



PROJECT NUMBER: 101054251

EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK OF TOWNS: PROMOTING AWARENESS AND EXCHANGING GOOD PRACTICES BASED ON THE EU CHARTER ON FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND ITS APPLICATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

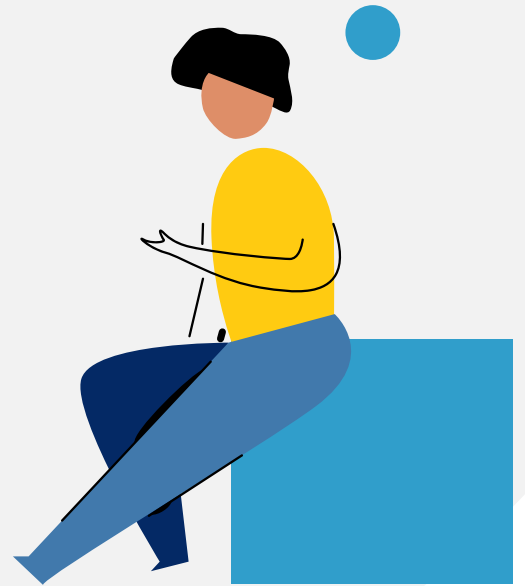
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Funded by the European Union

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INTRODUCTION



The European Union is based on a strong commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law worldwide. The European Human Rights Network of Towns (EUHRENET) has developed a set of EUHRENET Policy Recommendations in order **to add to the practical guidance on how to become and function as a town, adopting human rights as a guiding norm of local governance** - fostering a culture of human rights locally, assisting mayors and local administrations in integrating human rights in their work, increase participation of rights-holders, and encourage networking and cooperation with civil society, academia, and actors of the private sector.

The aim of the European Human Rights Network of Towns is to adopt human rights as a guiding norm of local governance in European towns in light of international human rights standards and based on the EU Charter of fundamental rights. This way the EUHRENET seeks for ways to encourage participatory democracy and social justice in town management.

The EUHRENET members work together on promoting a culture of human rights, using human rights as a foundation, focusing on vulnerable groups; putting individual

rights at the centre of public policies and empowering local communities to take the lead and challenge the local municipalities in their responsibilities.

The European Human Rights Network of Towns advocates that **local authorities across Europe should be seen as essential to protecting and promoting human rights** as they set laws, policies, and programmes that most directly impact people's lives. The EUHRENET members believe that it is crucial that the local governments in Europe have a clear understanding of their human rights duties, following the classical tripartite typology of States' human rights obligations, namely, **the duty to respect** (to 'respect' human rights as the responsibility of individuals and institutions not to harm the human rights of others through direct, detrimental action), **the duty to protect** (to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses) and **the duty to fulfil** (to take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights).



The EUHRENET Policy Recommendations are a set of policy advices that have been drafted by the twelve members of the European Human Rights Network of Towns in order to support local and European policy-makers in drafting adequate and up to date policies for respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Communicating the EUHRENET project findings and results is a crucial part of maximizing this impact and writing Policy Recommendations based on these findings offers to the European decision-makers and everyone in positions of influence the opportunity to use the findings to enact real change to policy and society at local, national and European level.

WHAT ARE THE EUHRENET POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT

The EUHRENET Policy Recommendations are based on seven transnational online and face-to-face events organised with and for policy makers, policy officers, and civil society members representing 12 EU countries as well as local activities (citizen debates, workshops, round tables) in each partner country between September 2022 and September 2023:

- Municipality of Torres Novas, Portugal (the lead partner of the project)
- Rafal Municipality, Spain
- CEIPES, Italy
- European Initiatives Society, Poland
- Sdruzeni SPLAV, z.s., Czech Republic
- Westpannon Regional and Economic Development Public Nonprofit Ltd., Hungary
- Gain and Sustain Europe, Austria
- Municipality of Kalnik, Croatia
- Društvo za razvijanje prostovoljnega dela Novo mesto, Slovenia
- Municipality of Bistrita, Romania
- Genista Research Foundation, Malta
- International Labour Organization, Netherlands.

