

A photograph of two women embracing warmly in front of a cathedral. The woman on the left is Black with her hair in a headwrap, wearing a dark grey coat. The woman on the right is white with long brown hair, wearing a tan coat and a blue patterned scarf. In the background, the stone arches of a cathedral are visible, and a string of blue and white Christmas lights hangs in the upper left corner.

LIVING TOGETHER IN DIVERSITY

AMAZINGLY DIVERSE CITY

Mechelen is an amazingly diverse city with more than 87,000 unique people. Young and old, rich and poor, straight and gay, with and without disabilities, highly educated and unskilled, and everything in between. We have roots in more than 130 countries, we have different philosophical beliefs, different cultural traditions, and different tastes and preferences. But what we all have in common is that Mechelen is our home.

Mechelen has come a long way. Today, it is widely perceived that we are a city that connects people, even in times of polarisation. We have achieved this by making our city a safe place where everyone can be themselves. But also by encouraging everyone to take positive initiatives for their street and neighbourhood. Or by drawing the attention of our organisations to a diverse and inclusive policy.

Living with each other instead of just next to each other is a shared responsibility. It also remains an important policy objective for the coming years.





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Colophon

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*Mechelen resident
Maarten Poels was
ambassador of
the National Games.*

1. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

The number of parasports in our city continues to increase. In 2023, there were 16 sports clubs in Mechelen with a parasports department, some of which also organise parasport camps during the holidays. In some sports clubs, athletes and para-athletes also train and exercise together. That's the direction we want to go in as a city.

The city of Mechelen has been investing in infrastructure for two decades to strengthen inclusion.

The fact that the National Games of the Special Olympics, the games for people with disabilities, took place in Mechelen in 2023, was the icing on the cake. And a motivation to put an even greater focus on accessible sports clubs and inclusive sports in the future.

The National Games were a huge celebration. Mechelen residents with and without disabilities committed themselves to providing the 3800 athletes with a heart-warming four-day event.

In Mechelen, every person counts. The fact that children are still born into poverty in our city is an absolute injustice. That's why we design our policy to give everyone equal opportunities: in the area of housing, education, work, leisure, health ...



12WORK: WORKING WITHOUT A RESUMÉ

12work (reads as 'want to work') gives everyone a fair chance to work. We put experience and school diplomas aside for a moment. For employers, it is a candidate's motivation that matters most. Anyone who wants to work is welcome.



found work in the first year and a half.

HELP FROM A MENTOR

Young people with a migration background find a job more easily if they get help from a mentor. For a few years now, the non-profit association DUO for a JOB has been connecting them with motivated people over the age of 50.



found a job or training within the year.

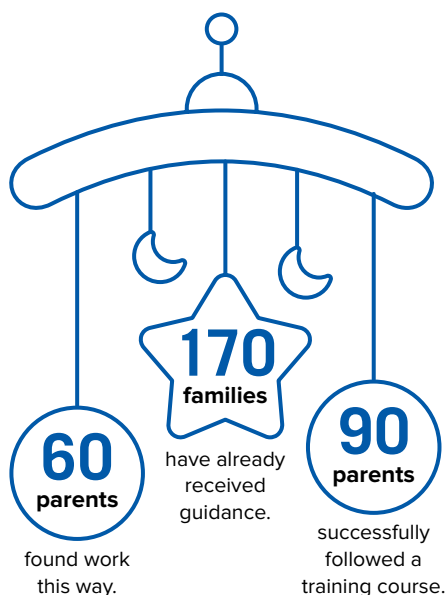


OPKOMST GIVES FAMILIES A SMOOTH START

Midwife Leen: 'At OPkomst (baby on the way), prospective and new parents can come to us with their questions and concerns. Among other things, we provide practical solutions or pregnancy follow-up, and address problems with family income or housing. We customise our help.'

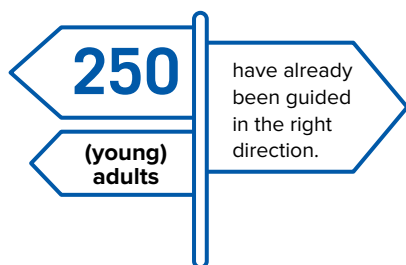
CHILDCARE AND GETTING BACK TO WORK

Parenting is a challenge for those who are studying, working or searching for work. Especially for families who have difficulty getting onto the labour market and who have little or no access to childcare. They can contact 38 Volt. Both for flexible childcare and for professional guidance for finding a job, training or voluntary work.



A HELPING HAND FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO STUDY (AGAIN)

Young adults who want to study (again) have been able to do so since 2021 at the Leerwinkel (learning shop). There they receive advice and information about courses, or careers guidance. After an introductory meeting, the employees look for a solution tailored to everyone's situation.



