



EUROPEAN CAPITALS of INCLUSION and DIVERSITY AWARD

COLLECTION of
best practices

#DiversityCapitals

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Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction	5
Showcase and celebrate achievements.....	8
Reward and recognition.	8
Why apply for the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award?	8
Citizen pride.....	9
Strengthened communication.	9
Raising awareness.....	10
Consolidation of inclusive initiatives.	10
Feedback and reflection.	10
Networking opportunities.	11
Learn from other communities.	11
Active community engagement	15
Key Aspects	15
Accessible and inclusive design.....	19
Intersectional approach.....	20
Policies grounded in equality data and research	22
Strategic planning and systematic work	23
Collaboration with various entities	24
Visibility and awareness-raising.....	25
Mainstreaming of equality	27
Training of staff	28
Why join networks of towns, cities and regions?	31
Become a Capital of Inclusion and Diversity in 5+1 steps	35
STEP 1: Identify the specific challenges and societal needs	36
STEP 2: Engage the public and affected groups in the process.....	36
STEP 3: Design and implement targeted projects and actions	38
STEP 4: Create partnerships and synergies with all relevant stakeholders	41
STEP 5: Assess and measure the impact of your actions.....	43
Last step: apply to win the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award	44

**Ana Gallego**

Director-General for Justice and Consumers



The European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award is an example of how exceptional dedication and innovation of towns, cities and regions can positively impact the lives of all. Over the past three editions, more than 220 local authorities have taken the opportunity to demonstrate their outstanding efforts and commitment to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. Through initiatives like the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award, we are proud to highlight the impact that municipalities all over the EU have to tackle discrimination in all of its forms. This change cannot happen without you.

I would like to thank all local authorities that contributed to this collection of best practices – your ongoing dedication is a driving force for all of us to stand for environments in which everyone can thrive. I am confident that this publication will inspire many other towns, cities and regions to follow your lead, take action to contribute to building discrimination-free environments and apply for the next editions of the Award.

Introduction

Equality is a core value of the EU, and the promotion of diversity and inclusion is a top priority for the European Commission. Under President Ursula von der Leyen, the Commission has been striving to build a Union of Equality¹, where all can live, thrive and lead regardless of their gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics.

To fight discrimination and foster a more inclusive, diverse, and fair societies, the Commission has adopted a proactive approach, with targeted strategies, action plans and measures. As part of this ongoing work, the Commission has been organising the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award since 2022. This initiative supplements the annual

European Diversity Month, which aims to raise awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace and across our societies.

The European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award recognises the efforts of EU cities, towns and regions in promoting inclusion and creating societies free of discrimination. It is open to all local authorities in the EU that are dedicated to building fairer societies by advancing diversity and inclusion in terms of:

- gender;
- racial or ethnic origin;
- religion or belief;
- disability;
- age; and
- sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics.

¹ Under President von der Leyen, the Commission adopted five Union of Equality strategies in 2020 and 2021:

- the gender equality strategy for 2020-2025;
- the EU anti-racism action plan for 2020-2025;
- the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030;
- the LGBTIQ equality strategy for 2020-2025; and
- the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities for 2021-2030.

The continuation of work on the Union of Equality was also announced in the Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024 – 2029.

‘The European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award is granted to local authorities that exemplify outstanding dedication to creating safe, inclusive spaces where all feel that they belong and can flourish. The winning local authorities transform the ideal of inclusion and diversity into tangible deliverables. This serves to inspire others. I thank these European capitals for taking the Union of Equality to citizens at the local level.’

Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality (2019-2024)

Despite significant advances, Eurobarometer data and surveys have indicated that many people in the EU still experience discrimination².

- 60% of Europeans believe that discrimination based on ethnic origin is widespread.
- Skin colour, ethnic origin and migration background are frequently cited grounds for discrimination.
- In 2023, 36% of LGBTIQ people declared they were facing discrimination in their daily life.
- In 2022, women earned on average 12.7% less than men across the EU.
- Persons with disabilities face obstacles

when accessing essential services, healthcare, education, employment, and political life.

- In 2022, 25% of Roma declared they had been discriminated against in their daily life, including in terms of employment and education opportunities.
- More than half of Europeans think that age can be a disadvantage in employment if they are considered too old or too young.

The finalists of the Award have shared their best practices and experiences from the application process with the objective to motivate more cities, towns

² Discrimination in the European Union (<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2972>).

Being Black in the EU (https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2023-being-black_in_the_eu_en.pdf).

LGBTIQ equality at a crossroads – Progress and challenges (https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2024-lgbtiq-equality_en.pdf).

2024 report on gender equality in the EU (https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/965ed6c9-3983-4299-8581-046bf0735702_en?filename=2024%20Report%20on%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20the%20EU.coming%20soon.pdf).

Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_810).

Roma in 10 European countries (https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2_en.pdf).

and regions to prioritise diversity and inclusion. The aim is to motivate more cities, towns and regions to prioritise diversity and inclusion in their policies and initiatives. The Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers has compiled these best practices and experiences in the present publication, which summarises the finalists' approach to promoting diversity and inclusion and key aspects of their work. It also features concrete examples, with best practices highlighted in boxed sections to draw attention to specific actions and their impacts. Additionally, it includes direct quotes from local authorities, capturing their insights and reflections on promoting diversity and inclusion and on their experiences of the Award process.

