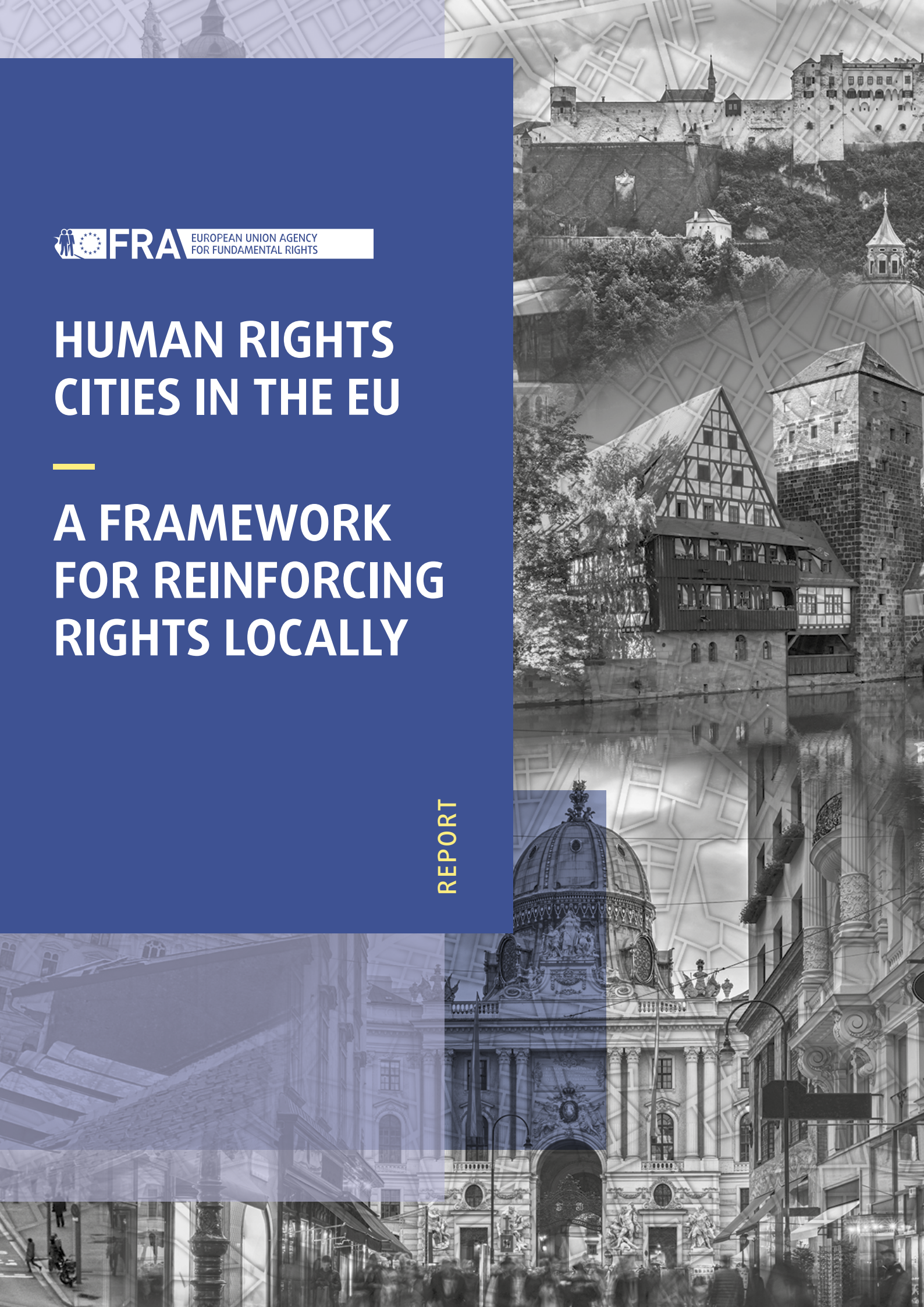


HUMAN RIGHTS CITIES IN THE EU

A FRAMEWORK FOR REINFORCING RIGHTS LOCALLY

REPORT



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Foreword

Around the globe, local authorities are putting human rights on the map. They are introducing creative initiatives to strengthen people's fundamental and human rights. Much of this activity is taking place at city level across the European Union. What can we do to foster this encouraging development?

This report proposes a framework for becoming and functioning as a human rights city in the EU. A human rights city takes action to respect, protect and promote human rights according to its competences.

Inspired by the framework for human rights indicators developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the proposed framework consists of three main elements: foundations, structures and tools. These elements formalise a city's commitment to fulfil human rights, provide for mechanisms and bodies that integrate this commitment into the city's work, and offer methods and resources that help implement a human-rights based approach in daily activities.

The actions of local authorities greatly affect our day-to-day lives. By delivering services, managing public space, or supporting the vulnerable, they also often make tangible the universal values and principles to which the EU and its Member States have committed themselves.

Becoming a human rights city means explicitly linking such activities to human and fundamental rights obligations. Doing so can have a reinvigorating effect, boosting confidence in local government and fostering public debates that ultimately help make fairer societies for all.

The framework proposed here is based on extensive exchanges with representatives from human rights cities and local governments, diverse practitioners, experts, and civil society, as well as EU-level and international organisations. We are very grateful for the strong engagement shown by our many partners.

Collaboration is also key to ensuring that more cities become human rights cities. We hope this report encourages city representatives to share experiences and insights about this important process, and national authorities to actively support cities seeking to bolster their commitment to human rights.

Michael O'Flaherty
Director

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Introduction

This report proposes a framework for becoming, and functioning as, a human rights city in the European Union (EU). It includes 'foundations', 'structures' and 'tools' for mayors, local administrations and grassroots organisations to reinforce fundamental rights locally.

In the EU, most people (70.9%) live in urban settings.¹ Cities are an ideal starting point to strengthen respect for human rights by developing a human rights-based policy framework to guide the development of the community. This empowers people to know and claim their rights, and to hold duty-bearers to account.

In a human rights city, the local government, local actors and people in the city work together and commit – in a declaration – to uphold international human rights standards and legal obligations. To do so, they take measures to deliver on these standards and develop rights-based policies on a wide variety of issues that cities are responsible for, thus contributing to protecting, respecting, fulfilling, and promoting human rights locally.

Human rights cities pioneered the 'localisation' of human rights². They established structures and tools to promote human rights, used a human rights-based approach in planning and development, applied participatory methodologies and set up human rights mechanisms.

Since Rosario, in Argentina, became the first human rights city in 1997, the initiative has developed across all continents. Graz, in Austria, became the first European human rights city in 2001. Since then, other cities have joined the initiative, such as Vienna, Utrecht or Barcelona. However, there are still only few of them in the EU, and their work is not always sufficiently recognised. Chapter 1 lists publicly known human rights cities in the EU.

The framework proposed in this report aims to encourage more cities in the EU to become human rights cities, and to help develop a local culture of rights. It is based on existing good practice and expert input by representatives of European human rights cities, EU institutions, academic experts, international organisations, civil society and city networks.³

The outlined framework also aims to facilitate links between human rights cities and EU instruments including policies, strategies and funding. Finally, it aims to stimulate a discussion in the EU on a future accreditation process for human rights cities.

Beyond cities

The proposed framework refers to 'cities' – but can be applied to towns and other forms of local government. These include municipalities and metropolitan areas, as well as forms of regional government, such as counties, provinces or regions.

The proposed framework for human rights cities in the EU is structured around **three strands**: foundations, structures and tools. They are inspired by the conceptual and methodological framework of indicators of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).⁴

Foundations formalise a city's commitment to complying with the full range of human and fundamental rights.⁵

Structures comprise mechanisms and bodies that integrate the commitments into the city's work. These include for instance a formal declaration of being a human rights city, setting up a human rights office and advisory councils, and providing access to remedies.

Tools include methods and resources that support the application of a human rights-based approach by mainstreaming human rights in various aspects of a city's work, and by raising awareness of human rights. They may include methods of rights-based programming, which measures progress through action plans, baselines, monitoring and evaluation, etc.

The framework for human rights cities draws on the extensive work from practitioners and stakeholders at all levels, for example:

- experience, structures, tools and resources that the European human rights cities have developed (see separate box for more details), and knowledge shared in the World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF) of Gwangju,⁶ including the Gwangju Declaration of Human Rights Cities and Gwangju Guiding Principles;⁷
- academic research on human rights cities and human rights at local level;⁸
- promising practices, know-how and resources from several city networks related to fundamental rights;⁹
- work on human rights standards, policies and indicators from the United Nations, in particular the **OHCHR**, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) on **Sustainable cities** and the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (**ICCAR**); policy developments under the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (**UN-Habitat**), **Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**; and reports and resolutions of the Human Rights Council on local governments and human rights;¹⁰
- Council of Europe knowledge, tools, resources, and policy developments, including the work of the Intercultural Cities Programme¹¹, two human rights handbooks,¹² several thematic guides and toolkits¹³, monitoring reports on the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government¹⁴, a compendium on promoting human rights at local and regional levels¹⁵ published by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and further thematic work on human rights¹⁶;
- activities by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights related to local government on human rights, democracy, policing and migration;¹⁷
- EU initiatives, in particular opinions, reports and initiatives of the European Committee of the Regions¹⁸ and its Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX),¹⁹ and of the European Commission, such as the new strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights²⁰ in the EU and the European Pillar of Social Rights

On terminology

The term 'human rights' refers to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as laid down in international legal instruments. The term 'fundamental rights' refers to human rights in the EU context; these are the rights included in the EU's **Charter of Fundamental Rights** and the rights reflected in the general principles of EU law.

Action Plan,²¹ and EU programmes, funding or other initiatives such as the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme;²²

- FRA activities, in particular its projects on **Community Cohesion at local level: addressing the needs of Muslim communities** (2008) and **joined-up governance** (2011–2014), as well as the outcome of cooperation with human rights cities at FRA’s fundamental rights forums in 2016 and 2018, and at FRA’s ‘policy lab’,²³ organised with the city of Vienna during the Vienna+25 conference.²⁴



2016

Meeting of human rights cities, hosted by Vienna, side-event of FRA 2016 Fundamental Rights Forum.



2019

Expert meeting about a framework for human rights cities, hosted by FRA and European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

2013

Meeting of a group of cities working in human rights, hosted by Utrecht.



2018

Policy Lab on human rights cities, hosted by FRA and Vienna, side-event of Vienna + 25 International Conference.



