



International cooperation: a window on the world

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2020-2025 POLICY NOTE

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Preface

Ghent has had an international character for many centuries. The port of Ghent, which used to be located in the city centre, was an important factor in this cosmopolitanism. Waterside cities are often bustling places, which look out over the water and across the horizon. They are centres of commerce and crossroads of different cultures thanks to a combination of creativity, enterprise and openness.

Ghent is firmly connected to the world and the world is present in Ghent. With over 150 nationalities, Ghent is a very diverse and international city.

Our answer to the question whether a city such as Ghent should continue to internationalise is loud and clear: yes it should. Local, regional and international cooperation is no longer optional. It has become a necessity and an obvious fact.

After all, societal challenges transcend municipal and national borders. It is impossible to confine the challenges of today and tomorrow to simple categories or physical boundaries.

Within this scope, internationalisation is not an aim in itself, but a means to address local needs and societal challenges in a global context. These challenges concern housing, poverty, climate change, urban development, labour market policies, education and diversity.

International policy is the extension of Ghent's local policy. In a globalised world, cities are not islands. More than ever, we are all interconnected.

This policy note lists about 40 actions concerning our city's international cooperation and its positioning as both locally and internationally connected.

Mathias De Clercq
Mayor

Ghent, November 2020

Course of the project

The present policy note is the result of various contacts inside and outside the municipal organisation. The scope and intensity vary according to the topic covered and the context. Consultations have taken place for some aspects and still need to be concretised for other aspects. Our ambition is clear. Today as well as tomorrow, consultation with all relevant stakeholders remains a spearhead of the City of Ghent's international policy.

In its development, numerous relevant municipal departments and external partners were consulted.

After discussion by the Committee on Finance, General and Civil Affairs and after the further consultation steps, the municipal council approves the policy note.

1. Vision and priorities

1.1. Our vision: international cooperation and positioning are a necessity

The City of Ghent aims to strengthen its focus on internationalisation and further develop its international cooperation with clear goals and motives while increasing the efficiency. The City's principal motives for its international efforts are addressing local needs in an international context, positioning Ghent on the international stage, promoting the interests of Ghent and its inhabitants in the international arena, inspiring other cities, making the most of the opportunities offered internationally and complying with the applicable international obligations and treaties. The City of Ghent intends to further increase the efficiency of its international partnerships, preferably by means of networking and project development.

According to the reportⁱ "The State of European Cities 2016. Cities leading the way to a better future" by the European Commission and the United Nations, cities are ideally suited for contributing to the EU priorities jobs and growth, migration and climate action thanks to their unique characteristics (scale and wider internal context). "Cities can boost innovation, embrace people from different backgrounds or with different lifestyles, and reduce our impact on the planet." The Belgian context, where competence is fragmentary and divided between the federal, regional and local government levels, also encourages collaboration across 'minor and major' borders.ⁱⁱ

Ghent's authorities are increasingly consulted by foreign municipalities and actors as well as international institutions. We can serve as a lever for the policy areas within our competence, or as a partner for policy making or implementation.

The desirable approach is for localisation and globalisation to go hand in hand, since today's societal challenges transcend city limits. We wish to address these challenges in partnership and with clear goals and motives. Looking beyond our borders, identifying shared interests and forging partnerships are essential for providing answers and proposing solutions to challenges such as climate change, growing inequality, the management of pandemics, the impact van digitisation and the quickly evolving economy.

The effectiveness of this approach appears from the increasing demand from other European cities, government authorities such as the Flemish government or the European Commission, academics, companies, cultural players and citizens for partnerships with city. High-quality international cooperation enhances a city's image, as municipalities offer a unique advantage: they provide a platform for discussion and exchange between administrators, policy-makers, citizens and, in extension, knowledge institutions.

In the coming years, this European and international reflex will be more important than ever for Ghent and the municipal organisation, especially in light of the coronavirus pandemic, the Green Deal, Brexit, the business interests, the European budgetary negotiations, the worldwide economic and demographic evolutions and the pressure on democratic values. The international dimension is no subordinate matter in Ghent's urban policy, but a fundamental building block. The City of Ghent intends to be an active player, not a passive bystander.

Guiding principles:

The Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) are an important guiding principle for our international policy. In 2015, the United Nations decided to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Ghent is assuming its responsibility in this respect, aiming for concrete realisations by 2030, partly through its international work. Out of a total of 17 development goals, we consider SDG 11 the most important one: *“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.”* For the first time, the international community has recognised the significant role played by cities in the achievement of the other 16 SDGs.



Another crucial principle for Ghent is respect for human rights. Ghent considers human rights of paramount importance. The 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the liberation of Auschwitz in early 2020 once again reminded us of the delicate nature of human rights. They require our continuous efforts and vigilance. That is why the City of Ghent works together with the North-South Urban Advisory Board on a human rights framework to guide Ghent's policy as well as its (international) partnerships and relationships. The City of Ghent plans to set up a Human Rights Commission consisting of representatives of the North-South Urban Advisory Board and external experts to ensure compliance with this human rights framework.

Our third guiding principle is the precautionary principle: we examine each step we want to take internationally, assess the risks (e.g. housing market prices) and opportunities (e.g. job creation) and make well-informed decisions on behalf of the Ghentians.

Our fourth guiding principle is turning Ghent into a City of People. We want to focus our policy on effecting meaningful change in consultation with local residents, knowledge institutions, companies, organisations and other government authorities inside and outside Ghent.

All this ties in with our new brand policy and mission to be an open city adopting a sustainable, solidary and reciprocal approach.

1.2. Ghent's international top priorities

“Ghent is a city with an open mind to the world. We are inspired by best practices from around the world. At the same time, it is our ambition to be a source of inspiration for other cities. We are an open city where everyone feels welcome and at home.” (coalition agreement)

The world is changing at an ever faster pace. Ghent would not be Ghent if we did not see mainly opportunities, rather than threats. The Ghent coalition agreement leaves no doubt about the need for international action if we want to fulfil our urban ambitions.

As an actor in the international arena, we utilise our assets and deliver on concrete targets, without a profusion of initiatives yet with a city-wide and coherent effort for our four defined international top priorities, three of which are explicitly mentioned in the coalition agreement. The fourth one is put forward by the European Union as one of its key priorities and fits in perfectly with Ghent's ambitions.

Gent, Youth Capital in 2024

It is Ghent's ambition to become European Youth Capital in 2024. We consider this title as a lever for a strong policy benefiting children and youngsters. Together with the departments and partners involved, we are investigating how we can join forces to achieve this ambition.

Ghent, European Capital of Culture in 2030

Ghent aims to be European Capital of Culture in 2030. We have a diverse range of cultural offerings that deserves recognition. Through our contacts in Flanders, Belgium and Europe, we are making joint efforts to obtain the necessary funds and knowledge that will eventually lead to the title. This challenge is taken up in consultation with Sami Souguir, Executive Councillor for Culture.

Develop Ghent into a European technology capital

With Executive Councillor for Economy Sofie Bracke, it is Ghent's ambition to become a European technology capital. Unlike the titles of European Capital of Culture and Youth Capital, we believe this ambition has a wider scope than a European title which is limited in time. It should put Ghent on the map in terms of technology, now and in the future, enabling us to continuously innovate and diversify Ghent's economy and create additional employment. The city plays a pioneering role in the fields of health tech, digital economy, biotech and clean tech and wants to continue to focus on these spearhead sectors. In addition, Ghent is investing in innovation and innovative approaches. We are reinforcing and pooling the knowledge available in the city with a view to achieving Ghent's ambitions and priorities in a more efficient and effective manner. We do so within our own municipal organisation as well as within the Ghent ecosystem. It is no coincidence that the Flanders Technology fair was organised in Ghent.

Ghent, climate neutral by 2050

Just like the European Union, Ghent strives to become climate neutral by 2050. Headed by Executive Councillor Tine Heyse, this ambition requires a city-wide approach, the coordinated development of means and a broad range of measures in various fields such as circular economy, energy, mobility, care, education, employment, innovation and culture. The European Union's Green Deal helps us realise our ambitions.

Thanks to their inclusive and mobilising character, these 4 powerful top priorities can be concretised in a well-defined and city-wide framework, and serve as a catalyst for investments that are implemented on the ground.

These 4 top priorities also enable us to build bridges with the thematic priorities of the coalition agreement such as climate change, migration, social rights, employment, tourism, housing, education, childcare and the port. Our organisation's international capacity and tools are also put into service for these thematic or sectoral priorities, as described in chapter 1.1. (motives section) and 1.3. (tools). Annex 1 of this policy note lists the international ambitions of the coalition agreement.

With our city services, Groep Gent and our strong external partners such as North Sea Port, the cultural, educational and knowledge institutions, social organisations, companies, Ghent Economic Board and citizens, we are prepared for the external developments on the horizon.

1.3. Strategy and tools

To realise the abovementioned international top priorities, our organisation adopted an operational strategy and a set of tools that were implemented in the 2020 -2025 multi-annual planning.

In the present policy note, we limit ourselves to the objective expressly referring to the general mission of the policy area of international cooperation.

Strategic Objective 10041	We develop Ghent in collaboration with its citizens and partners.
Operational Objective 10071	An enhanced image, more space and freedom for experimentation and innovation, reinforcement of Ghent's regional and international position and ensuring that Gent can realise its ambitions as a unifying force.

The aim is to make international progress in the field of:

- Ghent's desired image: increased recognition, visibility abroad and pride among Ghentians;
- experimental and innovative strength: Ghent is 'open for business' and has the capacity and policies to deal with the transition in terms of climate, digitisation, technology, coexistence, diversity, etc.;
- positioning: Ghent is among the European leaders of the regionally and internationally relevant rankings applicable to this city;

- collaboration and networking: Ghent is an attractive, centrally located and reliable regional and international partner to cooperate with.

