in optimising collaboration. This project resulted in the drafting and signing of a declaration of intent between the three associations where people in poverty speak up.

The website ‘[Poverty Memory](#)’ has been created in order to bundle all initiatives, actions and methodologies.

Below is a selection from *De Zuidpoort*, SIVI and BMLIK’s annual reports:

- > *De Zuidpoort* organised 190 activities in 2019 with a total of 3,276 participants. They also won the Federal Prize for Poverty Reduction, topic Participation.
- > SIVI conducted a total of 318 table discussions in 2020 - see also ‘Proud of’. SIVI also succeeded in getting 85 people with a migrant background involved in various policy participation processes.
- > At BMLIK they switched from group work to a more individual approach during the coronavirus period. Every week, they made ‘doorstep’ visits and phone calls to 59 families. In this way, they were able to creatively organise participation, action and dialogue around a number of policy topics.



Ambitions

The associations and city services involved aim to reach an even wider target group, so that hard-to-reach groups/minorities can also make their voices heard.

The methods and insights have since been adopted by other civil society organisations and city services. This ensures that policy participation by people in poverty is in the DNA of every city service. In this way, associations, civil society and city services are sharing the knowledge and experience they have gained yet further with each other.



Challenges

The associations make a very strong commitment and show great dedication to various social issues and challenges. This creates enormous time and workload pressure for the associations and their staff. As a result, core tasks are sometimes compromised.

In every participation event, the duality between individual needs as opposed to social needs or a need that emanates from a particular target group often comes to the fore. That is where attention is always needed.



Role of the City of Ghent

In the first place, the city and the PCSF assume the governing role and provide resources to implement the objectives and actions within the multi-annual and poverty policy plan. As a governing body, the City also coordinates between the associations mutually and between the associations and other civil society organisations. A ‘change coach’ project was launched in which the three associations, together with an external facilitator, researched and proposed solutions to reach a more diverse audience and to establish citywide cooperation between the associations and other midfield actors.

The city and the PCSF also play an active role in the participation of people living in poverty. This happens to a large extent through the Policy Participation Department

and within specific projects, such as Gent Knapt Op. A customer satisfaction survey is also organised every two years among users of the welfare offices.

17 **Importance of partnerships**

In Ghent, we work together with many organisations that make the voices of vulnerable citizens heard.

Cooperation and exchange in terms of the participation of people living in poverty is desirable and even necessary. At the local level, we bundle (policy) advice and thematic papers in a database, the [poverty memory](#). It not only provides an overview of what has already been achieved, but also aims to inspire new initiatives.

In addition, we plan and discuss various forms of participation (bottom-up, district-oriented, citywide, ad hoc) together with civil society organisations.

Exchange at the Flemish level would strengthen local administrations and civil society, allowing us to share new methodologies and initiatives. The importance of the input of experience in the fight against poverty also deserves thorough attention at higher levels.



Further info

Questions about this operation?

Koen Geirnaert - director of the fight against poverty - Service Local Social Policy, Department Welfare and Society - PCSF/City of Ghent -

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2 ZERO HUNGER



SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

SDG 2 topics

We translated the official sub-targets into topics for each SDG. You can also view the fully written-out sub-targets [here](#).

End hunger (2.1)

Safe, nutritious and sufficient food (2.1)

Malnourishment (2.2)

Fair wages (2.3)

Sustainable food production (2.4)

Genetic diversity (2.5)

SDG 2 in brief

This SDG aims to end hunger for all. This means that everyone has access to affordable and healthy food, also known as food security. 'Malnourishment' focuses on combating malnutrition, but also pays attention to the consequences of unhealthy dietary patterns. By using new farming techniques, we grow healthy and quality food in a sustainable way. Fair wages for small-scale food producers is a topic that applies more at the national and international level. In addition, this SDG focuses on preserving the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated crops and bred and domesticated animals.



The City of Ghent's strategy and approach

Strategy

In the Ghent Multi-annual Strategic plan 20-25, we find the following targets that contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals:

Less poverty in Ghent through a proactive and integral poverty policy by means of, among others:

Ensuring that people can meet their basic needs and exhaust their most important rights.

Ghent continues to lead the way in a bold and social climate policy by, among others:

reducing the climate footprint of food

City of Ghent approach

The projects highlighted in this report only provide a limited picture of how the City of Ghent operates on this topic. Since 2017, PCSF and the City of Ghent have been working together to structurally prevent large-scale food waste by collecting excess food through the [Foodsavers](#) project. Foodsavers provides better access to fresh and healthy food for those who are less well-off, through distribution platforms, social grocers or neighbourhood restaurants. Or there is the [Gentse Restorestje](#), which allows you to take home your leftovers from the restaurant. Also important is the support of and collaboration with the [KRAS services](#).

Through this link you can find further information on [food \(production\) and agriculture](#) in Ghent.



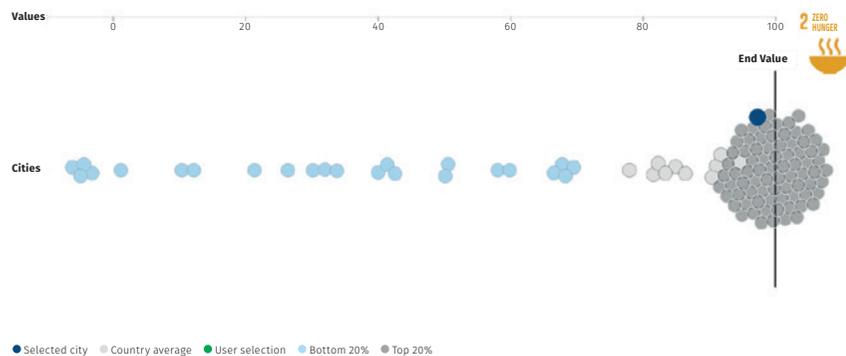
SDG 2 international

International benchmark in OECD SDG Index¹⁹

In order to allow for an international comparison for SDG 2 ‘no hunger’, the [OECD SDG Index](#) prioritises the following indicator: the proportion of the population (in percentage) with access to at least one food shop within a 15-minute walk. The data for this indicator in the SDG index dates back to 2017, but already provides an initial idea of where Ghent is positioned compared to the other cities for this goal.

The SDG Index assigns a score of 1-100, where a score of 100 is the proposed final value of the indicator to achieve the target by 2030.

Figure 4 OECD SDG-index – SDG 2



Ghent = ‘selected city’.
Source: OECD²⁰

International cooperation

With *Gent en garde*, the City of Ghent has a strong food strategy that has been committed to SDG 2 for years. This function is further explained in this section. With the food strategy, we are not only looking for local and healthy production, but also for ways to reduce food waste. Together with Rikolto, we are also making it an international story: [Food Smart Cities](#) is a collaboration between global leaders who exchange expertise and knowledge in the area of food supply in cities. A story that works both ways: Ghent can tell a powerful story about food redistribution (Foodsavers), whilst in Quito we hear how to involve hard-to-reach groups in this story.

Impact of the coronavirus crisis

Hunger and food aid increase

Poverty and hunger are on the increase in Europe.

A striking fact is that new poverty is being created by COVID-19. These people were already living in precarious conditions before the pandemic broke out. Their situation deteriorated rapidly due to the coronavirus crisis.

In both Belgium and the Netherlands, young people, the self-employed and flexworkers were most affected. Many already expected their income to drop by around 30%. The National Bank of Belgium estimates that by 2020 approximately 5 billion euros will be lost in household income for the total population, with the lowest-income families suffering the greatest losses.²¹

¹⁹ OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

²⁰ OECD. (2020). *Measuring the distance to the SDGs in regions and cities*, consulted at <https://www.oecd-local-sdgs.org/index.html>.

²¹ UNRIC. (2020, 16 October). Armoede en honger nemen toe in Europa. UNRIC (Poverty and hunger are increasing in Europe. UNRIC), consulted at <https://unric.org/nl/armoede-en-honger-nemen-toe-in-europa/>

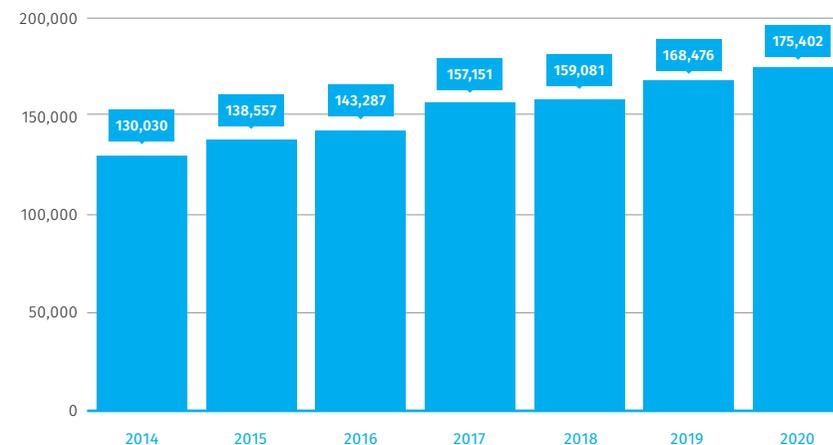
The number of people knocking on the door of food banks continues to rise

Belgian Food Banks distributed 17% more meals last year than in 2019. An average of 175,000 people queued up at food banks every month, an absolute and painful record. The fact that the coronavirus crisis is hitting hard is clear from the profiles of the people who come to collect a food parcel: people with a poor status - who are now suddenly out of work - but also students who are in dire straits because their student jobs have been lost.²² The number of people visiting the food bank has been increasing for years, but the increase in 2020 is higher than the increase between, say, 2019 and 2018.

In Ghent, we also see this increase. Perhaps the urban effect plays a part. This is inferred from the fact that the highest increase occurred in the Brussels Capital Region.²³ Increased demand for food can partly be explained by the increase in poverty, but also partly by the fact that supermarkets became more expensive. Food distribution is also under pressure on the supply side due to hoarding by the wealthier class.²⁴

In Ghent, nearly 50,000 individuals were reached by Foodsavers in 2020, almost as many as in 2019. This is remarkable, considering that social restaurants have been closed for months. Figures forwarded by food support organisations show that in 2020 more than 10,000 more people had recourse to food distribution than in 2019. For some organisations, the number of portions shows that more people need food aid for longer. In early 2021, Foodsavers noticed an ever-increasing demand for food, not only from large but also from smaller social organisations.²⁵

Figure 5 Number of customers at food banks



Created with LocalFocus

22 Baert, D. (2021, 17 February). Voedselbanken verdelen veel meer maaltijden in "recordjaar" 2020: "Ook studenten kloppen nu bij ons aan". VrtNWS (Food banks distribute many more meals in 'record year' 2020: 'Students are now also knocking on our door.' VrtNWS), consulted at <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2021/02/17/voedselbanken-verdelen-kwart-meer-maaltijden-in-recordjaar-2020/>

23 Ibid.

24 Signal Outreach Service

25 Foodsavers Annual Report, 2021



Photographer: Albrecht Heeffter

Enchanté



Enchanté



[Enchanté](#) invites people to participate fully in Ghent city life. Food is the most important connecting factor in this: it consists of a network of kind-hearted Ghent traders, social organisations and friendly customers. In this way, **Enchanté** contributes to the social dimension of sustainability. We help people in need with all kinds of small services. The traders offer a place to take a rest or have a chat, as well as a good cup of coffee or the opportunity to briefly leave a backpack.

Enchanté leaves people their dignity. We do not focus on a specific target group and have an offer that is accessible to all and adapts to the needs of vulnerable people. Everyone can participate and the network works on the basis of mutual trust and humanity. **Enchanté** re-engages people in a vulnerable position in society, as people among people. We start on the basis of existing networks. It is not about a separate (aid) facility. The network provides a home for people, without social workers, where you can be yourself. In addition, we not only involve traders but also visitors to the shops.



In practice

Enchanté describes itself as ‘a network of warm-hearted traders’. This beautiful alliteration (in Dutch) refers to all the places in the city where vulnerable people can go for free services, such as a glass of water, a place to leave your backpack, the possibility to warm up without having to consume anything, a socket to charge your mobile phone, a toilet, use of the Internet. In addition, the affiliated shops also offer ‘deferred services’. These are donations from visitors. Perhaps you have already heard of the **deferred coffee**: you buy a coffee, so that another person can drink it later.

We are always looking for new types of services and opportunities to increase the network’s impact. Hence, during the coronavirus crisis, we introduced the ‘deferred

beds’. Since October 2020, you can treat [someone to a ‘deferred’ bed](#) at Treck Hostel. In this way, someone who needs it can enjoy a warm bed in a quiet environment for a few nights. Just to relax and enjoy a tasty breakfast and a hot shower.

Enchanté takes place almost entirely in the public space and therefore reaches many people. We make people in vulnerable situations visible (again) and provide everyone with the opportunity to take on a solidarity-based care role. We do not hide being different or vulnerable, but turn it into impactful encounters between people. Bringing people from different social backgrounds together is not contrived, thanks to the simple methodology of providing services in an everyday venue. More than that, it enhances daily life within the Ghent urban context.



Collaboration in the city

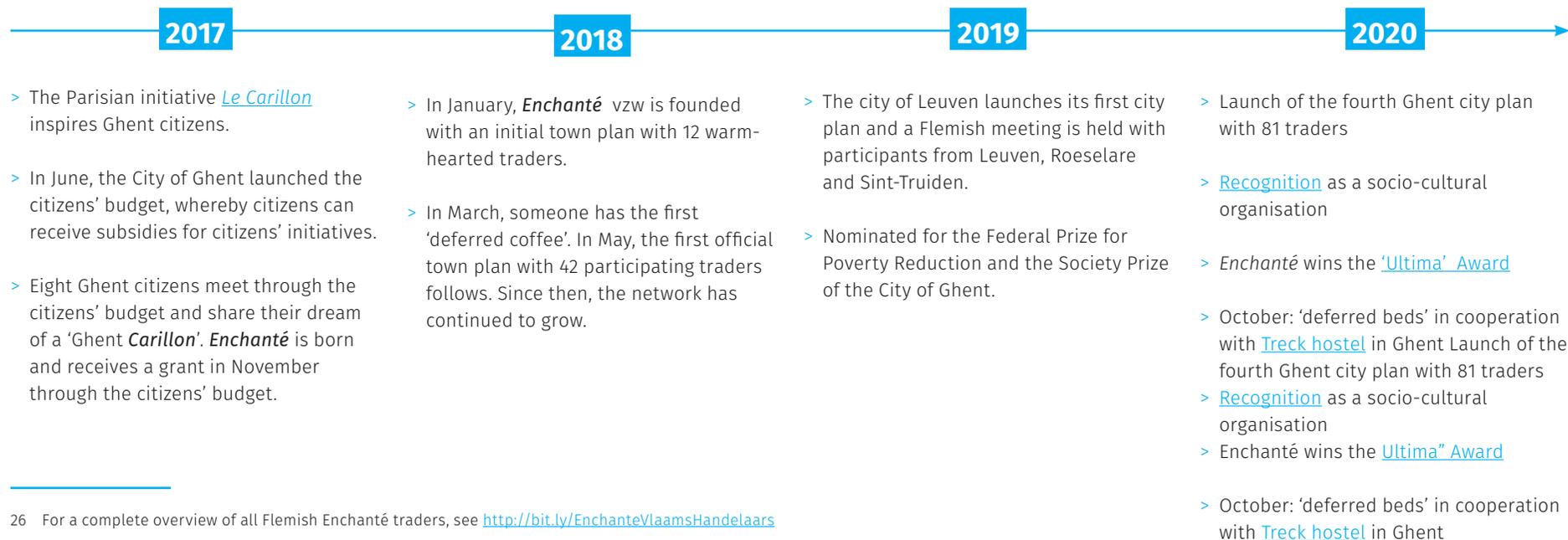
Enchanté was created in Ghent in 2018. Inspired by similar initiatives in Paris, among others, eight committed volunteers started a citizens’ initiative that gathered a network of friendly traders around it. Partly thanks to the City of Ghent’s citizens’ budget, these citizens came together around the table and gave shape to the idea. The founders can also be found [here](#).