DEVELOPING THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

FRA developed the proposed framework with a group of human rights cities, and practitioners from international, European, EU and national levels as well as experts and civil society. These partners shared expertise, promising practices and lessons gathered during a European expert meeting on human rights cities in 2019.²⁵

This was followed by four meetings with partners and several consultations in 2020 and 2021 to finalise the proposed framework. More details on FRA's partners are provided in the box entitled 'Our partners'.

Building on cities' experience, tools and resources

As noted, the presented framework draws on extensive work from European human rights cities and other practitioners, in particular from promising practices, mechanisms, tools and resources, these include:

- The **Graz Declaration of Human Rights** (2001), the **Human rights advisory council**, and the **annual human rights reports** (Austria);
- The City of **Vienna Charter. Shaping the future together** (2012) and **Declaration Vienna – city of rights** (2014), **Vienna gender equality and integration and diversity** monitoring reports and the work of the **Vienna human rights office** (Austria);
- Barcelona's **city of rights programme** (2017), the **Municipal immigration council**, the office for non-discrimination, the anti-rumours campaign, and the **methodology guide – City of human rights: the Barcelona model** (2018) (Spain);
- Utrecht's **local Human Rights Coalition**, the city **participatory approach** with residents, business and civil society, and new initiatives such as the "**denkme.utrecht**" platform for **digital participation** (the Netherlands);
- Nuremberg's **human rights office**, the **International human rights award** and **human rights education** (Germany).
- Salzburg's **anti-discrimination office** and the advisory body 'Round table human rights' (Austria);
- Valencia's **framework for immigration and interculturality** (2019-2022), the **Office of non-discrimination and hate crimes** and **training city staff** on human rights, discrimination and hatred (Spain);
- Middelburg's contributions to promoting **human rights and human rights education** in particular through the **Four Freedoms Award** (the Netherlands);
- Lund's **Social sustainability programme** (2020-2030), the **analysis of the situation in human rights and public health** as baseline for human rights city work, and the **anti-discrimination and anti-abuse plan 2020–2021** (Sweden);
- Turin's becoming "**Capital of rights and anti-racism**" (2021), the city **LGBT service**, awareness-raising, tools and resources on equality and non-discrimination such as the **Guidelines for Interculture and participation** or the **anti-violence guide** for the city administration and the province about violence against women (Italy);
- York's annual **human rights indicator report** and the grassroot-based **York Human Rights City Network** (United Kingdom).

Our partners

FRA is grateful to all the organisations, cities and individuals that contributed to the development of this framework.

The agency particularly thanks the representatives from local governments in 13 EU Member States: Austria (**Graz, Salzburg, Vienna**), Belgium (**Ghent**), Czechia (**Prague**), Finland (**Helsinki**), France (**Bordeaux**), Germany (**Nuremberg**), Hungary (**Budapest**), Italy (**Bologna, Turin**), the Netherlands (**Middelburg, Utrecht**), Poland (**Pomorskie** Province), Slovenia (**Ljubljana**), Spain (**Barcelona, Valencia**) and Sweden (**Malmö, Lund, Uppsala** and **County Administrative Board of Uppsala, Västra Götaland** region).

Other partners included:

- networks, in particular the **European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR)**, the **United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)** and the **Human Rights Cities Network**;
- institutional partners, namely the **CIVEX Commission of the European Committee of the Regions**, the **European Economic and Social Committee ad hoc group on fundamental rights and the rule of law**, the Council of Europe's **Intercultural Cities Programme** and the OHCHR;
- the **Norwegian National Human Rights Institution (NHRI)**;
- experts, in particular the **Czech Centre for Human Rights and Democracy**, the **Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law**, the **Global Campus of Human Rights**, the **International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels** under the auspices of Unesco, **Emerga Institute**, the **University of Essex Human Rights Centre**, the **Institute for Human Rights** of Åbo Akademi University and the Danish Institute for Human Rights;
- civil society, in particular **UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative**, the **Cologne Human Rights City Initiative**, **York Human Rights City Network** and the **Rafto Foundation for Human Rights** in Bergen.

Endnotes

- 1 Eurostat, 'Urban and rural living in the EU'.
- 2 K. De Feyter (2006), **Localizing Human Rights**, University of Antwerp, Institute of Development Policy and Management.
- 3 See further below 'Developing the proposed framework' and "Our partners".
- 4 OHCHR, '**Human rights indicators – Main features of OHCHR conceptual and methodological framework**'. '**Human rights cities: Theoretical and practical overview**', Intervention of Birgit Van Hout, Regional Representative for Europe, OHCHR, FRA expert meeting on human rights cities, 28 November 2019, Brussels.
- 5 See the box "Terminology".
- 6 '**World Human Rights Cities Forum**' (WHRCF), the annual flagship event of the global movement of human rights cities, organised in Gwangju by the Gwangju International Centre, the UCLG network and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, in cooperation with OHCHR and UNESCO.
- 7 World Human Rights Cities Forum: '**Gwangju Declaration on Human Right City**', 16–17 May 2011, Gwangju, Republic of Korea', and '**Gwangju Guiding Principles for a Human Rights City**', 17 May 2014, Gwangju, South Korea.
- 8 M. F. Davis, T. G. Hansen and E. Hanna (eds.) (2017), **Human rights cities and regions – Swedish and international perspectives**, Malmö, n.p., Raoul Wallenberg Institute and Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions; M. Kjaerum, M. F. Davis and A. Lyons (eds.) (2021), **COVID-19 and human rights**, London, Routledge; A. Arkadaş Thibert, A. Aykara, G. Günlük-Şenesen, Ö. Arun, U. Sunata, Y. Yücel, **Indicators of Human Rights Cities**, (2021), Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, the Union of Turkish World Municipalities and seven pilot municipalities; and developed in cooperation with the Union of Municipalities of Turkey and the Council of Europe; B. Oomen, M. F. Davis and M. Grigolo (2016), **Global urban justice: the rise of human rights cities**, Cambridge University Press; M. Grigolo (2019), **The human rights city: New York, San Francisco, Barcelona**, Abingdon, Routledge; E. Garcia-Chueca and L. Vidal (eds.) (2019), **Advancing urban rights: Equality and diversity in the city**, Barcelona, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB); A. Fernández de Losada and M. Galceran-Vercher (eds.) (2021), **Cities in Global Governance. From multilateralism to multistakeholderism?**, Barcelona, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB); M. Möstl (2021), '**Conceptualizing human rights cities: Legal deliberations and practical proposals on the pursuit of human rights and the SDGs at the local level**', World Human Rights Cities Forum, Paper Series I, WHRCF 2020; I. Meier, G. Oberleitner and K. Starl (Editors) (2021), **Research on human rights at the local and regional levels: Methods, practices, approaches**, Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Vol. 2, Graz, HRGL Publishing; K. Gomes and M. Möstl, G. Oberleitner and K. Starl (Editors) (2020), **Implementing human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level: Key issues and examples**, Human Rights Go Local Publications Series, Vol. 1, Graz, HRGL Publishing; S. Philipp and K. Starl (eds.) (2017), **Focusing on Human Rights at Local and Regional Level**, Graz, European Training and Research Centre Graz and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.
- 9 These include, for instance, the **European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR)**, the **International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR)**, the **United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)**, **Eurocities**, the **European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS)**, the **Intercultural Cities Programme** of the Council of Europe, **Child Friendly Cities**, the **Human Rights Cities Network** and **Cities for Digital Rights**.
- 10 **Report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on Local Governments and Human Rights (A/HRC/30/49)**; Human Rights Council resolutions **24/2** of 26 September 2013, **27/4** of 25 September 2014, **33/8** of 29 September 2016 and **45/7** of 6 October 2020 on the role of local government and human rights. See more at the **United Nations website**.
- 11 Council of Europe (n.d.), '**Intercultural cities programme**'.
- 12 Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2019), **Human rights handbook for local and regional authorities, Vol. 1: Fighting against discrimination**, n.p., Council of Europe; Strasbourg, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2021), **Human rights handbook for local and regional authorities, Vol. 2: Social rights**, n.p., Council of Europe.
- 13 For examples: **Making public procurement transparent at local and regional levels** (2018), (practical guide); **Preventing corruption and promoting public ethics at local and regional levels** (leaflet), **Organising intercultural and interreligious activities – a toolkit for local authorities** (2016), Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe. See more under '**Resources**'.
- 14 Council of Europe, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, '**Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government**'.
- 15 **Compendium of texts on Promoting human rights at local and regional level** (2016), Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe.
- 16 For examples: **Cooperation for effectiveness: Local authorities and national specialised bodies combating racism and intolerance** (2015), European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the **Dosta! Campaign on Roma and Travellers** (2006-2019) including the **Dosta!-Congress Prize for Municipalities**. See more under the section '**Human rights**' of the Council of Europe's portal.
- 17 For examples: **Local authorities' migrant integration guide**, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2018); **OSCE/ODIHR trains local police from Fuenlabrada, Spain on human rights standards in countering violent extremism that may lead to terrorism** (2018), OSCE; **Preventing terrorism and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism: a community-policing approach** (2014), OSCE.
- 18 European Committee of the Regions, '**Our work**', in particular the work on **multivel governance**, and initiatives such as the **Covenant of Mayors** or **Cities and regions for integration**.
- 19 European Committee of the Regions, '**Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX)**'.
- 20 European Commission (2020), '**EU Strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter**'.
- 21 European Commission (2021), '**The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan**'.
- 22 European Commission (2021), '**Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme**'.
- 23 See 'Annex', in **Vienna+25: Building trust – Making human rights a reality for all – Compilation of documents**, International Conference Vienna +25, 22–23 May 2018, Vienna, pp. 92–94.
- 24 **Vienna+25: Building trust – Making human rights a reality for all – Outcome document**, International Conference on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights, 22–23 May 2018, Vienna.
- 25 FRA (2019), '**Human rights cities: Great potential for improving fundamental rights in the EU**'.

1

HUMAN RIGHTS CITIES IN THE EU: ROOTING A HUMAN RIGHTS CULTURE IN THE CITY

National, regional and local governments are duty-bearers,¹ which means that they are responsible for implementing the human and fundamental rights obligations of states. These obligations bind all forms of local governments in urban or rural areas, irrespective of their size, but depend on what powers these local governments have over diverse policy areas, in particular education, health, social affairs or housing.

