

Call for contributions on local governments' initiatives to promote and protect human rights

In Sweden there is a movement towards working with human rights at the local level. This contribution is submitted by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) together with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. Thus the authors do not represent a municipality as such but are very much involved in the process of driving the movement of human rights cities in Sweden.

In addition to the contribution below, the process of setting the human rights city concept in a Swedish context is briefly introduced in the first attachment together with a short introduction to the platform. The second to fifth attachments are examples of how four Swedish cities have worked with human rights at the local level.

1. What human rights challenges is your municipality currently facing? What are your main thematic priorities?

While all the municipalities in Sweden have their own specific set of challenges, there are a few particular challenges that are relatively universal in occurrence, even though their magnitude can vary from place to place. Said challenges are segregation, labor market discrimination, accessibility for the differently abled, fair distribution of welfare services, and equality between genders.

Though these challenges are relatively universal, as mentioned previously different municipalities have chosen to focus on different issues based on their local salience. As such, the only universal thematic priority has been the education and mainstreaming of human rights based approaches to societal services at the local governmental level. This can be seen through the work different municipalities have done in the adoption of the policy platform "Human Rights at local and regional level – a platform for policy and institutional development." In the examples included with this application documents on both the above mentioned policy platform as well as examples from a few different municipalities have been included to show the concrete work being done in this field.

2. What laws, policies and programs have you developed to promote and protect human rights? How is human rights governance structured inside your municipality?

Each municipality has developed their own policies and programs based on their specific needs, but throughout this work the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has coordinated their work into the six overarching issues for policy development outlined in platform "Human Rights at the local and regional level." They are as follows:

- To be a local community where everybody takes an active responsibility to realize human rights and in that regard collaborate with civil society and other relevant actors
- To ensure knowledge and insight about human rights with politicians, officials, citizens and in civil society
- To include human rights in official policies, procedures and actions in order to strengthen the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights;
- To make visible the dilemmas and potential conflicts that emerge when rights are to be realized
- To ensure that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled when signing contracts and other legal documents
- To develop manageable mechanisms for regular reporting and communication of the results.

However, important to remember is that Swedish municipalities have with specific human rights issues for many years but usually not in a coordinated overarching way. In most cities you would find policies against discrimination, human trafficking and policies aiming at equality or fighting domestic violence. There are guidelines for national minorities and how to increase the accessibility of public spaces for people with any form of disability. There are national guidelines for accessibility of information of public authorities to name a few.

3. What methods does your municipality pursue to enhance cooperation with civil society and promote citizen participation in human rights governance?

Different municipalities have different strategies to increase citizen participation and build greater cooperation with civil society groups. One example is the Stockholm's resident dialogues and the *pursuit of rights* initiative. The *pursuit of rights* initiative is a summer job for youth which resulted in a number of short films reflecting experiences and reflections on structural racism, prejudice, anti-gypsyism and sexism. These short films were later used as part of the municipal government's competence development, and trainings, on human rights.

Another example is the city of Pitea where the municipality has made an outreach campaign to the civil society to cooperate and find solutions to different human rights problems. The campaign can be found throughout the city on posters and on the city's website.

4. Is your local government currently raising awareness on or promoting implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals? Is this action linked to your human rights action?

As the fulfillment of the SDGs also represents the fulfillment of a number of different human rights the work is related and their mutually reinforcing nature has helped accelerate work on, and acceptance of, both human rights and the SDGs themselves but usually not under the labeling of human rights. A few cities, such as Lund, have taken the approach to work with human rights under the umbrella of Social

sustainability linking it to the SDGs. The Raoul Wallenberg Institute for human rights and humanitarian law has made a publication showing the linkages between human rights cities and the SDGs.

5. What are your demands and what steps need to be taken in regards to the relation between local governments and national administrations and the UN system in regards to human rights (decentralization, resources, consultation processes, lack of visibility ...)?

SALAR and RWI do not represent a municipality. SALAR has not had the opportunity to officially answer this question. RWI will present its views jointly with other organizations at a side event in Geneva on 8 March. In general terms, RWI believes it would be very good to further raise the awareness as regards the human rights obligations for local governments. It would be good if the UN could support the development of a publication on what a human rights based approach would mean in a local context in different parts of the world.