

HUMAN RIGHTS GO LOCAL: WHAT WORKS

**Local Governments and Human Rights-Based Budgeting:
Pathways to Accountability**

5 February 2026

**Outcome Document and
Explanatory Remarks**





UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Human Security
 International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights
 at the Local and Regional Levels

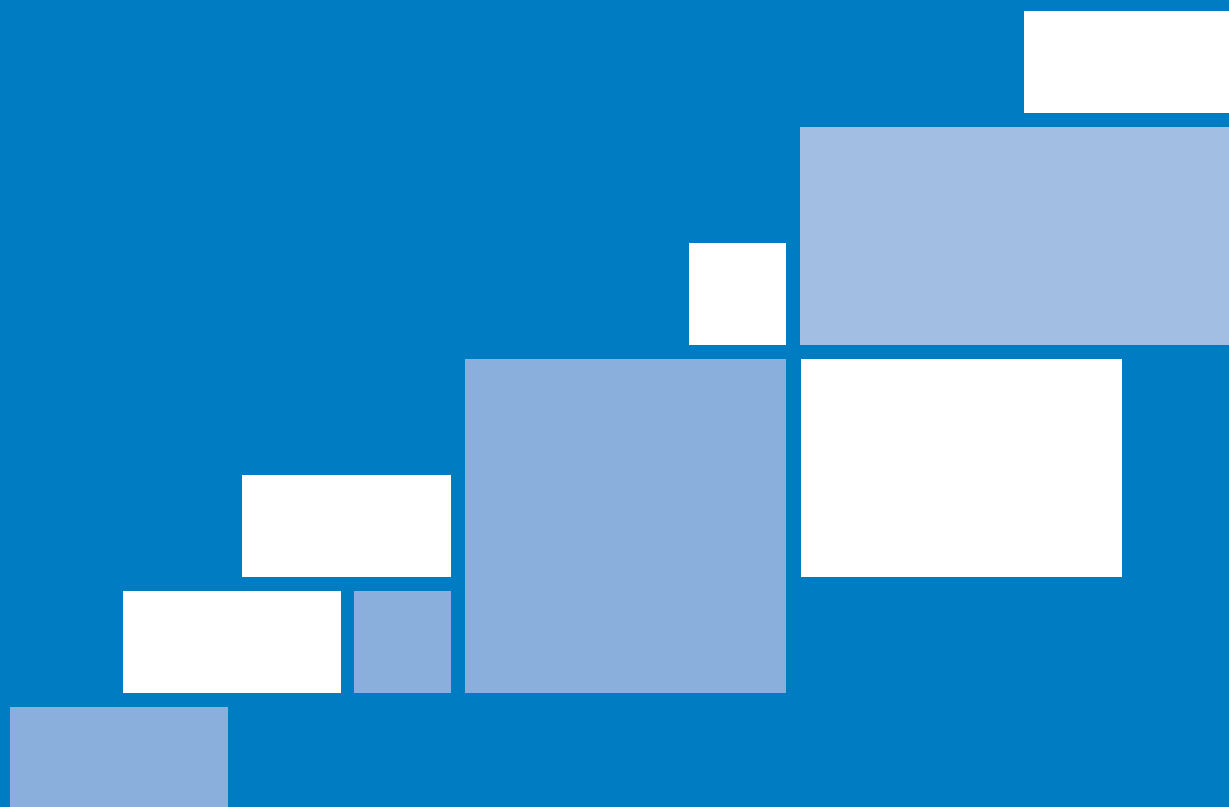
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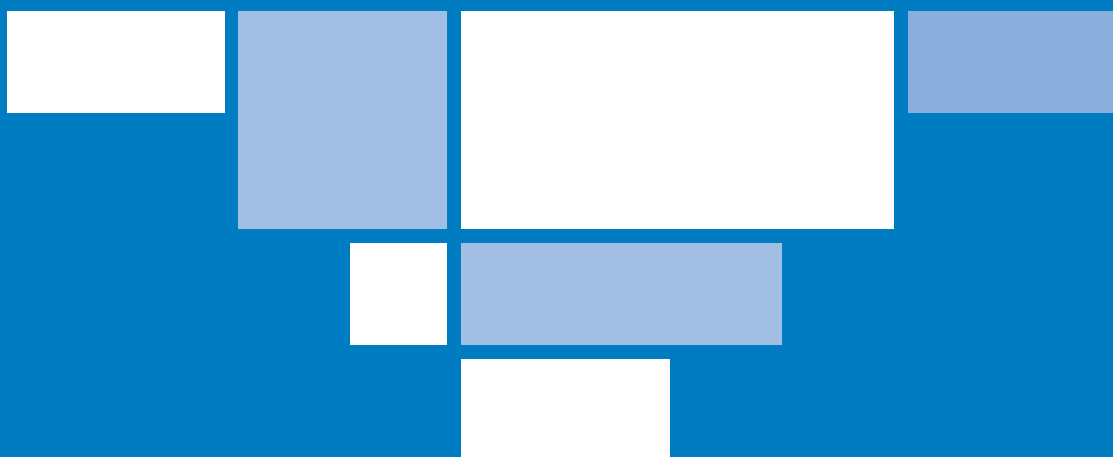
The event was organised by the International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels under the auspices of UNESCO and the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Human Security in Graz, Austria, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (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 UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (UCLG-CSIPDHR), the African Local Governments Academy (UCLG-Africa), the Austrian Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs, the Federal Province of Styria, the City of Graz, and the University of Graz





CLOSING CONFERENCE

Human Rights Go Local:
What Works



From **2 to 5 February 2026**, the **fifth edition of the Academy and Conference “Human Rights Go Local: What Works”** took place online. This year’s event under the theme “[Local Governments and Human Rights-Based Budgeting: Pathways to Accountability](#)” brought together an inspiring global community to showcase and synthesise innovative approaches and proven practices for protecting and promoting human rights at the local level. The overarching goal of the [event series](#) remains helping cities and communities to become more inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Publication: HRGL Volume 6

Released as a preparatory input ahead of the Academy, Volume 6 of the “[Human Rights Go Local](#)” (HRGL) [publication series](#) showcases human rights-based budgeting as a powerful tool for accountability. By applying human rights principles across the entire budget cycle, local authorities can align spending with rights, strengthen oversight and transparency, and establish clear mechanisms to monitor performance and ensure accountability. In this way, human rights-based budgeting serves both as a practical instrument and a guiding framework for local governments’ commitments.

Academy “Human Rights Go Local: What Works” (2–4 February)

The 2026 edition created a dynamic online space to exchange tools and methods for human rights-based budgeting from around the world. Through engaging plenary sessions and hands-on workshops, 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.



Klaus Starl, Executive Director of the International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels introduces the organization team, here Berrit Englmaier, Researcher at the Centre.



Gerd Oberleitner, UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Human Security opens the Academy.

Across three interactive days, the Academy addressed the following guiding aspects:

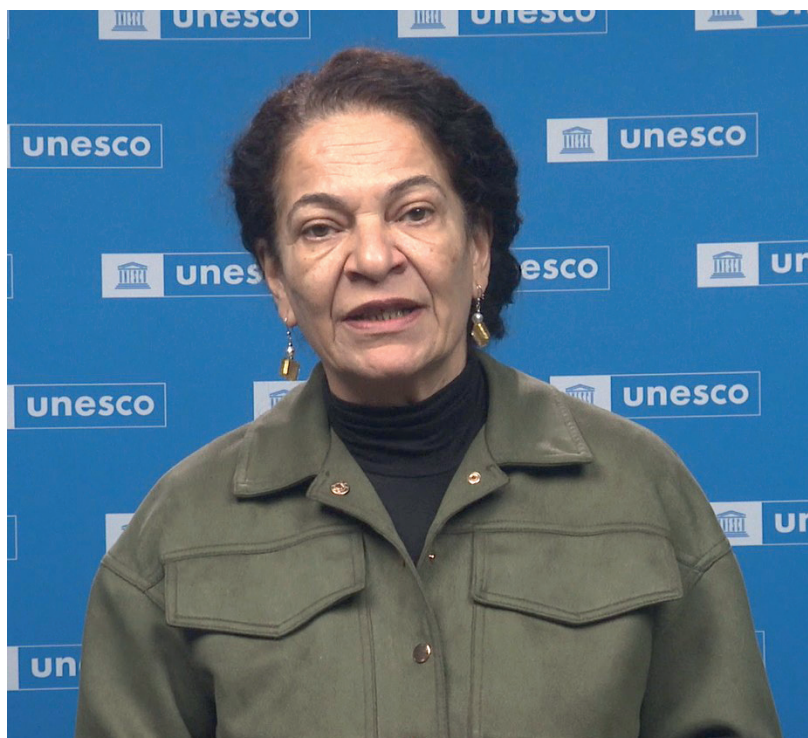
Day 1: Stocktaking – frameworks and instruments. After the opening ceremony the program assessed how existing human rights-based budgeting approaches advance local governments' human rights commitments, surveyed current frameworks and instruments, and considered their applicability across diverse local contexts.