Beyond the legal obligations, cities play an important part in the multilevel governance² of human and fundamental rights. Much of the day-to-day human rights work takes place at local level – for example, in delivering public services or managing public space, social care or education, or in relation to participation in public affairs and cultural, social and economic life, as well as through citizen dialogues. There are also human rights aspects of diverse areas where local government may have power, in particular public transport, water supply and sewage, power supply, environment, digitalisation, culture, arts and sports.

Local government can resolve many fundamental rights challenges, as FRA's work shows.³ Local and regional authorities, in particular cities, are already addressing many of these challenges by developing initiatives to fight racism and discrimination, or supporting the inclusion of vulnerable people or the integration of refugees, to name just a few ways. But often the sectoral policies that address initiatives at local level are not explicitly linked to human and fundamental rights obligations.

A growing number of cities in the EU have declared themselves human rights cities. There is no official list of all human rights cities, but cities in at least six Member States have publicly declared themselves human rights cities,⁴ and more cities are aspiring to become human rights cities or expand their human and fundamental rights work.



Local community meeting between Lund and 'Södra Sandby' village, Sweden, 2020.

The main feature of a human rights city is cooperation by local actors which commit to upholding human and fundamental rights in and through their work. The leadership of the city can start the process of becoming a human rights city,⁵ but so can a local coalition of grassroots organisations or from academia.

FRA ACTIVITY

FRA work relating to the local level

The agency's work on the local level includes:

- FRA (2020), **What do fundamental rights mean for people in the EU?**, Fundamental Rights Survey (report)
- FRA (2019), **Integration of young refugees in the EU: good practices and challenges** (report)
- FRA (2019), **Putting the Fundamental Rights Charter into practice: The local and regional perspective** (background document)
- FRA (2018), **Working with Roma: Participation and empowerment of local communities** (report) and the project on Local engagement for Roma inclusion
- FRA (2018), **Current migration situation in the EU: Impact on local communities** (focus report)

- FRA (2018), *From institutions to community living* (Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3)(reports)
- FRA (2017), **Together in the EU** (report)
- FRA (2014), **Making rights real: A guide for local and regional authorities** (booklet) and 'Joining up for fundamental rights' (toolkit)
- FRA/ICMPD (2009), **Housing policies promoting integration and community cohesion at local level**

- FRA (2008), **Community cohesion at local level: Addressing the needs of Muslim communities** (report)

FRA also cooperates with local authorities through events and meetings, in particular the annual dialogue with the CIVEX Commission in the European Committee of the Regions since 2009; and dedicated workshops at FRA's **Fundamental Rights Forum** (2016, 2018 and 2021).



Roma youth discuss inter-ethnic relations with the mayor of Aghia Varvara, Greece. FRA LERI Project.

Being a human rights city: what difference does it make?

- Declaring a city a human rights city affirms the commitment to respecting, protecting, fulfilling and promoting the rights and dignity of everyone living there. The city applies a human rights-based approach in policies and actions.
- A human rights city is an inclusive city that ensures equal rights for all. The city acts as a guardian and defender of human rights, focusing on the well-being of people. It ensures that everyone's rights are equally respected and protected, particularly for those people who are most vulnerable to human rights violations and social exclusion, in particular Roma and other minorities, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, persons with disabilities, children and youth, elderly people and homeless persons.
- A human rights city promotes the meaningful participation of all. It does this by engaging with civil society, in particular grassroots organisations, as well as business, faith and religious organisations and communities, through dedicated platforms and forums to promote and implement a human rights agenda defined together.
- A human rights city supports cooperation among the relevant actors to make human rights-related initiatives in the city coherent with each other. That reinforces the implementation of human rights standards and public accountability.
- A human rights city develops networking opportunities with other human rights cities. This lets them exchange practice and know-how regularly and pilot new approaches that can increase the impact of human rights on the everyday life of people in the society.

Endnotes

- 1 About duty-bearers, see OHCHR (2006), **Frequently asked questions on a human rights-based approach to development cooperation**, p. 15.
- 2 European Committee of the Regions (2012), **'Building a European culture of multilevel governance'**, opinion factsheet. See also FRA (2013), **An EU internal strategic framework for fundamental rights: Joining forces to achieve better results**, p. 14.
- 3 See, for instance, FRA (2018), **Working with Roma: Participation and empowerment of local communities**; FRA (2019), **Integration of young refugees in the EU: Good practices and challenges**; FRA (2014), **Making rights real – A guide for local and regional authorities**. See more also in the box entitled 'FRA's work relating to the local level'.
- 4 Graz, Salzburg and Vienna in Austria; Middelburg and Utrecht in the Netherlands; Barcelona and Valencia in Spain; Nuremberg in Germany; Lund in Sweden; and Turin in Italy.
- 5 B. Oomen, M. F. Davis and M. Grigolo (2016), **Global urban justice: the rise of human rights cities**, Cambridge University Press; M. F. Davis, T. G. Hansen and E. Hanna (eds.) (2017), **Human rights cities and regions – Swedish and international perspectives**, Raoul Wallenberg Institute and Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions; M. Grigolo (2019), **The human rights city: New York, San Francisco, Barcelona**, Abingdon, Routledge; E. Garcia-Chueca and L. Vidal (eds.) (2019), **Advancing urban rights: Equality and diversity in the city**, Barcelona, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs; Citizen Rights and Diversity Department (2018), **Methodology guide – City of human rights: The Barcelona model**; M. Möstl (2021), **'Conceptualizing human rights cities: Legal deliberations and practical proposals on the pursuit of human rights and the SDGs at the local level'**, World Human Rights Cities Forum, Paper Series I, WHRCF 2020; I. Meier (2021), **Research on human rights at the local and regional levels: Methods, practices, approaches**, **Human Rights Go Local Publication Series**, Vol. 2, Graz, HRGL Publishing; K. Gomes and M. Möstl (2020), **Implementing human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level: Key issues and examples**, **Human Rights Go Local Publications Series**, Vol. 1, Graz, HRGL Publishing.

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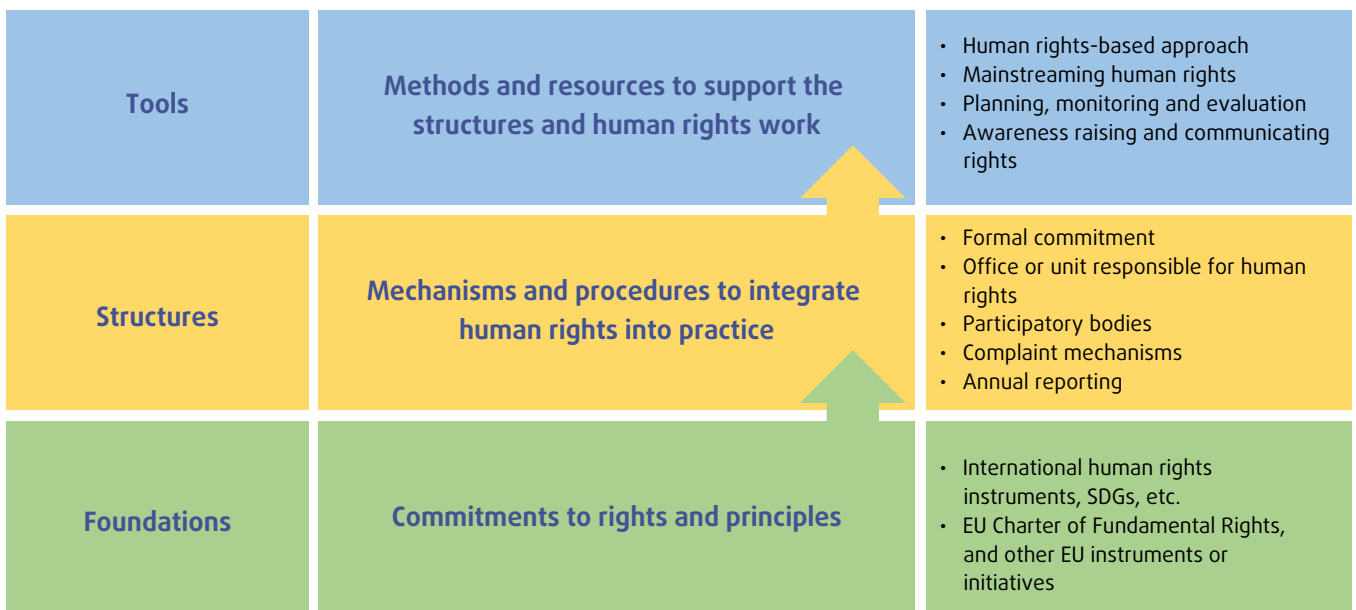
THE FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CITIES

The proposed framework compiles the elements necessary for becoming a human rights city in the EU. The framework is a flexible tool acknowledging the diversity of local contexts, the different powers of local governments, the size of the city and its resources. The framework is a 'living document' to review and customise.

The framework has three strands: foundations, structures and tools.

Figure 1 visualises the relationship between these strands. The tools support structures, which in turn integrate the foundations – the rights and principles – into a city's work.

FIGURE 1: STRANDS IN THE FRAMEWORK



Source: FRA, 2021

Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 outline key elements of a human rights city in terms of the three strands: foundations, structures and tools. Background information complements these elements, and practical examples come from human rights cities and from other cities that have developed extended work on fundamental rights that inspired this framework.

2.1. FOUNDATIONS – AFFIRMING THE CITY’S COMMITMENTS TO HUMAN RIGHTS

FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CITIES – KEY ELEMENTS

1. Commitment to ensuring compliance with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights¹ and related targeted efforts by the EU, as the Strategy to strengthen the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights outlines.²
2. Commitment to ensuring compliance with the international human rights standards that the Member State has ratified, including in all areas of work where the local authority has power. These can include, for example:
 - social services,
 - healthcare services,
 - public utility services, in particular water, sewage, electricity, transport, environment, refuge collection and recycling, management of public spaces and recreational services,
 - education at various levels, including lifelong learning,
 - culture, cultural heritage and sports,³
 - procurement of government goods and services.
3. Commitment to fulfilling the national plan for the global Agenda 2030 and its SDGs.⁴
4. Commitment to contributing as appropriate to international human rights monitoring mechanisms, in particular the United Nations Universal Periodic Review.



Galley Proof: a participative art project on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, 2019.



