

FORUM OF MAYORS 2020

6/10/2020 – GENEVA

Talking points

Athens is glad to sign the Geneva Declaration of Mayors, as we have already started implementing the following Sustainable Development Goals:

Sustainable Development Goals:

1. Sustainability and climate action

The Great Walk of Athens: This is a characteristic example of our on-going projects that promote an inclusive environment through re-imagining public space. This is a complete plan for the revival and integration of the historic centre with new walking paths and cycling zones that will connect historic neighbourhoods of Athens with its world-class archaeological treasures, inviting for the first time the Athenians and visitors as well to join the conversation about this project. Cars are being limited to less space, thus allowing the realization of sustainable mobility.

The expansion of green space will offer the city more shade and cool places in order to deal with the increasing number of extreme heat waves and the phenomenon of “urban heat islands”.

The project is presently at a pilot phase introducing simple changes to the streets, allowing residents and visitors to test, experiment, and respond before any traffic arrangements and changes become permanent. Since the project was announced in May 2020, we have had the opportunity to adapt the plans to the living city and to establish new ways to consult with our residents about major decisions.

The City of Athens is further developing a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan that adopts best practices from around the world which will help us become more resilient and competitive on a global scale.

The City of Athens is supporting the common efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions by joining relevant international networks (e.g. C40) and initiatives (e.g. the Global Covenant of Mayors and the European Green Deal).

- We are encouraging **electric vehicle** use by incorporating charging points throughout the city.
- Our plans also call for doing a better job **managing our city’s green areas** and ensuring the vitality of our “urban lungs.” We have increased spending on the management of existing trees and gardens, and we’re also designing pocket parks especially in "low green" areas. We’re addressing soil erosion and water penetration to help with the maintenance of these park spaces such as on Lycabettus Hill, which will be restored as a symbol of culture and nature that is visible from almost everywhere in Athens. The same applies for the Filopappou Hill and the National Garden, where new projects are already taking place.
- We’re repairing playground equipment and removing **graffiti** throughout the city so that residents can enjoy our parks and experience the value of clean air.

- **Schoolyards** are becoming greener as we are moving ahead. Green infrastructure is strengthened by innovative nature based solutions.
- As a municipality, our expertise is our **streets**. Taking advantage of the fact that during the confinement, cars and people were absent from our streets, the City of Athens has been hard at work **cleaning and disinfecting** everywhere. To give you only one example, we replaced 7000 trash bins.
- The budget for sidewalk reconstruction has been increased , with special focus on making them more accessible. The resurfacing is being done using “**cool materials**” **designed to prevent heat retention** – a key cause of poor air quality.
- We continue to **trust the experts** because during the outburst of the pandemic we trusted them with very positive outcomes.

Presently we are concluding the planning of our long-term resilience strategy that will be able to successfully adapt, mitigate and respond to the effects of climate change, natural hazards and hygiene challenges. This strategy is fundamentally based on attracting talent (the most valuable asset), investments and tourism. This is a long-term project, however the current administration is setting the foundations that will enable its successful conclusion in the near future. The role of the citizens’ engagement (participation in the planning) and the participation of entrepreneurship (PPP) is expected to be of crucial importance.

2. No poverty & zero hunger

For us, here in the City of Athens, “Nobody should be left behind” is not just a catchy slogan but an everyday goal to pursuit and achieve; after all, our work is based on the principle that authority is vested in the people and should be exercised to its benefit in the direction of a more sustainable, safer, greener, and inclusive city.

Just a few days the City of Athens has reaffirmed its commitment to the European Pillar of Social Rights by signing a new pledge concerning the 19th principle about housing and assistance to the homeless.

In face of the COVID-19 pandemic, social measures have been taken for the most sensitive and vulnerable groups, such as homeless people, the elderly, people with underlying diseases and drug addicts, through the operation of existing social structures (e.g. municipal social grocery and social pharmacy) and the establishment of new ones (e.g. Multipurpose Homeless Centre), as well as relevant programs (e.g. Help at Home Plus, soup kitchens).

3. Good health and well-being

Securing cleanliness and sanitation of the city as well as broad application of rapid tests either in permanent structures (e.g. municipal clinics) or in the streets (street-work).

