Contribution to the OHCHR Report on "LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS"

UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights

Introduction

Since the last contribution submitted by the UCLG for the OHCHR Report on "Local Governments and Human Rights" in 2019, the world has faced an unprecedented crisis. Needless to say, COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing challenges related to the promotion and the fulfillment of human rights at local level, especially in terms of inequalities. At the same time, **it has also unveiled the essential role of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) to ensure the access to services and rights in times of crisis; as well as their tireless engagement as key political actors to trigger transformational change through quality service provision, citizens' participation and social inclusion**.

The pandemic has revamped and accelerated local action on pre-existing priorities for the promotion of human rights such as right to housing or access to health. However, during the past two years, LRGs have also shed new light **on other transversal priorities, principles and approaches related to human rights which go beyond the pandemic, but are fundamental for the achievement of the SDGs and to prevent future crisis, notably the "Right to the City", digital rights, the ecological transition or gender equality**. **Lastly, LGRs have contributed to reaffirm and translate into concrete actions key notions linked to human rights to build back better** and to ensure that human rights are at the core of the recovery, such as *proximity*, *caring*, *commons* and *sharing* and – of course - solidarity.

The structure of the UCLG-CSIPDHR contribution is structured as follows: **first, we attempted to underline the elements of continuity and disruption in terms of priorities and actions of local governments and human rights from the submission of the last contribution in 2019**, notably in light of the health crisis and the latest political events - such as the ongoing war between Russian Federation and Ukraine, which has put at the core of global and local discussions the linkages between peace and human rights -. We underlined the **thematic priorities; as well as specific measures and mechanisms** adopted at local level, with a focus on persons in vulnerable and marginalized situations and on transversal approaches put in place by cities. **The objective of the contribution is to highlight local practices for the effective integration of human rights across the broader policy spectrum; but also to provide insights**

on how Local and Regional Governments testify the constant adaptation and evolution of strategies and policies for the promotion of human rights to diverse local contexts, and to political and social changes.

Then, we outlined **possible avenues for reflection on local and regional and human rights**, building on challenges and recommendation highlighted by our Members, on the activities and mandate of the UCLG Commission on Human Rights, in view **to leverage its ongoing collaboration with the OHCHR.**

The examples mentioned in the contribution are based on the 12[1] contributions received from the members of the commission; on news, interviews and reports produced by the Committee; as well as on documents presented by local governments in the framework of initiatives and processes in which the Committee was involved in the past 2 years.

1. Thematic Priorities and Key Principles: continuity and disruption

Violence against women and gender equality

Among the several thematic areas of Local and Regional Governments' action related to human rights, preventing and fighting violence against women is still a priority. For instance, **the Department of Seine Saint Denis (France)**, has launched "*Caring territories for women victims of violence*"[2], a decentralized cooperation project **on public policies against gender-based violence operating in the framework of an international network** and supported by UCLG. A backbone of the project is the creation of the **International Observatory on Violence against Women**[3], a platform that will **bring together the efforts of local governments to fight violence against women** in different local governments and territories around the world to **build data, raising awareness and foster collective learning on this subject**.

Cities have continued putting in place **specific policies, programmes and facilities** to address violence against women, for example by **facilitating access to housing to women victims of domestic violence** through existing municipal initiatives, such as in the case **of Sao Paulo (Brazil)[4].** COVID'19 has indeed pushed LRGs to scale-up efforts in relation to **domestic violence,** notably to provide **legal assistance, access to health and psychological care** to women victims of violence during the crisis, such as in **Mexico City (Mexico)**[5] , in the **Province of Pichincha (Ecuador)[6]; as well as by providing guidelines and tools to prevent violence, including in the digital environment,** as in the case of **Barcelona (Spain)** through SARA Program[7] .

---

[1] Up to 6/05/2022, 12 contributions were submitted: Amsterdam (The Netherlands); Buenos Aires (Argentina); Goicoechea (Costa Rica); Graz (Austria); La Unión (Costa Rica); Mexico City (Mexico); York (UK); Montreal (Canada); Seine Saint Denis (France); South African Local Government Association (SALGA); Valencia (Spain); Vienna (Austria).