Various partners make the project a success:

- > Traders²⁶: our Ghent network of traders covers 81 shops, including cultural centres such as Vooruit, Handelsbeurs or NT Gent, cafés and restaurants such as Lokaal, Homblé, Mub'art, creches, hairdressers, bakers, doctors, shops such as Oxfam World Shop.
- > Social organisations: CAW East Flanders, Psychiatric Centre Ghent-Sleidinge, Villa Voortman, vzw SIVI, De Fontein, Bij Pino, De Tinten vzw, Domos vzw, Refu Interim, De Zuidpoort.
- > Citizens: customers in our businesses.
- > Companies: as full and necessary partners in order to achieve inclusiveness.
- > City of Ghent services: Outreach work service, street work and **Opstap**, neighbourhood work, social stewards, city guards, community work, PCSF Ghent, MSOC.



Evolution



For whom

Enchanté is aimed at everyone: traders, citizens, social organisations. We do not have a specific target group in mind and are there for people in poverty who would like a drink, for people who want to break out of social isolation. For those who miss their bus or have no roof over their heads.

Our target group consists of people who visit the network of traders: to use a service, for social contact or as a way of passing the time.

In practice, there are a number of target groups that make the most use of the network: the homeless, people with mental or psychiatric vulnerabilities, people living in poverty, people with addiction issues, people with disabilities staying in assisted living facilities, prisoners and former prisoners and people with a migrant background.

26 For a complete overview of all Flemish *Enchanté* traders, see <http://bit.ly/EnchanteVlaamsHandelaars>



Kaat, community worker Ghent-centre:

‘Enchanté succeeds in reconnecting people. Lovely, isn’t it?’

Ann, ‘Homblé’ trader:

**‘I think it is important to be open to all people who are part of our city.
My door is open to everyone.’**



Proud of

We are particularly proud of the traders' enthusiasm. We have no shortage of traders willing to participate.

The involvement of all parties is heart-warming. Traders, customers and people using *Enchanté* services. A network has emerged spontaneously, without interference from traditional aid organisations. In this way we are paving the way for new networks, based on trust in the city. The people-oriented approach and dialogue, the basis for *Enchanté*, are the decisive factors for success.

Enchanté focuses specifically on commercial businesses for a broad approach and impact. Our greatest challenge is opening doors that would otherwise remain closed. The middle class can get involved socially and the social field gets more room to manoeuvre. The network acts as a connector/facilitator across sectors, roles and social positions. In this way, *Enchanté* remains an innovative project that adds something to the existing (social) urban landscape in terms of its working methods and range of services.

Enchanté assumes that most people are good. Apart from some simple guidelines, there is one big game rule and that is trust. We have no control mechanisms to see who is entitled to the services offered, nor do we supervise the traders. In disputes, we work with this mindset to find a solution. This simple approach works and is a major guarantee of our success.



Results

The most telling result is that *Enchanté* exists: grown from a few citizens' idea and now a reality. Other results are:

- > Before coronavirus, *Enchanté* had an average of 15,000 deferred consumptions per year.

- > Major satisfaction and positivity within the network: not a single trader left the network, and the social partners also continue to collaborate. The coronavirus and the associated bankruptcies unfortunately reduced the number of traders.
- > *Enchanté* provides some 20 basic services and 4 deferred services.²⁷
- > Deferred beds: to date about 450 beds have been 'bought', used by 40 people.
- > On Christmas Eve 2020, *Enchanté* organised 'the longest table': we distributed 700 takeaway meals in cooperation with the Solidarity Fund and the Cooking Team, Arts Centre *Vooruit* and traders.



Ambitions

We aim to make deferred coffee a habit. We also want to grow the *Enchanté* group and involve even more neighbourhoods. We want solidarity to be recognised as a matter of course in the cities in which we work.

Enchanté aims to strengthen the link between businesses, schools and traders. We are thinking about the concept of 'cordial schools': ensuring that solidarity within the school and also with the network outside the school is strengthened. We are thinking of the possibility of deferred services in a restaurant: we will then use these funds for school meals for the school a few streets away.

Our ultimate ambition is, of course, that we are no longer needed. Until then, we have the following goals, drawn up for our 2021-2025 policy plan:

- > Activating and facilitating local *Enchanté* networks.
- > New services, activities, methodologies and partnerships.
- > Focus on the image-forming of vulnerability and solidarity.
- > Social enterprise that inspires social entrepreneurship.
- > Measuring impact and aiming for impact.

27 See also the online city map https://enchantevzw.be/files/attachments/543/Enchante_winterstadsplan_dec19_mei20.pdf



Challenges

The biggest challenge is working with people from different backgrounds.

In addition, we must organise professionally without losing the character of a citizens' initiative. We need a strong core to keep **Enchanté** going.

For traders, confronting people in a vulnerable situation is sometimes a challenge. They would like to do more than just serve coffee. When do you refer to professional help? Where does voluntary commitment stop?

Due to Covid-19 crisis, the purchase of deferred services was put on the back burner. People no longer order in and have somewhat forgotten the story. We invest in re-energising people.



Role of the City of Ghent

The City of Ghent plays both an explicit and an implicit role. For example, some services of the City of Ghent are very closely involved, whilst financial support is also available.

Enchanté aims to complement the workings of the City and brings a multifaceted story.



Importance of partnerships

Enchanté seeks complementarity with government, the private sector and civil society. Together, we are tackling social challenges in a smarter way. We continue to seek new forms of cooperation. That is why we also work closely with the local and Flemish authorities.

Finally, *Enchanté* is a member of an international umbrella network of similar initiatives: [The Chîme](#), where we exchange knowledge.



Further info

Questions about this project? info@enchantevzw.be

www.enchantevzw.be

[Online map](#) where you can see the various traders.

[Online Enchanté Café](#) for treats, set up in the coronavirus era.





Gent en Garde

**GENT
EN
GARDE**



Gent en Garde



The City of Ghent aims to make the food system more sustainable: from production through processing and distribution to consumption and waste processing. Together with stakeholders, farmers and citizens, we wrote a food strategy with five goals:

1. More visible, shorter food chain.
2. More sustainable food production and consumption.
3. Strong social added value of food initiatives.
4. Reducing food waste.
5. Reusing as much food waste as possible as a raw material.



In practice

Gent en Garde aims to make all aspects of the urban food system sustainable and give all Ghent residents access to sustainable and healthy food. Together with the Food Council, we are shaping the urban food policy and we are setting up numerous concrete projects and campaigns.

The Food Council consists of some 30 enthusiastic and committed partners who, in their own way, play a role in the Ghent food system. Think of farmers, restaurant owners, academics, social organisations. Together we think about the future and the objectives of *Gent en Garde*, we support new projects, we hold discussions and inspire. Since 2018, the Food Council has its own budget to support innovative food projects.



Collaboration in the city

The City of Ghent is the project's promoter. The following partners are also cooperating:

[The Ghent Food Council](#) consists of some 30 partners who also represent the Ghent food system: Algemeen Boeren Syndicaat, Ateljee, Boerenbond, CSA Oogstgoed,

De Broederij, De Vroente/De Zonnekouter, EROV/Groot Vleeshuis, EVA, Food2know/Ugent, Foodwin, Gent Fair Trade, ILVO, Landelijke Gilde, Landwijzer, Lokaal, PCSF, Oxfam Wereldwinkels, Province of East Flanders, Rabot op je bord, Rikolto, Roof Food, Square Melon, City of Ghent (Economy, Environment and Climate), University of Ghent, Unizo, Velt, Foodteams, VOEM, working group on urban agriculture, community health centres.

In addition, various services and departments of the City of Ghent are working on the Ghent food strategy.



Evolution

The Food Strategy was launched in 2013. In 2018, the Food Council got its own budget.

Other milestones:

- > In 2018, *Gent en Garde* won the [ICLEI transformative action award](#)
- > In 2019, we received the [Global Climate Action Award](#) from the UN.



For whom

With the [food strategy](#), we target all Ghent citizens. With a sustainable food system, we create social added value and ensure that everyone has access to sustainable, healthy and affordable food. Accessibility of food and social cohesion are central.



Proud of

Ghent was the first city in Flanders with a food strategy and a food council. We have been doing pioneering work in recent years. *Gent en Garde* became a clear policy framework for Ghent's food policy. It is a strong brand and an example of co-creative policy-making.



Hilke, project manager Rabot op je bord:

'It's crazy how many vegetables we process together and hence save them from the dustbin. But the craziest thing is the interaction between the volunteers: there are so many different people around the table who otherwise would not meet.'

The way we experimented with co-creation within the Food Council was particularly innovative. And we are still experimenting and pioneering when engaging stakeholders. Roles and commitments taken on by the Food Council may evolve and grow over time.

Throughout the years, *Gent en Garde* and the urban food policy became a source of inspiration for other cities at home and abroad. Cities copy both the governance model and the various projects.

Finally, the Ghent Food Council grew: first a group of individuals and organisations that came mainly to defend their own interests, now an interactive group that creates added value together and looks at the bigger picture.



Results

Gent en Garde had a clear and measurable impact on the local food system. We managed to influence the consumption patterns of our citizens. Over the years, we have evolved from small-scale initiatives to larger projects with a structural impact. Some examples:

- > Thursday Veggie day campaign influenced the eating habits of the people of Ghent. Ghent currently has 7% vegetarians and thus scores far above the Belgian average.
- > Ghent residents often eat vegetarian: no fewer than 4 out of 10 say that they eat vegetarian food at least once a week. This is twice the Flemish average.
- > Every day, around 4,500 young people receive a healthy, affordable and responsible school meal. The meals consist of seasonal ingredients and 24% is organic. We also use fair trade products, sustainable fish, and so on. Since 2021, we have switched to flexi-meals to further reduce the climate impact of our school meals. Flexi-meals consist of up to 50% animal protein. And Thursday is still Veggie day, of course. The City of Ghent serves about 775,883 sustainable school meals per year.

- > Through the [Foodsavers platform](#), we have already saved more than 1,000 tonnes of surplus food from the dustbin to be redistributed to people in poverty. This is the equivalent of a million meals. Through Foodsavers, about 15% of the people of Ghent have access to healthy food support. In addition, preventing food loss has a major positive impact on the environment;
- > [Vanier](#) saw the light in 2018. Vanier is a cooperative web platform where local producers sell their products to shops, restaurants and industrial kitchens in Ghent. Using this platform, the city makes agricultural products from the short chain available to professional buyers. And we are working on transparent food chains and a fair price for the producer.
- > Since 2014, 42 school vegetable gardens have received professional guidance. More than 240 parents, teachers and headmasters participated in the workshops. Numerous pupils were introduced to vegetable gardening and learned about the origin of their food. Also 25 neighbourhood gardens received guidance.
- > Ghent's Restorestje (a box for 'doggy bags') has already been sold more than 60,000 times in more than 170 participating Ghent restaurants.
- > [Online map with picking fruit](#).



Ambitions

In the coming years, the City of Ghent will continue to invest in a healthy, sustainable and social food system and aims to be a climate-neutral city by 2050.

We want to continue our pioneering role in the field of co-creative food policy. Therefore, in the coming years, we will continue to build a robust, more autonomous food council with strong links to citizens and organisations.

The fight against food waste will be a focal point in the coming years.

Ghent wants to remain a pioneering city in the protein transition. In the short term, we are drawing up an ambitious protein policy. We strive for healthier and more sustainable protein consumption, where 60% of our protein needs are covered by

plant-based protein sources and 40% by animal-based protein²⁸. In so doing, we are making maximum use of our exemplary role and our own purchasing policy.

The City of Ghent is also more active on the topic of sustainable food production. In Ghent, there are about 100 farmers who produce food on slightly more than 20% of the Ghent surface area. Our Ghent farmers are an important partner in the development and implementation of the food strategy. Ghent wants to focus on a transition to an ecological and social agriculture that is economically profitable. In this way, we also invest in agriculture. Firstly, for local food production, with all the advantages of the short chain. But also for other goals, which we want to meet together with our Ghent farmers, i.e., a beautiful open landscape, recreation, biodiversity and water storage. Concrete campaigns are linked to the land policy and the start of a learning process with farmers and other stakeholders towards more sustainable and city-oriented agriculture in Ghent.



Challenges

Much of the policy that has an impact on the urban food system is the responsibility of other policy levels (agricultural policy, for example, is a Flemish competence). The urban level has its limits.

Some groups and economic sectors are difficult to involve in a structure like the Food Council. Disadvantaged groups, for example, or entrepreneurs who do not have the time to engage in participatory processes.

Pioneering also means that there are few examples to fall back on. Therefore, it is not always easy to determine what the next step should be. After the successful Thursday Veggie Day campaign, it was difficult to develop a follow-up concept with the same potential.



Role of the City of Ghent

The City of Ghent and the Food Council work together to achieve the food strategy goals. The role of City of Ghent is flexible and varies according to the context:

- > We provide a framework and a meeting place for everything that happens in the city around sustainable food, both online and offline.
- > We reinforce dynamics that already exist in the city, whether it is about citizens starting up a joint neighbourhood vegetable garden or entrepreneurs investing in sustainable catering.
- > As a government, we showed that we can influence individual behaviour. Our campaigns and tools influence how people eat. Through the Thursday Veggie Day campaign, for example, we saw a sharp rise in vegetarian eating habits.
- > If we see challenges that others do not take up, we launch our own initiatives where possible (e.g., Foodsavers).
- > Through our own purchasing policy or by supporting start-ups, we steer the market in the right direction.
- > Within the context of the food council, the city mainly takes on a facilitating (with the help of external process leaders) and supporting (agenda, report, follow-up) role. Alderman Heyse is president of the food council. In addition, the City provides the annual budget.



Importance of partnerships

We are putting great emphasis on partnerships. As a city, we attach major importance to exchanging knowledge with other cities and influencing higher authorities. We are therefore active in various national and international networks:

- > Flanders: VVSG, Council of Interests Local Food Strategies.
- > International: RUAf, Eurocities, Milan Urban Food Policy Pact.

28 In Flanders, it is still the other way round: 60% animal compared to 40% plant (2021).



Further info

Questions about the project?

milieuenklimaat@stad.gent

Lieta Goethijn - Environment and Climate Service - City of Ghent -

lieta.goethijn@stad.gent

The [interactive platform *Gent en Garde*](#) is an online meeting place for everyone involved with food in Ghent. Through our platform, we have already reached more than 20,439 people. We also have a [Facebook group](#) with more than 3,000 members.



3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Topics SDG 3

We translated the official sub-targets into topics for each SDG. You can also view the fully written-out sub-targets [here](#).

Child and maternal mortality (3.1 & 3.2)

Prevention and epidemics (3.3)

Mental health and wellbeing (3.4)

Substance abuse (3.5)

Road traffic victims (3.6)

Sexual health and family planning (3.7)

Access to health care (3.8)

Pollution mortality (3.9)

SDG 3 in brief

SDG 3 states that child and maternal mortality (worldwide) must decline significantly. The same applies to alcohol and drug use. Information on infectious diseases is considered necessary to prevent their spread, an assertion made more relevant by the coronavirus crisis. Also, the number of deaths due to pollution must be significantly reduced. This also applies to the number of traffic victims. The United Nations aims to raise the profile of mental health and wellbeing. We must provide universal health insurance, with protection against financial risk, and quality essential healthcare services must be accessible.