'We believe that diversity is not a burden, but a resource that can be used by all inhabitants of the city.'

City of Warsaw

This document also explains the benefits of joining networks of towns, cities and regions, and provides a step-by-step guide on how to tackle all forms of discrimination and achieve recognition as a European Capital of Inclusion and Diversity.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the shortlisted candidates of the 2022, 2023 and 2024 editions of the Award, who have generously shared their best practices and experiences in promoting diversity and inclusion. Special thanks to **Almada, Bologna, Catalonia, Centelles, Cologne, Corbetta, Ghent, Grad Koprivnica, Helsinki, Ingelheim am Rhein, Labin, La Laguna, Leuven, Livadia, Ljubljana, Madrid, Piraeus, Reggio Emilia, Terrassa, Växjö, Warsaw** and **Zagreb**.



Why apply for the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award?

Here are some key motivations and reasons for applying for the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award, as mentioned by finalists that shared their best practices:

Showcase and celebrate achievements.

The Award provides an opportunity to showcase and celebrate the hard work and the achievements of the local administration and their partners in promoting diversity and equality. It shines a spotlight on the efforts of communities of all sizes, giving recognition to even the smaller communities committed to diversity and inclusion.

‘Being shortlisted in the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award is like a sort of acknowledgement that we try our best to build a society based on respect, empowerment, and active participation of every single person.’

Municipality of Livadia

Reward and recognition.

Getting shortlisted brings widespread recognition, highlighting achievements locally, across the country and internationally. The Award serves as a significant acknowledgement and motivation for those dedicated to inclusion, recognising their contributions at the EU level.

'For us, it was very special and a big honour to win the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award and be invited to the Award Ceremony in Brussels. We felt that our efforts in implementing diversity and inclusion policies in our city were appreciated and noticed at the European level.'

Town of Ingelheim am Rhein

Citizen pride.

The Award provides a reason for people to celebrate and be proud of their local authorities. It can strengthen community spirit and encourage ongoing participation in diversity and inclusion initiatives.

'To be recognised on a global level, within a large European family, means a lot for a small town like Labin. The award ceremony itself was very emotional for all of us public employees and the mayor who received the award. After great media support, not only at the local or county level, but also at the national and EU level, we believe that every citizen of city of Labin felt like a special and very important wheel in this big world.'

Town of Labin

Strengthened communication.

The Award is a powerful means of communication and amplifies media presence at both national and EU levels. Since it provides an international platform to showcase achievements, it can help improve the reputation of towns, cities or regions in the realm of inclusion and diversity. The international exposure also underscores the importance of local initiatives to a broader audience and garners recognition from stakeholders.

'This award has been very important in two ways: the first, because it highlights the work of all the people who make this work possible, the second, because it represents a turning point for the recognition of the essential role of the regions in guaranteeing the rights of LGBTI+ people.'

Region of Catalonia

Raising awareness.

The Award serves as a tool to raise people's awareness of diversity and inclusion, both nationally and EU-wide. It provides a platform to highlight initiatives and inspire other cities committed to best practices in inclusion and diversity. For many shortlisted local authorities, the Award raised awareness across all municipal levels, including political decision-makers, middle management, and administrative staff.

'Winning the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Bronze Award 2024 has raised awareness in a remarkable way across all municipal areas, from political decision-makers to middle management and all administrative staff.'

City of La Laguna

Consolidation of inclusive initiatives.

Success in the Award can strengthen the inclusive services provided across municipal areas and serve as a powerful catalyst for the development of new projects. It ensures that inclusion and diversity remain consistently on the organisational agenda and are actively

discussed at all levels, leveraging the momentum created by the Award.

'This is a testament to the good work with diversity that is carried out daily within our organisations. Now we continue our journey towards an even more inclusive Växjö.'

Municipality of Växjö

Feedback and reflection.

Participating in the Award process provides an opportunity to reflect and assess the impact and effectiveness of activities and initiatives. The application process serves as a method to evaluate current efforts and utilise feedback from the jury and independent experts to strengthen future work in inclusion and diversity.

'The most significant part of the Award process is without a doubt the awareness of the visibility acquired by our initiatives. We feel the responsibility but also the pride of being a model and guide for other cities.'

City of Corbetta

Networking opportunities.

Participation in the Award offers access to a diverse network of EU towns, cities and regions committed to equality, diversity and inclusion. This network fosters the exchange of best practices, mutual inspiration and partnerships in combating discrimination and promoting equality.

'We believe that these awards are a great opportunity to learn about other ways of doing things and to fight for a more just world. That is why among the finalists we have been able to get in touch and give each other different ideas to carry out new actions to promote equality in our municipalities.'