Day 2: Lessons from the field. Sessions highlighted concrete cases from cities worldwide where human rights-based budgeting produced measurable local impact. Two parallel workshops took place. Workshop A offered insights into a practical scenario on human rights-based budgeting in maintaining a school. Workshop B elaborated on opportunities and challenges as well as the enabling conditions for adapting and transferring good practices to other municipalities.

Day 3: Local authorities' way forward to accountability. Discussions outlined what local authorities need to embed human rights-based budgeting within government systems globally, detailing next steps to enhance budget accessibility, participatory processes, and oversight – thereby strengthening accountability for human rights outcomes. The day also explored how city networks and international organisations can support local authorities in advancing human rights-based budgeting. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to network and exchange in the Academy's virtual living room.

Closing Conference 5 February 2026

In order to launch the 2026 Academy's Outcome Document, the event culminated in a high-level closing Conference on 5 February, moderated by Klaus Starl, Director of the UNESCO Centre, and Karin Schmidlechner, Professor of Contemporary History and longstanding member of the Centre. Opening remarks were delivered by high-level representatives of the organisers:



Lidia Brito
*Assistant Director-General
for Social and Human
Sciences, UNESCO*





Anacláudia Rossbach
Executive Director, UN-Habitat



Josef Schellhorn
*State Secretary at the
Federal Ministry for European
and International Affairs,
Republic of Austria*



Manuela Khom
*Deputy Governor,
Province of Styria*



Peter Riedler
*Rector of the
University of Graz*

A highlight of the closing Conference was the keynote address by United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif, who argues that public budgets are not neutral but reflect political priorities, making human rights-based budgeting a critical tool to ensure local authorities' transparency, accountability, and alignment with human rights obligations. Therefore, the key note calls on local governments to use budgets as instruments of dignity, equality, and social justice. Furthermore, civil society is encouraged to actively engage, so that human rights-based budgeting becomes a standard practice to deliver tangible improvements in people's lives.



Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights.



In celebration of the 25th anniversary of Graz as a Human Rights City, an all-women panel brought together leading voices. Moderated by Martha Davis, Professor of Law, Northeastern University, Boston, USA, the panel reflected on the Academy's Outcome Document, which presents twelve encouragements for applying a human rights-based approach to budgeting and strengthening horizontal and vertical cooperation.



From left to right: Elke Kahr, Mayoress of the City of Graz; Emilia Saiz, Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments; Alison Hosie, Researcher, Scottish Human Rights Commission; Claudia Luciani, Director of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe; Dafna Feinholz, Director, Research, Ethics and Inclusion, UNESCO and Savitri Bisnath, Economist and Senior Director, The New School, New York, USA.



OUTCOME DOCUMENT

of “Human Rights Go Local: What Works” –
Academy and Conference on Human Rights at
the Local and Regional Levels, 5 February 2026



Local Governments and Human Rights-Based Budgeting: Pathways to Accountability

We, the participants of the fifth Academy and Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels,

referring to the work done by

the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)*, which, in line with the Global Call against Racism, the UNESCO Roadmap against Racism and Discrimination, and the Global Alliance against Racism and Discriminations adopted in 2025 by its Member States, promotes antiracism and antidiscrimination efforts grounded in human rights principles and standards, specifically through the Global Alliance as a multistakeholder collaborative platform where national and local governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector exchange good practices, strengthen capacities, conduct research, and shape policy, operating through flagship programmes that are aligned with international human rights norms—including the annual Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination, the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities, the Network of Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination Officials, the Master Class Series against Racism and Discriminations, and the Programme on the Freedom and Safety of Scientists,

the *United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)*, mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities, being the focal point for all urbanisation and human settlement matters within the UN system, working with partners to build inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable communities, promoting urbanisation as a positive transformative force, reducing inequality, discrimination, and poverty, working in over 90 countries using a human rights-based, gender-responsive approach to promote transformative change through knowledge, policy advice, and technical assistance, specifically leveraging integrated urban and territorial planning, management, investment, and finance, as well as participatory multi-level governance and the localisation of the SDGs, as two key means of implementation for its current Strategic Plan, with the aim of ensuring finance frameworks and governance mechanisms foster adequate housing, land, and basic services for all,

the *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)*, which has promoted dialogue among local governments and their involvement in human rights mechanisms, fostered spaces for knowledge sharing, provided guidance documents for promoting human rights in the public sector, including through government budgets and procurements, increased efforts for raising awareness on human rights issues at the local level through advocacy notes and other resources, and contributed to building capacity of local and regional authorities and other local actors on human rights, including through its field presences,

the *Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe*, responsible for promoting the sub-national dimension of human rights and strengthening local and regional democracy and the rule of law in the 46 Council of Europe member states, that adopted a Human Rights Strategy in October 2023 to integrate and mainstream human rights in all its work, promote a culture of human rights at the local and regional levels, and facilitate greater cooperation and political dialogue between local, regional, national and international authorities,

the *United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)*, through its Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (CISDPDH), being the global network representing local and regional governments (LRGs) committed to advancing social inclusion, democratic governance and human rights worldwide, which has recognised that local and regional governments are frontline actors in fulfilling international human rights obligations, underscored human rights-based budgeting as a key priority for advancing rights at the local level and emphasised the need to align public resources with the realisation of rights for all, and acting on advocacy, capacity-building and peer learning exchange for the realisation of rights for all,



- a. reaffirming that international human rights standards and obligations remain a shared responsibility for all tiers of government,
- b. underlining that local authorities are required, in accordance with international human rights treaties, to take all appropriate measures, using the maximum of their available resources, for the progressive realisation of rights, and that this imperative extends to all aspects, duties, and processes of public budget management,
- c. recalling Human Rights Council Resolution 57/12 of 10 October 2024, which underscores the critical role of local governments in promoting and protecting human rights at the local level,
- d. recalling the New Urban Agenda providing a framework for urban development rooted in human rights principles and explicitly promoting an age- and gender-responsive budgeting approach,
- e. recalling the European Urban Charter III outlining principles for modern urban living,
- f. noting with appreciation the landmark call of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the establishment of Human Rights Economies, which requires the redirection of economic policies, including public budgets, tax, and fiscal policies, towards the full realisation of human rights for all,
- g. recognising that the Guidance Framework for creating a Human Rights City issued in 2025 represents a cornerstone for advancing a human rights-based approach to local governance,
- h. convinced that local governments, by virtue of their proximity to rights-holders and their responsibilities in the provision of essential public services, are optimally positioned to translate human rights standards into tangible improvements in the lives of their constituents,
- i. welcoming Human Rights Cities as leading champions of human rights and affirming our dedication to further advancing, refining, and applying the Human Rights City framework and concept,
- j. recognising the increasing number of international city networks and associations that join forces to collaborate, exchange knowledge, and collectively shape the global agenda,
- k. welcoming the adoption of the UNESCO's Global Alliance against Racism and Discriminations, and reiterating the critical role of the UNESCO's Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination, the Roadmap against Racism and Discrimination, and the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR),
- l. acknowledging the Human Rights Cities movement and trans-local cooperation — including international networks such as UCLG — as key drivers for localizing human rights through knowledge exchange, peer-to-peer learning, and joint advocacy efforts,
- m. acknowledging that public budgets are critical policy instruments promoting inclusive development and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level,
- n. emphasizing in particular the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 10 to reduce inequality within and among countries, which necessitates the promotion of universal social, economic, and political inclusion, the guarantee of equal opportunity through the elimination of discriminatory practices, and the adoption of fiscal and social protection policies designed to progressively achieve greater equality at the local level,
- o. recognising the essential efforts of UN-Habitat in advancing the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, specifically through the promotion of Voluntary Local Reviews as vital tools for monitoring progress, fostering local accountability, and ensuring that human rights-based development is realised within urban and territorial planning,
- p. recognising the transformative role of local budgets as key instruments for implementing human rights at the local level, directly impacting the well-being of communities and fostering inclusive development,
- q. underlining that the strategic mobilisation, allocation and spending of public resources through a human rights-based approach to budgeting enables local governments to advance the well-being of their communities, tackle inequalities, and foster social cohesion, thereby affirming their central position as catalysts for change,



