

Human rights in the digital era

Learnings on local governance from pilots in Europe



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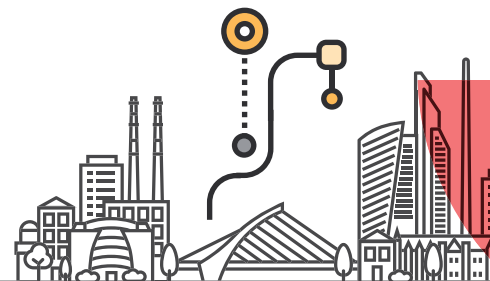
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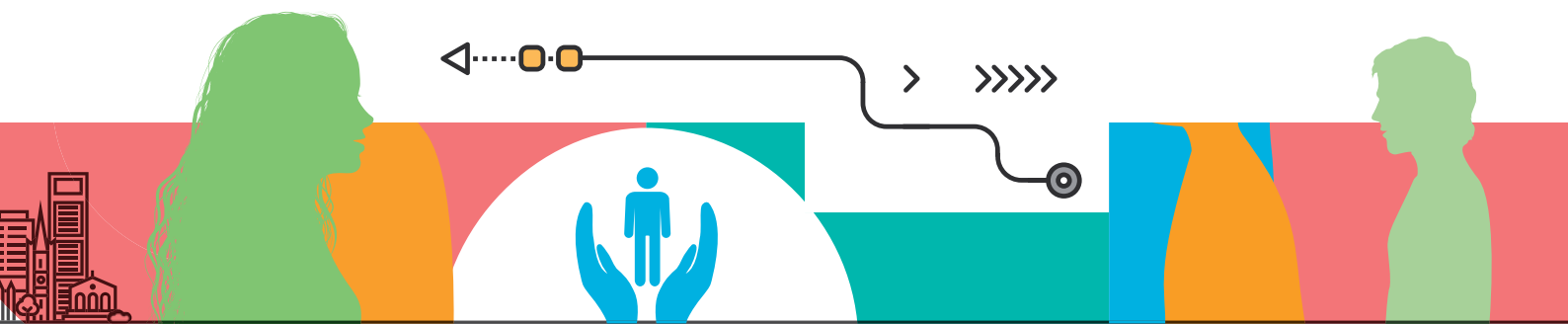


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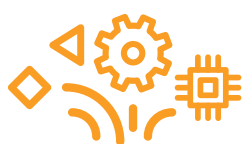
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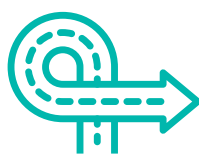


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01

Digital Human Rights in Local Governments





Digital technologies are increasingly becoming more important in all areas of society. In urban environments, services provided to residents such as garbage collection, the provision of playgrounds, parking spaces, streetlights, affordable housing, social support, and public transport all require a local government that is committed to facilitating good quality of life in the city. As these municipal services become automated with the help of digital technologies, it becomes essential to ensure that they truly serve a community in ways that align with core values such as inclusion, trust, transparency and equity.

This online and offline connectedness is impacting public life in our cities, and affects different groups across communities differently. The use of digital technologies, platforms, and data by governments and the private sector affect urban residents, sometimes in unforeseen or unintended ways, and may impact people's human rights.

A city that is truly smart is made up of city managers and citizens who use technology to create a better life for all. This is why UN-Habitat promotes [people-centered smart cities](#), where technologies are used to advance human development, overcome inequalities and build city systems that truly serve their communities. The people-centered smart city aligns digital thinking with key urban priorities such as providing green and affordable housing and improving urban environments. It achieves these goals through effective local leadership.

When a municipality or city fails to safeguard human rights in digital environments, what is at stake is the unequal treatment of residents. In such cases, some residents may be -even if unintentionally-, disadvantaged by digital systems, resulting in unfair access to services, unjust decision-making, or unwanted surveillance. Secondly, the lack of human rights protections in the digital sphere can contribute to a growing sense of distrust towards the municipality, as residents feel that their privacy and freedom are not adequately respected. Additionally, there is a risk of digital systems providing incorrect or misleading information, leading to inaccurate decisions.

Embracing a human rights-based approach to the design, purchase and deployment of digital technologies is key for avoiding the intended and unintended impacts of such technologies and for truly placing people at the centre of cities' digital transformation. To mitigate risks from technologies, it is crucial for municipalities to implement adequate policies and mechanisms to protect

and promote human rights, such as the right to privacy, and freedom of choice and representation. It is equally important that governments have the right capacity to apply technology as an enabler towards other human rights such as the right to adequate housing, right to the enjoyment of education, among others.

Over the last years, cities have increased their efforts to lead people-centered digital transformation to support sustainable urbanisation and promote human rights in the digital era. Cities have also increased collaboration by joining the [Cities Coalition for Digital Rights](#) (CC4DR), a network that brings together over 57 cities worldwide which are committed to promoting and defending digital human rights of citizens, residents and visitors in cities, to ensure fair, inclusive, accessible, affordable and non-discriminatory digital environments.

The Digital Rights Governance Project in Europe aimed at supporting cities to develop capacity and engage people to mainstream this human rights-based approach, by providing both normative and practical guidance to ensure that the human rights mechanisms that are in place offline are also in place online. This report summarises all the learnings from the project and tools to operationalise the guidance in cities.

Human rights in the digital era are referred to in this report as 'digital human rights'. These are not new human rights: they are interpreted as previously recognized rights -i.e. civil, political, economical, social and cultural rights- which need to be protected in the context of digital technologies. Following the Human Rights' Council's resolution on the promotion and protection of human rights on the internet, in July 2012, "the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression". This scope is also crucial for assessing how digital technologies affect previously recognized rights, and to propose the right measures and strategies to protect them.

02

The Digital Rights Governance Project



The Digital Rights Governance Project in Europe aimed at supporting local governments to uphold a human rights-based approach with regards to the digitalisation of their services and the digitalisation of the city. It was implemented by UN-Habitat, the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, Eurocities and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and funded by Open Society Foundations.

This project had two specific objectives:

- **Increasing local capacities to lead people-centered digital transformation strategies, policies and projects.** To achieve this goal, the project worked with the cities of Brussels, Dublin, Sofia and Tirana to address some of their digital rights challenges. From developing a digital rights policy to planning the city's commitments to narrow the digital divide to creating a capacity building programme for the municipality's staff, these pilots have provided insights that can be upscaled for other cities to increase their capacities. For instance, these technical assistance can support other cities within the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, and have also contributed to collaborate with partners such as CAF, the Development Bank of Latin America to localise the guidance in the region.
- **Developing tools to support local governments to assess, address and implement digital human rights related policy instruments.** For example, the document "[Mainstreaming human rights in the digital transformation of cities: A guide for local governments](#)" (hereby referred as "Guide"). Other tools have been co-developed with the four pilot cities and Technical Advisory Group with background on various areas related to digital rights, and they include: ; (1) a self-assessment tool to measure the maturity and identify gaps on the achievement of digital rights in a local government; (2) a learning module on digital human rights; and (3) a set of recommendations to include residents in data initiatives.

Digital Rights Governance Project in numbers

- ◆ 18 months
- ◆ 4 projects implemented
- ◆ 8 design workshops delivered to scope the city's pilots
- ◆ 20 experts involved in the Technical Advisory Group
- ◆ 2 policy documents drafted
- ◆ 2 consultation processes initiated
- ◆ 1 capacity building programme designed and delivered
- ◆ 2 learning modules for public staff and youth delivered
- ◆ 1 community workshop implemented
- ◆ 5 peer-learning sessions
- ◆ 1 Guide for mainstreaming human rights in local digital transformation launched
- ◆ 1 self-assessment tool designed and tested in 3 cities

The expected impact of this project was to increase local capacities to lead people-centred digital transformation strategies, policies and projects by mainstreaming digital human rights at the city level and promoting digital governance frameworks grounded in human rights. This impact was achieved through the following actions:

- **Defining a governance model on digital human rights:** establishing a benchmark and assessment that cities can apply based on their context needs and respecting their local capacity;
 - **Testing this governance model with cities in Europe:** working on a needs-based approach with selected cities to define actions to strengthen their digital human rights agenda by addressing policy issues which are most pressing for the cities involved;
 - **Developing guidance to operationalize the governance model:** elaborating playbooks, guides, practical resources with practical recommendations for cities;
 - **Defining an advisory group:** selecting qualified individuals with expertise on local governments, technology and digital human rights to contribute and support the development of these resources and provide technical guidance.
- **City of Brussels, Belgium:** In parallel with its Smart City Strategy, its Data Strategy and its Digital Transformation Programme (called BXL2021), the City of Brussels aimed at defining an action plan to promote digital inclusion and defining core areas for the protection of digital rights.
 - **Dublin, Ireland:** Dublin's challenge aimed at prototyping and developing a foundational educational module on digital rights, to promote the principles of ethics and privacy relating to new and emerging technologies.
 - **Sofia, Bulgaria:** Sofia aimed at expanding its capacities, developing new human-centered services and raising awareness about the importance of digital transformation and human rights in the digital environment. Sofia aimed at developing an assessment methodology to assess gaps and expand digital rights awareness.
 - **Tirana, Albania:** Tirana aimed at building public staff's capacity in transparency and accountability while also developing a digital rights agenda for the city.

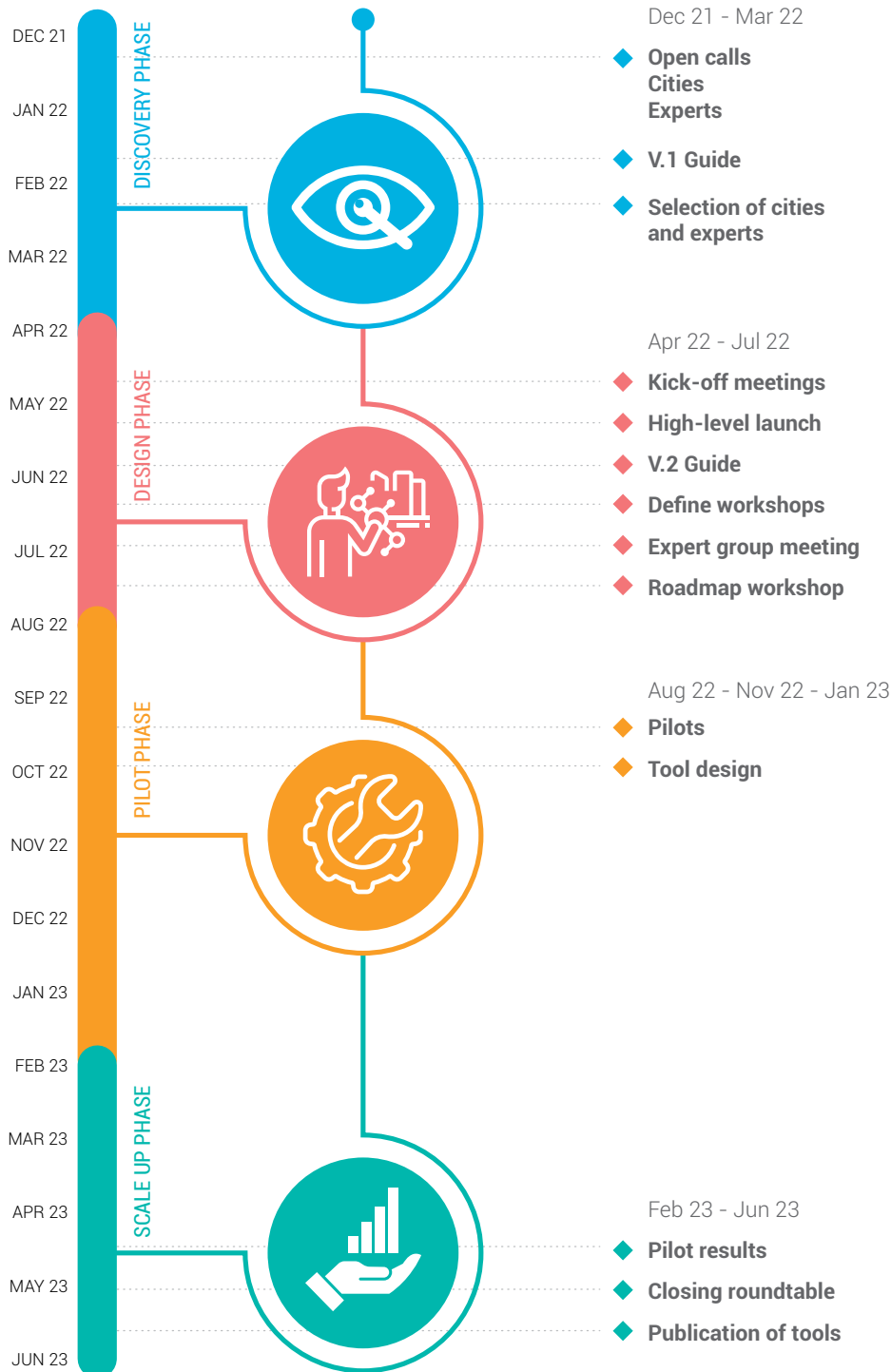
The four cities' challenges

Through an open call, 11 applications were received from Europe and four cities were selected for the digital rights governance project with specific challenges identified:



2.1 Project Phases

The project kicked-off in December 2021, and finished in June 2023. It consisted of four phases:



Phase 1 - Discovery

The Discovery Phase consisted in identifying cities and their challenges in mainstreaming human rights in their digitalisation strategies, and defining a framework to support the selected local governments. It included an open call for cities and experts aimed at understanding local needs and what technical support could be provided to address them.

This phase had three main activities:

1 Defining a governance approach:

Defining a governance model to develop guidance on how to mainstream digital human rights in local governments;

This activity included the design of the Guide to support local governments to uphold a human rights based approach in their digital transformation strategies.

2 Launching an open call for European cities:

To identify the challenges that they were facing in developing human rights based digital governance;

Out of the 11 applications received, the four cities were selected following a criteria that prioritising diversity of applications and which took into account the scope of the challenge. Diverse maturity levels were taken into consideration to select cities in different stages of their digital rights journey.

In May 2022, the four selected cities presented their challenges in a [high-level announcement event](#) that marked the beginning of the cooperation with UN-Habitat, the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights and partners to identify priorities within the digital rights thematic areas, in order to receive technical support to develop and implement workstreams to address their local challenges.