This is facilitated by focusing specifically on:

- file management in order to make the agenda of other government authorities and international stakeholders '(more) urban-friendly'; we keep an eye on the interests and needs of our regional partners and explore how we can make a sustainable contribution;
- acquire, process and share knowledge about urbanity with the aim to improve our practices in the field of mobility, climate, innovation, resident involvement, urban regeneration, human rights, etc. and inspire other foreign cities, government authorities and stakeholders, always taking into account the specific context or setting;
- obtain European and other external funds for launching innovative Ghent projects and initiatives. Conversely, the City of Ghent can share its knowledge and experience with other cities in the context of European projects.

We are not doing this on our own. Inside as well as outside the city of Ghent and Groep Gent, we rely on partners and forge essential coalitions. We network, negotiate and consult with other government authorities and private players, both in Belgium and abroad, to achieve our goals. The City of Ghent positions itself as a partner government. We work within the context of multi-level governance which is gaining importance on a European level.

With this strategy and these tools, Ghent's and our organisation's internationalisation continues.

By way of information, annex 2 states a few successful examples summarising what the international policy has made possible in everyday practice.

1.4. Initiatives

1. We deepen and broaden the external internationalisation of Ghent and Groep Gent within the scope of the sustainable development goals and with human rights as a guiding principle.
2. We give priority to the realisation of our 4 international top priorities (Youth Capital in 2024, Capital of Culture in 2030, a European technology capital and climate neutral by 2050), however without losing sight of the other urban priorities with an international link (e.g. mobility, migration, housing, employment and education).

2. Shared international policy agenda: our partners

2.1. Introduction

Ghent's international policy has been inspired by other government authorities as well as other partners such as civil society, citizens and companies. Conversely, Ghent's international policy has contributed to the ambitions of these government authorities and partners. Urbanity connects the different policy levels, each with their own programme. In the governmental sphere, this implies that we subscribe to the multi-level governance approach which is gaining importance in Europe. As a partner government, Ghent is explicitly assuming this role. We are positioning ourselves as cooperative partner and actively respond to the policy agendas and means of the regional, Flemish, Belgian, European and international governments. Coordination of these agendas helps us make concrete progress on the implementation of our tools, networking and the defence of our interests.

2.2. Attracting and keeping international talent

The Ghent Life Sciences Cluster will continue to grow over the coming years. Within this scope, 1,000 m² of additional laboratory space need to be created annually to continue to accommodate new and growing biotech companies. Direct employment in Ghent's southern outskirts is also increasing by approximately 50 direct jobs a year as a result of this growth. Recruitment is taking place internationally, and the families of highly qualified employees often move to Ghent as well. This results in turn in an increased demand for housing and in the growth of the international school and the expat community" (VIB, 2018).

Ghent and the region face the challenge of considerable investments in attracting and retaining international talent. These people are needed in Life Sciences, clean tech, health tech and biotech but also in other economic sectors as well as in the world of culture, care, education and sports. We have received this signal from various players from the business, academic and cultural communities. Ghent's ambition to become a European technology capital, Capital of Culture and Youth Capital will require the presence, attraction and retention of international talent as an absolute precondition. A growing number of international talents are finding their way to Ghent. They move to this city to study, obtain a doctoral degree, start up a business or find employment in the region and come into contact with other expats and locals, engage in culture and sports, enjoy themselves during the Ghent festival ...In short: they are new Ghentians who have settled here permanently or temporarily.

We prefer the term 'international talent' which is understood to mean international students and employees working in various sectors as well as vulnerable groups such as refugees. This group of people is as diverse as any other group of Ghentians.

It is required to develop a specific policy for this international talent as long as needed, and to provide in general policy as soon as possible. After all, we are talking about inhabitants who deserve customer-friendly services and sometimes have specific needs that need to be addressed in view of their specificity (e.g. linguistic diversity).

Over the past few years, the 'internationals' have increasingly set up bottom-up initiatives focusing on integration and community building. At the same time, the City of Ghent and other stakeholders have shown a growing interest in this target group. A few examples of such realisations are the start-up of the International School (primary education), the expat counter at the Civil Affairs department and the annual reception of new internationals at town hall.

Recent Ghent projects and developments have shown that the time is right for a more structural policy and ditto cooperation with regard to international talent. This ambition is being developed not just in Ghent but also in other cities in Flanders and beyond.

We are stepping up a gear during the current term. We wish to adopt a well-considered and strategy-based policy. Within this context, we are looking for answers to questions such as:

- what specific type of international talent do we wish to attract and retain?
- how can we make sure that the right conditions are in place in order attract and retain these people?
- how can we promote the integration of these new Ghentians?

Our approach has a wide focus: it concerns attracting and accommodating internationals as well as providing services and care. Particular attention is paid to how we deal with Ghentians who temporarily stayed abroad and are now returning to our city.

The economic factor is important, but so are aspects such as education, integration, leisure, community building, participation and housing. Since internationals move to Ghent anyway, it is important to steer this process in the right direction and ensure that internationals create added value for our city.

In practice, we try to do so with the help of other relevant partners. An opportunity is presented by the ERDF project concerning soft-landing of start-ups and scale-ups for which we have obtained European and Flemish funding in 2020 and 2021 and which we have set up in partnership with Ghent University and the Province of East Flanders. As a matter of fact, one of the activities will focus on surveying the needs of internationals and employers, optimising the networks and designing business cases we are testing for service optimisation.

Inside or outside this regional ERDF project, we wish to achieve the following concrete goals in Ghent:

- update and, where possible, simplify the procedures;
- develop English-language communication;
- investigate the community-building needs and expectations of internationals;
- explore the opportunities for relying on 'internationals' as ambassadors for Ghent;
- collaborate with higher education and knowledge institutions within the scope of the network of the higher-education cluster "internationalisation";
- collaborate with the Flemish government, which has made it one of its priorities;ⁱⁱⁱ
- conduct a feasibility study on the establishment of an international secondary school;
- investigate the feasibility of a single point of contact for internationals in Ghent or the wider region;
- investigate whether private parties can contribute financially or otherwise (cf. foreign examples).

2.3. A strong city in a dynamic (international) region

The combination of the growing self-awareness of the Flemish cities and the Belgian state reform have shifted the traditional regional and municipal delineations. The province of East Flanders has the highest number of voluntary municipal fusions in Flanders. Its competencies are limited to its territory, while Flanders has reorganised its regional policy (e.g. transport regions) and the development of urban regions has been put on the agenda of the Flemish Government. These are welcome developments for Ghent, as they increase its administrative efficiency and enable the city to better align with the European dynamic of the development of metropolitan cities. Ghent cannot continue its growth without a strong urban region and vice versa. An additional advantage is our proximity to Zeelandic Flanders and the province of Zeeland. If we think beyond the Belgian-Dutch border, several opportunities present themselves for Ghent and the wider region. For this reason, the development of Ghent's urban region also implies an international approach.

Investment in the North Sea Port District

The development of a common labour market and catchment area provides considerable benefits for local residents and companies on both sides of the border.”^{iv}

The importance of this cross-border dynamic should not be underestimated. In 2017, the European Commission emphasised that the growth potential in the European Union is concentrated in the border regions, as stated in the publication “Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions” (September 2017).

The current borders are still perceived as a physical, mental and legal obstacle (e.g. for cross-border work and waste transport).

The 2018 merger of the port of Ghent and its Zeelandic partner, Zeeland Seaports, in combination with smooth administrative contacts within the context of the consultation between the municipalities in the canal area resulted in the realisation that the new port’s economic growth depends on a dynamic region, and vice versa.



North Sea Port

Launched in August 2019, the cross-border project with the working title ‘North Sea Port District’ promotes cooperation in the wider North Sea Port area and explores how this cooperation can take shape.”^v

The project is driven by local and provincial governments that are active in the port and its immediate surroundings. These governments include the municipalities of Ghent, Evergem, Zelzate, Borsele, Terneuzen and Vlissingen as well as the provincial authorities of East Flanders and Zeeland. The objective is to develop a concrete agenda by the end of 2021 and take initiatives with regard to:

- accessibility and connections;
- an attractive living environment;
- housing, labour market and education;
- energy and circularity.

One problem for cross-border initiatives that should not be underestimated is the difference in legislation between the Netherlands and Belgium.

This applies, for example, to infrastructure projects (e.g. pipelines and waste transport) as well as to cross-border work (e.g. social security and taxation). Unpicking this knot is the mission of the administrative taskforce led by Ms Cathy Berx, governor of Antwerp, and Dutch former minister Piet Donner. It is described as a European pioneer project involving cross-border cooperation as to the port.

A justified concern shared by these partners is the need to better align, simplify or, if possible, optimise the existing administrative platforms (e.g. BeNeLux Integrated Territorial Cooperation) on both sides of the border.

Maintaining good, open relations with our neighbouring municipalities also fits in with this urban-regional dynamic. The City of Ghent is ready to address any challenges in the neighbouring municipalities. This is to our mutual advantage, because together we face the challenge of accommodating no fewer than 100,000 new residents in our city and the surrounding area by 2050.

It remains to be seen whether the Ghent region will also be able to position itself as a European mobility hub and thus contribute to the development of a European transport network.

The impact of Brexit: threats and opportunities

3.5 years after the referendum, the United Kingdom finally left the EU on 31 January 2020. The EU and the United Kingdom had to reach a final cooperation agreement by the end of 2020. On the basis of a study, it was estimated that Brexit will entail the loss of approximately 29,000 jobs in Flanders.^{vi} A hard (no-deal) Brexit will result in a greater loss of jobs than a soft Brexit. The objective is to limit any loss of jobs in partnership with the business sector and with other government authorities.

The impact of Brexit will transcend the economy. Collaboration in the field of higher education (Erasmus, research), exchanges with British cities, cultural programmes and the rights of British nationals residing in Ghent will all be affected by Brexit. Today, we are still not really noticing the effects of Brexit as it has not yet entered into force. Fortunately, all those involved are making the necessary preparations for what is coming. The Flemish government has made every effort to properly inform all stakeholders, and the Civil Affairs department has informed all British nationals living in Ghent. Flanders and Ghent wish to map the possible impact so as to develop appropriate measures (administrative Brexit cell and political taskforce). For Ghent, it is important to remain alert to the result of the Brexit deal (e.g. for companies and the North Sea Port). Maintaining contact with the Flemish government and the governor of the province of East Flanders is essential in that respect, as it enables us to take appropriate measures within our municipal competencies.