- r. convinced that embedding human rights principles and standards into the process and content of budgeting strengthens the effectiveness, and legitimacy of governance, fostering transparency, accountability, participation and trust within local communities,
- s. acknowledging that by demonstrating a clear and explicit commitment to human rights in their budgets, local governments enhance both their credibility and appeal to investors, donors, and international organisations, potentially facilitating access to external funding and resources,
- t. recognising the emerging evidence and practice by international organisations, city networks, civil society, and academia, which have demonstrated the potential of human rights-based budgeting to bridge the persistent gap between legal commitments and meaningful local implementation,
- u. welcoming the growing trend among local governments to render visible, communicate, and label their budgeting practices and services as directly related to the respect, protection, and fulfilment of human rights,
- v. acknowledging that no universally agreed model exists for human rights-based public budgeting at the local level,
- w. accepting that universally agreed human rights standards for human rights-based public budgeting should take into consideration the specific reality and lived experience of communities at the local level,
- x. acknowledging that there remains an urgent need for practical guidance, knowledge exchange, and innovation, drawing on documented successful experiences as replicable models,
- y. mindful of the fiscal constraints and systemic challenges faced by local governments, especially in the context of limited locally generated revenue, dependency on national budget transfers, and competing policy priorities,
- z. convinced that even under such conditions, local authorities retain a duty to align available resources with human rights principles and standards,
- aa. underlining that a human rights-based approach to local budgeting necessitates the integration of the principles and obligations of participation, transparency, non-discrimination, progressive realisation, non-retrogression, and the use of maximum available resources into all relevant stages of the budget cycle,
- bb. emphasising that participatory governance and the meaningful involvement of all segments of the population, including youth, older persons, women, and communities facing systemic disadvantage, are indispensable for ensuring that budgeting formulations, processes and outcomes truly reflect the needs and rights of all inhabitants,
- cc. noting that effective implementation of human rights-based budgeting demands the continuous development of administrative capacity, comprehensive training, and the systematic integration of rights-based methods and data into the budget cycle,
- dd. emphasising that the impact of budgetary decisions must be measured by the outcomes achieved in respect of full enjoyment of human rights by rights-holders, with particular attention given to those most at risk of being left behind,
- ee. united in the conviction that human rights-based budgeting can mark a significant step forward in the construction of Human Rights Economies and the realisation of the rights and dignity of all persons at the local level,

encourage local level governments worldwide to

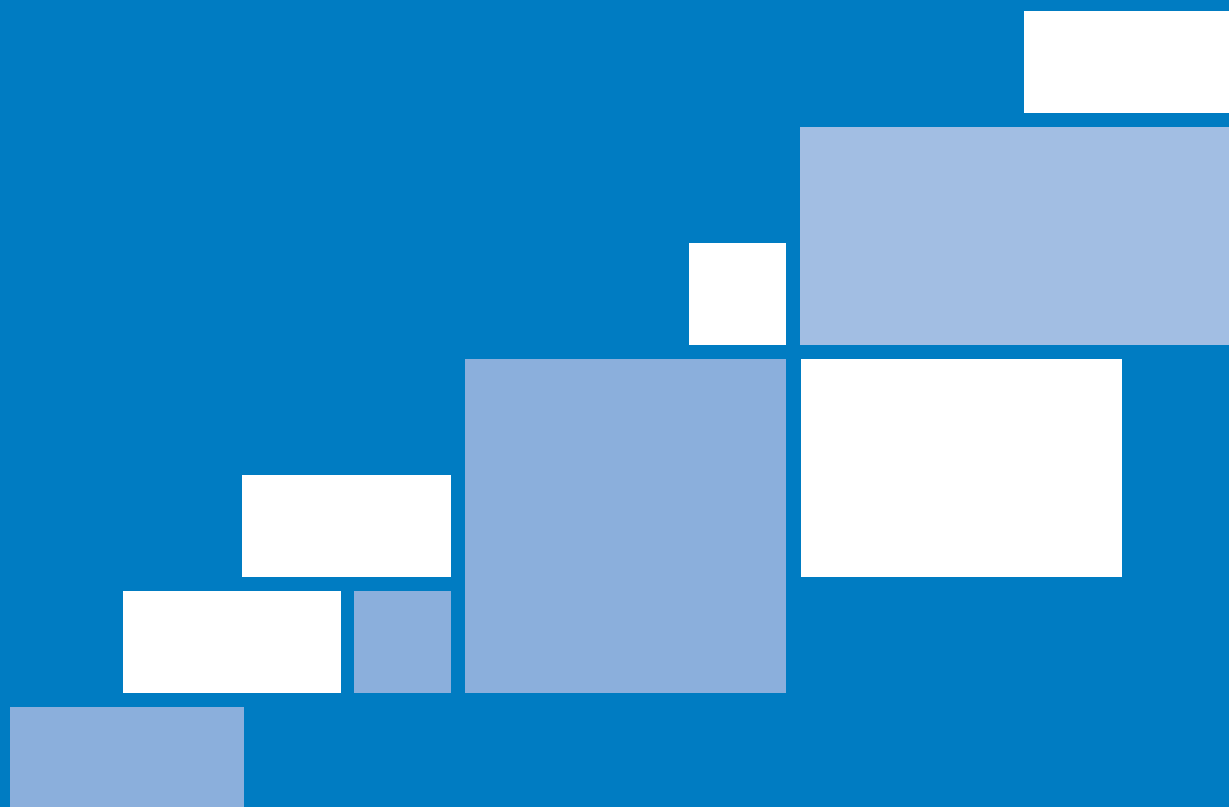


1. strategically leverage their budgetary powers across all stages of the budget cycle to deliver public services that fully respect, protect, and fulfil human rights obligations,
2. draw inspiration from pioneering peers with practical experience in human rights-based budgeting when developing innovative solutions tailored to local needs and context,
3. engage and partner with national governments, human rights institutions, academia, city networks, civil society organisations, and international organisations to share knowledge, methodologies, and best practices that link local budgeting with human rights,
4. actively participate in international and regional platforms to exchange experiences, build capacities, and promote peer learning on human rights-based budgeting, including through practitioner-oriented initiatives and other applied learning formats that support local governments in translating human rights standards into budgetary decision-making,
5. strengthen their institutional capacities to empower staff, leadership, and public officials with the knowledge and skills necessary to align budgetary decisions and processes with human rights obligations,
6. support and engage in interdisciplinary research uniting legal, administrative, economic, sociological, and public management expertise with the shared vision of shaping and advancing a coherent scientific field of human rights-based budgeting that bridges theory and practice,



7. foster transparency by ensuring that local budget information is publicly available, accessible, and presented in a clear format for constituents, enabling them to scrutinise and understand how public resources contribute to fulfilling their rights,
8. ensure meaningful participation of all constituents in a gender-just and age-responsive manner, with a particular focus on the youth and those most at risk of being left behind, in budgetary processes by ensuring accessible channels for engagement in budget preparation, implementation, and oversight, reflecting the lived realities of all community members,
9. allocate available financial resources in a way that fosters the social and economic inclusion of all, ensures equal opportunity, and reduces inequalities of outcome in order to progressively achieve greater equality,
10. advance accountability in fiscal governance by establishing oversight and monitoring mechanisms that assess and track the human rights impacts of budgetary decisions and expenditures,
11. strengthen public trust by clearly communicating how their budgetary allocations and expenditures contribute to the realisation of human rights, thereby affirming their indispensable role as champions of human rights,
12. build and strengthen alliances at the local, national, and international levels to bring the concept of human rights-based budgeting to life as a cornerstone of accountable, inclusive, and sustainable local governance.





EXPLANATORY REMARKS



Encouragement No. 1

Strategically leverage their budgetary powers across all stages of the budget cycle to deliver public services that fully respect, protect, and fulfil human rights obligations.

Explanatory remarks

This Encouragement contains the key call of the Outcome Document. It highlights the transformative role of local budgets as the primary policy instrument for translating abstract legal commitments into tangible improvements for inhabitants. It is based on the conviction that human rights are not merely a legal framework but an everyday management imperative that must be integrated into every stage of the budget cycle. This starts with the preparation and allocation and includes the execution and oversight. By leveraging budgetary powers, local governments can ensure that public services are not only delivered efficiently but are specifically designed to fulfil human rights obligations. This approach acknowledges that the strategic mobilisation and spending of resources is a direct way for local authorities to advance the well-being of their communities. Furthermore, it reinforces the principle that local authorities are duty-bearers required to use the maximum of their available resources for the progressive realisation of rights, even when facing significant fiscal constraints.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (a)** reaffirming that international human rights standards are a shared responsibility for all tiers of government.
- **Paragraph (b)** underlining the requirement for local authorities to take all appropriate measures, using the maximum of their available resources, for the realisation of rights.
- **Paragraph (p)** recognising the transformative role of local budgets as key instruments for implementing human rights at the local level.
- **Paragraph (q)** underlining that strategic mobilisation, allocation, and spending through a human rights-based approach enables local governments to advance community well-being.
- **Paragraph (aa)** emphasizing the integration of rights-based principles into all relevant stages of the budget cycle.

2026 Academy findings

- The Academy provided an introduction to various instruments of public financial management with a view to harnessing their leverage to strengthen human rights for all. In addition, various strategies were discussed on how economic considerations can be incorporated into negotiations on human rights policy in order to broaden the scope of the moral and political argument.
- Applying a human rights-based approach to public budgeting steers political decision making. Visualisation tools support capacity building for local authorities on applying a human rights based approach. Visualisation tools clearly illustrate the links between human rights, local authorities' duties and budget items. Thereby the human rights relevance of budgetary processes is made tangible for staff in finance administration. Visualisation tools are therefore a good practice for raising awareness on the human rights-relevance of budgetary processes.
- Local authorities' fiscal autonomy remains a key precondition for leveraging budgetary powers. Evidence from African governance structures indicates that local revenue, legal powers, and political leadership are core preconditions for human rights budgeting to overcome decentralisation constraints. Global city networks therefore invest in capacity building for local authorities on making budgets powerful accountability instruments.