GET RID OF FOOD WASTE WITH FOODSAVERS

Every Belgian throws away an average of 345 kg of food every year. At the same time, there are some people who don't have the money to buy enough food. Foodsavers is doing something about that.

Foodsavers collects 8 tons of food surpluses every week from the auction house, supermarkets and local retailers. These surpluses go to social organisations that offer food to vulnerable target groups. At the same time, Foodsavers gives job opportunities to people who have difficulties finding work.



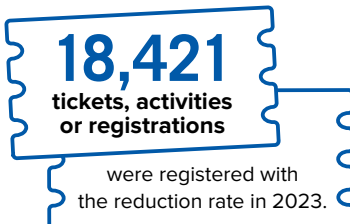


INTEGRATING TOGETHER

People who come from another country and don't speak our language (well) often feel alone. For ten years, the Integrating Together project has been linking new people from Mechelen to a buddy who knows Mechelen well. They go on fun outings together.

LEISURE TIME FOR EVERYONE

The UiTPAS is a loyalty card for sports, culture and leisure. The points you save with the 100 Mechelen UiTPAS partners can be exchanged for all kinds of discounts and benefits. But not all Mechelen residents have money left over at the end of the month for leisure activities. The UiTPAS with reduction rate is designed for them. This means that they only pay 20% of the basic price at the many UiTPAS partners.





DIGITAL INCLUSION

The digital world is evolving at lightning speed. To prevent digital exclusion, the City of Mechelen is developing the Digibank Mechelen project. Mechelen residents can go to one of the 18 digibank points for all their major and minor digital questions.

In the digibank workshop, Mechelen residents can also borrow a laptop, tablet or smartphone very cheaply.



EMERGENCY SHELTER AND PLENTY OF WARMTH

In 2019, we turned a former hospital building into a temporary home for 180 refugees. In February 2022 we had to step up our efforts when Russia invaded Ukraine. With a few quick adjustments, we were able to take care of Ukrainians in our emergency village from May onwards. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders takes care of the day-to-day business. In addition to shelter and food, the refugees receive support and language lessons.



accommodate 400
to 500 Ukrainians.
In total, we are able
to house more than
1,000 in our city.



A good neighbour is better than a distant friend. Having good contact with the people around you makes life so much easier and more pleasant. We like to help Mechelen residents to do this.

2. WITH EACH OTHER, NOT NEXT TO EACH OTHER



SUMMER OPPORTUNITY FOR TALENT

Every year, we organise the ten-day-long 'Talent krijgt Zomerkans' (summer opportunity for talent) summer school. This free initiative gives children and young people in their school years a boost, nurtures their talents and provides them with enjoyable experiences. They are free to choose whether they want to participate. This way, they can start the new school year with a good feeling and bags of confidence.



GO FOR A RUN TOGETHER

During the summer months, non-native speakers and Dutch speakers of Mechelen can go for a run in the park together. This is a way for newcomers to practise their Dutch in a relaxed, informal atmosphere. But it is also an enriching opportunity for the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Mechelen. You meet great people, you contribute to our city in a fun way and you learn a lot about other cultures.





YOUTH WORK FOR EVERYONE

Not every family finds it easy to access the youth movement. To change this, our youth service launched 'Jeugdwerk voor Alleman' (Youth Work for Everyone) together with the 23 youth organisations in Mechelen. The aim: to show that they are open to everyone and to share tips and inspiring stories through an accessible platform.

'The youth organisation has really helped me to learn the language and to make new friends,' says Mesbah, who has been living in Belgium for seven years now.



In Mechelen, we provide extra opportunities for newcomers and locals to meet one another.



PLEINMAKERS

In Mechelen, residents are not only involved in making policy, but also roll up their sleeves to make the place where they live pleasant. Pleinmakers are the people that help bring neighbours closer together.

Imad is a Pleinmaker in the Mahatma Gandhi social housing district.

'During neighbourhood days, we brought together people who had lived here for years, but had never talked to each other. I also notice that people regularly chat with each other in the street now. And they also want to do something for the neighbourhood themselves. We're here for each other.'



OVERKOP

Since 2017, all young people between the ages of 12 and 25, regardless of their background, sexual orientation or origin, have been able to go to the OverKop (topsy turvy) house, either to get something off their chest or just to be themselves.



'T MONUMENT

Walk-in centre 't moNument is a meeting place and information point for people with dementia and their caregivers. Nicole (60) has dementia. Together with her husband Ronny (57), she comes here every week.

Nicole: 'There is always something to do here. For example, we take

a walk, visit an exhibition, go cycling or sing together. It helps to be with people who understand what you're going through.'

Ronny: 'In the beginning, I googled a lot. Which made me miserable. Now I don't put my questions to Google, but in 't moNument, and that brings me peace of mind.'