



**RIGHTSCITIES**



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# **HUMAN RIGHTS SELF-ASSESSMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM FIVE EUROPEAN CITIES**



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## **PART 1: INTRODUCTION**

Committing to human rights is one thing; ensuring that those commitments are reflected in everyday municipal practice is another. Municipalities need practical ways of identifying where rights are already being upheld, where existing arrangements fall short, and where improvement efforts should be focused. Human rights self-assessment offers one practical way of addressing this challenge. By providing a structured process for gathering information, analysing findings, identifying action points, and supporting reflection and dialogue, human rights self-assessment can help municipalities better understand their current strengths and challenges. It can also provide a stronger evidence base for decisions about how to strengthen human rights implementation.

This report is intended as a practical resource for municipalities that are considering, undertaking, or further developing human rights self-assessment processes. Its purpose is to offer empirically grounded practical lessons on how human rights self-assessment processes can be designed and carried out, what conditions shape their quality and implementation, and what kinds of outcomes they can help generate. Rather than prescribing a single model, the report is intended to support municipalities in adapting human rights self-assessment to their own contexts.

The report draws on the experiences of five European cities – Gdańsk, Lund, Sopot, Utrecht, and Vienna – that participated in the RIGHTSCITIES project. As part of the project, these cities piloted a human rights self-assessment tool developed through the RIGHTSCITIES project. The cities adapted and applied the tool in their differing local contexts, which included different institutional starting points, governance arrangements, and strategic purposes. These experiences provide a practical empirical basis for examining both common patterns and important variation in how cities approach human rights self-assessment in practice.

Part 1 introduces human rights self-assessment in local governance, presents the self-assessment tool developed through the RIGHTSCITIES project, explains how the report's findings were developed, and shortly introduces the human rights profiles of participating cities. Part 2 identifies cross-cutting lessons from the participating cities about how human rights self-assessment processes can be designed and implemented, what shapes their quality, and what kinds of practical outcomes they may generate. Part 3 presents city-based narratives that illustrate different municipal approaches, experiences, and practical lessons in context. Part 4 synthesises the report's key lessons and identifies practical implications for municipalities developing, considering or undertaking human rights self-assessment processes.

## 1.1 HUMAN RIGHTS SELF-ASSESSMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Municipalities play a crucial role in the implementation of human rights because many of the policies, decisions, institutional practices and services that shape people's everyday lives are developed and delivered at the local level. Housing, education, social services, accessibility, participation, and the use of public space are only some examples of areas where municipal action directly affects how rights are experienced in practice. For municipalities committed to human rights, formal commitments or policy statements are, therefore, only a starting point. Human rights implementation at the local level requires sustained work to translate rights into policies, decisions, institutional practices, and services across different parts of the administration. This also creates a practical challenge for municipalities: gaining a clear and evidence-based understanding of how human rights are being implemented.

Understanding human rights implementation as an ongoing municipal responsibility has increasingly been reflected in local human rights initiatives, including so-called Human Rights Cities. While there is no single model for what constitutes a Human Rights City, these initiatives generally share an explicit commitment to aligning local governance more closely with human rights principles and standards.<sup>1</sup> In practice, Human Rights City initiatives are best understood as ongoing processes of learning, adaptation, and improvement rather than the achievement of a fixed institutional status.

At the same time, translating human rights commitments into municipal practice is rarely straightforward. Responsibilities are often spread across departments, policy areas, and governance levels, while the practical realisation of rights may depend on coordination between actors with different mandates, priorities, and forms of expertise. Even municipalities with strong commitments to human rights may, therefore, find it difficult to develop a clear understanding of how rights are currently being implemented, where important gaps or inconsistencies exist, where further action is needed, and what kinds of interventions may be most effective in strengthening human rights implementation.