We are planning the installation of the Ghent Brexit Taskforce that will closely monitor the developments in close consultation with the Flemish governments and report any bottlenecks to the other levels of government in time.

Within our specific municipal competencies, we are doing the utmost to turn Brexit, whether soft or hard, into an opportunity. The Ghent Economic Board can also play an active role in this process.

Possible opportunities include attracting businesses that wish to leave the UK and opening new markets in the EU, in consultation with Flemish employers' organisation VOKA, among others.

2.4. Administrative players Flanders and Belgium

As the new Belgian government took office on 1 October 2020, it devoted an important chapter of its coalition agreement to international policy. The City of Ghent considers this cooperative international attitude as an offer it gladly accepts. We believe there is a great deal of common ground to jointly achieve our international ambitions (e.g. as to human rights, the Green Deal and the inter-federal investment plan in consultation with local authorities and SDGs). We consult with the federal government with regard to the national recovery plans imposed by the EU, international talent, circular economy and the future of Europe, among other things.

The Flemish Government's policy notes provide numerous opportunities for helping to achieve Ghent's ambitions in partnership with VLEVA, VVSG, the Flemish delegation with the Permanent Representation, etc. on an international, regional and local level. A few examples:^{vii}

Foreign policy:

- Europe is a lever for Flemish foreign policy;
- the realisation that Europe cannot exist without grassroots support;
- the European principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, responsibility and solidarity remain important;
- Agenda 2030 and the European reflex are covered by several policy notes (environment, mobility, economy ...);

Domestic governance:

- synergies between the Flemish and European urban policies must be identified;
- the Flemish government participates in urban European networks and consultative bodies;
- participation by local authorities in European and international networks will be promoted;
- the interests of Flemish cities in Europe must be defended;
- attention is paid to the urban dimension of proposals as to the new multi-annual financial plan and the new European structure and investment funds.

Culture:

- it is good to know that a formal selection procedure for one of our international top priorities (European Capital of Culture in 2030) has been announced in the Flemish policy note on culture to start in 2024 with the publication of a call for candidates by Belgium.

The Flemish Government has also formulated international ambitions in other areas that are important to Ghent such as tourism, innovation, international talent, climate, youth and economy.

However, Ghent continues to insist that the Flemish government include us more explicitly as an important partner in its foreign positioning, pay attention to the impact of EU legislative proposals on cities and contribute to raising awareness and exchanging knowledge about the European Union.

Ghent expressly wishes to participate in the debate concerning the design, implementation and monitoring of the new EU structural funds (e.g. Interreg, ERDF, ESF) and is calling for European co-financing for Ghent's local aspirations and objectives.

2.5. The European policy agenda

The European Union is an important factor in the achievement of the 4 above-mentioned top priorities and the other urban objectives. Not just because the EU has the necessary resources, but mostly because we see an opportunity for linking our priorities to those of the European Commission.

For cities such as Ghent, Europe is perhaps the principal partner in terms of international policy. This unique cooperation project has brought us peace, prosperity and security. We adopt a great deal of EU legislation at a local level, so the strategic importance of in-depth knowledge of the European policy topics and of proactive participation in the European agenda setting process should not be underestimated. With 450 million inhabitants (after Brexit), the European Union is also an important player on the world stage, a preferential trading partner, a guardian of human rights and a diplomatic global actor.

The EU is facing major challenges and is under external and internal pressure. Brexit is the first time a member state has opted to leave the union, democratic values are challenged in some countries and the power relations between world powers such as the United States, China and Russia are causing tensions in the EU.

Cross-border and global challenges such as climate change, mass migration, mobility, digitisation and social inequality require decisive and broadly supported actions. All these challenges primarily affect urban and urbanised areas.

The 2019 Future of Cities report^{viii} by the European Commission defines the urban challenges having a major impact on our future and requiring an effective approach. Affordable housing, for example, is identified as an ongoing challenge which can only be addressed by a strong EU, and its role and importance will only continue to increase.

We advocate a European Union that takes action and inspires confidence. A strong EU can only be built from the bottom up by the member states, the regions and the cities. The year 2020 and the coming years are the ideal time for Ghent to assume its responsibility.

To do so, we rely on the European Commission's annual work programme, which indicates how the European Commission will translate its policy into concrete actions. Ghent also pays particular attention to cross-border cooperation (e.g. as to EU financing). In 2019, the Flemish government provided Ghent with the opportunity to attend the presentation of the programme. This was not just an excellent opportunity for the city to create networks and enter into a dialogue with other important societal players such as companies, civil society organisations and other government authorities, it increases the city's visibility and highlights its role as a partner in the achievement of the European policy ambitions. Ghent's coalition agreement and policy notes are combined with the European Commission's work programme to develop Ghent's EU action plan.

With its input and figures, Flanders is also contributing at a regional level to the European Semester, with which the European Commission aligns the member states' financial, monetary and fiscal policies. Ghent advocates the systematic inclusion of figures from major cities, since the urban reality is not always reflected in the regional averages.

A new European Commission led by President Ursula von der Leyen took office on 1 December 2019. 61% of the 751 members of the current European Parliament are newly elected. This provides us with opportunities. Through networks and direct contacts, we wish to work together with European politicians and officials to put our city more prominently on the European map.

We focus on topics where we can make a difference and that make the difference to us. The new Commission's priority policy areas were updated in light of the Covid-19 crisis and set the framework for Ghent's international policy: a green, digital and resilient European Union. Another effect of the coronavirus crisis is that more attention will be paid to efficient healthcare.

European Green Deal = "Ghent, climate neutral city"

The von der Leyen Commission devotes a great deal of efforts to fighting climate change and with its Green Deal, it aims to make the EU climate neutral by 2050. We fully support this pioneering role in words and deeds. Ghent has a lot to offer with its food strategy, the Ghent Regional Cleantech Cluster (circular economy), its climate policy, its sustainable mobility, procurement and travel policies, and the climate ambitions of its partners (e.g. North Sea Port).

We share our expertise in these areas with the rest of Europe and the world, and further develop it in our city so as to set an example for other entities and make a difference.

To this end, we make use of the Eurocities network, Covenant of Mayors, Climate Alliance and other relevant networks and consult with members of the European Parliament, EU officials and Commissioners to achieve our goals.

An economy that works for people = "Ghent, an enterprising city for and by Ghentians"

The European Commission has an action plan to implement the European Social Pillar, which should ensure that no-one is left behind by economic developments.

Completed in 2021, the action plan focuses on skills, child guarantee^{ix}, gender equality, Roma equality, platform economy and social economy.

Just like the SDGs, the European Social Pillar is part of the European Semester (economic and budgetary policy):

- the City of Ghent is monitoring the translation of the European Semester’s recommendations into Belgian and Flemish policies;
- Ghent wishes the Flemish government to urge Belgium and the European Union to make sure that the European analyses and recommendations take the specific urban context into consideration;
- Ghent will draw attention to the local needs (e.g. affordable housing and ending homelessness) via Eurocities so that these issues are addressed in the European Semester.

A Europe fit for the digital age = “Ghent, a digital city”

With EU Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, digitisation features prominently on the European political agenda (EU digital strategy of 4 March 2020). The EU faces major challenges and is running up against its economic, financial, physical, social and ethical limits with the launch of 5-G networks and the growing impact of artificial intelligence, the platform economy, cybercrime and the widening gap in digital literacy.

Ghent keeps a finger on the pulse via the “Organisation of Agile and Smart Cities” and via the Eurocities network in which we, as chair of the ‘digitisation’ forum, weigh on the political agenda to express our principles, concerns and ambitions regarding this topic.

We are looking for opportunities to cooperate on this topic on a European level and to support our municipal organisation which is in a digital transition process as well as our strategic partners such as knowledge institutions, companies and citizens.

Promotion of our European way of life = “every Ghentian counts, irrespective of the differences”

Ghent has always complied with the Treaty on European Union which lists the EU’s core values: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights. The Ghent human rights framework to be drawn up will advise the city on this topic in its tasks, operations and actions.

A stronger Europe in the world = “international solidarity is one of Ghent’s spearheads”

As European fair trade capital, Ghent aims to raise awareness among consumers about sustainable food, ethical clothing, conflict-free IT and ethical investment. As a purchaser of sustainable and fair-trade products, the City will also take further steps towards a fair purchasing policy. Thanks to our relatively large purchase volumes, we can have an impact on the market and encourage producers to adopt fairer business practices.

The EU’s trade policy is under pressure due to the global trade war. Within this scope, the EU imposed additional custom duties on American steel and aluminium after the United States had significantly increased the custom duties on European steel and aluminium. In addition, internal free trade is under pressure from Brexit.

With regard to solidarity, Ghent wishes to contribute to the worldwide struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic. Our healthcare sector stood side by side with many other organisations, companies and citizens to look after and care for all those afflicted by the virus as best they could. The economic and social impact of this pandemic is difficult to assess, but will without a doubt be considerable. To alleviate the consequences of coronavirus crisis, Ghent has launched a recovery plan including necessary short-term measures as well as actions to revitalise the city in the longer term. In addition, we advocate strong solidarity across municipal and national borders. We are asking all levels of government, including the European Union, to take coordinated action so that every EU member state can adopt clear measures while ensuring that the indispensable traffic of goods, data and people continues to flow as smoothly as possible during this crisis and afterwards.

Moreover, we count on financial support from other government authorities to contain the social and economic impact of the crisis as much as possible. The EU recovery plan will be of vital importance in this respect.

We are also more than willing to place our expertise at the disposal of anyone wishing to make use of it, in particular European policymakers, to draw lessons from the response to this crisis and prepare for future events causing a worldwide shock.