Galley Proof: a participative art project on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, State Theatre, Stuttgart, Germany, 2018

Background

Foundations represent formal commitments to respect human rights, fundamental rights and principles reflected in the international human rights commitments that states have ratified. These include the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter, which deals specifically with economic and social rights, as well as various more specific UN and Council of Europe conventions.

At EU level, the Charter of Fundamental Rights is the core instrument binding EU Member States when they act in areas that EU legislation or the EU treaties cover. EU law, like international human rights law, places obligations on all levels of government. The Charter reflects this, and applies to all levels of governments including local and regional. See **Article 51** of the Charter, 'Field of application'.

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which the EU has ratified, are linked to the disbursement of EU funds. Member States must ensure that EU-funded programmes comply with and implement these two instruments throughout the 2021–2027 EU funding period. This means that Member States should have in place effective mechanisms to ensure compliance, and appropriate arrangements to report when operations supported by EU funds do not comply.^a It also means that managing authorities of EU-funded programmes should establish and apply selection criteria and procedures that take the Charter into account.^b

These rules also bind local authorities participating in managing and monitoring EU-funded programmes, as well as when they benefit from EU-funded operations.

European Pillar of Social Rights

A core EU policy linked to human rights cities is the European Pillar of Social Rights.^c The EU adopted it in 2017. It comprises a set of social rights and principles. Although they are not legally binding, rights and principles that the pillar includes are implemented gradually through new EU legislation or policies.

For example, the new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, which the European Commission released on 7 October 2020, includes the target of "cut[ting] the poverty gap between Roma children and other children by at least half", which is in line

with principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.^d The EU's actions towards a 'Union of Equality' also "contribute to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights".^e Finally, new EU legislation, in particular the European Child Guarantee, draws on the pillar.^f

Agenda 2030

A city's commitments should include reference to the national action plan implementing the global Agenda 2030 and its SDGs. A wide range of SDGs are relevant to cities and interrelated with human rights, in particular SDG 11 ("Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"), which includes targets and indicators of relevance to human rights cities. Other SDGs, in particular on gender equality (SDG 5), on reducing inequalities (SDG 10) and on peace, justice and accountability (SDG 16), are also relevant for human rights cities work.

UN tools^g and policy documents, in particular the 2020 UN Human Rights Council Resolution on local government and human rights,^h note the importance of cities in implementing the Agenda 2030. The resolution recognises "the role of local government in the promotion and protection of human rights"ⁱ and calls on international human rights mechanisms to interact with cities and for all human rights mechanisms and other stakeholders "to cooperate with local governments to support them in discharging their human rights responsibilities".

^a See **Annex III, Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy, OJ L 231/159 (Common Provisions Regulation).**

^b See **Article 67, Common Provisions Regulation.**

^c **European Commission (2021), 'The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan'.**

^d **FRA (2021), Fundamental Rights Report – 2021,**

Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p. 135 section 5.2 of the report.

^e See FRA (2021), **Fundamental Rights Report – 2021**, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.

^f European Commission, ‘**The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee**’.

^g See, for example, European Commission Joint Research Centre (2020), **European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews**, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union; K. Gomes and M. Möstl (2020), **Implementing human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level: Key issues and examples**, Human Rights Go Local Publications Series, Vol. 1, Graz, HRGL Publishing. On the SDGs and national implementation, see, for example, UN Human Rights Council Advisory Committee (2020), ‘**Study on national policies to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by integrating**

human rights’, A/HRC/AC/24/CRP.2. Part V (pp. 15–16) concerns the involvement of local government, with concrete examples.

^h **Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 6 October 2020, A/HRC/RES/45/7.**

ⁱ FRA response (2019) to the Call for inputs to the report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on “effective methods to foster cooperation between local government and local stakeholders for the effective promotion and protection of human rights” (HRC resolution 39/7’); OCHCR, ‘**Local government and human rights**’; UN General Assembly (2019), ‘**Local government and human rights – Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**’, A/HRC/42/22. See also UN Human Rights Council (2015), ‘**Role of local government in the promotion and protection of human rights – Final report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee**’, A/HRC/30/49.

Selected practices

Cities’ commitments

Vienna’s commitments to human rights includes references to UN, Council of Europe and EU instruments. The Vienna Declaration refers specifically to the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** and the **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**.

Nuremberg refers primarily to the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**.

Barcelona includes references to the 2000 **European Charter for Safeguarding Human Rights in the City** adopted in Saint Dennis, considered as “regulatory reference framework”. The Barcelona vision also draws on interculturality and gender approaches.^a

In **Lund**, the human rights city work is connected to social sustainability and the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs).^b A dedicated programme (2020-2030) was put in place following an analysis of the human rights situation in the city. It covers six areas: democracy, education and learning, lifestyles, work and employment, housing and the local environment, and gender equality. The programme includes initiatives to support children, youth, and people with disabilities to fulfil obligations from the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** and the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**.

For example, the **Youth Council** engage young people from 12 to 25 on issues that matters to them. The city set-up also ‘**Influence Cafés**’, for young people who attend special school using graphic facilitation and illustration to support participation. The programme also includes various initiatives to support housing, fight homelessness, education, equal opportunities and more.^c

Heidelberg City Council signed the **European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life** in 2007. It was followed by **measures** to support women participation in public life, security in public and private place and gender equality at work.^d

Links to SDGs and Agenda 2030

Efforts to implement the 17 SDGs have created opportunities for cities and other local governments to develop human rights work.^e For example, **Utrecht** established itself as ‘Utrecht: A global goals city’.^f The initiative created opportunities to take measures in urban development; set up a transparent monitoring and indicator tool, the SDGs dashboard; develop cooperation with business (**Utrecht4GlobalGoals**); raise residents’ awareness of human rights; and mobilise the community through funding projects in Utrecht or internationally.

The Agenda 2030 encourages Member States, including at subnational and local levels, to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress”. For example, **Barcelona, Basque Regional Government, Bologna, Bonn, Ghent, Helsinki, Mannheim, North Rhine-Westphalia, Stuttgart, Turku and Valencia** submitted such voluntary local reviews (VLRs).^g

‘Doing together’ is also very much at the heart of the VLR process in the Finnish city of **Espoo**. It developed its strategy and goals in close partnership with communities, business and residents, including preschool children through initiatives such as ‘Day as a Mayor’ in kindergarten. It resulted in a comprehensive “roadmap for all activities and operations in the city”. The process acted as a useful “tool to better understand what is actually happening within the city” through stories and memories of people living in it, and to establish a path for city development until 2025.

Bonn 2030 addresses SDGs across municipal services. Collecting data and monitoring progress is a strong component of the approach developed. Drawing on **indicators for German cities, districts and municipalities**, the document illustrates in a transparent way how the city is doing on each indicator using a traffic light symbol. The city’s experiences contributed to the OECD project ‘**A Territorial Approach to the SDGs**’ to increase how local reporting by cities around the world influences the 17 goals.

Mannheim 2030 describes how the city will holistically address the SDGs. It was set up through a large and open participatory process with stakeholders and residents. It used citizens’ surveys, dialogue workshops with the mayor and structured dialogues such as discussions in the city council or ‘Urban thinkers campus’ with experts.

The **Sweden Local2030 Hub** is a multi-stakeholder platform for various local actors for “promoting capacity building, knowledge sharing, collaboration, and inspiration with the aim of accelerating the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda”.^h

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and local governments

The **Association of Croatian Cities** (Udruga Gradova) published an online article on the role of local authorities in implementing the Charter.ⁱ The article highlighted that “As citizens of the nearest level of public authority, cities and municipalities can initiate new policies and measures, set standards and good practices, and formulate clear political messages towards greater protection of fundamental human rights.” It refers to the ‘Cities for Equality’ project, which resulted in a manual to promote equality and fight discrimination, building on examples from cities such as **Pazin, Rijeka, Zabok and Zagreb**.^j

European Pillar of Social Rights

Since 2019, a group of cities has joined the **Eurocities** initiative ‘Inclusive Cities for All: Social Rights in My City’. Referring to the European Pillar of Social Rights, cities signed pledges to deliver on social rights. Participating cities include **Amsterdam, Athens, Bologna, Braga, Ghent, Glasgow, Gothenburg, Ljubljana, Lyon, Madrid, Malmö, Milan, Nantes, Rotterdam, Warsaw, Zagreb** and more.^k

^a See more in **City of human rights. The Barcelona model**, December 2018, Barcelona City Council.

^b U. Dagård (2020), **'Covid-19: The city of Lund – Two years as a human rights city'**, Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law.

^c The programme includes also activities to support national minorities based on the **Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities** and the **European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages**, and the **European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life** for activities to support and promote gender equality. For more information, see the **Social Sustainability programme** and the **website of Lund**. See also **'Covid-19: The City of Lund – Two Years as a Human Rights City'**.

^d **Heidelberg European Charter for the Equality between women and men at local level**, Heidelberg municipal website.

^e G. Fredriksson, I. S. Reis, M. F. Davis, M. Kjaerum (2018), **'Human rights cities and the SDGs'**, Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. See also K. Gomes and M. Möstl (2020), **Implementing human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level: Key issues and examples**, Human Rights Go Local Publications Series, Vol. 1, Graz, HRGL Publishing; I. Meier (2021), **Research on human rights at the local and regional levels: Methods, practices, approaches**, Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Vol. 2, Graz, HRGL Publishing.

^f **City of Utrecht**, Department of European and International Affairs (2018), **'Utrecht: A global goals city'**.

^g All voluntary local reviews submitted are available at UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, **'Voluntary local reviews'**. See also **SDG Knowledge Hub** (2019), **'14 cities discuss common SDG commitments, "worldwide movement" towards VLRs'**.

^h More information available on **Sweden Local2030 Hub**, a UN Hub to support the local implementation of SDGs.

ⁱ **FRA Fundamental Rights Report 2021** (p. 57) related to Croatia, Association of Cities (2020), **'Uloga lokalnih vlasti u provedbi europske Povelje o temeljnim pravima?'** ('The role of local authorities in the implementation of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights?').

^j Croatian Law Centre and the Association of Cities in the Republic of Croatia (2019), **Cities for Equality – Mainstreaming equality at the local level**, Zagreb, Croatian Law Centre.

^k Eurocities, **'Join Eurocities' initiative "Inclusive Cities for All: Social Rights in My City"**.

