

« 20 YEARS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT NETWORKING ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN EUROPE »

Report of the European Workshop of Local
Governments for Human Rights (2018)



UCLG
Committee

Social Inclusion
Participatory Democracy
and Human Rights

FOREWORD

The **European Workshop of Local Governments for Human Rights** brought together dozens of municipal, supra-municipal and regional leaders, policy-makers and officers from across Europe, carrying out a consolidated work on human rights. The workshop's main objective was to provide a space where to share challenges, actions and commitments related to local human rights action, as well as to explore priorities for regional and global networking.

The workshop was organized by the **Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of UCLG** under the initiative of Barcelona, Plaine Commune and Madrid. It took place at the UCLG headquarters of Barcelona on December 11th 2018, coinciding with the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 20th anniversary of the Barcelona Conference "Cities for Human Rights".

INTRODUCTION

"Bringing together local and regional human rights initiatives in Europe"

The coordinator of the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (UCLG-CSIPDHR), **Amanda Fléty**, welcomes participants to the workshop, recalling how this event was promoted by some of the Committee's active cities. It seeks to assess the outcomes of 20 years of local government human rights action in Europe. Now is a good moment for tacking stock and learning from existing local initiatives on human rights.

Amanda Fléty introduces the work of the UCLG-CSIPDHR: An autonomous group of cities and territories aimed at sharing experiences and promoting political debate on human rights and the right to the city. The CSIPDHR is member of UCLG, the world organization of local governments. Under the leadership of member governments, the Committee facilitates political meetings, advocacy processes or the development of tools (such as the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City) that support local governments in realizing all human rights.

The Secretary General of UCLG, **Emilia Sáiz**, welcomes participants to the workshop as human rights champions. At a global level, Emilia Sáiz believes that we are facing a global backlash against human rights. At the same time, many people and organizations (including United Cities and Local Governments) see in human rights a cornerstone for their action and a shared banner for mobilization on issues such as global citizenship or housing. There is hostility against rights, but also a fundamental consensus that they are a pillar for coexistence.

UCLG as global municipal movement is more than 100 years old. Its longevity shows that local governments have long been aware that the challenges they face can only be addressed through cooperation. Sáiz hopes that these meetings will help place human rights again at the center of local government international debates. In UCLG, this is a consolidated discussion alongside other strategic priorities such as the Right to the City or SDGs localization.

Dr. Gyonggyu Shin speaks on behalf of UCLG-CSIPDHR co-chair of the Metropolitan Government of Gwangju (South Korea), which is also the host city of the annual celebration of the World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF). This Forum is organized every year by its Metropolitan Government, the Gwangju International Centre and the UCLG-CSIPDHR.

Gwangju is a city firmly committed to the defense of human rights. In Gwangju's regional context human rights face major problems in protection and implantation. It should be noted, however, how many trends are transforming Asia and now human rights are gaining weight, thanks partly to the push of the municipal movement and collaboration with civil society. Gwangju hopes that European cities bring their commitment and networking capacity to the global scale, encouraging the exchange of practices with other regional contexts.



FIRST PART OF THE WORKSHOP

“Local human rights action: Challenges and priorities of European human rights cities”

Before starting the debate, the UCLG-CSIPDHR coordinator shares with the audience the results of the follow-up process on the implementation of the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City (ECSHRC) developed by the Committee's Secretariat. This process has welcomed the participation of more than 30 European local governments of different size and country context (know more about this process in the final annex of this document, where you will find a more detailed report on responses to the questionnaire). Indeed, data shows many Charter members still give a strong importance to human rights.

Many of them implement policies with a clear rights-based approach and are involved in national and European networks. Policies on education, awareness-raising and training focus municipalities' human rights action in regards to the follow up of the ECSHRC. At present, there is a strong interest to reinforce networking among cities in order to share experiences and knowledge and strengthen cooperation with civil society.

Barcelona's Human Rights and Diversity Director, **Aida Guillén**, opens the first round of debate focused on addressing existing challenges and sharing innovation human rights policies by European municipalities. According to Guillén, human rights localization can be seen as a response from European municipalities to the inaction that many national governments have towards their human rights obligations. In this sense, Barcelona has maintained a firm commitment and developed human rights policies for the last 20 years.