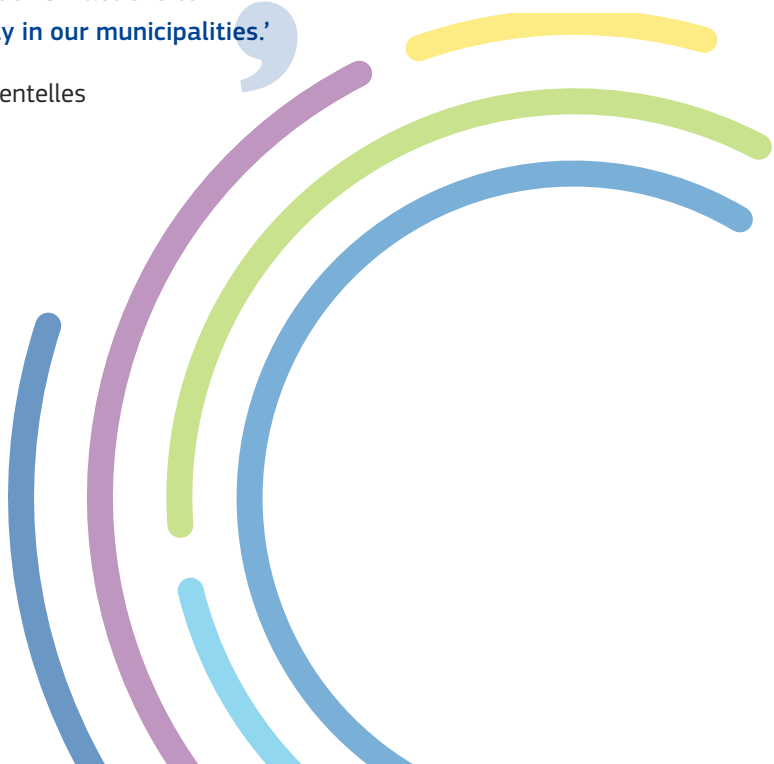
Municipality of Centelles

Learn from other communities.

The Award provides a platform to compare best practices and learn from other communities that serve as benchmarks in diversity and inclusion.

'The application process not only provided visibility to our practices but also offered the opportunity to learn from others at the European level. It is an enriching experience that has allowed us to better analyse our work, reaffirming that we are on a good path.'

Municipality of Almada



Thanks to all the above, it is a great push for not only continuing but also advancing work on diversity and inclusion, driving significant progress towards more equal and inclusive societies at local, regional, national and EU levels!

‘We are convinced that continuous short-, mid-, and long-term efforts highlighting the importance of tolerance and inclusion in all our activities are crucial. Being a leading role model in the field of inclusion and diversity is the best possible promotion for us.’

City of Ljubljana



City of Ljubljana receiving the Gold Award in the Specific category at the 2024 European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award ceremony. © European Union, 2024.

In the city of Koprivnica,

inclusive and sustainable policies are being implemented to include members of the Roma national minority in all spheres of life. Key measures include ensuring access to affordable kindergartens and preschool education for Roma children. The city offers translators for children who are still learning Croatian. These and other measures, such as financial support, have resulted in more and more Roma children in preschool, primary, and secondary education. Furthermore, in cooperation with the Roma association Kali Sara, the city administration has built a children's park and a sports playground in the Reka suburb, where many Roma live.

In the city of Bologna,

aside from the prestige of being recognised as a Capital of Inclusion and Diversity in Europe, this Award also meant acknowledging the engagement of people working on these issues, whose passion often extends beyond professional duties. It brought visibility to projects, initiatives and activities that often go unnoticed.

Madrid

is known as a welcoming city that respects LGBTIQ rights. According to a study carried out by the City Council in 2021, more than 80% of the surveyed LGBTIQ people consider the Spanish capital a very LGBTIQ-friendly city. Madrid is internationally recognised for its annual Pride celebrations, which are supported by the City Council with financial and human resources. In recent years, new initiatives have been set up, such as the LGBTFobia Victims' Services Office and the LGBTIQ Observatory, a forum for social participation.



The Diversity Management Unit of the Madrid Municipal Police. Photo provided by the city of Madrid

Key Aspects

The finalists of the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award are towns, cities and regions with great achievements and experience in creating and implementing policies, projects and initiatives that foster diverse and inclusive societies and combat discrimination.

The finalists serve as sources of inspiration and motivation for other towns, cities and regions in the EU looking to adopt a more proactive approach in the fight against all forms of discrimination. The finalists have identified the below aspects as essential to their work.

Active community engagement

‘The city of Koprivnica is honoured to have been recognised for its effective policies and strategy for providing support to people with disabilities as well as national minorities. Encouraged by this award and in addition to the existing measures, the city has decided to build upon the structural level and extend its incentives and measures of the Strategy for people with disabilities and the Social Program of the city of Koprivnica, supporting families and thus creating a stronger community.’

City of Koprivnica

Engaging with target groups and involving them in different projects, actions and initiatives is crucial. People should not be seen as mere passive beneficiaries but should be given the possibility to actively participate in the planning and implementation of initiatives. Collaborative governance – through partnerships with **representative organisations or community groups** – provides authorities with the necessary knowledge of people's lived realities.

The involvement of people not only ensures more informed and inclusive policies but also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. This active role can also lead to a greater sense of empowerment, allowing people to express their needs and contribute their knowledge in all stages of policymaking.



Bringing younger persons and police officers from Ghent closer together through sport. Photo provided by the city of Ghent.

Mondinsieme foundation, affiliated with the municipality of Reggio Emilia,


includes associations representing diasporas, intercultural associations and associations related to religious plurality. Its mission is to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue, active citizenship, and encounters between people of different origins, as well as between local, national and international bodies and institutions. The centre prevents cultural marginalisation and radicalism by promoting inclusion and mutual empowerment and aims to build an intercultural citizenship that recognises and values the advantages of diversity. According to its statute, the member associations elect a representative to the foundation's Management Board, ensuring that associations representing cultural diversity have a voice in decision-making. The associations meet at least twice a year in an assembly, which is an instrument for discussion and co-planning of interventions promoted by the municipality, as well as for presenting their proposals.