Human rights self-assessment is one way of addressing this challenge. At its core, self-assessment is a structured process through which municipalities examine their own policies, decisions, institutional practices, and services in light of human rights commitments and standards.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Human Rights Cities in the EU: a framework for reinforcing rights locally*, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/human-rights-cities-framework>, accessed 26 May 2026, and United Nations (UN), *Guidance framework for creating a Human Rights City*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/guidance-framework-creating-human-rights-city>, accessed 26 May 2026.

By turning general human rights standards and principles into concrete questions, self-assessment can support evidence gathering, structured analysis, internal dialogue, and priority-setting. Self-assessment can function not only as a structured review process, but also as a governance process that supports organisational learning, improved coordination, and more strategic action to strengthen human rights implementation.

The following section presents the self-assessment tool developed through the RIGHTSCITIES project, including its conceptual foundations.

## 1.2 THE RIGHTSCITIES HUMAN RIGHTS SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

The RIGHTSCITIES human rights self-assessment tool was developed to support municipalities in carrying out a structured internal assessment of how human rights commitments are translated into local governance and municipal practice. As discussed in the previous section, the purpose of such self-assessment is not only to support a clearer understanding of current human rights implementation, but also to strengthen reflection, learning, and informed action. The self-assessment tool is, therefore, primarily designed to support internal reflection and learning, rather than to serve as an external evaluation or compliance exercise.

The tool combines two complementary, but distinct, assessment dimensions, which together assess both the broader conditions for human rights implementation and the implementation of specific rights standards in selected areas of municipal responsibility.

The first part of the tool builds on the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) human rights cities framework and its accompanying practical guidance for local authorities.<sup>2</sup> This framework is designed to support municipalities in embedding human rights in local governance by identifying the institutional and practical conditions that enable rights to be realised in practice. It is structured around three categories of preconditions for local human rights implementation: *foundations*, which refers to the political commitments, principles, and values that anchor human rights work; *structures*, which are the institutional arrangements, responsibilities, and procedures through which human rights are integrated into governance; and *tools*, which refer to the practical methods, resources, and instruments that support implementation in day-to-day municipal practice.

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<sup>2</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Human rights cities in the EU: a framework for reinforcing rights locally*, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/human-rights-cities-framework>, accessed 26 May 2026, and European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Human rights cities in the European Union - Practical guidance*, [Human rights cities in the European Union - Practical guidance | European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

The first part of the self-assessment tool operationalises the full FRA human rights cities framework and its 20 action points, allowing municipalities to assess the extent to which these enabling conditions are in place.

The second part of the tool applies a more targeted thematic assessment of how specific human rights standards are implemented in practice, using the rights of persons with disabilities as a pilot focus in selected areas of municipal responsibility. Its legal anchor is Article 26 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU Charter),<sup>3</sup> which recognises the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure independence, social and occupational integration, and participation in community life. The substantive content of this assessment is interpreted through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)<sup>4</sup> and relevant guidance from the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee),<sup>5</sup> reflecting that the European Union (EU) itself as well as all members states are parties to the CRPD. Rather than assessing the broader governance infrastructure for human rights implementation, this part examines how specific barriers to the realisation of disability rights are addressed through municipal commitments, structures, tools, and practical measures in selected areas of municipal responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

Taken together, the two parts of the self-assessment tool offer complementary perspectives on municipal human rights implementation: the first part focuses on the governance conditions that support the implementation of human rights as a whole, while the second part examines how specific barriers to the realisation of the rights of persons with disabilities are addressed through rights-relevant commitments, structures, tools, and practical measures in selected areas of municipal responsibility. Both parts of the tool assess municipal outputs, such as policies, institutional arrangements, and services. Both are also informed by a human rights-based approach (HRBA), which emphasises principles such as participation, non-discrimination, accountability, inclusion, and empowerment in both what municipalities assess and how the self-assessment process is designed and carried out.<sup>7</sup>

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3 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU Charter), originally proclaimed 7 December 2000, legally binding 1 December 2009, [EUR-Lex - 12012P/TXT - EN - EUR-Lex](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

4 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted 12 December 2006, entry into force 3 May 2008, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>, accessed 26 May 2026.