Aida Guillén believes that city-to-city cooperation is key in this sense. In fact, today “we see how the concept of human rights cities is popular and there is a certain branding around the concept”. However, Guillén believes it is necessary to analyze the impact of policies promoted in the last 20 years. As the report carried out by the UCLG-CSIPDHR shows, awareness-raising and training policies have focused so far municipalities attention.

« Cities play a fundamental role in fighting against hate speech and extremism: It is only through building strong social ties and community life and having quality interpersonal relations between citizens that we can tackle these phenomena »

According to Guillén, building self-aware citizens, empowering people so they are aware and demand their own rights, is important but “should only be a part of our work: We have to take a step further as municipal movement, given that global trends are going in the opposite direction”. Guillén recalls the growth of discourses that “aim at placing physical, mental, social and political borders” and that “polarization is increasing and now is more complex”. According to Guillén, cities now play a key role to fight hate speech. It is “only through the generation of strong social ties among peoples, quality interpersonal relationships and vibrant community life, that these phenomena can be tackled. This is where the concept of human rights becomes key for the global municipal movement”.

Taking this step further implies proposing new and more ambitious human rights policies with specific objectives. According to Guillén, “if we have problems with discrimination and hate speech, we must take direct actions as a municipality, promote strategic litigation. If we want to realize the concept of “full citizenship” (human rights universality), then we must promote measures that make social services accessible to all. There are many other topics: public management of common goods, the remunicipalization of basic services ...”



According to the Mayor of Middelburg, **Harald Bergmann**, democracy and citizen participation are two important elements to consider in this debate. In his municipality, Mayor Bergmann feels how citizens want to get involved in decision-making processes. Strengthening participation channels is therefore a challenge “we cannot ignore”. Another key and interrelated issue would be the way municipalities treat vulnerable minority groups. Refugees, elderly people... According to Mayor Bergmann, “their voice has to be heard so that municipalities develop adequate policies”.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the issue of inequalities and economic and social rights such as housing. Bergmann believes cities should approach this discussion from a human rights perspective, given that *“it will allow us to deal with these problems in a better way”*.

Mayor Bergmann agrees that it is important to put human rights back on the agenda. This means *“working among us: colleagues in institutions, representatives and councilors from other parties...”*. Bergmann believes local leaders must defend the importance of human rights and explain why they are important for local government responsibilities. This entails devising human rights education initiatives, from government institutions to schools.

« We must promote human rights also when working among us politicians. We must convince colleagues in institutions, representatives and councilors from other parties of the importance of human rights for our work »

Mayor Bergman shares with the audience his work as Dutch local governments delegate and thematic spokesperson on human rights to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. This year his team has completed a report that demonstrates why human rights are important for local authorities and how they can develop measures on the basis of other municipalities' experience regarding vulnerable groups.

The President of the ECCAR network - European Coalition of Cities against Racism, **Benedetto Zacchioli**, notes how ECCAR was created after the 1998 Conference and is now made up of more than 180 European cities. Zacchioli stresses the importance of articulating networking and taking into account existing initiatives in the field of racism and non-discrimination.

The Deputy Mayor of Athens for migration and refugees, **Lefteris Papagiannakis**, considers human rights are fundamental for Athens reality in regards to migration and refugees. The Mayor of Athens is, in fact, a former human rights ombudsman. Even though Athens as a city is not working specifically on human rights, many of its services and initiatives could fall in this category. In regards to refugees, Athens works on issues such as the right to housing, access to the labor market or access to the health system.

The councilor of Civil Rights and Gender Equality of Sabadell, **Miriam Ferràndiz**, shares multiple examples of municipal human rights engagement. Sabadell has a consolidated line of action in awareness-raising on rights. It has also aimed at mainstreaming human rights in municipal action and not just departments directly involved. For example, the municipality has introduced human rights criteria in local public procurement processes and tenders. Another example of this comprehensive effort is the way in which the city works with citizens and community representatives on human rights issues.

