



# TOGETHER FOR RIGHTS! But How?!

## Recommendations for the participatory monitoring of Human Rights in Cities

## **Recommendations for the participatory monitoring of Human Rights in Cities**

The recommendations contained in this document are the output of the activities realised in the framework of the project Civic Action for Rights and Equality in Cities - CAREinCities. The project was aimed at improving cooperation within and among the cities of Ghent (Belgium) and Padua (Italy) to enhance human rights monitoring in the fields of social services and social inclusion. A group of civil society organisations, academic researchers and municipal officials from the two cities worked together over two months to reflect together on how to structure and implement an effective monitoring system for human rights in their cities.

The group followed a training on "Human Rights and Monitoring" to uniform their knowledge on the human rights-based and results-based approach to monitoring. In the following weeks, the group participated in six "Civic Labs", online workshops where participants from each city discussed the main challenges to the co-creation and implementation of the monitoring system and looked for possible solutions to them, proposing some provisional recommendations. Finally, a delegation from the two cities met in a "Mutual Learning Workshop" to exchange on their respective experience and to put in place a peer-learning process to elaborate a final list of recommendations and operational tips for effective participatory monitoring of human rights in cities.

This document aims to disseminate the knowledge co-produced through the CAREinCities project and to provide operational suggestions to all the European cities that are embarking on the exciting journey of building a participatory system to monitor human rights in the city.

The recommendations contained in this document owe much to the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)'s framework for Human Rights Cities in the European Union. Like this framework, they are not intended as absolute and definitive prescriptions, but as a flexible tool that recognises and adapts to the diversity of contexts and resources experienced by different cities in Europe.

# 1

## **Harmonising the meaning of key concepts among the different actors, to allow the alignment of expectations and actions towards the same objectives and targets**

The collaboration of different actors is a key feature for an effective and comprehensive monitoring of human rights in cities' policies and services. However, it also presents a challenge, as it gathers around the table many actors (local authorities, civil society organisations, academic researchers) who operate with different terminologies, priorities, and timelines. From the meaning of basic terms such as monitoring, human rights, policies, and services, to the definition of the target groups and the topics of interest, it is essential to make sure that participating actors share a common understanding of keywords. This will enable effective collaboration on a shared foundation and toward common goals.

### **OPERATIONAL TIPS:**

- Organising working sessions dedicated to identifying key terms, sharing each actor's understanding, and facilitating the convergence towards a common meaning. This can be facilitated through the alignment with international standards where unambiguous definitions exist, and through design thinking sessions where meanings can be elaborated around local contexts and expectations;
- Developing and sharing a local "glossary" of key terms. It should be built in a participatory way and work as a common reference in the development of the monitoring system;
- Building on case studies and best practices on how to deal with understanding and collaboration among diverse actors on sensitive topics such as human rights (e.g. studying the path followed by already established human rights cities).

# 2

## Involving the different stakeholders in all the relevant steps of the construction and implementation of the monitoring system to ensure ownership

Ensuring an active, consistent and high-quality collaboration of different actors in the monitoring system is essential but challenging. Resource constraints, the feeling of lacking decision-making power compared to other actors in the system, and the risk of weakened individual responsibility due to the collaboration of many structures can lead to a progressive disengagement of the participating actors, especially the less structured ones. Building shared responsibility around the monitoring system from designing indicators to data collection and analysis is essential to ensure the effectiveness of the system itself. Comprehensive participation and shared responsibility help to build trust among stakeholders, which is felt as a crucial factor for effective collaboration among actors from different backgrounds (public, private, associative, and academia).

### OPERATIONAL TIPS:

- Organising regular operational meetings among the actors contributing to the monitoring system to develop a sense of mutual support and a shared vision of the change to achieve;
- Scheduling sessions for presenting preliminary results and discussing data interpretation with all the stakeholders at key moments in the project timeline;
- Defining conditions for meaningful participation, assigning clear tasks to each actor, and collaboratively developing a timeline with shared and transparent deadlines;
- Defining common objectives that take into account all participating actors' interests so that each of them can benefit from the successful implementation of the system;
- Making sure that actors participating in the creation and implementation of the monitoring system have a mandate from their organisation and their participation is not only based on personal engagement.



