



Città di Palermo
Il Sindaco

Initiatives to respond to the COVID-19 crisis:

- 1. Social Initiatives:** As a result of increasing economic difficulties, the City of Palermo works to support families and individuals in need. In order to do so, three main actions have been put forward: a) the creation of a specific fund with the purpose of collecting state and private funds, as well as donations; b) the municipality distributes food stamps to be given to families complying with certain requirements previously identified by the social services of the city; c) the municipality supplies food to “Food Aid Centers” located around the city. These initiatives are implemented in cooperation with a number of local voluntary associations. In addition, a special hotline has been opened for citizens seeking psychological support. A number of psychologists from the area have made themselves available to offer their services.
- 2. Digital Initiative:** The national measures taken in response to the current crisis, have as a consequence that many people find themselves confined to their homes. As such, and when possible, they are forced to work from distance, relying heavily on teleworking and video conference tools as well as smart working systems (85% workers of Palermo’s municipality are now safely working from home). Although difficult, this new reality has also served as an impetus for innovation. Such innovations in IT and digital tools, emerging out of necessity in crisis time, can and will also be highly functional in future activities. An example of this is the newly developed virtual assistant tool on the city of Palermo’s website. This is an AI system with which citizens can interact and ask questions on all COVID-19-related issues. The virtual assistant, named after the “Genius of Palermo” (the city’s lay protector), is constantly updated. This provides users with the most recent information on regulations and emergency measures, for example regarding mobility, and offers advices on self-quarantine. Once the crisis will be over, this virtual assistant can be used as a support for any kind of ordinary requests by citizens, such as tax payments, registry documents and many other administrative functions.
- 3. Education Initiative:** The national Government has closed schools in order to limit the spread of the virus. To facilitate the continuation of education as much and good as possible, the education department of the city of Palermo, together with SISPI (the IT company of the municipality of Palermo), has created a digital school platform for teachers, educators and families. Via this platform, they can entertain and educate their students (kids from zero to six years of age) through online video, books, games and drawings, by using videoconference tools provided by SISPI. Besides continuing education, this initiative is to ensure the well-being of kids even outside schools as well as strengthening the spirit of the entire educating community at a time when sentiments of fear seem to be prevailing. With regards to primary, middle, high school and university activities, classes and exams are regularly going on through videoconference tools.