Sabadell seeks to empower groups that are normally excluded from the debate. Fighting against racism and fascism is undoubtedly another priority at the local level. The city counts with a Civil Rights Office and a Committee for Conviviality (formed by neighbors, police officers and community leaders) that work on shared strategies and discourses to curb racism and fascism. Sabadell also collaborated with the local Bar Association and endeavoured several legal initiatives and action in favour of human rights.

The representative of Cologne, **Frieder Wolf**, stressed how his municipality seeks to develop a more concrete action on human rights, and would like to do so after knowing more about this matter thanks to international cooperation with other cities. Wolf observes how the situation of local democracy has worsened across the world in the last couple years, posing a specific challenge to the global municipal movement. Considering the challenges for human rights protection, Germany sees with concern the rise of anti-semitism and other forms of hate speech. Refugees and migrants' inclusion is another challenge.

The representative of the Association of Local and Regional Authorities of Sweden (SALAR), **Cecilia Berglin**, highlights in the first place how the context of decentralization is quite advanced in the case of Sweden. This allows for strong local policies in the field of human rights. At a more specific level, Swedish municipalities can also have access to national funds to work more broadly on human rights issues such as human rights training for local officers. Alongside the Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, SALAR has developed a platform that identifies how cities and regions of Sweden work on human rights. This *"allows us to mature our understanding of what human rights cities are"*. This work focuses on aspects such as non-discrimination, training public workers, strengthening of relations with civil society or human rights and municipal budgets.



Toni Royo from the Catalan Fund for Development Cooperation highlights how his organization focuses on human rights at a local level especially through awareness raising. The Fons has been promoting for the last year the programme "Human Rights Defenders Cities", which seeks to enhance human rights awareness-raising of the population of 26 participating cities on the basis of welcoming, supporting and disseminating the work of human rights defenders threatened in their countries.

Another priority of the Fons Català is to provide knowledge on what municipalities do in terms of human rights. Municipalities often carry out human rights policies without being aware. The Fons Català has been conducting a comprehensive study that analyzes local public policies in the light of the human rights based approach to thematic areas like access to water and sanitation, citizenship rights, public procurement, housing and development cooperation. The Fons Català aims at knowing better how can municipalities better protect human rights at home as well as abroad: What are cities responsibilities? How are the human rights of its holders guaranteed? It also seeks to train institutions and technical officers so that they can carry out a better follow-up and disseminate among the local public.

Maribel Vaquero is the Directress of the Division for Conviviality and Human Rights of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa: a historical territory at the heart of the Basque Country that gathers 89 municipalities. The aforementioned Department's focus on human rights was initially based on strengthening coexistence in the field of peacemaking. Gipuzkoa experienced a violent conflict the inhabitants of which had to live with for five long decades.

Gipuzkoa's priority was therefore to promote peacebuilding in the post-conflict period. The Provincial Council's strategy in this area was based on promoting political dialogue in 24 municipalities. The conclusions of the project showed that it was still necessary to work on the "democratic political culture" of Gipuzkoa: at a social level, but also among political parties and other government institutions. In the case of education, Gipuzkoa has promoted a project in local schools in order to promote dialogue and peace.

« The first value most of our citizens identified to when thinking on how their city should be was respect for human rights: A framework from which to build social justice and inclusion as well as greater respect for diversity »

The Directress of the Area of Participation and Districts of Bilbao, **Inmaculada Ereña**, highlights how her city has undergone a large process of urban renewal: from industrial city to cultural emporium, center of services and an outstanding tourist destination. After the improvement of the physical and urban environment of the city, the priority of Bilbao was to determine "*with what values the city was to be built*". A participatory process was initiated. Taking into account the models of open government and participation, various forums were set up with entities and organizations that allowed for a set of 17 values that the city recognizes as its own (Bilbao, City of Values). The first value shared by many was respect for human rights: a framework from which citizens aspired to build justice and social inclusion or greater respect for diversity. It is through this work that the City Council discovered the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City, to which Bilbao adhered in 2018 to follow-up its work in the field.