## **Mapping existing financial and knowledge resources of active or potential stakeholders to overcome financial restrictions**

Time and financial resources are always among the first concerns of local actors when it comes to setting up a new project that does not respond immediately to the mandate of their organisation or institution. This concern is raised by actors from the public, the associative, and the academic sphere alike. Understaffing is a common challenge, and while cooperation with other actors is widely acknowledged as valuable, it is often deprioritized in favour of addressing productivity demands, managing emergencies, and meeting tight deadlines. However, creating a collaborative network around a common objective can be a significant opportunity to improve access to and the sharing of participants' resources. This includes material resources - such as venues and logistical structures for organising meetings and events, digital tools and supports. It also involves financial resources - such as funding for projects and services that can support and build synergies with the monitoring system - and knowledge resources - including monitoring expertise, existing datasets, and data collection tools. Mapping the existing resources of active or potential stakeholders that could support the project is a first step to reinforce collaboration.

### **OPERATIONAL TIPS:**

- Sharing material and knowledge resources among participating actors to reduce costs and the administrative burden generated by data collection and storage;
- Mapping and integrating existing datasets (from the public sector, from academia, from CSOs);
- Directing part of grants and funding for services on related topics towards the development and implementation of the monitoring system, and considering this component when applying for new grants;
- Exploring the possibility of sponsoring from the corporate social responsibility of social businesses interested in the fields monitored by the system.

# 4

## **Using horizontal collaboration and multidisciplinary exchange to identify the appropriate tools for data collection, aggregation and analysis to ensure efficiency, transparency and user-friendliness**

Different international and local institutions have been working on the definition of indicators to localise human rights. Despite the great efforts made to elaborate these frameworks, they tend to lack any guidance on how to apply them, and what tools to use to collect, aggregate and analyse the necessary data. Lacking clear direction on how to effectively collect reliable data, municipalities tend to turn to data experts to develop data collection tools, without considering the actual context in which on-the-ground collectors (usually public officials or civil society organisations) operate. This is unlikely to result in the proper use of the tools and accurate data collection. On the other hand, civil society organisations tend to use basic tools to collect data, but they may lack the competencies to aggregate and analyse them, and to make their data comparable to other datasets. The collaboration between monitoring and data experts and data collectors on the ground is essential to ensure the design of tools that are properly manageable in the field while allowing the collection of reliable and comparable data.

### **OPERATIONAL TIPS:**

-  Favouring multidisciplinary exchange on the development of user-friendly and reliable tools to manage data between data experts and data collectors on the ground;
-  Assessing the quality of already used data collection tools, and adapting them instead of creating new ones whenever their assessment is positive;
-  Training municipal officials and service providers on how to collect data and how to use them carefully for reliable monitoring;
-  Employing qualitative data reported by service providers from civil society organisations to help interpret the quantitative measure of indicators.

# 5

## Ensuring transparency of the monitoring system

Transparency is an essential feature of good governance and it is the basis for accountability. It is defined as one of the principles of a human rights-based approach and a fundamental feature of a human rights city. Moreover, one of the main aims of monitoring and evaluation is to ensure transparency and accountability of local policies and actions. Transparency is essential to build trust among participating actors, as well as between the people and the city. As such, it represents a crucial challenge as it exposes participating actors to direct evaluation from rights holders. In addition, ensuring the accessibility of a large amount of data and its management requires the elaboration of digital solutions that might be costly and difficult to manage properly. Therefore, it is necessary to find solutions that are sustainable for the city and easily accessible by citizens to ensure constant transparency of the monitoring system.

### OPERATIONAL TIPS:

- Prioritising the use of an existing user-friendly local platform that is already known and visited by citizens to share data and annual reports rather than creating a new one;
- Building transparency on how the use of municipal budget is linked to the monitoring of common indicators, e.g. adding specific criteria linked to projects' contribution to the monitored indicators in municipal calls for proposals. This measure should be aimed at enhancing cohesion, and not at excluding actors;
- Raising awareness among public officials and local politicians about the importance of "data-supported" decision-making.



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