Practical examples

- The city of Rosario's Plan Cuidar uses evidence-based budgeting to shift social policy away from fragmented, sector-by-sector spending towards a rights-based model that targets the most vulnerable people and areas, such as elder care. Thereby care is seen as a universal human right, rather than a political task, the implementation of which is optional or negotiable. Data, territorial diagnoses, and community input support the equitable allocation of resources with evidence to reduce gender inequalities. The approach is structurally anchored in the municipality by a steering group, involving local authorities across departments and thematic working groups of experts. The steering group is tasked with ongoing monitoring of outcomes, facilitating an adjustment of budget choices according to changed needs. The example of Rosario's monitoring combines local knowledge on the subject, participation of beneficiaries and robust methods. It shows how to make care policy more effective, fair and measurable in its outcomes.
- Since 2006 the city of Vienna has embedded gender budgeting into its regular budget process. Gender budgeting requires an assessment of all expenditures in terms of relevance for gender equality. Gender equality is operationalised through expected outcomes for each department, progress indicators and standardised reporting obligations. Members of all departments as well as experts and civil society organisations participate in the definition of outcomes. Assessment of progress / achievements is compiled in the framework of an annual evaluation. Success factors of the Vienna gender budgeting approach include long-term political commitment, staff training, and in-house gender expertise. This approach has become an internationally recognised good-practice model, while Vienna is still aiming to reduce persistent disadvantages for women in the city.

Materials and further links

- Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels (2023), 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.
- Englmayr Berit, Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels (2026), [Alignment of local government budget sections and UDHR Articles | Flourish](#) Visualisation.
- Englmayr Berit, Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels (2026), [Relationship chart UDHR - Budget | Flourish](#) Visualisation.
- United Nations (UN), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2017), [Realizing Human Rights through Government Budgets](#), HR/PUB/17/3, New York and Geneva.
- Scottish Human Rights Commission (2019), [Human Rights Budget Work: What? Why? How?](#) Collected Briefing Papers.
- Türk Volker, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in: United Nations (UN) Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) (2025), [Guidance framework for creating a Human Rights City, 23 July 2025](#).



Encouragement No. 2

Draw inspiration from pioneering peers with practical experience in human rights-based budgeting when developing innovative solutions tailored to local needs and context.

Explanatory remarks

This Encouragement recognises that while the principles of human rights are universal, their application through budgeting is deeply contextual. It accepts that there is no single, universally agreed-upon model for human rights-based public budgeting at the local level. Therefore, the exchange of experiences among pioneering local governments is essential for identifying replicable models and successful practices. By observing how participating human rights cities have overcome similar challenges, local authorities can find innovative ways to bridge the gap between legal mandates and local implementation. This peer-to-peer inspiration is seen as a vital catalyst for localizing human rights, allowing governments to adapt proven methodologies to the specific lived experiences and needs of their own constituents.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (g)** recognising the 2025 Guidance Framework for creating a Human Rights City as a cornerstone for local governance.
- **Paragraph (j)** recognising the increasing number of international city networks and associations that join forces to collaborate, exchange knowledge, and collectively shape the global agenda,
- **Paragraph (k)** welcoming the adoption of the UNESCO's Global Alliance against Racism and Discriminations, and reiterating the critical role of the UNESCO's Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination, the Roadmap against Racism and Discrimination, and the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR),
- **Paragraph (l)** acknowledging the Human Rights Cities movement and trans-local cooperation – including international networks such as UCLG – as key drivers for localizing human rights through knowledge exchange, peer-to-peer learning, and joint advocacy efforts,
- **Paragraph (o)** recognising the essential efforts of UN-Habitat in advancing the localisation of the SDGs and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, specifically through the promotion of Voluntary Local Reviews as vital tools for monitoring progress, fostering local accountability, and ensuring that human rights-based development is realised within urban and territorial planning,
- **Paragraph (v)** acknowledging that no universally agreed model exists for human rights-based public budgeting at the local level.
- **Paragraph (w)** accepting that budgeting standards should take into consideration the specific reality and lived experience of local communities.
- **Paragraph (x)** acknowledging the urgent need for practical guidance and innovation drawing on successful experiences.

2026 Academy findings

- In order to realise the potential of human rights budgeting, guidance on design, implementation and monitoring is necessary. Real-world experiences and lessons from cities and international organisations serve to demonstrate how local governments apply human rights norms in budgeting, develop tools and frame-works, establish practice and sustain human rights budgeting.



- Particularly pioneering cities showcase field-tested practices that inspire human rights-based budgeting worldwide. Local governments' approaches to adapt human rights principles, like participation, equity and evidence-based policy-making to political and fiscal contexts become accessible through peer-exchange.
- City networks serve as horizontal platforms for peer-to-peer exchange, while international and regional organisations provide capacity building beyond national hierarchies.

Practical examples

- The City of Porto Alegre is a pioneer in participatory budgeting. It has introduced this approach already in 1989 to respond to a dissatisfaction with the traditional representative democracy. With the introduction of participatory budgeting, the city aimed at giving residents, especially marginalised groups, a role in decision making regarding public investment priorities. This approach has become a globally recognised model for ensuring transparency, accountability, and social inclusion at the local level, while improving the people's access to infrastructure and public services.
- The City of Gwangju has implemented participatory budgeting already in 2011 as part of its broader human rights city model. It is innovative because the city connects budgeting to participatory democracy, transparency and collaborative governance rather than treating it as a stand-alone consultation exercise. The "Gwangju Citizen Participation Budget System" gives citizens a structured role in proposing, reviewing and selecting public projects. Citizens participate in the whole cycle of budgeting, from proposal to execution stage. This constant involvement makes citizens input more consequential and strengthens the city's accountability.
- The participatory budgeting is anchored in the city's human rights agenda, which is a distinctive feature of Gwangju's approach. The city foresees different participatory processes in budgeting as part of creating a human rights city, including auditing and monitoring mechanisms. This structural anchoring enables Gwangju to use citizens' participation for rights-based governance.

Materials and further links

- Bisnath Savitri, Kjaerum Morten, and Davis Martha F. (eds.) (2026): Human Rights Economies and Subnational Governance, Theory and Practice, Routledge Studies in Human Rights, New York.
- Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels (2026), [Local Governments and Human Rights-Based Approaches to Budgeting: Pathways to Accountability](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Volume 6, HRGL Publishing, Graz.
- Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels and UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Human Security (2023), [Governing the City by Human Rights Objectives: Management Concepts and Instruments](#), Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks of Human Rights Go Local: What Works Academy and Conference, Graz.
- Möstl Markus, Oberleitner Gerd, and Starl Klaus (2026), [Towards the realisation of a human rights economy through human rights budgeting at local level](#), in: Bisnath Savitri, Kjaerum Morten, and Davis Martha F. (eds.): Human Rights Economies and Sub-national Governance, Theory and Practice, Routledge Studies in Human Rights, New York.
- Philipp Simone, Starl Klaus, European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (ed.) (2017), [Focusing on Human Rights at Local and Regional Level](#). Graz.



Encouragement No. 3

Engage and partner with national governments, human rights institutions, academia, city networks, civil society organisations, and international organisations to share knowledge, methodologies, and best practices that link local budgeting with human rights.

Explanatory remarks

The Encouragement to foster multi-stakeholder partnerships is based on the understanding that human rights-based budgeting requires a collaborative ecosystem. Local governments often operate within complex multi-level governance structures where they depend on national budget transfers and are influenced by international policy trends. By engaging with a wide array of actors including academia and civil society as well as organisations like UNESCO, UN-Habitat, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, OHCHR, and UCLG local authorities can access specialised expertise and diverse perspectives. Such collaboration not only strengthens the technical quality of the budget, but also enhances the legitimacy of local governance by aligning it with broader national and international human rights agendas.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (j)** recognising the increasing number of international city networks and associations that join forces to collaborate.
- **Paragraph (l)** acknowledging trans-local cooperation and international networks as key drivers for localizing human rights.
- **Paragraph (r)** highlighting that embedding human rights into budgeting fosters transparency, accountability, and trust.
- **Paragraph (t)** recognising emerging evidence and practice by international organisations, city networks, and academia.

2026 Academy findings

- Engaging in national networks, research partnerships and capacity-building guides cities in setting up human rights budgeting as a cross cutting issue of public management. Engaging in various networks facilitates local authorities' access to knowledge, good practices of meaningfully fostering participation and accountability.
- Particularly cities, start using their budgetary power as a tool to human rights accountability, benefit from engaging with civil society.
- Partnerships with academia and international organisations support access to knowledge on methodologies, the adaption of practices, and the co-creation of tools. Academia as a network partner drives interdisciplinary research and data use in local decision-making. International organisations like OHCHR, UNESCO, and UN-Habitat develop guidance, indicators, and technical assistance.



