

Human Rights Go Local: What Works

Academy and Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels

Human Rights Accountability of Local Governments: Assessment Frameworks and Tools

(Working title)

8 – 11 February 2027

Concept Note

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1. Background

The International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels under the auspices of UNESCO and the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Human Security in Graz, Austria, together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the African Local Governments Academy (UCLG-Africa), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the Austrian Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs, the Federal Province of Styria, the City of Graz, and the University of Graz organise the sixth edition of the annual Academy and Conference “Human Rights Go Local: What Works”. The event contributes to the United Nations’ vision of protecting and promoting human rights for all by informing local governments on how to deliver on their related obligations, as well as to the goals set by the 2030 Agenda, and its promise to “Leave No One Behind”.

The Academy and Conference series demonstrates innovative approaches and proven practices for protecting and promoting human rights at the local level, making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. It ultimately seeks to improve the quality of life of all people living in urban areas and smaller municipalities around the globe. With this event series, the International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels fulfils its mandate to build bridges between all institutions, organisations, initiatives, engagements, efforts, and ideas that focus on local and regional human rights practices, to moderate their exchange as being an information clearinghouse, and to facilitate the implementation of human rights at the local level.



Figure: The process of the Human Rights Go Local series including publication, Academy, Conference, and Outcome Document

Topical human rights issues, the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the current volume of the [“Human Rights Go Local” publication series](#) are the basis for the selection of the thematic focus of the annual event. In 2021, the first Academy brought together 40 human rights experts from local governments, international and regional organisations, and the research community to discuss field-proven methods to generate reliable human rights data for evidence-based policy-making at the local level. All practices, findings, and proposals of this event were synthesised in the Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks on [“Building Bridges between Local Governments and the Scientific Community to Promote Human Rights”](#), which was presented by the co-organisers to 200 international guests at the Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels held on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the city of Graz (Austria) as Europe’s first Human Rights City.

The second Academy, held in 2022, built on these results and focused on successful strategies and initiatives for strengthening local authorities’ commitments to human rights. Valuable insights and experiences concerning the drivers and actors of local human rights commitments, the local development of commitments, and the steps that could be taken in the future were collected by 70 participants in the Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks entitled [“From Intentions to](#)



[Commitments: Towards the Effective and Sustainable Implementation of Human Rights](#)” and presented to 400 conference guests from 55 countries.

The 2023 Academy focussed on experiences made and lessons learnt in governing the city by human rights objectives. 62 participants discussed the potential for change related to the integration of human rights into the management, administrative and policy processes of local governments. The Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks on “[Governing the City by Human Rights Objectives: Management Concepts and Instruments](#)” summarises the results of this event and contains 12 concrete Encouragements for action for local authorities, which the Mayor of the City of Graz presented to the 386 participants of the Conference broadcasted from Graz City Hall.

At the Academy 2024, a total of 81 participants used their wealth of knowledge to exchange on the development and implementation of human rights action plans at local level. The resulting Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks on “[Accountability in Action: Human Rights Action Plans of Local Governments](#)” is a collection of 14 Encouragements with which the participants of the event aim to motivate local governments worldwide to adopt effective human rights action plans to strengthen their accountability. A total of 50 invited guests attended the Conference in person at the television studio of the Austrian Public Broadcasting Corporation, while an additional 350 attendees from 44 countries joined online.

At the Academy and Conference 2026, 217 speakers and participants created a dynamic online space to exchange tools and methods for human rights-based budgeting from around the world. Human rights-based budgeting was showcased as a powerful tool for accountability. The Academy explored how budget decisions can strengthen local governments’ accountability and help make human rights a reality for everyone. Examples from diverse cities and regions illuminated the topic from multiple angles. The resulting Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks on “[Local Governments and Human Rights-Based Budgeting: Pathways to Accountability](#)” presents twelve encouragements for applying a human rights-based approach to budgeting and strengthening horizontal and vertical cooperation. The Outcome Document was launched in a high-level closing Conference on 5 February. Opening remarks were delivered by high-level representatives of partner organisations. In celebration of the 25th anniversary of Graz as a Human Rights City, an all-women panel brought together leading voices who reflected on the Academy’s Outcome Document. Finally, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif encouraged mayors worldwide to adopt a human rights-based budgeting approach in her closing keynote.

Rationale

In recent years, a wide range of non-judicial accountability mechanisms, including assessment frameworks and tools have been developed by various international and regional organizations and networks. These mechanisms support local governments in strengthening and demonstrating their human rights accountability. Given the rich diversity of these available instruments, local authorities face the practical task of identifying and choosing those accountability mechanisms, whose frameworks and tools that match their specific local realities.

The Academy and Conference supports local authorities in this endeavor in two essential ways: On the one hand, the program provides a timely opportunity to showcase various assessment frameworks and tools, effectively building a shared knowledge base on “what works.” This serves to build a practical bridge between international and regional organizations as developers and local authorities as users. On the other hand, the program addresses a fundamental question:



What does a local authority actually gain from introducing a human rights accountability mechanism? To answer this, it demonstrates how these mechanisms translate into concrete political, economic, social, or legal potentials, highlighting how existing mechanisms yield tangible reputational gains, increased public trust, and a distinct competitive advantage for local governments on the global stage.

For these reasons, the 6th edition of the “Human Rights Go Local: What Works” Academy and Conference provides an online platform to bring together assessment frameworks and tools with the lived implementation experiences of local authorities.