[2] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/launch-territories-protecting-women-gender-based-violence-initiative-and-celebration-25

[3] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/international-observatory-violence-against-women-and-girls-initiative

[4] https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/habitacao/programas/programa_habitacional_po de_entrar/

[5] https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-local-perspective-mexico-city

[6] https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-interview-paola-pabon-president-province-pichincha-ecuador

[7] https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dones/es/bcn-antimachista/servicios-de-atencion-la-violencia-machista/sara

Several local governments have taken measures **to promote gender equality** through **exploratory feminist walks, inclusive planning of safe public spaces** and **educational initiatives, participatory mapping of women residents' priorities** in cooperation with civil society such as in **Iztapalapa (Mexico)**. Other cities have created *ad hoc* **municipal institutions on gender equality** like in **Sousse (Tunisia)**; developed **learning tools and guidelines** to fight discrimination such as those produced by **Seine Saint Denis (France)**[8] and – especially in the past few months - to promote **solidarity campaigns for the protection of women´s rights in armed conflicts**[9].

COVID-19 has also highlighted the **key role played by women workers in care services**: for instance, **Libreville (Gabon)** held a public event to stress the key role played by working women in care services as essential to address the COVID-19 pandemic and distributed protection materials to protect their health[10]. Another important emerging reflection at global level is around the key role of **women in leadership and decision-making positions** in **placing care for the people and the planet at the center of local governance** [11].

<u>Inclusive digital transition and digital rights</u>

Promoting an **equitable digital transition** is also an important theme addressed by LGRs, especially **to foster local citizenship, participation and social inclusion of marginalized groups**[12]. For instance, in 2021, **Barcelona (Spain)** has funded the Digital and Democratic Innovation Lab[13], focused on **trainings and exchanges on open technology and citizen participation**. **Iztapalapa (Mexico)** combined **budget transparency and community engagement** through **digital channels to report abuse and ensure effective monitoring**.
Digitalization is also a powerful to guarantee t**he continuity of public service provision, access to information and civic solidarity,** as in the case of **Vienna**[14] **(Austria)** during the COVID-19 crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has also shed a new light on the importance of **digital rights and their consequences on people's livelihood and on the access to other fundamental rights**. For example, several local governments have focused their efforts **to address the digital divide to ensure access to education, especially for youth and children**: **Rivas Vaciamadrid (Spain)**[15] provided tablets and SIM cards to support children in vulnerable situations. **Gwangju (Republic of Korea)** provided 2,600 smart devices to schools to support remote education among children from low-income families and covered their internet fees. It also provided adapted online lectures for blind students and produced accessible materials for hearing-impaired and developmentally disabled students[16]. **Goicoechea (Costa Rica)** accelerated the

---

[8] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/right-city-women-advancing-csipdhr-and-uclg%E2%80%99s-agenda-gender-equality , https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/guide-fight-discrimination-local-level-contribution-departmental-council-seine ; https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/womens-right-feminist-city-radical-transformation-our-way-living

[9] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/8-march-womens-rights-violations-armed-conflicts

[10] https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/multiple-forms-discrimination-induced-or-exacerbated-covid-19-pandemic-what

[11] https://www.uclg.org/en/media/news/uclg-feminist-municipal-movement-commit-generation-equality

[12] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/role-local-participatory-democracy-practices-advancing-urban-equality-conversation

[13] https://oidp.net/en/content.php?id=1800

[14] https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-interview-shams-asadi-human-rights-commissioner-vienna

[15] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-interview-pedro-del-cura-mayor-rivas-vaciamadrid

[16] http://www.gjdream.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=504032

digitalization to facilitate access to services **specific groups** such as elderly, as well as to better provide access to national economic subsidizes to **marginalized groups** during the crisis.

In the framework of **the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights**[17], an initiative launched in 2018 by **Amsterdam, Barcelona and New York City** and supported by UCLG, **Brussels (Belgium), Dublin (Ireland) Sofia (Bulgaria) and Tirana (Albania),** will work with experts in digital governance to co-create, design and pilot a **Digital Rights Governance Framework**[18] to ensure equal and universal access to technology, the protection of privacy and data, and freedom from discrimination by artificial intelligence and algorithms.

