

Local Governments as Frontliners Against Racism and Discrimination: Collaborative Frameworks for a Global Movement

In the run-up to International Human Rights Day and the framework of the 4th edition of the **UNESCO Global Forum Against Racism and Discrimination**, hosted by the Municipality of Barcelona, UNESCO, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and UCLG co-organized the side event “*Cities and Human Rights: Collaborative Frameworks Against Racism and Discrimination*”. This event underscored local and regional governments' (LRGs) pivotal role in combating racism through human rights-based approaches. The participants explored the role of cities and local governments in establishing the "Global Alliance Against Racism and Discrimination" shared good practices to fight racism.

Global Alliance Against Racism and Discrimination: The Municipal Movement Commitment towards the Second World Summit for Social Development 2025

Pablo Fernández, UCLG Assistant Secretary-General for Partnerships, stated that LRGs are not merely implementers but political actors driving change, responsible for guaranteeing human rights and ensuring access to public services and inclusive policies. He reaffirmed the commitment of our municipal movement to fight racism through the **Global Alliance Against Racism and Discrimination**. This coalition is one of UCLG's contributions towards the Second World Summit for Social Development 2025 and will prioritize three thematic pillars:

1. Establishing inclusive caring systems.
2. Strengthening youth engagement in governance.
3. Advancing anti-racism and anti-discrimination as affirmative action for the first time.

Cities and LRGs as pivotal to fight racism

“Racism costs a fortune to our society and local and regional governments are so important as they are the actors of long-lasting positive impact against racism,” said Anna Mario Majlőf, UNESCO Representative. She stressed the pivotal role of cities in this fight as they are the ones who can engage citizens and empower them to ensure values are respected.

Our Co-President Philip Rio, Mayor of Grigny, underscored that, amidst the multiple challenges our societies are facing, no matter their scale, cities are transforming human rights into concrete actions to fight for equality and against discrimination through access to public services and inclusive and transformative public policies to ensure access to housing, healthcare, education, and public spaces for all. He highlighted our global campaign “**10, 100, 1000 Human Rights Cities and Territories by 2030**” as a catalyzer of local action to prioritize human rights through a collective approach.

[Click here to join our global campaign!](#)

Our Co-president also enlisted the work done through our Committee to advance human rights, particularly in the agendas of racism, LGBTQI+, violences against women, right to water, additionally with the update process of the UCLG Charter-Agenda of Human Rights in the City and the partnerships established with the OHCHR to localize the universal framework.

On the same note, Facundo Chávez Penillas, Disability Advisor of the OHCHR also, highlighted the pivotal role of local and regional governments as democratic institutions to ensure human rights. He reaffirmed his commitment to guarantee that antidiscrimination is a key area to becoming a Human Rights City.

Part I: Building common frameworks on Human Rights & the fight against racism

The need to bring neocolonial and intersectional approaches to education for fighting racism was proposed by Ashwini K.P., UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Mariëlle Vavier, Deputy Mayor of The Hague, showcased how in her city they are already implementing these recommendations through an independent committee that addresses the historical injustices which still affect the lives of the inhabitants. This is strengthened through policies for specific groups, such as job-seeking initiatives and strategies for inclusive nightlife catering for future generations. Similarly, Jose Antonio Aguilar: Chair of the Group of Independent Eminent Experts on the Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, shared how Mexico City is implementing an integral strategy to end racism, addressing education, public spaces, transport and public services in general, with a special focus in migrants.

Representing the OHCHR, Janica Puisto presented our co-joint framework that provides political, institutional and operational guidelines on “How to become a Human Rights City,” which also aims to enhance inclusion and practical tools. For Morten Kjaerum, former Head of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, this framework is particularly relevant amidst the key challenge of fragmentation, as it will provide institutional tools to implement human rights at the local level.

Part 2: Cities Combating Racism and Discrimination: Sharing knowledge and good practices

Barcelona is paying special attention to the diversity of its population, by bringing services closer to LGBTQI population, such as housing and training for professionals, as explained by Anabel Rodríguez Basanta, Director of the Barcelona Directorate of Citizens' Rights Services.

In La Courneuve, Mayor Gilles Poux led a complaint with the French national anti-discrimination body to render visible the lack of neutrality of national public services. In this way, this city reaffirms its commitment to regain the trust of its population.

In Montevideo, there is a special department to repair the afrodescendent population through access to public services and the right to housing, culture and health, as shared by Fabiana Goyeneche, Director of International Relations. She also stressed the importance of city networks, such as UCLG, to boost local action.

From Gwangju, Gyonggu Shin, International Advisor of the Gwangju International Center, reminded the importance of the World Human Rights Cities Forum as key to collaborating with international organisations and to gain support, especially in this delicate moment in South Korea with the attempt of the national government to impose a martial law.

In Espluges de Llobregat, Deputy Mayor Oliver José Peña Estévez recounted his experience of discrimination owed to his migrant background, knowing first hand how awareness and education are pillar in this fight.

The Path Forward: A Global Alliance for Local Action

Linda Tinio-Le Douarin, co-developer of the Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination of UNESCO, brought to the forefront as well the importance of city networks, such as the European Cities Against Racism of UNESCO, particularly due to the opportunities to share knowledge. She also highlighted the importance of colonial approaches.

The side event served as a powerful reminder that combating racism and discrimination requires coordinated action, innovation, and bold leadership from local governments. By fostering partnerships and building inclusive frameworks, cities are shaping a future where diversity and equality are celebrated, and human rights are upheld for all. Together, local governments are proving that the fight against racism starts with transformative action at the community level.