Some of the main topics discussed in the Academy's plenary sessions and workshops are:

- **Stocktaking:** Which accountability mechanisms are already available for local governments committed to human rights? How binding are their assessment frameworks, and what concrete benefits do local authorities gain from applying them?
- **Lessons from the field:** What are the perceptions of local authorities with first-hand implementation experience regarding “what works”? What are the political, economic, social and legal benefits for local governments implementing these accountability mechanisms? What efforts and resources are required to undergo the assessment framework? Which lessons have been learned so far? How can existing practical experiences best be transferred to different local contexts?
- **Needs and potentials:** What do local authorities require to implement human rights assessment frameworks and tools (e.g. technical support, capacity building and funding)? How can local authorities’ practical needs be matched with international capacity building offers and the interests of potential donors? What are the key success factors that drive and sustain human rights accountability at the local level?

Plenary sessions and workshops will bring together human rights experts and practitioners from the local, regional, national and international levels to discuss challenges, solutions and best practices. The Outcome Document is the tangible output of the Academy. It will be discussed with high-level policy makers at the closing Conference on 11 February 2027.

2. Overall goal

The 2027 edition of the Academy and Conference “Human Rights Go Local: What Works” aims to advance the human rights agenda at the local level. This goal will be achieved by building bridges across different levels of governance, academic disciplines and regions, as well as by promoting the exchange between local authorities, human rights experts, and practitioners from around the world.

Special attention will be given to the participation of the next generation of human rights experts, who will be provided with the opportunity to exchange on experiences with peers, share their views and get in touch with mentors in the field of human rights.

Moreover, the Academy aims to build alliances between local governments and city networks to develop, pilot, and implement frameworks and tools for (self-) assessing human rights performance of local authorities and outcomes.

3. Target groups

The organisers aim to provide an easily accessible platform of knowledge, exchange, and collaboration for all those working with or within local governments across all functions. The



primary target groups encompass those who wish to explore the potential of frameworks and tools in promoting human rights accountability.

The prime target groups include representatives of local governments (both in policy-making and public administration), city networks, and intermediaries, such as human rights professionals and practitioners from think tanks, academia, civil society. Moreover, the Academy targets international and regional organisations, businesses, and potential investors interested in providing resources to support local authorities' human rights accountability. Finally, the event welcomes young professionals and emerging practitioners interested in gaining expertise on the subject.

4. Broader objectives

1. Take stock of existing frameworks and tools to assess human rights performance and outcomes: what is their scope and how do local authorities benefit from using them?
2. Improve the visibility of assessment frameworks and tools that effectively promote the accountability of local governments.
3. Balance standardised assessment frameworks (including tools, such as human rights indicator sets and methods) with contextual preconditions and requirements, ensuring transferability.
4. Exchange user perceptions of local authorities, think tanks, human rights institutions, academics, civil society organisations, regional and international organisations, donors and investors.
5. Improve the understanding of human rights accountability and communicate the benefits of joining accountability mechanisms to local and regional authorities.
6. Expand the existing network for the exchange of experiences and further develop solid working relationships and collaborations.
7. Co-create practical recommendations for municipalities on developing, implementing, and monitoring human rights performance and outcomes.
8. Develop and adopt an Outcome Document and discuss its content with high-level local authorities and policy makers.

5. Outcomes

1. Local governments will be aware of the incentives and benefits of upholding accountability through human rights assessments.
2. Participants will demonstrate improved knowledge of human rights assessment frameworks and tools.
3. Local governments will be better equipped to constantly assess their capacities and challenges in terms of human rights accountability.
4. International, regional and local actors will have aligned their perspectives on the further development of assessment frameworks and tools.
5. The results of the Academy will have been fed into the Conference in the form of an Outcome Document as a tool to promote accountability of local governments.

6. Requested cooperation partners



The 2026 edition of the Academy and Conference is organised in collaboration with:

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), UCLG Africa's Local Governments Academy (ALGA), the Austrian Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs, the Federal Province of Styria, the City of Graz, and the University of Graz.

7. Human Rights Go Local readings

Building Bridges between Local Governments and the Scientific Community to Promote Human Rights” [Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks 2021](#) of Human Rights Go Local: What Works - Academy and Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels 2021 on Field-proven Research Methods on Human Rights, 1-9 February 2021, Graz, 9 February 2021.

From Intentions to Commitments: Towards the Effective and Sustainable Implementation of Human Rights, [Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks 2022](#) of Human Rights Go Local: What Works - Academy and Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels 2022, 1-8 February 2022, Graz, 8 February 2022.

Governing the city by human rights objectives: Management concepts and instruments, [Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks 2023](#) of Human Rights Go Local: What Works – Academy and Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels, 1-8 February 2023, Graz, 7 February 2023.

Accountability in Action: Human Rights Action Plans of Local Governments, [Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks 2024](#) of Human Rights Go Local: What Works Academy and Conference 2024.

Karina Gomes and Markus Möstl, [Implementing Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the Local Level: Key Issues and Examples](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publications Series, Volume 1, HRGL Publishing, Graz, 2020.

Isabella Meier, [Research on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels: Methods, Practices, Approaches](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Volume 2, HRGL Publishing, Graz, 2021.

Jasmien Deklerck, [From Commitment to Responsibility for Human Rights in Cities and Regions](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), [Human Rights Go Local Publication Series](#), Volume 3, HRGL Publishing, Graz, 2022.

International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels, [Governing the City by Human Rights Objectives: Embedding Human Rights in Public Management Instruments](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Volume 4, HRGL Publishing, Graz, 2023.

International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels, [Accountability in Action: Human Rights Action Plans of Local Governments](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Volume 5, HRGL Publishing, Graz, 2024.