A new push for European democracy = “Ghent is a participatory city”

Conference on the Future of Europe

“We need to review all mechanisms of democratic governance following on from the European elections. This should be done in conjunction with national institutions and with the involvement of the We are ushering in a new era of reforms.”

David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament, thus concluded the approval of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The von der Leyen Commission aims to give European citizens a greater say through this two-year project which was launched in 2020, strengthening democracy, confidence and transparency. The further development of the European project also concerns the European Parliament’s power to initiate legislation and revise the procedure for the election of the President of the Commission. Without a doubt, the people of Ghent have interesting ideas about this topic. Ghent therefore volunteers to help shape the content of this conference, e.g. via Eurocities.

The Belgian Presidency of the EU

In the first semester of 2024 (from January to June), Belgium will preside over the Council of Ministers. Ghent wishes to actively contribute to the agenda via the Flemish and Belgian levels of government. We are willing to host the ministerial conferences within the scope of this Presidency, just like we did in the past. We thus want to draw European attention to our city and further expand our network by means of contacts with Flemish, Belgian and European diplomats, officials and politicians.

The 2024 European elections

The previous European elections, which in Belgium were organised simultaneously with the regional and federal elections of 26 May 2019, were characterised by highest turnout in 20 years. It is encouraging to see that Europe excites people, and Europe excites the City of Ghent. The city council wishes to continue building bridges between citizens and European policy, while defending the unique European values of solidarity, equality and freedom which have brought peace and prosperity in Europe. This does not mean we will no longer be critical about the way the EU is functioning. Europe is not perfect and there is room for improvement in many areas. We inform our Ghent partners – citizens, companies, academics, organisations and other government authorities – about European policy and encourage them to participate. For concrete actions, please refer to the chapter on ‘Events, campaigns and conferences’. This way we initiate a dialogue in the run-up to the next European elections and help formulate broadly supported and well-considered proposals for improvement.

The EU’s Urban Agenda

“The Urban Agenda for the EU is an integrated and coordinated approach to deal with the urban dimension of EU and national policies and legislation. By focusing on concrete priority themes within dedicated Partnerships, the Urban Agenda seeks to improve the quality of life in urban areas.”

With the Pact of Amsterdam, the European Union has officially reinforced its urban policy. Multi-level administration has been put into practice thanks to this new working method. The European Commission, national authorities and cities sat down together to put forward proposals on better governance, knowledge and financing via 14 priority policy themes and partnerships. Ghent exchanged expertise in the 'jobs and skills' partnership. The EU is currently looking into how to continue these partnerships in the new term. Ghent wants to lift these partnerships to a higher level, that of implementing the recommendations. This term, Ghent will closely monitor the Urban Agenda via the Eurocities network and seize the relevant opportunities to launch concrete actions.



A milestone to be looked forward to is the update of the Leipzig Charter, which has been renewed during the German Presidency of the European Council in the second half of 2020. This policy document was adopted during the previous German Presidency in 2007 and outlines a set of common strategies and principles for sustainable urban development. The objectives defined in the Pact of Amsterdam need to be implemented in line with the Leipzig Charter as far as the sustainable development of the urban environment is concerned.^x A new aspect of this Charter is the link between attention paid to the neighbourhood level and an outlook on the world – in part via the SDGs – in the urban policy, with a strong focus on climate policy. Ghent will subscribe to this Charter at the annual meeting of the Eurocities network in November 2020.

2.6. Ghent in the rest of the world

As mentioned above, we take into account the European policy context for the Ghent top priorities and objectives. However, the world is bigger than Belgium and Europe. The interdependence is equally situated on a global scale.

The City of Ghent concentrates on the global issues that are most important to Ghent. Those issues can be linked with our Ghent community. For example, we think it is important to work together at a global level on topics that are best addressed at this level, such as climate and migration.

Our international solidarity policy is described at length in a separate policy note by Ms Tine Heyse, Executive Councillor for North-South Cooperation.

Furthermore, Ghent will actively work on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, not only within the city, but wherever possible, and will expressly state its support in international forums.

Every year, we publish a sustainability report. The objectives of the note are as follows:

- The report is primarily aimed at putting appealing sustainable Ghent projects in the spotlight;
- by involving the stakeholders in the selection of sustainable projects, we want to create leverage to improve the cooperation in the city in terms of sustainability;
- the SDGs are the guiding framework of the report. Every year, we highlight a few SDGs and provide relevant Ghent data. This way, we keep the SDGs alive in Ghent and continue to act as a pioneer;
- in addition, the report will be submitted as a 'Voluntary Local Review' to the UN. From next year, we will zoom in on 5 or 6 SDGs per report.

2.7. External stakeholders active in Ghent

For the realisation of the international top priorities and the other priorities, we are closely working together with local stakeholders. We keep our finger on the pulse and engage in an open dialogue via existing or yet to be launched consultation platforms with relevant stakeholders such as the Ghent Economic Board, the partners in the Labour Pact, Community Ghent and the consultation platform Kunstenoverleg, and we will explore how to cooperate and enhance each other at an international level.

A good example of such an intensive cooperation is the establishment of the Higher Education Cluster Internationalisation between the City of Ghent and the higher education institutions active in Ghent.

The presence of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Ghent has an additional economic, cultural and scientific value. The cooperation between the City and the Higher Education Institutions creates a lot of potential. Last term, efforts were made to optimise the cooperation. We discussed how to improve cooperation on spatial, societal and social themes and how to make better use of the HEIs' expertise for today's societal and urban issues. In order to fully use the existing potential, a new cooperation structure has been developed with a strategic-tactical level and 4 clusters that provide strategic cohesion, coordination and a helicopter view. All the existing study groups and projects have been placed under one of these 4 clusters: 'HEIs and urban issues', 'Student in Ghent', 'HEIs in Ghent' or 'HEIs and Ghent in the world'.

The cluster 'HEIs and Ghent in the world' unites the City with representatives of the international services of Ghent University, Artevelde University College, University College HOGENT and School of Arts, LUCA School of Arts, University College Odisee and Catholic University of Leuven (Ghent Technology Campus), Orpheus Institute, International Academy of Opera and the Higher Institute for Fine Arts. Via an internationalisation consultation platform, we cooperate on partnerships, international talent, international students, European subsidies, city marketing and international profiling. Our ambition is to gear the international strategies to each other, to enhance them and to examine how the City can facilitate HEIs, support them in their international ambitions and vice versa.

2.8. Initiatives

3. We are positioning ourselves as a cooperative partner and actively respond to the policy agendas and resources of the regional, Flemish, Belgian, European and international governments.
4. Within a cross-border dynamic, we invest in the development of the North Sea Port District, and as a shareholder, we support its international positioning and reputation.
5. We will develop a more structural policy and cooperation on international talent with an eye to attracting and retaining international talent in the economic, cultural, care and education sectors.
6. We actively cooperate on the ERDF project 'Soft-Landing', investigate the feasibility of a single point of contact for internationals and conduct a feasibility study on the establishment of an international secondary school.
7. We are planning the installation of the Ghent Brexit Taskforce within Groep Gent to anticipate the consequences and opportunities of Brexit.
8. We will strengthen our partnership with the EU and argue our agenda items as early as possible in the European policy cycle, taking into account the 6 priority policy area of the new European Commission.
9. We are a candidate to help shape the content of the conference on the future of Europe and to host ministerial conferences as part of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of Ministers.
10. We will actively contribute to the sustainable development goals and publish an annual SDG sustainability report on the achievements.
11. We will participate in European initiatives and campaigns like the Covenant of Mayors, the Smart Cities & Communications European Innovation Partnership and the European Mobility Week.
12. We actively support the higher education institutions in Ghent in their internationalisation on the basis of a coherent and shared agenda at the city level.

13. For the international top priorities and the other priorities, cooperation is initiated with the relevant players of, inter alia, the cultural sector, the youth sector and the economic fabric, and existing cooperation is continued.

3. European subsidies 2021-2027

3.1. Introduction

European subsidy projects offer the city opportunities (1) to experiment and innovate, (2) build up and exchange knowledge and good practices, and (3) establish international networks with other European cities as well as with European companies, knowledge institutions, NGOs and citizens via civil society organisations (quadruple helix), all of this within an international context. Such innovative projects have to be completely at the service of the implementation, optimisation and increased impact of the Ghent multi-annual plan.

3.2. The wider European framework

Through its regional policy, the EU also invests in neighbourhoods, including in Ghent. The policy aims to improve the economic growth, employment and quality of life in all EU regions and cities by means of strategic investments. Nearly one third of the total EU budget goes to regional policy. The regional policy is the most important EU investment policy and is financed by several funds, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund + (ESF+). A part of these funds is controlled by a partnership of national and regional authorities, in our case Flanders. In addition, the Interreg programmes (interregional cooperation) are financed with budgets made available by the European Regional Development Fund.



(Skills navigator is an EU project with Ghent as leader – interreg programme)

For the 2021–2027 period, European regional policy will focus on 5 main objectives:

- a more intelligent Europe by means of innovation, digitisation, economic transformation and support for small and medium-sized enterprises;
- a greener, carbon-free Europe where the Paris Agreement is implemented and which invests in energy transition, renewable energy sources and the fight against climate change;
- a more connected Europe, with a strategic transport and digital network
- a more social Europe where results are achieved with regard to the European pillar of social rights and where high-quality work, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare are supported;
- a Europe that is closer to its citizens by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.

The subsidies are organised via numerous thematic or regional programmes, each with their own emphasis on the basis of these 5 main objectives. For example, investments for regional development will be strongly aimed at objectives 1 and 2. Due to coronavirus, extra budget will be provided in the European Cohesion Policy funds, for example via the REACT-EU programme of the current 2014–2020 term. For Flanders, this will mean extra calls from ERDF Flanders and the European Social Fund. In addition, negotiations for the European budget for 2021–2027 will continue in the second half of 2020 and will then be finalised so that new calls for projects will be possible from 2021 onwards.

