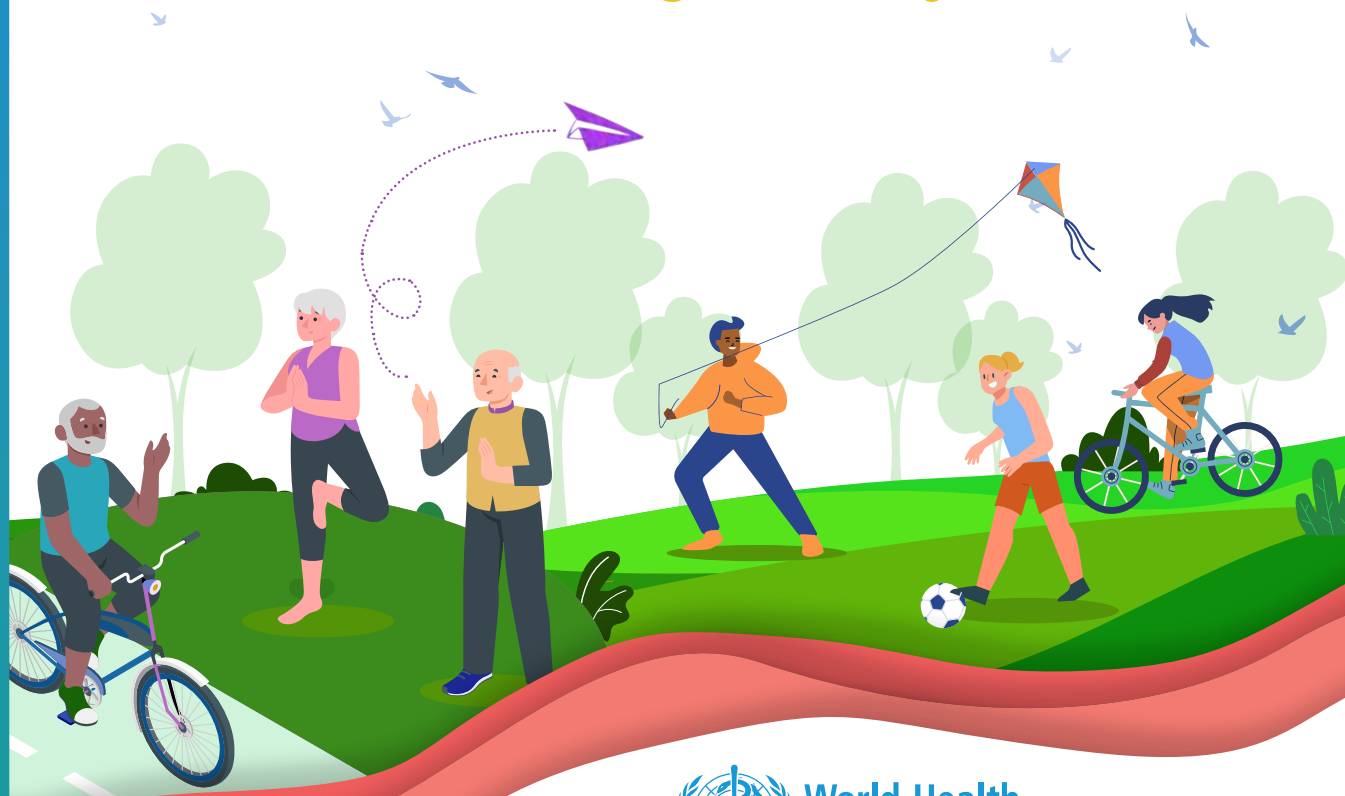


# Political statement of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network

Towards thriving societies:  
advancing health in the  
well-being economy



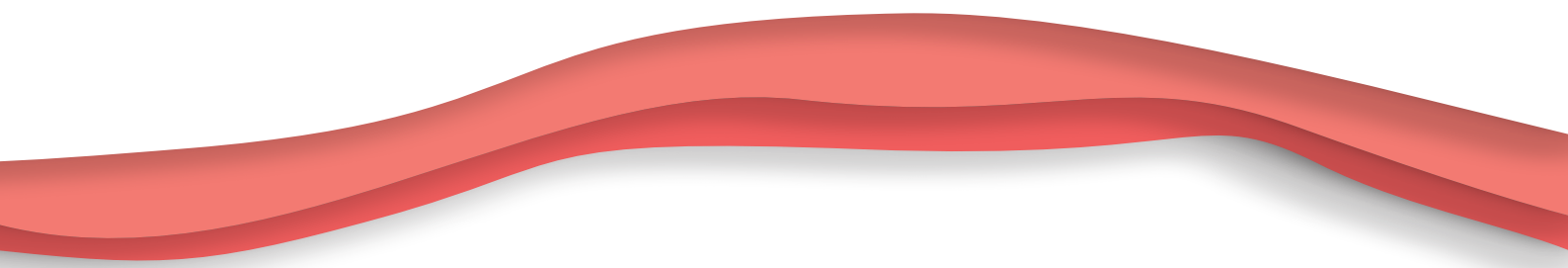
World Health  
Organization

European Region

Cities are drivers of innovation across public and private sectors towards enabling an economy that works for everyone. The following Political Statement has been developed through consultation with member cities and WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development and reflects commitment to the Health and Well-Being Economy Pilot initiated by the WHO European Healthy Cities Network. The pilot aims to bring expertise together to support action in cities towards well-being economies

Note: the graphics in the document are reflective of the various discussions that took place during the WHO European Healthy Cities Network's Annual Business Meeting from November 21–23, 2023 in Utrecht, Netherlands (Kingdom of the). The graphics are key takeaways from the conference and are independent of the statement.






We, the mayors and senior political representatives of cities, gathered on 21–23 November 2023, confirm our commitment to the values and principles of the Healthy Cities movement.

In recent years, the world has experienced a confluence of crises that pose a significant threat to the progress made in public health. This threat is compounded by the intricate interaction of social, environmental, economic and commercial determinants of health, in which the actions and omissions of commercial actors positively and negatively influence the conditions shaping people's lives – how they are born, grow, work, live and age (1). These crises span various sectors, including public health, economics and the environment, and are exemplified by events such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing conflicts globally. These crises have not only put the health gains made over previous decades at risk but have also negatively affected the personal and societal well-being of communities and especially affect young adults and children.

The adverse effects have been felt across communities in the WHO European Region, intensifying existing health inequities, which have been further exacerbated by poverty, migration and social inequalities such as income disparity, various forms of discrimination and inadequate housing (2). These multifaceted inequalities persistently afflict communities and maintain part of the population in vulnerable situations. They create barriers in accessing health care and essential resources and pose significant challenges to the