Photo provided by Reggio Emilia.

The town of Ingelheim am Rhein

has established an information point where individuals can visit the city's offices and receive more information about discrimination. This service offers advice on steps to take if someone has been a victim of discrimination. The town emphasises that diversity and inclusion involve not only promoting these values but also providing advice and structural support to those affected by discrimination.



Accessible and inclusive design

In designing new projects and improving existing ones, prioritising **accessibility and inclusive design** emerges as a foundational principle. Policies and initiatives should ensure that all individuals can fully benefit from and use the services provided, without encountering barriers stemming from various discrimination grounds, such as gender, ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, socio-economic status, or cultural background. These challenges manifest in diverse forms, such as inadequate infrastructure, products or digital services, or language barriers. It is crucial to observe and address the specific needs of everyone and the unique challenges faced by diverse groups. This approach ensures that everyone can enjoy their town, city or region equally.



Accessible transport.
Photo by Maija Astikainen, provided by the city of Helsinki.

In the city of Ghent,

the strategy 'Nothing about them without them' is implemented in customer services to ensure accessibility for everyone. A diverse group of volunteers, including individuals from different origins, non-binary persons, persons with disabilities, people living in poverty and older persons, test different public services, such as the process of issuing a driving licence. Step-by-step, this process is monitored by the municipal authorities. After the testing phase, detailed information on the barriers experienced by the volunteers is gathered. This data is then used for bilateral exchanges and recommendations with the service providers to improve the accessibility of their services. Each year, this project evaluates 4-5 products and services, and on average, 15 actions are issued for each customer journey to enhance accessibility.

Intersectional approach

Discrimination is often multidimensional, and only an **intersectional approach** can pave the way for sustainable and respectful changes in society. Intersectionality³ refers to the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as racial, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, skin colour, ethnic origin, gender, and other personal characteristics/identities, playing a role in unique experiences of discrimination and disadvantage. An intersectional approach involves recognising that people's identities are complex and multifaceted, and that their experiences of discrimination are shaped by a combination of factors.

³ According to Article 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, when 'defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation'. The European Institute for Gender Equality defines 'intersectionality' as an 'analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics/identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination'. This definition applies equally to any form of discrimination.

‘Investing in intersectional policies that promote diversity and inclusion is the greatest reform of public administration in terms of effectiveness and efficiency of policies.’

City of Reggio Emilia

In the realm of diversity and inclusion initiatives, adopting an intersectional approach is crucial for advancing equality, fostering inclusion, and combating discrimination effectively. It involves ensuring that all policies, practices and programmes consider the intersecting identities and experiences of individuals. Key to this approach is the **active involvement of diverse civil society organisations** representing various identity groups in the decision-making process. This involves reducing barriers to participation for marginalised groups by ensuring accessibility – for instance, ensuring venues are fully accessible and conveniently located, providing necessary translations, ensuring safe spaces for participation, and offering incentives and reimbursements to contributors for their input.

The city of Helsinki

had adopted an Equality and Non-discrimination Plan for services for the period 2022–2025, which recognises intersectionality, citizen participation, norm criticism and accessibility as key dimensions to consider in building a more inclusive city. According to the plan, actions and initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion should be based on existing data, engage all relevant stakeholders and be adequately resourced and sustained over time.

Policies grounded in equality data and research

Developing policies grounded in **equality data and research** is fundamental to ensuring effective and informed decision-making. By systematically gathering and analysing data on equality issues, municipalities can identify disparities, understand root causes and tailor interventions to address specific needs within their communities. Research-backed policies not only improve the accuracy and relevance of initiatives but also foster transparency and accountability in governance. This approach empowers municipalities to proactively promote fairness, inclusion and equal opportunities for all residents.

The city of Piraeus

Piraeus bases its policies and activities on extensive research, data analysis, and evaluation, ensuring they are evidence-based and data-driven. Quantitative and qualitative data are gathered to assess programme success, monitor progress and pinpoint areas for improvement. Various techniques are used to gather information, such as stakeholder feedback, demographic statistics, participation rates, and survey findings to inform their initiatives. Regular input from community members, regional associations, and business partners ensures that diversity and inclusion initiatives are tailored to meet community needs and goals. Stakeholder input is solicited throughout all stages – from planning and execution to assessment – facilitating ongoing improvements based on evaluation results and stakeholder feedback. After their participation in the Awards, Piraeus continues to prioritise evidence-based policies, evident in plans to increase research on LGBTIQ+ community experiences and needs and consult experts when planning policies and actions targeting women and vulnerable groups.

Strategic planning and systematic work

Systematic work to promote diversity and inclusion should be based on **strategic planning** and **long-term goals and objectives**. The finalists of the Award emphasise the importance of carefully designed strategies that identify specific challenges, design tools and projects to address them, and set specific and feasible goals. Strategies should include short- and long-term impact assessment processes and indicators to measure the effectiveness of actions. Adequate allocation of human and financial resources is critical to ensure the successful implementation of initiatives. This ensures sustainability and long-term impact.

According to the city of Terrassa,

the promotion of equality and diversity in the city must be conceived as a dynamic process spanning short-, medium- and long-term perspectives. The city aims to advance and adapt public management in response to changing societal needs. Their strategic roadmap consists of continuously integrating intersectional equalities into municipal action. Terrassa seeks to strengthen and consolidate the results already achieved but also expand the strategy to encompass all municipal areas, aiming for a comprehensive approach to inclusivity and equity citywide.