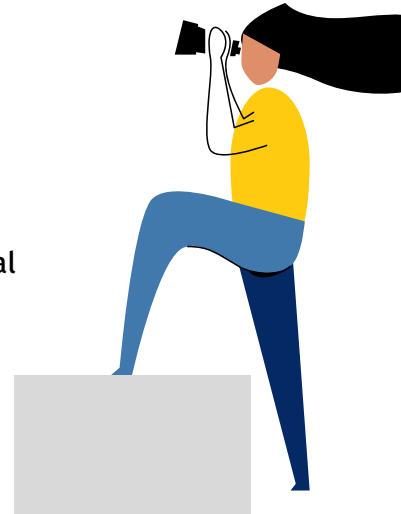
These Policy Recommendations are genuine and drawn from our local EUHRENET communities in all network partner countries, taking into account international best practices, searching to influence local, national and European policy debates.

The EUHRENET Policy Recommendations are resulting a broad consultative process on local human rights protection and prevention of human rights violations, which engaged and gave voice to marginalized communities, seeking to strengthen public demand for reform in our towns. These processes opened up dialogue and debate between citizens and European towns, where a wide range of human rights concerns emerged as local community development priorities, seeking to result in awareness of the need to challenge vested interests.

Drafting those Recommendations, the EUHRENET members hope to have a beneficial impact on the lives of society and the citizens, both locally and at European level - in search to improve social integration and inclusion of all communities; increase the effectiveness of public services and public policy; and enhance quality of life and outcomes in areas such as intercultural dialogue, inclusion and human rights protection.

EUHRENET POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The EUHRENET Policy Recommendations are focused on local, national and European recommendations in five general areas:



1 STRENGTHENING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY ACROSS EUROPE

- Addressing the crisis of representative democracy in Europe: protect and improve voting access for all. Ensure that local authorities and states facilitate the act of voting for all citizens have.
- Participation and power sharing. Boosting citizens' involvement in innovative participatory governance and democratic participation with a special focus on the underrepresented groups of migrants and minorities.
- Fostering participatory democracy and human rights, European local governments need to be working together with citizens and civil society on inclusive strategies for further development and implementation of local policies based on the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights, which enshrines the fundamental rights people enjoy in the EU as a modern and comprehensive instrument protecting and promoting people's rights and freedoms in the light of changes in society, social progress and scientific and technological developments.
- Promotion of participatory democracy in formal and non-formal education. Invest in educational mechanisms that promote understanding of participatory democracy and teach tools on how to actively participate in the democratic processes at the local level - starting with the youngest groups, to form more active and participatory children and young people, aware of the importance of civic participation.
- Fostering active civic participation and power sharing. Create adequate measures to enable students in formal education settings to create, debate, and implement innovative human rights initiatives that can transform their country and its communities. Adopt educational strategies that motivate the young people to think critically in the school space and/or the municipality, with the expected outcome that they will take ownership and responsibility for their engagement.
- Establish processes for encouraging inter-cultural decision making, following the good practices of the European Capitals of Culture.

- Local awareness-raising actions for peace. Promotion of awareness-raising actions on Human Rights and promotion of peace, with associative movements and civil society.
- Fostering volunteering as a peace and human rights promoter. Promote volunteer actions involving the entire community; support local organizations (such as places and materials to develop your work); share good practices and examples and reward the work of volunteers.

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REDUCING POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND EXTREMISM IN LOCAL EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES



- Build strong, institutionalized organizations that allow them to create professional structures capable of resolving internal conflicts, making good decisions, and maintaining close links with their voters and supporters.
- Holding political forces responsive and consistent with their electoral promises. Transparency and anti-corruption measures.
- Ensuring that political parties take a long-term perspective and political responsibility and commitment to future generations.
- Promoting intercultural dialogue strategy development and implementation. Identifying intercultural innovators and bridgebuilders and engage them in an innovative fostering of intercultural relations, trust and cooperation with an emphasis on structures, action and resources which bring people together across cultural boundaries.
- Tackle political polarization on the problems of gender mainstreaming:
 - Use gender mainstreaming in local decision making. Integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination.
 - Empowering women in work-life balance. Available and high-quality pre-school institution. Extended flexible working time and place.
 - Empowering men's care and boosting the role of fathers for gender equality.
 - Support men to get involved in the family life. Highlight the importance of conscious and meaningful fatherhood. Men's positive involvement in the lives of their partners and children creates a global opportunity for equality, and it benefits women, children, and men themselves.