physical and mental health of the general population and the resilience of health systems. To address these challenges, a paradigm shift is urgently needed in how we think about the relationship between health and the economy. This shift in thinking is embodied by the well-being economy approach, which emphasizes the importance of public and private responsibility for population health, and by public investment, early intervention approaches and allocating resources to improving population and societal well-being while also focusing on the environment and health in a sustainable way.

Well-being economies not only respond to crises; the approach picks up and amplifies the already growing movements of circular economies, community wealth building, social sustainability and beyond GDP – many of which have been driven by local authorities and actors. Added to this is the increased call from the general public to live in places that are safe and vibrant and where people can thrive and not merely survive. These changes have created new opportunities for the health and development sectors to work together to improve people's lives and societies today and for the coming generations.



The pursuit of healthier societies and well-being economies is an interconnected agenda that has gained traction among governments and international institutions throughout the WHO European Region. This movement builds on progress to date, including the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development, the Geneva Charter for Well-being and the integration of health considerations within economic and business frameworks. It specifically takes forward WHO Regional Committee for Europe resolution EUR/RC69/R5: Accelerating progress towards healthy, prosperous lives for all, increasing equity in health and leaving no one behind in the WHO European Region, specifically around bringing the social values of solidarity, equity, social justice, inclusion and gender equality into mainstream fiscal and growth policies and the outcome of the WHO European Regional High-level Forum on Health in the Well-being Economy (3). At the heart of this approach lies the recognition that health both drives and co-creates well-being economies based on the complex interaction between individual and community health, early interventions, economic prosperity and social and environmental factors. Healthy populations, health-care services and health equity deliver more prosperous and resilient societies and economies, and the health sector can also maximize these economic and social benefits. Health will also benefit from well-being economies through improved conditions for everyone to be well.