A **targeted approach** is crucial for plans and initiatives that aim to promote diversity and inclusion. It involves identifying specific focus areas and developing clear, well-defined steps to effectively achieve objectives. Equally important is the continuous assessment of the impact of these plans and initiatives to ensure they remain effective and responsive to the changing needs of the community.

Collaboration with various entities

In addition to involving the public and those affected, creating synergies with all public and private stakeholders – at both national and EU levels – is crucial for advancing diversity and inclusion efforts. The effectiveness and reach of initiatives can be improved by **collaborating with various entities** – including other public authorities, experts, civil society organisations, stakeholders from the private sector, as well as municipalities, cities and regions across the EU and international institutions.

This dialogue and collaboration are essential for understanding diverse norms and structures, offering and receiving support, drawing inspiration, and exchanging best practices. It enables the development of well-informed, comprehensive, large-scale plans and fosters collective action towards achieving diversity and inclusion goals as a unified community.

The city of Warsaw

facilitates NGO collaboration through the Forum of the Commission for Social Dialogue, which is a platform for exchanging information. Warsaw's cooperation with local communities and civil society is crucial. The city finances or co-finances projects implemented by NGOs, which directly reach the groups vulnerable to discrimination. These initiatives provide essential services such as legal and psychological support, which are also provided in languages other than Polish. NGOs play a vital role in preparing reports and recommendations that inform future project planning and propose new actions. Their voice is extremely significant in shaping city policies that respond effectively to residents' needs.

‘Madrid City Council gives special importance to social participation, both of people exposed to discrimination and of social organisations that fight for their rights. Their opinions and proposals are taken into account when designing programmes, evaluating them and implementing improvements.’

City of Madrid

Visibility and awareness-raising

Visibility and awareness-raising are integral aspects of the work and actions carried out by the finalists to promote diversity and inclusion. **Communicating the impacts of discrimination** and the numerous challenges faced by individuals from diverse backgrounds plays a pivotal role in promoting awareness and garnering support for initiatives to combat discrimination.

The city of Leuven

places great significance on inclusivity. Its core priority is establishing projects and policy initiatives that foster an inclusivity within its diverse population. Communication and awareness-raising serve to positioning Leuven as an inclusive city in all internal and external communication. Getting recognised at the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award contributes greatly to this communication strategy and serves as a powerful tool to promote the city's commitment to diversity and equality.



Warsaw's buildings illuminated with rainbow colours in a gesture of solidarity with the LGBTIQ community. Photo provided by the city of Warsaw.

The discrimination that different groups experience needs to be widely understood and acknowledged, while also highlighting the **benefits of implementing diversity and inclusion policies**. It is not just about raising awareness of the challenges faced by these groups but also about showcasing their contributions to the community. The finalists stress the importance of disseminating information through awareness-raising campaigns that highlight the needs of vulnerable groups – including providing a platform for sharing testimonies – and, in parallel, showcasing their unique personalities and talents.



Festival of Art and Tolerance in Labin. Photo provided by the town of Labin.

The city of Corbetta

has undertaken a range of specific targeted actions to raise awareness of the myriad challenges and violence faced by individuals in disadvantaged positions. In 2019, they inaugurated the first Rainbow Bench dedicated to advocating for LGBTIQ rights and installed a Rainbow Chair in 2022 in the city council hall to honour victims of gender-based violence. Collaborating with neighbourhood committees throughout the city, Corbetta has also installed several red benches dedicated to victims of violence and femicide, aiming to educate on gender equality through cultural symbolism and awareness. Furthermore, Corbetta runs targeted awareness campaigns via social media and press platforms, organising impactful initiatives and flash mobs dedicated to raising awareness about gender respect and cultivating a culture of anti-violence.



Rainbow bench. Photo provided by the city of Corbetta.

Mainstreaming of equality

The shortlisted cities, towns and regions stress that **mainstreaming equality** is crucial for integrating principles of diversity and inclusion into all aspects of governance and society. It involves embedding these principles systematically in policies, programmes and practices to ensure they are central to decision-making processes at all levels.

By mainstreaming equality, societies can effectively address systemic discrimination and inequality. This approach ensures that diversity considerations are not treated as separate or isolated issues but are instead integrated into broader agendas, such as economic development, education, healthcare, and social services.



The municipality of Växjö

is dedicated to integrating diversity and inclusion into both their overarching policies and daily work. It ensures that every department comprehends the importance and methodologies of working with inclusion and diversity. The municipality is advancing a Plan for Equality, a new strategic plan set to be adopted by the highest governing body. It provides a clear framework for prioritising the promotion of equal rights for all and mandates systematic inclusion and diversity work across all municipal departments. The plan identifies four priority areas: minority rights, children's rights, gender equality and the promotion of inclusion. All strategic plans are implemented at the highest level by the city council and have an integral role in the municipality's governance system, ensuring that all initiatives are regularly evaluated and followed. Evaluation and follow-up of initiatives occur twice a year, with reports delivered to politicians and directors to track progress. The Development Department plays a crucial role in implementing and monitoring the plans related to inclusion and diversity. They collaborate closely with all departments and provide support in inclusion efforts. The department's experts participate in workshops with senior management and politicians to ensure effective implementation of the Plan for Equality.