In addition to ERDF and ESF, there are numerous other financing instruments that are directly controlled by the EU. These subsidy programmes (e.g. Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), Horizon Europe, Life, Erasmus) and financing mechanisms (e.g. deposits and loans) offer many opportunities for the City of Ghent and our partners.

3.3. The Ghent approach

Our European subsidies policy is twofold:

- On the one hand, we make every effort to get the most out of the subsidies available.
- On the other hand, we try to influence decision-making at higher levels of government, so that the City of Ghent, the Ghent region, stakeholders, citizens and priorities benefit from the subsidy regulations as much as possible.

Making optimal use of the subsidies available

The Strategic Subsidy department of our organisation examines, within the scope of the strategic and financial multi-annual planning, how the European subsidy flows can be used best and supports other city services and stakeholders within the Groep Gent to develop partnerships and draw up, submit and efficiently implement projects within the most appropriate programme.

Furthermore, sufficient attention is paid to the maintenance and constant improvement of the use of the subsidy flows as a City, by learning lessons from running and finished projects.

In addition, we examine if and how we can improve our use of alternative funding instruments developed by Europe (e.g. EU Invest).

We will activate the European subsidies as a form of leverage funding to channel urban, supralocal and European means to important flagship projects (see annex 2), that make the difference for the future at the level of technology, culture, youth, education, innovation, economy, climate, etc., themes that match the Ghent policy objectives.

The human rights aspect is explicitly included in our own assessment in case of European projects the City has launched itself or has collaborated on. To the degree that the European instructions allow it, a human rights clause is included, by analogy with Ghent University.

Weighing on decision-making at higher levels of government

The “cohesion policy” or the ambition of the EU to eliminate territorial, social and economic differences between all EU regions as much as possible is included in the ERDF Flanders programme. Within ERDF Flanders, specific attention is paid to sustainable urban development, and an urban contact point is established within the City. The programme also offers opportunities for innovative projects.

In addition, the Flemish share in the European Social Fund (ESF), which is used to realise education and employment projects, is managed by Flanders. Furthermore, Flanders and the provinces have a say in several Interreg programmes which stimulate cross-border cooperation.

In the new term, the Urban Innovative Actions will be included in the Urban Europe Initiative, a new tool that combines all instruments for urban development into one programme for cooperation between cities. The initiative concerns innovation and capacity building in all thematic priority areas of the Urban Agenda for the EU (for example integration of migrants, housing, air quality, urban poverty and energy transition).

We strive to plead Ghent's position in the setting of territorial and substantive priorities in these programmes with the competent authorities.

However, the UK leaving the EU is a new factor in these budget discussions. The British contribution to the EU budget will disappear, at a moment that the EU wants to invest more in climate, safety and defence. Cooperation with the UK in Interreg programmes will no longer be possible.

Without any doubt, there will be budget cuts in the cohesion policy. The size of these cuts still has to be decided. We will keep our finger on the pulse through our European channels, and repeat our message about the importance of a strong cohesion budget, which is the foundation and the glue to sustain European policy and the EU. The cohesion policy is the visible result of the cooperation project. We have already argued for this in 2019, in the name of the 140 cities of the Eurocities network, in the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Policy.

We will keep insisting on it under the current and future EU Presidencies of Croatia and Germany in 2020 and via Eurocities.

In the policy note, we already briefly mentioned the Green Deal, an ambitious European programme to tackle climate change. The Green Deal Investment Plan (€ 1,000 billion) provides, among other things, a Just Transition Fund, which Flanders cannot rely on. On the other hand, there are other possibilities such as InvestEU, Innovation Fund (industrial innovation) and the Just Transition Scheme (transport and energy) which are financially more interesting, but the question remains whether or not Ghent will be able to rely on them.

Via Eurocities, Ghent is actively involved in leading the new Horizon Europe Mission on Smart&Climate Neutral Cities. Within this consultation platform, the framework for the financing of substantial research funds for the benefit of higher education and knowledge institutions is decided on.

Calls for projects for soft topics such as education, childcare, homelessness and poverty often risk receiving less attention within the EU funds, and in particular in their Flemish translation, or are strongly linked to 'work'. Ghent will urge the EU and Flanders to provide sufficient means for the 'social' themes, as during the previous EU funding period.

3.4. Initiatives

14. Together with the Ghent stakeholders, the City of Ghent will get the most out of the European subsidies and funding, pursuant to the 4 top priorities and within the scope of the strategic and financial multi-annual planning. That way, we will manage to realise innovative projects and initiatives in Ghent that best match Ghent's ambitions.

4. City diplomacy

4.1. Introduction

By city diplomacy we mean the procedures and institutions cities use to enter into relations with stakeholders at an international political level with the goal of representing and promoting their own and shared interests. The City of Ghent engages in two types of city diplomacy that strengthen each other, either by receiving an international audience (incoming movements) or by going abroad (outgoing movements). Human rights are also a crucial factor in our city diplomacy contacts. The City of Ghent works together with the North-South Urban Advisory Board on a human rights framework to guide Ghent's policy as well as its (international) partnerships and relationships. The City of Ghent plans to set up a Human Rights Commission consisting of representatives of the North-South Urban Advisory Board and external experts to ensure compliance with this human rights framework.

4.2. International networks

International networks offer the City the opportunity to establish contacts in several urban policy areas that are interesting to Ghent. These networks may be broad in content or focused on a single policy area. The network can be oriented towards file management, awareness-raising campaigns and/or exchange of knowledge and experience. A network can lead to finding new partners for European subsidy projects, which in turn can result in new networks.

The City of Ghent is a member of approximately 42 different international and European networks, and this number has been steadily rising since 1993. Membership is based on a well-informed choice and is frequently evaluated. The results of our survey of the city services (2018-2019) underline the great overall satisfaction and the importance of our participation in the international networks.

The lion's share of the networks are thematic and are open to both cities and non-cities. Examples are 'ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability' (a leading global network of more than 1,500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development); 'EUniverCities' (a European network for medium-sized cities and their universities, which shares knowledge and launches projects on the cooperation between a city and its higher education institutions); UNESCO Creative Cities Network for Music; LUCI (an international platform to help cities progress towards a more sustainable use of light) and European Network Child-Friendly Cities.

In the policy note, we further discuss two 'city-wide' urban networks in which Ghent plays an active role, namely Eurocities and the Global Parliament of Mayors.

Eurocities

The Eurocities network is one of the most important and influential instruments for the City of Ghent to enhance its position in Europe and to weigh on the EU policy. As a thorough Ghent cooperation of civil servants and politicians in Eurocities has a positive effect on the city and its citizens and users, we will continue our commitment to the network during this term.

This way, we can increase the visibility of the City of Ghent in Europe, enhance our impact on the European political agenda and fulfil the various thematic ambitions of the Ghent coalition agreement.

In addition, this is in line with the aspiration of the Flemish Government to *'continue to build the European Union from the bottom up [...]'*.

Ghent presents itself as a crucial partner to achieve this.

The Eurocities urban network focuses on sharing knowledge, file management and projects on European policy. The City of Ghent has been a member of this network since 1998 and has decided to play a more active role in it, with the chairmanship of former mayor Daniël Termont in 2017-2018, for example.

Ghent starts this term with the active participation of mayor Mathias De Clercq, who has set out the political guidelines for the network together with 11 other European elected colleagues in the Executive Board. Our three-year mandate in the Executive Board will end in 2021. We officially announce our candidature to be re-elected.

In addition, Ghent is vice-chair of the Environment Forum. It is our ambition for Ghent to take up the chair of this forum from 2020 to 2022. This could enhance our climate ambitions and help us contribute actively to the European Green Deal.

Although the chair of Ghent in the Digital Forum ends officially at the end of 2020, we keep playing an active role, so that we can take a lead on 'digitisation', which is strategically important for our society and our city today and tomorrow in line with the digital agenda and the sum of € 9 billion provided by the EU.

In light of our ambition to become European Capital of Culture by 2030, we are making the most of our role in the Eurocities Culture Forum.

The Ghent network of officials who participate as thematic experts in the policy groups is invaluable to help build the Ghent and European policy. Next to Vienna and Nantes, Ghent is the most active city in Eurocities. We will keep up the good work.

Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM)

In 2013, American political scientist Benjamin Barber launched the idea to establish a Global Parliament of Mayors in his book 'If mayors ruled the world'. He argued that cities are better suited than nations to tackle the most important global challenges because they can handle in a more pragmatic manner and 'are not bothered' by sovereignty. Unfortunately, professor Barber passed away in 2014. Nevertheless, his work was continued, and after a number of preparatory meetings attended by the City of Ghent among others, the Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM) was established in 2016.

This network addresses global challenges such as climate change, migration and urban security. The GPM involves all the relevant world players via resolutions and actions that mayors can realise both independently and in cooperation with (international) partners.



This global urban network is an effective multi-level governance tool which tackles issues we cannot handle alone as the City of Ghent, Flanders or Belgium. The global character, the access to crucial international institutions and the great commitment of influential cities/mayors are strong assets of the GPM and constitute a great addition to the intra-European agenda and European networks we participate in.

The following years we will also actively participate in the virtual GPM Platform and the yearly GPM Mayors Summit to share our knowledge and experience and to acquire new insights and scope for policymaking from other cities around the world. Furthermore, we are also trying to help shape the international agenda setting within and through the GPM board.

4.3. Visits and receptions

The City of Ghent has had an active policy on high-quality city diplomacy for several decades now and receives many foreign delegations of different nature, including short diplomatic receptions of ambassadors, heads of state or other (local) authorities, study visits of one or more days of other (local) authorities or organisations, project or network meetings of more than one day and conferences. Several city services receive international visitors. Those visits are very diverse in nature and content.

Other European cities also receive regular requests for receptions and study visits of all kinds. City diplomacy is finding acceptance as so-called soft diplomacy.