- Ensuring local legal enforcement strategies to respect reproductive rights. Public financing of infertility treatment methods and access to contraceptives. Ensuring real access to methods and means of contraception, also through the reimbursement of contraceptives.
- Investing in gender equality training and sexual education. Introduction to compulsory school curricula the subject "knowledge of human sexuality" adapted to age, cognitive abilities and needs of students, prepared and conducted in accordance with actual research and data, not based on worldview and religious beliefs.

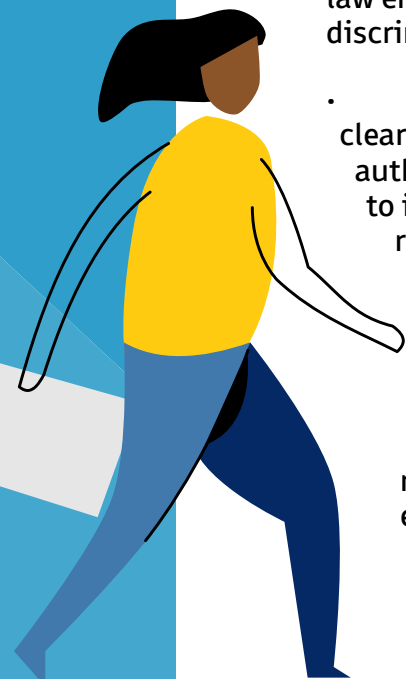
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TACKLING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES VIA EDUCATION AND TRAINING STRATEGIES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

Because institutional change alone is not enough, it is important that political leaders themselves, international organizations, practitioners, educators, and, last but not least, media play an educative role that incentivizes the understanding of democracy not as a "zero-sum-game" but as a plural ground where constructive debate and respect for the other (not just his/her ideological positions, but also as individual) is essential.

Respecting fundamental human rights within public authorities is essential for a just and democratic society. To ensure this, the following recommendations should be considered:

- **Training and Awareness Raising.** Public servants should undergo regular training and awareness programs on human rights to foster a profound understanding of their significance. Local authorities should provide comprehensive human rights training to law enforcement officials, emphasizing the importance of fair treatment, non-discrimination, and respect for human dignity.
- **Clear Guidelines and Procedures.** The development and implementation of clear guidelines and procedures for adhering to human rights in the work of public authorities are indispensable. Organizing educational campaigns and workshops to inform the community about human rights, their importance, and how to recognize and report human rights abuses is an important step towards this.
 - **Training legal officials.** Local authorities should ensure that courts have the necessary resources and capacity to handle human rights cases promptly and fairly and encourage transparency in legal proceedings.
 - **Whistle-blower Protection.** Robust protection for individuals reporting human rights violations should be guaranteed to cultivate an environment of transparency and accountability.



- **Promoting intercultural dialogue** in the local, national and European education policies – pre-school, primary, middle-, high-school and higher education.
- **Training on digital skills and protecting human rights at digital space**
 - In a rapidly changing economy driven by the digital age, local authorities and policymakers must adapt to the evolving landscape. As robots and AI reshape industries, timely preparation and effective policies are essential to navigate potential job shifts and ensure workers' rights protection.
- **Developing funding mechanisms** for training programmes, institutions and content.
- **Cultural Change:** A cultural shift within public administration, promoting an ethos of appreciation and respect for human rights, is pivotal.

4 EMPOWERING LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION

Preventing human rights violations and protecting the rights of all local community members. Ensuring the inclusion of the vulnerable to discrimination local communities and individuals: young people, women and girls, migrants and minorities, people with disabilities, elderly, socially marginalized families and communities, all those experiencing social and economic exclusion.