<u>Right to Housing</u>

Ensuring access to housing remains a key priority for local governments. For example, the municipality of **Recoleta**[19] **(Chile)** has developed "*la inmobiliaria popular"* (*Popular Real Estate*), an unprecedented public residential complex, consisting in 38 affordable housing units prioritized for low-income residents. **Montreal**[20] **(Canada)** achieved to build 12.000 new social housing units between 2018 and 2021, as part of a comprehensive plan for an *Inclusive Metropolis*.

The COVID-19 crisis "*brought to the forefront challenges predating the outbreak, such as homelessness, inability to pay rents, evictions or housing financialization*[21]*"* following Leilani Farha´s (The Shift) during the **first UCLG Community of Practice on Housing organized by the CSIPDHR** in June 2020[22]. **LRGs firmly stood up to guarantee the right to housing during these unprecedented times through legal and economic measures:** for instance, **Victoria Regional Government**[23] **(Australia)** introduced a 6-month suspension of evictions, a ban on rent increases, a tax relief for homeowners, as well as a $500 million aid for the most vulnerable tenants. **This also included the development of more integrated cooperation mechanisms with local stakeholders and tools and targeting different segments of the population**: for example, the city of **Brussels**[24] **(Belgium)** collaborated with neighbourhoods committees and local associations **to help homeless people access housing and reintegrate them in the labour market**; while **Mexico City**[25] **(Mexico)** ensured **access to housing to sexual workers**. The city of **Valencia**[26] **(Spain)** opened a municipal line to inform households experiencing

---

[17] https://citiesfordigitalrights.org/thecoalition#:~:text=The%20Cities%20Coalition%20for%20Digital,digital%20rights%20based%20policy%2Dmaking.

[18] https://citiesfordigitalrights.org/selectedcities

[19] https://ww2.recoleta.cl/inmobiliaria-popular-cumple-un-ano-entregando-arriendo-a-precio-justo/, https://www.elmostrador.cl/noticias/opinion/2019/06/15/inmobiliaria-popular-de-recoleta-desarrollo-local-justicia-social-y-posibilidades-de-nuevas-politicas-de-vivienda/

[20] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/uclg-community-practice-housing-assessing-ways-advance-right-housing-context-covid

[21] Remark of Farha, The Shift Campaign, during the first UCLG Community of Practice on Housing organized by the CSIPDHR in May, 2020 + https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/uclg-community-practice-housing-assessing-ways-advance-right-housing-context-covid

[22] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/uclg-community-practice-housing-assessing-ways-advance-right-housing-context-covid

[23] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/rent-relief-programs-and-moratorium-evictions-context-social-crisis-caused-covid-19

[24] From: Report HLPF 2021 (GOLD UCLG) https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/hlpf_2021.pdf (p. 82) and http://www.revesnetwork.eu/wp/?page_id=1710

[25] https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-local-perspective-mexico-city

[26] https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/valencia-joins-cities-adequate-housing-strengthening-affordable-adequate-housing

problems and at risk of eviction and reached **agreements with the private sector** to allocate vacant housing units. Moreover, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), developed **guidelines on the role and responsibilities of LRGs in South Africa in providing shelters for homeless persons, addressing the lack of clarity of the national legislative framework and governance mechanisms**[27].