A well-being economy has a policy orientation and governance approach that aims to put people and their well-being at the centre of policy and decision-making (4). Well-being economies shift and maximize the benefits of all investment for equitable well-being across human, social, economic and planetary well-being (Fig.1) (5,6). This includes using a wide range of levers, such as innovative fiscal instruments, procurement, employment, regulation and impact assessment of policies to deliver well-being while maximizing the co-benefits across these domains.

We recognize that a well-being economy is designed and meant to serve people's well-being and protect the planet, with the economy delivering for our communities and the environment. We therefore build on the One Health approach and the Copenhagen Consensus of Mayors: Healthier and Happier Cities for All and reaffirm our commitment to the six key themes and to ensuring that our policies are structured around them.

We commit to shifting towards a well-being economy by reorienting and advocating for investment in priorities that promote



- > PLANETARY WELL-BEING
- > HUMAN WELL-BEING
- > ECONOMIC WELL-BEING
- > SOCIAL WELL-BEING

WELL-BEING  
FOR ALL

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF  
THE HEALTHY LIVES MOVEMENT





Fig. 1. Planetary, human, economic and social well-being capital

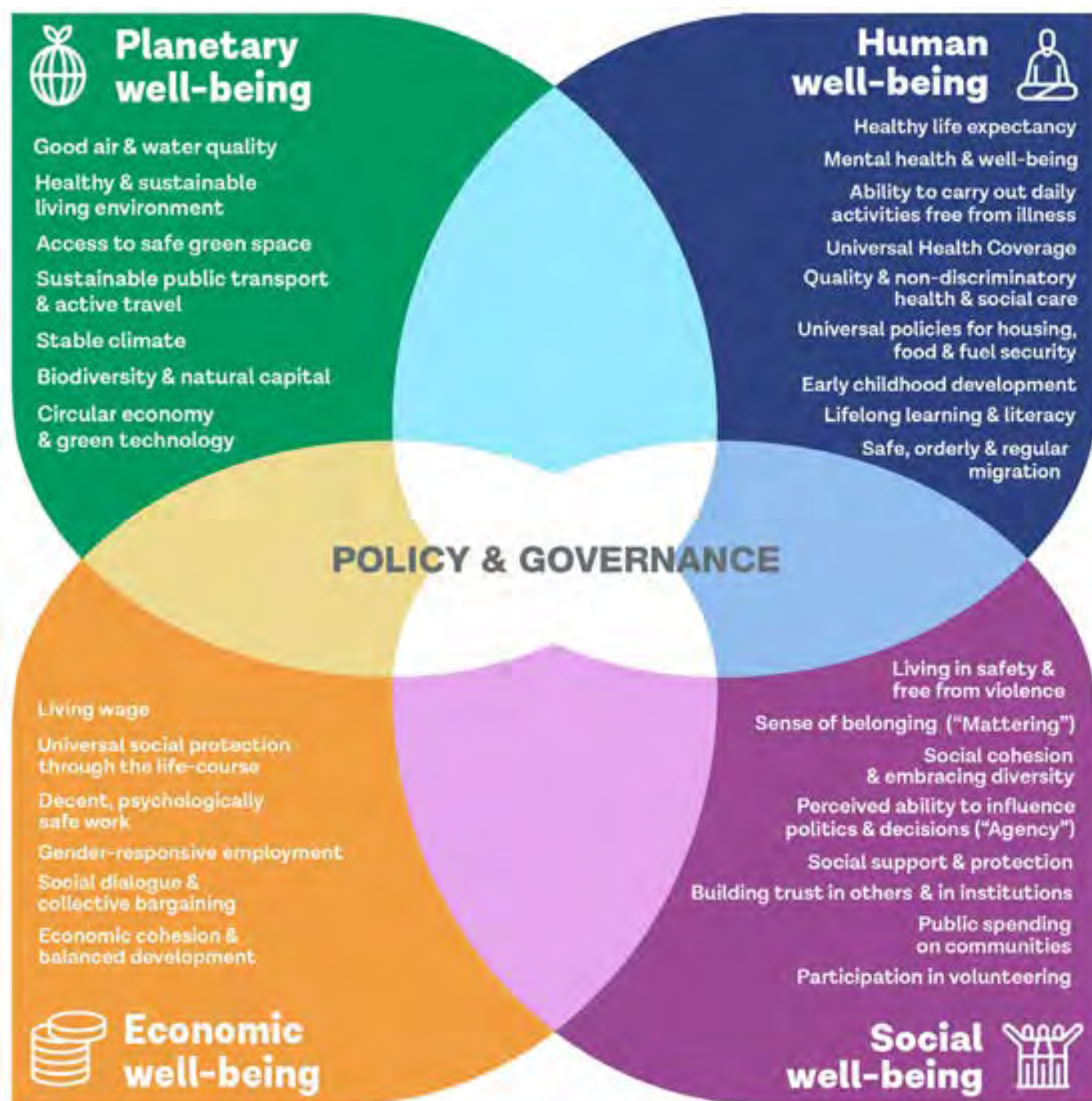


Fig.1 Source: WHO analysis, building on OECD well-being framework. Measuring well-being and progress: well-being research. OECD well-being framework [website]. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD; 2022 (<https://www.oecd.org/wise/measuring-well-being-and-progress.htm>).

By responding to current challenges and preparing for future generations, we aim to cultivate a sustainable and inclusive society that gives priority to the overall welfare of individuals, communities and the environment, striving for a world in which well-being is at the forefront of our policies, progress and prosperity and no one is left behind.

We consider that the process of integrating well-being across the European Region is an essential step in aligning our mandates to strengthen cooperation and coordination between cities, sectors and stakeholders at the local level. Cities are at the front line of this transformation and can lead by example, leveraging their hands-on experience to pioneer innovative well-being initiatives that can guide broader regional progress towards thriving societies.