- **Providing open and free access to Information.** Public administration should be transparent, offering citizens easily accessible information about their rights and the functioning of authorities.
- **Educating in intercultural sensitivity and cultural appropriateness.** Ensuring the application and practical implementation of human rights legislation at the local level.
- **Monitoring and Reporting:** Independent monitoring mechanisms should be established to oversee public authorities' activities regarding human rights violations. Periodic reports on the state of human rights should be published.
- **Ensuring the functioning of Independent Judiciary:** Ensuring the independence of the judiciary is imperative to effectively prosecute and penalize human rights violations.
- **Empowering local authorities for human rights protection of the vulnerable to discrimination local communities and individuals.** Educating in intercultural sensitivity and cultural appropriateness.
- **Empowering local civil society organizations and groups to cooperate with local authorities, especially in the countries with democracies in transition.**
- **Developing and Implementation of Adequate Local Gender Mainstreaming Strategies**

- To promote equal treatment and equal opportunities for men and women, a comprehensive set of political recommendations and measures is imperative:
 - **Promotion of Gender Diversity:** Actively promote gender diversity across all sectors to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in various roles.
 - **Legislation on Equality:** Implement and consistently enforce legislation on gender equality, prohibiting discrimination in all facets of life, including employment, education, and access to resources.
 - **Protection against Gender-Based Violence:** Strengthen prevention and protection measures against gender-based violence, including domestic violence.
 - **Awareness-Raising and Training:** Launch initiatives to raise awareness about gender-related issues, both in educational institutions and workplaces. Training programs for public officials and employers can help dispel biases and stereotypes.
 - **Women in Leadership Positions:** Promote women's representation in leadership roles in politics, business, and other domains. Quota regulations and incentives for organizations can facilitate the inclusion of women in leadership positions.
 - **Education and Vocational Training:** Ensure that girls and women have equal access to education and vocational training as their male counterparts, establishing the foundation for equal participation in the labor market.
 - **Equal Pay:** Formulate policies to ensure that men and women receive equal pay for work of equal value. This can be achieved through wage transparency, sanctions against companies for wage disparity, and empowering women with negotiation skills.
 - **Parenting:**
 - **Parental Leave and Childcare:** Facilitate paid parental leave and affordable childcare options, enabling women and men to reconcile family and work responsibilities effectively.
 - **Improve equality in adoption and foster parenting:** Change the law. Policy makers should advocate for changes in the law to eliminate discrimination based on marital status and sexual orientation. Legislation should be adapted so that all citizens have equal access to adoption and foster parenting regardless of marital status or sexual orientation.
 - **LGBTQI+ parenting**
 - **Eliminate legal ambiguities for LGBTQI+ communities:** Legislation should be clear and unambiguous about the rights of single and LGBTQ+ people in adoption and foster care placement processes. Clear legislation will reduce inequalities and enable better implementation of procedures.
 - **Raise awareness in society:** Policy makers should support awareness-raising and educational programmes that contribute to the acceptance of family diversity. This will reduce prejudice and discrimination and increase understanding and acceptance of different family forms.
 - **Train professionals:** It is also important to educate social work, health and legal professionals about the specific needs and challenges of single parents and LGBTQ+ parents. This will help to better support and treat these families.
 - **Working Time Flexibility:** Introduce flexible working time models that enable both men and women to better align their work with family commitments, thereby

promoting gender equality.

- Human Rights Protection Strategies for Migrant and Refugee Women and Girls
 - Gender-Specific Support in Asylum Procedures: Incorporate gender-specific considerations into asylum procedures to adequately address the unique needs and risks of migrant women and women with children. This may entail trained personnel and specialized procedures.
 - Protection from Gender-Based Violence: Ensure that migrants are shielded from gender-based violence through the enactment and enforcement of laws and policies that promote violence prevention and control.
 - Access to Healthcare: Provide migrant women and women with children unrestricted access to quality healthcare, encompassing reproductive health services and prenatal care.
 - Education and Integration: Implement measures within EU Member States to guarantee that migrant women and their children have access to education and integration into society through dedicated programs and resources.
 - Family Reunification: Facilitate family reunification for migrant women and their children within the EU to bolster mental well-being and family stability.
 - Labor Market Integration: Promote labor market integration programs for migrant women within the EU and its Member States to foster their economic independence.
 - Children's Rights: Prioritize the rights of children, including migrant children, and ensure their adequate protection and support.
 - Combating Discrimination: Take steps to combat discrimination based on gender and migration status, both within society and the labor market.
 - Cooperation with NGOs: Strengthen collaboration between the EU and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide information, support, and resources to migrant women and women with children.
 - Awareness-Raising and Training: Develop awareness-raising and training programs for public officials, police, and healthcare services to heighten awareness of the specific needs of migrant women with children.
- Human Trafficking: Prevention, Protection and Prosecution

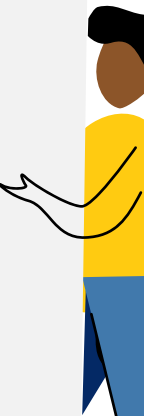
It is essential to confront and reduce vulnerability which is the main condition that leads to human trafficking. The following practical strategies and collaborative actions can protect vulnerable populations and ensure justice for survivors. We believe that the phenomenon can be reduced with a multilateral approach: society, institutions, NGOs, citizens, and municipalities must cooperate to achieve a concrete result.