Receiving ambassadors

In order to use diplomatic receptions of ambassadors even more as a policy instrument and to make the most of the possible opportunities these receptions can create, we have opted for a more proactive approach in which we invite ambassadors whose contacts may be of interest to the City of Ghent (Groep Gent) and/or to its strategic partners on our own initiative. We want to balance the receptions we 'have to' organise (reactive) and the receptions we 'want' to organise (proactive).

In autumn 2020 or spring 2021, Ghent will host the diplomatic event of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs. Together with Ghent University and North Sea Port, we will offer an interesting programme. Topics important to Ghent will be discussed with the ambassadors and their staff. It will also be discussed with the Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs. Every year, that department organises diplomatic homecoming events for the General Representatives for the Flemish government abroad. In 2017, Ghent already acted as host city and it is our ambition to repeat that during this term.

Study visits



Visit from Utrecht to Ghent (2020).

Ghent is a popular destination for both domestic and foreign working visits. We want to keep it that way, but sometimes our capacity is stretched. That is why we will examine what internal organisational structures and procedures or alternative organisational forms (e.g. fixed thematic or area study days, outsourcing of site visits) can relieve our city services. Better agreements on the confirmation, the content, communication and logistics are on the agenda. To that end, a city-wide study group will be created to look into these issues without compromising on quality or hospitality. In addition, we will have an eye for the reciprocity of knowledge exchange: visitors will actively participate in the programme and return visits will be possible, as far as those visits add value to our own policy. Finally, we will continue to professionalise the receptions by paying particular attention to the inventory and by improving the information flow, communication and dissemination of knowledge and expertise.

4.4. Foreign missions

Over the coming years, Ghent will continue to participate in foreign outbound trade missions and other image-defining events (e.g. exhibitions, niche events and partnership events). Those events can be organised and coordinated by the Flemish or Belgian authorities or other partners (e.g. Flemish employers' organisation VOKA and North Sea Port).

In addition, we may also organise our own, individual missions. Those missions take place within the scope of our top priorities and are sometimes combined with participation in an event or a meeting of a network organisation of which Ghent is a member.

The main goal of the foreign missions is always to establish potentially interesting administrative contacts, put Ghent in the spotlight, disseminate knowledge and support participating companies, educational and knowledge institutions as well as cultural stakeholders. We will examine to what extent we can replace physical visits by virtual ones.

4.5. Consultation with Flemish MEPs and the European Commission

With regard to the specific topics Ghent is working on (e.g. cross-border cooperation, EU funding, Capital of Culture, innovation and climate), direct contact with the competent authorities and staff is still the best option. This term, we will concentrate on that even more. We need to strengthen the ties again, especially because the composition of the European Parliament and the European Commission has changed. An additional advantage for Ghent that should not be underestimated is the appointment of Mr Charles Michel, former Prime Minister of Belgium, as President of the European Council.

The consultation with the Flemish MEPs is twofold:

- at least one yearly consultation between the 13 centre cities;
- direct dialogue between Ghent and the Flemish MEPs, in particular the East Flemish members and the members that are active in the committees or consultation bodies relevant to the topics Ghent is working on.

What does the European project look like in Ghent and where do people and policy meet in Brussels? To make that tangible and to strengthen the ties between Ghent and European politicians, a visit will be organised in 2021, among other things, to introduce the Ghent administration and management team to the European institutions.

4.6. Interaction between the 13 Flemish centre cities

In 2019, the 13 Flemish centre cities explained to each other the international aspect of the coalition agreement of their Executive Committees. This way, they were able to share their aspirations and plans with each other. Over the past 2 years, this platform has gained in importance, especially thanks to the sustained participation and cooperative mentality of several Flemish administrations (VLEVA [Liaison agency Flanders-Europe], city policy and foreign policy). The knowledge that is exchanged helps us position ourselves and professionalise our international operations.

An additional platform for positioning and advocacy is the establishment of the administrative committee on Municipalities in the World within VVSG, of which the mayor of Ghent is a member.

4.7. Diplomatic cooperation with the Netherlands

Since 2011, Flanders and the Netherlands have worked on a joint agenda for strategic cooperation including for the promotion of cross-border cooperation between both countries. The Flemish and Dutch Prime Ministers usually meet once every two years at a formal summit, either in the Netherlands or in Flanders, to agree on new partnerships and to conclude treaties on as many domains as possible. There are also regular meetings between the ministers or high official representatives competent for Transport, Infrastructure and Water Management, Spatial Planning, Nature and Environment, Integration and Minority Policy, Mobility, Economic Affairs and Innovation, etc. At the end of 2016, Flanders and the Netherlands organised a joint government summit in Ghent to discuss the fusion of the ports of Ghent and Zeeland and to launch numerous cooperation projects.

We need to maintain good relationships with our Dutch colleagues for the sake of optimal cross-border cooperation with Terneuzen, among other things, and the fusion of the ports of Ghent and Zeeland in the North Sea Port.

The City of Ghent will once again volunteer to organise a Dutch-Flemish government summit in Ghent or to organise a mini-summit in preparation for such a government summit on concrete topics that are important to the City of Ghent or the North Sea Port. An additional relevant consultation channel is the Dutch – Flemish Cross-Border Cooperation. The participating parties are the provinces, ADM, VVSG (Association of Flemish Cities and Towns), Benelux, the Dutch and Flemish government. VVSG has recently agreed to involve Ghent more closely in these consultations.

4.8. Bilateral partnerships with cities

The City of Ghent has 7 official sister cities (Kanazawa in Japan, Tallinn in Estonia, Wiesbaden and Melle in Germany, Nottingham in the UK, Mohammedia in Morocco and Saint-Raphaël in France) and 5 official partner cities (Gdansk in Poland, Burgas in Bulgaria, Weihai and Taizhou in China and Liège in Belgium).



Visit to sister city Tallinn (2019)

We currently require an evaluation and update of the current bilateral partnerships with foreign cities. We wish to reorient, improve and deepen the cooperation and, most of all, invest in international networks and projects with one or several cities.

We are evolving towards a coordinated, city-wide method where the following principles are paramount:

- we make use of a decision-making framework with criteria for the assessment and periodic evaluation of bilateral partnerships;
- we make sure the cooperation takes place in close consultation with the relevant city services and stakeholders;
- we make the cooperation specific and measurable in a cooperation agreement (MoU) or declaration of intent, including a human rights clause based on the example of Ghent University;
- we take into account factors that can create tension such as security, (geo)political instability and human rights policy, with 'cooperation for change' as the basis. we take into consideration the specific, intercultural context of the partner city;
- we keep the protocol expectations to a minimum.

This method will be applied to Ghent's current bilateral partnerships, which offers new opportunities. The ongoing MoUs will be evaluated at the end of their term. We will continue to cooperate with some of them (e.g. Kanazawa), but we will slowly and formally stop our partnership with other sister cities (see annex 3). The term '*verzustering*' (twinning) will not be used anymore.

Ghent is open to potential cooperation projects or requests from outside of the EU. The abovementioned method will be applied, but due to the limited presence of international urban networks or project possibilities (e.g. via European subsidies) outside Europe, a temporary bilateral partnership with a non-European city can be opted for more easily. The criterion 'geopolitical situation' will outweigh in the cooperation assessment because of the greater administrative distance.

4.9. Initiatives

15. As set out in the policy note on International Solidarity by Tine Heyse, Executive Councillor for North-South Cooperation, a human rights framework will be developed and a human rights committee will be established to guide all our international contacts and relations.
16. We will use our city diplomacy even more effectively and proactively than before.
17. We will make use of worldwide or European networks of Ghent stakeholders.
18. We will act as host city for the diplomatic days of the FPS Foreign Affairs and we are also volunteering to host the Flemish government's homecoming event for foreign diplomats.
19. We will optimise the organisation of receptions and study visits, and will look into alternative organisational structures and forms with a city-wide study group on study visits.
20. We will participate in and organise foreign missions that contribute directly to the economic, scientific and cultural ambitions of Ghent and its stakeholders (e.g. international companies, North Sea Port and knowledge institutions)
21. We will enhance the diplomatic collaboration with the Netherlands for optimal cross-border cooperation.
22. We will reorient our bilateral cooperation with partner and sister cities, investing as much as possible in international networks and projects with one or several cities.
23. We will renew the cooperation agreement with sister city Kanazawa.
24. We will play an active part in international and European networks and constantly evaluate our presence, always keeping in mind our international top priorities and important local priorities.
25. We want to promote Ghent in Europe and maximise our role within the Eurocities city network, which meets local needs by helping prepare, implement and evaluate the European policy.
26. We will take up a more active role in the Global Parliament of Mayors network that addresses global challenges.

5. Putting Ghent in the international spotlight

5.1. Introduction

Ghent has a wide range of communication tools and wants to use them not only to put the city in the international spotlight, but also (via communication channels, events and campaigns) to involve citizens and other stakeholders more in international topics that are important to our city. Ghent is promoted in line with the city's brand policy. Within this context, a reassessed city marketing fund with an international focus is a very important tool.

5.2. A new brand policy which generates international added value

A city can be considered a brand that evokes associations, which you can and should work on. If you do not utilise your own strength to actively take responsibility on the image and the story of your city, others will do it for you.

That is why, in the period ahead, the administration will be working in a participatory way on our *raison d'être*. The basis will be formed by the already formulated brand essence ("Ghent is a free city. A city where we are proud of the fact that everyone can be rebellious. A city where we have the nerve to do our own thing together.") and Ghent's three core values (setting new standards, being open minded and connecting). Together with stakeholders, we focus on what Ghent stands for, what our shared story is and what our own strength is instead of the competitive position towards other cities or regions.

This new brand policy leads to a city with a clear position and a strategic focus. It makes sure that our voice is heard and creates a shared ambition that should lead to an appropriate activation of our stakeholders inside and outside Ghent.

Collaboration is the key to reach meaningful change for Ghent and its citizens. The brand policy will have to find wide acceptance and be supported by policymakers, administrators and other actors that constitute a city. Step by step, the brand policy will have to be converted into further strategy development, marketing and communication, but also into setting up "on brand" actions.

