



CITY OF
BERGEN

THE GOVERNING MAYOR
Bergen City Hall

Office of the High Commissioner for Human
Rights

Our reference: 2019/70837-3
Date: 6. april 2022

Human Rights City Bergen - contribution to OHCHR report on Local Government and Human Rights

Dear sir/madam,

We, the Human Rights City Bergen, are honoured to be invited to give input to the report on local governments contribution to protect and promote human rights.

In June 2018, the City Council in Bergen voted to become Norway's first Human Rights City. The status commits our organisation and challenges the way we think and work.

Bergen is the second largest city in Norway with a population of approx. 285 000, with almost 500 000 inhabitants in the Greater Bergen Region. Bergen is the host city of the Rafto Prize. We have a human rights cairn on the highest of the seven mountains surrounding our city. We have a UN Human Rights Plaza in front of the Rafto foundation, with the right to hoist the UN flag. And we have a strong and devoted civil society engagement in the human rights field.

[Laws, policies and programmes in place to protect and promote human rights](#)

The city of Bergen is already securing its inhabitants fundamental human rights through the way we run our schools, elderly care, child welfare, social insurance and integration, to name a few. These areas are covered by thematic plans, decided upon by the City Council. Providing services to our inhabitants is a statutory requirement and our number one priority. Being a human rights city we strive to walk the extra mile to secure the needs of vulnerable groups, and we have goals and ambitions that comes in addition to our core mandatory responsibilities. This is a result by political will, and is illustrated by the fact that we have thematic plans and goals on how to combat human trafficking and how to increase fair trade and how to be a demanding costumer in our procurement processes for the better good of human rights.

While the decision to become a Human Rights City is a positive one, the label comes without any obligations. We have ambitious goals on how to fulfil our expectations through the City Government political platform, our international strategy, and thematic plans. Building on the recommendations of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) framework of October 2021, we are developing a political declaration to define the Human Rights City Bergen.

[Challenges and promising practices](#)

Bergen is an integrated part of a globalised world. Two years of pandemic has led to a lot of pressure on our resources in health, education and social services. We are now facing a refugee crisis in Europe following the war in Ukraine. The City of Bergen strives to be a safe

haven for Ukrainian refugees, and recognizes the task of welcoming refugees as the most important task for the municipal organization in the current situation.

Bergen and the Bergen Region have a long history as an international trading and shipping hub. This outward-looking tradition has strengthened the city as host to international cooperation and a diverse community development. Our international ambitions relating to human rights are integrated in our international strategy and action plan.

One promising example is how The City of Bergen and Bergen Inclusion Centre is a pilot in the Building Dignity Framework. The Framework is a collaboration between the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB), Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, the Australian Human Rights Institute at the University of New South Wales, and the Rafto Foundation for Human Rights in Bergen. Bergen is home to a growing refugee and migrant population. The pilot – due for completion in December 2023 - involves the conversion of a former school building into a centre that both provides a language school and other services for newly-arrived refugees and immigrants, as well as facilities open to the neighbouring community. The pilot project team, led by Bergen City Architects, is working to implement the Dignity in the Built Environment Framework throughout the building project lifecycle. Design and Architecture Norway (DOGA) has featured the Bergen inclusion centre as a best-practice example in its “National Roadmap for Smart and Sustainable Cities and Communities». The Building Dignity Framework provides a vision for dignity and respect for human rights throughout the built environment lifecycle and recommendations for action: from land acquisition, planning and financing, through design, construction, management and use, to demolition and re-development. Being a pilot has challenged our established routines of planning and building, giving the City Architects and dignity as a central value a more prominent place in the process.

[Key principles to promote and protect human rights](#)

We are preparing a political declaration on the Human Rights City Bergen to be adopted by the City Council this year. The declaration is inspired by recommendations in the FRA Framework, and is expected to provide a common set of standards, a common goal and awareness of local governments contributions to human rights.

This being said, there is a general positive stance towards being a Human Rights City and ownership of the concept among our politicians. The City Government highlights their human rights ambitions from the first page of the political platform. The City Government works towards a human rights-based approach in all parts our organisation. This covers all activities exemplified by procurement, service providing and citizens involvement. Human rights guide how we meet and facilitate for minorities, and how we act to combat human trafficking. It influences how we provide children’s rights, combating poverty and the right to believe and love independent of where you are from, your disabilities and how you define yourself. It’s about how we find human solutions to human caused climate changes. And it sets fresh air, access to clean water and untouched nature in a broader context.

Best regards

Roger Valhammer
Governing Mayor

The document is approved electronically.