- Data Collection and Research: Invest in comprehensive data collection systems to gather accurate and up-to-date information on human trafficking for labor exploitation. Support research initiatives to identify emerging trends, assess the effectiveness of anti-trafficking policies, and inform evidence-based interventions.

- Guarantee essential services equally for all in member countries: By institutionalizing a baseline of care and support (shelter, psychological and medical support, legal assistance...) and utilizing soft law instruments, such as recommendations to member states, we can ensure that essential services are available equally to all trafficking victims across all member countries.
- Harmonizing the National Referral Mechanisms: To promote uniformity and efficiency in aiding victims, it is necessary for all Member States to implement national referral mechanisms through laws, regulations, or administrative provisions, facilitating seamless coordination among relevant institutions and standardizing procedures for directing victims to suitable assistance and support systems.
- Developing and Implementation of Adequate Local Child Rights Protection Strategies
 - Focus on the best interests of the child: Legislative changes should take into account that the best interests of the child come first and that the best interests of the child are served by providing a loving and safe home. Amendments must protect children's rights and ensure that the best interests of the child always come first.
 - Professional counselling and assessment: The inclusion of professional counselling and assessment in adoption and foster care proceedings is critical to assessing whether prospective parents are able to adequately care for the child, regardless of their marital status or sexual orientation.

5 LOCAL, NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIPS IN PREVENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- Networking and cooperation; cross-sectoral synergies; public-private partnerships. Empowering local civil society organizations and groups, especially in the countries with democracies in transition.
- Creating new public-private partnerships for intercultural dialogue and inclusion: local authorities, citizens, business, NGOs, academia, etc.
- Collaboration with and support local human rights organizations that work to protect and promote human rights, as they play a crucial role in advocating for vulnerable individuals and monitoring abuses.
- Encouraging open and inclusive discussions between the authorities, community leaders, and citizens to address human rights concerns and find collaborative solutions.





- Fostering active collaboration on human rights protection at the international level, with the EU and its Member States exchanging and promoting best practices and standards in the field of local human rights protection.
- Applying a multi-level governance approach and build alliances at local, regional, national, and international levels, foster knowledge-sharing, join existing networks, and seek exchanges with peers, regional, national, and international actors and organisations, as well as with civil society, academia, and actors of the private sector, with a view to base local public administration more strongly on human rights standards and principles.

EUHRENET TRANSNATIONAL EVENTS				
WP 1	PORTUGAL, TORRES NOVAS	ONLINE	6-7 OCTOBER 2022	Fostering participatory democracy and human rights via development and implementation of local policies based on the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights. (Advancing democracy and human rights from the bottom-up)
WP3	ITALY, CEIPES	FACE-TO-FACE	12-13 DECEMBER 2022	European towns developing competences to deliver a human rights based approach to local policy-making and promotion of active citizenship
WP4	AUSTRIA, GAIN & SUSTAIN	ONLINE	2-3 FEBRUARY 2023	European towns encouraging active citizenship and promoting social justice in town management: lessons from the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights
WP5	CZECHIA, SPLAV	FACE-TO-FACE	8-11 MARCH 2023	Human rights approach to gender equality and women empowerment in good local governance.
WP6	POLAND, TIE	ONLINE	APRIL 2023	Empowering the local communities and putting individual rights at the centre of public policies: European Towns tackling exclusion and discrimination of vulnerable groups
WP7	PORTUGAL, TORRES NOVAS	FACE-TO-FACE	JUNE 2023	Local authorities promoting the culture of peace .
WP2	SLOVENIA, DRPDNM	ONLINE	SEPTEMBER 2023	Supporting local authorities to adopt human rights as a guiding norm of local governance in European towns.

DISCLAIMER

This publication has been produced with the support of the CERV Program of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the EUHRENET project partnership and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the Commission.

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