The City of Ghent's strategy and approach

Strategy

In the Ghent Multi-annual Strategic plan 20-25, we find the following targets that contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals:

Ghent shows every Ghent citizen the way to increased wellbeing, better health and care through, among others:

- > Better access to quality care and welfare services.
- > Every Ghent citizen is given every opportunity for a healthy life and wellbeing.
- > Increasing tailored support for specific (welfare) needs of vulnerable Ghent citizens.
- > Reducing social inequalities in health, with an increased focus on mental wellbeing.

In Ghent, we are working together on a healthy, clean living environment by, among others:

- > Avoidance and resolution of environmental pollution with a (health) risk.
- > Improving air quality within the city's territory.

Everyone can move around sustainably, smoothly and safely in Ghent by increasing the selective accessibility of motorised traffic.

City of Ghent approach

The two projects or operations in this report only provide a limited picture of how the City of Ghent works with respect to this topic.

The Ghent Health Council, with representatives from the health and welfare sector, provides advice on Ghent's health policy. Its priority is to improve the health of the people of Ghent and therefore it strives for equal access to care and prevention



[The 2025 vision note](#) elaborates on the figures and signals that give an idea of the challenges for the health policy in Ghent. These challenges are translated into a number of targets based on three main cornerstones:

- > Enhancing health literacy
- > Accessible, targeted, neighbourhood-oriented and integrated primary care
- > Participatory, intersectoral and evidence-based health policy

If you want to know more about health and wellbeing topics in Ghent, please go [here](#).

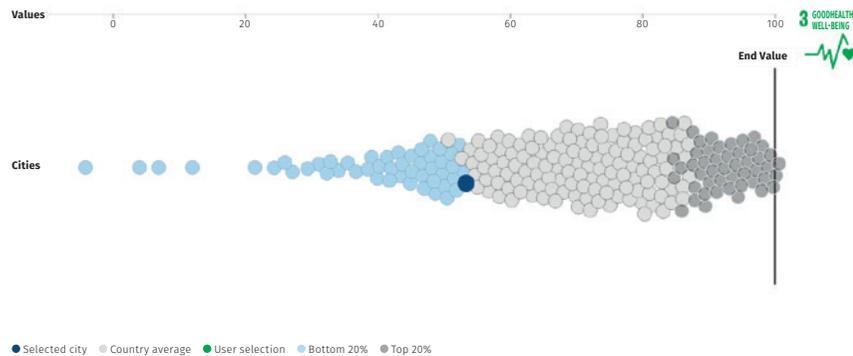
SDG 3 International

International benchmark in OECD SDG Index²⁹

In order to enable international comparison for SDG 3 ‘good health and wellbeing’, the [OECD SDG Index](#) assumes the following indicators: infant mortality (the number of deaths in children aged 1 year or younger per 1,000 births) and traffic-related mortality (deaths per 100,000 residents). The data in both indicators is combined in an SDG index and dates back to 2017, but nevertheless give an initial idea of where the Flemish region positions itself compared to other regions with respect to this goal.

The SDG Index assigns a score of 1-100, where a score of 100 is the proposed final value of the indicators to achieve the target by 2030.

Figure 6 OECD SDG-index – SDG 3



Ghent = 'selected city'
Source: OECD³⁰

International cooperation

When we refer to health, we are not just talking about healthcare. Prevention is better than cure, which is why the City of Ghent has been committed to fair trade for years. Buying products with a fair-trade label not only ensures a minimum income for producers, it also provides the necessary capital to make health a central issue. As the City of Ghent, we go even further than asking for labels in the purchasing policy; we also focus on social criteria. The production of textiles and ICT materials takes place worldwide in poor working conditions; together with suppliers, we strive for transparency in the production chain and for an improvement of these conditions. In the story of socially responsible work clothing, we wrote a [toolbox](#) together with VVSG to help public purchasers on their way, and in the story of ['Fair ICT'](#) we are partnering with Electronics Watch - and with University of Ghent to move suppliers in the right direction.

Impact of the coronavirus crisis

Impact on health

75% of Ghent citizens feel generally healthy³¹, a stable share since 2011. Compared to the previous survey (2017), there is a very slight increase. The report by Statistics Flanders³² shows that for 79% of the Flemish people surveyed the current state of health (spring 2021) is more or less the same as the situation before the coronavirus crisis. For 16%, the state of health has deteriorated, whilst for 3% it has improved.

The younger age groups are more likely than the older groups to report that their health has deteriorated: 24% of respondents in the 18-24 age group and 10% in the 65-74 age group. Among the over-75s, the proportion is slightly higher (14%). At the same time, the proportion of those who consider that their health has improved is

²⁹ OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

³⁰ OECD. (2020). *Measuring the distance to the SDGs in regions and cities*, consulted at <https://www.oecd-local-sdgs.org/index.html>.

³¹ Survey as part of the 2020 municipal and city monitor.

³² Abdelhakim, A., Carton, A., Moons, D., Noppe, J., Vander Molen, T., Van Peer, C. & Verlet, D. (2021). Statistiek Vlaanderen (2021/4), COVID 19 bevraving: Gezondheid, Welzijn en Sociale contacten, Brussel, 2021 (*Report Statistics Flanders, 2021/4. Results COVID-19 survey. Health, wellbeing and social contacts*. Brussels: Statistics Flanders).

slightly higher in the younger age groups than in the older age groups³³. People living in big cities and inner cities are most likely to say that their health has deteriorated compared to the situation before the coronavirus crisis (18% each)³⁴.

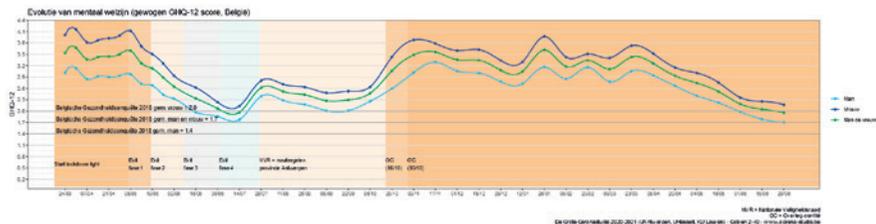
Impact on wellbeing

Many surveys show that the mental wellbeing of Belgians is not as good as before the crisis³⁵. This picture evolves, depending on lockdowns and measures. During the first lockdown, the highest scores were measured on the GHQ12³⁶, well above the measurements of the 2018 Belgian Health Survey. At the start of the summer, we already scored significantly better on mental wellbeing than during the first lockdown. During the summer holidays, the figures rose again, then stagnated until the beginning of October, only to rise again with the emergence of the second wave. Since November 2020, the figures have been fluctuating at a high level, but they seem to be on the decline again since the beginning of April 2021.

Research by University of Ghent into mental wellbeing during the first lockdown showed that the following target groups scored lower in terms of mental health: women, singles, people without children, people in flexi-jobs, students living in dormitories, people with an underlying psychological vulnerability and young adults (-25 years). People living in an urban context scored lower on mental health than those living in a rural environment.

The sixth health survey by Sciensano³⁷ also indicates that the mental wellbeing of Belgians is affected by the Covid-19 crisis: after one year, anxiety disorders (21%) and depressive disorders (21%) are still widely present in the population aged 18 and older, with figures only slightly lower than in April and December 2020. The percentage of people with mental health issues remains particularly high among people under the age of 50. There is a clear age effect. Young adults (18-29 years) are the most affected by anxiety (34%) and depression (38%); seniors (65 years and older) the least (9 and 10% respectively).

Figure 7 Evolution of mental wellbeing (weighted GHQ-12 score, Belgium)



Source: UAntwerpen & UHasselt & CU Leuven, The major Coronavirus study is an initiative of. Antwerp, Belgium, Available at: <https://corona-studie.shinyapps.io/corona-studie/>

33 Ibid.

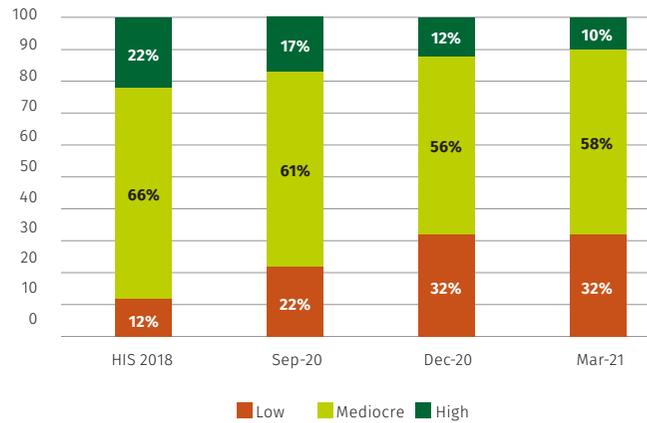
34 Ibid.

35 Berete, F., Braekman, E., Bruggeman, H., Charafeddine, R., Demarest, S., Drieskens, S., Gisle, L., Hermans, L., Leclercq, V. & Van der Heyden, J. (2021). Zesde COVID-19-gezondheidsenquête. Eerste resultaten. Brussel (Sixth COVID-19 Health Survey. First results. Brussels): Sciensano. <https://doi.org/10.25608/r4f5-1365>

36 GHQ score = the higher the worse. 0 means no complaints, 12 means severe psychological complaints.

37 Berete, F., Braekman, E., Bruggeman, H., Charafeddine, R., Demarest, S., Drieskens, S., Gisle, L., Hermans, L., Leclercq, V. & Van der Heyden, J. (2021). Zesde COVID-19-gezondheidsenquête. Eerste resultaten. Brussel (Sixth COVID-19 Health Survey. First results. Brussels): Sciensano. <https://doi.org/10.25608/r4f5-1365>

Figure 8 Distribution of population (aged 18 and older) according to level of life satisfaction (low, moderate, high) according to survey (Health Survey 2018, 4th, 5th and 6th COVID-19 health survey), Belgium 2021



Source: Sixth COVID-19 Health Survey. First results. Brussels, Belgium; Depot number/2021/14.440/29. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25608/r4f5-1365>

The Health Survey indicates that there are more people who lack energy among the over-65s. 14% of the over-65s are vulnerable³⁸ and 33% are at increased risk of vulnerability. Sciensano assumes an underestimation of the actual situation.

38 Sciensano measures frailty in the elderly by the presence of issues in the following areas: lack of energy, reduced appetite, weak muscle strength, reduced walking speed and little physical activity. An older person is considered vulnerable if they have at least three of these issues.

39 Sciensano

40 Belga. (2021, 7 April). Levensverwachting nam forse duik in 2020. De Standaard (Life expectancy took a dive in 2020. *De Standaard*), consulted at https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20210407_94225587

Mortality rates

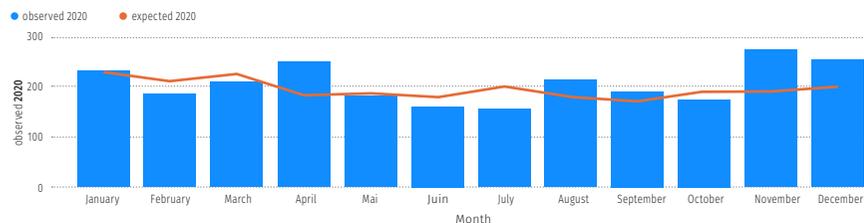
Mortality rates are the most extreme indicator of how hard the coronavirus crisis has hit our society. In Belgium, roughly 30,000 people have died during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to the previous three years, this means an excess mortality of 42% for that period. In 2020, 126,000 deaths are recorded in Belgium, an excess mortality of 16.6%. Excess mortality is linked to three main events: the two coronavirus waves and the August heat wave. Of these deaths, about 85% are directly related to COVID-19. Mortality was higher during the first wave than during the second³⁹. At the Belgian level, we see that average life expectancy has fallen⁴⁰ and that especially people older than 85 have died in the first and second waves.

In Ghent, too, there is an excess mortality for 2020, although it is much lower, namely 6%. Mortality is highest in the over-85s (18%) and to a lesser extent in the 64-84s (3%). For the younger age groups, mortality is lower.

Table 1 Deaths 2020 expected vs observed

2,335 expected **2,481** observed

age	expected	observed	excess mortality (abs)	excess mortality (%)
0-44	92	82	-10.00	-11%
45-64	280	229	-51.00	-18%
65-84	965	990	25.00	3%
85+	998	1,180	181.60	18%
Total	2,335	2,481	145.60	6%

Figure 9 Deaths 2020 expected vs observed

Source: City of Ghent, Population statistics 2020.

The impact of socio-economic factors on mortality rates

Studies show that people with a migration background were harder hit during the first wave⁴¹. This is particularly noticeable among middle-aged men (40-64 years). In the 'Sub-Saharan-African' background group, the mortality rate is as high as 70%, compared to 7% in the native-born group. For middle-aged women, the difference is less pronounced: 40% compared to 10%. In Belgium, socio-economic factors, such as income and level of education, appear to be the deciding factors. And in densely populated urban areas, infectious diseases spread more easily than in rural areas⁴².

Chronic disorders

In 2018, 9.9% of Ghent residents had the status of **chronic condition**, a higher proportion than in 2013 (7.9%). This is a trend that can be seen in all 13 city centres (Municipality and City Monitor 2020).

Knack⁴³ reports that at least 10% of COVID-19 patients are still suffering from symptoms three months after infection. There is no certainty about the number of people in Belgium suffering from 'long Covid' complaints, but it is an underestimated issue. According to Knack, long Covid is more common in the young, active population.

The Federal Knowledge Centre⁴⁴ for health indicates that it is currently very difficult to precisely estimate the number of people suffering⁴⁵ from long Covid, as there are still too few high-quality scientific studies on the subject. Based on current scientific knowledge, we estimate that 5 to 36% of patients continue to show symptoms up to 12 weeks after the onset of the acute COVID-19 phase. After 12 weeks, these figures drop to between 2 and 15%.

According to an estimate by the National Institute for Sickness and Disability Benefits, nearly 460,000 people are suffering from long-term illness in Belgium today. It is to be feared that we will be able to add at least a few tens of thousands of long Covid patients to this number⁴⁶. According to the international literature, 5-15% of Covid patients still have symptoms that prevent them from working after 12 weeks. This is worrying, because we know that people who are absent from work for more than three months often do not return and are less likely to recover⁴⁷.

41 Vanthomme, K., Gadeyne, S., Lusyne, P. & Vandenheede H. (2021). A population-based study of mortality among Belgian immigrants during the first COVID-19 wave in Belgium. Can demographic and socio-economic indicators explain mortality differential? *SSM - Population Health*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100797>

42 Ibid.

43 de Preter, J. (2021, 26 May). Long covid: de moeizame weg naar erkenning voor tienduizenden patiënten. Knack. 21 (Long Covid: the arduous path to recognition for tens of thousands of patients *Knack*. 21), https://www.knack.be/nieuws/gezondheid/long-covid-de-moeizame-weg-naar-erkenning-voor-tienduizenden-patienten/article-longread-1737829.html?cookie_check=1627911838

44 KCE. (s.d.). *Contributions COVID-19*. KCE, consulted at <https://kce.fgov.be/nl/publicaties/bijdragen-covid-19>

45 Prevalence = number of people with a disorder at a given time.

46 de Preter, J. (2021, 26 May). Long covid: de moeizame weg naar erkenning voor tienduizenden patiënten. Knack. 21 (Long Covid: the arduous path to recognition for tens of thousands of patients *Knack*. 21), https://www.knack.be/nieuws/gezondheid/long-covid-de-moeizame-weg-naar-erkenning-voor-tienduizenden-patienten/article-longread-1737829.html?cookie_check=1627911838

47 Ibid.



Health Guides

Health Guides



By deploying health guides or Community Health Workers, we want to strengthen the health skills of vulnerable groups in Ghent and increase their access to health care.