2.2. STRUCTURES – MECHANISMS AND PROCEDURES TO HELP INTEGRATE HUMAN RIGHTS INTO DAILY CITY WORK

FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CITIES – KEY ELEMENTS

5. Formal declaration of the city's commitment to human rights at the highest political level, e.g. mayor, vice-mayor and/or other governing body. The declaration could also refer to the links between human rights, the rule of law and democracy, and to the principle of good administration.
6. Nominating an elected representative in the city council on human rights.
7. Establishing a human rights structure/office within the city administration to help coordinate activities, raise awareness of human rights and support outreach and participation activities.
8. Establishing a human rights consultative participatory body or council(s) with key local players, including business, youth groups, sports and cultural associations, civil society representatives, etc. It should help to discuss human rights issues, engage diverse vulnerable groups living in the city, communicate with them and cooperate with them on human rights. In particular, these include Roma; national, linguistic and religious minorities; migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; young people and children; elderly people; persons with disabilities and mental health problems; people who are homeless or in extreme poverty; and single-parent families.
9. Establishing an anti-discrimination office or ombuds institution with a human rights remit, which can also provide support to victims of crime. Such facilities can provide low-threshold access to justice and legal remedy. Community mediators could also supplement them, to improve social inclusion and resolve conflicts between people in diverse communities.
10. Developing an annual reporting mechanism on the human rights performance of the city. Its findings could be discussed in the city council to monitor progress, identify lessons learned and propose new activities.
11. Fostering partnerships and cooperation with national bodies, in particular NHRIs, equality bodies and ombuds institutions, as well as with relevant European and international organisations. Cities can also join and contribute to city networks,⁵ which facilitate the exchange of information on human rights issues.

Background

This category covers mechanisms and procedures to help implement human rights in the city's work. A first step would be to formally declare it a human rights city. The format for this may vary but would typically be a decision or declaration by the political leadership of the city, to ensure sustainability.

Cities should set up mechanisms and procedures to support human rights work, facilitate participation and coordination, and monitor implementation. This could take the form of a participatory advisory council dedicated to human rights or addressing the needs of specific groups such as Roma, migrants, refugees, or children and youth. Such councils act as a way for the city to communicate with various players and engage them. It can also take the form of a human rights office that can help to coordinate efforts within the administration,

raise awareness about fundamental rights, and support the engagement with stakeholders, civil society, individuals and communities.

There should also be mechanisms to make public authorities accountable, facilitate access to justice and legal remedy, and support victims of crime, thus creating effective ways for citizens to claim their rights. For example, a city can set up an anti-discrimination office or a local ombuds institution. It can fund victim support services and community mediators to support social inclusion and help resolve conflicts.

Finally, activities under this category should also build on cooperation with a variety of stakeholders at national level – NHRIs, academia, civil society, business, etc. – and internationally with city networks.

Selected practices

Formal city declarations

Examples of such declarations include those adopted by **Graz**, Austria (2001), **Vienna**, Austria (2014), **Nuremberg**, Germany (2014), **Barcelona**, Spain (2016).

Bilbao has had a 'Charter of Values' in place since 2018. It used a participatory process to identify 17 'values', which the charter includes: respect for human rights, solidarity, participation, trust, creativity, equality between women and men, environmental sustainability, etc. It serves as a basis for improving the quality of life and well-being of people, and guiding the city's future development. Complementing it, the 'Values Development Plan' establishes activities to deliver on the values.^a

Activities developed under the Bilbao charter include the specific programme 'Bilbi, balioak ibilian' ('Bilbi, values on the move') on education, youth and values.^b This programme includes testimonies related to some aspects of the Charter of Values (immigrants, victims of bullying or of gender violence). It aims to draw attention to the need to reinforce values and social commitment, to make young people aware of them and to disseminate knowledge of the importance of their role in society.

Participation, including of vulnerable groups

Espoo provides families, youth, elderly and people with disabilities with easy-to-use online access to the **city website**. This includes guidance, support and counselling services, and more. Young people between 13 and 20 also have a channel for feedback and initiatives to "participate and get heard".

Vilnius's open data policy provides a new channel of communication between residents and the municipality.^c Since 2015, the city has provided open access to non-sensitive data that obeys **Regulation (EU) 2016/679** of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing **Directive 95/46/EC** (the General Data Protection Regulation). This policy covers information related to finance, public procurement, real estate and public transport. This helped provide new benefits and smart solutions to improve residents' daily life.

Human rights advisory council and election campaign monitoring

In **Graz**, the Human Rights Council monitors the human rights situation in the city and reports annually to the city council.^d The report compiles information from more than 150 local stakeholders, including city departments and civil society. It outlines existing problems and good practice, proposes recommendations and assesses how past recommendations were implemented. The Human Rights Council also monitors election campaigns by assessing the human rights compliance of election material, speeches and interviews by all political parties.

Malmö has established an advisory **Council of the National Roma Minority**. It supports the participation of Roma with the city, help to fight discrimination and vulnerability and help to promote the Roma culture and language. It consists of representatives of the city council and Roma associations. The council meets four times a year and report on activities.



Press event of the Graz Human Rights Report, 2019, Austria.

Human rights office

Nuremberg, Vienna, and the Swedish region **Västra Götaland** for instance have established human rights offices or departments in their administration. These help coordinate human rights initiatives or action plans, provide the city and its leadership with advice and guidance on human rights activities, raise awareness of human rights and help engage with stakeholders such as civil society.

Anti-discrimination office, support to victims of discrimination and crime



Meeting of Barcelona Municipal Immigration Council, 2020, Spain.

Barcelona has established an 'office for non-discrimination'. The **Barcelona discrimination observatory** complements it by helping to monitor human rights. Since 2018, the observatory has published an annual report^e with detailed data about discrimination, actions and initiatives taken to address it, and suggestions for future actions. Work of the observatory gather information and expertise from the Office for non-discrimination, the human rights resource centre of the City and several victims support organisations.^f

Other cities such as **Graz, Valencia, Salzburg** and **Nuremberg** have also established an anti-discrimination office.

Copenhagen, in collaboration with representative organisations of Danish restaurants, cafés and nightclubs, has established training course for bouncers, security guards and other staff at nightclubs, bars and restaurants. This has helped participants deal with situations in which guests may experience discrimination, avoid these situations completely and de-escalate any potential conflicts.^g

Bologna established a comprehensive policy on equality and non-discrimination as part of the city **programming document 2021-2023**. A dedicated office and three units ensure the implementation of the city policies: on LGBTIQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer] rights, diversity and gender policies; on human rights, new citizens and international cooperation; and on intercultural services.

To support the implementation of the equality policy within the administration, Bologna has established several mechanisms. For instance, the city council adopted a **local action plan 2018-2021** on a rights-based approach to the inclusion of people with minority background. A review of this action plan will take place by end 2021. The city also signed a **'Pact of cooperation'** (2017) with local associations for the promotion and protection of LGBTIQ persons. These initiatives are complemented with capacity building of staff on equality and non-discrimination.

Turin established a permanent commission in the city council on rights and equal opportunities. This commission makes proposals and monitors equal opportunities related to work and life, to ensure the dignity and freedom of people. This initiative is part of a broader set of mechanisms and tools to promote equality and fight non-discrimination, such as the LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex] Service to fight discrimination based on gender and sexual identity, the participatory body Citizen Coordination against Violence to Women, the **guide dedicated to women who have suffered violence and stalking**, and awareness-raising campaigns such as **'I speak and I do not discriminate'**.^h See more under 'Partnerships and cooperation' below.

Heidelberg Anti-Discrimination Network brings together departments from the city such as the Office for Equal Opportunities, the Municipal Disability Commissioner, local associations, and grassroots initiatives. With meetings twice a year, the network is a platform for cooperation "to support people who are discriminated against on the basis of ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual identity".ⁱ

Assessment and reporting

Vienna has put in place comprehensive monitoring mechanisms on **gender equality** and on **integration and diversity**. They report to the city council on these two areas every three years. They cover a wide range of topics, and use indicators to measure the impact of the city's anti-discrimination work.

These monitoring processes rely on information gathered through a wide range of city administration departments. They provide valuable support for mainstreaming gender equality and diversity.^j

Partnerships and cooperation

Gdansk implements a comprehensive programme providing quality services for immigrants, called the Immigrant Integration Model.^k An interdisciplinary team of 150 stakeholders designed it. It includes references to human rights principles, in particular dignity, equality and solidarity.

Turin coordinates the Italian Network of Regions, Autonomous Provinces and Local Authorities (**RE.A.DY**). Created in 2005, it helps prevent, combat and overcome discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Participants meet annually to develop common initiatives and exchange good practice, hence supporting an effective multilevel cooperation and coordination between different levels of governments. The network website publishes collections of these practices covering education, families, networking, training, housing and services, and sport.

In Sweden, the **Association of Local Authorities and Regions** and the **Raoul Wallenberg Institute** developed a **joint project** to explore what it means to be a human rights city in the Swedish context. The project delivered a publication on "**Human Rights Cities and Regions - Swedish and International Perspectives**", a **'platform for policy and organisational development'** as well as capacity building activities to support cities, in particular Lund, to become a human rights city.

In April 2021, the **Dutch government** started to consult a range of national-level actors and cities to establish a "human rights platform for municipalities [...] for the purpose of bringing local strategies and other initiatives together, sharing best practices and clarifying minimum standards", as part of activities under the Dutch national human rights action plan.^l

The **Cities Coalition for Digital Rights** (CC4DR) is cooperating with UN-Habitat to establish a ‘digital rights helpdesk’.^m It will be a technical and policy-related service providing local governments with support and guidance to ensure that local digital strategies, policies, projects and services integrate inclusion and human rights. It will act as one-stop virtual shop with key resources and access to experts. A digital human rights governance framework complements it, along with guidelines that will be developed through a review of existing frameworks of leading cities and stakeholders on the topic, and in consultation with digital rights experts.

Amsterdam, Barcelona and New York launched CC4DR in 2018. It now includes over 50 cities worldwide, including cities in the EU such as **Athens, Bratislava, Grenoble, Cluj-Napoca, Dublin, Leipzig, Lyon, Nice, Turin, Milan, Vienna and Zaragoza**. The network is “committed to promoting and defending digital rights in urban context through city action, to resolve common digital challenges and work towards legal, ethical and operational frameworks to advance human rights in digital environments”.ⁿ

Cooperation between NHRIs and cities

Few NHRIs cooperate with the local level in the EU, FRA’s work shows. Some NHRIs, however, have established regional offices, organise local visits or have dedicated projects. In a recent report, FRA encouraged “EU Member States [to] consider increasing support for cooperation between NHRIs and cities or regions – with dedicated resources. Such cooperation would not only reinforce human rights locally but also support the awareness of rights”.^o

The **Norwegian NHRI** began a project to raise awareness of international human rights obligations and help cities and other local governments fulfil them. The project will raise awareness of the practices of human rights cities. The initial phase included a survey of local authorities on their activities related to human rights. Findings from the survey will be published in the second half of 2021.