Anti-discrimination

LRGs have pursued their efforts to combat every day's life discriminations and exclusion of vulnerable and marginalized persons through specific policies, plans and programmes; as well as by investing in data production and collection. For example, **Minneapolis**[28] **(US)** implemented a comprehensive municipal plan in 2021 to act for racial equity **by diversifying public spending**; by increasing racial representation in the workforce on the basis of disaggregated data and engaging with different communities. The regional **Parliament of Catalonia**[29] **(Spain)** passed the *Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination Act* on December 2020, creating all at once **two dedicated committees, an advisory committee**, as well as the **Discrimination Observatory**. The Observatory contributed to build new data on discrimination: its latest reports included aporophobia (i.e. the "*contempt, phobia, aversion, rejection or hatred towards poor people*") as a major type of discrimination experienced by homeless people during the lockdown. Indeed, **the COVID-19 pandemic led to increasing discrimination towards specific groups on the grounds of race or ethnicity, pushing LRGs to scale-up their actions**[30]: for example, **Ottawa**[31] **(Canada)** recognized **racism as a public health issue** to raise awareness on discriminations related to Covid-19**.** The Human Rights Commission of **New York**[32] **(US)** led the fight against **anti-Asian racism and harassment** connected to the health crisis by carrying out 30 **bystander intervention trainings** and fostering residents' engagement in defending community members facing this kind of situations.
Several LRGs have increasingly taken action to prevent discrimination towards Indigenous Peoples, disabled persons, Afro descendants and LGBTQI+, as in the case of the *Mexico City's Local Action Plan against Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia[33]*, which the city is implementing since 2019 in cooperation with regional partners and other cities of the LAC countries. Since 2017, **Buenos Aires (Argentina)** is promoting the **Casa Trans,** a space for sociability, training and education and protection of the rights of the trans community, managed with in cooperation with civil society.

Participation and social Inclusion

---

[27] https://www.salga.org.za/Documents/Media%20Room/Circulars/c2020/05-May-2020/RE__Circulars_on_Website/11%20SALGA%20Circular%20on%20Interpretation%20of%20Design ated%20Municipal%20%20Essential%20Services%20%20During%20%20the%20COVID%20-%2019%20National%20Lockdown%20Period.pdf
[28] https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/government/programs-initiatives/strategic-racial-equity-action-plan/
[29] https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/oficina-nodiscriminacio/sites/default/files/Informe%20OND%202020%20EN.pdf
[30] https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/multiple-forms-discrimination-induced-or-exacerbated-covid-19-pandemic-what
[31] https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/ottawa-board-of-health-recognizes-racism-as-public-health-issue-1.4983807
[32] https://www1.nyc.gov/site/cchr/community/bystander-intervention.page
[33] https://coalicionlac.org/sites/coalicionlac.org/files/documentos/Plan%20de%20acci%C3%B3n%20Ciu dad%20de%20M%C3%A9xico.pdf

Furthermore, **LRGs have been actively engaged in fostering social inclusion of marginalized groups.** The city of **Nador[34] (Morocco)** promoted the values of living together among the younger generation by holding the *Migrants week Expo Intercultural Africa*, in view to a better **including of migrants and refugees. São Paulo[35] (Brazil) released a municipal educational program ("*Povos Migrantes*") and organized workshops promoting migrants' inclusion.** The city of Buenos Aires (Argentina) has promoted specific multi-level partnerships for **digital training to foster refugee women's access labour rights and to bridge the digital divide especially affecting women refugees**[36].

Local governments have been particularly active in bridging linkages between education, inclusion and participation. **Grigny[37] (France)** has put in place the notion of *Cité éducative* **by supporting families in their educational role**. The city offers spaces that facilitate access to safe and attractive environments for learning beyond school.

Guaranteeing democratic participation at the local level is also a way to provide greater equality, "*a method of group decision-making characterized by a kind of equality among the participants at an essential stage of the collective decision making*"[38]. **LRGs are playing a key role in leveraging the active participation of all publics to local democratic and civic life**. **York[39] (UK)** has launched the *Community Voices Project*, engaging with members traditionally unlikely to participate in public-sector decisions, such as homeless or disabled persons. Also, **Montreal[40] (Canada) Indigenous Peoples Reconciliation Strategy** (2020-2025) envisages to establish a commissioner for the relations with Native communities and people within the Police Service of the city.

Local governments have also promoted the collective right of access, use and management of urban spaces and facilities, as another major participation lever, bringing renewed attention to the notion of *commons*[41]. For instance, through its *Council's Regulation on Governing the Urban Commons* working towards "*the care, regeneration and maintenance of urban commons*", the city of **Turin[42] (Italy)** has launched its first *Pacts of collaboration*, a legal tool providing principles for collaborative sub-local governance through which citizens and local administrations can jointly manage the city's urban commons.