Health guides are volunteers who are trained for this purpose. Some of them are liaison or key figures⁴⁸ from vulnerable groups. As a health guide, they support individuals and families in finding the right health and welfare services.



In practice

In practice, it is often about a little push to overcome fear, a listening ear to build trust, helping to remember appointments or helping to understand information.

Health guides do not take over tasks from social workers or health professionals, but they take on a supporting role that complements the professionals' tasks:

- > They guide people to primary health and welfare care and accessible lifestyle offerings.
- > They support vulnerable groups in using health and welfare services: reminding people of appointments, picking people up at home and taking public transport together, providing information, etc.
- > They provide support against loneliness during the coronavirus crisis: calling people, visiting them at home, etc.
- > They promote healthy behaviour: improving health literacy, discussing health topics, etc.
- > Lastly, they also have a warning function: being attentive to requests for help and problems and combining them.

More information on the tasks of health guides can also be found on the [website](#) of the Primary Care Zone Ghent.



Collaboration in the city

The Health Council, under the coordination of the City of Ghent, is the place where Ghent's health and welfare partners meet and cooperate on the city's health policy. It is a comprehensive and professional network, with the reduction of health inequalities  as its main objective. The seeds of this project were sown at the Health Council. Participants stressed the importance of adequate support to find the way to the right health care.

From the ongoing health policy and signals from the associations where people in poverty speak up (survey in 2018-2019), persistent inequalities in health care emerged, due to various social factors. The need for friendly support and guidance for vulnerable groups surfaced there as well.

Therefore, from the cooperation between the poverty policy and the health policy of the City of Ghent, the 'health guides' project was launched in 2019. This is the translation of the [international 'Community Health Workers' methodology](#) at the Ghent level.

48 Liaison/key figures connect the vulnerable target groups, communities and the City, organisations/help and care providers.



Amir - Health Guide:

‘They can’t make sense of the offer, they don’t think they can afford it, they are afraid. I nudge them to get over that threshold, I reassure them, I offer a listening ear to gain their trust. Once that is done, I help them to make an appointment for a new job. I go with them and help them to explain their problem and to better understand the information they are given. In fact, we are an essential link between these vulnerable people and the health care system.’

Ella, patient:

‘A health guide is not only concerned with your problems, but also with how you ended up in a particular situation. And also looks beyond this. I think that is important.’

After an initial phase in 2019, the project received funds for 2020-2021 from the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) to reduce social health inequalities.

The project's steering committee was made up of organisations represented in the Health Council of Ghent and of organisations from the associations where people in poverty speak up.

- > [de Tinten vzw](#), [De Fontein vzw](#), [BMLIK](#) (youth and adult work), [De Zuidpoort](#), [CAW](#), [social work services of the mutual health organisations](#), [Kind&Gezin](#), drop-in team of [De SLOEP vzw](#), drop-in team [Wiegwijs Ghent](#), drop-in team [i-man Middle](#) New Ghent, CLBs, general practitioners and hospitals (AZ Jan Palfijn, UZ Ghent, AZ Sint-Lucas).
- > Outreach work service City of Ghent, 13 [local service centres](#), [MSOC](#).
- > Since 2021, all care and assistance providers in Ghent can apply.

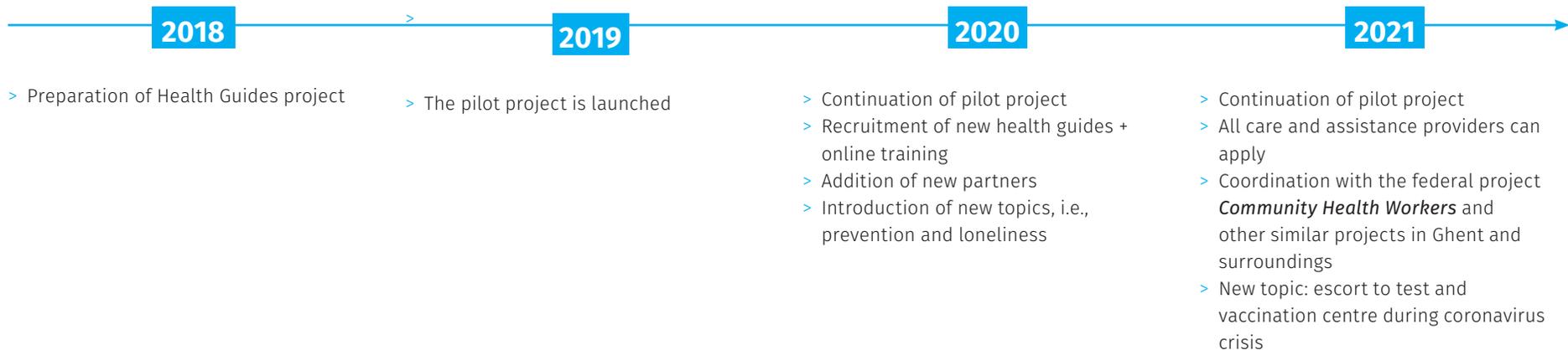


For whom

This project is intended for all Ghent citizens, with a specific focus on vulnerable people and families. Here we apply the 'proportional universalism', actions and policies for all citizens, but with a different intensity for certain target groups. Fundamentally tackling health inequalities can only be achieved by targeting all groups at once. The policy or action is thus aimed at all citizens (universal), but its application is more intensive the more vulnerable the target groups are and the more obstacles they have to overcome (proportional).



Evolution





Proud of

Ghent is a pioneer: the city was the first in Belgium to roll out a project with Community Health Workers. The professional field asked us to investigate to what extent this international approach, translated into the Ghent context, could provide an answer to a number of challenges in the area of accessible health care.

Cooperation was the operative word in the elaboration:

- > a questionnaire was developed with partners and health guides
- > flash cards were worked out with partners and students

By organising peer coaching moments, we were able to meet the needs and requirements of the health guides. At their request, various topics were discussed or organisation visits scheduled.

Health guides are volunteers rather than social workers, which lowers the threshold. The fact that the volunteers are not part of the health care system also provides a sense of security for people who are fearful or suspicious of that system.

The emotional and psychological support, simply due to proximity, time and being on an equal footing, are important prerequisites for success. It injects more humanity into healthcare. The multilingualism of the health guides allows for better support for non-native vulnerable people.

This approach inspires confidence. We also always pay attention to coordination with other projects and voluntary work in Ghent, such as social guides, oral care coaches, key figures, etc.

The project also contributes to the personal development of the health guides.



Results

This project succeeded in reaching vulnerable groups, such as people living in poverty and non-native speakers. Some people just need a little push, in which case counselling is a good starting point. For others, the effect is limited, or the positive effects are only visible in the longer term.

Sometimes the patient and the health guide share the same background or experience. But also thanks to the health guide's qualities (open, patient, without prejudice, etc.), trust can be established.

The closeness and trust between the health guides and the patients ensure a high level of satisfaction and an important basis for patient empowerment. Patient empowerment means making the patient, client or vulnerable target group more resilient. They experience less stress, their self-confidence is increased, which also increases their autonomy and therapy adherence⁴⁹.

Health guides gain more experience with the health sector through their volunteer work. Because of their own history, they quickly pick up fresh information. They also actively participate in training courses and peer coaching events. Often, they are inspired by the sector and would like to make it their professional job.

This is how we achieve great results. We went from 157 applications in the 2019 pilot project to 192 applications in the 2020 project. One application can result in more than one guidance. In some cases, this involves one or two follow-up appointments, in others five or six.

⁴⁹ Adherence is the extent to which patients carry out their treatment as agreed with their healthcare provider (e.g., taking the prescribed medication correctly). Adherence to treatment improves patient health and reduces healthcare costs.



Ambitions

The focus during the pilot project was on lowering the barriers on the way to the healthcare facilities. We also want to pay more attention to health promotion during counselling sessions⁵⁰.

In the future, the role of the health guide can be better known and recognised, and therefore better integrated with other work. This should ensure that the project is structurally anchored, so that health guides become a regular offering in Ghent and we can provide good care to all Ghent citizens.

We want to continue our outreach work and also approach vulnerable citizens with special needs. To this end, we use available data (our own or from partner organisations) where possible.

Furthermore, at the community level, we want to discuss specific issues and thresholds and promote health behaviour. This could be about the importance of a regular GP, therapy adherence, making specific services known by, for example, organising visits to relevant organisations in Ghent together with the health guides.



Challenges

We can see that there is a fine line between empowerment and pampering. Healthcare providers are also sometimes hesitant to use health guides. Moreover, some people do not agree to be helped by a health guide and the most vulnerable target group (such as the homeless, people without legal residence, etc.) are difficult to reach.

Since there is a shortage of interpreters, we must ensure that health guides are not used merely as interpreters. This project's coordination pays a lot of attention to this.

Working with volunteers increases turnover and the need for continuous training and a constant influx of new people. As the group grows, so does the need for extra support.



Role of the City of Ghent

The City of Ghent has a twofold role in this project: both actor and facilitator.



Importance of partnerships

At the local level, other municipalities regularly come knocking to exchange experiences and best practices on similar projects. We notice that there is a lot of interest in the project.

At the national level, a project on professional Community Health Workers is being initiated by the Federal Government (under Frank Vandenbroucke, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health). As a result, eight paid health guides recently started working in Ghent. The project found inspiration in Ghent. Experiences were shared to speed up the launch of the federal project. The University of Ghent (responsible for the evaluation of the project in Ghent) has also already been in contact with the University of Antwerp (responsible for the evaluation at the federal level).

⁵⁰ Health promotion means promoting healthier behaviour. This can be done by influencing people's individual behaviour, but also by creating a healthy living environment. The main focus is on empowering people (through knowledge and skills) to make healthy lifestyle choices themselves, as well as creating an environment that protects and supports health. This approach is therefore broader than eliminating the risk of disease.

The deployment of Community Health Workers is an international method. In different regions and settings around the world, positive experiences and exchanges have already been developed.



Further info

Questions about the project?

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Administration - City of Ghent - Leen.VanZele@stad.gent

Further information on the health guides can be found on the [webpage](#) of the Ghent Primary Care Zone.

A health guide can be requested on the City of Ghent [web page](#) or the [registration system](#).





Mobile community work mental health

Mobile community work mental health



Mobile mental health workers create a support base for people with mental health problems in vulnerable neighbourhoods in Ghent. They build bridges to support these people and front-line organisations in their search for appropriate help.

By means of *kwartiermaken* (and creating opportunities)⁵¹, they offer residents with mental health problems the chance to recover and fully participate in society. Finally, they fight the stigma surrounding people with mental health issues.



In practice

The mobile mental health worker does initial case-finding and case-binding. This means that the mobile worker proactively looks for residents with mental health problems who remain under the radar of care providers, who cannot find their way to care or who do not have a request for help themselves (any more). This last group is referred to as care avoiders.

Mobile workers also play an important role in building up a network, together with the social workers and social work organisations in the neighbourhood, to ensure a quick and effective referral for the patient.

Mobile workers are actively working on reducing the gap between first-line network partners and mental health services (GGZ):

- > They provide advice, support and coaching to neighbourhood partners on mental health issues.

- > They build bridges to appropriate mental health care together with neighbourhood partners. This ensures that clients receive the right care more quickly, but also that neighbourhood partners become more familiar with the services on offer and that shorter lines of care are created.
- > Together with partners from social control and health promotion, network meetings are organised to bring neighbourhood partners together around the topic of mental health: neighbourhood workshops and peer coaching on mental health vulnerability, consultation on shared care at neighbourhood level.

Finally, mobile workers are *quartermasters*. They develop a support base in the neighbourhood for people with mental illness. By often being present in the neighbourhood and the neighbourhood organisations, being in contact with neighbourhood health centres, PCSF services, neighbourhood police officers, etc., they show that there is no such thing as a group of people that you have to approach completely differently. They show how strong connection can be and provide a recovery-oriented approach.

⁵¹ *Kwartiermaken* aims to promote a social climate in which more opportunities are created for people on the margins to belong and participate according to their wishes and abilities. *Kwartiermaken* is tailored to the neighbourhood, in consultation with relevant partners and actors. Through cooperation with community organisations and residents, you achieve mutual understanding between society and residents with mental illness.



Dave, Mobil Team coordinator & contact for mobile workers:

'I can see from what they are doing that they are somewhat preparing society for a warm environment for people who are a little different.'

Veronique, mobile worker Watersportbaan:

'The more slowly you move through the neighbourhood, the more likely it is that someone will see and take your extended hand.'



Collaboration in the city

The City of Ghent is the project's promoter. The following partners also contribute to the project:

- > [PAKT](#), network mental health care region Ghent, Meetjesland, Flemish Ardennes, Mobil team, [Psychiatric Centre Ghent Sleidinge](#), [Psychiatric Centre Dr Guislain](#), [Psychiatric Centre Karus](#);
- > Various neighbourhood partners in the neighbourhood of Rabot, Nieuw Gent, Watersportbaan and Binnenstad (for the latter neighbourhood only for target group of homeless people): neighbourhood health centres, drop-in centres, social housing companies, police.
- > City of Ghent services: Health and Care Management service, Mental Health Team; Service Policy Participation, Social Management; Service Outreach Work, Neighbourhood work.



Evolutie

September 2018

- > Launch of the project in the Nieuw Gent neighbourhood with the [Poco Loco drop-in centre](#). Poco Loco is a meeting place for people with mental health issues.
- > A mobile worker was connected to the drop-in centre in order to actively seek out and bring into contact the target group and support people in their own environment. Both the operation of the drop-in centre and the deployment of the mobile worker were evaluated positively and the cooperation agreement with Psychiatric Centre Ghent Sleidinge was extended.

October 2020

- > Start of project group for mobile workers (representation of the City of Ghent, PAKT, hospitals involved, Hogent professional group Equality).
- > Expansion of the project with deployment of mobile workers in the Rabot and Watersportbaan neighbourhood in cooperation with Psychiatric Centre Guislain and Psychiatric Centre Karus.

March 2021

- > Expansion of the project with the deployment of a part-time mobile worker in the Ghent Centre region with a focus on homeless people with a serious psychiatric condition in cooperation with PAKT.

The various cooperation agreements currently run for three years (until the end of 2023), with the possibility of a 2-year extension (until the end of 2025). Structural anchoring of the existing operation and expansion to other neighbourhood will be a major challenge for the project group.



For whom

Initially, we focus on reaching out to local residents with high levels of psychological vulnerability who are unable to find appropriate care. We build relationships, develop a network in the neighbourhood and within the resident's context and build a bridge to mental health care.

Secondly, we work with the neighbourhood, the residents and the neighbourhood organisations. We provide support for better inclusion and acceptance of people with high mental vulnerability.

Thirdly, we work together with the specialist mental health services, trying to bridge the gap between the neighbourhood approach and the specialist mental health services, in view of better long-term cooperation.



Proud of

The project is a good example of municipal care: a shared responsibility between the local government and mental health partners. In addition, the neighbourhood-oriented mental health approach with attention to both individuals and the creation of a general broader base is unprecedented in Belgium.

The explicit choice to focus on source-based work (street work methodology) with mental health expertise is also innovative. As a result, people under the care radar are detected more quickly. The assertive, non-coercive approach creates trust, making people more likely to accept an extended hand. Thanks to their coaching presence and continuous consultation, the mobile workers remain a sounding board for the care partners and the patient. This prevents one of them from terminating the care process prematurely.

Working in a neighbourhood provides the opportunity to quickly become involved in the neighbourhood network. The mobile community mental health worker becomes a familiar face in the neighbourhood and hence gains the trust of residents and partners more quickly. The defined area allows for work at the patient level (shared care and referral to care) and at the level of the neighbourhood and its organisations (*kwartiermaken*).