^a *Council of Europe, ‘Intercultural cities: Good practice examples’.*

^b *Information provided to FRA by City of Bilbao.*

^c *Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2021), Human Rights Handbook for Local and Regional Authorities, Vol. 2: Social rights, n.p., Council of Europe, p. 95.*

^d *City of Graz (n.d.), ‘Graz - the first human rights city in Europe’ (leaflet).*

^e *Barcelona Discrimination Observatory Report 2020, Human Rights Resources Centre, Office for Non-Discrimination, Barcelona City Council (2021).*

^f *International Centre for Human Rights at Local and Regional Levels (2021), Human Rights Go Local: What works.*

^g *FRA (2019), Fundamental Rights Report – 2019, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p. 90.*

^h *Turin, ‘Rights and participation’.*

ⁱ *See description of the Heidelberg Anti-Discrimination Network, Heidelberg Website.*

^j *Council of Europe, ‘Intercultural cities: good practice examples’.*

^k *Gdansk (2016), Immigrant Integration Model. Read more in OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2018), Local Authorities’ Migrant Integration Guide, Warsaw, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.*

^l *Government of the Netherlands, ‘National action plan on human rights 2020’, Action #1 under section ‘3. Integrated approach: when the system stalls’ page 24.*

^m *Information provided to FRA by the CC4DR network.*

ⁿ *Cities for Digital Rights, ‘About us’.*

^o *FRA (2020), Strong and Effective National Human Rights Institutions – Challenges, promising practices and opportunities, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p. 20.*

2.3. TOOLS – METHODS AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT HUMAN RIGHTS WORK

FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CITIES – KEY ELEMENTS

12. Mainstreaming of human rights in all policy areas and processes of the city administration, adopting a ‘whole-of-government’ approach to human rights rather than seeing it as the responsibility of one department only.
13. Applying a ‘human rights-based approach’ to the city’s work, with:
 - clear identification of the people as rights holders with entitlements, and the corresponding obligations of the city as duty-bearer to deliver on the rights;
 - analysis of inequalities, redress of discrimination and empowerment of people, including through positive measures to improve access to services and increase participation for marginalised and disadvantaged groups, in particular Roma and other minorities, persons with disabilities, etc.;
 - participation of inhabitants in decisions that affect them;
 - accountability and transparency in the way the city operates and delivers services to the public directly or through service providers, by setting up quality control measures and users’ feedback mechanisms;
 - promotion of diversity, respect and a sense of belonging for everybody in the communities.
14. Capacity building, training and human rights education to uphold human rights principles, including training for elected politicians, management and municipal staff, and human rights education for specific target audiences, in particular police, teachers, healthcare providers, social housing organisations, etc.
15. Human rights budgeting (and procurement).
16. Developing and implementing a local action plan on human rights, including a set of indicators, through a participatory process involving rights holders.
17. Putting in place procedures for scrutinising the compatibility of local policies and regulations with human rights, and assessing their impact on human rights, for example through a committee in the local council.
18. Establishing a process for monitoring and evaluation, in a participatory way, and based on data and indicators. These can be linked, whenever possible, to:
 - existing national or EU survey data as well as SDG targets and indicators,
 - indicator frameworks⁶ or review mechanisms established by city networks for specific thematic policies (e.g. on interculturality, equality, migrant integration, rights of the child or Roma inclusion),⁷
 - action to remedy identified shortcomings.
19. Proactive championing of human rights through communication initiatives and public awareness raising in the form of campaigns, awards or prizes, public debates, cultural or sports events with a human rights label, etc.
20. Cross-national cooperation and peer exchange on human rights, including through dedicated city networks, integration of human rights issues in town-twinning or civil servant exchange programmes, etc.



Vienna Children and youth parliament, 2021, Austria.

Background

The United Nations defines the human rights-based approach (HRBA) as:

“a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress. [...] Under a human rights-based approach, the plans, policies and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law. This helps to promote the sustainability of development work, empowering people themselves – especially the most marginalized – to participate in policy formulation and hold accountable those who have a duty to act.”^a

The HRBA includes several dimensions, in particular mainstreaming human rights; equality and non-discrimination; participation; legality; accountability; and transparency.^b

Among them, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defined mainstreaming human rights as the “process of integrating human rights in development programming”.^c It means in essence that human rights ought to be considered in a cross-cutting manner within organisations and their activities.

Mainstreaming is also connected to gender equality – known as gender mainstreaming.

It is defined as “a strategy towards realising gender equality. It involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination.”^d

Further tools include human rights budgeting (as well as procurement), a system for distributing resources with people as the priority. It involves how “rights are impacted by how the money is raised, allocated, and spent. Specifically, budget decisions should reflect human rights standards and the process of formulating, approving, executing, and auditing the budget should reflect human rights principles.”^e Human rights budgeting is not necessarily linked to allocation of extra budget; it can be based on clarifying how the budget allocation contributes to the city’s fundamental rights priorities.

Importantly, human rights ought to be part of each step in a programming approach, involving planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. These require high-quality data, generated using a human rights-based approach.

The OHCHR outlines key points in its publication on a human rights-based approach to data.^f In particular, the relevant population groups should participate in the collection and analysis; cities need to be accountable to ensure that data collected comply with human rights; and the methodology, data and results should be transparent and publicly available. The data collected should ideally feed into

human rights indicators. Those are indicators that capture the width and breadth of human rights in terms of commitment, compliance and actual outcome.⁹

Planning, monitoring and evaluation should involve civil society, grassroots organisations, academia, business and rights holders. Expertise from national-level bodies can be explored by cooperating with organisations, in particular national ombuds institutions, NHRIs or equality bodies, or in a cross-national way with city networks.

Awareness raising and communication are also key for delivering human rights commitments. FRA's Fundamental Rights Survey shows that 9 out of 10 people in the EU believe that human rights help create fairer societies' It also shows that more efforts are needed to raise awareness to people about their rights. Awareness activities can cover campaigns, award ceremonies, festivals, public debates and so on.

Communicating about rights needs to be part of the human rights work, not just an add-on. Communication must cover issues of broad interest to people, to which they can relate, and it must have a positive approach. It has to bring authentic voices that tell human rights stories, and to trigger people's core values. Communication needs to be designed with people from the communities and local 'influencers' who will act as champions for human rights.

To help practitioners, provide inspiration and encourage innovation, FRA has published a booklet entitled **10 keys to effectively communicating human rights**. It includes concrete examples of effective narratives, practices and tools. See **FRA's video** about the booklet.

Sharing experiences through peer exchange, nationally and across national borders, is an important tool that can help cities build up their capacity.¹ EU funds, such as the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme**, provide **dedicated funding opportunities** for capacity building through town twinning and networks of cities, promoting civic participation and more.

Cities and networks should consider mapping funding opportunities at national and European levels to ensure that they can make full use of them.

^a *OHCHR (2006), Frequently asked questions on a human rights-based approach to development cooperation, New York and*

Geneva, United Nations, p. 15. See also additional thematic resources on the HRBA: OHCHR, 'Urbanization and human rights'; OHCHR (2017), Realizing human rights through government budgets, New York and Geneva, United Nations; UN General Assembly (2020), 'Guidelines for the implementation of the right to adequate housing', A/HRC/43/43; UN (2008), 'Basic principles and guidelines on development-based evictions and displacement – Annex 1 of the report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living', A/HRC/4/18. See also UN Sustainable Development Group, 'Human rights-based approach'; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018), 'Guidance note – The SDGs, human rights, gender, and sustainable development in the 2030 Agenda.'

^b *See, for example, OHCHR (2006), Frequently asked questions on a human rights-based approach to development cooperation, New York and Geneva, United Nations, pp. 35–37.*

^c *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2012), Mainstreaming human rights in development policies and programming: UNDP experiences, p. 5.*

^d *European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 'What is gender mainstreaming'.*

^e *Scottish Human Rights Commission, 'What is human rights budget work?'; see also OHCHR (2017), Realizing human rights through government budgets, New York and Geneva, United Nations.*

^f *OHCHR (2018), A human rights-based approach to data – leaving no one behind in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.*

^g *See OHCHR (2012), Human rights indicators – A guide to measurement and implementation; FRA (2011), Using indicators to measure fundamental rights in the EU: Challenges and solutions.*

^h *FRA (2020), What do fundamental rights mean for people in the EU?, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. This report presents findings from the Fundamental Rights Survey based on 35,000 people's responses to questions about fundamental rights. It covers all EU Member States, North Macedonia and the United Kingdom.*

ⁱ *European Commission, 'Call for proposals – Networks of towns'; European Commission, 'Call for proposals – Town-twinning'.*

Selected practices

Applying an HRBA

In the area of artificial intelligence, **Amsterdam** and **Helsinki** have taken steps to build their policies and activities on a rights-based approach. For example, these cities have established a **register** on the way they use algorithms and artificial intelligence systems.

Helsinki offers people easy-to-use access so they can better manage personal information gathered by the city. Such initiatives contribute to transparency and create opportunities for people to provide feedback or raise concerns. Helsinki's approach draws on 2018 **MyData Global guiding principles**. These were identified with contributions from individuals and organisations from 40 countries worldwide. Such principles include for instance "a culture of respect, transparency and openness, diversity by design and accountability".

The city of **Fuenlabrada** in Spain has mainstreamed community policing principles^a and fundamental rights within the work of its local police. This includes activities such as setting up a specialised unit, diversity and inclusion policies, and taking measures to prevent or prosecute hate crimes. Fuenlabrada Police has developed capabilities on the rights of LGBTI people, migrants and people belonging to religious groups, and contributed to manuals and tools to promote rights-based and community policing approaches.^b

On 9 June 2021, the **Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU** released '**Guiding principles for a human rights based approach on public services**'. There are nine principles. Public authorities, including at local and regional levels, must:

1. promote citizens' participation at all stages of the process, particularly from excluded or disadvantaged groups;
2. design, first and foremost, for the communities in vulnerable situations;
3. analyse, in a systematic way, the expected and unforeseen consequences of service availability;
4. value the process as much as the outcome;
5. ensure privacy and citizens' personal data security;
6. consider cases of misuse a serious problem to tackle;
7. promote continuous service monitoring and assessment;
8. develop the rights holders' and duty-bearers' capacities;
9. ensure transparency on obligations, responsibilities and rights regarding services.