5 Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crpd>, accessed 26 May 2026.

6 The areas of municipal work covered in the second part of the self-assessment tool are Work and employment; Housing; and Political, democratic and community participation.

7 The exact set of principles differs between conceptualizations of human rights-based approach (HRBA). See for example the PLANET framework, *Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Programming: HRBA Toolkit*, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (2025), p. 32. See also Bruce, Anna, & Sjöwall, Johanna (2026). *Human Rights Based Approach for Local Governments – Why, What and How?* Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD). This tool focuses specifically on human rights-based approach in municipalities and includes the principle of localisation to reflect human rights implementation on the local level, <https://rwi.lu.se/publications/human-rights-based-approach-for-local-governments/>, accessed 26 May 2026.

Neither part of the tool directly measures the extent to which individuals enjoy their rights in practice. This output-oriented approach was considered appropriate for the pilot phase and was applied across both parts of the tool. At the same time, because the ultimate aim of human rights implementation is the effective realisation of rights in practice, future development may consider giving greater attention to how rights are realised and experienced, particularly in relation to the second part of the tool which focuses on specific rights.

### **1.2.1 DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL**

The self-assessment tool was developed collaboratively within the RIGHTSCITIES project consortium through an iterative process that combined academic translation of human rights standards into an assessment framework adapted to local governance with practical input from participating cities. Academic partners led the conceptual and methodological development of the tool, while partner cities contributed feedback based on their administrative structures, policy priorities, and practical experience with human rights work at the local level. This collaborative approach helped ensure that the tool was legally and conceptually grounded, while remaining practically usable in different municipal contexts.

The design of the tool was guided by several practical considerations. Questions were formulated to minimise ambiguity and reduce the need for highly individual interpretation, while encouraging responses that reflected the municipality's overall approach rather than isolated initiatives or examples of good practice. The tool was also designed to be usable by municipalities at different stages of engagement with human rights work, including as a practical starting point for cities seeking to develop a more systematic human rights approach, as well as by municipalities with more established Human Rights City initiatives.

### **1.2.2 INTENDED USERS AND FLEXIBILITY**

The self-assessment tool is intended for use by the municipality as a whole rather than by a single unit or department. It is designed to support a cross-departmental process in which a designated focal point coordinates the assessment, while relevant departments and staff contribute information reflecting their respective responsibilities and expertise. This is intended not only to strengthen the quality and completeness of the assessment, but also to support internal coordination, organisational learning, and shared ownership of human rights implementation.

At the same time, the tool is designed to be flexible and adaptable to different local contexts. Municipalities vary considerably in terms of size, administrative organisation, available resources, policy priorities, and the stage they have reached in their human rights work. The tool, therefore, does not require all parts to be completed within a single assessment cycle, allowing municipalities to focus on the sections most relevant to their current priorities or capacities. Practical adaptations, including translation into local working languages where needed, may also be necessary to support broad participation, effective collaboration, and a meaningful assessment process.

### **1.2.3 APPLYING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL**

The self-assessment tool is intended to support a structured process of information gathering, reflection, analysis, and action, rather than the completion of a questionnaire as an end in and of itself. While municipalities may adapt the process to their local circumstances, the tool was designed to support a broadly structured but flexible process involving the following core elements.

*Information gathering.* The process begins with collecting relevant information across the municipal administration. Cities are encouraged to start by identifying existing documentation, data, strategies, evaluations, and reporting materials, supplemented by internal consultations, interviews, statistics, stakeholder input, or other locally relevant sources. Because the self-assessment spans multiple policy areas and governance functions, this stage typically requires coordination across departments and contributions from staff with differing forms of expertise. The selection of which parts of the tool to apply, the evidence needed to support the assessment, and the actors involved in the process should be informed by the municipality's legal obligations, institutional responsibilities, and local priorities.