The representative of the Nuremberg Human Rights Office, **Sophia Brostean-Kaiser**, highlights how Nuremberg is the only German city that counts with a Human Rights Office. For Brostean-Kaiser, one of the main challenges refers to the growing polarization of society, together with new social needs derived from demographic change, migration and the aging of the population. Nuremberg has a consolidated work in the fight against discriminations and racism within the framework of the ECCAR network.

The Directress of Citizenship Services of Terrassa, **Mercè Soler**, highlights how her city has a consolidated commitment in the field of human rights, reflected in the city's own municipal action plan. This commitment goes back to the city's adhesion to the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City, and was renewed in the last mandate with the creation of a Citizens Commission on the ECSR Follow-Up (where the municipality and 13 civil society entities cooperate to follow up on the city's implementation of the Charter).

Terrassa seeks to promote human rights as a global, all-encompassing vision: "*Human rights must be transversal axes of action and political discourses of all municipal action*"

according to Soler. *“Many times, cities focus on the issue of awareness-raising, but now it’s time to look at other more specific issues”*. Terrassa has therefore been one of Spain’s first cities to opt for direct municipal water management as a guarantee of public service. Terrassa is also working on introducing human rights criteria in municipal public procurement. The city has equally opened sanctioning files to banks that speculate with vacant houses at a time of housing emergency and to defend the right to housing; and works for equality through methodologies based on intersectionality.

The representative of Naples Department for Citizenship Rights and Social Cohesion, **Alessia Piccirillo**, highlights the worsening conditions and political situation in her country. Naples has recently experienced the dismantling by order of national authorities of self-constructed camps and the forced expulsions of Roma camps. Her department works to promote and defend fundamental rights within the framework of a national political situation that is worsening and that carries the municipalities capacities to the limit.

SECOND PART OF THE WORKSHOP

“Cities for Rights: Articulating initiatives and commitments at the global level”

In the second part of the debate, local government representatives and partner organizations discussed what should be the priorities for relaunching and better articulating initiatives on regional and international human rights cities networking.

On behalf of the human rights Commission of UCLG-CSIPDHR, some active cities of the network are promoting a regional-global process where municipalities from different regional environments (Europe, Asia ...) share their work and priorities on human rights and the right to the city to further articulate networking initiatives at a regional and global level. Another objective of this session is to assess what can be the role of European cities in a global network of human rights cities. This process occurs in parallel with the progressive recognition by the UN human rights system of the role of local governments in the promotion and protection of human rights. There are several consultation and advocacy process in this regard that the CSIPDHR and UCLG have been facilitating in recent years.



Barcelona’s Human Rights Director **Aida Guillén** believes “network diversity” shouldn’t be seen as a problem: there are some networks which have a technical purpose and others which focus on the political component, where cities come together to advance shared messages. Exchanging practices or conducting field visits are positive experiences according to Guillén, but human rights also have a strong political component.

In a second turn of the debate, Guillen believes local governments must work together to claim further recognition by the UN system. The OHCHR is for example a central pillar in human rights governance. Local governments should nonetheless consider how, as the UN is formed by national governments, it will engage with municipalities on the basis of their relationship with states. The advance of decentralization and advocacy processes before the United Nations such as the one led by UCLG has already provided space and recognition between local governments and the United Nations, but “we must keep pushing”.

Middelburg’s **Harald Bergmann** mentions how national associations of cities can support technical and political aspects of local human rights governance. We must also consider the support that municipalities receive from national associations of municipalities. According to Mayor Bergmann, networking should give priority to exchanging experiences, success stories and lessons learned in carrying out human rights policies.

According to **Benedetto Zacchirolli**, ECCAR promotes knowledge and learning tools that can be used by everyone, such as a Toolkit for equality. Zacchirolli believes that “*we must raise citizen’s awareness on the activities that their own cities have in city networks*”.

The representative of Athens, **Lefteris Papagiannakis**, believes it is important connect initiatives. Papagiannakis believes that being part of networks that defend human rights is more important than ever in a moment of rising extremism. In the case of Athens, cooperation between Greek cities and the EU has allowed cities to better respond to challenges posed by the lack of resources / centralization, hampering municipal action. Athens has promoted for example a national network of Greek cities that works on this subject.