Action plan

The Swedish **Västra Götaland** region has adopted an action plan called 'For Every Human Being'.^c Its 12 priority areas cover equality, participation, accountability and transparency. The region applied HRBA principles for several projects in the community, including a project on psychiatric care involving patients and medical staff. The region published on their website detailed information and resources materials about its work on applying a human rights-based work.

The **Brussels Region** adopted its action plan against racism and discrimination in 2019. It covers 23 measures, including establishing a platform against racism, exchanging good practices and developing a method of data collection. Various bodies will carry out the plan, including the Belgian equality body Unia, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, and the labour unions.^e It has adopted further initiatives to mainstream gender equality and fight discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Lund Katedralskolan's anti-discrimination action plan 2020–2021 draws on feedback that students, teachers and other staff shared through surveys.^f It covers discrimination on various grounds (age, disability, religion or creed, gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity or sexual orientation), harassment and abuse. It includes an evaluation of the 2019–2020 plan.

Malmö's 'Plan against discrimination' covers school, work, housing, participation and support.⁹ The plan is available in several languages to ensure wide dissemination in communities. The Municipal Executive Board is responsible for following up and revising the plan, drawing on feedback from city departments on its implementation. This initiative is complemented by the Discrimination Ombudsman, and a citizen office to offer support for individuals facing discrimination'.

Participation

Utrecht has established a comprehensive action programme 'Making city together in the Utrecht way'.^h It supports engagement with civil society, residents, business and other stakeholders. It draws on principles of an HRBA: it was prepared in a participatory way, engages a variety of people from the communities, and provides feedback on the results of the participation at different stages of development. The programme includes a three-step guide (covering consultations, asking for advice and cooperation); and other tools such as progress reports; various channels for communications off- and online; and districts' platforms to support interactions between the city administration and residents.

Ljubljana has established various ways to engage with the population. Since 2003 the **Office for Citizens' Initiative** has offered assistance in communicating with citizens and listening to their complaints. People can submit requests in various ways: in person, by email, fax, telephone or post, or on the web.

This Office is responsible for managing the mayor's open days. In 2016, the city established a dedicated information and support service ('information point +65') for senior citizens and people with disabilities.

Evidence-based policies locally

Bordeaux has set up a comprehensive approach to fight discrimination and promote equality.ⁱ This includes a series of roundtables and dialogues with individuals, civil society and communities in 2015 as part of the 'Etats Généraux Egalité et Laïcité 2015', and a survey that the Observatory for Equality and Fight against Discrimination organised. The survey identified four areas of concern: housing, employment, public spaces and private services.

The city adopted an action plan to fight discrimination, and created a 'diversity label' to promote good practices in areas of recruitment, professional development, contracting services and communication. The city council, together with UNESCO, ICCAR and ECCAR, launched a global campaign in 2019.^j It showcases diverse portraits of people in public spaces with messages that foster equality in diversity and living together.

The **Bulgarian National Statistical Institute**, in partnership with **FRA**, has started to develop and test innovative methods to reach out to specific vulnerable groups at regional and local levels. With support from the EEA/ Norwegian Financial Mechanism, the project responds to the demand for data disaggregated by various vulnerability criteria (ethnicity, gender, disability, age, region, etc.).^k

Awareness raising and communicating rights

The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe** has appointed **Harald Bergmann**, Mayor of **Middelburg**, as **thematic spokesperson** on human rights at local and regional levels. He also chaired the development of the two human rights handbooks.^l

Since 1995, the **International Nuremberg Human Rights Award** has recognised and supported efforts of human rights defenders. It also aims to encourage more people to commit to human rights. The award is organised in cooperation with the UN.

Valencia recently established "I Edition Awards for Equality" to "reward actions, good practices and equality projects [...] in the areas of gender and sexist violence, health and sport, employment, conciliation and co-responsibility, coeducation and art and culture".^m

Communication is also an important element in fighting against hatred, stereotypes and prejudice. **Barcelona** has had an **anti-rumour strategy** for years, as an integrated part of the city's comprehensive approach to promoting equality and fighting against discrimination and hatred. The strategy uses the **methodology** that the Intercultural Cities programme developed. It aims to "raise awareness of and debunk [...] rumours, prejudices and stereotypes, provide anti-rumour tools and resources and promote dialogue and intercultural relations".ⁿ

This initiative includes a large network of more than 1,000 members, involving organisations and individuals, with the city's support. It resulted in a wealth of hands-on materials and resources such as a manual, a comic book, training courses for 'anti-rumour agents' and a guide for professionals. The project is a "simple, effective way to build a more cohesive society between the local and the immigrant population in Barcelona".^o

In **Bologna**, the communication campaign 'Bologna Cares!' helped to "raise awareness among the local population and to actively involve them on the topic of asylum seekers' and refugees' reception, choosing a specific topic each year and focusing in particular on the period around World Refugee Day on 20 June". The initiative is part of the Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers project.^p

Cooperation and peer exchange

Four EU capitals, **Bratislava, Budapest, Prague** and **Warsaw**, formed the Pact of Free Cities in late 2019. It promotes "democracy, pluralism, openness and cultural diversity". The pact is intended as a tool to reach out to the EU on common areas of interest, pool resources and offer opportunities for joint projects in areas of "sustainable city planning, climate protection, social inclusion, housing, and the digital agenda".^q It refers specifically to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and other EU initiatives such as EU policies and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

^a Council of Europe (2018), 'Fuenlabrada: Study visit for police officers on community policing', *Intercultural Cities Programme*.

^b David Martín Abanades (2019), *Intercultural cities – Manual on community policing*, n.p., Council of Europe. See also 'Lessons learned in Europe: The role of local police in tackling racism, xenophobia and hate speech', CLARA (Local Learning Communities against Racism, Xenophobia and Hate Speech) project, September 2020.

^c Action plan 'For every Human Being' for human rights work in Region Västra Götaland, Sweden, 2017–2020.

^d International Centre for Human Rights at Local and Regional Levels (2021), **Human Rights Go Local: What works**.

^e FRA (2021), **Fundamental Rights Report – 2021**, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p. 66.

^f Katedralskolan (n.d.), 'Anti-discrimination and anti-abuse plan, 2020–2021', Lund city Website.

^g Malmö (n.d.), 'Plan against discrimination'.

^h Utrecht Municipality, 'Participatiebeleid' ('Participation policy').

ⁱ City of Bordeaux, 'Lutte contre les discriminations' ('Fight against discrimination').

^j Unesco, "'Me, different?": UNESCO and the City of Bordeaux launch a global campaign against racism and discrimination'.

^k FRA Activity: providing data on vulnerable groups, FRA (2021), **Fundamental Rights Report – 2021**, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p. 139.

^l Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2019), **Human rights handbook for local and regional authorities, Vol. 1: Fighting against discrimination**, n.p., Council of Europe; Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2021), **Human rights handbook for local and regional authorities, Vol. 2: Social rights**, n.p., Council of Europe. See also the article "Harald Bergmann over mensenrechten: 'Het hoeft niet ingewikkeld te zijn'", ("Harald Bergmann on human rights: 'It doesn't have to be complicated'"), VNG Magazine #3, 21 February 2020.

^m Valencia, '1 Edition Awards for Equality'; 2019 edition.

ⁿ Barcelona City Council, 'BCN anti-rumour strategy', *Citizen Rights and Diversity*.

^o European Commission, 'Barcelona anti-rumours campaign', *Migrant Integration Information and Good Practices, European Web Site on Integration*. See also Council of Europe, 'Intercultural cities: Good practice examples'.

^p Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2019), **Human rights handbook for local and regional authorities, Vol. 1: Fighting against discrimination**, n.p., Council of Europe, p. 73.

^q Budapest, 'Pact of Free Cities'.

Endnotes

- 1 The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU is binding on EU Member States within the scope of EU law.
- 2 **The Strategy to strengthen the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** (2020), p. 3.
- 3 See examples on the contribution of culture, cultural heritage and sport in human rights in cities: **'Culture and sport'**, in *COMPASS – Manual for human rights education with young people*, 2nd edn, Council of Europe (2020); **Conference on the role of cultural heritage in fostering community cohesion**, (2018), Strasbourg, the Project STEPS on **'Cultural heritage and diversity'** and **good practice examples from cities on culture, leisure and cultural heritage** from the Intercultural Cities Programme of the Council of Europe;
- 4 See European Commission Joint Research Centre (2020), **European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews**, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union; K. Gomes and M. Möstl (2020), **Implementing human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level: Key issues and examples**, *Human Rights Go Local Publications Series*, Vol. 1, Graz, HRGL Publishing.
- 5 Examples of relevant networks are ECCAR, ICCAR, **Child Friendly Cities**, the **Intercultural Cities programme**, **Eurocities**, **smart cities**, the European Forum for Urban Security, **Shelter Cities**, **Rainbow Cities Network**, the **Human Rights City Network**, the **UCLG**, **Cities for Digital Rights**, the **Council of European Municipalities and Regions**, the **European Association for Local Democracy** and **Local Governments for Sustainability**.
- 6 See more about indicators in International Centre for Human Rights at Local and Regional Levels (2021), **Human Rights Go Local: What works**, section 'Encouragement No. 3', pp. 12–13.
- 7 For example Council of Europe, **'Tool No. 17: Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool – Indicators for measuring child participation'**.

3

IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK – PROPOSALS FOR A WAY FORWARD

3.1. 'ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL'

The proposed framework outlines elements of the three core strands: foundations, structure and tools. Cities and other forms of local governments can use it to design and implement their own step-by-step implementations, as they differ across the EU in structure, composition and powers.

In doing so they can benefit from the experience of existing human rights cities and develop peer learning practices.

3.2. PROMOTING EU POLICY OBJECTIVES

EU institutions have over the past few years increasingly focused on the important role of cities in sustainable and equitable development and in fulfilling fundamental rights for people in the EU.

