



# Overview of social measures in cities to respond to COVID-19 crisis

Policy note

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This paper gives an overview of actions taken by cities to put in place emergency measures and adapt social services to the COVID-19 crisis, as reported by the cities themselves and published by EURO CITIES on the web platform [www.covidnews.eurocities.eu](http://www.covidnews.eurocities.eu).

To date, about 60 cities have submitted live updates on various emergency measures to support vulnerable groups during this coronavirus crisis, including in the following areas:

- Support to the elderly (hotline, active reach out, delivery of basic material assistance)
- Support to the homeless (increasing shelter capacities, medical assistance)
- Food supply (to families and children in need, homeless, central distribution)
- Health care (hotline, increasing care capacities, drive-thru test centres)
- Prevention of domestic violence (prevention campaigns, extension of existing services)
- Education (promoting digitalisation, providing childcare, tackling educational inequality)
- Support to migrants (increasing shelter capacities, providing information)
- Extending the access to social services and benefits



## Supporting the elderly

During the COVID-19 crisis, the protection of the elderly became a priority for cities. Many cities established hotlines to remain in contact with their elderly populations, while others actively reach out to seniors via phone or food delivery.

### Contact hotlines

Many cities (Barcelona, Bordeaux, Bristol, Cardiff, Genova, Madrid, Milan, Poznan, Tirana, Cluj-Napoca, Leeds, Istanbul) provide hotlines for elderly in case they need information or assistance. In some cities, hotlines also serve to coordinate food delivery or connect seniors to volunteers to help them with shopping for groceries.

**Madrid** launched a hotline connecting the elderly with volunteers, as well as a service providing recommendations concerning physical activities and health conditions during confinement.

## Active reach out

Some cities (Bratislava, Vilnius, Glasgow, Fuenlabrada) provide digital devices for seniors to remain in contact with friends and family during isolation. Other cities (Milan, Helsinki, Nice, Barcelona) actively contact with their elderly population to identify those in need of particular assistance.

**Helsinki:** Via the 'Helsinki Helpline' campaign, volunteers call all 27,000 residents above the age of 80 to propose practical help.

**Nice:** City employees volunteer to contact 35,000 seniors and identify those in precarious situations.

## Delivery of basic material assistance

During isolation, it has become a priority for many cities (Zaragoza, Pendik, Nice, Bordeaux, Nicosia, Munich, Bologna, Milan Osmangazi, Pau, Toulouse, Ljubljana, Harleem, Angers) to provide home delivery of basic necessities to seniors. Cities provide this service by coordinating volunteers and municipal staff.

**Pendik:** The municipal police go shopping for people aged 65 and older who must stay in isolation at home due to the coronavirus.

**Bologna:** Elderly, disabled and other people who need assistance get home delivery of groceries and medicines.



## Supporting the homeless

Another priority for cities is to provide basic needs to homeless people. Many cities increased their shelter capacities and extended the provision of medical assistance and protective equipment to homeless people.

### Increasing shelter capacities

Many cities (Genova, Gijon, Berlin, Leipzig, Cardiff, Nice, Zaragoza, Glasgow, Dusseldorf, London, Brussels, Madrid, Vienna, Bratislava, Munich, Edinburgh, Athens, Budapest, Istanbul) found solutions to house homeless people, especially when they show symptoms of COVID-19 and need to be quarantined. Commonly, cities use public buildings to provide emergency housing, but sometimes also privately owned hotels or hostels. For Rotterdam, the crisis was an occasion to tackle the general issue of homelessness, investing €20 million in independent housing, counselling, and better living conditions for homeless people.

**London:** Reserved around 300 hotel rooms to give some homeless people the possibility to self-isolate.

**Bratislava:** Prepared a quarantine town with the support of medical and social staff with a maximum capacity of 230 people.

**Budapest** created further shelter places for 500 homeless people. Additionally, one of the wings of the City Hall serves as a temporary shelter for the homeless who would like to voluntarily self-isolate.

