

# Oslo as an Intercultural City

## Joint action of the Council of Europe and the European Commission

### City of Oslo

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Oslo declared itself an open and inclusive city in 2001 – OXLO, Oslo Xtra Large. Oslo is a prosperous city. With one in four of its population an immigrant, the city acknowledges that the continued well-being and prosperity and of its minority groups, is an essential part of it over all future success.

The City of Oslo was a participant city in the pioneering phase of the Intercultural City project from 2005 to 2007, and joined the program as a joint action of the Council of Europe and the European Commission in 2008.

#### Public statement

The city of Oslo declared itself an open and inclusive city in 2001. The policy is named OXLO – Oslo Xtra Large. The declaration “*Oslo – a city for all*” passed by an unanimous city council, states:

“Oslo is a city where all citizens are of equal value. The citizens of Oslo are its future and its most cherished resource. We are citizens with different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, and have all the same fundamental rights, duties and responsibilities. (..) The municipality of Oslo aims to mirror the diversity of its population, among its public servants and leaders, and in the services it provides.”

Subsequent city governments have stated their commitment to the OXLO-policy, latest in 2005 when the government of city commissioner Erling Lae stated:

”The city government will work for an open and inclusive capital, characterized by diversity and tolerance for differences in lifestyles. The city’s diversity is manifested in its population’s diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, - in a rich cultural scene, and in the coexistence of diverse identities and lifestyles. This diversity enriches the city and is an essential part av the city’s identity.”

“The city government will continue its campaign against racism and discrimination through Oslo Xtra Large – the OXLO-campaign (...). The government aspires to the role of bridge building, promoting the intercultural dialogue between minority-based NGOs and others who works for diversity and tolerance.”

#### Review and trial projects

Oslo is a diverse city. Immigrants comprise 25% av the population, ethnic minority groups – people with an immigrant background – 33%. In the schools 2 out of 5 pupils are of minority backgrounds. In the European context, ethnic minorities in Oslo do well. The level of unemployment is low – about 5% – and the level of education is high. The difference in living conditions between majority and minority is small, when you compare people who are born and bred in the city.

The city administration has initiated a series of roundtable meetings, inviting experts and scholars to develop a standard for integration and diversity for Oslo. The initiative is based on the report “Standard of openness and diversity” (Oslo 2008, attached), from the project “The Intercultural

City” 2003-2005 which preceded the ongoing COE/EU Intercultural Cities program (link [www.interculturalcity.com/city\\_case.htm#oslo](http://www.interculturalcity.com/city_case.htm#oslo)).

At present there are numerous projects run by the city or in partnerships with NGOs, in the fields of education, business and employment, sport and arts, and neighborhood and urban regeneration. There are also several initiatives aimed at promoting diversity in the police (a state responsibility) Following the visit by the group of experts from the Council of Europe in August 2008, assessing the intercultural policy of Oslo, city districts, agencies, schools and NGOs will be invited to contribute to the list of flagship trial projects that will be included in the city’s action plan.

### **Mediation**

An emergency taskforce was established in 2005, with representatives from the municipality, NGOs, scholars and the police. The purpose is to respond quickly to crisis where youth and violence are involved, and to problems of racism and neo-nazism.

The capacity to deal with minor episodes, however, is widely spread on the level of schools and youth services. In the city districts, this work is coordinated through the SaLTto-networks, where municipal youth workers, schools and the local police participate. In dealing with localized conflicts, community leaders from NGOs, churches and mosques are regularly consulted and engaged, as well as the local staff of the state-run Mediation and Reconciliation Service.

### **Language**

Some 5 000 adults are at any one time enrolled in language tuition programs. The city provides free tuition to refugees and adults in family with Norwegian citizens or refugees. The free tuition programs are – on certain conditions - extended to unemployed immigrants in general, in need of help from employment and welfare agencies to get a job.

Refuges are enrolled in two-year introductory programs, which besides language training consist of periods of in-work training and mentorship and an introductory allowance.

The adult education service adopted i 2008 a three year 10 mill € strategy named “Strengthening our efforts” consisting of 20 measures, amongst others tuition courses that can be combined with having a job and / or taking secondary and higher education.

In recent years the city has adopted a strategy of language stimulation which target children in kindergartens and primary schools. The aim is that no children shall enter schools without a basic knowledge of Norwegian and no pupils leave school without a mastery of the language. The strategy consists (among other measures) of subsidized kindergarten fees, language tests at health clinics, combined mother-child tuition classes and educational programs in kindergartens.