3 Launching an open call for experts:

Establishing a Technical Advisory Group to provide technical assistance to the pilot cities and develop specific tools to operationalize our work.

The open call for experts sought qualified individuals with experience and expertise in thematic areas of the Guide: digital inclusion, individual's control and autonomy of data, transparency and accountability, public participation and community engagement, privacy, digital public goods and open digital infrastructures, human rights-based procurement and capacity building.

Applicants were selected based on their technical and normative experience in one or more areas of digital rights, how they intended to contribute and experience working with public policy and local governments. Diversity of geographical representation, gender and experience were taken into account.



Dublin

Pilot a digital rights learning module for public officials and youth



Brussels

Implement the guide as a structure of the digital inclusion initiatives



Sofia

Expand capacities to develop human-centred services and implement an action plan



Tirana

Training for civil servants to raise capacities and draft a digital rights agenda

Phase 2- Design

The aim of the Design Phase was to work with pilot cities and advisors to unpack the challenge and frame priorities, define clear needs and set up an actionable roadmap with deliverables to address the challenge and implement actions to safeguard human rights in the digital context of city governments.

Design Workshop and pilot roadmaps

Two workshops were hosted with each city to establish priorities and set clear deliverables to define an action-oriented roadmap for piloting. One workshop was aimed at determining the priorities and goals of the pilot project, organised with multiple stakeholders inside and outside of the municipality. The second workshop was conducted with primarily internal stakeholders from different departments across the municipality to determine a roadmap for action with concrete tasks assigned according to the timeline of the pilot. .

Experts' proposals and matching process

During the Design Phase, an assessment was conducted to select and match the expertise of candidates to the Technical Advisory group with the workstreams identified for the Pilot Phase.

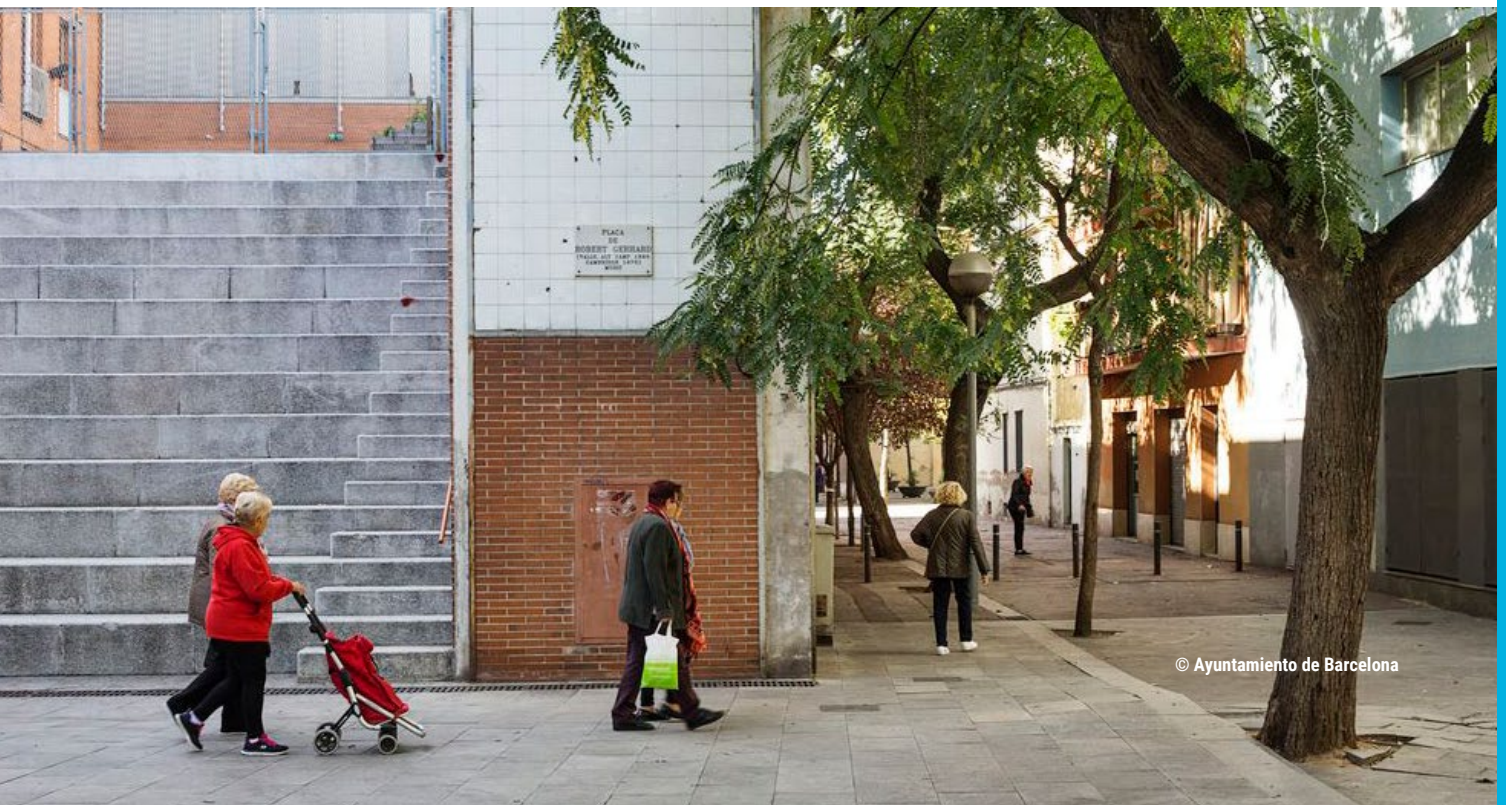
Expert support was assigned under three modalities:

Modality 1 - Express advice system: In this modality, the selected qualified individuals applied to provide all four cities with around one hour of pro-bono advice support per week, during the test period within the Pilot Phase. We assigned 11 advisors to provide support under this modality.

Modality 2 - Deep-dive Guidance: In this modality, advisors provided dedicated guidance and support to one city to develop a policy report, training materials or other activities related to the city's pilot. Two advisors per city were identified to provide dedicated guidance to cities under this modality.

Modality 3 - Authoring normative, technical and knowledge resources: Under this modality, advisors supported the guidance and its implementation in general by authoring papers, supporting thematic policy documents, reports, self-assessment tools, outlining training curriculums and capacity building programmes. Based on the expert's proposals, two deliverables have been produced:

- [Digital Rights self-assessment tool](#): 4 experts have explored existing tools to assess digital rights and connect the existing Guide to the assessment. The outcome of this research has been a self-assessment tool for cities. This tool has been tested with the cities of Sofia, Amsterdam and Maceió [1] during the pilot phase. Section 4.2 provides some details of the self-assessment tool.
- [Governance approaches on citizen engagement in urban data](#): A group of 5 experts have explored emerging data governance models and case studies to understand residents' roles in data initiatives and governance practices. The outcome of this research was a typology of citizen's roles, recommendations and actions for cities, which have been summarised in Section 4.4.

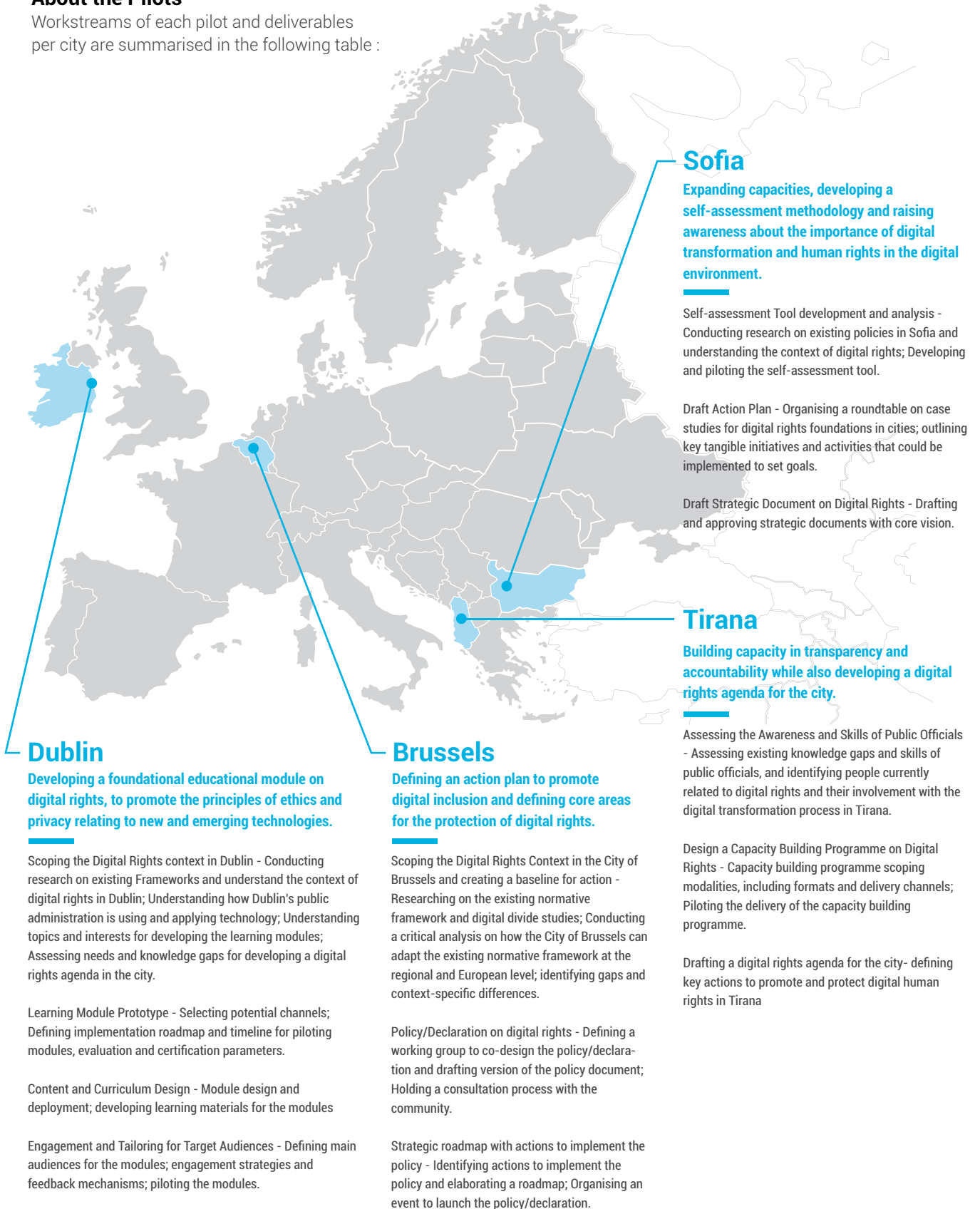


Phase 3- Pilot

This phase focused on experimentation and on refining the policy issues which are most pressing for the cities involved. This phase has also developed guidelines and tools to operationalise the guidance provided to cities that can be used by local governments to assess, address and implement digital rights related policy instruments.

About the Pilots

Workstreams of each pilot and deliverables per city are summarised in the following table :





Expert Support and Engagement

The pilot phase was concentrated on fostering city-to-expert engagement and technical support to pilots. This was done through various meetings and networking events, which gave experts and pilot cities a platform to work in collaboration on the most important topics for cities:



Kick-off Events:

after the design phase concluded, kick-off meetings were organised with all expert groups across the three modalities, introducing the modality processes, providing an overview of the city challenges and roadmaps, and connecting experts with each other.



Networking sessions:

cities and experts were introduced through a "Cities x Experts Meet and Greet Session". Some Cities and experts also met in-person during a networking breakfast held at the Smart City Expo in Barcelona in mid-November 2022.



Peer learning sessions:

four roundtables featuring advisors as keynote speakers were hosted on common challenges observed among all the pilots - such as, setting foundations for a digital rights agenda; centering community engagement and public participation; a surgery session with case studies on implementation in the public realm with the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights; and a workshop on how to include residents in data initiatives.

In addition to these engagement opportunities, experts in Modality 2 (Deep-dive guidance) provided support to the four pilot cities to address their challenges, and experts in Modality 3 (Authoring normative, technical and knowledge resources) developed the deliverables described in the section "Developing tools to mainstream human rights in digital transformation strategies".

Phase 4- Scale Up

Based on the learnings from the pilot implementation, the Scale Up Phase has built on the findings from the previous phase and defined clear actions to strengthen policies, commitments and initiatives to digital human rights in pilot cities and secure the continuity of the work developed during the pilot phase. This phase will also operationalize the technical support provided to pilot cities and will explore ways to scale the services to other regions and local realities.

2.2. Main outcomes

Using a challenge-based approach to strengthen digital human rights governance ensured local needs were put at the centre of the pilots and supported local governments in addressing ethical and digital rights' aspects of their local digital strategies, policies, projects and services.

The project had four main outcomes:

1. Participant cities implemented local actions to strengthen a human rights-based digital governance and included commitments in their political agendas

During the Design Phase, the pilot cities were introduced to the governance model presented in the Guide, and identified thematic areas, mechanisms and tools most connected to their challenge and which would be prioritised in the implementation.

The project team has provided technical guidance during the Pilot Phase on how to operationalize the approach and assess the current state of the different areas related to digital governance to identify which ones should be prioritised in the short and long-term. As a result:

- The City of Brussels focused on digital inclusion and aiming to develop a policy document on digital rights with commitments for the city
- Dublin focused on increasing capacities of local authority staff and creating awareness on digital rights among youth groups
- Sofia aimed to self-assess the current state of policies and strategies and create a digital rights action plan and strategy
- Tirana worked in capacity building actions with a focus on privacy and security towards developing a digital rights agenda in the city
- All cities have planned commitments related to digital human rights

2. Participant cities strengthened their capacities to uphold human rights in digital contexts

All four cities had a dedicated team to coordinate pilots and have reached out to internal stakeholders in the city administration to support pilot activities. As an outcome of the project, all four cities have worked with internal and external stakeholders to create awareness on the need to protect digital human rights locally. City officials were also exposed to a 'learn-by-doing' approach, which ensured ownership and facilitated capacity building within the municipality staff and increased knowledge of internal and external stakeholders throughout the process.