Practical examples

- The [Human Rights Cities Network](#) promotes the development of human rights in Europe and beyond. This online platform creates an interactive community of human rights cities practitioners. Its vision is to help make human rights a reality for every citizen, in every city; and in doing so to foster participatory democracy and social justice.
- UNESCO establishes consultation and needs assessments in collaboration with local authorities, communities, civil society, and NGOs. The [UNESCO Studio](#) is an example for this: it is a model, developed over more than a decade in partnership with a UNESCO Chair at a university in Montreal. The UNESCO Studio involves a comprehensive consultation process, including university networks, public authorities, and communities, as part of a research–action project.
- The World Urban Forum (WUF) was established in 2001 by the United Nations to examine rapid urbanisation and its impact on communities, cities, economies, climate change and policies. The first WUF was held in Nairobi, Kenya in 2002 and has been held around the world ever since. Representatives of national, regional and local governments, academics, business people, community lead-ers, urban planners and civil society representatives will be among the thousands of people attend the WUF, which takes place bi-annually.

Materials and further links

- Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels, [Local Governments and Human Rights-Based Approaches to Budgeting: Pathways to Accountability](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Volume 6, HRGL Publishing, Graz, 2026.
- Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels and UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Human Security (2021), [Building Bridges between Local Governments and the Scientific Community to Promote Human Rights](#), Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks of Human Rights Go Local: What Works Academy and Conference 2021.
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Encouragement No. 4

Actively participate in international and regional platforms to exchange experiences, build capacities, and promote peer learning on human rights-based budgeting, including through practitioner-oriented initiatives and other applied learning formats that support local governments in translating human rights standards into budgetary decision-making.

Explanatory remarks

This Encouragement builds on the role of international and regional platforms as “laboratories” for democratic decision-making and human rights innovation. It emphasises the importance of applied learning formats, including those promoted by UNESCO’s Global Alliance against Racism and Discriminations or UCLG’s Committee on Social Inclusion, to equip local practitioners with actionable tools. Participation in these forums allows local officials to move beyond theoretical understanding toward the practical application of rights-based standards in fiscal planning. By sharing successes and setbacks in global arenas, local governments contribute to a collective body of knowledge that can be supportive to refine the budgeting tools of Human Rights Cities and likeminded local governments. This active engagement ensures that local authorities are not only recipients of international standards but also influential contributors who shape the global agenda on the human rights economy.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (k)** reiterating the critical role of UNESCO’s Global Forum, Roadmap, and the ICCAR network.
- **Paragraph (l)** acknowledging trans-local cooperation as a key driver for knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer learning.
- **Paragraph (o)** recognising UN-Habitat’s efforts in advancing the localisation of the SDGs through Voluntary Local Reviews.
- **Paragraph (x)** noting the urgent need for knowledge exchange and innovation based on documented successful experiences.

2026 Academy findings

- International organisations like UNESCO stand ready to work with cities, in practice via city networks. The International Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ICCAR) but also other city networks related to water, biosphere reserves, and cultural heritage. These city networks serve as fundamental base and platform for collaboration and peer exchange on building accountability frameworks that support and sustain a human right-based economy.
- International and regional networks serve as horizontal platforms of capacity building and peer exchange. The European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR) encompasses around 200 member cities across Europe, all committed to combating racism and implementing our Ten-Point Plan of Action. The coalition supports its member cities in programming and implementing by means of capacity building and facilitating peer-to-peer exchange.
- Having access to capacity building on applying a human rights-based approach to strategic planning is a core benefit of being a member in a city network. City networks, such as UCLG Africa, operate their own academies for local authorities. The UCLG Africa Academy of Local Governments Africa (ALGA) is operational since 2016. ALGA offers training programmes and awareness-raising activities, including e-learning courses in French and English on participatory budgeting through the Academy platform.



- Action plans which set out human rights as cross-departmental matter and long-term strategy, provide the framework for the implementation of human rights-based budgeting. City networks collect and compile good practices on how to develop action plans and strategies, implement action and evaluate their human rights outcomes and make them available to member cities.
- An open and honest peer-to-peer exchange on an eye level is a so-called super power of city networks. Member cities vary widely in size, resources, and administrative structures, but face similar challenges. City networks bring them together for open and honest dialogue about challenges and possible solutions. Human rights-based budgeting regularly comes up in these exchanges, and cities learn tremendously from one another – sharing strategies, avoiding duplication, and learn from each other's past mistakes. Therefore, city networks help cities move forward collectively rather than individually.
- City networks support collective standard-setting on human rights-based budgeting. Networks like United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and its Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (CISDPHR), and the World Human Rights City Forum (WHRCF) drive inspiration, local adaptation, and application of rights-based approaches to local budgetary procedures.

Practical examples

- Since 2004, UNESCO has been working closely with the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities, formerly the International Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ICCAR), which now includes more than 700 member cities across all regions of the world. UNESCO considers cities and local governments as key frontliners and working with them is the first crucial step toward addressing deep-rooted social challenges and discrimination. UNESCO is further establishing a Global Alliance Against Racism and Discrimination in close collaboration with several UNESCO Chairs around the world, many of which are linked to cities and focus on inclusive and sustainable urban development, alongside broader networks of academics, experts, and research centres.
- UCLG Africa is a network of 54 national and regional associations of local governments committed to promoting decentralisation, including in the area of local budgeting. UCLG Africa's key space for support is its flagship event, Africities, gathering around 11,000 participants every third year. Africities provides a platform for research dissemination, networking, capacity building, digital transformation, and the sharing of good practices and innovations.

Materials and further links

- [Africities](#), the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa's flagship pan-African event.
- Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels and the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Human Security at the University of Graz (2026), [Human Rights Go Local: What Works](#), international online Academy and Conference to build bridges between actors at the international, regional and local level to strengthen human rights accountability.
- European Coalition of Cities Against Racism, [The ECCAR Toolkit for Equality. City Policies Against Racism](#).
- Health and Social Care Scotland (2026), [Health and Social Care Partnerships Scotland](#), HSCS.
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- United Cities and Local Governments, [The Power of We](#).
- World Human Rights Cities Forum (2026), [Human Rights Cities Against Authoritarianism and Populism](#), Gwangju, Korea.
- The [World Urban Forum \(WUF\)](#) is the premier global conference on sustainable urbanisation. WUF was established in 2001 by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).



Encouragement No. 5

Strengthen their institutional capacities to empower staff, leadership, and public officials with the knowledge and skills necessary to align budgetary decisions and processes with human rights obligations.

Explanatory remarks

The Encouragement to invest in institutional capacity is based on the finding that effective human rights-based budgeting is contingent upon the skills and awareness of the people within the administration. It recognises that local officials are frontline actors who must understand how their technical budgetary decisions impact the rights of the population. Empowering staff through continuous training, such as the programs offered by the African Local Government Academy (ALGA), ensures that rights-based methods and data are systematically integrated into the daily practice of public management. This capacity-building effort is intended to move human rights from being a peripheral concern to becoming a core administrative competency. By strengthening the “human capital” of the local government, authorities can better ensure that budget formulations and outcomes truly reflect their commitment to the dignity and rights of all constituents.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (h)** emphasizing the responsibility of local governments to translate human rights standards into tangible improvements.
- **Paragraph (cc)** noting that effective implementation demands continuous development of administrative capacity and training.
- **Paragraph (z)** asserting that local authorities retain a duty to align available resources with human rights standards even under fiscal constraints.

2026 Academy findings

- Capacity building on a more strategic and conceptual level to facilitate translating human rights obligations into local practice is offered by international organisations, such as the OHCHR. Operational guidance is available on minimum core standards, non-retrogression, and non-discrimination to bridge human rights norms with local budgetary processes. Local authorities, particularly staff in public management are the target group of such capacity building initiatives.
- Capacity building on monitoring human rights compliance is needed by local authorities. Monitoring tools, including budget analysis, tracking expenditures are subject of capacity building done by the OHCHR. Moreover, local authorities obtain guidance on how to respond to audits using indicators. Capacity building facilitate local authorities' rights-compliant decision-making, particularly in times of fiscal constraints.

Practical examples

- OHCHR's work with member states and teams in countries, including Kenya, Timor-Leste, Mozambique, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka. The work focuses on supporting national efforts to align budget allocations in health, social protection or education sector with human rights obligations and compliance standards. OHCHR's aim is to shift the budget discussion away from narrow sectoral perspectives toward a broader human rights enhancing approach. OHCHR also supports capacity building and sharing of promising practices on human rights analysis of both, national and local budgets.



- UCLG Africa Academy is offering e-learning on participatory, gender and climate budgeting and executive masters' programs for territorial managers. Training of trainers is an approach promoted by UCLG Africa's ALGA to engage multipliers and gatekeepers.
- Scotland pilots a workshop concept, that links equality assessments to human rights budgeting. Thereby full budget reviews are piloted together with finance directors.

Materials and further links

- Blyberg Ann (2015), [Human Rights Budgeting and Budget Analysis, Report authored for the Scottish Human Rights Commission.](#)
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Encouragement No. 6

Support and engage in interdisciplinary research uniting legal, administrative, economic, sociological, and public management expertise with the shared vision of shaping and advancing a coherent scientific field of human rights-based budgeting that bridges theory and practice.