With the start of new staff in 2020, the project was anchored to the 2B team (Mobil PAKT team). On the one hand, this ensured that the operation was well embedded and supported staff. On the other hand, it also allows for better trajectories involving continuity of care for patients who require long-term outreach care.

Finally, local policy and PAKT partners commit themselves to the project group to work together on accessible, neighbourhood-oriented care and to build the bridge to specialist care from there. The different partners have common goals. The project is a starting point for everyone to work together on communal care.



Results

Due to the lack of an appropriate registration tool, there are no reliable figures. From spring 2021, it will be possible to convert activities and results into quantitative data. Some qualitative results:

- > In New Ghent, the mobile worker has already been able to reach nearly 200 citizens with psychological complaints. Many of them have gained access to mental health care thanks to this involvement/help. In the other neighbourhoods, the workers only started in the autumn of 2020 and there are no representative figures yet.
- > Through the agreements between the City of Ghent and the psychiatric hospitals, the proverbial walls around the psychiatric centres/care are disappearing. Referrals of patients and organisations to appropriate mental health care have clearly improved.
- > The mobile workers' approach enables them to identify the areas in which the mental health services fall short.
- > The mobile workers provide support/training to frontline organisations, which has a positive effect on the knowledge of and trust in the frontline workers.
- > The mobile workers are the driving force behind numerous initiatives/working groups on mental health vulnerability or shared care.

Through their activities, the mobile workers break through the stigma often attached to mental health care and people suffering from mental health issues, thus painting an alternative picture.



Ambitions

In terms of local anchoring in the neighbourhoods, the project is at cruising speed and there is a great deal of support from the neighbourhood partners. Major challenges for the future include:

- > Structural anchoring of bridges to healthcare. Whilst successful pathways are still too often based on personal relationships between mobile workers and mental health care workers, we want to focus even more on the broad anchoring of care networks and shared care pathways.

- > Good balance between care for the individual patient and care for the neighbourhood.
- > Structural anchoring of the methodology of community workers in the neighbourhoods where the project is running and further expansion to other Ghent neighbourhoods with a high level of vulnerability.

We strive for the good socialisation of care, in which the patient's needs are central. In this context, there is a need for this:

- > Better acceptance of people with mental health issues.
- > Easier accessibility to care, also for the most vulnerable Ghent residents.
- > Care continuity and care networks tailored to the needs of the individual.



Challenges

In pathways to shared care, it is sometimes a challenge to find a balance between care for the individual and care for the neighbourhood. How do we take care of an individual who, for example, creates a nuisance in the neighbourhood?

Moreover, employees face barriers within the sector, even if they are employed within mental health/psychiatric centres. We also note that people with multiple problems (mental health, VAPH⁵², addiction, homelessness) often fall between the cracks in the care network.



Role of the City of Ghent

The City of Ghent is the facilitator and provides the means for the realisation of the project. The practical implementation lies with the PAKT partners. In addition, the Department of Health and Care Management chairs the project group Mobile Mental Health Workers, and an employee of that department supports the teamwork where necessary (organising the team, peer coaching, methodology development).



Importance of partnerships

Cooperation with the Flemish and federal governments is necessary in the longer term. The City of Ghent undertook to finance a pilot project with a strong focus on individual care pathways, socialisation of care and the inclusion of people with mental health issues. These are supra-local powers. The city does this on the one hand based on the need we observe in an urban context and on the other hand with a view to the opportunities hidden behind cooperation with local partners. With this project, we are working on a good practice to further build on. We are looking for partners in the Flemish and federal government, on the one hand to structurally anchor the existing work and on the other hand to extend the methodology to other Ghent neighbourhoods.

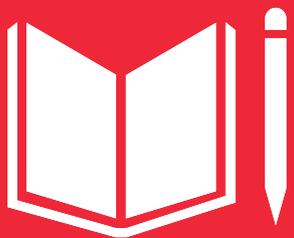


Further info

Questions about the project?

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4 QUALITY EDUCATION



SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

SDG 4 topics

We translated the official sub-targets into topics for each SDG. You can also view the fully written-out sub-targets [here](#).

Quality school trajectory (4.1)

Accessible and high-quality childcare (4.2)

Affordable and accessible education, including higher education (4.3)

Technical and vocational skills relevant to the labour market (4.4)

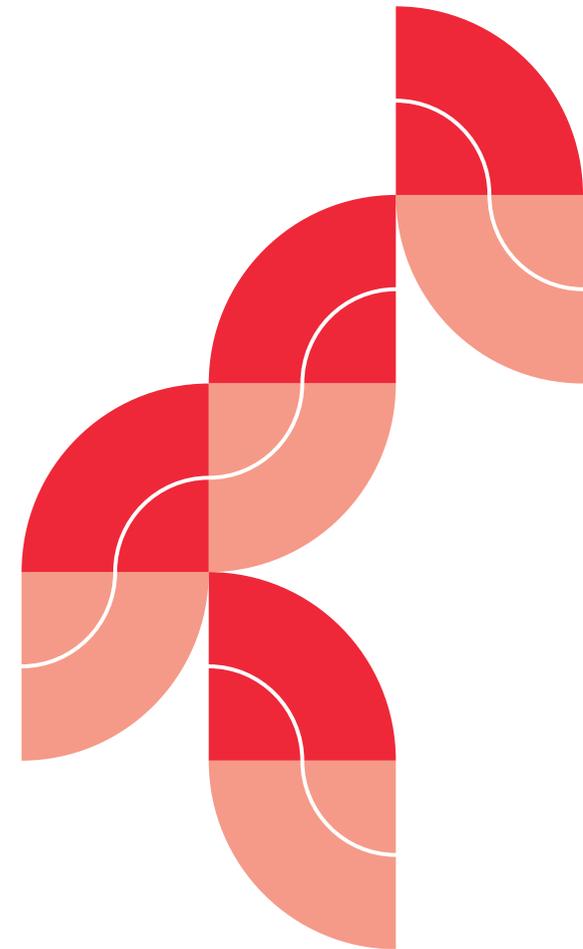
Educational inequality by gender, origin and people with disabilities (4.5)

Functional literacy (4.6)

Acquiring sustainable development knowledge and skills (4.7)

SDG 4 in brief

This SDG aims to ensure access to learning and education for all. This starts in early childhood with access to quality development, care and education. It is about equal education opportunities in primary, secondary and higher education, regardless of gender, origin or disability. The education offered must be geared to the labour market. Attention is paid to functional literacy, but also to knowledge and skills related to sustainability.



The City of Ghent's strategy and approach

Strategy

In the Ghent Multi-annual Strategic plan 20-25, we find the following targets that contribute to achieving sustainable development goals:

- > Ensuring tailored and integrated assistance to the vulnerable population and its growing issues
- > Ensuring that people can meet their basic needs and exhaust their most important rights

Every Ghent citizen can develop their skills through childcare and education by, among others:

- > Strengthening the quality and accessibility of childcare up to the age of 3.
- > Strengthening the Urban Education System in Ghent.
- > Expanding the city as a broad learning and living environment.
- > Strengthening the actors in growing up, learning and education.
- > Focus more on the opportunities and challenges introduced by the presence of students and institutions of higher education.

More Ghent citizens at work with a Ghent labour law by, among others:

- > Better matching supply and demand in the labour market, now and in the future.
- > Reaching more people and keeping them on the highest possible rung towards employment.

Approach of the City of Ghent

The two projects or operations in this report only paint a limited picture of the operation of the City of Ghent on this topic. Ghent is the largest educational city in Flanders, offering a wide range of services for toddlers, children, teenagers, students and adults. For example, in the next four years, the City of Ghent will invest over one and a half million euros in [healthy, sustainable and affordable meals](#) in more Ghent kindergartens. Moreover, the Teaching Centre Ghent is actively tackling the shortage of teachers by means of the [Teacher in Ghent](#) project. 'Operation Successful', also brings together various campaigns to combat early school leaving. Lastly, a project on which the City of Ghent is working, [drastically reduces energy consumption and CO2 emissions](#) in 16 school buildings or childcare facilities.

But that is not all. If you want to know more about education, childcare, students and lifelong learning in Ghent, you can do so [here](#).



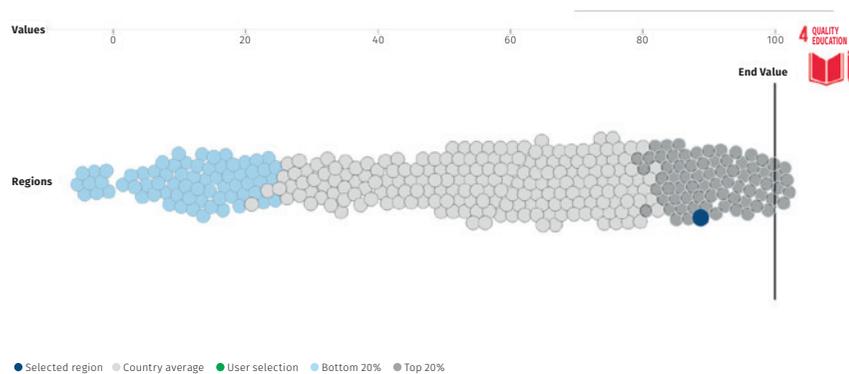
SDG 4 International

International benchmark in OECD SDG Index⁵³

At the local level, Ghent is not included in the SDG index for SDG 4. That is why we look at the Flemish region in order to provide an international comparison. The [OECD SDG Index](#) prioritises the following indicators: the share of early school leavers (in percentage) in the population aged 18-24 and the share of the population aged 25-64 with at least a tertiary education degree⁵⁴. The data for both indicators is combined in an SDG index and date back to 2017, but still gives an idea of where the Flemish region positions itself compared to other regions for this objective.

The SDG Index assigns a score of 1-100, where a score of 100 is the proposed final value of the indicator to achieve the target by 2030.

Figure 10 OECD SDG-index – SDG 4



Flemish region = 'selected region'
Source: OECD⁵⁵

International cooperation

With the many institutions that are found in Ghent, we pay special attention to the cooperation between educational institutions worldwide. In addition, we support smaller projects; for example, with the project subsidy 'Gentenaars zonder grenzen' (Ghent citizens without borders), the Unisport Academy was financially supported in Zambia in 2020. It must recognise [the local sports academy](#) as an official school in one of the largest slums in Southern Africa. In this way, sport is linked to basic education, an important way of raising education to a higher level in a country where this is not always the case.

Impact of the coronavirus crisis

Impact on education

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, the Ghent education system had a number of urban problems, such as low pre-school participation, problematic absences, delayed school progress, early school leaving, inequality based on socio-economic status in the home, etc.

These problems have been exacerbated by the pandemic. We cannot yet quantify the impact with official figures, as these are not yet available. However, we can substantiate it on the basis of our own assessments from the field and on the basis of a number of qualitative studies on learning disadvantages.

Preschool

During the 2019-2020 school year, kindergartens were forced to close their doors from 16 March to 29 May. Between 2 June and 30 June, the kindergartens reopened, albeit not all of them full-time.

⁵³ OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

⁵⁴ The OECD SDG Index provides data for the Flemish region only for the last indicator (higher education).

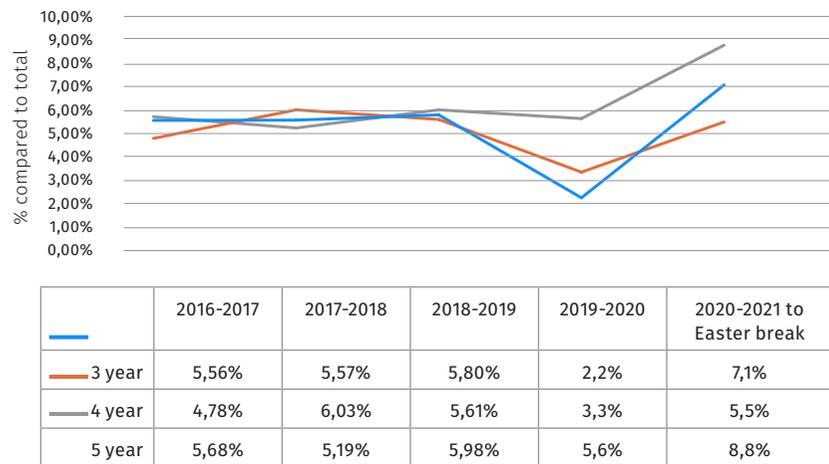
⁵⁵ OECD. (2020). *Measuring the distance to the SDGs in regions and cities*, consulted at <https://www.oecd-local-sdgs.org/index.html>.

In order not to infringe on the established rights of pupils with regard to the school allowance and the conditions for admission to mainstream primary education, all pre-school children from 16 March 2020 to 30 June 2020 were counted as being in attendance.

The figures show a decrease in the number of pre-schoolers who are under-attended, but you cannot simply compare that school year to other school years.

For the current school year (2020-2021), however, an increase is shown.

Figure 11 Kindergarten participation

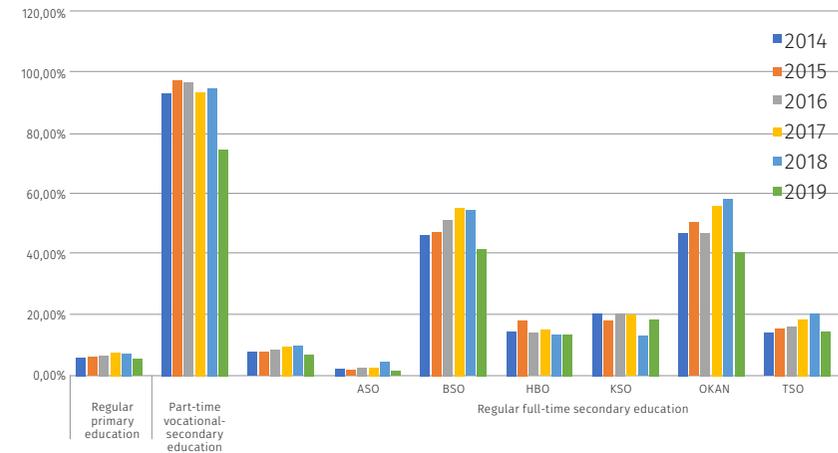


Source: Education Services Agency

Problematic absences

The same story is true for problematic absences in primary and secondary education. There, too, the number of problematic absences is decreasing everywhere (except in art education). Again, this is mainly due to the coronavirus measures from March 2020 and the amended registration from the time the measures were introduced.

Figure 12 Problematic absences



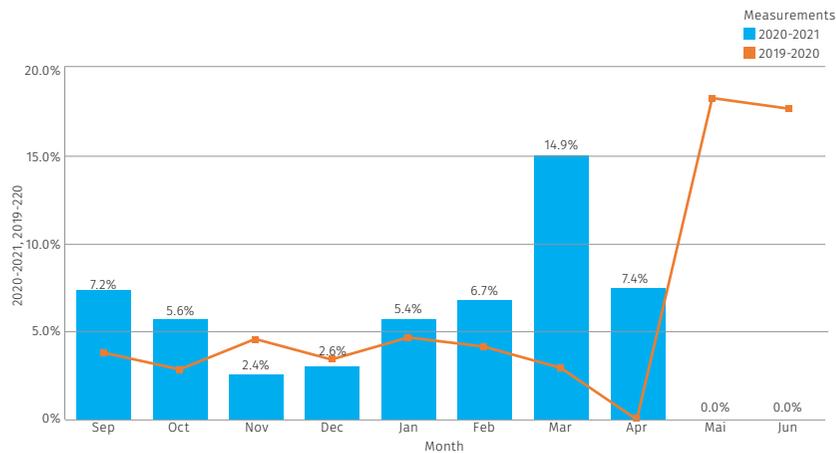
Source: Education Services Agency

Trend of absences in urban education

The following figure shows the impact of the coronavirus on the daily attendance of pupils within the Ghent municipal school system for the current school year 2020-2021 (compared to the previous school year 2019-2020). The data comes from a data pilot with some schools.