During the Design Phase, a set of emerging topics and common challenges across cities arose. For example, city examples of foundations, youth engagement and capacity building are common areas to potentially host technical discussions and foster city-to-city engagement during following phases of the project. As an outcome, we hosted peer learning exchanges for pilot cities to increase local capacities and enable dialogue across cities, experts and project partners to discuss strategies and mechanisms to promote digital governance that upholds digital rights. This phase was also an opportunity for the cities to foster collaborations with actors from the digital human rights ecosystem and for breaking institutional silos.

During the Pilot Phase, cities have explored how to host meaningful conversations with the community and create awareness on the need to protect human rights when accessing and using technologies. For instance, the City of Brussels has included a consultation process with organisations and communities affected by the digital divide; Dublin piloted a community workshop in the Docklands area and Sofia has invited their local ecosystem to provide insights to the recommendations from the self-assessment tool.



Learnings from this empirical exercise strengthened the guidance to cities in different ways, including:

- defining enabling conditions, context-specific needs and building blocks for sustaining people-centered digital strategies and policies
- outlining actions to mainstream digital rights approach across digitalisation processes in cities through a bottom-up approach based on local challenges
- Increasing understanding of the 'digital human rights' concept, and the interplay between digital technologies and human rights, its risks and opportunities

3. When it comes to adopting a human rights based approach to digital technologies, cities find guidance and support more useful than frameworks

A draft version of the [Digital Rights Governance Framework](#) was released for review in December 2021. Following the Fundamental Rights Agency [Framework for Human Rights cities in the EU](#), normative work from cities and UN International Frameworks, the document gathered **foundations, structures** and **tools** that cities can put in place and which can be customised according to local needs. It was co-created with partner organisations and representatives from cities part of the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights. This first version was open for feedback during several weeks, and received inputs from representatives of cities and civil society.

Through the Design Phase workshops, we have tested the implementation of the approach presented in the Guide. Cities had to identify thematic areas, methods and existing initiatives that relate to their challenge. The thematic areas, mechanisms and tools identified throughout the workshops were considered as entry points to implement human rights based digital governance. Pilot cities have also explored how to implement foundations or define core values and principles for the city and are building their own capacities towards promoting and defending human rights when designing, implementing and using technologies.

During the Design Phase of this project we have learned that, due to the siloed nature of the digital human rights agenda, cities are willing to embed human rights into their existing policies and initiatives, as opposed to

implementing a Framework. The goal for the pilot cities was not the implementation of the framework itself; they were rather willing to focus on strategic entry points to mainstream human rights based on local needs that prioritise individual and collective wellbeing throughout the digitalization of a city and administration. Therefore, the term "Guide" illustrated better such a focus, instead of 'Framework'. The second version was launched during the Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona (November 15th 2022) as "Mainstreaming Human Rights in the Digital Transformation of Cities - A Guide for Local Governments.

4. A multi-stakeholder community of practice has been created both at the local and global level

During the pilot phase, we conducted the following advocacy actions to increase global awareness on digital human rights: (1) a networking event and panels during the Smart City Expo World Congress Barcelona (15-17 November 2022); (2) hosted panels in MozFest and RightsCon to showcase the pilot learnings; (3) mobilised the political leadership of the Coalition, such as the General Assembly and the Coalition's Annual Political Meeting to spark interest and inspiration from the work of the pilot cities; (4) strengthened partnerships with city-networks, multilateral organisations and international government bodies to promote the framework, further advancing its iteration and outreach.

Two learning sessions were held with the four pilot cities: one to showcase London's Emerging Technologies Charter, and the second on Portland's Surveillance Technology Policy.

As an outcome from the pilot's implementation, we have also established partnerships with CAF- the Development Bank of Latin America, to run a similar process and improve human rights digital governance in selected cities in Latin America. CAF, in collaboration with UN-Habitat and UNIT, launched an open call for cities using learnings from the discovery and design phases to localise the Guide and supported the cities of Niteroi (Brazil), Medellin (Colombia) and Mexico City (Mexico) in the design of a roadmap to support human rights in their local contexts.

This project has also made technical support provided to cities and communities more accessible, validated in practice through the pilots and grounded in strong local/international principles and values, community of practitioners and policy experts.

2.3 Lessons Learned

This section summarises the challenges faced and the learnings under each of the phases of the project. These learnings were monitored by the project team throughout the four phases of the project, and, when necessary and appropriate, strategies to address them were implemented. This section includes useful recommendations that could be taken into consideration for replicating or scaling up the project.

1. Cities need to build capacity on digital human rights, both at the normative and the technical level.

The pilots were a conversation starter for cities to begin to consider the human rights implications of digital technologies, and engage in critical thinking. In this endeavour it was key to foster peer learning and sharing knowledge across teams within the municipality, but also with other cities. Equally important was the 'learn-by-doing approach' promoted by the project, in which the municipality team owned the challenge and was proactive in addressing it.

2. The pilot projects were an enabler to connect city departments which were not working together and foster a whole of government approach.

The topic of human rights in cities' digital transformations' needs to be addressed with a multidisciplinary, holistic perspective. The digital human rights agenda must be embedded into already existing policies, commitments and initiatives in order to prevent that they become siloed and that only one department is responsible for this agenda.

3. Digital human rights cannot be achieved without meaningful participation and representation of a diverse set of stakeholders.

Throughout the project, we realised that in order to build a digital human rights agenda cities needed to engage in meaningful discussions with their local ecosystems, involving the local community in the co-design and the development of the project itself.

4. Technical support is key to advance people-centered smart cities.

The creation of the Technical Advisory Group with alternative modalities allowed the project team to experiment with different ways to provide technical support to the local governments. It explored what configuration was more efficient to improve service delivery to city representatives. In this process, modality 2 - deep dive guidance, with dedicated support and longer hours of engagement was more successful than modality 1 - express advice system, which offered only 1-hour ad hoc consultations. This also hints at the need for funding to secure dedicated technical support needed by cities on digital human rights, to ensure the digital transformation journeys are inclusive, human rights-oriented and people-centered.

Discovery Phase

	Lesson learned	Recommendation
Cities need guidance during the open call	Given that human rights in digital environments are an emerging topic for local governments, cities need technical guidance before applying.	Organising an informative session while the call is open is recommended, so everyone can depart from the same ground. This can also encourage participation from cities that might feel intimidated by the topic.
Understanding of what digital rights are	The concept of 'digital rights' is often considered abstract. When cities miss a comprehensive understanding of what digital rights are, we realised the challenges submitted were too broad.	The Guide defines digital human rights with six thematic areas, for its implications and risks, as well as for its capability to promote and uphold human rights. Cities can use this guidance to increase their knowledge on how the adoption of digital solutions can impact human rights locally.



Discovery Phase

Scoping the challenges	There was a broad range of challenges and topics. Some applications were focused on merely one topic (e.g. the development of an open data portal), while others were broad (e.g. safeguard digital rights).	Narrowing down the scope of the open call and defining modalities of the challenge or asking specific questions on the level of awareness on digital rights in the city's administration. Using the self-assessment tool as a previous step to the open call could provide useful insights on the maturity on the field of digital rights in the city and shed light into the gaps that could be addressed through the guidance.
Commitments and city's sponsors	During the pitch meeting and in the open call we asked about political commitment to this agenda and resources (financial, human, etc.) that cities could commit to work in addressing their challenge. After selecting the cities, we experienced challenges in setting up meetings to plan the Design Phase, which resulted in some delays for running the workshops and finding the right stakeholders to invite.	Reinforcing political commitment by including in the application process a letter from the highest political level to work in strengthening digital rights.

Design Phase

	Lesson learned	Recommendation
Not taking local understanding of digital human rights for granted	In addition to a certain level of commitment and resources from the city side to successfully run this pilot, a basic level of understanding concerning the broad scope of digital rights in local government context is also needed. In pilot cities where this agenda is emerging, the required guidance was more intense. For instance, during the design workshops we learned that public officials working in different themes connected to digital rights met for the first time, so it was challenging to work in scoping the roadmap.	Host specific introductory meetings or learning sessions on digital human rights foundations before starting the pilots. Apply the digital human rights definition presented in the Guide, with use cases to illustrate the interplay between digital technologies and human rights
Digital human rights as a whole of government topic	During this phase, we learned that for most cities it was more desirable to embed digital human rights into already existing strategies, policies and mechanisms. What was needed was strengthening local capacities and existing structures and set political commitments to reinforce this human rights based governance approach. This nuance motivated us to change the initial term 'Framework' for 'Guide', as the new wording put the focus on alignment, support and guidance, rather than on a framework.	The digital human rights agenda must be embedded and strengthened in already existing policies, commitments and initiatives to prevent that they become siloed and that only one department is responsible for this agenda. Governments must seek entry points to realise a human rights-based strategy to digital transformation processes.

Design Phase

Engaging advisors meaningfully

Working with advisors allowed us to bring together a great variety of expertises, backgrounds and disciplines. While this was key for enabling enriching conversations and setting up a wide variety of working modalities, we also found that indications for advisors on how to contribute were not clearly specified at the beginning. One of the main reasons for this was that the open call for cities and experts were run almost simultaneously.

Additionally, we also found that, to make the most out of the potential of the advisory group, we needed to invest in building strong personal relationships and include them as part of the multi-stakeholder community of practice on digital human rights.

Running the open call for experts when cities' challenges are clear. Ask for specific experience or background in the call to reduce the match-making efforts.

Make networking and personal contact a priority. Prioritise communications channels that facilitate a personalised contact, such as a Slack or LinkedIn group, and invest in proper engagement so that experts feel valued. For example, invite experts as panellists in events.

Common themes and challenges in pilot cities

While every city has different challenges and priorities depending on their specific context, the project revealed some common themes among all cities, opening opportunities for mutual learning and collaboration. All cities agreed on the importance of data protection, a theme which they considered to be of importance to citizens as well. Many participants agreed on the need to raise awareness about privacy and security of personal data among citizens, as well as workers of the public sector through capacity building programs.

Another common theme was raising awareness on digital rights among the public, which required effective ways of communicating and engaging with citizens and stakeholders.

Prioritise holistic approaches that take into account different factors, and ensure collaboration among departments and effective ways of communication between members of different ongoing projects.

Organising topic-focused, in depth workshops is key for transferring information and building capacity. The citizen dimension raised the topic of the digital divide, since not all groups benefit equally from these initiatives due to inequalities in access and information about technology.

Hosting hybrid and on-line events

We found that in-person meetings bring in a lot of added value. They create a more durable commitment and engagement for internal stakeholders on the ground. In person, it is easier to create an impactful learning experience, as you collectively build on the experiences and input from every person present in the room.

In-person meetings and workshops should be prioritised, and hybrid workshops should be well designed to enable meaningful participation.

During the Pilot Phase, we hosted in-person meetings in the city of Dublin to deliver the local authority training sessions. The meetings with Sofia, the City of Brussels and Tirana to deliver each city's specific deliverable were hosted online.

Design Phase methodology and local sponsors

The team faced some delays in setting dates for the workshops due to the summer holidays, the need to identify internal and external stakeholders in the city's administration, and changes in pilot cities' sponsors. However, these workshops were an enabler to start conversations across government agencies. For instance, we discovered that for some cities, teams working in data protection, digital transformation, citizen participation etc. were in the same room for the first time.

The active engagement through the designated focal points or a city task team is crucial to ensuring a successful outcome of the process. It is important that such a task force team is diverse, is representative of different social signifiers such as gender, social class, race and nationality and other minorities and ensures representation of different expertises and areas of work.



Pilot Phase

	Lesson learned	Recommendation
Incentives and commitments	We have learnt about the importance of setting incentives in pilot cities to implement the pilot and the need to find collaborators on the ground to make solutions scalable and sustainable. In order to succeed, pilots needed to have local buy-in from all levels of management, and the team in charge of implementation needed to be highly motivated.	Have honest conversations before starting the pilot to set expectations and commitments, and agree on a set of minimum collaboration requirements. Throughout the project, offer continuous incentives, such as including the participant city in events, learning opportunities, and communications.
Hosting meaningful conversations and peer learning, and building a safe space to discuss sensitive topics	The project has offered cities a safe space to share their uncertainties with regards to challenges posed by digital technologies, and we have learnt that by engaging in meaningful and trustworthy conversations, cities feel more suited to address them. In these efforts, creating peer learning moments for all pilot cities and advisors was key to share progress and common challenges, connect and learn from each other.	Create a trustworthy, safe and engaging environment, and make peer learning and experience sharing moments a structural activity within the project.
Need for dedicated funding and human resources for cities	We have found that refining and delivering the pilot deliverables depended significantly on the local team, and whether they had the capacity to combine the work around the pilot with their daily workloads. We believe the more commitment in terms of resources a city dedicates, the more impact and sustainability the pilot has.	Allocate funding for local implementation, including grants for cities or local organisations. Fund experts to deliver technical support to cities and foster local technical capacity.
Include marginalised populations and vulnerable groups	We have also learned that it is important that marginalised populations and vulnerable groups can understand the pilot actions, which requires the city to tailor participatory processes and tools to fit different profiles.	Include strategies to ensure respectful participation in interviews and other interactions with marginalised members of the community, such as active listening, ethics of care, etc.
Work with civil society organisations (CSO) to identify local digital human rights challenges	Organised civil society is an excellent source of best practices and innovative ideas, and CSOs are usually aware of digital human rights challenges and points for improvement that may have gone unnoticed by local authorities. Including their perspective structurally can allow local governments to define challenges in a more nuanced and inclusive way, and therefore address them in a way that is meaningful for the community.	Identify civil society organisations working on digital human rights locally and assess needs and challenges, and include them as structural advisors in the pilot. These organisations should be part of the co-design of the pilot and be involved throughout the whole process.
Engage with other cities and stakeholders	These pilots have been an entry point for other cities in the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, who are also seeking to implement the human rights-based approach to their digital transformation through city action and pragmatic guidance and work towards legal, ethical and operational mechanisms. Additionally, the pilots have also involved researchers, policymakers, and digital rights experts, who have become advocates for strengthening the digital rights agenda locally and globally, thus securing a 'stewardship' of the project.	Involve a wide variety of stakeholders and connect the learnings of the pilots with a wider network of global practitioners on the field of digital human rights.