Explanatory remarks

This Encouragement underscores the necessity of a strong nexus between science and the society to advance the field of human rights-based budgeting. It acknowledges that the complexities of modern urban governance cannot be addressed through a single discipline. By supporting and engaging in interdisciplinary research, local governments can help bridge the gap between legal human rights obligations and economic public management practices. Such research provides the evidence-based foundation needed to develop indicators, conduct impact assessments, and analyse the financial benefits of human rights-based budgeting. This approach is intended to foster a more profound understanding of how fiscal decisions affect different segments of the population, thereby supporting the idea of human rights economies at the local level. Moreover, engaging with researchers ensures that local policy remains innovative and responsive to emerging social and economic challenges.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (n)** emphasizing the importance of SDG 10 and the need for fiscal policies designed to achieve greater equality.
- **Paragraph (t)** recognising the emerging evidence and practice from academia and international organisations.
- **Paragraph (x)** acknowledging the urgent need for practical guidance and innovation drawing on documented experiences.
- **Paragraph (ee)** uniting in the conviction that human rights-based budgeting is a step toward Human Rights Economies.

2026 Academy findings

- Interdisciplinary research that brings together legal, economic, administrative, sociological, and public management perspectives to advance a coherent field of human rights-based budgeting is a source, that is not yet fully used by local authorities.
- Cities are co-producers of knowledge. Cities' readiness to provide their practical insights in collaboration with academics, networks, and international organisations helps develop practical and useful tools as well as data and evidence that connect theory with practice. Local authorities' engagement in practice-oriented research supports the production of monitoring tools, which are tailored to local needs. Practice-informed research helps local authorities to make human rights visible and measurable in budgets.
- International and regional organisations have capacities and knowledge to develop practical indicator sets, derived from international standards and ready for local contextualisation. These methodologies are to be adapted and applied for cities of different sizes and rural areas in order to establish internationally applicable monitoring standards and practice.



Practical examples

- The Toolkit for Equality is manual on equality policies, that offers procedural guidance from designing policies to impact assessment and follow up. All of the information has been collected in cooperation with a wide range of local politicians, civil servants, consultants, civil society organisations, lawyers and the local people concerned. The Toolkit is compiled by cities for cities, and gives examples and detailed guidance on implementation. The thematic chapters on policy models relevant to local governance show the concrete practice of following a human rights-based approach to the promotion of greater equality.
- Within the Social and Human Sciences Sector, UNESCO is promoting efforts to strengthen democratic governance and human rights through the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme. MOST works with national authorities, scientific communities, and civil society to reinforce the link between research and policy, and between knowledge and action, so that policy responses to social challenges are evidence-based and inclusive. MOST operates through national committees and other mechanisms to enhance policy-relevant research, and its work increasingly cascades to the local level, where community consultations take place. By strengthening the research–policy nexus, MOST supports governments in designing public policies that address inequalities and promote social justice in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.
- The production of visualisation tools, linking budgets to UDHR articles, pilots in Scotland reviewing budgets through HR lenses, and knowledge hubs collecting local practices are examples of good practice.

Materials and further links

- Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels (2026), [Local Governments and Human Rights-Based Approaches to Budgeting: Pathways to Accountability](#), in: Oberleitner Gerd and Starl Klaus (eds.): Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Volume 6, HRGL Publishing, Graz.
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Encouragement No. 7

Foster transparency by ensuring that local budget information is publicly available, accessible, and presented in a clear format for constituents, enabling them to scrutinise and understand how public resources contribute to fulfilling their rights.

Explanatory remarks

The Encouragement to foster transparency is a fundamental requirement for accountability in a human rights-based approach. It is based on the conviction that rights-holders have a right to know how public funds (and ideally the maximum available resources) are being used to respect, protect, and fulfil their rights. Transparency is not merely about the publication of financial documents but about ensuring that information is accessible and understandable to all parts of the community. By presenting budgets in a clear format, local governments enable public scrutiny and facilitate social dialogue. This openness is essential for building trust between the administration and the population, as it demonstrates a clear and explicit commitment to rights-based priorities. Furthermore, transparent budgeting practices enhance the credibility of local governments in the eyes of international donors and investors.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (r)** highlighting that embedding rights principles strengthens governance and fosters transparency and trust.
- **Paragraph (s)** acknowledging that a clear commitment to human rights in budgets enhances credibility and appeal to investors and donors.
- **Paragraph (aa)** underlining transparency as a necessary principle for the integration of human rights into the budget cycle.

2026 Academy findings

- Even the best-designed accountability systems risk remaining symbolic rather than effective – at least from the population's point of view, if they do not facilitate access to information and independent monitoring. Transparency builds public trust by making budgets accessible and comprehensible to constituents. Access to information on budgetary processes is therefore a cornerstone of human rights-based budgeting.
- Budgets are public documents, arguably the most important policy documents any government produces. Therefore, public budgets should reflect collective choices about priorities and the use of resources. Yet in practice, budgets are too often inaccessible, overly technical, and published too late in the process. Using global methodologies on open budgeting, the Scottish Commission assessed Scotland's budget processes. In the Open Budget Survey, each country is assessed across three dimensions: transparency of budget information, opportunities for meaningful public participation, and the effectiveness of legislative and audit oversight. Together, these tell us how open and accountable a government's budget process is in practice. The Commission found improvements over time in the availability of documents, but continuing gaps in participation and accessibility. Moreover, the Commission has detected differences between local councils in terms of transparency and accessibility: some councils were making real efforts to improve transparency and engagement, while others lag behind. Visualisation tools, which correlate budget lines (e.g., infrastructure, safety, public transfer) directly to human rights standards, facilitate an inter-departmental standardisation of transparency and accessibility.



- Citizen budgets, plain-language summaries, and visualisation tools help to demystify how funds fulfil rights like housing, health, and education and are therefore means of fostering transparency.
- Local authorities, who publish budgets in clear formats, using disaggregated data, who include timelines, infographics, and links to UDHR articles – allow residents to track allocations to vulnerable groups and scrutinise rights impacts.
- Access to information is not under full influence of local authorities. Access to information and digital connectivity, including internet access, is recognised by the UN since 2016 as a human right essential for freedom of expression and participation, however not yet fully implemented in practice. Participation and inclusivity, ensuring no person and no place is left behind is of importance when it comes to transparency. Transparency and accountability are also grounded in dialogue, fostering trust and progressive rights realisation in key sectors such as education, health, housing, water, sanitation, and social protection.

Practical examples

- Transparency is also needed when it comes to the results of consultations and how these are used by local authorities in public budgeting. People rarely see whether, or how, their input has shaped the final outcome of budgetary processes. However, without a transparent feedback loop, they will not see the effects of their participation and many may feel there is little point in engaging again.
- Local authorities must go beyond simply publishing budget documents and rather provide information in forms that people can understand: using clear language, visual summaries, and accessible formats. Dense spreadsheets or technical PDFs are not recommended to publish public budgets.
- The Toolkit for Urban Inclusion in Arab Cities is the product of a cooperation between the International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels and (members of) the UNESCO-supported Coalition of Arab Cities against Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance. It includes a part on participation and access to information.

Materials and further links

- Scottish Human Rights Commission, [Open Budget Survey](#).
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Encouragement No. 8

Ensure meaningful participation of all constituents in a gender-just and age-responsive manner, with a particular focus on the youth and those most at risk of being left behind, in budgetary processes by ensuring accessible channels for engagement in budget preparation, implementation, and oversight, reflecting the lived realities of all community members.

Explanatory remarks

This Encouragement emphasises that participation is a core human right and an indispensable tool for effective local governance. It is based on the finding that when constituents are involved in the budget process, the resulting fiscal decisions are more likely to reflect the actual needs and “lived realities” of the community. The encouragement specifically calls for a gender-just and age-responsive approach, ensuring that groups often excluded from decision-making have meaningful access. This participatory approach transforms constituents from passive recipients of services into active agents in the realisation of their rights. By establishing accessible channels for engagement throughout the entire budget cycle, local governments can improve the legitimacy of their measures and ensure that fiscal policies contribute to social justice and the reduction of inequalities.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (d)** recalling the New Urban Agenda’s promotion of an age- and gender-responsive budgeting approach.
- **Paragraph (r)** stating that participation strengthens the effectiveness and legitimacy of governance.
- **Paragraph (bb)** emphasizing that participatory governance is indispensable for ensuring outcomes reflect the rights of all inhabitants.
- **Paragraph (dd)** highlighting the need to give particular attention to those most at risk of being left behind.

