



DiGIN

INSPIRING PRACTICE

Strategic Framework for a Diverse and Inclusive Human Resources policy

by the Municipality of Ghent

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Inspiring practice: Strategic Framework for a Diverse and Inclusive Human Resources policy



The municipality of Ghent, Belgium, is advancing diversity and inclusion through targeted internal policies. With its commitment to inclusive employment practices, Ghent is working to reflect the diversity of its population within its administration. In 2020, the municipality adopted the “Strategic Framework for a Diverse and Inclusive HR-policy 2021–2025” setting out its vision and priorities on DEI in the workplace.

Objective



To support employees who share personal characteristics through dedicated peer networks. These groups aim to foster a stronger sense of belonging, reduce isolation and create informal spaces of solidarity within the organisation.

Impact



The framework outlines Ghent’s current DEI priorities, focusing on people with disabilities, the LGBTQIA+ community, and individuals of foreign origin. It includes 85 actions to be considered or implemented across departments. It also offers support to teams and managers. A revised version is planned for 2025 to further consolidate and expand these efforts.

Implementation steps

Phase 1: Strategic vision and framework

The municipality adopted the overarching framework in 2020, identifying key priority groups and proposing targeted actions. This created a common language and ambition across departments.

Phase 2: Departmental ownership and action plans

Each municipal department was asked to develop its own DEI Action Plan based on the framework. Some developed comprehensive strategies, while others made more limited progress. Actions were tailored to the department's function.

Phase 3: Inclusive policy innovation

Examples of departmental action include:

- The Department of Health & Care introduced an anti-discrimination statement co-signed by staff and residents in care facilities.
- The Department of Welfare revised the function description for social workers to promote diversity and inclusivity in recruitment.

Phase 4: Monitoring and review

Though representation targets were set (e.g. 30% of new hires from a foreign origin, 2% with disabilities), broader inclusion metrics remain under development. A follow-up strategic framework is planned for 2025, aiming to improve concrete goal setting and inclusiveness indicators.

Lessons learned & challenges



DOs

Provide practical support and recognition

Offer a dedicated budget, regular access to space and clear Human Resources recognition of the networks as part of the internal inclusion strategy. Even small forms of institutional support make a big difference in visibility and legitimacy.

Respect autonomy

Let networks be shaped by their members. These groups function best when they reflect the needs and rhythm of the people they serve. HR can be a facilitator not a driver.

Normalise their presence

Integrate visibility of the networks into internal communications and DEI materials. This helps increase understanding among all staff and makes the networks more approachable for new employees.

Foster trust and confidentiality

Ensure that participants feel safe joining without fear of judgement, retaliation, or tokenisation. Set clear expectations for confidentiality in meetings and communication.

Build bridges, not silos

Encourage soft collaboration between different employee networks and departments when relevant, without forcing alignment. This promotes intersectional awareness and shared learning.

DON'Ts

Don't instrumentalise the networks

Avoid using the networks as a PR tool or placing the burden of solving organisational DEI issues solely on their members. These groups are not a substitute for institutional responsibility.

Don't minimise time and effort required

Two hours per month of work exemption may not be enough. Explore options for additional support for coordination, especially when networks take on consultative roles.

Don't allow scepticism to undermine purpose

Be prepared for internal resistance or misunderstanding some staff may question the relevance of identity-based groups. Tackle this by proactively communicating the networks' value for wellbeing, connection and inclusive culture.

Don't assume one-size-fits-all

Each network will have different dynamics, needs and levels of engagement. Avoid imposing a uniform structure or performance expectations across all groups.

How can this replicated by others?

Municipalities can adapt this approach by developing a central DEI vision and enabling each department to create tailored action plans. Success depends on balance: strong central coordination with localised ownership and flexibility.

Contact us

Reach out to the D&I office (HR Department)

✉ diversiteitsbeleid@stad.gent

📄 [Strategic Framework 2021–2025 \(PDF\)](#).

DiGiN Consortium Partners:



Inspiring practice

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Authors: Naomi Mike, Lanckriet Aarnout
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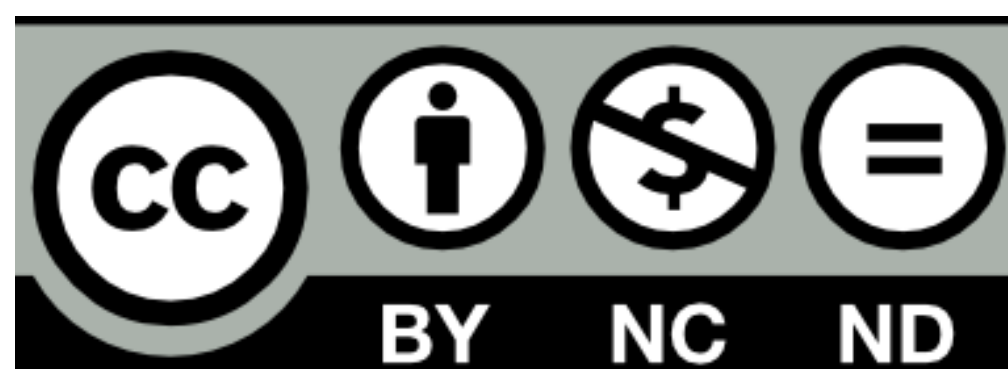
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