03

Strengthening Foundations and Structures in Cities: Pilot Projects in Europe





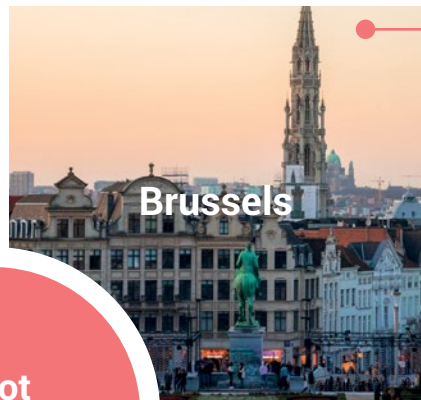
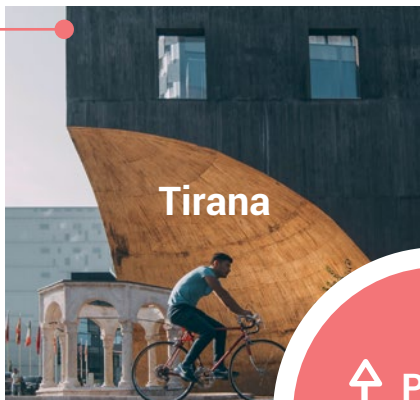
Working with the cities of Brussels, Sofia, Dublin and Tirana, the Digital Rights Governance Project addressed challenges connected to their local digital transformation process. The pilot cities promoted a multi-level governance strategy, built skills and capacity to develop digital technologies in an ethical, inclusive and sustainable way.

This section will describe each of the pilots and summarise lessons learned from implementation along with future workstreams to ensure sustainability.

Assets capacities and skills of public local officials

Develop capacity building program for public officials

Strategies to work with communities



Digital divide assessment and baseline for action

Define a policy document on digital rights

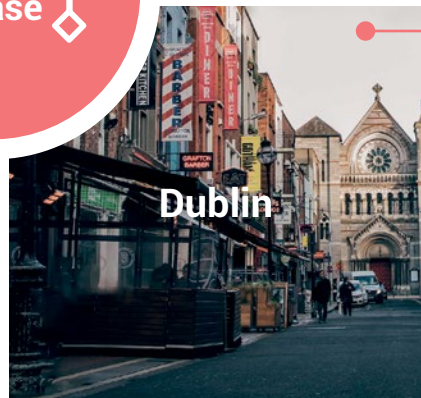
Roadmap to implement actions of the policy document



Self-assessment tool and analysis

Draft Action Plan and strategy on digital human rights

Capacity building



Scoping the Digital Rights Context

Learning Module Prototype

Develop learning materials

Engage and tailor for targeting audiences

© Sofia Municipality & Unsplash: Gregory Dalleau (Dublin), Alexandr Bormotin (Tirana), Francois Genon (Brussels)



3.1

The City of Brussels: Setting Foundations on Digital Human Rights

The City of Brussels' pilot in numbers



- ◆ **1 policy document**
drafted and submitted to political approval
- ◆ **27 workshops**
meetings/roundtables
- ◆ **57 people**
involved in the consultation process
- ◆ **6 civil society organisations**
and 17 citizens engaged in consultations*

*more consultations planned until the start of the political finalisation steps

The City of Brussels is the capital of the Kingdom of Belgium and considered as the capital of the European Union, with a population of 188.737 inhabitants. The City of Brussels strongly believes that building a smart and sustainable city should involve all citizens and city players and deliver digital tools and innovation can help to build a more supportive, dynamic and inclusive society.

To develop a smart, sustainable and inclusive city, the City of Brussels has recently defined a [Smart City Strategy](#), a Data Strategy and a Digital Transformation programme (called BXL2021) and is currently implementing several programmes and initiatives to foster a human-centric approach to digital transformation. As the City of Brussels is in the middle of an important digital transformation and is setting new ambitions in terms of smart city and data governance, the city needs to make sure the right mechanisms and structures are foreseen to protect digital rights and reduce the digital divide.

Through the pilot, the City of Brussels aimed to define a clear action plan (horizon 2030) to promote digital inclusion and define core areas for the protection and promotion of human rights in digital contexts. At the time of the open call, the City of Brussels needed support to plan its actions to fight the digital divide, and to include them in a clear action plan, to promote digital inclusion and define core areas for the protection of digital rights. Although the city administration and politicians have already proven their commitment by joining the CC4DR and implementing initiatives to uphold human rights in their digital transformation policies, the City had not defined its core values and priority areas nor published a formal digital rights policy or declaration with a clear action plan, with quick wins and longer-term actions, to cover all priority areas in the fields of human rights and digital transformation.

Design phase of the pilot

In collaboration with the Smart City Unit of the City of Brussels, the design phase started by hosting a workshop in late August 2022 to gather insights on the challenge and analyse opportunities and assumptions behind the problem. This workshop provided an opportunity to analyse needs and assumptions behind the challenge, leading to new insights to define the pilot. Participants included public employees from different departments and units such as Smart City; Data Protection; Equal Opportunities, IT, Business analysts, Strategy, Public Education, Citizen affairs, Citizen participation as well as a few regional actors.

During the session, workshop participants identified a series of barriers to address the challenge, including: formalising commitments to digital rights with a clear vision and action plan to uphold digital human rights and sponsorship; understanding the digital divide at the city level; fostering multi-stakeholder engagement to raise awareness and strengthening public capacities.

Based on the design workshops and on a prioritisation exercise led by the City of Brussels' Smart City Unit, the following deliverables were identified for the pilot phase:

1. Digital rights context in the City of Brussels and digital divide assessments on the regional and federal level
2. Local digital divide assessment design
3. Digital Rights Policy
4. Strategic roadmap to implement the policy

Setting commitments regarding human rights in the use of digital technologies

The aim of the City of Brussels' Digital Rights Policy is to establish the City of Brussels' digital rights commitments and lay out the actions the City of Brussels is committed to in order to implement them.

The draft principles for the City of Brussels' Digital Rights Policy started with a preliminary research on the existing policies at the local, regional and national level that are relevant to digital rights.

The City expressed their need to develop an official set of principles to serve as basis for future actions at the municipal level regarding digital rights in the City of Brussels. A draft was then prepared with a set of principles based on the [EU Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade](#), the [principles of the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights](#), the [Declaration on joining forces to boost sustainable digital transformation in cities and communities in the EU](#) of Living-in.eu, the [UN-Habitat's people-centered smart cities pillars](#), as well as existing political roadmaps of the City of Brussels, such as the [Citizen Participation Charter](#), the [IT Masterplan](#) and the 2018-2024 [Majority Agreement of the City of Brussels](#). For the drafting of actions, the City of Brussels conducted a mapping of existing initiatives at the local level and looked for synergies with the regional and federal actions.

For the validation and feedback from stakeholders, a set of practical actions were implemented:

- **Brainstorm sessions:** two sessions were led by the City of Brussels Team and aimed at discussing the scope of the policy and definition of principles with internal stakeholders from the city administration and key regional actors.
- **Principles working sessions:** two sessions were organised to share the draft principles and to validate them with internal stakeholders from the city administration and a few regional actors.
- **Actions working sessions:** similarly to the principles working sessions, 2 sessions were held to discuss actions related to each principle.
- **Follow-up meetings on the governance of the policy:** these internal meetings were held to agree upon responsibilities of each stakeholder that will be part of the governance body of the policy, reformulate the principles and complete the actions listed in the policy.

As a result of this process, a first version was compiled and is currently being submitted for political approval.

Addressing the digital divide in the City of Brussels

As a complement to the policy document, the City of Brussels is carrying out an assessment of the local digital divide on its territory, conducted by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). This process entails analysing existing databases, interviewing field actors and experts in order to map the gaps and identify who is the most affected by the digital divide in the City. This study will provide key insights and a list of priority actions as output of the analysis. These will be implemented in the policy document.

Digital Rights Policy Document

The City of Brussels Digital Rights Policy aims at clearly communicating the City's digital rights 2030 vision and commitments to uphold human rights. A communication campaign on the policy will also inform all residents and digital rights actors (e.g. digital inclusion organisations, social workers, etc.) about the existing and future efforts to promote and protect digital rights in the City's territory.

The City of Brussels principles are divided into five subsections: (1) Digital inclusion, solidarity, equality and equity, (2) Transparency, accountability and freedom of choice, (3) Participation in the digital public space,

(4) Privacy, data protection, safety and security, and (5) Sustainability. At the moment of this publication, the City of Brussels Digital Rights Policy is being submitted to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen for political approval of the document and authorization to run consultations.

The final version of the policy document is planned to be launched during the last quarter of 2023. Next steps on the consultation and political approval process include:

- **First approval by the Board of Mayor and Aldermen:** approval to do a citizen consultation through interviews of field actors and roundtables with civil society organisations and resident groups (elderly people, youth, people with disabilities, among others) on the general theme of the digital divide.
- **Translation of the policy into French and Dutch:** to share it with local actors and to continue the political approval process.
- **Political approval to start consultations:** approval by the Board of Mayor and Aldermen to share a confidential draft version with civil society organisations to ask for their feedback and to include it in the final version before the final political approval
- **Consultations:** continue interviews with experts and roundtables with civil society organisations and residents to seek feedback about the draft version of the policy including a session with the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights network.
- **Final version of the policy:** including feedback from consultations and interviews along with the recommendations of the VUB and laid out by graphic designers.
- **Political finalisation steps:** submitting the last version of the document to: (1) the Steering Committee of the city administration; (2) an "Inter-cabinet meeting" gathering all political cabinets of the city; (3) the Board of Mayor and Aldermen; (4) the City council.

Through existing and planned initiatives in areas such as digital inclusion, accessibility, procurement, among others, the City of Brussels will use all reasonable endeavours to meet the commitments listed in this document and to implement the associated actions by 2030, unless unforeseeable circumstances prevent it. Actions identified in the City's policy document are complementary to the [Regional Digital Appropriation Plan 2021-2024](#)

In terms of governance of the policy, the commitments and the action plan will be reviewed yearly by organising meetings with stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the plan. This action plan will be a living document and updated gradually based on political priorities and new initiatives.

Lessons learned from the pilot

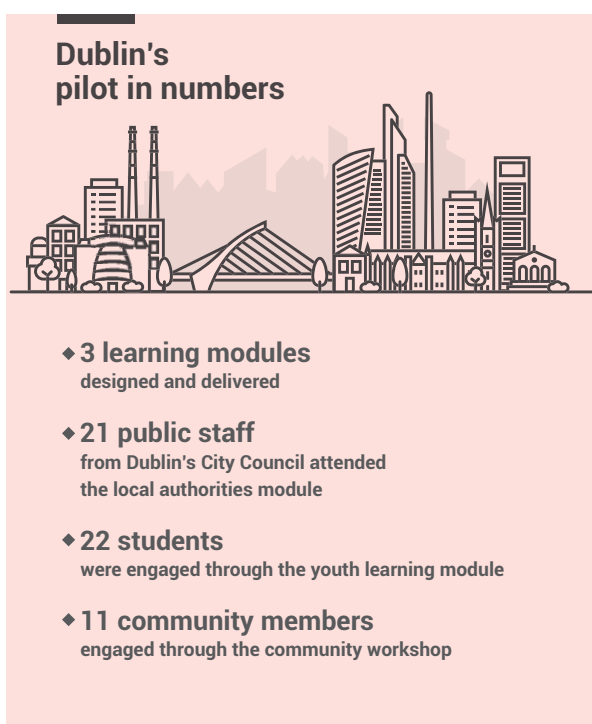
The City of Brussels was the first pilot city to work on setting up a Foundation with local core values and commitments to digital human rights and affirming them at the political level. The City of Brussels Digital Rights Policy also included actions to strengthen Structures mentioned in the Guide, for instance, the city has planned actions to strengthen the following mechanisms: Mechanism 3 "Mainstream human rights and digitalisation in all policy areas and processes of the city administration", Mechanism 6 "Organise and promote participation of people in the decision-making process of the city", Mechanism 11 "Build a repository of human rights impact assessments for new projects" and Mechanism 12 "Apply a human rights lens to procurement and funding of digital solutions".

This pilot was also insightful to understand how to engage with local stakeholders and communities affected by the digital divide and how to connect local values with existing international frameworks. Another key learning from this pilot was the need to host meaningful engagements with internal stakeholders working across different topics of the digital human rights agenda in the City, and having their views and initiatives reflected in the early drafts of the document. This contributes to strengthening a whole-of-government approach and the development of commitments based on existing needs and capacities.

To assess the digital divide and promote digital inclusion, it is important to have a fundamental awareness and understanding of the digital divide and how it affects specific community groups. It is extremely relevant that the City of Brussels has initiated the collection of information through a series of roundtables to consult with residents about connectivity, digital skills and literacy, so that the input and feedback from residents can complement the contributions of experts and public employees in order for the policy document to properly represent their views and needs.

3.2 Dublin:

Increasing awareness among local authorities, youth and residents on the ethical and privacy implications of technologies in the public realm



Dublin is the capital of the Republic of Ireland with a population of 1,458,154,544,107 inhabitants including 592,713 inhabitants in Dublin City Council's Administrative Area. Through the [Smart Dublin](#) program, Dublin City Council is addressing local challenges by introducing new and emerging technologies. Smart Dublin is an initiative of the four Dublin Local Authorities ([Dublin City Council](#), [Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council](#), [Fingal County Council](#) and [South Dublin County Council](#)) that uses new technologies to improve services and enhance quality of life in Dublin. On behalf of the four Dublin Local Authorities, Smart Dublin endorsed the principles of the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights to promote and uphold Dublin's residents human rights in digital contexts.

Over the past few years, Dublin has implemented initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive digital governance in the city including [Wifi4EU](#) to promote free access to the internet in public spaces, the "Ethics and the Smart City" research partnership with Maynooth University to explore ethical issues relating to the wider Smart Dublin Regional programme and recently the [Academy of the Near Future](#), a collaboration between [CONNECT Research Centre](#), Dublin City Council and the Smart Docklands district testbed, and aims to bring a broader range of people (particularly local authority staff and schools) into the conversation about new technologies through interactive workshops, hands-on activities and online resources.

Dublin City Council is delivering a range of cutting-edge technology projects that range from drones to 5G, to digital twins and connected lifebuoys and works across research, industry, public sector and community groups to address city challenges through the adoption of new and emerging technologies. As the city drives forward digital transformation, it is becoming more necessary to build digital solutions that are trustworthy, open and transparent. In this endeavour, educating and upskilling public sector entities that design them and residents the city serves is crucial.