As mayors and senior political representatives of cities in the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, we are committed to advancing the principles of a well-being economy to benefit our cities and their residents and future generations. Building on the insights and commitments from decades of action and collaboration across various sectors, we acknowledge the importance of the four types of well-being capital – planetary, human, economic and social – and are putting forward the following recommendations for specific action in giving priority to the health and well-being of our communities.





# > PLANETARY WELL-BEING

Cities are vital accelerators of action on climate change and planetary well-being, including the following:

1. Protecting and enhancing the environment
2. Integrating well-being into urban planning
3. Promoting sustainable communities





# 1. Protecting and enhancing the environment

Given the importance of planetary well-being, we will work towards creating healthier cities by enhancing air quality, promoting access to green spaces and supporting access to safe, clean water. We will actively support initiatives that reduce pollution and protect biodiversity through partnerships with local stakeholders, piloting community initiatives and increasing awareness on how climate change and extreme weather events affect human health. Ensuring that the people who are at the highest risk from climate change are not also the most severely affected is vital.





## 2. Integrating well-being into urban planning

We recognize that cities can strategically use urban planning in shaping the well-being of our residents. We will work towards integrating well-being indicators into our city planning processes, ensuring that decisions on infrastructure, housing, management of natural spaces, regeneration and transport give priority to human and planetary well-being. Through effective urban planning, we can foster entrepreneurship, innovation and sustainable business practices. This approach contributes to economic growth that is not only inclusive but also environmentally conscious, aligning with our vision of a flourishing and equitable society.



### 3. Promoting sustainable communities

We remain committed to advocating for sustainable communities through transformative approaches such as the circular economy and adopting new ways to promote renewable energy sources and enhancing energy efficiency to minimize carbon emissions while promoting the uptake of novel financing mechanisms to benefit the environment and incorporating social and health benefits within these processes.