2026 Academy findings

- The OHCHR works with local authorities across planning, execution, monitoring, and revision stages of public budgeting and thereby often finds that participation by affected communities is lacking. However, a human rights-based approach to budgeting demands early and meaningful participation in setting priorities, access to budget information, and opportunities for feedback. Incorporating these elements leads to more human rights friendly budgeting processes in the local context.
- UNESCO encourages local authorities to ground their budgetary processes in dialogue, participation, and trust-building. An ongoing and genuine dialogue between authorities and communities in constructing a human rights-based economy is crucial. Citizen participation and capacity building are essential to strengthening authentic local responses, as recent UNESCO initiatives illustrate. For instance, participatory budgeting in the field of rebuilding and reconstructing neighbourhoods ravaged by military attacks, e.g. in Mosul, Ukrainian cities or in Beirut, inclusive processes for fair resource allocation have helped align priorities, budgeting, and accountability with human rights principles.
- Means to facilitate participation are: data-driven identification of needs, active outreach, and inclusion from budget planning through monitoring. This counters top-down allocation by making vulnerable voices central, using disaggregated data (by race, gender, disability, etc.) to reveal inequalities and justify targeted spending.



- Participatory budgeting from the start of cycles, with tools like citizen assemblies, consultations, and “citizen budgets” in plain language enable scrutiny. Social audits and public expenditure tracking involving affected communities to verify rights fulfilment in sectors like housing, health, and water. Outreach strategies, such as training local facilitators and using networks to reach informal settlements or remote groups are to be promoted.

Practical examples

- The framing of participation is important: the OHCHR, in its work in Kenya, for example, promotes participatory budgeting processes that treat rights holders as agents of change, not as merely passive beneficiaries. This includes people affected by poverty, displacement, environmental degradation, or other vulnerabilities. Participation needs to be accompanied by accountability, which is central to this entire discussion. Tools such as social audits and public expenditure tracking systems (PETs) are particularly useful for enabling local governments to track funding flows, monitor spending, and assess whether resources reach their intended destinations – schools, hospitals, water facilities, or social protection offices.
- The importance of youth participation is addressed by UNESCO. Beyond whole-of-society engagement and collaboration with civil society, involving young people makes their efforts more impactful. UNESCO runs the Master Classes Against Racism and Discrimination, which empower young people to become champions of local anti-racism initiatives and promote human rights in their communities. UNESCO also sees potential in city youth councils, which can play a meaningful role in shaping accountability frameworks from a youth perspective.
- The International Observatory for Participatory Democracy (OIDP) for the Africa Region sees gender participatory budgeting as a process through which local governments enable women to fully engage in public policy debates in Africa. Through this approach, women directly contribute to decisions on the use of public resources, their allocation, and the ongoing monitoring of how those resources are spent. It goes beyond mere consultation, ensuring women’s full participation and co-decision making at every stage, while explicitly integrating their lived realities. This requires circulating budgetary information and obliging local authorities to account for how public resources are used. Crucially, data must not only be accessible but also understandable – especially in African contexts, where a single small country might have 21 different languages, unlike more linguistically uniform places in Europe.
- One of the major contributions of gender participatory budgeting is its ability to redirect public resources toward women’s essential needs. Therefore, gender participatory budgeting is a powerful tool and lever for more inclusive, equitable, and effective governance. It strengthens citizen participation and ensures public action better meets the real needs of the population – particularly women.

Materials and further links

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Encouragement No. 9

Allocate available financial resources in a way that fosters the social and economic inclusion of all, ensures equal opportunity, and reduces inequalities of outcome in order to progressively achieve greater equality.

Explanatory remarks

This encouragement focuses on the content of the budget and the substantive impact of allocation decisions. It is deeply rooted in the goal of reducing inequality, as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 10. The Encouragement is based on the conviction that a Human Rights Economy must prioritise the elimination of discriminatory practices and the promotion of universal social and political inclusion. By intentionally directing resources toward social protection and the fulfilment of economic and social rights, such as housing, health, and education, local governments can address the root causes of systemic disadvantage. This approach requires authorities to balance competing priorities in a way that protects the minimum core of rights and ensures non-retrogression. Ultimately, rights-based allocation serves as a mechanism to transform the idea of social justice into a measurable reality for all community members.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (f)** noting the call for Human Rights Economies that redirect fiscal policies toward the full realisation of rights.
- **Paragraph (n)** emphasizing SDG 10 and the adoption of fiscal policies designed to achieve greater equality.
- **Paragraph (q)** underlining that a rights-based approach to budgeting enables governments to tackle inequalities and foster social cohesion.
- **Paragraph (aa)** emphasizing the principle of progressive realisation and the use of maximum available resources.

2026 Academy findings

- Budgets must shift from uniform distribution to equity-focused allocations, addressing structural disparities in housing, health, education, and other public services. Equity focused budget allocations include evidence on intersectional discrimination (race, gender, disability) to ensure equal opportunity and social inclusion for all.
- Field-tested approaches of equity budgeting include progressive taxation, participatory input, and non-retrogression safeguards to progressively achieve equality.

Practical examples

- The City of Vienna has pursued a consistent equality policy, with gender budgeting introduced in 2005 as part of its broader gender mainstreaming strategy. Gender budgeting has been integrated into the city's financial administration since the 2006 budgetary cycle and applied across all expenditure areas. Gender budgeting ensures that every planned expenditure is reviewed for its relevance to equality and supported by gender analyses. Its success stems from clear political commitment, embedding the gender expertise in all administrative areas, ongoing staff training, and the development of practical tools such as the new digital "gender bot."



- Gender participatory budgeting in the African context has brought about some key achievements in terms of equality. In education, the participation of women in budgeting has raised awareness about girls' schooling and helped prevent early marriage and in health, it has supported the construction of modern clinics for women in remote areas, far from major hospitals, making childbirth safer. Furthermore, female participation in budgeting has improved women's access to water and sanitation. The female unemployment rates are high in African cities. However, participatory budgeting has created job opportunities, facilitating the socio-economic integration of women, as job opportunities were created tailored to women's needs.
- Oregon has an Office of Equity and Community Engagement that oversees the Human Rights Program in Eugene. Eugene operates under a biennial budget and has faced cuts in each budget cycle over the past 10 years because of financial constraints. As a result, programs that serve people with the greatest needs are often at-risk during budget decisions. The Human Rights Commission therefore holds discussions and develops recommendations for City Council to help sustain essential social programs and protect equity-focused services. City Council has so far been able to support several priority programs identified by the Human Rights Commission. At the same time, Oregon is seeking more sustainable long-term solutions so that the same budget discussions do not have to recur every two years. The current focus is on strategic budget planning that better secures equitable support for priority services over time.

Materials and further links

- Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels (2026), [Local Governments and Human Rights-Based Approaches to Budgeting: Pathways to Accountability](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Volume 6, HRGL Publishing, Graz.
- Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels (2023), [Governing the City by Human Rights Objectives: Embedding Human Rights in Public Management Instruments](#), in: Oberleitner Gerd and Starl Klaus (eds.): [Human Rights Go Local Publication Series](#), Volume 4, HRGL Publishing, Graz.
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Encouragement No. 10

Advance accountability in fiscal governance by establishing oversight and monitoring mechanisms that assess and track the human rights impacts of budgetary decisions and expenditures.

Explanatory remarks

The Encouragement to establish oversight and monitoring mechanisms is a cornerstone of accountability. It recognises that the success of a human rights-based approach must be measured not only by the amount of money spent but by the actual outcomes achieved for rights-holders. By tracking the human rights impact of expenditures, local governments can identify which policies are working and where barriers to equality remain. This requires the use of relevant data and indicators to ensure that the impact is visible. Monitoring mechanisms provide the evidence needed for social dialogue and policy adjustment. This systematic tracking ensures that human rights commitments remain meaningful and that local authorities can be held accountable for the progressive realisation of the rights of their constituents.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (o)** recognising Voluntary Local Reviews as vital tools for monitoring progress and fostering local accountability.
- **Paragraph (r)** highlighting that accountability and independent oversight strengthen the legitimacy of governance.
- **Paragraph (dd)** emphasizing that the impact of budgetary decisions must be measured by the outcomes achieved in respect of full enjoyment of rights.

2026 Academy findings

- In many countries local budget documents do not yet fully reflect human rights obligations in their financial content. Therefore, design and foster monitoring and evaluation processes and procedures that include the attainment of human rights, including economic and social rights, the rights to development as well as the right to a clean healthy and sustainable environment. When monitoring, foster substantive collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, i.e. the public and the private sector, academia, civil society to ensure inclusive processes and reliable outcomes.
- Mandatory ex-ante and ex-post human rights impact assessments (HRIA) of budget decisions against standards like minimum core obligations, non-discrimination, and progressive realisation are promising approaches of standardised oversight mechanisms. Disaggregated quantitative data (by gender, race, disability) and qualitative data to monitor equality outcomes, non-retrogression, and resource maximisation across budget cycles are further promising approaches in this regard.
- Oversight mechanisms build on multi-stakeholder collaboration, including city internal monitoring, performed by budget staff, auditors, and councils. External monitoring includes national human rights institutions (NHRIs), civil society, and supreme audit institutions (SAIs) conducting independent evaluations. International support for monitoring is provided by the OHCHR frameworks and tools, such as e-learning, and knowledge hubs for standardised monitoring.