Enhancement of the medical care, psychological support and consulting of the citizens in need during this stressful period, through relevant social services and municipal hotlines.

Creation of a New Reception Centre for homeless drug addicts.

All municipal employees have been provided with personal protective equipment, such as masks, gloves, special uniforms and goggles.

All necessary measures have been taken so that the 380 schools within the limits of the City of Athens are clean and hygienically safe. Under the responsibility of the Vice – Mayor for Health and Education, Mr. Manolis Kalampokas, there are antiseptics, disinfectants, soap and chlorine in perfectly adequate quantities.

Introduction of digital municipal services and certificates (e-services and e-certificates), recognising technology as a crucial factor for the improvement of the quality of life of the citizens.

We are also creating new dedicated **parking spaces for disabled** persons and working to make sure that people who need those spaces will find them available without searching or waiting. When we treat accessibility concerns **in the right way, in the human way.**

4. Gender Equality

The “Shelter for Women Victims of Violence & their children” operates on 24/7 basis, 365 days a year. Specialised staff (social worker, psychologist, pedagogue) provides safe hospitality, food, socio-psychological support and care for our ladies guests and their children. The shelter aims to support women (regardless of the age, religion or nationality, who have been victims of any form of violence: physical, psychological, sexual or economic), empower and reintegrate them into community life and the labour market.

The programme “All women safe” by the City of Athens in cooperation with Center Diotima offers - free of charge - legal help (legal consulting, assistance in filing a lawsuit, court representation) and psychosocial support (psychological first aid, information and linking with services) by specialised lawyers and a psychologist/social worker. A new support hotline offers to women the possibility to communicate with specialised scientific personnel from the Department of Equality and Anti-Discrimination Policies of the City of Athens.

5. Decent work and economic growth

Exceptional economic relief measures have been taken for citizens and enterprises in Athens affected by this unprecedented health crisis through suspension or exemption from payment of municipal fees.

6. Innovation

We aim at promoting entrepreneurship, skills training, and projects targeted for the integration of vulnerable groups in the direction of a more resilient economy.

Innovathens

The city’s first business incubator provides equipped space and digital tools to spark collaboration, create sustainable businesses, and promote diversification of the city’s economy.

The Athens Digital Lab

Accelerating the city’s digital transformation by supporting development of tech ideas that advance a new model of municipal governance and civic participation.

Invest in Athens

The focal point for the promotion and attraction of investments offering a mix of incentives, advice, and support services.

7. Life on land

Our new website www.animalscityofathens.gr aims at the protection of the four-legged friends of our city that must receive the care and attention they deserve as a proof of humanity and civilization from our side. The citizens can now being informed about the actions of our competent municipal department, search all available pets seeking a hospitable home, register their adopted pet in the municipal data base, report a missing pet or incidents of abuse.

8. Peace, justice and strong institutions

Last week we here in the City of Athens had the honour to organise (virtually this year) the 2020 Athens Democracy Forum, in cooperation with the & Culture Foundation, The New York Times, the United Nations Democracy Fund, the Kofi Annan Foundation, the newspaper “Kathimerini” and under the patronage of Her Excellency the President of the Hellenic Republic.

The aim of the Athens Democracy Forum is to serve as the North Star on which democracy and society can reorient themselves. It seeks to make democracy work by empowering society through better governance and citizen engagement. The Foundation aims to be the leading global platform for dialogue and solution-oriented activities concerning 1) the role of culture, as an expression of freedom and individuality, in allowing a society and democracy to flourish and 2) the evolution of democracy, civil society and the arts and media. The Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the Mayor of Athens, Mr. Konstantinos Bakoyannis, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mrs Marija Pejčinović Burić, the historian and bestselling author, Prof. Yuval Noah Harari, the President of Microsoft, Mr Brad Smith, and many other personalities participated in this year’s event.

Furthermore, the City of Athens is an ardent supporter of the new initiative “European Capital of Democracy”, which was launched a few days ago, and every year will recognise one city for its outstanding work empowering its citizens and developing inclusive services; after all, democracy was born in the cities and the cities are the heart of our democracies since the ancient times when Athens introduced this political institution in the world.

Thank you!