Dublin City Council's project aimed to prototype and develop a foundational educational module on digital rights, to promote the principles of ethics and privacy with regards to new and emerging technologies. Dublin is addressing this challenge through the development of three learning modules on digital rights for local authorities, youth and residents. Keeping ethics, openness and transparency at the centre of digital transformation; Dublin believes that these attributes are key to the success of new digital solutions and essential drivers to build trust with communities.

Design phase of the pilot

The city identified the challenge of upskilling public sector employees, students, and communities. It was proposed to address these challenges through a 'capacity building' foundation module on digital rights, delivered through their established Smart City education programme [Academy of the Near Future](#) (ANF) toward promoting the high level principles of ethics and privacy in the backdrop of new and emerging technologies.

In close collaboration with Dublin City Council's Smart City Team and Smart Docklands, the Design Phase of the pilot started by hosting a workshop in mid July to gather insights on the challenge and analyse opportunities and assumptions behind the problem. This workshop included participants from Dublin City Council, CONNECT Research Centre and Smart Docklands. It aimed to define a roadmap to co-design a scenario-based learning module, delivered in a hybrid format, using real life city case studies in an engaging way.

During the session, workshop participants identified a series of barriers to address the challenge, including: lack of awareness regarding emerging technologies, making the learning module relevant given the pace of technological evolution, promoting collaboration with institutions and experts on complex digital technologies and education; and creating awareness focusing on digital rights among residents and community groups.

As a result of the workshops and internal discussions with the team, four key deliverables were identified:

1. Scoping the Digital Rights Context in Dublin
2. Developing a Learning Module Prototype
3. Developing Learning Materials about Digital Rights
4. Promoting Engagement and tailoring for target audiences

The aim of the pilot phase was to define learning modules prototypes, delineating the scope and structure such as modalities of delivery, timelines, audiences and evaluation parameters. In a later stage, these modules will be scaled up, tailored and disseminated across targeted groups and various stakeholders. Dublin's commitment to these prototypes was outstanding, and enabled to work on a "train the trainer" methodology, to promote sustainability of the modules.

Learning Modules design

In order to deliver the learning modules, team members from UN-Habitat, the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights and Institute of Ethics in AI - Technology University of Munich (TUM) participated in a technical mission to Dublin in March 2023. The aim of the mission was to implement the learning module on digital rights for local authorities in Dublin City Council, participate in Dublin's "Design Your Future City" week to implement the workshop for transition year students on data privacy and ethics and host the community workshop in the Docklands area. This mission was also a great moment to explore synergies between the Guide and the Irish Public Sector Duty and establishing commitment on new future collaborations.

During the design phase, the Academy of the Near Future and Dublin City Council created [a video exploring ethics in smart cities](#) that was particularly useful for some of the sessions. The video sparked discussions on how the use of data and new technologies in cities raise several ethical risks such as privacy threats, surveillance and data oversight when using AI systems.

1. Learning Module for Local authorities implementation

The "Digital Rights Workshop: Ethics and Data Privacy Local Authority Learning Module" was piloted at the end of March. The aim of the session was to increase capacities to make better decisions regarding technology solutions from the outset of a digital project and promote conscious choices on the impact of technologies in the public realm. This session was designed by Smart Dublin's Team with the technical support and moderation by Simon Chignard from the Technical Advisory Group. After an introduction to digital human rights, workshop activities included understanding unconscious bias, assessing intended and unintended consequences of technology using a delivery robots case study and policy implications for regulating (or not) the use of such technologies in public spaces. Participants also had the chance to collaborate with colleagues across different departments, share ideas and discuss how this topic relates to their daily work.

For the scoping and prototyping of this learning module, the Technical Advisory Group of the project conducted desk research and interviews with the cities of New York, Amsterdam and Lyon and conducted a benchmarking exercise to understand main narratives behind each experience, as well as audience, content, objectives and expected impact. These results were discussed during a working session with Dublin's team and experts from the Technical Advisory Group in which the scope of the prototype was first drafted.

Overall, the team agreed on delivering a learning module through hands-on experiences, reflective thinking, and helping participants apply new skills into practice in the short term. To guide the module, the team decided to choose a real-life case study from a city that had implemented a technological solution in the public realm that imposed digital rights challenges.

To identify insightful cases that will help in designing the module, members from the CC4DR were invited to bring good and bad case studies from their local context. In this session, we learned about case studies in Toronto, Portland and Barcelona and selected Toronto's use case on delivery robots.

The design of the learning module was done in close collaboration with Smart Dublin's and the project teams. This was extremely important as it allowed us to implement a "train the trainer" approach that could make the module sustainable and replicable. For example, during the in-person session, members of Smart Dublin supported moderation and some of the activities of the workshop.

2. Learning Module for Youth implementation

The youth learning module focused on developing critical thinking skills around ethics and privacy in a smart city, the implications of technologies and how they are impacting youth's daily lives in cities. In order to foster creativity and critical thinking skills, the methodology selected was a walking debate. Three core themes were focused on: surveillance technology in the public realm, privacy, and tech for social good. Open statements were created: covering issues such as the use of Chat-GPT4 in the classroom, social media use, and the metaverse. The goal of the debate was to provide an open and supportive space in which students can voice their opinions and insights. When a question is posed students were invited to move to either side of the room; one side is "Strongly agree" the other side is "Strongly disagree". Students could stand anywhere on the spectrum, and the facilitator invited them to voice their opinion on why they have chosen their position. This format allowed all participants to participate, regardless of their confidence level in public speaking. The format also promoted peer learning and students were encouraged to change their opinion in response to their peers' points.



The debate was very inspiring, and students presented insightful arguments into the discussions around data protection, online experiences, social media and the role of the public sector in protecting human rights online. As a conclusion of the session, students were invited to develop a Zine with recommendations for future generations on how to protect human rights in digital contexts. This use of reflective practice allowed students to consolidate their learning.

The session was co-designed with the Academy of the Near Future and implemented during the Design Your Future City Week (DYFC). Participants were selected with a focus on prioritising female and DEIS (lower socio-economic background schools) participants. 22 students across Ireland were selected; 55% of participants identified as female, 45% identified as male and 50% of workshop participants were from DEIS schools. The team is planning further iterations in upcoming editions of the Design Your Future Week to scale-up the module.

3. Community workshop implementation

The aim of the workshop was to understand public concerns on technologies, trade-offs between privacy and public purpose and how they shape residents' daily lives. The workshop was open to the community, and participants included residents of the Docklands area, researchers and people interested in digital human rights. This session was divided into three main parts: (1) individual perceptions on privacy and digital rights; (2) digital rights in our daily lives, including digital rights in public spaces; (3) values, truths and trade-offs in digital rights, which explored participant's perceptions on justifiable benefits for sharing your personal data and trust in organisations.

In terms of learnings from this session, many of the participants were already working in topics related to digital rights or had an interest in the agenda, so for future iterations the team will scope a series of additional discussions to engage with them through the workshop. For audiences that are not completely familiar with the topic, the team is exploring implementing this community workshop in other community centers and libraries that work with specific community groups such as elderly populations.

This workshop was designed in partnership with the Technology University of Munich (TUM) and Smart Docklands and was hosted in a Community Center in the Docklands neighbourhood in Dublin.

Lessons learned from the pilot

Dublin's pilot aimed at working on strengthening their structures by focusing on Mechanism 5 of the Guide: "Build skills and organise training in human rights and digital transformation". As established in the Guide, upholding human rights principles through training for municipal staff can raise awareness and commitments toward human rights in digital projects and services. This pilot is also contributing to Mechanisms 6 "Organise and promote participation of people in the decision-making process of the City" and 12 "Apply a human rights lens to procurement and funding of digital solutions".

During the Pilot Phase, we conducted research on existing digital rights frameworks and strategies from cities globally. In this regard, Dublin's team was interested in understanding how other cities are implementing digital rights principles, what are the best strategies, who is in charge of enforcing and monitoring these frameworks and which were the main outcomes and learnings. The local team also mapped the digital rights context in the city focusing on existing legal and regulatory frameworks and digitalisation strategies within the City Council and in Ireland (eg.: Digital Ireland Framework, data protection frameworks such as GDPR, etc.).

In this mapping exercise, Dublin's team highlighted the [Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty](#), a mandate that is set out in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act from 2014. The Dublin City Council's Equality Office in collaboration with other departments has developed a framework and [Strategy and Action Plan](#) that details the values and sets out our high level goals, objectives and actions, such as: dignity and respect ; diversity and accessibility; inclusion and social justice; participation and engagement; choice and autonomy. These were included in the local authorities workshop discussions, and are core values aligned with the Guide that can ensure long-term sustainability.



3.3 Sofia:

Developing a roadmap to mainstream digital human rights in existing policies and strategies

Sofia's pilot in numbers



- ◆ **1 digital rights self-assessment tool**
designed and tested
- ◆ **Draft political declaration**
on digital human rights for Sofia
- ◆ **1 Roundtable**
to discuss the draft document
- ◆ **27 stakeholders**
participated in the Roundtable
- ◆ **10 organisations**
engaged through the consultation

Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria and the 14th largest capital in Europe with a population of 1,549,465 million inhabitants. The city is rapidly becoming an innovative, tech, green and entrepreneurial hub. Digital and sustainable transformation is at the core of Sofia's development. The protection and encouragement of human rights in the digital environment is an indispensable part of this process, and the City of Sofia has committed to putting citizen participation, confidentiality, security and protection of personal data, as well as data transparency, accountability and non-discrimination in the center of all processes to promote democratic participation and inclusion for all.

In 2020, in line with its long-term commitment to digital transformation and sustainability, Sofia Municipality established the 'Digitalisation, Innovation and Economic Development' department headed by a Deputy Mayor.

Innovative Sofia aims to support the development of Sofia as an intelligent, digital, innovative and tech city, to encourage digital rights development and protection, and to contribute to and facilitate the increasing quality of life for all citizens – in Sofia, Bulgaria, and abroad.

Innovative Sofia, alongside EU experts and over 100 local stakeholders, developed the [Digital Transformation Strategy for Sofia](#) (DTSS) and the Action Plan for its Implementation under the Digital Cities Challenge (DCC) project of the European Commission, to encourage Sofia's innovative, digital and sustainable transformation and the adoption of new human-centred digital services and smart solutions.

Design Phase

During the session and based on a preliminary analysis of the challenge led by Innovative Sofia, workshop participants identified a series of barriers to address the challenge, including lack of general awareness of digital rights and digital transformation; encouraging public participation; the existing digital divide and inequalities in Sofia; and the lack of a digital rights framework and an actionable roadmap with activities to address challenges such as the digital divide, public participation, access to information on trusted technologies and awareness raising.

As a result of the workshops and internal discussions with the team, four key deliverables were identified:

1. Self-Assessment tool and analysis
2. Action Plan and recommendations based on the assessment
3. Strategic document/ political declaration on digital rights
4. Tools and capacity building

Self-Assessment implementation

As part of the pilot phase, a self-assessment tool was designed and implemented to evaluate the maturity of the digital rights agenda in Sofia and drafting a set of recommendations to strengthen and sustain these actions. The self-assessment was developed to be a simple and practical tool to support the implementation of the Guide and is meant to provide a quick scan of all of the areas within the municipality connected with digital human rights in order to assess gaps and provide recommendations on how to address them. Sofia was the first city to test the assessment and provided insights to improve the prototype. The project presented a summary of the gaps identified along with recommended options for building an action plan. The aim was to provide a comprehensive menu of possible avenues of action for Sofia.

Prioritised actions from the self-assessment tool

Based on the self-assessment recommendations, Innovative Sofia team discussed and prioritised a series of actions to be implemented in the short and medium term. These recommendations were presented to Sofia's local ecosystem in a Roundtable held at the end of April. The aim of the session was to review and validate the results and recommendations from the self-assessment tool and co-design an actionable roadmap document based on their insights. This document was also open for feedback and the team is currently addressing comments to include the recommendations in the digital rights political declaration for Sofia.

The prioritised actions for building a roadmap for strengthening digital human rights in Sofia include:

Build a Digital Rights Foundation for Sofia: the pilot project drafted a proposal of Digital Rights Principles especially drafted for the City of Sofia, which could be used as a starting point for such a process, which would have as an outcome the affirmation of the core values and principles at the highest political level (ie: signature by the Mayor or Deputy Mayor):

- establish the core values of the city and affirm them at the political level
- identify all thematic areas in which the city has taken action or implemented initiatives
- ensure the declaration is supported at the highest political level
- set up a series of guidelines based on existing

technological infrastructure and new services and technological solutions prioritised in Sofia's DTSS (eg.: interoperability guidelines)

- replicate these efforts in Bulgarian cities- reach out to the assembly of municipalities and sharing the outcomes of this process

Strengthen Structures to develop a whole-of-government approach: the following mechanisms can be used by Sofia to embed digital human rights in the structure of the city administration:

- Provide regular training (online and offline) on digital human rights and related topics for all city employees in Sofia. If not possible, we recommend prioritising training for: (i) the dedicated team; (ii) ICT professionals and employees working with digital projects, (iii) digital human rights ambassadors across departments (1 person per department)
- Develop an awareness campaign or specific training on human rights and technology for residents, to empower them to safeguard their rights in the digital world.
- Once the political declaration has been approved, update existing policy documents to embed digital human rights into them.
- Develop a clear and concise policy framework for public engagement, including objectives, scope, and criteria for engaging with residents:
- offer a variety of engagement channels, such as online platforms, in-person events, and community meetings, to ensure that a broad range of residents can participate.
- encourage and facilitate collaboration and co-creation between city officials and residents, focusing on involving underrepresented and marginalised groups.
- ensure that participatory tools and processes are accessible and inclusive, considering the diverse needs of the city's residents.
- implement an advisory council with recognized experts and residents to assess accessibility and usability of digital solutions
- Improve the human rights and digital technology office or an Ombud institution to support residents with digital rights issues.