We see an increased number of absences in the past school year in May and June. In the current school year, too, the number of absences has increased significantly.

Figure 13 Trend of absences



Source: own figures urban education

Learning deficit

There is a correlation between the socio-economic conditions in which children grow up and the extent to which they suffered (further) learning disadvantage during the coronavirus crisis, as shown in (preliminary) research⁵⁶. These studies examine the consequences of the coronavirus crisis, in particular complete and partial school closures during the first wave of the pandemic (spring 2020), in terms of education (opportunities) in Flanders. It includes, among others, the analysis of learning outcomes for children who completed primary education at the end of June 2020 and who moved on to secondary education in September.

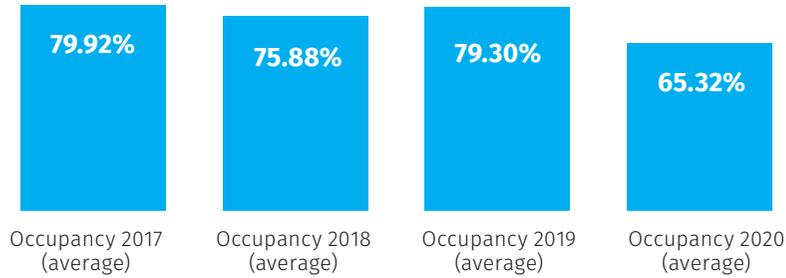
This shows that the learning disadvantage per pupil has increased to an average of half a year (compared to the average). Especially for STEM, languages and mathematics, there are alarming learning losses: a lot of learning material was 'forgotten', but there are also the consequences of reduced teaching time and the impact on socio-psychological wellbeing. An increased lack of pupil self-direction can also be observed, together with an increased lack of learning skills.

The negative effect of the coronavirus crisis on learning performance increases as the socio-economic status of the pupils decreases: the greater the socio-cultural distance between 'family' and 'school', the more limited access to the digital (learning) world, the stronger the negative coronavirus effect on the (already existing) learning deficit.

Because pupils with a higher socio-economic status do not lag behind as much, or even gain in learning (because they have the necessary pedagogical incentives at home, or parents who can provide support in processing new material), the coronavirus crisis has resulted in an increase in inequality in educational opportunities.

56 Maldonado, J-E., De Witte, K. (2020). *The effect of school closures on standardised student test outcomes*. Leuven: KU Leuven, Department of Economics.

Figure 14 Actual occupation of childcare facilities



Source: City of Ghent Childcare Department

Impact on childcare operation

Childcare centres stayed open during lockdown. It was a period of changing gears again and again. The scripts were not always in line with those of the schools. There was fear among the staff and an impact on the daily staffing of the childcare centre.





Accessible childcare in Ghent

Accessible childcare in Ghent



The Local Consultation Childcare (LOK) ensures suitable coordination and exchange between various childcare providers in Ghent, in order to eliminate inequalities and strive for accessible and high-quality childcare.

Research shows that good quality childcare can have a huge positive impact on children, parents and society. Due to a shortage of care facilities, not all children and families can benefit from these positive effects. Richer families or families with a highly educated mother use childcare more often than poorer families. It was assumed that this was the result of personal choices: mothers in certain population groups would rather stay at home with the children than go out to work. Research by the HIVA and *Kind en Gezin* shows that the unfulfilled need for childcare is much greater among the disadvantaged and people with a migrant background. Because of the way the supply is organised (i.e., affordability, availability, geographical distribution), access is not equal⁵⁷

This is where the *Matthew effect* comes into play: people from higher income groups benefit relatively more from childcare than lower income groups.

The LOK is responsible for:

- > Information sharing and vision development between the various partners.
- > Monitoring supply and demand at district level.
- > Local policy on the expansion of childcare within their own territory.
- > One-stop shop where all parents' questions about childcare are gathered and centrally processed in order to facilitate parents' search for a place in childcare.



In practice

In the partnership we share information and develop a vision with the following actions:

- > **Monitoring of figures per neighbourhood in Ghent:** annually we create a Coverage Ratio Report⁵⁸. This report provides an overview of the demand for and the supply of childcare services per district in Ghent. We also map out places where parents pay according to their income. By linking to the poverty index of the *Agentschap Opgroeien* (Agency for Growing Up), we get a picture of the neighbourhoods in which more affordable childcare is a priority for Ghent.
- > The advice that the Local Consultation Childcare gives to the City of Ghent and the city in turn to *Kind en Gezin* on the **expansion of childcare** within its own territory, takes into account the Coverage Ratio report. In order to increase the accessibility and availability of shelters, priority is given to new or converted income-related venues in the areas of Ghent where the supply is lowest. Research has shown that by increasing and setting up urban shelters in poorer neighbourhoods, more social equality is achieved. The current LOK working method therefore takes these insights on board. In the advice, LOK also takes into account the qualifications of employees in order to strive for more quality childcare.
- > The City of Ghent launched a **central desk for shelter requests: Kinderopvangpunt Gent**, to make childcare centres more accessible and to support parents in their search for a centre. The LOK monitors, assesses and adjusts⁵⁹.
- > The LOK is committed to **joint actions that promote the sustainability** (environmental and climate quality) **of the initiatives** (e.g., washable nappies).
- > The LOK sends out **policy signals** about issues experienced by the sector (press releases and letters to the minister).

57 Van Lancker, W. & Vandenbroeck, M. (2019). De verdeling van de kinderopvang in Vlaanderen en in de centrumsteden: spanning tussen de economische en sociale functie van kinderopvang. Centrum voor Sociologisch Onderzoek. Geraadpleegd via <https://soc.kuleuven.be/ceso/spsw/publications/de-verdeling-van-de-kinderopvang-in-vlaanderen-en-in-de-centrumsteden-spanning-tussen-de-economische-ensociale> (The distribution of childcare in Flanders and in the inner cities: tension between the economic and social function of childcare. Centre for Sociological Research), consulted at <https://soc.kuleuven.be/ceso/spsw/publications/de-verdeling-van-de-kinderopvang-in-vlaanderen-en-in-de-centrumsteden-spanning-tussen-de-economische-en-sociale-functie-van-kinderopvang>

58 For the 2020 report, see https://stad.gent/sites/default/files/media/documents/20201002_Rapport_dekkingsgraad_KO_2020_DEF.pdf

59 Explanation of how the desk works: see [video](#).



Celia, coordinator at Bengelhof daycare centre:

‘There is so much know-how in so many people and it is nice that you can share it with each other through the LOK.’

Ann, coordinator at daycare centre De Knuffelboom XL:

‘The cooperation with various local services ensured that the Knuffelboom XL also got a place in the neighbourhood and is known by the parents in the area.’



Collaboration in the city

The LOK is an advisory body of and for all those involved in the care of children in Ghent. It gives advice on matters relevant to childcare and is made up of a representation of local actors, users and local government. The Local Consultation Childcare meets at least four times a year.

Childcare needs are locally very different. Therefore, the participation of local actors and users is very important. They formulate proposals and advice for the city council, both on their own initiative and at the request of the administration. The Local Consultation Childcare also advises *Kind en Gezin* on the expansion of childcare within its own territory and informs local actors and users.

The LOK Ghent is made up of the following members:

- > Chairman and secretary of LOK Ghent
- > Local actors
- > Organisers of childcare facilities (representatives of the organisers of group and family childcare facilities for babies and toddlers).
- > Stakeholders (representatives of the partnership House of the Child Ghent, pedagogical support active in Ghent, Centre for inclusive childcare in Ghent, services that put parents in touch with childcare, training providers for childcare, etc.).
- > Users (delegate of the Family Union, organisations or services that can represent the parents such as community work, the associations where people in poverty speak up, CAW, IN-Ghent, Centre for Basic Education, employment projects, etc.).
- > City council of Ghent (the alderman responsible for childcare).
- > *Kind en Gezin* (representative of the Local Teams Ghent of *Kind en Gezin*).



Evolution

The local partnership has existed for 20 years, originally as a consultation platform for after-school care and evolving into child care for babies and toddlers. In Flanders, the local authorities were given more room to manoeuvre: they had more of a say in the distribution of resources and in the coordination of childcare supply and demand.

One of the milestones in the LOK's work was the launch of the [Kinderopvangpunt Gent](#). A website shows the full range of childcare services. Through a citywide central digital hotline, you submit childcare applications to all partners (started 1 June 2017). It supports parents who are looking for a place in childcare.



For whom

Childcare facilities in Ghent and indirectly all parents with children up to 3 years old.



Proud of

The partnership has members with extensive and longstanding experience, including knowledge of both the European and local contexts and policies.

There is a relationship of trust between the City of Ghent, the partners and the actors involved. They regularly exchange information.

Ghent thus positions itself as a pioneer in Flanders and as an example of expert and thorough operations.



Results

We made arrangements for the simultaneous processing of applications and equality in the allocation of places by agreeing on a fixed allocation time among the organisers.

We provide various channels to increase accessibility. An application can be submitted:

- > By telephone (09/268 20 86) via Gentinfo (6/7 days and available daily from 8 am to 7 pm).
- > By e-mail (kinderopvangpunt@stad.gent).
- > By booking an appointment with the physical desk.
- > Through registration of organisations and services that assist parents.
- > Through registration in every shelter in the city.

Every year there are approx. 2,500 applications, ¾ of them are allocated a place through the central system by one of the 233 childcare centres in Ghent. Complete figures on the offer are published in the [Childcare for Infants and Toddlers 2020 Report](#).



Ambitions

- > Sufficient and affordable places for all families in need of childcare.
- > Eliminate barriers for vulnerable families in accessing childcare.
- > Continue to work on quality childcare: smooth transition from childcare to school, ecological sustainability of initiatives.
- > Optimise the exchange of information and cooperation between the actors, such as welcome during closing periods, urgent requests, cooperation at neighbourhood level.



Challenges

Flemish resources for extra childcare places in Ghent are distributed on the basis of advice given by the LOK to Kind en Gezin (see earlier). Several organisers are applying for it. The demand for places always exceeds the available resources. Allocation of funds always leads to disappointment for certain applicants. Tension between individual and common interest is inevitable.



Role of the City of Ghent

The City of Ghent takes on the role of actor/organiser and of manager. As a manager, the City of Ghent is the facilitator for the partnership (LOK) and the actions that are taken there. It provides staff and operating resources for this purpose.

The city council undertook to inform the partnership in advance and to take its advice to heart, for all decisions involving childcare. In addition to the available subsidies from the Flemish government, the city council itself invests in expanding the number of childcare places: on the one hand, by organising childcare itself with its own means and, on the other, by making subsidies available to other organisers in Ghent.



Importance of partnerships

Cooperation with other authorities is enriching. There was an exchange of experience with other Flemish centre cities and in Europe on the question 'how to achieve access to childcare' (DECET⁶⁰ - ISSA).

The Childcare Department pursues an active policy in terms of internationalisation. The organisation of high-quality and accessible childcare is an important topic in this context. Two networks take priority:

1. EUROCITIES, where we follow up on two content-based working groups:

- > Working Group Education: in coordination with Education Centre Ghent (OCG).
- > Working group (Child) Poverty & Social Inclusion: in coordination with PCSF, Youth Service and International Relations Department.

On behalf of Eurocities, our service representative participated in a European Commission working group that resulted in the publication [How to work, train and motivate high quality staff in ECEC](#).

2. ISSA (International StepbyStep Association), an international network focusing on the exchange of expertise on 'accessible high-quality ECEC systems'. We are playing an active role here. In 2017, for example, we hosted [the biennial ISSA conference](#).

Finally, we also have an elaborate (international) visit policy. This is part of a broader framework of an active 'knowledge and expertise' policy. Networks are used specifically to share knowledge or add expertise.



Further info

Contact details for Kinderopvangpunt Gent: <https://kinderopvang.stad.gent/>





Overcoming learning deficits in times of coronavirus

Overcoming learning deficits in times of coronavirus



Learning deficit is not a new problem, but has increased due to the coronavirus crisis. Governments, including local authorities, have made large budgets available to mitigate the long-term effects.

The projects we describe below help to eliminate the learning deficit in Ghent that was caused or increased by the coronavirus crisis. We also focus on preventing future learning deficits. The projects are based on a vision of learning deficits that the Education Centre Ghent developed together with the teaching profession.

1. **'Project on eliminating and preventing learning deficits'**: additional deployment of people during the school year, with various profiles, during and outside of school hours. In this way, we created extra learning time, promoted learning improvement and worked on the students' wellbeing through differentiation, co-teaching and appropriate individual guidance.
2. **'Project Ghent Summer School'**: offer of summer schools during the summer holidays. We are making a conscious effort to reduce the 'summer backlog'⁶¹. The emphasis was on a rich learning experience for (vulnerable) children and young people. After an initial experiment in the summer of 2020 (with Flemish and local coronavirus measures), we continued the process in the summer of 2021.



In practice

Learning loss and learning deficit are complex problems. The approach focuses on:

- > Working hands-on: ensuring that children and young people continue to find their way to school;
- > Increasing the wellbeing of children and young people: through extra psychological support or by organising extra enriching activities within the learning context (e.g., movement or artistic expression).
- > Extra learning support and extra learning time in school and outside of school. In this way, missed learning opportunities are offered again.

The basic principle is: A pupil who does not feel well, does not learn well (and vice versa). That is why we opt for an overall approach with a holistic view of learning.

1. Eliminating and preventing learning deficits.

Ghent schools received extra urban support to eliminate and prevent learning deficits. This was complementary to regional, Flemish initiatives.

The schools in Ghent kept control of the learning process, in cooperation with the pedagogical guidance services and the pupil guidance centres. They were responsible for identifying learning needs, monitoring and remedying them. The City of Ghent (Education Centre Ghent) provided extra helping hands for the learning support that was needed. Extra help was provided inside and outside the classroom and as much as possible during school hours. Outside of school hours, there was the offer of the all-day community school⁶², through study support or mentoring. We pay attention to the balance between school and leisure time: additional learning support should not feel like a punishment for the pupils.

2. Ghent summer school

In the summer of 2020, the City of Ghent launched the Ghent Summer School, a pilot project with Flemish and city resources. In 2021, we will repeat the project. Here, too, we focus on eliminating and preventing learning deficits. Children and young people

61 Learning loss due to the long holiday period.

62 An educational offer in the district outside of school hours



Anouk, was in charge of supporting summer school organisers:

'By working together in times of crisis, you get to know your own hidden talents and those of your colleagues. I have seen people exceed themselves. That's nice to see.'

from vulnerable families were given extra learning opportunities during the summer holidays. We organised this based on a broad vision of learning, living and relaxing. In 2020, nine organisations took part in the Ghent Summer School. We organised 45 summer classes for 350 pupils.

Some schools organised this for their own pupils, others for pupils from their own network or across networks. All participating schools could call on the support offered by Education Centre Ghent. We provided citywide coordination and direction, co-financing, administrative support, content-related exchange of experiences and good practices, staff support, facility support and support in the (pedagogical) enrichment of the offerings. Participating schools were responsible for their own summer classes.

In 2021, due to coronavirus fatigue, few schools set up their own summer school, despite the renewed urban support offered. That is why we set up an open Ghent Summer School together with five partner organisations. Ten other partner organisations enhance this offer.