Practical examples

- UN-Habitat promotes Community Managed Funds (CMFs) as a mechanism that translates human rights principles into actual budget rules, structures and outcomes. CMFs are financing mechanisms where resources are channelled directly to democratically elected representative community structures to plan, implement and monitor small scale projects that support local development. CMFs are community driven and community led. CMFs built on the principles of participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability with committees required to include women, young people, persons with disabilities, tenants and other marginalised groups that otherwise might run the risk of exclusion. UN Habitat has been promoting CMFs particularly in the context of their work on participatory slum upgrading which builds on the lack of adequate and safe housing conditions, clean water supply, sanitation and secure land tenure. UN-Habitat focuses on race management, gender equality, climate resilience and leadership of those living in the communities. Procedural accountability is codified through, for example, joint signature bank accounts, published roles, recorded elections, minutes of meetings, monthly reporting models and standards for field monitoring.
- The ECCAR City Reporting Tool and procedure helps member cities move beyond political commitments and deliver concrete, measurable outcomes. It ensures a structured, continuous, participatory monitoring, that is embedded across policy areas. When a city joins ECCAR, it commits to the ECCAR 10-Point Plan of Action, which is a shared, rights-based framework covering key municipal areas like policing, housing, education, employment, culture, and conflict management. The reporting tool requires cities to take at least one concrete action per commitment area, preventing selective or symbolic measures. Cities must also appoint a dedicated focal point for coordination and follow-up, ensuring clear responsibilities and political anchoring.
- Frequent, iterative reporting builds learning. While formal biennial reporting is required, the online tool enables more regular updates. Cities receive feedback from the Scientific Advisory Council, track progress over time and across departments, and turn reporting into an ongoing process rather than a one-off task.
- Monitoring must feed back into decision-making. ECCAR member cities use monitoring feedback to inform their mayors, councils, and departments. They also benefit from external input – from ECCAR's Scientific Advisory Council, but also from UNESCO experts and peers. The ECCAR city reporting tool fosters transparency and peer learning: cities can directly access each other's reports (automatically translated into local languages via supported software), creating positive accountability and motivation to improve.

Materials and further links

- Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels (2026), [Local Governments and Human Rights-Based Approaches to Budgeting: Pathways to Accountability](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Volume 6, HRGL Publishing, Graz.
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Encouragement No. 11

Strengthen public trust by clearly communicating how their budgetary allocations and expenditures contribute to the realisation of human rights, thereby affirming their indispensable role as champions of human rights.

Explanatory remarks

This Encouragement addresses the vital link between fiscal communication and the political stability of local communities. It recognises an emerging trend where local governments label and render visible their services as directly related to human rights. By clearly communicating how the budget supports rights local authorities can improve their political image and reputation. This practice helps demystify the budget and makes the administration's efforts more transparent to civil society. When inhabitants understand that their basic needs are being addressed through a rights-based framework, their trust in local representatives and democratic institutions is strengthened. This proactive communication affirms the position of local governments as leading champions of human rights in an era where rights may face challenges at national or international levels.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (h)** noting that local governments are optimally positioned to translate standards into tangible improvements.
- **Paragraph (i)** welcoming Human Rights Cities as leading champions of human rights.
- **Paragraph (u)** welcoming the growing trend among local governments to render visible and label their budgeting practices as human rights-related.
- **Paragraph (ee)** expressing the conviction that human rights-based budgeting strengthens the realisation of dignity for all.

2026 Academy findings

- Clear communication, which explicitly links budget lines to rights realisation, is essential for building public trust and positioning local governments as human rights champions.
- The use of visualisation tools, citizen budgets, and plain-language reports to show how expenditures in sectors like infrastructure, health, education, and safety directly fulfil minimum core obligations demystifies budgeting for the local population. Correlating water funds to the right to water for instance counters perceptions of human rights as “distant” and demonstrates tangible impacts of budgeting to communities. By communicating these connections, local authorities improve their legitimacy and credibility.
- Evidence-based storytelling, drawing on outcomes for vulnerable groups, participatory process results, and audit findings, helps frame budgets as “moral documents” that can contribute to reducing inequalities. Routine post-budget disclosures, together with public expenditure tracking, enable the population to verify whether rights commitments are being fulfilled.



Practical examples

- The Scottish Human Rights Commission promotes informed public debate and transparency by publishing human-rights assessments of the budget and guidance. Furthermore, the Commission issues briefings and guidance as well as engagement and parliamentary scrutiny to explain how budget choices affect rights.
- The City of Graz informs its citizens through a printed publication called “Bürger:inneninformation Graz” (citizens’ information). It is delivered monthly by post to all households. The publication presents all budget decisions adopted at the most recent municipal council meeting and helps residents understand how public funds are allocated across sectors such as social services, infrastructure, the environment, culture, and administration.
- The Graz Balanced Scorecard is the city’s strategic management tool for documenting, measuring, and steering departmental work. Each year, departments agree on targets in a contract covering services for citizens, finances, internal administration, staff development, and equality goals. The Balanced Scorecard helps the city align municipal work with clear objectives and monitor progress systematically.
- A case analysis on how a human rights-based approach can help resolve public service budget dilemmas. A secondary school in Graz must choose between renovating sanitary facilities to ensure privacy and hygiene or improving entrance security to protect students and staff. Workshop participants examine which option better meets the school’s human rights obligations and how rights-based budgeting can support fair, transparent, participatory, and non-discriminatory resource allocation.

Materials and further links

- Bisnath Savitri, Kjaerum Morten, and Davis Martha F. (eds.) (2026), Human Rights Economies and Subnational Governance, Theory and Practice, Routledge Studies in Human Rights, New York, 2026.
- Isabella Meier and Klaus Starl (2026), [Global evaluation of city reports](#), submitted to the [European Coalition of Cities against Racism](#), Graz.



Encouragement No. 12

Build and strengthen alliances at the local, national, and international levels to bring the concept of human rights-based budgeting to life as a cornerstone of accountable, inclusive, and sustainable local governance.

Explanatory remarks

The final Encouragement emphasises the collective nature of the movement toward human rights-based budgeting. It is based on the conviction that no local government should act in isolation, especially when facing global challenges like climate change or rising inequality. By building and strengthening alliances, including international networks, such as ICCAR or UCLG, local authorities can create a unified voice for rights-based governance. These alliances serve as platforms for joint advocacy, resource mobilisation, and the exchange of innovation. The Encouragement views human rights-based budgeting not just as a technical tool, but as a foundational element for sustainable and inclusive local development. Strengthening these global and local bonds ensures that the commitment to human rights becomes a permanent and resilient feature of the local governance landscape.

Related paragraphs of the Preamble

- **Paragraph (a)** reaffirming that international human rights standards are a shared responsibility for all tiers of government.
- **Paragraph (j)** recognising international city networks that join forces to collectively shape the global agenda.
- **Paragraph (l)** acknowledging trans-local cooperation as a driver for knowledge exchange and joint advocacy.
- **Paragraph (ee)** united in the conviction that this approach marks a significant step forward in the construction of Human Rights Economies.

2026 Academy findings

- Building alliances across levels is essential for standardising approaches to human rights-based budgeting as well as for positioning local governments as active partners in multi-stakeholder coalitions. City networks form key alliances at the local level, which enable capacity building and peer-to-peer exchange in collaborative action.
- Through alliances, local authorities access and exchange tools, capacities, and legitimacy, while national and international actors access local evidence to refine their frameworks. Therefore, alliances create “horizontal” and “multi-level” ecosystems for exchanging methodologies, best practices, and standard setting.
- NHRIs, parliaments (e.g., Ghana’s human rights committees), and central finance ministries are national actors of collaboration. Building alliances with these actors supports for instance the alignment of decentralisation with human rights budgeting standards. Partnerships with international and regional organisations, such as the OHCHR, UNESCO, UN-Habitat or the Council of Europe CLRA are relevant for technical assistance and capacity building on human rights frameworks and monitoring.



Practical examples

- The UNESCO is currently developing a Global Alliance Against Racism and Discrimination in close collaboration with several UNESCO Chairs around the world, many of which are linked to cities and focus on inclusive and sustainable urban development. Furthermore, broader networks of academics, experts, and research centres are included into the Global Alliance. The Global Alliance is built around four main pillars in the global fight against racism and discrimination: 1) normative standards and standard setting; 2) research and data; 3) capacity building; 4) advocacy and awareness raising, relying on a whole of society approach. The Alliance does not work only with policymakers and researchers but also actively engages civil society to ensure participatory and inclusive decision-making.
- Through Dalit Lives Matter Global Alliance, an inclusive learning space for over 1,000 Dalit children barred from schools was created. However, the alliance is affected by budgetary constraints.
- The World Human Rights Cities Forum supports local authorities in making human rights central to urban policy, offering networking, knowledge exchange, and strategies to entrench rights in public services and decision-making.
- United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the OHCHR also facilitate local authorities' engagement with UN human rights bodies, though not as formal "alliances".

Materials and further links

- The [UNESCO Global Alliance against Racism and Discriminations](#) is a coalition designed to promote intersectional approaches, advance legal frameworks, and hold governments accountable for fighting racial discrimination. Launched following the 4th Global Forum in December 2024, it brings together governments, city officials, civil society, and academics to shift from policy pledges to concrete anti-racism action.





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