



11th April 2019, Amsterdam

Dear sir, madam,

The City of Amsterdam presents its compliments to the High Commissioner for Human Rights and hereby submits information relevant for the preparation of the report “on effective methods to foster cooperation between local government and local stakeholders for the effective promotion and protection of human rights” in accordance with resolution A/HRC/39/L.8.

The City of Amsterdam stands ready to cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the issue of human rights and local governments. Please rest assured of our highest consideration.

On behalf of the City of Amsterdam,

Kind regards,

Sabine Gimbrère,
Director of the International Office

Human Rights in the City of Amsterdam

Background

Ever since the 17th century, Amsterdam has been a refuge for people fleeing persecution for their faith or beliefs. The resulting mix of cultures has shaped and enriched our city over the centuries. This diversity is clearly visible in Amsterdam's unique culture and spirit of commerce. But it's most visible in Amsterdammers themselves: our DNA comes from a wide variety of cultures. Sometimes literally, and nearly always figuratively. Freedom and tolerance are not only basic principles that should be given by others; freedom and tolerance form the basis of the identity of Amsterdammers.

Amsterdam's diversity is its greatest strength. The focus lies not on differences, but on what unites the people of Amsterdam. When people of different backgrounds live and work together, they come up with new insights, which in turn fuels innovation and creativity.

That's why Amsterdam's policy is about creating equal opportunities for everybody. It's about ensuring that all Amsterdammers can participate in the city and making sure that no one is excluded. After all, the more people that participate, the stronger and more dynamic our city grows. The current coalition government for the period 2018-2022 continues the legacy of Amsterdam as an open and tolerant city¹. The principles of equality and freedom for all inhabitants of Amsterdam form the fundaments of policy development for the coming years. Priorities in the coalition agreement related to human rights are amongst others: the fight against discrimination and racism, gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights, fighting social inequalities and poverty.

The development of Amsterdam as a Human Rights city is a continuous process that may never be finished as such. Indeed, addressing human rights is a dynamic process in which the local government and civilians together are responsible for a healthy social climate. Freedom, democracy and human dignity should be meaningful and visible on all levels in a open and tolerant city. Only then the City of Amsterdam truly remains a city of human rights.

Human Rights policy

Human rights form the basis of all Amsterdam's policies. This means that the City's many residents must all be free to be themselves and to make their own choices. Crucial to this is the concept of mutual responsibility, based on the principle of 'equal rights, equal opportunities'. Responsibility for the city, for freedom, and for the safety and well-being of everyone who lives in Amsterdam. If basic rights are taken for granted they can be threatened – even in a place like Amsterdam.

Amsterdam is a Human Rights City. This means that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an explicit fundament for policy development. This international legal basis provides a legal framework for local social policies. The most recent policy brief on Human Rights dates from 2016 and is attached in Dutch. The main points of this brief are summarized in the paragraph below.

¹ <https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/coalitieakkoord-2018/>

Human rights are an integral part of everything the city government does, since we are bound by international law and human rights law. Before the publication of the policy brief in 2016, the City of Amsterdam had already integrated human rights into certain policy fields. For example, in 2015 the City of Amsterdam developed policies on refugees and youth in accordance with Human Rights principles (based amongst others on the convention on the rights of the child). A rights based approach was also already implemented in policies on the elderly, LGBTQI+, women's rights and anti-discrimination. In 2015 the City of Amsterdam facilitated a year long dialogue with bottom-up organizations and Amsterdammers. These conversations took place with a wide array of social groups and people in public spaces such as café's, local community centers, schools and local government offices. Participants were asked how they felt about human rights, how they experienced the protection and promotion of their rights in Amsterdam and which topics related to human rights were of particular importance to them. Please find the outcomes of these consultations in the attachment to this document in Dutch. Next to the topics of discrimination, access to health care, housing and refugees, which were already embedded in policies, four relatively unexplored topics were frequently mentioned. Accessibility of public transport and public spaces, children's rights, privacy and education were identified as new topics that have a strong link with human rights. Consequently, the City of Amsterdam has expanded its policy to a human rights perspective to meet these demands.

In the past years the City has developed a training program for civil servants on human rights. Three times a year a group of 30 people are trained by the University of Amsterdam. In a recent policy brief on diversity and inclusivity from December 2018, the City of Amsterdam further developed policy on racism & discrimination, women's rights and LGBTQI+ rights (please find the policy brief attached in Dutch). Moreover, in December 2018 The Amsterdam's City Council requested a yearly "human rights scan", a new premiere for The Netherlands. The first scan will focus on the rights of children and the results are expected in December 2019.