Environment, Food security and Climate action

While urban and rural territories are already experiencing the severe consequences of climate change, LRGs are setting powerful examples on how to translate the linkages between environmental sustainability and human rights as a vector to strengthening

---

[34] UCLG Peer Learning on Migration – April 2022 (report to be published soon)

[35] https://educacao.sme.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/nucleo-de-educacao-etnico-racial/povos-migrantes/

[36] https://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/vicejefatura/derechoshumanos/noticias/re-lanzamos-programa-de-capacitacion-en-herramientas-digitales

[37] https://www.citeseducatives.fr/le-projet/les-cites-educatives

[38] Tom Christiano. "Democracy". In The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, edited by Edward Zalta (2018),https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/18_democracy_in_cities_and_territories_by_laura_roth_universitat_jaume_i.pdf

[39] https://www.yorkhumanrights.org/current-work/community-voices/

[40] https://montreal.ca/en/articles/2020-2025-strategy-reconciliation-indigenous-peoples-7760

[41] https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/14_defining_and_discussing_the_notion_of_commoning_by_alessio_kolioulis_the_bartlett_development_planning_unit_university_college_london.pdf

[42] http://www.comune.torino.it/benicomuni/eng_version/pacts_collaboration/index.shtml#:~:text=A%20Pact%20of%20collaboration%20is,the%20model%20of%20shared%20governance.

resilience to prevent future crisis. The government of **Quelimane**[43] (Mozambique), for example, has restored its mangrove forests to reduce flooding and rises in sea-level, and to foster job opportunities and economic growth for its poor communities – thus intertwining environmental action with the fight against economic inequalities. Through land-planning mechanisms such as the *Urban Agriculture Programme* and the *Green Belt Project*, the government of **Rosario (Argentina)**[44] facilitates the access to urban and peri-urban vacant land for low-income residents or women collectives, in order to foster local food production systems.

Seine Saint Denis (France) has also began raise standards and lower energy consumption in public institutions and launched the first-ever **Territorial Food Plan**[45] is being implemented to give residents access to quality food produced in a responsible manner.

<u>Peace</u>

The recent outbreak of the war between Russian Federation and Ukraine and the persistence of armed conflicts throughout the world have brought back the attention on the role of LRGs for peacebuilding. After the **Municipal Peace Talks**[46], an exercise of peacebuilding from a local perspective aimed at strengthening the multilateral system, promoting the respect for international law, opening pathways of dialogue, and fostering local democracy as a pillar for a sustainable peace.

Peace does not only mean absence of war, but also as a key lever to promote democracy, territorial cohesion and social inclusion at local level. For instance, the municipality of **Goicoechea (Costa Rica)** leverages *the Civic Centre for Peace*[47] and local cultural centers for the protection of the rights of the most vulnerable groups and promote peaceful cohabitation of different segments of the society. In this sense, in 2023 the city of **Bogotá (Colombia)** will host the *Fourth World Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace* [48], to provide a space for reflection for LRGs and **foster collective global advocacy for peace-building policies in cities and territories from a comprehensive approach**.

In the context of the current Russian- Ukrainian conflict, **local actions have been essential to mitigate the humanitarian crisis and to foster solidarity**. For example, the city of **Rzeszow**[49] **(Poland)** located near the western Ukrainian border, had to handle an unprecedented flow of Ukrainian displaced people thanks to the dedication of its municipal agents, the quick provision of public shelters and welcoming spaces for refugees; as well as to the hospitality of many local residents, Rzeszow managed proved to ensuring access to the basic needs of displaced groups.

---

[43] Report HLPF 2020 (GOLD UCLG) https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/Informe%20HLPF-FINAL.pdf (p. 98)

[44] https://www.metropolis.org/news/food-based-responses-climate-emergency-and-urban-inequality-rosario , https://www.rosario.gob.ar/inicio/produccion-sustentable-de-alimentos-cinturon-verde

[45] https://seinesaintdenis.fr/ecologie-et-amenagement/environnement-ecologie-urbaine/patssd#:~:text=Le%20D%C3%A9partement%20a%20vot%C3%A9%2C%20en,qualit%C3%A9%20pour%20toutes%20et%20tous.