Regarding joint activities with UN human rights institutions such as the OHCHR, Athens recently participated, along with other European local governments, in a meeting with the the regional OHCHR branch in order to raise-awareness on the way cities can offer access to health services to migrants without documentation. Papagiannakis believes that this discussion has just begun but it is necessary for multilateral entities to take the initiative. Papagiannakis also believes there has been progress in recent years in terms of recognition.

Sabadell's representative, **Miriam Ferràndiz**, highlights the need for intermediary cities to make their voice heard in these kind of processes. One of the networks top priorities should therefore be to offer ways by which local governments can participate more easily in the city networks' ecosystem while avoiding too complex structures.

In the case of Cologne's representative, **Frieder Wolf** believes city networks are a useful tool to connect politicians, strengthen links between them and influence institutions. There is a long way to enhance recognition among citizens of their own cities' participation in these networks. Given local government experience, participation in international city networks and, in general, to develop their own global action as cities, is a key contribution to overall processes on sustainability, development and global governance.

According to Gwangju's **Dr. Shin**, the collaboration of South Korean cities with national government can be seen as an example of successful multilevel cooperation. Bottom-up mobilization of Korean cities for human rights has led the permanent mission of the ROK in the UN Human Rights Council to bring their voice and key political messages in the discussions, leading to the 2015 report (A/HRC/30/49) and 2016 resolution (A/HRC/33/8) that opened the process of recognition of local governments as key actors in the promotion and protection of human rights. This last resolution recognizes local government role in the promotion and protection of human rights, and encourages national governments to take them into account in the definition of national strategies in the field.

« 33/8 resolution by the Human Rights Council opened the process of recognition of local governments role in the promotion and protection of human rights. It didn't only recognize local governments, but also encouraged national governments to take them into account in the definition of national human rights strategies »

Maribel Vaquero from the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa highlights how her administration facilitates a regional network of municipalities working on human rights. These kind of initiatives allow small municipalities (of 500 inhabitants) to start working on these issues. Likewise, the Provincial Council has also launched collaborations with local universities, so that they can support municipalities in adopting the human rights-based approach in local policies. This allows to share materials and access to good practices. On the other hand, in the case of defining new alliances of municipalities and regions on human rights matter, it seems that a fundamental issue should be the fight against hate speech.

The representative of the Global Platform for the Right to the City and the Habitat International Coalition, **Álvaro Puertas**, highlights how the Global Platform brings together hundreds of social movements and grassroots organizations that fight for human rights and the right to the city at an urban level across the world. On the basis of the alliance with UCLG and its Human Rights Committee – CSIPDHR, the Platform has had the opportunity to continue advocating in global agendas hand by hand with local governments, providing experiences and dialogue with grassroots initiatives that allow the advance of human rights and the right to the city (the latter as an emerging concept). It is important that civil society actors are at the table, because there is a lot to learn.

Marina Canals represents the International Association of Educating Cities, a network of cities that addresses human rights from the field of education. Member-local governments of the Association believe many human rights challenges must start in the minds of people and in learning processes. Education is therefore key to promoting all human rights.

Joshua Cooper brought to the meeting the experience of a North American human rights cities alliance: a regional experience of networking in a different continent. Cooper believes that having this conversation is so important and that it is necessary to continue promoting and supporting the participation of cities in international forums on human rights and sustainable development (two increasingly interrelated agendas). In the United States “we have examples of cities like New York, taking the initiative in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals”. Many cities accompany New York in this exercise of leadership also in the monitoring of human rights and their participation in the “Universal Periodic Review” of the United Nations. Cities must continue to seek alliances with other key actors for multilevel governance such as national associations.

Amanda Fléty (UCLG-CSIPDHR) closes the debate by inviting attendees to participate in the Human Rights Committee of UCLG and those other mechanisms from which municipalities can advance regional and global discussions on human rights in the framework of the global municipal movement. In the next year, the UCLG World Congress in Durban (November) will also represent a good occasion to relaunch the global commitment that local governments have regarding the global defense of human rights.