*Analysis and prioritisation.* Once the self-assessment is completed, the results provide a basis for structured analysis and prioritisation. The purpose of this stage is to develop a broader understanding of the strengths, implementation gaps, inconsistencies, and priority areas for improvement in the municipality's current human rights implementation. This may include identifying disconnects between formal commitments and practical implementation, as well as underlying challenges, such as unclear responsibilities, weak coordination, missing procedures, or limited institutional capacity.

*Identifying action points.* The analytical process is intended to lead to practical prioritisation and action planning. Based on the findings of the self-assessment, municipalities can identify priority areas for improvement and consider what institutional reforms, strategic adjustments, or practical measures may be needed to strengthen implementation.

Depending on the context, this might involve revising policies or strategies, strengthening participation and accountability mechanisms, improving accessibility, building staff capacity, or clarifying internal coordination and responsibilities.

*Broader dialogue and participation.* Engagement with relevant external stakeholders, including rights-holders, is an important part of rights-consistent governance and should be considered throughout the self-assessment process. This ranges from defining the scope of the assessment and gathering information to interpreting findings, identifying blind spots, and prioritising action. Such engagement helps ensure that municipal assessments and decisions are informed not only by internal administrative perspectives, but also by the experience, expertise, and rights claims of affected rights-holders. It also reflects relevant human rights obligations relating to participation, inclusion, and accountability. At the same time, not all aspects of the assessment are equally suitable for external discussion, particularly where questions relate exclusively to internal administrative processes. Municipalities may, therefore, determine how and at what stages broader dialogue is appropriate in light of their legal obligations and local context.

### **1.3 METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT**

This report draws on the experiences of the five participating cities that applied the RIGHTSCITIES human rights self-assessment tool as part of the project. The primary analytical material consists of structured questionnaires completed by representatives of the participating cities, supplemented by follow-up clarifications and interviews with city coordinators. Throughout the project, participating cities and academic partners also engaged in ongoing exchanges – through online and in-person meetings – on the development, application, and refinement of the self-assessment tool. While this broader dialogue formed an important part of the collaborative project context, the analytical findings presented in this report are based only on information explicitly captured through the questionnaires, follow-up clarifications, and interviews.

Part 2 of the report presents a comparative synthesis of recurring patterns, shared experiences, and key lessons emerging from the participating cities' engagement with the tool. The analysis is based on a qualitative review of the material collected from the five cities, with findings included where relevant themes, challenges, barriers, facilitators, or outcomes were evident across three or more city experiences.

The purpose is not to provide a comparative evaluation of individual cities or to draw statistically generalisable conclusions, but to identify broader cross-cutting insights relevant to the practical application and further development of municipal human rights self-assessment tools. For this reason, individual findings are not systematically attributed to specific cities in Part 2.

Part 3 complements this comparative synthesis through more contextualised city narratives drawn from the same underlying material, with additional emphasis from the coordinator interviews. Rather than repeating the cross-cutting analytical findings, these narratives were selected because they offer particularly clear and instructive examples of how different cities approached the self-assessment process, navigated specific challenges, or generated useful outcomes. The purpose of these narratives is to illustrate the diversity of practical pathways through which municipal human rights self-assessment can be undertaken, to highlight experiences with transferable relevance for other cities, and to provide insight into how different stages of municipal human rights engagement may shape both the assessment process and the kinds of value derived from it.