[46] https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/eng_uclgpeacetalks_agenda.pdf

[47] https://www.imas.go.cr/es/comunicado/goicoechea-cuenta-ya-con-terreno-para-centro-civico-para-la-paz

[48] https://www.ciudadesdepaz.com/?lang=en

[49] https://erzeszow.pl/pl/41-miasto-rzeszow/1713-aktualnosci/52586-w-rzeszowie-mieszka-ponad-100-tys-uchodzcow-z-ukrainy-dane-z-raportu-ump.html and UCLG Peer Learning on Migration – April 2022 (report to be published soon)

2. Mechanisms to ensure the protection of human rights

Transversal approaches and mechanisms for the promotion of human rights

In addition to the several thematic priorities aforementioned - which entangle different mechanisms for the promotion, protection and fulfillment of human rights – local governments – especially the 12 contributions of UCLG CSIPDHR - highlighted their **increasing efforts to introduce transversal approaches on human rights at local level and to develop specific mechanisms for their integration, recognition and promotion across the policy spectrum.**

These mechanisms range from **budget allocation for regular human rights impact assessment**, as **Graz (Austria)** is envisaging for the year 2024; to **multi-level cooperation through knowledge exchange**. **Valencia (Spain)** has developed Valencia (Spain) has developed the *Plan de Convivencia Municipal* 2021-2024[50] for the defense of human rights and citizenship in cooperation with the surrounding cities and territories. **Amsterdam (Netherlands)** works closely together with Dutch embassies and other national institutions in strengthening human rights, for example to complement national actions on gender equality, freedom of expression, LGBTIQ+ and non- discrimination. **The ultimate goal of the city is to be consulted by intergovernmental organizations in the drafting phase of documents and to be regularly asked to submit comments on how legal instruments work out in practice**.

Other cities **actively collaborate with civil society and academia**, such as in the case of **York (United Kingdom)**, through York Human Rights City Network (YHRCN) a civil society partnership to generate a **locally informed understanding of human rights** and to relate them to other issues such as education, housing and healthcare. **Vienna (Austria)** has developed a **human rights-based policy framework** to strengthen cooperation of the local authorities, local actors and individuals to **foster participation, non-discrimination and equality, accountability and transparency across all municipal functions and policies**. The city is also working to foster human-rights based approaches in **civic spaces** through the **"Human Rights District" initiative**, in which each neighborhood **identifies priorities for public policies and stakeholders to be involved** in cooperation with the city's Human Rights Office.

The **regency of Wonosobo (Indonesia)[51] is working on the implementation of a human rights complain tool** which will make it easier for residents for accessing proximity-based access to justice mechanisms, denounce human rights infringements and other forms of discrimination.

These mechanisms contribute **to build data and monitor human rights implementation**, as in the case for the YHRC Annual Indicator Report[52].

Furthermore, **education, awareness-raising and training on human rights are still at the core of local action, targeting different groups and through different methods**, such as by leveraging arts and culture with youth and children in **Vienna (Austria)** or by **developing learning courses on discrimination and advocacy campaigns** in **Valencia (Spain).**

Some cities also underline **the linkages between the implementation of human rights and the UN Agenda 2030, since both are connected to fight poverty, as well as to the overall principle of leaving no one behind,** mainstreaming equality and non-discrimination in all fields

---

[50] https://www.valenciaextra.com/es/valencia/pleno-valencia-aprueba-plan-convivencia-municipal-contra-discriminacion-odio-proximos-4-anos_501781_102.html
[51] GOLD VI Working Paper Series #18 April 2022
[52] https://www.york.ac.uk/cahr/news/2022/2021-indicator-report/

of the municipal functions. In this sense, the **UN Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)[53] are gaining increasing importance in assessing and monitor local actions on human rights, as underlined in Amsterdam's contribution.** For example, the third VLR of **Mexico City[54]** highlights the pathways for the COVID-19 recovery, **which are based – among other things - on respect for rights and equality and inclusion and well-being**.