'The promotion of diversity and inclusion should be mainstreamed into all institutional policies and activities.'

City of Bologna

Training of staff

Training plays a crucial role in effectively promoting diversity and inclusion within organisations and communities. It provides opportunities for staff to deepen their understanding of diversity issues, including diverse cultural backgrounds, identities and perspectives. Training equips staff with practical skills to engage with diverse communities and address issues of discrimination effectively. This includes improving **communication skills, conflict resolution techniques and cultural competence**, enabling staff to navigate diverse situations with confidence and cultural sensitivity and respect.

An integral component of training is **addressing unconscious bias and fighting stereotypes**. Encouraging employees to reflect on and challenge their personal biases and assumptions can help build awareness, improve services, and foster a more inclusive workplace culture. Training also empowers staff to implement inclusive practices in their daily work. This can include adopting inclusive language, accommodating diverse needs, and creating accessible spaces and services. By embedding these practices in organisational culture, staff help create a more welcoming and equitable environment for everyone.

‘While we have been focusing on diversity, inclusion and equality policies in the last few years, there is still a significant room for improvement. We have to be aware of unconscious bias. A way to build awareness and address unconscious bias is to encourage every employee to review, question and analyse their own personal biases and assumptions.’

City of Piraeus



The municipality of Centelles

emphasises comprehensive training in all areas to promote equality, including educational workshops and training sessions on targeted groups of the public and specialised training for various entities and service providers. Centelles provides training to associations and committees to incorporate a gender perspective into their activities, helping them recognise participation barriers and promote gender-inclusive participation. They also offer specific training for grassroots sports coaches to help identify discrimination and promote equality in sports. Another notable initiative is the gender-based violence prevention project, which includes the Lilac Point programme. This programme involves equality agents at nightlife parties who educate attendees about violence against women and LGBTIQ, safe sexuality, and victim care services. The programme also identifies risk factors and implements measures to promote safer environments, such as improved lighting. Centelles will also launch a training for party organisers, enabling them to identify risk factors, design safer parties, and appropriately refer cases of gender-based violence to the Lilac Point.



Road sign: 'Centelles does not tolerate gender-based or LGBTIQ-phobic violence'. Photo provided by the municipality of Centelles.

Why join networks of towns, cities and regions?

‘The city of Ghent welcomes the exchange of best practices, because we believe that cities will play a more prominent role in the future implementation of a more progressive and inclusive European Union.’

City of Ghent

Participation in the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award has integrated the finalists into a network of local authorities championing equality, diversity and inclusion. While some local authorities were already members of other networks before the Award, many were motivated to join additional ones afterwards due to the valuable experiences gained. What is there to gain from membership in larger national and international networks?



Ingelheim am Rhein joins the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism. Photo provided by the town of Ingelheim am Rhein.

The finalists highlight the opportunity to meet, connect, and share their plans and ideas through the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award. Participation in the competition enables them to contact other candidates, ask about their initiatives and exchange experiences and knowledge. The finalists stress that subsequent interactions have laid the foundation for ongoing contacts, enabling them to learn from others' initiatives and discovering ways forward.

This exchange has been pivotal in shaping future collaboration on diversity and inclusion policies. It makes it possible to jointly examine the forms of discrimination people in the EU experience, possibly leading to the design of common projects and initiatives at national or EU level. The exchange is facilitated by social media and technologies that enable communication and collaboration from one corner of the EU to another.

'We maintain close cooperation with regional, national, and international networks and actors from civil society and science, enabling the city of Cologne to set new standards for good practice.'

City of Cologne



Mayor of the city of Cologne Henriette Reker receives a catalogue with recommendations for the management of colonial heritage from a committee of experts. Photo provided by the city of Cologne.

For some local authorities, the Award has also opened doors to engage in various external events such as round tables, training sessions, and forums. These platforms enable cities to showcase their initiatives and gather valuable feedback to strengthen future efforts.

Despite their different geographical and thematic contexts, these towns, cities and regions share a common vision for and commitment to the EU values of equality and non discrimination. Their exchange can be a source of information, expertise, inspiration and motivation, leading to strong partnerships and common actions and initiatives.



Since achieving success in the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award, the city of Zagreb

has garnered recognition from numerous networks and organisations, validating its dedication to diversity and inclusion. This acknowledgement has not only placed Zagreb in the spotlight but also opened doors for new partnerships aimed at further enhancing its social infrastructure. Excellent examples of successful partnerships include the Initiative 4 Cities in collaboration with Split, Rijeka, and Osijek. This initiative focuses on improving citizens' lives through affordable housing, digitalisation, and the green transition, demonstrating a commitment to transcend political differences and accelerate reforms. Another notable example of best practice sharing is Zagreb hosting of a study visit for representatives from the city of Pula, Istria County, and civil society organisations. This visit aimed to educate participants about Zagreb city's Commission for Persons with Disabilities, which has served for over 20 years as a benchmark of good practice and collaboration between civil society and the public sector. Internationally, Zagreb maintains robust partnerships with networks such as Eurocities and the European Social Network. In 2023 they hosted, in collaboration with ESN, the European Social Services Awards ceremony to showcase best practices and experiences, recognising outstanding achievements in delivering social services across Europe.



Become a Capital Of Inclusion and Diversity in 5+1 steps

How can a town, city or region promote diversity and inclusion, advance equality, and combat discrimination? The journey to end all forms of discrimination can be long and complex, but there are clear and strategic steps authorities can take to initiate this process. The positive impact of such initiatives on people's lives can be significant and transformative.