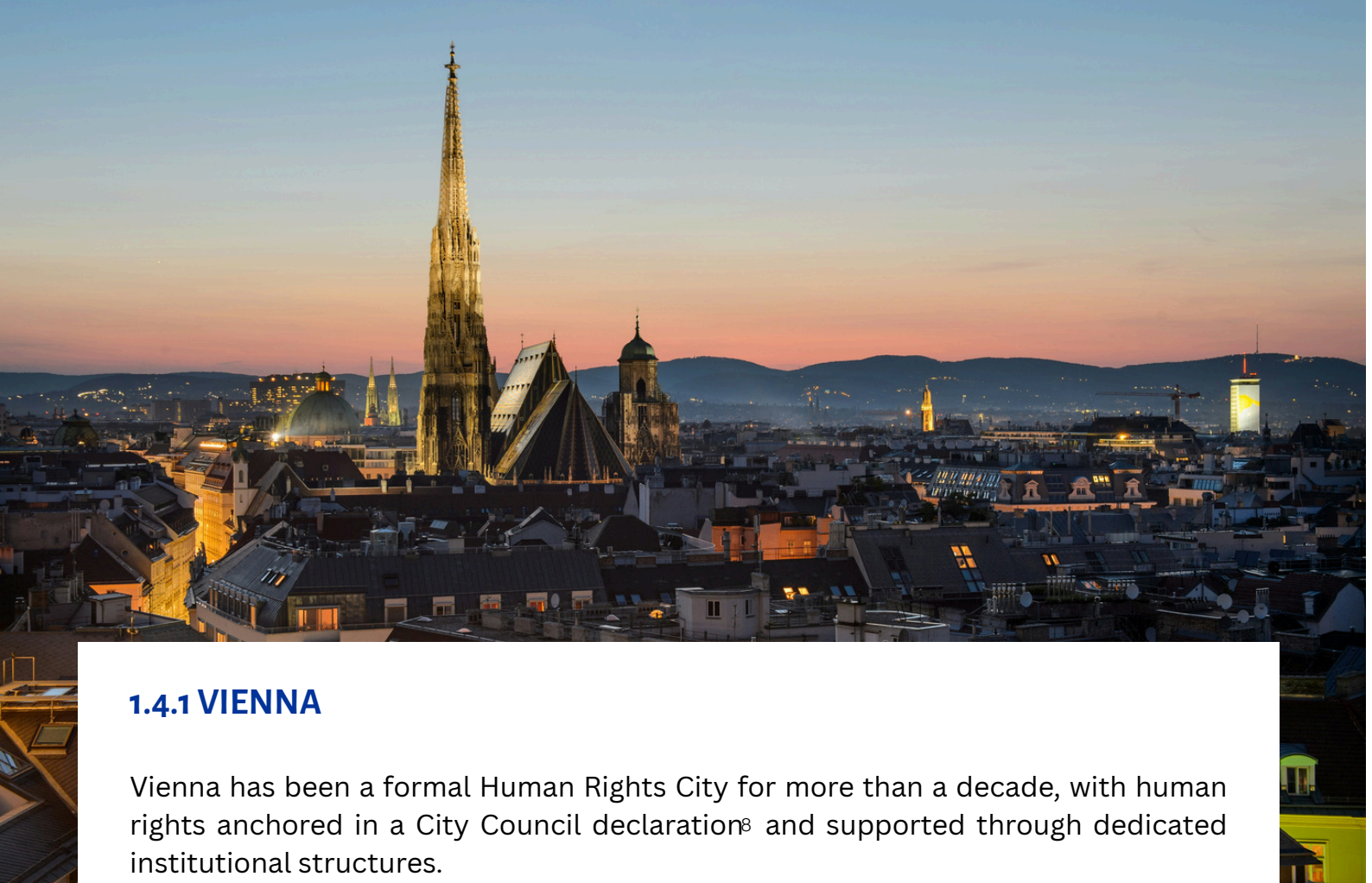
Part 4 distils the practical implications emerging from the comparative analysis in Part 2 and the more contextualised city experiences presented in Part 3. Rather than presenting new empirical analysis, this final part translates the report's analytical insights into practical considerations for municipalities designing and using human rights self-assessment processes. Part 4 identifies considerations that may support municipalities in making deliberate strategic, methodological, and evidentiary choices in light of their specific institutional context, governance structures, implementation challenges, and intended use of the process and its findings. Importantly, it does not prescribe a single model for municipal human rights self-assessment.