- Enhance partnerships with national and international actors to advance digital human rights protection. The city is an active member of the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, and should leverage this network to increase cooperation with non-governmental stakeholders, international organisations and other cities to address digital human rights challenges.
- In the long term, develop a comprehensive inventory or register of all the digital technologies and services used by the city, including information on their purpose, provider, and department across all departments

Digital Rights Declaration for Sofia

At the beginning of the pilot phase, the project and Innovative Sofia teams analysed the following three options to set principles and commitments on digital human rights:

- 1. Drafting a Digital Rights Strategy**, including a series of actions to implement commitments of the city towards digital rights. The political approval steps of this strategic document was similar to the DTSS approval process: (1) recommendations by the Mayor or Deputy Mayor; (2) internal consultations in Sofia's Municipality (including Legal Department, Administrative Department and Data Protection Officer); (3) approval from internal stakeholders; (4) Mayor's approval; (5) submission to the City Council; and (6) voting the proposal by Sofia's City Council.
- 2. Updating the current Digital Transformation Strategy of Sofia**, adding digital rights elements explicitly. This process also needed the feedback and recommendations by the Deputy Mayor for Digitalization, internal feedback from stakeholders and Sofia's Municipal Council approval.
- 3. Establishing a political declaration on digital rights**, based on the recommendations of the assessment, feedback from the local ecosystem, existing policies in Sofia and the Guide developed by the project team.

Due to the bureaucratic and political steps to approve a Strategic Document, this political declaration was considered to be more feasible in the short-term, also given the interim parliamentary elections in April 2023 and Municipal elections in September 2023 and possible administrative delays in the approval process. This political declaration will need ratification by the municipal council and is planned to be sent for approval by mid 2023.

The draft version of the Digital Rights Principles for Sofia was presented to the local ecosystem during the Pilot Roundtable. They are based on the principles of the [Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, UN-Habitat's People-Centred Smart Cities pillars](#) and existing policies of the Municipality like the [Digital Transformation Strategy for the City of Sofia](#). Principles include: (1) Autonomy, freedom and self-determination; (2) Digital literacy, equity and inclusion; (3) Transparency and accountability; (4) Public participation and engagement; (5) Privacy, security and protection; and (6) Open and ethical public goods and services.

Lessons learned from the pilot

This pilot was particularly insightful on how to develop core values based on a bottom-up and needs based approach. In this regard, the self-assessment tool implementation helped identify existing gaps and find ways to address them through an Action Plan to protect and promote human rights online and offline that is rooted on the needs, capacities and existing policies of the Municipality.

Sofia's pilot was critical to learn how to set up a Foundation with commitments to human rights in the digital context of a city. Many recommendations and commitments from this pilot will also strengthen existing structures within the City of Sofia. For instance, this pilot will also tap into Mechanism 1 of the Guide "Formalise the city's commitments to human rights" and through the design and implementation of the self-assessment tool, Sofia also worked on Mechanism 13 of the Guide "Establish an annual reporting mechanism on human rights related to digital technologies".

As the Deputy Mayor for digitalization, innovation and economic development, Mr. Kerezov, pointed out during the Roundtable, this political declaration will set the principles and actions to inform residents on the human rights they need to promote and protect in online contexts, and will be complementary to the DTSS, which is the main roadmap for the digital transformation in Sofia. Being this declaration the first of its kind in Sofia and in Bulgaria, it will give an opportunity to develop initiatives and introduce new policies and regulations at the national level.



3.4

Tirana:

Strengthening public sector capacities to promote and protect human rights online

Tirana's pilot in numbers



- ◆ **102 public staff assessed**
- ◆ **1 capacity building programme designed and delivered**
- ◆ **47 public sector officials attended the sessions**
- ◆ **23 met the certification criteria:**
 - 13 participants received a Certificate of Completion
 - 10 participants Certificates of Attendance

Tirana is the largest city and the capital of Albania, with a population of 912,190 inhabitants. The city envisions to become a digital start-up hub due to a young, multilingual population that is looking for self-employment and low capital requirements to set-up businesses. To serve this vision, Tirana Municipality has been working to enhance public service delivery through technology and innovation by developing community-based solutions, referring to apps and platforms designed to help citizens and the community in their daily life in terms of local digital public services. Among these initiatives, we can mention: the Bibliotech initiative, that aims to transform public libraries into technological centres to increase citizens' digital literacy; Friendly Wi-Fi Albania, a national security certification standard for public WiFi that allows the access of filtered non-abusive content for citizens of Tirana public sport; Digital Tirana, a public-private partnership to increase support to startups, entrepreneurs, ecosystem actors as well as provide comprehensive information on digital nomads.

Tirana's municipality also developed internal-based innovations, which are platforms and systems that were created by the ICT Department. These initiatives aim to increase the Municipality's staff performance and municipal processes through systems for asset management, financial management, performance evaluation, access control, document sharing and e-learning. Over the past 7 years, the Municipality has increased their investments in digital infrastructure and in recent years the digitalization of approximately 170 public services.

However, a lot of challenges and barriers remain to provide a fair and complete digitalisation of the city. Albanian citizens are less tech-savvy and not sufficiently aware of data privacy rules and of e-governance services' use. The lack of trust between citizens and public administration was also coupled, at the time of the open call, with the need to build transparency and accountability of public sector officials and to develop strategies to protect human rights in this rapid digitalization process. Indeed, the City of Tirana is facing challenges related to the lack of awareness on digital rights among its staff, and the municipality also wanted to identify priorities and actions to make human digital rights a reality.

Considering these aspects, the aim of Tirana's pilot was to deliver training of civil servants to raise their capacities in how to understand and work with digital human rights and drafting a digital rights agenda for the city. This pilot is aligned with the [Guide for Mainstreaming Human Rights in the Digital Transformation of Cities](#) developed as part of the project. Specifically, Tirana aimed to work on strengthening their structures through building skills and organising training in digital human rights and digital transformation.



Design Phase of the Pilot

In close collaboration with Tirana's General Directorate of Information Technology, Innovation and Data, the Design Phase of the pilot started by hosting a workshop to gather insights on the challenge and analyse opportunities and assumptions behind the problem. This workshop included participants from the Municipality of Tirana, the research agency ARRA, the local organisation SciDev, UNOPS, the UN Office of the Resident Coordinator in Albania and partners of the project.

The workshop identified the following barriers to address the challenge: incomplete legal frameworks to protect human rights online; inadequate digital skills; lack of awareness on digital human rights and lack of collaboration across the ecosystem. Participants also discussed existing needs in Tirana that could be connected to the pilot with, including: implementing a digital skills assessment; developing a capacity building program for public officials; planning awareness campaigns; improving community engagement.

The last exercise of the workshop implied identifying immediate, medium term and long-term priorities to develop an actionable roadmap for the pilot phase. Based on the Guide and on internal needs from the Municipality, the team prioritised the piloting of a capacity building program on digital human rights, aiming to develop public sector capacities.

Capacities and skills assessment of public local officials

First, a survey was developed to public sector officials from Tirana Municipality to understand their knowledge on the topic of digital rights and the areas and methods they preferred for a future training program. 102 answers were provided by public officials working for a wide range of different Departments' municipalities.

The survey showed that raising awareness and building capacities on digital human rights was necessary. Indeed, a majority of the respondents were involved in the development or implementation of digital solutions for the city. However, their knowledge on digital human rights was mostly general or basic and mostly none of the survey respondents had training on data protection or on the importance of ensuring the protection of human rights in the digital sphere.

The survey also showed that public officials are mainly concerned about cyber-attacks and cybercrime such as theft or abuse of personal data, ransomware (malicious software) or phishing. They highlight the importance of the safety and well-being of children. They also pointed to the use of personal data and information by companies or public administrations and the lack of privacy due to increased surveillance efforts. Finally, they were concerned about the difficulty some people have in accessing the online world (e.g. persons with disabilities, elderly people, those living in areas with little or no internet access).

Participants were also asked to rate how necessary they thought it was to receive training in areas such as: (1) addressing the ethical issues of technology; (2) encouraging the protection of human rights in technology; (3) measures to address bias and discrimination against some groups in the use of technology; (4) increasing digital inclusion and accessibility; (5) methods for ensuring that people have access and control of the data collected about them; (6) privacy, safety and security regarding data and technology use; and (7) how to promote community participation and public engagement in technological decisions.

The results of this previous question showed that most respondents rated statements as "very necessary". Respondents were particularly concerned by privacy, safety and security and the need to receive training on methods to ensure that people have access to and control over data collected about them. As for the preferred way of getting this training, in-person workshops was the preferred answer, followed by videos, virtual workshops, and text format.

Lastly, we conducted interviews with five General directors from the Municipality. All directors agreed on the need to raise awareness about digital rights among public officials as well as the general public. Among the common proposals for the workshops, the directors highlighted the necessity to identify key people from each department for initial training, and who will be in charge adapting it to the specific requirements of their department. They mentioned that hybrid format workshops, combined with supporting materials, and mid to long-term planning were necessary for successful capacity building.



Capacity building program for public officials

Tirana's Capacity Building Programme on Digital Rights was piloted during January and March 2023. The objective of the program was to increase the knowledge of the different areas of digital human rights among public officials at the Municipality of Tirana. It aims to not only introduce these topics in a theoretical manner, but also to connect it with the specific challenges that different departments of the municipality face. For the delivery of specific modules of the program, and given the relevance that public staff gave to data governance topics, we partnered with MyData and the Open Data Charter.

The audience of this pilot program were public officials of the Municipality of Tirana who participated in the survey scoping the needs for digital rights training as well as general directors who were interviewed on the subject of the program. The program covered topics that were highly requested by public officials that responded to the survey. The sessions were delivered online, and covered one introductory session and three deep dive modules, namely:

- **Introductory Module: Introduction to digital human rights.** This session aimed to introduce digital human rights and what cities can do to promote and protect them.
- **Deep Dive Module 1: Data control, safety, security and protection.** Participants learned what governments can do to protect the human right to privacy. Topics on this module covered data protection and security practices and considerations on how to protect people's personal data.
- **Deep Dive Module 2: Digital Inclusion, equality and equity.** This session aimed to showcase how inclusive digital governance can help address inequalities and empower people from marginalised groups that are often underrepresented in technological development.
- **Deep Dive Module 3: Transparency and Accountability.** This session explored how to ensure transparency and accountability in government decisions regarding technology projects and data practices.

Overall, 47 public sector officials, working across more than 20 departments of the Municipality, attended the workshops: 27 participants in the Introductory module; 23 participants in Deep Dive Module 1 (data protection); 17 participants in Deep Dive Module 2 (digital inclusion) and 22 participants in Deep Dive Module 3 (transparency and accountability). As a result, 23 participants complied with the certification criteria and two types of certificates were issued: 13 participants received a Certificate of Completion (attended at least 3 modules) and 10 participants Certificates of Attendance (attended 2 modules).

Lessons learned from the pilot

The capacity building program demonstrated the need to train public sector officials in human rights and digital transformation to create awareness on the topic and demonstrate how digital human rights themes interact with the public sector duties and projects. During the sessions, we hosted moments of reflection to understand challenges and opportunities for upholding human rights in digital services, and which knowledge gaps needed to be addressed to protect and promote digital rights.

Tirana's pilot focused on strengthening Mechanism 5 of the Guide: "Build skills and organise training in human rights and digital transformation".

In terms of lessons learned from this pilot implementation, one of the main learnings is the need to deliver this session with support in local language to build a safe space for discussions and knowledge sharing. Given that each session had a space for discussions, the Team had learned that connecting the themes with the current work and duties of the public officials was important; further iterations of this capacity building program should include a final assignment to implement the learnings in a pragmatic way in a project of the Municipality. Finally, this program could be scaled up by implementing a hybrid format and a "train the trainer" module for specific digital rights champions (eg.: Innovation Directorate) to deliver the program.

The pilot project in Tirana demonstrated the need to expand local capacities to lead human rights based digital transformation and to increase capabilities of public servants to manage inclusive and responsible use of technologies. This capacity building program is a first step towards co-defining a digital human rights agenda in Tirana by adopting a "whole-of-a-government" approach to human rights and digital technologies, promoting residents participation and partnerships with the existing local ecosystem.



04

Tools to mainstream human rights in local digital transformation strategies





The project resulted in a series of guidelines and tools supporting local governments to assess, address and implement digital human rights related policy instruments and initiatives. These tools are also aimed at strengthening the digital rights governance model with evidence-based experiences from cities tackling their local challenges related to the governance of digital technologies.

4.1 Guide on Mainstreaming Digital Human Rights

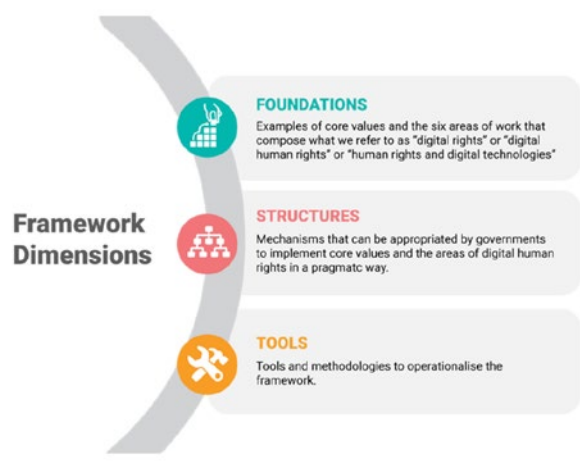
From using open data and delivering digital services, to implementing surveillance policies and adopting Artificial Intelligence solutions, local governments have an important role to play in the governance of smart cities, towards a people-centred digital transformation. Starting from such challenges and opportunities, the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, UN-Habitat, Eurocities and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) developed the [Guide to Mainstream Human Rights in the Digital Transformation of Cities](#) - officially launched during the Smart City Expo World Congress Barcelona 2022.

The Guide sets the Foundations, Structures and Tools that city governments can put in place in their digitalisation strategies and initiatives to ensure human rights are protected and promoted at all times, inspired by the "Human Rights Cities in the EU: a framework for reinforcing rights locally", by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) [2].

More importantly, for a concept often considered abstract, the Guide defines 'digital human rights', considering opportunities and implications to human

rights in the digital era, in six key thematic areas: digital inclusion, equality, equity; freedom, autonomy, control and self-determination; transparency and accountability; public engagement and community participation; privacy, safety, security and protection; public goods and open infrastructure.

For each of the thematic areas, the guide highlights some key areas and identifies tools taken from various use cases and examples. All the tools, methodologies and resources provided by the Guide are supported and integrated by use cases and toolkits, collected from a wide variety of stakeholders: local, regional and national governments from all around the world, international organisations but also civil society, academia and the private sector. This catalogue of best practices offers to local governments, freely accessible and ready-to-use instruments from which local governments could take inspiration in designing and implementing their local models for digital governance.