Collaboration in the city

Education Centre Ghent is the manager of a broad network of Ghent schools and other education-oriented partners. This city service was the pivotal point in the implementation of the city education coronavirus plan. This plan was implemented together with the Ghent education sector, which in turn is represented in the Regiegroep Onderwijs Gent⁶³.



Evolution

The project 'Eliminating and preventing learning deficits' officially started on 15 December 2020. It originally ran until 31 August 2021 and was extended until 31 December 2021 after a mid-term review in May 2021. The final evaluation will follow in January 2022.

The various summer schools ran in July and August, with a focus on the second half of August (in line with the new school year). The evaluation of the project resulted in an 'Inspiration Guide for Summer School Organisers' and policy recommendations for the competent Flemish ministers (Education and Local Authorities). In this way, the City of Ghent provided Flanders with policy input based on its practical experience, which was inspiring for the further Flemish rollout.



For whom

We organised both projects primarily for students with additional learning needs due to the coronavirus crisis. There is a correlation between the extent to which pupils fell behind in their education due to the coronavirus crisis and their socio-economic status (SES). Therefore, we gave priority to pupils who meet one or more SES indicators 🇳🇱 (e.g., home language not Dutch, mother has no secondary education diploma, school allowance).

The Ghent summer schools have the same target audience, but at a different time of year: the summer holidays. Research shows that children from vulnerable families suffer more from the 'summer relapse': learning loss due to the long summer holidays. The offer of summer schools focuses on these children and aims to bridge the gap between the world in which they 'learn' and the world in which they 'live'. 🇳🇱 This gap is socio-cultural and also socio-economic (poverty can have a negative impact on learning opportunities).

63 This is the local education council, where the City of Ghent discusses and follows up policies in the field of education and upbringing. Education Centre Ghent supports and organises this urban policy platform.



Proud of

These projects were new ways for the local government to cooperate with the education sector.

For the Learning Deficit project, we achieved a shared vision of learning for the first time, and translated it into the cooperation agreement with the educational sector.

The coronavirus crisis made it necessary and possible to formulate a common mission and vision. Until now, we had made a distinction between the educational field (task: pedagogical-didactical, with respect for pedagogical freedom) and Education Centre Ghent (task: peer coaching between schools).

With the 'eliminating and preventing learning deficits' project we are taking a new step. Extra resources were spent on the basis of a common vision and we made a framework to deploy the extra hands in the schools.

Throughout the project, there was plenty of room for innovation from the bottom up. The extra resources and the crisis mode led to creativity.

With the summer schools, we have a new learning tool for children and young people.

Summer school builds a bridge between the summer holidays and the school year: it is not school and it is not a holiday. Summer school contains a 'school' component to remedy the learning deficit. But it is much more: discovery and experimentation in a playful way, exercise, relaxation, a rich learning experience that vulnerable children in particular would otherwise be deprived of in the summer.

The trick is to strike the right balance. The pilot in the summer of 2020 has already delivered a lot of expertise that can be used in future summer schools.



Results

Eliminating and preventing learning deficits

- > The additional classroom support staff had more impact if they worked for a longer period of time and thus became a permanent figure for the students.
- > The greatest learning gains were achieved at the individual level, with good coordination between coach, school and student.
- > Coaches learned a lot from each other through exchange and hence achieved results faster.
- > The school organisation is sometimes put under pressure when volunteers or its own teachers are deployed as well (e.g., for supervision outside the classroom). The wellbeing of the pupils depends on the wellbeing of the school.

Ghent summer school

- > Summer 2020: participation of 356 pupils.
- > The added value of summer school 2020 was mainly in the area of preventing summer relapse, less in the area of eliminating learning deficits. Above all, summer school built a bridge to the world of 'learning' and 'school' after the long summer holidays and thus prevented further learning deficits, as pupils were stronger at the start of the new school year.
- > Space for alternative forms of learning: learning through experience (e.g., the city as an experimental and learning space).
- > Summer 2021: with the Open Ghent Summer School, the 'Education Centre Ghent', together with its partners, aims to reach 865 pupils.



Ambitions

After a mid-term evaluation, the learning deficit and prevention project was extended until 31 December 2021. The use of resources remains complementary to supra-local initiatives and within the limits of what is feasible (teacher shortage). We also keep a strong focus on wellbeing in relation to learning.

The education sector is also asking for longer-term support. The possibilities are being investigated, but from an urban perspective, we do not have the structural means to fully commit to this. Consultation with Flanders is required, and any supranational funds must be tapped.

With regard to the Ghent summer school, there is currently a new Flemish funding framework, which, among others, better defines the role of the local authorities, and therefore our options in the further rollout and development of a summer school in Ghent. However, although it is comprehensive, the financial framework is not sufficient. Certainly, the means of control remain too limited.

The 'Open Ghent Summer School', which we set up with six partners (including the 'Education Centre Ghent' itself) and enrich with the offerings of a further ten partners, is a new concept that came about because the schools indicated that they could not organise their own offerings for their own pupils during the summer. We are examining whether and how we can expand on the content and extend it into the future.



Challenges

The base of support among the educational partners is a focal point. Schools are overburdened and new ideas initially lead to resistance. We must look for ways to remove said resistance and turn it into a strength. The local government can support cross-network projects with a pedagogical-didactical slant. Plan burden becomes plan pleasure. If children and young people feel better at school and more valued in their learning to live, the focus of schools shifts to (even better) organising individual learning processes.

In addition, structural resources are necessary for good basic care during school hours. Extra supervision outside of school hours creates extra stress and pressure on both pupils and teachers.

Lastly, it remains difficult to recruit additional teachers, due to shortages in the labour market.



Role of the City of Ghent

For the project of eliminating and preventing learning deficits, the role of the City of Ghent is both facilitating, connecting and operational.

In the Ghent Summer School project, the City of Ghent and Education Centre Ghent were mainly facilitators and supporters (summer 2020). We divided the operational role among the partners: educational partners, pedagogical third parties, City of Ghent, Education Centre Ghent. In 2021, Education Centre Ghent was both the manager of the partnership that gave shape to the Ghent Summer School and the organiser of part of the programme.



Importance of partnerships

More cooperation and synergy with the Flemish government, responsible for education policy in Flanders, is important. The coronavirus has taught us that cooperation between both levels (Flemish and local) on educational policy can be successful (e.g., offering extra pedagogical-didactical incentives, optimum school organisation). But this synergy must be strengthened, in mutual consultation, and in function of the most effective use of public resources.

European Structural Funds can help city governments and their partners achieve education goals even faster and with greater impact. In this way, we are working even better towards optimal learning, living and working opportunities for all children and young people. We need to strengthen this too, in order to reverse the negative effects of the coronavirus crisis and to anchor achievements.



Further info

Questions about this project?

Eddy Van de Walle - Education Centre - City of Ghent - eddy.vandewalle@stad.gent



5 GENDER
EQUALITY



SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

SDG 5 topics

We translated the official sub-targets into topics for each SDG. You can also view the fully written-out sub-targets [here](#).

Discrimination against women (5.1)

Violence against women (trafficking, (sexual) exploitation) (5.2)

Harmful practices against women (child marriage, forced marriage, genital mutilation) (5.3)

Recognising unpaid care and home work (5.4)

Full participation of women in society (5.5)

Access to (sexual and reproductive) health care (5.6)

SDG 5 in brief

SDG 5 focuses on gender. At the heart of the SDG is the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. First and foremost, the SDG aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and violence against women worldwide. In addition, the SDG is aimed at the full and active participation of women in political, economic and public life. This goes hand-in-hand with the recognition of unpaid care and home work. We can only achieve this goal if women have equal access to health care, education and economic resources.



The City of Ghent's strategy and approach

Strategy

In the Ghent Multi-Annual Strategic Plan 20-25, we find the following targets that contribute to achieving sustainable development goals:

In Ghent, super-diversity is the new normal, by among others:

Increasing equal opportunities for target groups at higher risk of social vulnerability.

A safe Ghent thanks to close and alert security services through, among others:

- > The broadening of a balanced and supported three-pronged policy: prevention, restoration and enforcement.
- > The strengthening and renewing of a nearby and responsive security service.

City of Ghent approach

The two projects in this report only provide a limited picture of how the City of Ghent operates on this theme.

The City of Ghent's gender policy refers to social differences between men and women (as opposed to biological differences) that are learned, change over time and can vary greatly within and between cultures. Gender also refers to the characteristics and roles that people describe as 'typically' male or female. At the local level, the City of Ghent aims to promote equal opportunities between women and men, to work on a positive image and make us reflect on how we sometimes think about men and women in terms of 'stereotypes'.

In addition, the City, in cooperation with relevant partners, supports and encourages initiatives specifically aimed at:

- > Bringing together (women's) networks and associations (e.g., Univers'elle women's network of IN-Ghent).
- > Raising awareness and providing information on topics such as (intra-family) violence, poverty, gender stereotyping, etc.
- > Stimulating and strengthening specific target groups, such as individuals with a migrant background, the LGBT community and transgender people, etc.

Ghent also aims to be a fully-fledged home for the LGBT community (gays, lesbians and bisexuals) and transgenders (people who feel or show themselves to be different from their biological sex). Both groups form an invisible minority. They are still faced with prejudice, lack of understanding and ignorance, discrimination and sometimes violence. We live in a progressive country in terms of equal rights. But equal rights 'on paper' do not mean that people are always treated equally in everyday life. In Ghent, we therefore want to work towards equal treatment and more respect for the LGBT community.

In 2014, we therefore launched the Rainbow Declaration. It forms the basis for the City of Ghent's LGBT policy. The declaration contains six points that all contribute to creating a positive image of and more respect for the LGBT community in Ghent. In order to implement these points, a Rainbow Action Plan followed in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. We focus on the LGBT and trans community and involve Ghent organisations and all Ghent citizens in our efforts to create a tolerant city.

Would you like to know more about gender policy in Ghent? You can do so via [this link](#).

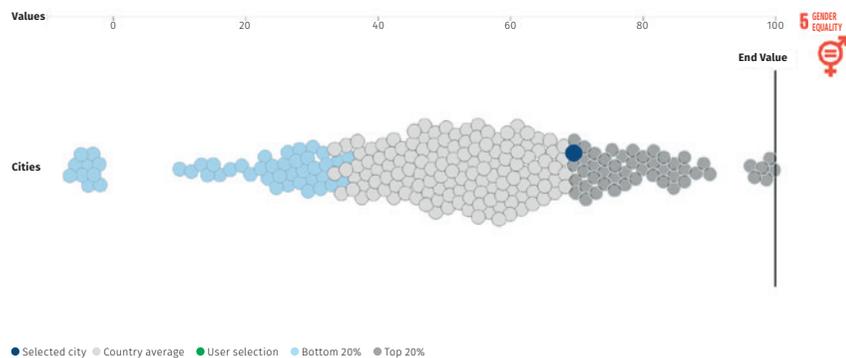
SDG 5 International

International benchmark in OECD SDG Index⁶⁴

In order to allow for an international comparison for SDG 5 'gender equality', the [OECD SDG Index](#) suggests the following indicator: the gender gap in employment rate (male/female, in percentage points). The data for this indicator dates back to 2017, but already gives an initial idea of where Ghent positions itself compared to the other cities with respect to this goal.

The SDG Index assigns a score of 1-100, where a score of 100 is the proposed final value of the indicator to achieve the target by 2030.

Figure 15 OECD SDG-index – SDG 5



Ghent = 'selected city'
Source: OECD⁶⁵

International cooperation

In 2020, the City of Ghent, in cooperation with 11.11.11, organised the annual activity festival on international solidarity: [Belmundo](#). The topic? Gender in an international perspective! From lectures on cinema evenings to 'gender in the blender' cafés. For a whole month, gender issues were discussed from an international perspective, with testimonials from Cuba, Bangladesh and Kenya. We paid special attention to 'Dare to wear', an initiative of Ghent Fair Trade and others, which centred around fashion and gender through testimonials, a catwalk show and discussions on gender inequality across borders.

Impact of the coronavirus crisis

Gender equality affected by the COVID-19 crisis

Despite significant progress made in the field of gender equality in recent decades, this crisis highlights the differences between women and men that still exist in society, for example, in the area of health, at economic and social level, in the division of household tasks and in the area of violence⁶⁶. The trends in this text are to be situated at the Belgian level.

Below you will find a list of differences that have already been somewhat highlighted. Part of the analysis is based on the gender expertise of the Institute for Gender Equality and the publicly available information it was able to consult.

⁶⁴ OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

⁶⁵ OECD. (2020). *Measuring the distance to the SDGs in regions and cities*, consulted at <https://www.oecd-local-sdgs.org/index.html>.

⁶⁶ Instituut voor de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen. (2020). Nota over de genderdimensie van de COVID-19 crisis. Instituut voor de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen (Institute for Equality between Women and Men. (2020). Note on the gender dimension of the COVID-19 crisis. *Institute for Equality between Women and Men*), consulted at https://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/nl/nieuws/nota_over_de_genderdimensie_van_de_covid_19_crisis.

Virus affects women and men differently

The virus itself does not affect women and men in the same way. On 21 April 2020, Sciensano reported that 61.9% of confirmed cases were women and 38.1% were men. Among the fatalities, however, there were 37% men and 34% women (and 29% unknown). So there seems to be a marked excess mortality among men. There is also growing concern about the psychological effects of the pandemic and the lockdown. Sciensano's first COVID-19 health survey shows that women (24%) suffer more from anxiety disorders than men (16%) and relatively more women (18%) are affected by depression than men (14%).⁶⁷

As far as the economic aspects of the crisis are concerned, we note that women are more likely to work part-time than men and that temporary unemployment due to lockdowns therefore hits them harder. In 2018, the employment rate for women was 67.4% and for men 78.9%.⁶⁸ Women (43.6%) also work more often part-time than men (11.8%)⁶⁹ and have more precarious contracts. Their net monthly disposable income drops due to unemployment and therefore they are more likely to be driven into poverty.

Single parents are hit hard

There is a gender imbalance in the distribution of paid work outside the home and unpaid work inside the home. In Belgium, according to a study by the Institute, this amounts to 1 hour and 20 minutes more housework per (week) day for women.⁷⁰ Single parents, the majority of whom are women, have to take on all unpaid care tasks anyway.⁷¹

More reports of family and partner violence

When it was announced on 17 March that we would have to stay 'in our bunks' for the next few weeks, alarm bells went off for families whose homes were not safe. Even then, counsellors for partner and family violence knew that an invisible problem would start to fester. Families that are already under stress, usually come under even more pressure now that they must constantly be together at home, without much contact with the outside world. Partner violence is committed by both men and women, but the majority of victims are women⁷²

67 Braekman, E., Charafeddine, R., Demarest, S., Drieskens, S., Gisle, L., Hermans, L. & Scohy, A. (2020). Eerste COVID-19 gezondheidsenquête: eerste resultaten. Brussel (*First COVID-19 health survey: first results*. Brussels: Sciensano. <https://doi.org/10.25608/f0tt-py28>)

68 FOD WASO, 'INB01 - Werkzaamheidsgraad' ('INB01 - Level of activity'), consulted on 1 May 2020: https://werk.belgie.be/nl/file/7107/download?token=3R8vHC_Y

69 Statbel. (s.d.). Deeltijds werk bij loontrekkenden, volgens regime deeltijds werk en geslacht (2017-2020) (*Part-time employment of wage-earners, according to part-time employment and gender regime (2017-2020)*) Accessed on 29 April 2020 at <https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/werk-opleiding/arbeidsmarkt/deeltijds-werk#figures>

70 Glorieux, I., van Tienoven, T.P. (2016). Gender en tijdbesteding. Brussel: Instituut voor de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen (*Gender and time management*. Brussels: Institute for Equality between Women and Men), consulted at https://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/nl/publicaties/gender-en-tijdsbesteding_0

71 Instituut voor de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen. (2020). Nota over de genderdimensie van de COVID-19 crisis. Instituut voor de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen (Institute for Equality between Women and Men. (2020). Note on the gender dimension of the COVID-19 crisis. *Institute for Equality between Women and Men*), consulted at <https://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/nl/nieuws/nota-over-de-genderdimensie-van-de-covid-19-crisis>

72 Bal, G. & Vrancken, I. (2020, 18 April). De coronacrisis treft mannen en vrouwen op een andere manier: hoe COVID-19 niet genderneutraal is. VrtNWS (The coronavirus crisis affects men and women in a different way: how COVID-19 is not gender neutral. VrtNWS), consulted at <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2020/04/17/het-coronavirus-treft-mannen-en-vrouwen-op-een-andere-manier-of/>



Photographer: Jeroen Willems

Bounce Up



Bounce Up



With 'Bounce Up', the autumn of 2020 turned into a month-long celebration of resilience among the LGBTI+ community in Ghent. It was organised by Casa Rosa. [Casa Rosa](#) is the East Flanders Rainbow House and the umbrella organisation for some 20 East Flanders gay and transgender associations.