# > HUMAN WELL-BEING

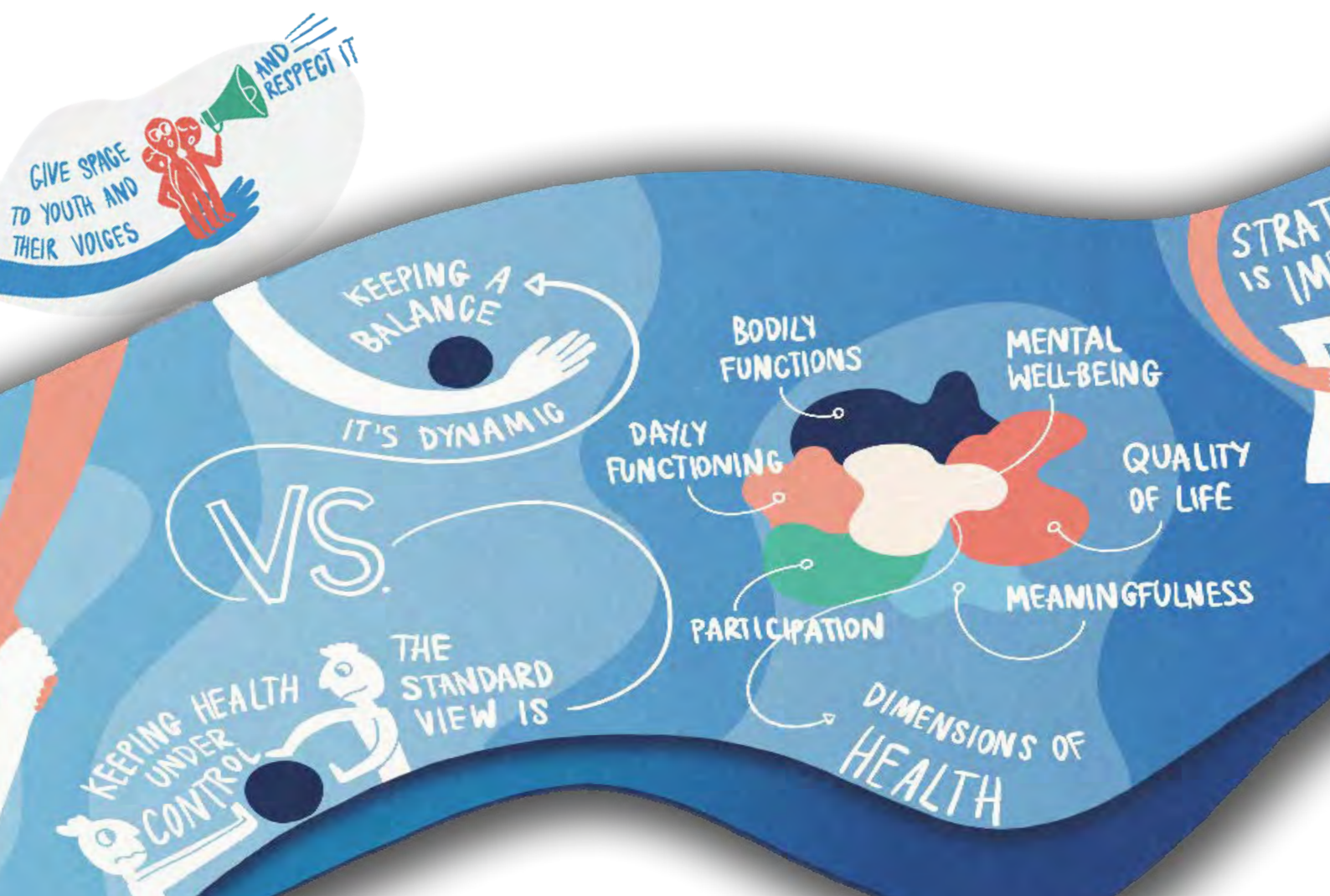
- 4. Giving priority to health-care services as drivers of improved health and economic outcome
- 5. Empowering through learning and development
- 6. Advocating for health, security and inclusion
- 7. Improving mental health of adolescents and young adults, fostering participatory decision-making and inclusive practices and incorporating meaningful youth engagement





## 4. Giving priority to health-care services as drivers of improved health and economic outcomes (7)

We firmly acknowledge that the prosperity and progress of any society are closely rooted to a person's well-being. This fundamental understanding underscores the significance of investing in and nurturing the physical, mental and emotional health that collectively contribute to the quality of life for everyone within our community. We understand that a strong public health and health-care system is needed and commit to investing in initiatives that promote preventive health care, mental health support and equitable access to high-quality and non-discriminatory health-care services for all. Health-care services can go further in maximizing their benefits for economies and societies by proactively using their employment and procurement levers.