According to UCLG’s Secretary General, **Emilia Sáiz**, this debate has proven to be a good opportunity to observe how each municipality defends human rights after different contexts and visions. However, it is still important that cities get involved and take this work to global debates and processes on development agendas. It would be important that human rights leaders and officers inside municipalities also participate in global networks like UCLG and share their political visions there. For UCLG, housing and migration have been key issues for 2018 on the Right to the City; in 2019 we hope that accessibility and human rights can become major discussion topics for our Policy Council on the Right to the City.

ANNEX

“Main outcomes of the follow-up process on the implementation of the ECSRHC”

The Secretariat of the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of UCLG has carried out, throughout 2018, a process to monitor the implementation of the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City among its 365 municipalities-signatories. This process has been promoted by member-local governments and also focused on the situation of local human rights policies and priorities regarding international networking among European cities.

This process has been conducted through questionnaire. Answers were collected between June and December 2018, reaching the number of 33 responses by municipalities-signatories in 7 different countries: Spain, Italy, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Albania and Croatia.

8 of the participating cities had more than 500,000 inhabitants; 10 were between 100,000 and 500,000 inhabitants; and 15 had less than 100,000 inhabitants.

Participants to the follow-up process are the following: Alcalá de Henares; Badalona; Barcelona; Bologna; Budapest; Canet de Mar; Cardedeu; Castellar de n'Hug; Cerdanyola del Vallès; Cubelles; Esparreguera; Genova; Granollers; Lleida; Madrid; Manresa; Molins de Rei; Mülheim an der Ruhr; Naples; Nurnberg; Poggio a Caiano; Reus; Riga; Rijeka; Sabadell; Sant Boi de Llobregat; Sant Feliu de Llobregat; Santiago de Compostela; Sevilla; Sitges; Terrassa; Tirana; and Trecate.

The questionnaire is structured in 3 blocks:

- (i) local human rights policies;
- (ii) commitments towards the implementation of the ECSR;
- (iii) and priorities for international networking.

In the questionnaire's first block, 11 municipalities out of 33 have given the highest score in relation to the importance that human rights have in their municipal action (on a scale of 1 to 5). The average of this distribution is found in 3.7. When assessing the way in which cities concretize this commitment, the preferred option by municipalities has been (i) to participate in networks of municipalities that defend human rights (28), followed by (ii) establishing measures to raise awareness and promote human rights culture (25); (iii) promote concrete policies with a focus on rights, such as a municipal measure against discrimination (24); (iv) develop strategies for the protection of minorities and for the social inclusion of vulnerable groups (24); and (v) developing trainings for local officials and workers on human rights (22). The least preferred options in this block have been (i) to advocate for human rights at the national level (10); (ii) review municipal legislation (11); or establishing local programs for human rights guarantee (12).

27 municipalities have declared to know somehow the ECSR while 6 have acknowledged not knowing it. Regarding the importance of the ECSR in municipal action, cities declared an average 2.9 out of a distribution of 1 (less important) to 5 (more important). The preferred option for municipalities with respect to the ECSR implementation is (i) education and awareness-raising programs (20) and (ii) training for local officials (14). Otherwise, the least frequent options are (i) create a local monitoring commission with the participation of civil society (4) and (ii) establish guarantee mechanisms in light of the rights set forth in the Charter (8).

Asked about whether if relaunching networking among human rights cities at an international level would be a positive idea, 25 municipalities out of 33 have responded affirmatively. From these responses, the preferred option in regards to what should be the focus of networking has been (i) facilitating learning sessions between cities on human rights policies (19), followed by (ii) promoting advocacy for human rights at the national, European and international level on issues such as migration, housing or democracy (18); (iii) promote dialogue between local and international civil society (17); and (iv) re-launch municipal commitment towards the ECSR and with the concept of human rights cities at an institutional level (17). The least preferred options have been (i) holding regular meetings (9) and (ii) defending the role of local governments in the promotion and protection of human rights at the national, European and international levels (10).