Often the power of stigma, shame, pressure to meet standards can lead to situations where LGBTI+ people feel they are losing themselves, feeling alienated from family and friends (and wider society). There are also studies showing that discrimination and/or feeling 'different' or inferior can lead to stress, depression and general ill-being. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on several areas of life, according to ILGA Europe⁷³.

By organising Bounce Up, Casa Rosa would like to do its part to improve the resilience and wellbeing of the LGBTI+ community. In November 2020, the importance of resilience within the community was discussed, with a specific focus on transgender people, people from migrant backgrounds and people with mental disabilities. Bounce Up was an impetus to continue the conversation, information and knowledge sharing about resilience among the LGBTI+ community, to empower individuals and bring the community together and support each other.



In practice

Bounce up is primarily organised to inform the target group and a wider audience. Despite online meeting fatigue among many people in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, many people still took part in the virtual activities. We started with calming mindfulness. We learned a few ways to become more peaceful, more aware of ourselves. This activity received a lot of enthusiastic reactions.

There was also a lecture on racism, with insight into what racism is and what impact it has on someone confronted with it. We learned that its impact is serious and can even be passed on from generation to generation. Afterwards, we created a brief summary of the project itself. All videos are still on our [Facebook page](#).

The signals that emerged from the lectures and panel discussions have been raised within the Rainbow Network. This is a network of all the major partners in Ghent who help shape the Ghent LGBTQIA+ policy, such as UNIA, Ghent Local Police, Ghent University, vzw Jong and other organisations. The network is coordinated by the Local Social Policy Department of the City of Ghent. The network has been working on resilience for two years, hence the signals will be taken into account when developing new projects and activities. Care for victims was also included in the City of Ghent's Action Plan for Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism, from which training and education for victims and bystanders will follow.

73 ILGA Europe. (2020). *COVID-19 impacts on LGBTI communities in Europe and Central Asia: A rapid assessment report*, consulted at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/sogi/-/report-by-ilga-europe-covid-19-impacts-on-lgbti-communities-in-europe-and-central-asia-a-rapid-assessment-report>



Femke - employee at Casa Rosa:

‘We have given a voice to some of the organisers of organisations working for the LGBTI+ community. They talked about the influence of the coronavirus on their operations and the relationship with their target group. We have also given people from the community who have their own operations the opportunity to introduce themselves and their operations. We hope this will help the community to connect even more with these operations. We also held more informative webinars and lectures to provide additional knowledge on topics that are not always easily covered, such as racism and everything that is involved in a transgender person’s transition.’



Collaboration in the city

The initiator of Bounce Up is Casa Rosa vzw, the East Flanders and Ghent Rainbow House. Casa Rosa provides a house and a home for LGBT people and those around them by offering a meeting place, information and support and organising activities. Casa Rosa is aimed at all individuals and groups interested in and working with sexual orientation and gender identity in Ghent and East Flanders. The following internal (from the City of Ghent) and external partners have cooperated in the project:

- > Staff and volunteers from Casa Rosa, [PuurNatuur](#), Switch Witch Syndrome, De Zefier (psychologist's practice), [Slam the tea](#), [Wel Jong Niet Hetero](#), [Genderspectrum vzw](#), [Transgender Infopunt](#), Gender Spectrum, Slam-T, [Pride of Colour, Blond, Girls Go Boom](#);
- > the Equal Opportunities Team of the Local Social Policy Department of the City of Ghent.



Evolution

The preparatory phase ran from September 2020 to October 2020. Then the entire programme was defined and organised and the promotion started. The project took place in November 2020. In December 2020, the project was evaluated.

In the end, 14 activities were organised (taking into account some activities that could not take place due to coronavirus measures).



For whom

The target group for this project is mainly the LGBTI+ community. LGBTI+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, and others. In addition, people from the wider public could participate, so everyone was welcome.



Proud of

The project has provided more than one topic. For four weeks, we offered lectures, webinars, panel discussions, etc., on various topics. One week we discussed racism, one week Trans* people, one week the community and one week wellbeing. Everyone could decide for themselves where their own interests lay.

We noticed that it is a greater challenge to get people interested in online activities. We know, of course, that Bounce Up took place at a time when everyone was telecommuting and perhaps wanting to get away from computer screens. Despite the 'virtual fatigue', we were able to reach quite a number of people for the various activities. We were asked whether certain activities might be resumed if it were possible to do so physically.



Results

There were around 20 to 100 participants per activity. The live broadcast of the Zoom meetings on Facebook was also a success, with dozens of people following on that channel. The streaming to Facebook allows interested parties to follow all activities (again) after the project. The [Switch Witch Syndrome video](#) on YouTube has been watched many times.

We also offered a resilience training course through Gender Spectrum. The participants in that training reacted very positively. Two of our employees also took part in it and said that participants were enthusiastic.

A brief summary was also given on the Ghent Rainbow Network for the various authorities and organisations in attendance. This ensures that new projects and collaborations are created. In the future, the organisations involved will also be able to use it for an activity.

The Ghent Police, for example, organises a chatbox on IDAHOT⁷⁴ itself to provide information on reports of LGBTI+ victims. UNIA organises 'Give me one minute'. This is an action for the third grade in secondary schools, with the aim of getting students to make and submit a film around the LGBTI+ theme. The winner will receive a budget to work on the LGBTI+ theme for a whole year.



Ambitions

We aim to be a house where people who are on the LGBTI+ spectrum feel at home and safe. The intention is also to give a voice to our supporters in times of need.

Many unique people work in our building, each with their own strengths and talents. This is something we value highly. It is also the intention to extend our welcome events to several days a week in the future.

Of course, we want to organise many activities in the future to bring our target group together but it is also important to raise more awareness in society, in cooperation with various key partners.

Ghent's Rainbow Network is very important for collaborations. We sit around the table with different authorities and organisations that can play an important role in the LGBTI+ story. Needs are identified within the network, and projects and collaborations can be created that adapt to them.



Challenges

Bounce Up was a large and very ambitious project. It was quite a challenge to organise the project. We wanted to do everything we could to make it happen, despite the coronavirus restrictions. We switched from in-person to online and were able to expand our horizons. We looked at how the technical part works, but also our communication through social media was an aspect we definitely wanted to focus on. Variety is very important in announcing activities in a fun and interesting way. We provided attractive text and photos for the posts on our social media and increased the reach by adapting the way the images were presented.



Role of the City of Ghent

The City of Ghent has made the project possible in various ways. First, a budget was made available to realise the project. In addition, the city of Ghent made equipment available for the live streaming of activities.

The support and advice of the City of Ghent was also an indispensable aspect of this project.

Casa Rosa is in close contact with employees of the City of Ghent, for which we are grateful. We are given great opportunities and can thus prove ourselves. The City of Ghent also ensured that our project became visible to the wider public (e.g., [article in City Magazine](#), page 19).

74 International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, 17 May 2021

17 Importance of partnerships

As a regional Rainbow House, our focus and task are the local operation at city and municipal level. We work together with the Flemish Government, Internal Administration Division, to achieve our goals.

Through our Flemish umbrella organisation, [Cavaria](#), we regularly participate in international webinars and networking events, such as ILGA-Europe (the European LGBTI+ interest and network organisation).

Further info

Questions about the project?

info@casarosa.be

Via the [website](#) you can find information on the project and the speakers.

The Bounce Up event can also be found on [Facebook](#).

Facebook Casa Rosa <https://www.facebook.com/casarosabe>

Instagram Casa Rosa https://www.instagram.com/casa_rosa_regenbooghuis/



Photografer: Jeroen Willems



Photographer: Wouter Raaijmakers

Fathering Group by De SLOEP vzw



Fathering Group by De SLOEP vzw



The Fathering Group by *De SLOEP* vzw focuses on promoting the role of fathers in the family, with the aim of giving fathers more responsibility and allowing them to take responsibility.

Based on the vision of sharing responsibility within the family between both parents, women and girls also come out stronger, which forms the link with SDG 5 - Gender Equality. Women still often carry the mental load, the mental burden of housework, the pressure as breadwinner lies more often with the man. Sharing responsibilities between both parents leads to a more equal distribution of household chores and less parental burnout⁷⁵.

From this broad view of gender equality, we aim to give fathers the opportunity to be more than just the breadwinners in the family, which makes them more likely to have a good time with the children. This is not obvious, especially for vulnerable fathers living in poverty.

There is no universal upbringing concept, every family is different. For this reason, *De SLOEP* vzw the Fathering Group provides space for sharing parenting tips and offers fathers the opportunity to fill in the knowledge themselves. The Fathering Group brings together fathers from different cultures and backgrounds, which makes for super-diversity in the operation.

Finally, it also promotes mutual recognition between fathers and breaks down social isolation.



In practice

De SLOEP vzw offers family support to vulnerable families with young children, in all their diversity. We do this in an accessible way and always with self-reliance as the ultimate goal. Family support is offered through various [parent groups](#) (Mothering Group, Fathering Group, Ready for School, Babybabel, etc.).

The Fathering Group meets monthly. Participants primarily share experiences and knowledge, but activities are also organised for fathers and their children. During these meetings, special attention is paid to the participation of parents. The parents can help set the agenda.

There is also attention for vulnerable families and there is great respect for the fathers' individuality. The Fathering Group does not impose any conditions on the participation of fathers or on the age of their children. Everyone who is or feels like a father is welcome. Participation in the fathering group is without obligation and the number of participating fathers can therefore vary.

The focus during meetings is on sharing experiences and seeking mutual recognition between fathers. We notice that the same information as in the mothers' group is often shared, but in a different format. The support of the whole family is always central.

Every year, *De SLOEP* vzw organises a more important day of activities with father activities. In the past, we used to go on weekends like this with the fathers and their children.

For several years now, everything involving fathers has been structurally integrated in the work of *De SLOEP* vzw. We identify as a father-friendly organisation. A different theme is planned each year: the theme for 2021 is 'nature experience'.

⁷⁵ People who are completely exhausted by the high level of stress that comes with being a 'father' or 'mother'. Research by the Catholic University of Louvain and the International Investigation of Parental Burnout consortium shows that as many as one in twelve parents in our country suffer from this type of burnout. (<https://uclouvain.be/en/discover/press/news/parental-burnout-hits-individualist-western-countries-hardest.html>)



A father from the fathering group:

‘The Fathering Group is very important to me, but also to my family. I can be a better father, who can also mean more to them outside of work.’

Jan-Maarten, group worker at De SLOEP vzw:

‘Sharing experiences, both difficulties and good times, provides mutual recognition. I myself have noticed that over the years fathers dare to give each other compliments or tips, which I feel was much less the case in the beginning.’



Collaboration in the city

De SLOEP vzw is the project's initiator. These partners have contributed to the Fathering Group success story:

- > Arne Van Schoors (initiator), various professionals and volunteers.
- > The Learning Fathering Network Belgium with some 30 partners.



For whom

The Fathering Group is aimed at vulnerable fathers. Through our field of activity and years of experience, *De SLOEP* vzw reaches many people with a migrant background. In order to work in a coordinated way with Flemish fathers, the cooperation with Niki van Hamel is important: he is an expert in coaching and training on 'connecting fatherhood and communication'. In this way, we support cooperation and communication between fathers from different backgrounds.



Proud of

When *De SLOEP* vzw Fathering Group were launched in 2007, little attention was being paid to fathers. By choosing to work with fathers, we made an innovative choice. The attention paid to fathers in the workplace increases as a result, and a

climate of trust without judgement is created. Yet we find that society still has a long way to go to fully recognise fathers in a parenting role.

No subject is taboo during the Fathering Group, so we can have very open discussions. The involvement and participation of fathers is highly valued and leads to a high level of involvement. We are also proud of the bonds that have been forged over the years between the professionals and the fathers themselves. This shows that this project has a sustainable effect and base.

We also notice the effect of our work on mothers: there are conversations at home about the topics, especially when it comes to parenting. It also creates trust: mothers allow fathers to take over certain tasks. Our operation often leads to perceptible changes. Terms such as maternal gatekeeping, which is a phenomenon that often occurs shortly after birth and which means that as a father you cannot always take on the role that you would like to take on, are thus identified and discussed.

De SLOEP vzw is also asked as an expert in that field: a nice recognition for our acquired expertise.

Finally, the fathers' weekend is another great - and free - initiative, where the fathers go out together with the children, without the mothers.



Evolution





Results

The project has a good reach, with a stable number of dads taking part in the Fathering Group. In 2018 and 2019, 9 and 12 meetings respectively took place⁷⁶. Last year, unfortunately, only two Fathering Group meetings could be held due to the coronavirus measures in place.

In addition, the Fathering Group is increasing the attention paid to fathers raising children. The formal and informal network that the project facilitates is important to the fathers.



Ambitions

We remain committed to structural embedding, also financially. We also aim to continue to spread our vision of the role of fathers under the banner of 'father-friendliness', a social recognition of the role of fathers.

In addition, we remain committed to strengthening vulnerable families and to long-term sustainable outreach to fathers. We have been successful in this for a long time now, thanks to our approach that allows for feedback at the end of meetings and for setting the agenda for the next meeting. Commitment, respect, quality and an empowering approach are critical.



Challenges

The Fathering Group started small, it was and is sometimes difficult to get the group together: sometimes we talk about one participant, sometimes about ten. Vulnerable fathers without a migration background are hard to reach.

Due to the fathers' working hours, it is necessary to organise the Fathering Group in the evenings or at weekends. During the coronavirus crisis, we tried to connect fathers through a WhatsApp group, which was not always easy. We therefore look forward to non-digital meetings.

In addition, there is a lack of structural embedding. Additional staff and finances play a crucial role here. Flemish support for the Fathering Network and projects and/or organisations that want to work with fathers would be a step in the right direction and would also be a good signal at the social level.



Role of the City of Ghent

The City of Ghent has a supporting role through the recognition of *De SLOEP* vzw for health work. We also make use of buildings belonging to the City of Ghent.



Importance of partnerships

The Fathering Network connects all manner of organisations that work (or want to work) around fathers to exchange good practices and expertise. The aim of the network is to pay attention to fathers in policy and in practice. The learning network meets twice a year.

We focus on international cooperation through the [International Step by Step Association](#) (ISSA). This cooperation does not focus specifically on fathering, but on the topic of parenting support.

We therefore hope to see additional international attention paid to the role of fathers through a Platform for 'father-friendliness' and would like to link up with countries of origin. That is why we dream of an annual congress for the Fathering Group worldwide. This would give us additional opportunities to exchange knowledge.



Further info

Questions about the project?

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Website <https://www.desloep.be/>





<https://www.stad.gent/sdg>