Lastly, Local and Regional Governments continue to stress the importance of ad-hoc local autonomous institutions dedicated to human rights guarantee, like the Human Rights Commissioners of Vienna (Austria), New York (USA), or the Undersecretariat for Human Rights and Cultural Pluralism of Buenos Aires (Argentina). Whether this is not possible for legal or administrative constraints, cities have developed alternative mechanisms such as the **Graz Human Rights Advisory Council**, which includes judiciary, law enforcement, administration, municipal government and civil society, or the **Quito (Ecuador)´s Council for the Protection of Rights,[55]** gathering local governments and civil society.

<u>Guarantee access to services and rights during crisis</u>

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, cities have been particularly relevant to promote access to services and rights through **proximity and caring, ensuring public service provision, but also by promoting social well-being and environmental sustainability**. For example, **Madrid (Spain**) has created a "**proximity ecosystem**" to protect and deliver basic services to those most vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic, including by leveraging public spaces and urban agriculture[56]. Also, **Sfax (Tunisia)[57]** adopted extraordinary measures **to provide a basic livelihood to residents at extreme risk of vulnerability and ensure universal access to public health**, especially migrants in an irregular situation, **targeting at the same time different forms of bias and discrimination through community dialogue**.

The provincial government of **Pichincha (Ecuador)[58]** has taken important measures in the fields of **social assistance and public health**, leveraging the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis to identify key priorities for the future, such as **food security, gender equality and transnational cooperation.**

The cities of **Renca (Chile)** and **Valencia (Spain)[59]** highlighted the importance of considering the link between COVID-19 and inequalities while addressing the impacts of the pandemic, **paying special attention to elderly and homeless people**.

Local governments have also promoted **workers 'rights and well-being**. **The South African Local Government Association (SALGA)** promoted a **remote work policy** to provide support to ensure the well-being and the protection of rights of local employees in the digital environment. **La Uniòn (Costa Rica)** has streghtened **comprehensive local programmes** such

---

[53] https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews

[54] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/288982021_VNR_Report_Mexico.pdf

[55] https://protecccionderechosquito.gob.ec/

[56] https://decide.madrid.es/legislation/processes/117/proposals#:~:text=Decide%20Madrid&text=Su%2 0objetivo%20es%20convertirse%20en,situaci%C3%B3n%20de%20confinamiento%20que%20vivimos.

[57] https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-local-perspective-cities-sfax-and-douala

[58] https://uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-interview-paola-pabon-president-province-pichincha-ecuador

[59] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-local-perspective-renca-chile-and-valencia-spain

as the *Integrated Health and Life Skills programme* **to foster well-being, caring and access to job opportunities** to improve the livelihood of children, youth and other vulnerable groups.

To conclude, LRGs have been able to tackle the crisis and foster a sustainable recovery by adding the dimension of human rights to service provision, highlighting not only the need of ensuring access to services, but also the ability to provide quality services while respecting human rights.

3. Looking forward: the role of local governments for the promotion, protection and fulfillment of human rights

Local and Regional Governments in promoting structural political change through human rights, both by integrating them into key policy areas; as well as by leveraging human rights as a transversal approach to link different SDGs. The UCLG CSIPDHR supports LGRs efforts in this sense.

The events and challenges of the past two years further revealed how cities and territories contribute to ensure continuity in the promotion, protection and fulfillment of human rights; but also to foster human rights 'monitoring and their reinforcement; and to leverage local experiences to trigger innovation. We need to **underline the transversal approach of local governments in relation to human rights, which enables effective actions against inequalities and discrimination and for the implementation of the SDGs in a comprehensive manner**. **The post-Covid 19 era: key moment to build back better, to revamp social contract. Important occasion to recognize cities not only as service providers but as political actors to shift the narrative on human rights.** As public service providers and closest level of governance to the people, Local and Regional Governments have a common responsibility to ensure the fulfillment of human rights and that all citizens can enjoy their city equally. In embracing transformative narratives and long-term goals, Local and Regional Governments can become guardians of human rights and the new voice of human rights dignity in their territories.