'This recognition as a European Capital of Inclusion and Diversity is not just an accolade, but a commitment to values that define our urban identity. We believe that inclusion is not merely a buzzword, but a guiding principle that shapes our policies and actions.'

City of Zagreb



City of Zagreb receiving the Gold Award in the category for local authorities with more than 50 000 inhabitants at the 2024 European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award ceremony. © European Union, 2024.

STEP 1: Identify the specific challenges and societal needs

Every society has unique contexts and dynamics that require targeted responses, actions and solutions. It is essential to research and develop methods to understand the specific forms of discrimination that are prevalent in your town, city or region before trying to address them. Basing this research on existing studies and data ensures that the approach is evidence-based and comprehensive. To gather representative and comprehensive information, the experiences and needs of all populations and groups must be considered in this process, with particular focus on the multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination people might experience.

‘Feeling included is much more than feeling tolerated or accepted. That is not enough. Inclusion means feeling safe and free to participate in the whole spectrum of the community that is a city. Inclusion is the open choice to take on any possible role, from a passive citizen to a proactive agent. An inclusive city does not see your (gender) identity, background or disability as a barrier, but as enriching the community with diverse experiences.’

City of Leuven

STEP 2: Engage the public and affected groups in the process

It has many benefits to involve the public and those directly affected in the process of identifying challenges and developing policies and initiatives. Firstly, it ensures that the conclusions about the prevalent forms of discrimination and most pressing challenges are well informed. Secondly, it empowers target

groups, making them feel valued, seen and respected. Finally, it fosters a sense of social responsibility within the community, as the public gets to take a role – from early education through adulthood – in the process of designing policies and strategies that will benefit them.



Kids drawing. Photo provided by the city of Leuven.

This participatory process helps spread and promote the values of diversity, inclusion, equality and solidarity throughout society. It is crucial to take

a structural and long-term approach, rather than taking sporadic action, to ensure sustained impact and commitment.

La Laguna's approach

to promoting diversity and inclusion is characterised by comprehensive and collaborative governance, active citizen participation, dedicated budgets, and cross-sectoral cooperation between municipal areas and other public administrations. The aim is to create a city model that is inclusive of all its residents. To this end, La Laguna relies on the active participation of organisations representing various groups. The city has established several dedicated councils and boards that focus on various aspects of diversity and inclusion, including the Council and ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities, the Council for the Older persons, the Children's Council, the Women's Council, the LGBTBIQ Council, the Volunteering Council, the Board of the Roma people, the Board of migrants and the Board of homeless people. These councils and boards play integral roles in planning, implementing, and evaluating initiatives to ensure collaborative work in diversity and inclusion. Each council operates with its own budget and increasingly collaborates across sectors to ensure the full inclusion of all community members. The departments with direct responsibility for Diversity and Inclusion (such as the Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Accessibility, Works and Infrastructures and the Department of Equality and LGBTBIQ) have their own budgets and staff.



Information point on accessibility. Photo provided by the city of La Laguna.

STEP 3: Design and implement targeted projects and actions

Once priorities are set and challenges identified, it is time to take concrete and strategic action. Based on research, available information, and the input from affected groups, targeted measures and initiatives must be implemented to eliminate

the barriers and discrimination these groups experience in their daily lives. These actions must be clear and coherent, incorporating specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound goals.



The region of Catalonia

has 117 comprehensive LGBTIQ+ care services (Xarxa SAI LGBTIQ+) that cover the entire region, with services in all cities over 20 000 inhabitants and county-level councils serving smaller towns. While some actions target the wider population, the main beneficiaries are LGBTIQ people and their families. These services assist in creating local LGBTIQ+ plans (adopted by around 400 towns), run awareness campaigns, and provide information on LGBTIQ+ rights, job placement opportunities, gender transition processes and gender affirming public health services. They support victims of LGBTIQ+ phobia with psychological care, free legal advice, and assistance in filing complaints. Additionally, SAIs guide workplaces and educational centres in creating safe spaces. In 2025, Catalonia plans to implement a socio-community support service for LGBTIQ+ people and their families, along with temporary housing for LGBTIQ+ refugees and those in vulnerable situations.



First national conference of the LGBTIQ SAI Network, October 2023. Photo provided by the region of Catalonia.

The actions should be based on strategies and concrete action plans, and might include: (i) developing new policies; (ii) changing services, structures and infrastructure; (iii) organising events; or (iv) launching educational programmes and

awareness-raising campaigns. The actions should be tailored to the unique needs and features of each society. Consider designing initiatives that are sustainable and can change over time rather than relying solely on short-term projects.

The commitment to diversity and inclusion of the municipality of Almada

is guided by national and international frameworks, reflected in its motto, 'Almada, Territory of Many'. Almada employs a comprehensive approach with several strategic plans, including Plans for Equality and Non-Discrimination; a Social Development Plan; a Disability Strategy; Plans for Migrant Integration and Roma integration; a Plan for Active Ageing; a Health Strategy; and a Sports Development Plan. These strategies involve multiple stakeholders and formal collaboration mechanisms, based on intersectionality and complementarity.



Campaign: 'As Almada as you – Say no to prejudice. Defend equality.' Photo provided by the municipality of Almada.