A successful brand policy requires a coordinated, sustained approach. In this context, focus is very important. The brand policy generates added value by enhancing Ghent's image on an international level.

5.3. Internationalising the city marketing fund

For several years now, the City of Ghent has used the city marketing fund to support wonderful cultural, knowledge, sports and innovation projects of private organisations and companies that promote Ghent.

The above-mentioned ongoing exercise on brand policy will also reassess the role and functioning of the current city marketing fund. We will evaluate the fund and adjust it if need be. We will pay particular attention to the city-wide ambitions so that the budget available can be purposefully invested, and the fund will be a crucial tool to enable third parties to collaborate on top priorities such as the wish to become Youth Capital in 2024, European Capital of Culture in 2030, a Technology Capital and a climate-neutral city by 2050.

The approach of the Van Eyck year, for which an (extra) subsidy was created with a focus on 1 theme, is an excellent example of how such a new, focused yet widely supported approach could work. Our 4 international top priorities are perfectly suited for this.

5.4. International awards

Actors from Ghent, including our own organisation, regularly win international awards.

Not only was Ghent the first Fair Trade City in Flanders, it has recently been granted the Fair and Ethical Trade Award by the European Commission.

In 2019, Ghent received the Global Climate Action Award from the United Nations for its sustainable food strategy 'Gent en Garde'.



The advantages of such awards are obvious:

- the international recognition from a wider and professional audience;
- they usually come with a considerable amount of money;
- they open doors for networking, knowledge exchange, financing and agenda setting;
- they are an encouragement to continue with the winning action and thus contribute to the achievement of our policy objectives;
- even if you did not win, entering the competition was often worth it. It is a learning moment (What can be done to improve the action? How to deal with certain types of competition?), the action remains on the local agenda and attracts further investments.

Competing for an award can have its disadvantages too. Not every international, public and commercial award entails the same quality and profit. It takes time and expertise to assess this properly. Participating requires capacity, time and resources.

We will develop a new strategic framework that enables us, the administration, to submit application files more purposefully – cf. 4 top priorities. That will offer us an answer to the question whether we can compete for the European iCapital^{nl} and the Green Capital awards at the same time, for example. If so, then the preconditions with regard to the use of means of communication are set. This strategy can also help us decide on roles, division of tasks and operational documents.

5.5. Participation via campaigns and events

We involve the inhabitants of Ghent in both our own international ambitions (e.g. bringing in the titles “European Capital of Culture” and “European Youth Capital”) and the international and European policy and the corresponding concrete occasions, like the European elections.

Over the past years, we have achieved our first successes with regard to international citizen participation, for example with the “Stem Wijs” (vote wisely) campaign, by appointing a Ghent president for Europe and the organisation of a European Citizens’ Panel on a green and social Europe. We did more than just providing information. For example, we went to the European Parliament with the results of the Citizens’ Panel. During the Mayor’s Summit organised there by Eurocities, we were the only city to bring a citizen of Ghent drawn by lot for the first time, but definitely not the last, to address mayors and European politicians.

We will continue with this active European citizen participation in the coming years and will bring ideas from the grass roots up to the highest levels, where possible. In addition, we will make sure that this participative approach inspires other institutions and authorities as well.

In practice, our goal is at least one public activity a year. We will make optimum use of opportunities (e.g. Conference on the Future of Europe, Europe Day, Vote Wisely!), work together with other actors from inside and outside Ghent (Europe Direct, higher education, European projects in various secondary schools) and will not forget to connect all of this with our international top priorities and the corresponding priority target groups (youth, start-ups, scale-ups, creative people).



In addition to the yearly events, the City of Ghent is planning a big international meeting in 2023. That will be the moment to look back on the past years and to discuss our international ambitions. Input and reflection by third parties – both experts and those interested – are essential elements to continue to steadily build our ‘international community’.

5.6. International conferences

In 2018, Ghent held 46 conferences^{xii}. However, figures don't tell the whole story. Quality is at least as important as quantity. International conferences are interesting for our tourism industry, attracting investments and stimulating knowledge exchange. We actively try to attract international conferences. We do that more purposefully by bringing the conferences into line with our 4 strategic top priorities, both international and local. A platform will be launched with the relevant parties who take on this task. Gent Congres plays an important role in this respect.

5.7. Communication

A communication strategy will be devised and implemented in order to draw international attention to the administration's achievements. We will continue to make use of existing successful external communication tools, like the electronic newsletter and the twitter account @ghentinternatio. We also have the ambition to publish more internationally relevant, interesting content on the city website, taking into account the 4 top priorities. Part of the website will have to be in English. We keep the language legislation as well as customer friendliness in mind.

We keep our finger on the pulse of new developments in the communication world and experiment with new ways of communication (e.g. storytelling) and tools (e.g. podcasts, blogs, video).



Ghent is looking into how to enhance relevant internationally-oriented communication from stakeholders and partners, such as the networks in which we operate, other government authorities, higher education institutions etc. and how those partners can in turn share the story of Ghent in an international context.

We keep an international calendar with all the international initiatives that are taken by the City of Ghent.

5.8. Initiatives

27. We strengthen the brand policy to position Ghent internationally.
28. A reassessed city marketing fund boosts international city-wide ambitions.
29. We create a new strategic framework to compete for international awards.
30. With a participation project, we increase involvement of citizens and other stakeholders in international policy. We consult the relevant urban advisory councils in due course. We aim at minimum 1 yearly public activity and organise a big International Meeting in 2023.
31. Attracting international conferences will be better aligned with the strategic top priorities, both international and local.
32. Within the communication strategy, we further invest in an appropriate cross-media approach to secure a better international position for Ghent.
33. We keep a calendar with the international initiatives, especially the incoming and outgoing administrative meetings and visits.

6. An international municipal organisation

6.1. Introduction

A high-performing international policy is founded on a management and an organisation that focus on working internationally and attracting international profiles.

6.2. Internationalising staff

More and more of our organisation's staff come into contact with the internationalisation of Ghent during their daily work. Internationalisation has permeated all areas: not only the more traditional services (e.g. front office) or the traditionally known areas like economy, culture and sports but other areas as well (e.g. communication, well-being, environment, mobility, strategy, climate, staff, housing and finances).

The workplace is no longer limited to the physical city office in Ghent. Networking and cooperation outside of your own office, both digital (e.g. Skype, teleconferences) and physical (e.g. official trips abroad), are gaining importance as part of the curriculum of contemporary staff members. That challenge increases in importance, as the EU is more and more open to the participation of city experts in their advisory councils and consultative bodies, especially regarding technical matters.

That is why our organisation needs to invest in the staff's international and intercultural skills, offer them the time and space and coach them to move to an international work-oriented context, provide them with the opportunity to participate in international exchange programmes and let them gain work experience in internationally active organisations and networks. Conversely, we open our organisation to foreign staff from other government authorities or international networks who want to gain experience in our organisation for a limited period, and who wish to explore and get to know the local context.

An elaborate internal communication strategy that enables staff to acquire and share knowledge on working internationally is an important organisational tool. To that end, we are developing MIA^{xiii} as a digital knowledge management system and community hub.

In addition, we invest in real-life meetings by organising a second international meeting for staff (the first one was organised in 2019), lunch meetings, lectures and other events. The goal is always to inspire staff internationally and to enable them to learn from each other.



Copyright Ghent (2019)

Let's not forget that "working internationally" requires an effort. As an organisation, our task is to create a climate where working, thinking and acting internationally is self-evident.

This policy is of course developed in close collaboration with the HR department and Executive Councillor Van Braeckvelt.

6.3. Supporting services that show or have international ambitions

The city-wide international direction is in the hands of the International Relationships and Networks service. The direction is goal-oriented, not optional and requires a sustained effort and capacity.

In addition to the general direction, this service works in a demand-oriented manner. The other policy areas and their respective political responsibilities and services can request tailor-made support for the realisation of their ambitions and plans.

The 2018 survey asked the PCSW and the municipal departments about their international networks and their expectations as to the International Relationships and Networks service. The services expect assistance in the following matters, in that order:

- receiving EU subsidies (30.44% of the respondents), which is the responsibility of the Strategic Subsidy department;
- offering a helicopter view of international trends, policy developments and networking (17.40%);
- acting as an intermediary, bringing parties together and establishing contacts (17.40%);
- dispatching questions and information (17.40%) to tackle challenges;

- practically following up on and supporting the hosting of meetings, if necessary with SPOC, providing assistance with filling in questionnaires and with international communication (13.04%);
- representation on international forums and at international events (4.35%).

These results were communicated to the municipal services. A tailor-made approach can be offered on this basis.

Making official trips abroad more sustainable

Ghent keeps its finger on the pulse of the world. This means that the staff and administration of the City and the PCSW of Ghent maintain contact with international partners to share knowledge, inspiration and contacts. That usually happens digitally, but a meeting in person is often still the appropriate way.

Since the staff and administrators of the City and PCSW of Ghent are important players and catalysts for the creation a better city, together with other stakeholders such as citizens, companies and academics, we create a framework at organisation level with recommendations on a more sustainable travel policy for official trips abroad of more than one day for the staff and administrators of the City of Ghent and Ghent PCSW.

From now on, we select the most sustainable mode of transport possible for official trips abroad of more than one day, on the basis of a clear selection plan. We also make a constantly changing list of the most popular destinations that mentions the mandatory or appropriate mode of transport for each destination.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all physical official trips (abroad) have been cancelled since March 2020 and have often been replaced with digital meetings. We will explore how we can optimally combine digital and physical meetings in the future, including for foreign contacts, always in line with the selection plan for sustainable travel.

6.4. Initiatives

34. We are developing an HR policy that encourages staff to work 'internationally'.
35. We upgrade the quality of the internal international city operation and use it even more strategically as a knowledge network and a consultation platform.
36. We open our organisation to foreign staff and international networks that want to acquire experience in the city.
37. Within the scope of the communication strategy, we further invest in an appropriate cross-media approach that includes communication tools such as MIA as well as numerous meetings and learning moments, which inform staff and inspire them to work internationally.
38. For the second time, we organise a quality measurement on the participation in international networks and develop appropriate improvement proposals together with the services.
39. We do the same for the expectations and quality of the several roles of the International Cooperation and Relations as well as the Strategic Subsidies departments.
40. We create a framework at organisation level with recommendations on a more sustainable travel policy for official trips abroad of more than one day for the staff and administrators of the City of Ghent and Ghent PCSW.