## 5. Empowering through learning and development

We believe that investing in early childhood development and continually supporting lifelong learning opportunities within workplaces and communities are integral to human well-being. These initiatives are essential building blocks of our dedication to the well-being and prosperity of our communities to ensure that we are better skilled, connected and equipped to realize our full potential. Investment to support early childhood development is key, establishing strong foundations for the development of children to mitigate the impact of intergenerational child poverty and to support the life-course approach to developing health as a key resource for health and social development.





## 6. Advocating for health, security and inclusion

In our pursuit of healthier and safer societies, we as leaders recognize that well-being extends to encompassing essential factors such as housing, food, migration and security and strongly support the implementation of universal policies to ensure that every individual has the necessary resources to thrive. We recognize the contributions of older people to our communities and cities. Support for older people needs to be a priority. Investment to support those who live alone and want to continue living at home is invaluable. Focusing on each individual's needs is required to find new homes in residential care. Older people's skills and talents need to be recognized and applauded while focusing on problems such as loneliness, impaired mobility, vision and hearing and especially dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Healthy ageing and age-friendly communities need to be a strong focus, including whole-of government responsibility for healthy ageing throughout the life-course(8).





## 7. Improving mental health of adolescents and young adults, fostering participatory decision-making and inclusive practices and incorporating meaningful youth engagement

The pressure on mental health is most urgent among adolescents and young adults, and this is the time to focus on reducing underlying causes (such as pressure to perform, an individualizing society and strong focus on quick fixes) and offering perspective, in terms of economic wellbeing, social support, empathy and community spirit, and care, for a resilient and mentally healthy generation. The mental health of adolescents and young adults and including them in both society and the economy are vital to future healthy, fairer and prosperous societies and also a key point of convergence across health, labour, social policy and education. Solutions can only be found by working in co-creation with the adolescents and young adults themselves. At the local level, we will promote well-being approaches by encouraging public dialogue and including diverse voices, with an emphasis on engaging young people in decision-making processes. We will establish spaces for young voices to be heard and valued.



# > ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

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8. Promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, guided by proactive city leadership
  9. Recognizing the responsibility of public and private actors for health-promoting and health-enabling practices
  10. Boosting investment in cities through fair taxation