4.2

Digital rights self-assessment tool

One of the key initial steps when adopting a whole of government human rights-based approach to digital governance is assessing the level of maturity with regards to the topic. We observed the need to develop a tool that would support local governments in assessing their maturity and build a deeper understanding of digital rights challenges, opportunities, and impacts within the municipality digital initiatives.

The draft prototype of the assessment was developed by a group of the Technical Advisory Group, led by Antonio Carvalho E Silva Neto, Duduzile Ndwandwe, Pedro Roseiro and Davi Rossiter. The prototype tool was designed by Martina Bergues (UN-Habitat) with the technical support from the coordination team.

The self-assessment was developed to be a simple and practical tool to support the guide implementation. The tool is meant to provide a quick scan of all of the areas within the municipality connected with digital human rights in order to assess the level of maturity, gaps and strengths.

The tool functions as a maturity benchmark on digital human rights, helping cities measure their progress and plan improvements and apply this guidance based on their context needs, respecting their local capacities. It should be seen as a starting point for a process of continuous improvement, rather than a one-time event.

Once the self-assessment is completed, cities will:

- have a clear view of the maturity levels of the Foundations, Structures and Tools related to each thematic area of the Guide
- receive a series of recommendations that can help them build a roadmap for action
- have a series of KPIs associated to the recommendations to measure progress

Cities can also use this assessment to monitor the results by repeating this assessment yearly and embed feedback throughout their local implementation process.

What's next

This tool was tested in the cities of Sofia, Maceió and Amsterdam, who provided useful feedback for fine-tuning the tool. The project team is exploring ways to publish the self-assessment tool online, in order to make it available to any city who may want to apply it. Additionally, the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights will make it a structural tool for supporting its members in being better equipped to protect and promote digital human rights, by making it a step of new members' endorsement process.

4.3

Learning module on digital human rights for cities

The new and emerging field of human rights-based digital policymaking demands an active investment in capacity building at the local level. For governmental employees this creates a need for more awareness, knowledge and skills on the topic. It is important for them to understand the core concepts of digital rights, how they relate to the digital governance of a city and what this means for their own role or profession within the municipality. As part of the project, one online and one offline learning module was developed on the topic of digital human rights in cities.

In Tirana, a series of online masterclasses/webinars were organised. A first session introduced the concept of digital rights and the six areas that define it. The selection of digital rights subtopics that were covered in subsequent learning modules was based on a survey, in

which officers could provide information on their current knowledge-level on digital rights as well as indicate the subtopics within the field that they are most interested in. By completing 3 or more courses, each participant received a certificate confirming their participation. Topics selected included: open data, transparency and accountability.

In Dublin three in-person modules were developed. First, for public authority staff, a hands-on course was created for public authority staff to apply ethical value analyses, integrated with principles stemming from their local public duty mandate, when adopting new and emerging technologies. A second module focused on the citizens of Dublin, discussing different scenarios on the use of (personal) for the public good. Finally, a module was designed for youth in high schools, opening space for them to debate over statements related to digital rights.





4.4

Citizen Engagement in Urban Data Initiatives: Approaches, Challenges and Recommendations

Under Modality 3 of the project, a group of experts from the Technical Advisory Group conducted research to explore how city governments are including citizens in local data initiatives and governance. This chapter summarises the findings and recommendations from the research co-authored by Simon Chignard, Marina Micheli [3], Manuel Portela and Paul Boettcher.

Engaging citizens [4] in the governance of data at the urban level contributes to promoting a human rights-based approach while adopting emerging digital technologies to address local challenges. It is a way for local governments to embrace some of the core values that compose digital human rights. In particular, it fosters "freedom and autonomy", one of the six key themes of digital human rights (as identified in the previous report Mainstreaming human rights in the digital transformation of cities). In the data domain this could mean that cities put "in place initiatives that allow people to be able to control what happens to the data generated by and about themselves, who gets to see and use it, and for what purposes"[5].

Citizen engagement in urban data governance often implies challenging the idea that individuals only passively produce data to inform platforms or governments, getting little to no benefits from it. Instead, it suggests that citizens are more aware of and able to decide how certain information is collected, managed and used and for which purposes, often for the public interest. There is currently little knowledge about how cities are implementing initiatives for engaging citizens in data governance due to the novelty and complexity of the topic. To address this gap, the current chapter presents the findings of a set of semi-structured interviews with representatives of 11 cities [6]: Bratislava (SK), Dublin (IR), Den Haag (NL), Sofia (BG), Helsinki (FI), Rennes (FR), Barcelona (ES), Zaragoza (ES), Berlin (DE), Hamburg (DE), Ghent (BE). The interviews [7] explored the various ways city governments are including (or trying to) citizens in data initiatives and governance practices. Overall, the interviews have been an occasion for city representatives to reflect on this issue and elaborate an understanding on how to involve citizens in data initiatives, the main challenges and outcomes.

The main outcome of this work is a typology of citizens' roles in data initiatives at the local level. In addition, early findings of the interviews have been validated through an online workshop, which saw the participation of 20 experts, including some of those who participated in the interviews. The conclusions of this chapter provide a set of recommendations to inform policy makers and city representatives on how to continue exploring and implementing citizen engagement initiatives in data governance at the urban level.

A typology of citizens roles in data initiatives

Taking inspiration from other frameworks, such as the classic "ladder of citizen participation" by Sherry Arnstein, the analysis of the interviews led to the identification of 7 roles citizens can play in cities' data initiatives and data governance. We present the roles below, ranking them by frequency in our sample (ie. in how many interviews they appeared among the 11 we conducted). These roles are defined from a particular perspective: the point of view of cities.

Citizens as "recipients of information" - Frequency: All cities. This information can be related to local public services, or its publication aims to enhance transparency and accountability at the local level. In this role, citizens are only seen as passive recipients and no specific action is required or expected from their side. Examples range from Urban Data Platforms to more experimental projects, such as a tool to allow citizens to compare their [waste management data](#) in Rennes or an interactive map for citizens' individual [use of solar panels](#) in Den Haag.

Citizens as "participants in data collection initiatives" such as citizen science approaches and data altruism initiatives - Frequency: 8 cities. Citizens are active data collectors, who generate or share data. Mobility and environmental issues (air or water quality, such as [Dublin' Waterblitz](#) and [Sofia' InnoAir](#) initiatives) are among the most frequent topics addressed by these initiatives. This draws from a citizen science approach, where lay users are invited to collect and gather data as active

participants, often through the use of specific kits for "sensing" the environment (e.g. water testing kits, smart lights for bikes). Data altruism, where citizens are invited to share their personal data to increase understanding of a situation by a local public authority (e.g. mobility data to improve bike users safety in the city), is very rare.

Citizens as "skilled data reusers" such as participants of hackathons or data challenges - Frequency: 5 cities.

Citizens are active data reusers when they participate in defining new ideas and solutions to solve local problems thanks to their understanding and skills in using (open) data. However, it is worth noting that most data reusers are digitally literate and usually not representative of the local population. Examples include [Bratislava Climathon](#), a city-wide hackathon on climate change, and the [Urban Data Challenge](#) in Hamburg, a programme to develop innovative concepts for micro mobility flows in the city.

Citizens as "participants of public consultations" on smart city or data strategies - Frequency: 3 cities.

Citizens might be asked to contribute to the digital/data strategy of a city at different steps of the process: at the beginning (identifying the issues, framing the problem), during (giving insights on residents' perspective) and at the end of the process (providing feedback on the strategic priorities and action plans). As a result, there are at least two modalities of participation: "open participation", where everyone can freely contribute for a shorter period of time (for instance, voting on priorities or providing feedback on solutions and projects, such as the Hamburg Digital Participation System) and "assisted or guided participation", where citizens' juries are constituted and active throughout a longer timeframe, such as the Digital Berlin Municipal Committee made of 70 randomly selected Berliners or the [Rennes Citizen Council on Sustainable Digital](#).

Citizens as "participants of data literacy initiatives" - Frequency: 3 cities.

Data literacy initiatives are usually linked to other initiatives, such as promotion of open data portals or awareness raising of broader societal issues (on privacy or freedom of expression). Cities can deploy one-off initiatives (for instance, an open data day) or build long-term approaches (such as a dedicated training programme, such as [Dublin's education programme](#) for young people and local authority staff). We identified different objectives among data literacy initiatives, from providing basic knowledge about data collection to transferring practical and technical knowledge on how to use and transform (open) data, such as an initiative in Barcelona to promote open data in schools.

Citizens as "data controllers" of data about them held by local public authorities - Frequency: 3 cities.

Cities routinely collect and manage inhabitants' personal data (for instance, on household characteristics) to deliver public services. Cities might introduce new systems to enable citizens to actively control, access to, and decide to what extent share their personal data - for instance, by managing consent at a granular level. This approach, championed by the MyData movement, has been implemented within the experimental project [DECODE](#) in Barcelona or in [Helsinki](#).

Citizens as "producers of digital footprints" - Frequency: 3 cities.

Cities might get access to citizens-generated data held by private companies and use it for planning better public service delivery. In this final type, citizens are only passive data producers whose data is accessed and managed by other entities. Yet, through this approach, citizens' data is (potentially) used to produce benefits for the general public, beyond the company who collected it. For instance, Barcelona included ad hoc clauses in tender contracts to access data collected by private companies, such as a mobile phone operator.



The four main types of challenges and obstacles that we identified through the interviews and the perspectives of city representatives are the following:

1. Difficulties in reaching engaged citizens: Overall, there are biases in citizens' participation in favour of the more privileged groups in society. Lack of digital skills leads to marginalised groups being left out from these initiatives, while a widespread lack of data literacy (including knowledge on the importance of data in today's economy and society) hinders citizens' involvement more broadly. Furthermore, people might find the topic of an initiative not relevant and lack motivation to participate, even if they possess the necessary skills. An additional issue is low trust towards public administrations, both for the ability to handle data safely and effectively and for capacity to achieve promised results and impact.

2. Limited capacity of the public sector. Local administrations often lack human and financial resources, infrastructures and organisational capacity to put in place ambitious initiatives for the collection and governance of data that involve citizens. Internal structures might not enable data innovation, as there are difficulties in collaboration between departments and limited capacity to react effectively to citizens' inputs and manage expectations. In addition, cities perceive they cannot compete with the resources Big Tech and large private companies can invest in data innovation. The lack of clear and overarching strategies for data management at the city level is an additional challenge, which might

lead to squandered efforts, collecting data without providing concrete benefits for citizens.

3. Lack of guidance on data governance practices:

Data governance is a relatively "new" topic at the city level. There is still much experience to be gained both in general and in the participatory aspect. More legal guidance is needed as cities often perceive there are legal barriers. Currently we see a greater focus from administrators on privacy risks than on the opportunities to use data for the public interest. Some also perceived a lack of debate at the political level on the importance of data for the common good. Cities lack examples of good practices in this field, for instance, on how data intermediaries might work at the urban level.

4. Data quality issues: According to several participants in the study, data collected by citizens presents additional challenges for being used by public administrations to inform decision-making and public service delivery due to its low reliability. Its use is at times disregarded by city representatives with the motivation that it has no statistical validity. Data collected from civic projects is considered unreliable for public policy use, especially if not integrated with administrative authoritative data. A related challenge regards citizens' data collected by private companies and obtained by cities through ad hoc data sharing agreements (business-to-government data sharing). For instance, the information provided in such data is often considered unsuitable for publication in urban data platforms as it might lead to controversies.



Recommendations for local governments

After analysing the results from the interviews and the workshop, we share the following recommendations for local administrations and policy makers. These non-exhaustive recommendations are general guidelines to foster citizens' engagement with urban data.

1. Start from small: Several interviewed cities have performed pilots for testing ideas and engaging citizens. These pilots helped to incorporate lessons and increase trust at a slow pace while reducing the risk during its implementation. Similar to adopting open data strategies, starting from specific sectors with controlled environments allows the administration to acquire experience to scale it for more ambitious programmes.

2. Consider the effects and value of data collection and use: any data initiative should have a clear definition of the purpose and added value of the collection process for citizens. Data use can have an enormous potential when different roles are involved; for example, in a positive aspect, the solely gathering activity might help as an excuse for citizens to engage within a community of practice and a common interest. However, on a negative aspect, data collection can cause marginalisation or criminalisation of citizens' behaviours or group belonging, causing harm to specific communities. These effects should be considered and can be evaluated.

3. Set a clear and relevant objective for the initiative: Citizens and staff have their motivation for participating in a particular activity. Motivation might be related to obtaining an individual or collective benefit, solving specific needs or situations, or contributing to a common cause. These motivations should be cleared out to have an effective engagement. For example, local administrations should look for tangible outcomes to improve public services affecting citizens' day-to-day lives (e.g. mobility, green policies). For this purpose, it is advisable to avoid framing the initiatives around data governance, since data is perceived as an abstract topic and is not relevant for lay citizens. It is important, instead, to invest time in understanding citizens' demands and potential motivations to define a relevant topic during the planning process.

4. Holistic approach in engaging in data initiatives:

Individuals and communities can play different roles in data initiatives. We identified seven different types above. Investing in building relationships with community members might help to understand what roles they are willing to take and which involvement they seek to define the value of data. Furthermore, as there is a continuation from traditional forms of public participation to these data projects, establishing initiatives in collaboration with active civic groups could be a good strategy to ensure effectiveness.

5. Increase data awareness: To increase the involvement of the public, data literacy programmes should be put in place at the city level. In addition, different means of communication should be used to explain why data governance is important, how everyone can benefit from data use, and what roles citizens can adopt in data initiatives.

6. Improve internal structures and train staff:

Administrative staff requires training and practical guidance on accessing, protecting and managing different kinds of data, as well as in understanding the responsibilities and consequences of processing it. New professional roles could be included in the administration, such as data scientists, data stewards and "data translators, who have an understanding for citizens' problems and for the challenges of the administration, and also a creative mind on how to answer problems with data" (quote from an interview). In addition, it is recommended to explore data governance models to find those that fit the organisation.

7. Define a strategic involvement: Citizens participating in public initiatives expect short-term and long-term outcomes that require continuous involvement and communication by different stakeholders. Usually, there are stakeholders with experience in the topic of interest open to collaborate and help in the engagement of citizens and data governance practices. Engaging with stakeholders and communities of practice from current ecosystems will enhance residents' trust in the process.

