



“Local governments for human rights”

22 July 2025

10:00 - 13:00 and 15:00 - 18:00 CEST

Room VIII, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Concept note

Background

In 2019, OHCHR, in collaboration with UCLG, convened the first joint meeting with local governments: “Local Governments for Human Rights – Addressing Social and Economic Inequalities at the Local Level” in Geneva. The meeting brought together mayors, local government officials, human rights experts, city networks, civil society, academia and the UN human rights mechanisms. As a result of the meeting, several recommendations were formulated, notably recognizing the importance of organizing regular OHCHR-UCLG meetings among local governments, city networks, civil society organizations and other stakeholders; building the capacity of local governments on human rights; strengthening the engagement of local governments with the UN human rights system; establishing criteria for the process of building a human rights city and creating a structure for supporting and evaluating local governments that aim at becoming “human rights cities”¹. In 2022, UCLG and OHCHR signed a letter of agreement, with the objective of convening regular meetings to create a dedicated space for dialogue between local and regional governments, city networks, OHCHR, UN human rights mechanisms, and facilitate knowledge sharing, mutual learning and development of partnerships.

In light of the recommendations of the 2019 meeting and UCLG-OHCHR collaboration agreement, this meeting is an opportunity to continue the dialogue on the realization of human rights at the local level. Mayors and local governments will have a unique opportunity to share their experiences, challenges and good practices, particularly on a human rights city, the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights, such as housing, water, sanitation and food, including discussions on human rights enhancing public procurement and ensuring that budget revenues, allocations and expenditures at the sub-national level reflect human rights obligations and principles. In addition, the meeting provides a platform for local governments to share their views at the international level, thus contributing to strengthening inclusive multilateralism.

¹ The campaign “10, 100, 1000 human rights cities and territories by 2030” was launched in 2022 by UCLG and the cities of Vienna, Barcelona, Grigny, Gwangju, Mexico City and Utrecht. Currently over 100 cities have joined the campaign. For more information, please visit: <https://www.uclg-cisdg.org/en>

Local and regional governments have a pivotal role in realizing human rights. As the closest level of governance to their inhabitants and communities, local governments are well-positioned to address human rights issues at the local level and prevent violations. Furthermore, all local and regional governments have shared complementary duties with the State to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. As organs of the State, local and regional governments have international obligations that stem from international treaties to which the State is a party.

Decentralization and the devolution of powers, for example on health, education, water, sanitation and housing, from the central government to the sub-national level implies greater responsibility for local and regional governments in realizing economic, social and cultural rights. Human rights are also relevant in the context of transforming care and support systems to ensure that these systems would be gender-responsive, disability-inclusive and age-sensitive and in full respect of human rights and the dignity, autonomy and agency of both those providing and those requiring care and support. In discharging their duties in public service delivery, local and regional governments may face challenges such as the lack of technical capacity, limited financial resources and institutional structures and inadequate cooperation and collaboration between different levels of government.

According to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States, at all levels of government, must take steps to the maximum of their available resources for the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights. This obligation includes responsibilities of local and regional governments related to resource generation, allocation and spending, which should follow the principles of transparency, participation and accountability, and contribute to the fulfilment of human rights through the delivery of public services. In addition to human rights budgeting, public procurement can be used as a transformative policy tool in realizing human rights by leveraging government spending. Therefore, discussions will be held on ways to integrate human rights norms and principles into local budgeting and procurement processes.

The main objectives of the meeting are to:

- Recognize the important role and work of local governments in the realization of human rights and enhance dialogue between local governments and the UN human rights system;
- Present the OHCHR-UCLG guidance framework on building a human rights city, share feedback and experiences on building a human rights city, and discuss the next steps;
- Share good practices, initiatives and challenges on the realization of economic, social and cultural rights at the local level, including on human rights budgeting, procurement and human rights-based care and support systems;
- Facilitate knowledge sharing, mutual learning and development of partnerships among local governments, the UN human rights system, city networks, civil society, academia and other stakeholders.