## Medical assistance

Some cities (Brussels, Brno, Nice, Madrid, Leeds) provide protective equipment, such as masks and gloves, and extended medical assistance to homeless people.

**Brussels:** Set up a mobile unit with medical staff serving the needs of homeless people.



## Supplying food

Many cities provide food to various vulnerable groups, e.g. low-income families, homeless people or children in need, through delivery, but also through centralised logistical hubs.

### To families in need

Methods to provide families in need with food aid range from deliveries by volunteers to providing “solidarity baskets” and vouchers through public-private partnerships. Such means of food aid delivery have been applied in Edinburgh, Beşiktaş, Tirana, Zagreb, Bordeaux, Madrid, Nicosia, Budapest, Istanbul and Bristol.

**Madrid** has established public-private partnerships to provide families in need with prepaid cards to buy food and basic necessities.

**Istanbul** distributed nearly 36,000 shopping vouchers and 560,000 food packages to vulnerable people.

### To homeless

Some cities (Genova, Leipzig, Nice, Brno, Dusseldorf, Edinburgh) formed teams to distribute food to homeless people, while shelters often extended their provision of food and citizen initiatives provide other necessities.

**Leipzig:** Emergency shelters provide free breakfast, lunch and supper. Also, on a ‘garden fence for homeless people’ food, clothes and sanitary products can be donated.

### Centralised distribution of food aid

Some cities (Munich, Zagreb, Nantes, Milan, Riga, Cluj-Napoca, Istanbul and Turin) established centralised hubs for the storage and delivery of food, and cooperate with associations, volunteers and others to distribute this aid.

**Turin** opened a logistics hub for the storage and home delivery of food, including 13 places of distribution throughout the city. Turin also extended the already existing distribution of food and basic necessities partly funded by the FEAD.

### To children of low-income families

Tallinn, Riga and Ljubljana found solutions to provide children in need with a warm meal.

**Tallinn:** Pupils in need will be able to get a daily free school lunch. Schools will inform families about the availability of a free meal and where the students can get it.



## Health Care

Naturally, cities are very concerned with the performance of their health care services during the COVID-19 crisis. Many cities established channels to provide remote psychological and medical advice or increased their testing and hospital capacities.

### Hotlines

Many cities (Milan, Espoo, Nice, Zagreb, Zaragoza, Vienna, Bordeaux, Poznan, Krakow, Nicosia, Barcelona, Ljubljana, Beşiktaş, Madrid, Dusseldorf, Viladecans, Istanbul) operate hotlines to provide remote medical and psychological assistance to COVID-19 patients and others.

**Bordeaux:** Operates several hotlines for people differently affected by COVID-19, advising on mental health issues and supporting people in grief and healthcare professions.

**Krakow:** Provides free medical consultations by phone for people in need of care unrelated to COVID-19.

### Increasing care capacities

To relieve pressure from hospitals, some cities (Stuttgart, Ljubljana, Porto, Berlin, Munster, Madrid, Antwerp, Besiktas, Istanbul) opened provisional care facilities or propose treatment of COVID-19 patients via video calls. Cities like Besiktas also provide additional psychological help to address the long-term consequences of the crisis.

**Berlin:** Constructed a new hospital for 1000 COVID-19 patients.

**Munster:** The University Hospital offers medical advice to intensive care doctors in other hospitals by video.

**Besiktas:** Launched an anti-stress campaign to help people as restrictions are lifted. As part of the project, an anti-stress committee was established and citizens will be able to meet with clinical psychologists at events in the public parks, online, or in private by appointment.

### Drive through test centres

Cities like Porto, Nice, Munich, Zagreb and Glasgow also contribute to national efforts in means of testing for COVID-19. Some cities use public spaces as drive-through test centres and try to provide fast test results.