On the international level, human rights have been integrated into international policy for many years. Amsterdam initiates dialogue with other cities to put human rights on the agenda, in particular to advance women's rights and to strengthen the position of LGBTQI+ people. In 2007 Amsterdam founded the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN). In 2015 Amsterdam joined the Shelter City initiative, which offers temporary housing, training, and protection to international human rights defenders who are fighting to end human rights violations in their home countries. Through this program, the City of Amsterdam sends a clear message that it supports the fight for freedom and equality worldwide. This is in line with Amsterdam's international policy: 'Amsterdam International Responsible Capital City 2014-2018'.

Specific programs and policies on human rights themes

As stated above the rights based approach is integrated on all policy areas. Please note that the specific human rights themes listed below are therefore non-exhaustive.

LGBTQI+ rights

The City of Amsterdam is currently developing new policy on LGBTQI+ rights. In the meantime Amsterdam continues the implementation of the "pink agenda 2015-2018". Please find the Pink Agenda set out in the attached document in English. The new policy will continue the Pink Agenda, with the following additional goals:

- Increase the social acceptance of LGBTQI+ persons.

- Improve the position of trans people.

Moreover, the Amsterdam is member of the international Rainbow Cities Network en hosts a international pride each year. Through the Rainbow city network Amsterdam offers capacity building and assistance to other cities.

Women's rights

The City of Amsterdam has identified the following goals to advance the position of women:

- Improve the resilience of vulnerable girls to prevent psychological, social and physical harm (including domestic violence).
- Strengthen the self-determination and acceptance of sexual diversity.
- Improve the economic independence of women and improve the balance between informal care duties and work.
- Strengthen the social infrastructure for emancipation efforts, facilitating cooperation and activities for and by women's organizations.
- Give more attention to the role of men in the advancement of women's right and initiate related projects.
- Develop a monitoring system for emancipation.

Anti-discrimination

The City of Amsterdam is combatting discrimination through the following pillars.

- Strengthen education on human rights and inclusive citizenship.
- Improving inclusiveness and diversity for the staff of the Municipality of Amsterdam.
- Improve and combat discrimination in the work place.
- Prevent and combat discrimination in night life / entertainment.
- Fight aggression and violence in the public space.

Amsterdam aims to organize an international conference on tolerance in the future. A funding program is set in place for projects on human rights in general, LGBTQI+, women's rights, anti-discrimination and inclusiveness ("shared history").

Inclusion of refugees and migrants

The City of Amsterdam focusses on the rights and inclusion of "new Amsterdammers". The city facilitates participation of refugees and migrations in decision-making processes through a consultative working group and by cooperating with the European Council on Refugees and Exiles. Moreover, the municipality of Amsterdam developed the unique "Amsterdam Approach" for refugees with a residency permit. In this approach new Amsterdammers are coached intensively to become successful in the local labor market. Finally, the City of Amsterdam is active in the European Partnership for Inclusion of Refugees and Migrants, as part of the EU's Urban Agenda. Through this network Amsterdam aims to enhance cooperation between different levels of government to improve the inclusion of migrants and refugees.

Right to privacy

The City of Amsterdam is currently developing new policy named "Amsterdam, a digital city". In this policy explicit attention is given to the importance of democratic and bottom-up checks and balances on the storage and processing of personal data.

Freedom of expression

Amsterdam is one of the founding cities of the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN)². This network provides shelter for independent writers and artists. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Amsterdam hosts human rights defenders as part of the Shelter City initiative.

Freedom of assembly

The City of Amsterdam published a handbook on general rules and good practices on the facilitation of assemblies. Currently, an international English version of this handbook is being developed. Please find the Dutch version through: www.amsterdam.nl/bijkansheilig. In March 2019, the City of Amsterdam shared a written submission with the UN Committee on Civil and Political Rights and consequently participated in a General Discussion in preparation for a General Comment on Article 21 (Right of Peaceful Assembly) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in Geneva, Switzerland.

Accessibility of public spaces and public transport.

The government of Amsterdam decided in March 2016 to implement the project "Amsterdam works on accessibility". Goals on accessibility were formulated by the different vice-mayors responsible for the themes housing, diversity, health, public services, traffic, human resources, sports and public space. Because the issue has many links with different policy themes an integrated approach was taken. Later that year The Dutch senate ratified the treaty on the rights of people with disabilities in 2016. This has encouraged the City of Amsterdam to continue its efforts in the accessibility of public spaces and public transport.

The Rights of the Child

In 2015 new legislation on youth was implemented in The Netherlands. This legislature builds upon the international convention on the rights of the child. The laws set in place expanded the mandate of municipalities on general, mental and forensic health care. Amsterdam had already set in place many initiatives and projects related to children's rights. Examples are a Children's ombudsman, a helpline youngsters can call to ask advice, The Platform for Youth and an NGO providing legal advice for children. The City of Amsterdam is monitoring these initiatives continuously and is evaluating the demand for more initiatives and policy development.

² <https://www.icorn.org/city/amsterdam>