# Application to join ECCAR –

# European Coalition of Cities Against Racism

# City of Helsingborg

## Part 1 General information

**Background**

The city council of Helsingborg decided in August 2014 to join the European Coalition of Cities against Racism. The city has the ambition to improve and enhance the work against racism and discrimination of any form. Since 2015 Helsingborg has participated in the Swedish network of member cities to exchange experiences and discuss mutual topics related to ECCAR’s 10-point plan of action.

Helsingborg is a city with about 138 000 inhabitants which makes Helsingborg the 8th largest municipality out of Sweden’s 290 municipalities. The city is situated along the coast in southern part of the country and is Sweden’s closest point to Denmark with the Danish city Helsingor visible on the other side of the sea.

Helsingborg’s city council has 65 members and is elected by the inhabitants every four years. Beside the city council there are several politically appointed boards, each with their own areas of responsibility such as city planning, social services, culture, school and leisure etc. The city executive committee leads the municipality’s work and ensures that all decisions become reality. It prepares the issues which the City Council is to decide upon and presents suggestions on how the City Council should act.

**Groups who could be subjected to racism and discrimination**

The population of Helsingborg is growing fast and is very multicultural, approximately 30 000 people are born in another country and over 160 different nationalities are represented in the city. Although, this ethnic, national and cultural diversity is an asset and a trade mark for our city, not all people living in Helsingborg are welcoming it. Many people growing up and living in Helsingborg struggle to gain equal rights and opportunities as people who are part of the majority i.e. the norm. Moreover, the large discrepancies in income, health and participation within the city create gaps between different groups in the society which might cause increased social unrest.

In Sweden there is a law regarding our five national minorities; Roma, Sweden-Finnish, Jews, Tornedalingar and the Sami population. These minorities have through history been subjected to racism and discrimination. The law, which was adopted in 2010, protects their rights and gives them the recognition as national minorities. Each municipality has their own action plan to implement this law and in Helsingborg it is called *Program for Helsingborgs work to satisfy the rights of the national minorities*.

Recently, the number of refugees has increased, mainly because of the crisis in Syria, and the city receives many refugees and unaccompanied children. This has challenged especially the social services, child care and school system of our city but there is also a lack of housing. The unaccompanied children are in need of protection, care, education and other prerequisites to be able to live a good life here.

Helsingborg also has a number of EU-migrants who temporarily come to Helsingborg to earn money in order to support their families back home in Romania or Bulgaria (typically). Also the Roma population living permanently in Helsingborg is a group that might be exposed to discrimination.

The above mentioned groups are groups at risk of being targeted by hostility, racism or discrimination. This is very important for the city to monitor, prevent and challenge. A local study [[1]](#footnote-1)also highlights the situation for young LGBTQ-people who experience hostility in the city. Another study [[2]](#footnote-2)shows that the intolerance is larger in Helsingborg than other big cities in southern Sweden especially among young people. This is one of the reasons the work against discrimination is now being mobilized.

Helsingborg is now enhancing the work to become a more open and inclusive city. This is one of the city’s eight overarching goals that all departments of the city have to implement. The city has recently adopted a *Quality of life-program* for the next eight years which presents the political will in environmental and public health issues. The program includes areas such as gender equality, antidiscrimination, children’s rights and integration. There is also a newly established advisory committee of politicians who will monitor these issues.

The city is in the process of developing an action plan called *Plan for equal opportunities* that will include activities to prevent discrimination and to promote equal opportunities. It will embrace all seven grounds of discrimination in Sweden; sex, age, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. The ambitions of ECCAR’s 10-point plan of action will be included in the *Plan for equal opportunities*.

**Relevant laws, regulations and strategies**

In Sweden issues surrounding racism, discrimination and hate crimes are not handled by the municipalities per se. Instead it is mostly handled by the police, the courts of justice and Ombudsman against discrimination. However, the municipalities play a large role in the work to prevent and fight racism and discrimination of any form. It is stated in the Local Government Act (1992) – “the democratic rules of the game”- for municipalities and county councils in chapter 1:2 *Municipalities and county councils are to treat their members equally”.*

Sweden has also signed seven international UN-conventions and has adopted a Discrimination Act (2008) with the purpose to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age. The municipalities have the responsibility to implement and realize these laws and conventions.

Co-operation with the civil society is a crucial strategy in the work against racism and discrimination and the city has many contacts with several different actors. One of them is the Antidiscrimination Bureau in Helsingborg that helps people who have been discriminated against with consultation, support and advice in legal issues.

The City of Helsingborg values the opportunity to become an ECCAR member and the support provided by ECCAR’s 10-point plan of action. Being part of a network of cities with similar goals and determination in the work against racism and discrimination would offer encouragement, support and exchange in this crucial work.

1. Renholm, Linnea. *Ung hbtq/hbg – en studie om unga hbtq-personers situation i Helsingborg*. [Young LGBTQ- a study of their situation in Helsingborg] (2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Skånes kreativa kapacitet – talang, tolerans och den kreativa klassen*. [Scania’s creative capacity – talent, tolerance and the creative class] (2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)