7. Annexes

7.1. Annex 1: Coalition agreement

From the coalition agreement: “Ghent sets out a new course and wants to be an example to other European cities”

Page 4: “We are inspired by best practices from around the world. At the same time, it is our ambition to be a source of inspiration for other cities. Not only by what we are doing, but also by how we do it: we aim for good relations with other authorities like neighbouring municipalities, the province and the Flemish and federal authorities. We consider these authorities as partners in taking up the challenges that the local authorities and the Ghentians face.”

Page 5: “The residents of Ghent are our priority. The City will be an agile and effective organisation that responds efficiently and purposefully to the constant changes of our Ghent community. We counter compartmentalisation as much as possible and stimulate cross-pollination between the different policy areas.”

Page 7: “Professional and motivated staff guarantee high-quality services. That is why we pursue a modern human resources policy that combines leadership with coaching and stimulating the staff. We cherish their talents, we offer training.”

Page 17: “The City of Ghent wants to lead the urban regional labour market policy. At the start of this term, we will conclude a Ghent labour pact with the various authorities, social partners, the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB), North Sea Port, educational institutions and the partners of “Ghent – City in Action”. The job opportunities in Zeeland are included in this strategy as well.”

Page 20: “We actively attract new (foreign) investors and companies by collaborating with FIT and bringing together scattered initiatives. In order to keep attracting international companies and researchers, we encourage a secondary division of the International School Ghent. Together with relevant partners, we highlight the strengths and enterprises of Ghent by means of targeted economic city promotion.”

Page 21: “The cross-border fusion port is an ambitious project. We establish the local stakeholder management, thus calling for attention to urban regional policy objectives in further port developments. This way, we continue to build support for the port in the city.”

Page 21: “We give the port area the status of an experimental region where labour, mobility and sustainability are addressed in a cross-border manner. Rail links and cross-border labour deserve to be a priority. To this end, we work together with companies and the European, Flemish, Belgian and Dutch authorities.”

Page 38: “The knowledge institutions can count on local authorities that create the ideal environment for organising higher education in optimum conditions. A direct dialogue with students is also ensured by paying particular attention to international students and new communication channels. Together we work on an integrated student policy. We create opportunities for students and researchers to contribute to solving the challenges we are facing as a city.”

Page 43: “Our city has an open mind to the world. The port, universities and many companies attract people from around the world. Ghent wants to be an open city where everyone feels welcome, both expats who live here temporarily and people who want to build their future in Ghent.”

Page 52: “More than ever, we want our international top athletes to be ambassadors and promoters of practising sports and exercising.”

7.2. Annex 2: examples of activities

Ghent is a member of 42 formal international and European networks:

- In 2017-2018, Ghent was president of Eurocities, the European Network of Cities, the Culture Forum included. Within this network, Ghent chaired the forum on digitisation in cities in 2019-2020.
- Ghent was one of the first Belgian cities that signed the EU covenant of mayors for climate.

Campaigns, events and citizens' panels;

- International meetings for city staff (2019);
- Citizens' Panel in 2019 (Ghent was one of the 20 cities selected by the EU);
- "Stem Wijs" (vote wisely) campaign in 2018; part of the "Cities4Europe, Europe4citizens campaign" in 2017-2019;
- Visit with 50 Ghentians to the "EU Open Days" in 2019;

Working visits and receptions;

- Dutch cities network G40, Stockholm region, Gdansk, Kanazawa;
- Dutch-Flemish government summit (2016) and diplomatic homecoming events of the General Representatives of the Flemish Government abroad (2017);
- Visit of EU commissioners Malmström (2019) and Bulc (2018);
- Participation in foreign trade missions (e.g. to the United States, China and Israel);
- Homecoming events for Belgian ambassadors abroad (autumn 2020, TBC);
- 12 international delegations visited the childcare department;

EU projects;

- 3 Urban Innovative Actions (TMAas, Iccarus and CoGhent) within the scope of the EU Urban Agenda for a total amount of € 3.5 million (2017), € 4.8 million (2018) and € 4.7 million (2020) respectively;
- Interreg and Urbact projects: URBCON (2018), PlastiCity (2019), ROOF (2019), EDUCAS (2019), Tracks (2019), PACE (2020), SpeedYouUp (2020), etc.
- ERDF projects: e.g. Soft Landing Flanders project and financing of urban renewal (Dampoort Tunnel, Maria Gorretti Church, Matadi Bridge etc.)
- Partner in the EU partnership 'jobs and skills' (2018-2020);

Communication and marketing.

- Financial support, via the city marketing fund, of activities with international resonance (including a separate subsidy for Van Eyck events in 2019)
- The international promotion of the Van Eyck year;
- A 6-monthly international E-newsletter and almost daily tweets on the twitter account @ghentinternatio;
- Regular posts on the Mia Group 'Ghent International' addressed to the employees
- The 'sustainable procurement strategy' is one of the most successful policies described in the OECD report Urban Policy Reviews, A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals (2020);

Attracting and retaining international talent

- Yearly reception of new expats at the town hall (from 2016);
- Cooperation with bottom-up initiatives like the Expats Community Ghent study group to organise several public activities a year;
- Preparation of ERDF project with the Province and Ghent University about soft-landing with a work package on expats (2019);

International awards

- 2nd place in the Green Capital competition, edition of 2020 (winner was Lisbon);
- UN award for the Ghent SDG communication campaign (2018);
- UN Global Climate Action Award (2019) for the Ghent food strategy (2019);

Representation on international forums and at international conferences;

- Guest speaker at the Mayors Summit in March 2019;
- Panellist at the Digital Assembly in Bucharest during Romania's EU presidency (June 2019);

- Conversation on 17 March 2020 with Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager;

International statements co-signed by Ghent

- SDG Bilbao declaration (ICLEI) – 2018;
- The Shift, a UN initiative that recognises housing as a human right (2018);
- Housing pledge of Eurocities (2019);
- Basel Appeal on Disarmament and Sustainable Security (2019);

Advocacy

- EU files raised: e.g. Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), 2022-2027 cohesion policy, port development (L204 railway), Brexit, social dumping.

7.3. Annex 3: Bilateral partnerships

Application of the new criteria for the current partner and sister cities:

- Tallinn, Wiesbaden and Nottingham: formally annul the partnership and if appropriate reorient towards cooperation within networks and subsidy projects.
- Melle (DE) and Mohammedia: formally annul partnership.
- Saint-Raphaël: partnership has been annulled in 2018 at the request of the Twinning Committee of Saint-Raphaël.
- Kanazawa: renew MoU according to the new guidelines at the end of the current MoU.
- Burgas and Liège: formally terminate MoU. If appropriate, reorient the cooperation towards a cooperation within networks and subsidy projects.
- Gdansk: evaluate MoU at the end of the term. If appropriate, reorient the cooperation towards a cooperation within networks and subsidy projects.
- Weihai: MoU ended in 2019 and will not be renewed.
- Taizhou: On 4 June 2018, Ghent signed a “Letter of intent about the preparation of a partnership relation” with Taizhou. The goal of this Declaration of Intent was to draw up a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two cities in 2019. That was not formalised because no common theme for cooperation was found.

7.4. Annex 4: Abbreviations

BITC	BeNeLux Integrated Territorial
ERDF	CooperationEuropean Regional Development
ESF	Fund European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FPS	Federal Public Service Global
GPM	Parliament of Mayors Higher
HEI	Education Institutions
IT	Information Technology Interregional
Interreg	Cooperation
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OASC	Open & Agile Smart Cities
PCSW	Public Centre for Social Welfare
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Networks
VIB	Flemish Institute for Biotechnology
UK	United Kingdom
VLEVA	Liaison Agency Flanders-Europe
VNG	Association of Dutch Municipalities
UN	United Nations
VOKA	Flemish employers' organisation
VVSG	Association of Flemish Cities and Towns

7.5. Annex 5: External sources

ⁱⁱ European Commission, United Nations, (2016). The State of European Cities 2016. Cities leading the way to a better future: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/cities-report/state_eu_cities2016_en.pdf

ⁱⁱSource: Antalovsky, E., Dangschat, J.S., Parkinson, M. (2005). Cities in Europe – Europe in the Cities: Final report. NODE Research Austria.

ⁱⁱⁱFlemish coalition agreement, page 53 (2019-2024)

^{iv}Atlas van Kansen voor de Euroregio Scheldemond', Utrecht, 2013.

^vConcept werkagenda North Sea Port District, Architecture Workroom Brussels, 2019

^{vi}Regional, Provincial and Municipality-Level Analysis of the Impact of Brexit on Belgium, KULeuven, Professor Hylke Vandenbussche, November 2019.

^{vii} Evaluation by VVSG (Association of Flemish Cities and Towns) of the international perspective of Flemish policy notes (2019)

^{viii}<https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/the-future-of-cities>

^{ix}The European Child Guarantee is meant to address child poverty in Europe and to improve the children's well-being. With this guarantee, inspired by the European Youth Guarantee, the EU wants to help member states reduce child poverty through an integrated approach and improve the well-being of all the children in the Union. The Child Guarantee is included for the first time in the long-term EU budget 2021-2027.

^x<https://europadecentraal.nl>

^{xi}Ghent applied to become iCapital and received the good news in August 2020 that it is on the shortlist, together with 11 other cities. The winner was announced by the EU at the end of September 2020. Unfortunately, Ghent did not win. Leuven is the winner, congratulations.

^{xii} <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2019/05/23/aantal-congressen-in-vlaanderen-stijgt-met...>

^{xiii} MIA is the name of the intranet of the City of Ghent.