



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

ZENTRUM ZUR FÖRDERUNG DER PROMOTION OF  
MENSCHENRECHTE HUMAN RIGHTS  
IN GEMEINDEN AT THE LOCAL AND  
UND REGIONEN REGIONAL LEVELS

Under the auspices of UNESCO

# The Business Case for Human Rights at the Local Level

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# Why should Local Governments care? The business case



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## Good governance

- establishes credibility,
- gives authority,
- honours with reputation,
- facilitates city diplomacy,
- leverages equality,
- promotes quality of life and wealth,
- avoids trouble!



# A Business Case?

The question is not whether local authorities ought to apply human rights, but how they can do so in practice.

The ‘business case’ addresses how human rights can be implemented at a local level in the most effective and efficient manner.

It also highlights the ‘clever’ element of the obligation: why pursuing a pro-active human rights policy pays off for local and regional authorities.

# The Awareness Gap

A central barrier for human rights is the ‘awareness gap’:

An authority withholds a drivers’ license for a person requiring it to earn a living (right to property, right to work, gender equality)?

Court dealings in bankruptcy proceedings (fair trial, right to property, rule of law...)?

There are many of such examples, with human rights being relevant in virtually all contexts.

# The Awareness Gap

The awareness gap has several facets:

Local authorities are often not aware about the human rights elements of their work: they do not refer to human rights in their decisions.

The population is unaware of their human rights in their every-day life.

# Misconceptions

Human rights are perceived as an abstract concept operating merely at the international level.

Human rights are a moral concept without impact on the practice of authorities.

Civil and political rights are 'free of charge' while economic and social rights are expensive to implement, but:

costs of running a court or a prison (relating to civil and political rights) in contrast with the costs for a school or a hospital (relating to economic and social rights).

# More than an Obligation

Local government has a dual role:

- It should provide services in compliance with human rights standards,
- but also it should provide for human rights by delivering good services.

Good (local) governance goes hand in hand with human rights and is part of human rights.

# More than an Obligation

The active delivery of human rights is a policy goal in itself:

- leading to services oriented towards people's actual needs.
- developing a local society which allows for equal participation.
- holding administration and politicians accountable to the community that they serve and represent.

# More than an Obligation

Hypothesis:

‘more’ human rights pays off for local governments and communities.

The benefits of adopting a human rights based approach exceed its costs.

Interpret human rights as extensively as possible to realize individual well-being and social cohesion.

We offer three main clusters of arguments:

# Rationale for the Business Case

Firstly, wealth:

human rights implementation is a precondition for wealth,  
rather than a luxury.

Failure to respect human rights impoverishes societies –  
economically, socially, culturally, and linguistically – as well as  
bearing high societal costs and risks.

# Rationale for the Business Case

Secondly, the public good:

Participation, empowerment and democratic accountability rest at the core of any elected official's interest. The 'good' for society, so that it is visible and tangible for the public, is 'profitable' for politicians.

# Rationale for the Business Case

Thirdly, societal investment:

human rights implementation is, economically speaking, an investment into societal infrastructure.

Social justice, equality, distribution of income, employment, education etc. are core policy goals which an active human rights policy can help achieve.

# Ten Benefits from the Obligation

If consistently pursued, all sectors of society benefit from effective human rights protection at a local level,

individual citizens, civil society,

the economy,

politicians, government administration, law enforcement, judicial administration, amongst many others.

How these sectors of society benefit from human rights protection can essentially be summarised in 10 arguments:

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

## 1. The 'well being argument':

Citizen-oriented and non-discriminatory services, participatory decision-making, legal certainty, functioning schools and hospitals, a healthy environment, all lead to a stronger sense of well being and identification of citizens with their city/municipality.

This argument is essential.

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

## 2. The 'economic growth argument':

Human rights implementation is part of a regional development policy: Fair working conditions, quality education, a functioning rule of law, diversity management, all contribute to a comparative advantage.

Human rights implementation contributes to the growth of a city as well as its income from taxation. These factors generate economic and social stability, particularly in times of economic crisis and change.

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

## 3. The 'public order argument':

Pro-active human rights implementation is a major contribution to social cohesion, inclusion, justice and peace.

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

## 4. The 'productivity argument':

Fulfilling human rights prevents discrimination, generates higher productivity, provides more freedom for creativity and innovation, and reduces the risk of legal and social conflicts as well as transaction costs.

It adds to predictability. One can rely on the application of the rule of laws, thus making it a safe place to invest in.

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

## 5. The 'human rights beacon argument':

Cities and regions applying a human rights based approach trigger a wide range of civil society activity: NGOs, academia, the creative and knowledge industries settle or emerge.

The internationality of the respective workforce and the job opportunities in the field are success stories.

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

## 6. The 'voluntarism argument':

Human rights motivate people to engage in the community and carry out voluntary work.

Local governments that create incentives for human rights voluntarism can reap major benefits from such private, non-profit initiatives.

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

## 7. The 'service argument':

The administration is better equipped to carry out its services, due to education, guidance, safeguards, legal certainty and confidence in the daily delivery of administration or provision of goods and services to the community.

Human rights are engines for change. Human rights implementation can motivate LA to learn and improve their way of working, its structures and services (professionalism).

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

## 8. The 'quality assurance argument':

The human rights framework provides standards for the assessment of structure, processes and the outcomes of any policy and measure, i.e. their impact on citizens.

In particular, the '4A-Scheme', developed by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is a powerful tool for quality assurance.

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

## 9. The ‘mutual learning argument’:

A rights aware population continuously advocates for improvements in administration and political discourse (for instance through human rights reports).

At the same time, political discourse has a major impact on public opinion, the media and the societal climate. Public officials can support a ‘human rights climate’ in a city by promoting rights awareness.

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

10. Politicians have much to gain from promoting human rights:

Human rights need strong leadership and commitment by local politicians.

The ‘respectability argument’: A strong human rights policy and profile gives politicians credibility and legitimacy.

The ‘city-diplomacy argument’: The case for human rights provides an opportunity to create a positive international image.

# The Business Case: Ten Benefits

Thank you very much for your attention