The new **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** came out on 4 March 2021. It stresses that delivering on the pillar is “a shared political commitment and responsibility of the EU institutions, national, regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society, all of which have a role to play in line with their competences”.¹

The new **Strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU** released on 9 December 2020 highlights that “Local authorities are also well placed to raise awareness about people’s rights and about what people can do if their rights are breached”². The Council conclusions of 8 March 2021 on the Charter also highlight the role of cities.³ They note that “cities and local governments are important actors in the promotion of fundamental rights at national and European level”. The conclusions refer specifically to FRA’s initiative to develop a framework for human rights cities in the EU that “should provide adequate visibility to the Charter”.

Recent EU strategies⁴ also highlight the role of cities in the promotion of equality, in particular the Anti-racism Action Plan⁵ and the LGBTIQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer] Strategy.⁶ Moreover, the Security Union Strategy, published in July 2020, refers to the new Urban Agenda partnership on “security in public spaces” reflecting “the strong commitment of Member States, Commission and cities to better address threats to security in urban space”.⁷

The EU will provide € 1.5 billion in funding through its new Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme⁸ to promote and protect rights and values. This fund is open to public authorities, including cities, municipalities and other local authorities. It provides targeted funding through calls for proposals for town-twinning projects and networks of towns to promote rights and values.⁹

New EU initiatives on equality, inclusion and diversity

The new **EU Action Plan against racism** (2020–2025) designates the European capital(s) of inclusion and diversity each year. The aim is to recognise and make visible cities' efforts to put in place robust inclusion policies at local level.

The 2021–22 work programme of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme makes € 18 million available for cities and towns to promote rights and values. A specific call for

proposals to promote capacity building and awareness of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights will also be open for cities and towns in autumn 2021.*

* *European Commission (2021), Commission implementing decision of 19.4.2021 on the financing of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme and the adoption of the multiannual work programme for 2021–2022, C(2021) 2583 final, Brussels, 19 April 2021.*

3.3. RECOGNISING CITIES' HUMAN RIGHTS EFFORTS

Wider recognition of efforts, e.g. at EU level, can be an important incentive and powerful catalyst for action. Experience from other policy fields, such as environmental protection, shows this, in particular the EU's Green City Accord.¹⁰ Signing the accord is free of charge. Signatory cities must address environmental management of air, water, nature and biodiversity, circular economy and waste, and noise. They have to develop a set of targets on these areas and take action, which will be reviewed within three years.¹¹ The European Commission leads the initiative, and a group of partners supports it.¹²

Interlinkages between the environment and social policy goals have grown stronger over time. Already the EU's 2001 Sustainable Development Strategy emphasised that economic growth must come with social cohesion and environmental protection.¹³ Council conclusions 20 years later refer to the two dimensions of sustainability, and call for the strengthening of the "social dimension [...] in order to promote inclusion, equality, including gender equality, and a socially fair transition, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, while ensuring that EU's common values, including democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights are safeguarded."¹⁴

Hence, a 'Human Rights City Accord' could be an important new pillar to support an inclusive and sustainable EU at local level. It could recognise and promote the efforts of cities in the EU to respect and promote human and fundamental rights. A Human Rights City Accord could use assessment methods that several human rights cities already have in place, or other models, in particular the Child-Friendly Cities model.¹⁵ That requires a city to fulfil a set of minimum criteria to receive formal recognition by UNICEF as a child-friendly city.

Practitioners, cities and networks had two meetings in 2020¹⁶ to exchange ideas on a possible label and accreditation process for human rights cities. They noted in particular that:

- accreditation and assessment procedures need to be simple, practical, and supported by a methodology and tools that can cover diverse activities;
- the procedures could use information prepared for other reporting on international obligations or from existing city networks review processes;
- the main focus of any assessment should be on the concrete impact of cities' actions on people's lives, the effectiveness of city administrations and working methods;
- its frequency (annual, biennial, etc.) can vary, but should be regular;
- it should be linked to and complement other assessments or reviews, in particular those organised through city networks;
- the process should foster meaningful dialogue with relevant stakeholders.

TOWARDS AN ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The proposed framework for human rights cities in the EU could support the establishment of a dedicated ‘human rights city label’. Such label could be awarded to cities or other forms of local government if they comply with the proposed framework for human rights cities. It can follow incremental steps, as in Figure 2.

- The basic level is in blue. It only requires a city to declare itself a human rights city by making a formal commitment to respecting and promoting human and fundamental rights, as the result of a participatory process in the city.
- The intermediate level is in yellow. It follows external assessment, by peer review between cities and/or external assessment. Cities have to show what resources (considered broadly, including budget and staff) and processes they are using to reach their human rights objectives.
- The expert level is in green. It follows external assessment, by peer review between cities and/or external assessment, which examines concrete outcomes on people’s lives in the city.

The system should be flexible to allow cities to decide which assessment level they would like to go through, or even to go directly to the expert level assessment. It should also take into of cities powers in human rights.

FIGURE 2: PROPOSAL OF THREE INCREMENTAL STAGES OF RECOGNITION OF A HUMAN RIGHTS CITY

| Human rights city Development level | Type of assessment/review | Stakeholder involved | Expected outcome |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Basic level | Self-declaration | City level | Commitments formalised |
| Intermediary level | Peer review (external assessment optional) | Cross-national group of cities | Human rights resources and processes assessed Greater credibility |
| Expert level | Peer review and External assessment on agreed method and benchmarks | Cross-national group of cities, and other actors (i.e. academia, networks, EU, Intergovernmental organisations, etc.) | Concrete outcomes in people’s lives assessed Higher standards and greater recognition |

Source: FRA, 2021

Endnotes

- 1 See section “Joining forces to deliver a more social Europe”, European Commission, ‘The European Pillar of Social Rights Action plan’, Europa Website page.
- 2 Section 4. - Strengthening peoples’ awareness of their rights under the Charter, **New Strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights**, COM(2020) 711, 2 December 2020.
- 3 Council of the European Union (2021), **Council conclusions on strengthening the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the European Union, 8 March 2021**, 6795/21.
- 4 Several new EU strategies in the area of fundamental rights have referred to the role of local and regional authorities, to various degrees: the EU Strategy on the implementation of the Charter (2 December 2020), the Action plan on integration and inclusion (24 November 2020), the Anti-racism Action Plan (18 September 2020), the LGBTIQ Strategy (12 November 2020), the Security Union Strategy (24 July 2020) and the new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation (7 October 2020).
- 5 European Commission (2020), *A Union of Equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020–2025*, COM(2020) 565 final, 18 September 2020.
- 6 European Commission (2020), *LGBTIQ Equality Strategy – 2020–2025*, COM(2020) 698 final, 12 November 2020.
- 7 European Commission (2020), *EU Security Union Strategy*, COM/2020/605 final, 24 July 2020.
- 8 The Council adopted the two programmes that constitute the EU justice, rights and values fund on 19 April 2021. The programmes will help to further promote, strengthen and protect justice, rights and EU values in 2021–2027. See Regulation (EU) 2021/692 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1381/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014, **OJ L 156, 5.5.2021**.
- 9 European Commission, ‘**Call for proposals – Networks of towns**’; European Commission, ‘**Call for proposals – Town-twinning**’.
- 10 European Commission, ‘**Green City Accord**’.
- 11 ‘**Green City Accord – Frequently asked questions (FAQ)**’, European Commission Website.
- 12 Partners include Eurocities, Local Governments for Sustainability and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions.
- 13 European Commission (2001), **A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union strategy for sustainable development**, COM(2001) 264 final.
- 14 Council of the European Union (2019), **Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030**, 8286/19, 9 April 2019, para. 14; see also, for example, **Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2020 on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment, and amending Regulation (EU) 2019/2088**, OJ L 198, p. 13–43, 18 June 2020.
- 15 Minimum criteria include demonstrating results to ensure a comprehensive approach; meaningful and inclusive child participation; and demonstrated dedication to eliminating discrimination against children and young people. See Unicef (2018), **Child friendly cities and communities handbook**, p. 13.
- 16 Case studies covered ECCAR, Intercultural Cities, Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, York Human Rights Indicator Report, UCLG and the Global Charter, Hawaii Voluntary Local Review, UN Convention against Corruption, Child-Friendly Cities and Utrecht SDGs dashboard.

In conclusion

Human rights cities, through their dedicated engagement and hands-on approach to human rights, have contributed greatly to strengthening fundamental rights protection in the EU, by showcasing that human rights matter in the city.

Diverse initiatives at EU level could promote the use of this proposed framework. Examples include:

- piloting accreditation for EU human rights cities as proposed above;
- developing an EU-level media information campaign on human rights cities;
- establishing an initiative for ‘European human rights capitals’ based on the successful **concept of the European capitals of culture**;
- Developing and promoting EU dedicated funding to build up cities’ capacity to become human rights cities and share their good practices across the EU;
- ensuring that high-level political representatives from human rights cities participate in EU citizens’ dialogues organised nationally;
- involving human rights cities in relevant EU policy debates, for example on EU strategies and action plans concerning fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law.

This proposed framework for human rights cities intends to inspire cities, municipalities, regions and other forms of local government to join the growing number of human rights cities around the EU and globally by standing up for fundamental rights and making them part of the city’s culture.

The framework can also mobilise EU institutions and Member States to support and create incentives to help more cities to commit to fundamental rights and the human rights city approach. They can do this through dedicated programmes, projects, funding and platforms for exchange.

This proposed framework intends also to foster a discussion between cities and other actors at EU and national levels towards developing a dedicated label and accreditation process for human rights cities in the EU. FRA is committed to facilitate and contribute to such a discussion in the context of its work, in particular its cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions.

By using the proposed framework for human rights cities in EU, cities can embrace in their daily work a broader human rights approach rooted in international law and practice, hence deliver inclusive, human-centred and simply better public services for everyone in the city.

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PROMOTING AND PROTECTING YOUR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS ACROSS THE EU —

This report proposes a framework for becoming, and functioning as, a 'human rights city' in the EU. It includes 'foundations', 'structures' and 'tools' for mayors, local administrations and grassroots organisations to reinforce fundamental rights locally. It is based on existing good practice and expert input by representatives of human rights cities in the EU, academic experts, international organisations and city networks.

The proposed framework aims to encourage more cities in the EU to become human rights cities, and to help develop a local culture of rights. It also aims to facilitate links between human rights cities and EU instruments including policies, strategies and funding. Finally, it aims to stimulate a discussion in the EU on a future accreditation process for human rights cities.



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