The town of Labin

implements numerous projects to address the needs and the challenges the most vulnerable groups face. The largest project of the city involves constructing and co-financing a home for older persons. Other initiatives include crowdfunding for a mammogram device to benefit women's health, investing in teaching assistants and assistants in kindergartens (including for children with disabilities) and installing solar power plants to save energy for individuals in vulnerable positions.

STEP 4: Create partnerships and synergies with all relevant stakeholders

Collaboration and partnership with a wide range of stakeholders is essential for the success of diversity and inclusion initiatives. These partners can range from global and national authorities, civil society organisations, companies, and research institutes to local authorities, associations, and neighbourhood committees. The experience, expertise and networks of these partners can be immensely beneficial in the implementation process. Moreover, exchanging ideas

and best practices with stakeholders can save time and help avoid mistakes. These synergies can also create opportunities for financial or political support at national and EU levels.

After the process of identifying all potential partners, it is crucial to specify the roles and responsibilities of each partner. Incorporating relevant stakeholders into the governing system is vital to ensure systematic follow-up and accountability.

As part of the MUST-a-Lab programme (2022-2024), the municipality of Livadia

has dedicated significant efforts to foster diversity and inclusion for migrants. The primary objective of this initiative is to enhance dialogue between migrants, stakeholders involved in integration processes, civil society, and policymakers. The project involves the establishment and operation of Policy Labs using an innovative methodology to facilitate interaction among migrants, stakeholders, and elected officials. The initiative aims to identify and address the needs of third-country nationals, identify gaps in existing procedures, and review local integration strategies to better serve migrants and enhancing the working life of stakeholders. Consequently, this effort boosts social cohesion and local community development. After analysing local integration policies and reviewing services for migrants, studying best practices, training facilitators and engaging stakeholders and migrants, Livadia established three policy labs in 2023, with representation from stakeholders, migrants, and policymakers. The facilitators used innovative methodologies to promote constructive dialogue, fostering a bottom-up approach to analyse and improve local integration strategies based on participant recommendations.



World Refugee Day. Photo provided by the municipality of Livadia.

In the city of Cologne,

measures are implemented in close cooperation with target group-specific urban society providers and scientific institutions. This collaboration enables the city to focus more closely on the needs of the target groups and gain insights into social discourses, ensuring that administrative actions are sustainable. The proximity to scientific institutions supports the city administration in aligning with the latest standards and developing them further. For instance, the city has decided to tackle Cologne's post-colonial heritage and for this purpose and has established an expert committee of civil society actors to advise the city administration on this matter. Another example is the state programme 'NRWeltoffen', a funding programme for intersectional projects, where an intersectional committee of Cologne civil society actors decides on the funding use. Additionally, the city has launched a campaign for the acceptance of queer people with a migration and refugee background.

STEP 5: Assess and measure the impact of your actions

It is essential to create assessment tools and indicators to measure the impact of policies and initiatives against the objectives and goals set. Long-term actions are a necessity to effectively address discrimination and promote equality. In this process, impact assessment and evaluation are

necessary to monitor progress and to identify the strengths, the weaknesses and the possible risks of the implemented strategies and action plans. Making necessary modifications ensures powerful, sustainable and long-lasting impacts.

One of the leading policies of the city of Ljubljana

is to foster a tolerant and inclusive city identity. This ongoing effort is supported by the mayor, city councillors, and city administration leaders. Collaboration with experts, stakeholder meetings, and systematic monitoring enable continuous improvement of policies. Ljubljana's municipal strategies, annual plans, and action plans outline clear objectives, measures, indicators, and deadlines. Monitoring, implementation, and reporting are overseen by responsible stakeholders, with joint reports reviewed by the City Council. The mayor's advisory bodies, including the Council for Elimination of Architectural and Communication Barriers, the Council for Older Residents' Issues, and the Youth Council, provide valuable feedback. The city co-finances various programmes through public tenders and requires implementers to report regularly on their progress and outcomes. For instance, The Logbook for youth projects includes group questionnaires to provide detailed feedback on implementation, learning outcomes, and user insights, boosting the effectiveness of these initiatives.

'The work to build and sustain more equal and inclusive societies is never complete - actions are needed every day, from all of us.'

City of Helsinki

Last step: apply to win the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award

The European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award is open to EU local authorities that actively implement inclusive policies challenging discrimination based on gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, sex characteristics, religion or belief, and ethnic or racial origin. Eligible applicants include towns, cities and regions in the EU, if they are administrative units governed by a city council or a democratically elected governmental body.

The Award has two general categories: one for local authorities **with fewer than 50 000 inhabitants** and another for those with **more than 50 000**

inhabitants. Additionally, local authorities are rewarded in a Specific Award category, focusing on different themes each year. The following themes were covered in the previous editions: Roma inclusion (2022), LGBTIQ equality (2023), and safety of women in all their diversity (2024).

For more information, visit the website. You can receive monthly updates and future press releases by signing up for the newsletter. Reach out to the organisers by sending an email to JUST-CITY-AWARDS@ec.europa.eu.



Terrassa City Council receiving the Gold Award in the category for local authorities with more than 50 000 inhabitants at the 2023 European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award ceremony. © European Union, 2023.

‘Being the European Capital of Inclusion and Diversity winner has been like opening a window to exchange fresh ideas with other European cities and to show with pride and gratitude Terrassa’s commitment to inclusion and diversity.’

City of Terrassa



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