This is why we need provide LRGs with visibility but also include them in monitoring of human rights frameworks: **OHCHR Resolutions and agreement with UCLG are strategic opportunity in this sense**, especially to map initiative and extrapolate data to reinforce and mainstream local commitment at the international level.

Of course, **many challenges lie ahead**. Local and Regional Governments have witnessed **increasing inequalities and discrimination,** especially towards marginalized groups and during the COVID-19. This prevents LRGs to promote **transformative changes to foster anti-discrimination and intersectionality,** especially through **quality education, communication and information**. Raising inequalities are particularly visible in relation **to homeleness and access to housing**; **to the discrimination of informal workers;** as well as while analyzing local action in regard to more comprehensive approaches embracing human rights such as the **Right to the City**. **The overall lack of data – including qualitative data- jeopardizes regular monitoring and assessments of human rights implementation at local level**; which often go hand in hand with challenges related **to political continuity**. **Insufficient economic and human resources; the saturation of social services** were also identified as key challenges by LRGs for the development of programmes and projects for the promotion and protection of human rights at local level.

At the same time, several Members of the CSIPDHR Commission have outlined clear priorities and pathways for a sustainable recovery with human rights at its core. For

example, human rights are essential to rethink the way LRGs carry out their work in the field of social care **or to reduce precariousness in employment and inequalities** by proposing lasting and transformative paths for social inclusion[60] ; **as well as to renew the notions of income, work and unemployment to tackle poverty, combating stigmatisation and discrimination**[61]. The need to the establishment of a new social agenda for cities and territories is also important to collectively strengthen and amplify the human rights agenda at the local level, **and to put in place new initiatives such as universal basic income or the right to housing for all**[62]. More then ever, human rights rights values are recognized as bridges between local institutions and citizens to build inclusive societies, and to avoid past mistakes which have challenged basic mechanisms for human rights protection, such as universal health care[63]. This is why LGRs often ask for more **effective multi-level cooperation, decentralization and more resources to be able to better connect citizenship needs with their current and future aspirations**[64]. In their contributions, cities such **Goicoechea and La Uniòn (Costa Rica) have also highlighted the necessity for improved mechanisms of access to labour rights to informal workers to prevent deepening inequalities and the need for strategic partnerships with the private sector. Last but not least, Sine Saint Denis (France) identified the ecological transition as a key priority to link health with food security; while also pushing for the consultation of LRGs in human rights-related processes at national and international levels to promote a human rights culture at the local level and an effective monitoring at the national one.**

UCLG Commission initiatives support this process, in particular through the revision of the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City. The Charter-Agenda update process seeks to reinforce cooperation among local governments and key actors in the human rights cities movement. The aim is to articulate diverse thematic and sectoral contributions, updating and expanding the global-local vision on human rights offered by the Charter-Agenda with new approaches and territorial experiences. At a time of deep global transformations and uncertainties triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, this process can help reinforce local governments' role as guardians of the next generation of human rights. The Charter-Agenda update process is also aimed at gathering relevant inputs and perspectives by local governments on human rights and the right to the city, with a view to nourish the UCLG "Pact for the Future" process: A new roadmap for our world organization based on revamping the social contract on People, Government and Planet.

Also, the Commission will launch the International Campaign "10,100,1000 Human Rights Cities and Territories by 2030". The campaign aims to launch a global Human Rights cities movement explicitly committed to translate human rights principles at the local level. Starting from 10 first cities and territories, the ambition is to gather 100 Local and Regional Governments towards UCLG Daejon Congress and 1000 for the realization of the Agenda 2030.

[60] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-local-perspective-mexico-city

[61] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/latest-news/utrecht%25E2%2580%2599s-co-mayor-linda-voortman-joining-uclg-csipdhr-co-presidency-renewed

[62] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-local-perspective-renca-chile-and-valencia-spain

[63] https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-interview-shams-asadi-human-rights-commissioner-vienna

[64] . https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/news/challenges-and-responses-covid-19-interview-pedro-del-cura-mayor-rivas-vaciamadrid