**Munich:** Besides three drive-in coronavirus testing stations, Munich set up a walk-through testing for medical staff. Test results are provided within 24 hours via SMS.



## Domestic violence

With families spending more time together at home, domestic violence is an issue of concern for cities. While some extended their existing services, others launched awareness campaigns to prevent violence at home.

## Campaigning

Some cities (Madrid, Nice, Zaragoza, Malmo, Bristol) launched awareness campaigns and actively call on neighbours to take actions if they know of cases of domestic violence in their neighbourhood.

**Nice** launched an awareness raising campaign, a hotline, an email contact, a partnership with pharmacies and provides emergency accommodation for women in need, while the usual consultation services remain open.

## Extending existing services

Some cities (Cardiff, Dusseldorf, Nice, Ljubljana, Madrid, Istanbul) decided to extend their existing services to tackle increasing domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis.

**Dusseldorf** enlarged its accommodation facilities, shelters and protection services for women and children in need.

**Istanbul** opened an additional centre to provide shelter service for women in close cooperation with women's NGOs prioritising aid for women living in emergency conditions.



## Education

Cities are promoting the use of digital tools to continue classes where schools are still closed. Cities also actively tackle the long-term consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on educational inequalities.

### Digitalising of education

Some cities (The Hague, Fuenlabrada, Madrid, Gdansk) try their best to ensure equal opportunities to all pupils by providing low-income families with digital devices for their children to follow online school courses from home. Other cities (Tirana, Bamberg, Istanbul) developed digital learning platforms.

**Tirana:** All classes are uploaded online on a free platform, broadcasted on national tv, and teachers established online contact with parents and students.

**The Hague:** Distributed 330 laptops to families with low income.

### Providing childcare

Some cities (Nice, Ljubljana, Tallinn, Lisbon, Istanbul) continue to provide childcare, especially to children of workers in essential professions or in socio-economically vulnerable districts, either with the help of volunteer caretakers or by keeping the usual childcare services running.

**Tallinn:** Keeps all municipal kindergartens running to enable more parents to continue working.

**Istanbul:** In addition to providing childcare online, Istanbul is also running a project which involves creating kindergartens in districts with less privileged economic conditions. The city also distributed 100,000 gift boxes to children of disadvantaged families for children's day on 23 April.

## Tackling educational inequality

Cities like Rotterdam and Vienna invested to tackle the long-term consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on educational inequalities.

**Rotterdam:** Invested €2,4 million to provide school children from disadvantaged families with extra courses over the summer to avoid them falling behind.

**Vienna:** is investing €17 million to help out the more than 16,000 young people currently without a job. The package includes intra-company vocational training, qualification passports, assistance for catching up the missed time and offers to enter into professions in health, care and IT, dedicated to the young generation.



## Supporting migrants

### Extending accommodation facilities

Some cities (Brussels, Groningen) try to provide accommodation to newly arriving migrants who do not have access to housing.

**Groningen** is establishing an emergency centre for newly arriving migrants who now do not have access to asylum procedures.

### Providing multilingual information

With newly-arrived migrants often facing language barriers, some cities (Lublin, Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Gdansk) provide multilingual information on their websites, by phone or through mobile applications.

**Nuremberg:** Uses “Integreat”, a mobile guide for refugees and migrants, to spread information tailored to the local context.



## Extending the access to social services and benefits

Cities like Vienna and Madrid made sure their citizens can continue to access social benefits throughout the pandemic. Madrid also substantially increased its workforce in the social services.

**Vienna** ensured its services to its 133,000 users during the crisis by extending the duration of expiring social benefits. People could easily extend their benefits from their homes as the city put in place an automatic procedure and postponed controls. This allowed everyone in need to get their social allowances and stay financially stable.

**Madrid** allocated €5 million to strengthen social services with 264 personnel. The Temporary Employment Plan (PET) includes 118 social workers (a 22% increase over the total) and 41 administrative assistants (33% more).



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