### **Media and communication**

The city has an internet service, called “Cultural diversity in the media” informing on concerts, exhibitions and festivals organized by artists with minority backgrounds. The service was established in recognition of Oslo as the multicultural capital of Norway. This pro-diversity coverage of the cultural scene is reflected in the local media (newspapers, radio, local TV). Several of the stars in music and filmmaking, as well as sports, gaining national and international prominence in recent years, are of minority background.

Among journalists and editors, and media researches, there is a growing awareness about the role of the media in promoting cohesion and presenting news in a responsible and intercultural way.

This has resulted in a stronger focus on the recruitment of journalists with ethnic minority background.

The municipality runs its own publication – “Oslo Now” – which is distributed freely to every household in the city. The Office of diversity and integration runs an internet based newsletter – the “OXLO bulletin”. The municipality sponsors an event called “Top 10” ([www.thetop10.no](http://www.thetop10.no)), which each year celebrates and profiles the ten most successful immigrants in Norway, in business and work, academia and media, culture and civic life.

### **International Policy**

The city’s international policy is described in the 2002 city council white paper “Strategy for the international cooperation of City of Oslo”. International impulses and benchmarking – especially within Europe and the Nordic region – contributes to development of the city as a provider of services, as a living and vibrant city and as an attractive place for business investments. In the government parliamentary whitepaper on the role and function of the capital – *The Open and Creative Capital* (2007) – the city’s function as the gateway for immigration of skilled workers is stressed (in accordance with the writings of Richard Florida on the role of the creative class).

The international strategy is pursued through agreements of cooperation, through international organizations, through networks and projects and through visits and international profiling. The themes of integration, diversity and tolerance are important to organizations and networks such as Eurocities, Metropolis, ECCAR and the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation, as well as to agreements with cities as Gothenburg and St. Petersburg.

There is an International Office in City Hall, and the city administration is represented within EU by its European Office in Brussels. In recent years, the city of Oslo has been profiled as a city of peace and tolerance, through the Nobel Peace Center and the new Wergeland Center – COE’s European center for intercultural dialogue.

### **Intercultural intelligence**

The Office of diversity and integration (EMI) was established in 2005. Its main duty is to facilitate dialogue and consulting with minority groups, administrate the OXLO-campaign, and service the NGOs representing minority groups and interests.

The office runs an internet based newsletter – the OXLO bulletin – and a monthly seminar – Contact Forum - for exhibiting examples of best practice. In partnership with organizations such as Top 10, the Council of Immigrant organizations and others, EMI promote positive role-models and make visible the success stories of the modern cosmopolites of Oslo.

EMI will play a central role in the development of a standard for integration and diversity for Oslo, as the center for guidance on actions by public services against racism and discrimination (a duty by law from January 1. 2009).

### **Intercultural competence**

The city sponsors a variety of initiatives and measures meant to spread intercultural competence. Among these is the “Diversity Mirror” (DM), a benchmarking device used by public services to develop an organizational culture for a diverse society. DM is a measure used by schools, kindergartens and offices for employment and social welfare, enabling them to make a diversity profile of their own attitudes and non-written codes of action, and plan how to make their services better suited for users with minority backgrounds.

Building intercultural competence is to be a central strategy of the Office of diversity and integrations, following the instruction of duties to act and report in the Discrimination Act (augmented 2008).

### **Welcoming new arrivals**

New arrivals are offered a basic 300 hours tuition program. 50 hours of this program are classes in Norwegian life and society, in a language that the participant can understand. Refugees are offered a two year introductory program (see language tuition, above).

The adult education service runs an internet information service called [www.velkommenoslo.no](http://www.velkommenoslo.no), which also provides information in English.

Immigrants who follow language tuition program are also offered – as part of the “Strengthening our efforts”-strategy – assistance from minority councilors and a “Know your city”-program during the summer.

### **Governance and leadership**

The city of Oslo adopted the declaration “*Oslo – a city for all*” in 2001, declaring itself an open and inclusive city in 2001. The policy is named OXLO – Oslo Xtra Large. The process of developing a standard for the city for integration and diversity started in 2008, with the report “Standard for openness and diversity”.

The Office of diversity and integration was established in 2005, while the advisory Council of Immigrant Organizations has existed since 1988. Following the augmentation of the Citizen Act in 2006, the aula of the City Hall is used for citizenship ceremonies.

In the city council 20% (12 of 59) of the members have minority background, representing five out of the seven political parties in the council. In local elections foreign citizens who have stayed legally in Norway for three years have the right to vote.

The Council of immigrant organizations (RiO) has been in existence since 1988. This is a consultative body, where the leader is elected by the city government and the members by immigrant organizations. Since 2004 municipal agencies, city districts and the city government itself are obligated to consult RiO in all matters regarding the development of public services better suited for users with minority backgrounds.