WELL-BEING  
ECONOMIES  
DELIVER



## 8. Promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, guided by proactive city leadership

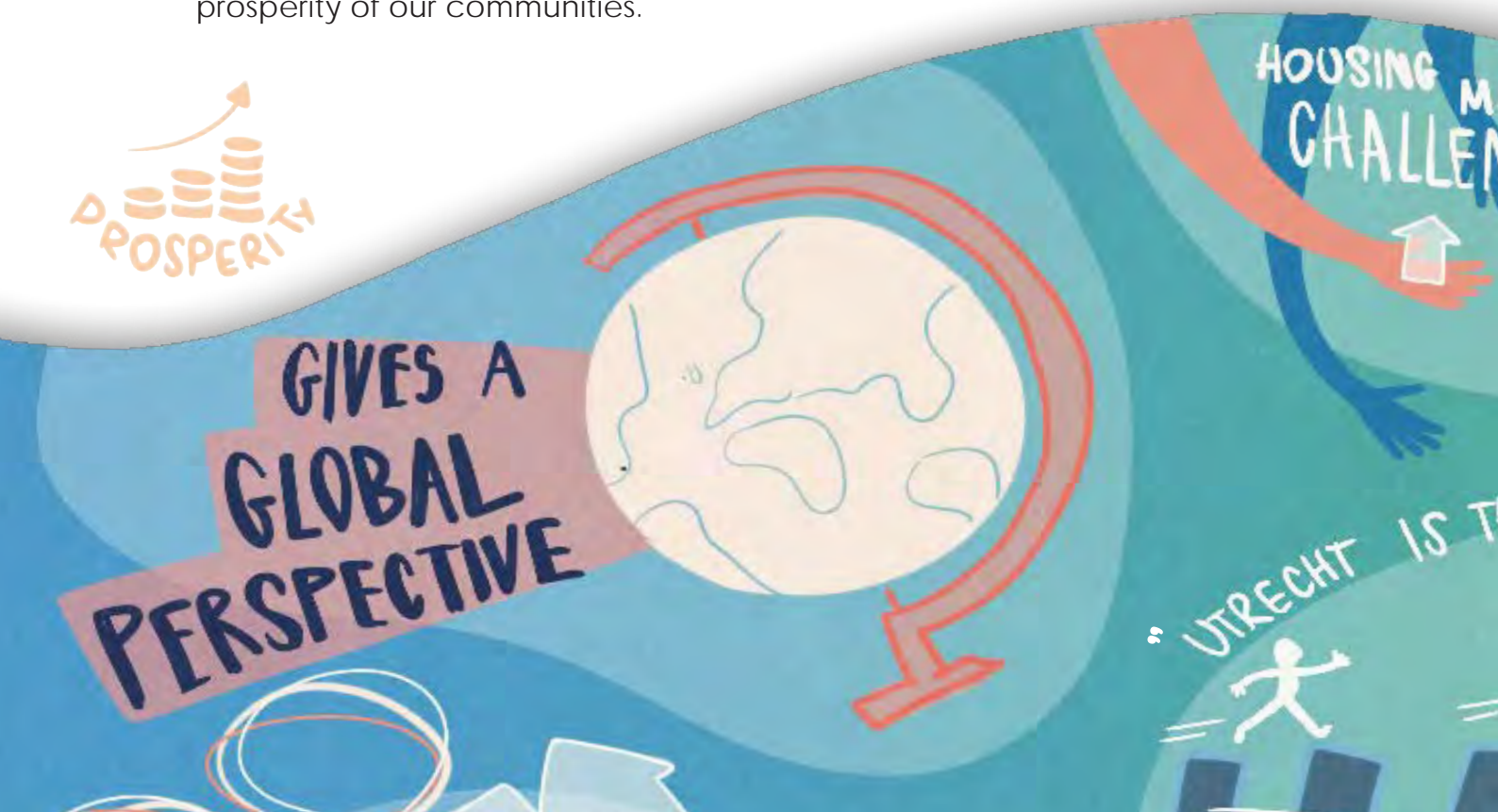
We acknowledge that workforce well-being is a key component of a well-being economy. This includes advocating for public health-oriented policies such as living wages, fair and decent work, safe workplaces and social protection to enable people to thrive. In addition, it is imperative to emphasize the importance of addressing not only physical health but also to take concerted action to enhance mental health and foster high-quality social links. These aspects fundamentally drive a well-being economy. We are dedicated to actively seeking input from various perspectives, including young people, on spending priorities (such as gender budgeting and participatory budgeting) and incorporating their unique perspectives into such areas as education, health care, environmental sustainability and youth-focused initiatives. Moreover, to ensure comprehensive inclusive practices, we remain steadfast in our commitment to designing policies that encourage equal opportunities within workplaces and ensuring that gender-responsive practices are integrated across all sectors and result in positive outcomes.

DECISION-MAKERS  
 LABOUR EXPERTS FINANCE  
 HEALTH ECONOMY SOCIAL  
 CIVIL SOCIETY PROTECTION  
 INTERGOVERNMENTAL  
 ORGANIZATIONS



## 9. Recognizing the responsibility of public and private actors for health-promoting and health-enabling practices

In tackling the commercial determinants of health and advancing the well-being economy, we advocate for public and private actors taking an active role and cooperating, both as employers and as health promoters, to achieve these goals. This involves engaging civil society, implementing conflict-of-interest policies and encouraging transparent dialogues with industry stakeholders. Given the vital role of city leaders in shaping and implementing policies that give priority to public health and economic sustainability, we emphasize the importance of supporting regulation, legislation and incentives and minimizing health-harming commercial determinants of health. To drive progress, we as cities will focus on strategies between local government, civil society and the private sector to align efforts to improve public health outcomes. By taking these specific steps, cities can effectively address the commercial determinants of health, promoting a well-being economy that gives priority to the health and prosperity of our communities.



