

**"International Human Rights - Local Delivery: Why a joined-up approach to human rights implementation is essential"**

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**Check against delivery!**

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**Chair,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Human rights talk can be abstract. But in fact, human rights are part of our everyday lives: when we are ill, we want to receive good medical treatment; we all want to be treated with respect; when we go to work, we want to have working conditions that respect our health, safety and dignity; when our rights are violated, we want to be able to complain about it and get redress; we want our children to receive quality education; we want to live in a safe environment. All these examples have a strong local component.

53 years ago, Eleanor Roosevelt – the mother of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – said:

*"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."*

And, ladies and gentlemen, this is still valid today: It is the local and regional authorities who facilitate people's access to their rights on a daily basis, whether it is to healthcare, to fair and just working conditions, freedom of expression, education and so on.

So the bottom line is: fundamental rights are brought "alive" locally; and more and more cities are officially signing up to fundamental rights. Graz understood human rights challenges as early as 2001, when your City Council issued the Declaration on Human Rights. Concrete projects and activities followed. Graz was the first European city of human rights – and I would like to congratulate all of you who have made this possible. In this context, I would like to extend my appreciation for the work that the *Graz European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights* has undertaken over the past 12 years. The Centre is also a partner of the Fundamental Rights Agency in several projects.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

If Eleanor Roosevelt knew it over 50 years ago – then isn't it a bit surprising that we in Europe had to wait so long to have the first human rights city? Maybe not. This actually reflects very well the development that human rights have made: of course, fundamental rights protection and promotion have been very prominent on the international agenda for quite a while. Take, for example the Universal Declaration of 1948.

But it was only in the past 20 years that there was a remarkable shift on how we view human rights within Europe. If we think back, during the Cold War, human rights were a popular topic when we in the "Western world" discussed about countries on the other side of the iron curtain, or South Africa, or Chile or other states, but not about ourselves.

Today, human rights have very much reached the core of our own societies. I call this the domestication of human rights. Let me give you some concrete examples: the debates that we have in the EU about prisoners in solitary confinement, or about the treatment of persons with mental illness, about the rights of children, and so on. Human rights questions have come home. Therefore, we should become aware: today's human rights defenders are people who work on patient care, or as

prison wardens, or on access of minorities to social services, or on legal aid for undocumented migrants, or on the protection of personal data. And so on.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

So we have today, finally, arrived at a stage when fundamental rights are also on the local agenda in EU countries. But how can we translate all those rights from theory into practice at the ground level locally? How can we transform the fundamental rights from books into concrete local rights? There is a pressing need to respond better to citizens' needs.

For this, cities themselves are key actors. It is the cities and local communities which are directly confronted with challenges such as migration, education, healthcare, access to housing, discrimination etc. All these challenges are very real, so local authorities need to identify tangible solutions.

There are a number of concrete obstacles to this; let me mention three key problems:

**1) First: Often, human rights related policies and measures are not well coordinated between the local and the national level. Therefore, there is a risk that local citizens are facing serious human rights challenges without getting redress or support from the competent public authority.** Take, for example, racist and xenophobic discrimination or free movement within EU Member States – this simply cannot be addressed in one city alone.

One concrete challenge that Europe is facing today is migration. Take the case of those several thousand Roma EU citizens who move to other EU Member States. Some of these Roma come from regions with extremely high unemployment; they migrate in order to find additional income to survive. This is based on the right to freedom of movement, as well as other associated rights. For the receiving countries and communities, this creates a clear challenge in terms of anti-discrimination and integration. **How can we find sustainable solutions to integrate migrants successfully into society?**

**2) Second: there is unequal access to services, and socio-economic inequalities persist. In order words: discrimination continues.** When policies are not human rights-proof, the negative effects are most visible locally: social exclusion and marginalisation rise, patients with minority backgrounds may not receive proper healthcare, or children with disabilities do not receive good quality education. **How can we ensure that everyone has equal access to basic services?**

**3) Finally: the existing legislation is not really used** – for several reasons. One reason is that many people - and often even the authorities - are **not aware of human rights legislation**. Our research has shown that although ethnic minorities are frequently discriminated against they generally do not even know that discrimination against them might be illegal. For example, in 7 EU Member States that we surveyed, between 28% and 86% of Roma did not know that discrimination on the labour market against them was actually forbidden by law. This leads to people not reporting the discrimination they suffered.

Another reason for not reporting human rights abuses is that people either do not know where to complain in the first place; or they do not trust the authorities or the police. 80% of minorities do not know a single organisation where they could go to complain about a concrete case of discrimination. **How can we ensure that everyone is aware about their rights, and about the existence of redress mechanisms - and that everyone actually uses them?**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

These are some of the problems. So what are the ways forward?