05

The road ahead





Through the work of the four pilot cities, it has become clear that the digital transition in cities is not a task to be taken in a silo and must be grounded by a human rights-based approach. Mainstreaming digital rights requires consultations both at the city level and with all stakeholders involved, including civil society. The project also highlights the important role that the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights and its principles play in providing a space to co-create such policies among different cities, in facilitating knowledge exchange and its power to conduct advocacy and outreach.

The outcomes and lessons learned of the Digital Rights Governance Project in Europe are already shaping long term change at the local level. All four cities engaged in the pilot have explicitly committed to draw up a long term strategy that will support digital rights implementation and directly influence their local policies. Additionally, and through the CC4DR, the project has potential for scalability as it captures best practices as a capacity building tool for other city members who want to develop or enhance policy and programmatic interventions on the protection of digital rights. While every city has challenges and priorities that depend on their local contexts, the project highlighted that common themes exist among cities, opening opportunities for dialogue, learning and cross collaboration that will be useful and constructive for the diverse membership of the CC4DR. This will be especially important to take into consideration given the project's kickstart in Latin America illustrating that protecting human rights at the digital level is not only a global north affair.

Moving forward, the outcomes of the project are critical and will continue to influence multilateral dialogues related to technology, smart cities, sustainability and human rights, as was the case at Mozfest and within the

Urban 20 process in which digital rights were included in the city-led Urban 20 communiqué presented to the G20. An important milestone will be the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Summit taking place in September, 2023, acting as the mid-term review of the SDGs halfway to 2030 and the United Nations Summit of the Future, which will see the adoption of a Global Digital Compact based on digital rights principles which come up loud and clear in the pilot cities of the DRGF Europe: application of human rights online, digital connectivity, data ethics, fighting discrimination, and more.

Looking at the field of digital rights, new topics are still emerging, redefining the scope of the field. As digital human rights highlights the connection between technology and society, the work in this field continues to indicate that technology not only reproduces but also amplifies existing inequalities. In this regard, we must continue to champion an equitable and just digital transition. It will be equally important to connect the work of the project to a global multistakeholder network to ensure that the concepts and principles of digital rights are representative and inclusive of a global community.

5.1

Localising the Guide in Latin America

Latin America's cultural diversity is an invaluable source of evidence-based learning. The region's rich tapestry of traditions, languages, and belief systems, influenced by Indigenous, European, African, and other heritages, fosters cross-cultural dialogue and the promotion and protection of the rights of all its inhabitants.

Between November 2022 and June 2023, CAF and UN-Habitat, with the support of [UNIT](#), conducted the '[Ciudades y Derechos Digitales](#)' [8] Programme, a learning and co-creation process with various stakeholders in Latin America to understand the challenges and needs faced by city planners in designing smart cities that promote and safeguard human rights. The results of this process were captured in a Latin American Guide for Digital Transformation and a community of practice implemented through a digital helpdesk service. Recognising that challenges and needs are as diverse as the region itself, there are contextual considerations that characterise Latin America and its cities before embarking on a detailed analysis.

Firstly, historical evolution is crucial. Understanding the Latin American experience within its historical framework is essential. The region has been deeply influenced by colonisation, social movements, and diverse struggles for social justice. These historical foundations continue to shape the contemporary landscape of Latin America. Socioeconomic factors also emerge as critical dimensions that require careful consideration. The region has experienced a complex array of economic systems, ranging from periods of rapid growth to deep recessions and socioeconomic disparities. Examining these socioeconomic factors provides significant insights into development complexities, poverty alleviation, sustainable economic practices, and, most importantly, the significant structural inequality prevalent in the region.

Secondly, the political context is noteworthy. The Latin American experience reveals intricate political dynamics, ranging from authoritarian regimes to democratic transitions. These shifting political currents have profound implications for governance, citizen participation, and the protection of human rights.

Analysing the political realities of Latin America offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities encountered in local digital transformation processes as societies strive for equity and inclusivity.

Thirdly, one of the most critical variables in the region is the challenges surrounding environmental care and conservation. The Latin American experience sheds light on the complex relationship between the region's environment and its communities. As Latin America grapples with pressing environmental issues such as deforestation, pollution, and climate change, exploring these challenges through the lens of digital transformation enables the identification of urgent needs for environmental conservation, sustainable development, and the harmonious coexistence of human populations with their natural surroundings.

Lessons and Learnings

While the previous description provides a glimpse into the multifaceted nature of the region, it offers a broad perspective on the contextual backdrop against which the following findings from the Programme unfold:

1. Legal frameworks and jurisprudence for protecting digital human rights in Latin America. Contrary to popular belief, Latin America possesses a formal system and a jurisprudence that effectively protects Digital Human Rights. Esteemed institutions like the [Inter-American Commission of Human Rights](#) (IACHR) and national courts play a pivotal role in recognising and upholding these rights. The IACHR, through its resolutions and recommendations, consistently emphasises the importance of safeguarding Digital Human Rights. Furthermore, there are also agreements such as the recently published '[Carta Iberoamericana de Principios y Derechos en los Entornos Digitales](#)' [9], which contributes to the consolidation of this subject on the agenda of all subscribing states. This ensures that these legal principles are duly considered in their national and local policies.

This robust legal framework challenges misconceptions and serves as a testament to Latin America's dedication to safeguarding fundamental freedoms within the digital sphere. It underscores the region's commitment to ensuring that individuals' rights are equally protected online as they are offline.

2. Local planners do want to learn about the subject, but they need practical guidance on how to implement a human rights-respecting digital transformation. With the rapid advancement of technology, cities are keen on acquiring knowledge and developing capabilities to navigate this digital shift effectively.

They acknowledge the need to comprehend the intricate interplay between digital transformation and human rights, especially in terms of how it directly affects their residents. Understanding the practical implications of this transformation allows cities to design policies and strategies that prioritise the protection and promotion of human rights.

Additionally, cities play a critical role in generating capabilities around digital transformation. They invest in initiatives that promote digital literacy and skills development, enabling citizens to actively participate in the digital society and make informed choices. By empowering individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge, cities ensure that their residents are not only beneficiaries but also active contributors to the digital landscape. Through their efforts, a significant number of local planners and teams strive to strike a balance between technological advancement and the protection of fundamental rights, thus maximising the benefits of the digital era for their citizens.

3. Organised civil society as an excellent source of best practices and innovative ideas. Civil society acts as a catalyst for positive change by actively engaging with various stakeholders, including governments, private sector entities, and international organisations. Through their expertise, research, and advocacy efforts, civil society organisations generate valuable insights and practical solutions that address the complex challenges arising from the intersection of digital transformation and human rights.

Furthermore, civil society organisations often serve as 'watchdogs', monitoring the impact of digital technologies on human rights and raising awareness about potential risks and violations. They conduct independent research, document cases of abuse, and provide evidence-based recommendations to policymakers and other relevant actors. Their efforts foster transparency and accountability, ensuring that digital transformation aligns with the principles of human rights, inclusivity, and democratic governance.

Moreover, organised civil society serves as an inspiration by showcasing successful initiatives and innovative approaches that promote human rights in the digital realm. By sharing best practices and success stories, they inspire and motivate governments, businesses, and individuals to adopt practices that respect and protect human rights in the context of digital transformation.

Upholding digital human rights in Latin America

Contrary to common belief, Latin America has made significant strides in establishing a robust legal framework to protect digital rights. The region has enacted a range of laws and regulations that acknowledge the importance of safeguarding human rights in the digital realm. However, effectively enforcing and implementing these laws requires the active involvement of institutions such as courts, government agencies, and civil society organisations.

Despite the progress achieved, other challenges persist in ensuring comprehensive protection of Digital Human Rights. Limited access to digital resources and technology remains a barrier, particularly for marginalised communities. Concerns over privacy and freedom of expression are heightened by online surveillance practices. Additionally, the digital divide exacerbates existing social and economic inequalities, highlighting the urgent need for collective efforts to bridge this gap.

Addressing these challenges calls for a multifaceted approach. Strengthening legal mechanisms, promoting digital literacy, and investing in digital infrastructure are pivotal steps toward enhancing the protection of Digital Human Rights. Collaboration among governments, local organisations, and the private sector is crucial for advancing these objectives and fostering a more inclusive and equitable digital landscape for all individuals.

Civil Society Organisations play a vital role in advocating for human rights in the digital age. These groups bring expertise, engage in advocacy efforts, and monitor the implementation of policies and practices. By leveraging their knowledge and influence, civil society organisations contribute to the development of best practices and inspire stakeholders to prioritise the protection of human rights amidst digital transformation.

Latin American experience in the journey of digital transformation provides valuable insights and considerations for policymakers, practitioners, and citizens. Understanding the historical, political, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental dimensions of the region allows us to navigate the complexities of digital rights and work towards a future that upholds the principles of human dignity, equality, and justice in the digital age.

5.2

Emerging topics

As digital human rights highlights the connection between technology and society, the imperfections and inequalities we face everyday will also translate into the digital realm of city-life and public spaces. These imperfections will not automatically fade away with technological advancements of urban life. While technology is often seen as a one-size fits all approach, people that live in cities are diverse and have different needs. In a multitude of ways, digital technologies pose new challenges and translations to our commonly held norms, values and rights. Digital human rights therefore require a central position in the digital governance of any city.

Representation in the digital rights discourse

Practitioners in the field call for a '[decolonising process for the field of digital rights](#) in Europe and beyond'. In this project, we emphasised the importance of co-creating the guide with a multi-stakeholder global network, adding examples, perspectives and discussions that are global, to avoid only amplifying European perspectives. During the start of a new phase within the pilot-projects, we always reconnected with the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights member-cities to share lessons learned and feedback on tools or challenges locally.

In addition, we placed emphasis on talking *with* the local community on these topics. Here, we reinforce the need to include marginalised communities directly impacted or oppressed by technologies. Such groups lack access to and lower quality of digital services. Guidance to local governments should also consider engaging with these communities and finding narratives to create awareness towards promoting and protecting human rights online.

There has been high interest in the Guide and the project from cities across the globe. Though this project focuses on Europe, lessons are shared with partners from Latin America, Africa and East-Asia. In collaboration with Afroleadership, for example, we organised a workshop on people-centered smart cities and digital human rights for local civil society organisations to understand needs and challenges. Moreover, an online session was organised during Mozfest in order to collectively map arising urban digital rights issues across the globe. Also within Europe, other cities are keen to follow the implementation process in the selected cities. We are motivated to scale the solutions that come out of the pilot-phase of all four challenges, so that other cities in the EU can also make use of them in the future.

Sustainability and digital rights

Finally, we highlight that the Guide should be customizable and the local digital rights declaration should be based on an interpretation that fits each specific community. This also gives space to a second trend we see emerging, which is the inclusion of [sustainability](#) and [climate justice](#) in the field of digital rights. We have seen cities that include this in their foundations, such as the City of London. First, we can see sustainability included among the digital rights cities across multiple layers of government, for instance the City of Brussels added Sustainability as one of their principles. In this sense, the thematic area could be regarded as an elaboration under the existing umbrella of digital human rights and connected under SDG11. How exactly environmental ecosystems, technological ecosystems will be harmonised with people-centered ecosystems in urban contexts needs raising attention. As what can be beneficial for one, can be detrimental for the other(s). These tensions should be made more explicit, if one chooses to include sustainability as a digital human right principle.

Cities as leading testbeds

Through this project we have enabled local governments to ground their digital transition in a human-rights approach and to go from normative theory, to practise to policy based on their own local challenges. After the start of our project, the European Commission launched [European Digital Rights and Principles](#) on the 26th of January 2022. These principles should underpin the society that several EU regulations continue to shape. The interest in the topic is only rising, and questions on how to implement such topics in practice are coupled with that rising interest. We notice this based on the large number of stakeholders attending the online session, the number of cities and experts who responded to the open call and the positive support of partners.

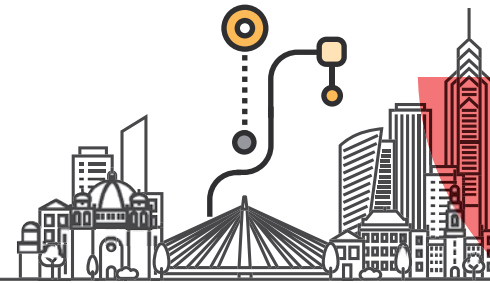
In our approach, we emphasise that digital rights are not new rights and draw from both perspectives. Digital rights are existing human rights that pose novel challenges with the widespread use of digital technologies. The human rights frameworks and mechanisms we can count on in the physical world, should also be available and enforced in the digital space.

The norms, values and rights we often take for granted are under pressure with the rise of digital technologies. Upholding them needs collective work and active reflection. Cities becoming hubs for data production, service provision being increasingly digitised and automated, new models of participation and engagement emerging for city dwellers, new technological solutions being tested or deployed. The ongoing digitalisation of societies, industries and government affects public life and can only be addressed adequately through broad collaboration.

Our initiative has brought together local and global approaches and advocates for such change in practice and in policy. By collaborating with a range of UN agencies, the attention and awareness for this topic has gained support and momentum. The Guide and the Digital Helpdesk for Cities as part of '[The People Centered Smart Cities Flagship Programme](#)', put the issue of digital human rights higher on the agenda and stimulating sharp discussions on the novelty and pre-existence of the human rights concepts, applied to digital environments.



Endnotes



[1] Although the city of Maceió was not part of the four European cities selected given its geographical situation, it volunteered to pilot the self-assessment, which provided useful insights on the application of such a tool in the context of a non-European city.

[2] <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/human-rights-cities-framework>

[3] The information and views set out in this article are those of the author only and should not be considered as reflecting the official opinion of the European Commission.

[4] In this research, we define "citizens" as people who pass through the city and use its services but also inhabitants who do not have the legal status of a citizen, including those undocumented or unhoused.

[5] Schaeffer Nonose and Jensen (2022), "Mainstreaming human rights in the digital transformation of cities: A guide for local governments", UN-Habitat/ Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, p.12

[6] The study focuses on European cities only due to the regional scope of the Digital Rights Governance project and existing resources to conduct the research, but the co-authors of the research would like to encourage future work in other areas of the globe.

[7] The authors of this research would like to thank all the city representatives and experts who took part in the interviews and in the validation workshop for their valuable contributions.

[8] In English, 'Cities and Digital Rights'

[9] In English, 'Iberoamerican Charter of Principles and Rights in Digital Contexts'





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