## 10. Boosting investment in cities through fair taxation

We endorse fair taxation policies that drive progress in our cities and align with the principles of a well-being economy. Given the central role cities play in fostering well-being and prosperity, we emphasize the necessity to increase investment in our urban centres. Through fair taxation practices and policies, we can generate the necessary revenue to fuel transformative actions within our cities. These investments should be linked to transparent and accountable governance, ensuring optimal and equitable resource allocation. Effectively directing investment will lay the foundation for a well-being economy that uplifts our cities.






# > SOCIAL WELL-BEING

11. Enabling individuals through participation, trust and volunteering, recognizing that health begins at home and within the community
12. Embracing diversity and inclusion





## 11. Enabling individuals through participation, trust and volunteering, recognizing that health begins at home and within the community



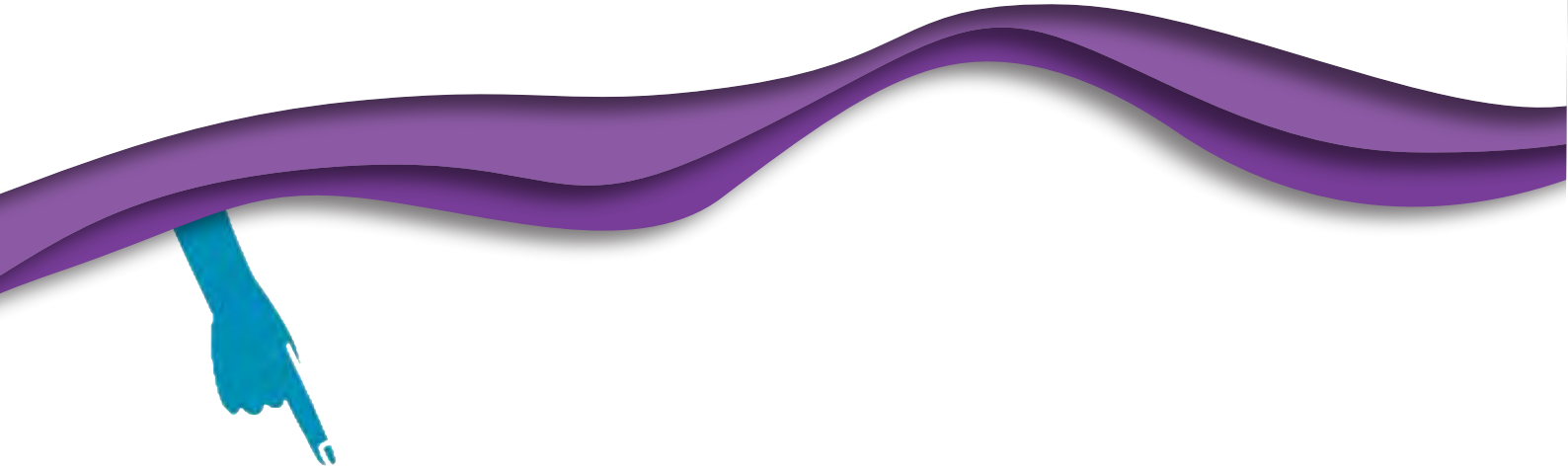
Trust, sense of belonging and social cohesion lie at the heart of social well-being. Since building well-being economies and addressing health equity require active community engagement, we strive to enable individuals by establishing platforms for public participation, seeking and encouraging diverse voices and perspectives in decision-making processes and ensuring that action is community-driven.

We firmly believe that health and well-being start at home and within communities. Adopting a community development approach, we advocate for local interventions that empower residents to actively participate in and contribute to shaping their own well-being. This approach promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility, fostering a stronger sense of trust, belonging and social cohesion.

Since volunteerism strongly influences social well-being, we recognize volunteering as a powerful means through which individuals can actively contribute to their communities and foster a sense of belonging and trust. These combined efforts are directed at uplifting communities and building trust within communities and institutions, ultimately shaping a more cohesive and prosperous society.



## 12. Embracing diversity and inclusion



We reaffirm our commitment to equity and social justice. We will work towards tackling health and social inequalities by ensuring that all residents, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or place of origin, have access to high-quality health care, education, social services, and life opportunities. Further, cities will give priority to community safety initiatives and programmes aimed at reducing violence and creating secure living environments.

In adopting these actions, we align ourselves with the principles of the well-being economy and pledge to make our cities healthier, more equitable and sustainable to benefit everyone.





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