I will go into detail on a number of points here:

- First, coordination and partnership
- Second, making people aware of their rights
- Then, impact assessment of fundamental rights implementation is key
- Further, of course is the question of money
- And finally, how cities can learn from each other

1) to my first point – coordination and partnership: In order to address cross-national phenomena such as migration or poverty, **coordinated policies and**

**instruments internationally, nationally and locally** are needed. We call this type of coherent planning and decision-making *joined-up human rights governance*. This approach is new: it brings together central government agencies, local governance structures, specialised bodies, and private and voluntary organisations. The Fundamental Rights Agency is in the middle of a project where we identify different models of cooperation between the national, regional and local levels – and for this we look at several different countries, and at very different human right topics such as: migration, asylum, anti-discrimination, poverty and gender mainstreaming.

But in parallel to national, regional and local coordination, there must also be **coordination across a range of different sectors**: the labour market, housing policies, education etc. This can for example mean systematic mainstreaming of Roma inclusion issues into policy areas of education, employment, public health, infrastructure, urban planning and so on. Local authorities are important actors in this process.

To add to the complexity of different levels and different sectors, the third component here is the **local partnership between authorities, civil society organisations and private businesses**. It is proven that this partnership is the best way to improve service-delivery. Concretely, this means that people's basic needs are met in their surroundings. For example, think of the need to provide community-based care for persons with disabilities rather than institutionalising them far away from their home. The Human Rights Reports by the city of Graz shows clearly that some achievements have been made, just to mention the health service for everyone, without even the need for official documents or social insurance.

In this context, local businesses should be encouraged to look at human rights not as an extra effort, but as an opportunity to increase their visibility and productivity, to attract new customers, and to provide better services for the community. The Human Rights Report of Graz describes the remarkable introduction of anti-discrimination provisions in public procurement contracts. This is a promising start; it sends the right message: discrimination reduces profits.

2) I come to my second point, **local governments can play a role in 'selling' human rights** to people. People must know their rights better. At every airport you find posters about passengers' rights – similarly, at every town hall, at every hospital, in every school, people could be similarly made aware of their human rights. If people are more aware of their rights, they can participate more actively and can help authorities better respond to their needs. This includes access to local complaint bodies. Training of elected representatives and their staff is also very important. Generally speaking, human rights education is of utmost importance.

Again, from your Human Rights Report we know that there are many institutions which provide human rights education in various aspects. Again the European Training Centre for Human Rights is one of the outstanding providers. Political leaders and local administrations should also take up their particular responsibility in this respect, and lead by example.

3) My third point is: **Impact assessment of fundamental rights implementation is key**. But if I want to measure my impact – I must define very clearly from the beginning what my goal is. And then I must measure how I progress. And if I then see that I do not progress, I need to change my policies. So, in order to do a proper impact assessment, good data collection is needed, and this must be based on reliable indicators. Today there is often still neither good data collection nor clear goals and indicators.

Your Human Rights Reports go in the right direction, and the recommendations, which are based on the Human Rights Declaration, are becoming even clearer and more practical. Graz is also a member of the Coalition of Cities against Racism and passed in this frame a 10-Point-Plan-of-Action against Racism which lists concrete goals for achievement. The FRA will follow with great interest which achievements have been made – and how – in order to add them to our list of recommended examples.

4) Regarding money, there is a very telling Austrian saying: “Ohne Göd ka Musi”<sup>1</sup> **Human rights implementation costs money**. I would therefore encourage local and regional authorities to use existing EU funding for their fundamental rights

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<sup>1</sup> No music without money.

projects, in partnership with civil and business sectors. One example is the "Fundamental rights and citizenship" programme (2007-2013) that the European Commission is offering.

5) Finally, there is no need to re-invent the wheel. Cities and local communities **can learn from each other**. Part of our work at the Fundamental Rights Agency is to collect **examples of good practice** and to distribute them further. We come across many different examples on how such problems are addressed across the EU. On this note, I would like to encourage public and private actors in Graz to continue sharing their expertise, for example with the Fundamental Rights Agency's network of local and regional authorities.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I summarise: Experience and research show very clearly - coordination and cooperation between all levels and all actors is the way forward. It would be great if the City of Graz could become a role model in "living" human rights.

At the beginning of my speech, I quoted Eleanor Roosevelt's inspiring words. Allow me to also end my intervention with a quote from her: the local delivery of human rights is "in our hands"!

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to our discussion.