The scope of the report should be understood in light of the project's pilot character. All participating cities applied both parts of the self-assessment tool, and many of the experiences and lessons identified were cross-cutting, rather than clearly linked to only one part of the assessment. The report offers a structured reflection on the factors that shaped the assessment process in practice, including barriers and facilitators affecting its effectiveness, the credibility and usability of findings, and the broader organisational and governance benefits that may emerge through municipal human rights self-assessment. It is not intended as a formal evaluation of either the self-assessment tool as such or the human rights performance of the participating cities.

## 1.4 PARTICIPATING CITIES

Participating cities differ significantly in size, governance structures, and the ways in which human rights are integrated in local governance. The following city portraits provide brief contextual introductions to each city, highlighting institutional features relevant to understanding their participation in the RIGHTSCITIES project. They are intended as background information rather than analysis, with deeper reflections on each city's experience presented in Part 3.





### 1.4.1 VIENNA

Vienna has been a formal Human Rights City for more than a decade, with human rights anchored in a City Council declaration<sup>8</sup> and supported through dedicated institutional structures.

A defining feature of Vienna's approach is its dedicated Human Rights Office, which has a strong formal mandate. The Office serves as the central coordinating body for human rights work across the city administration, with a broad mandate that includes mainstreaming human rights in municipal decision-making, promoting human rights education and awareness, and engaging with local stakeholders. Vienna also maintains active engagement with national and international human rights processes, including reporting under mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)<sup>9</sup>, and was among the cities involved in the development of the FRA human rights cities framework.

This institutional anchoring is reinforced by permanent staffing, budgetary resources, established internal networks, and substantial institutional memory built over years of continuous work. Rather than relying on project-based initiatives, Vienna's model embeds human rights within regular local governance structures and long-term administrative practice. Vienna's profile in this report is that of a long-standing Human Rights City with a strong institutional mandate and dedicated infrastructure for human rights implementation.

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<sup>8</sup> Declaration Vienna - City of Human Rights, [Declaration "Vienna - City of Human Rights"](#), accessed 26 May 2026.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review, [Universal Periodic Review | OHCHR](#), accessed 26 May 2026.



## 1.4.2 UTRECHT

Utrecht was the first Human Rights City in the Netherlands. A defining feature of Utrecht's human rights governance is the Utrecht Human Rights Coalition<sup>10</sup>, established in 2012. This brings together municipal actors, civil society organisations, public institutions, academic actors, and civic initiatives, reflecting a broader governance approach built on participation, collaboration, and institutional mainstreaming.

The coalition includes actors working on equality, poverty, climate, youth, and social inclusion. This reflects a broad understanding of how human rights intersect with local governance and everyday municipal policy, including through actors who may not explicitly frame their work in human rights terms.

Beyond the local level, Utrecht is also active in shaping broader Human Rights City approaches among municipalities. The city contributed to the development of the FRA human rights cities framework and has also been involved in developing peer review-based accreditation approaches for Human Rights Cities. Utrecht's profile in this report is that of a city where human rights governance combines local coalition-building and institutional mainstreaming with active wider inter-city engagement.

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<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Coalition in Utrecht, <https://humanrightsutrecht.nl>, accessed 25 May 2026.



### 1.4.3 LUND

Lund became the first Human Rights City in Scandinavia in 2018, marking a clear commitment to embedding human rights in the city's long-term governance. What distinguishes Lund's approach is that human rights are embedded within the city's broader sustainability governance, rather than organised as a separate policy track.

Human rights work is anchored in the city's Unit for Social Sustainability which sits within the city council administration. This places human rights within the same governance framework used for long-term strategic planning and sustainable development, linking them directly to mainstream municipal decision-making rather than stand-alone initiatives.

Lund's Human Rights City commitment is also supported through formal political and administrative structures for coordination, follow-up, and dialogue, as well as capacity-building initiatives for municipal staff. These include work on areas such as children's rights, gender equality, violence prevention, and human rights-based approach (HRBA). As the first Human Rights City in the region, Lund has also played a visible role in national and international human rights and sustainability networks. Lund's profile in this report is that of a city where human rights governance is embedded in mainstream sustainability governance and long-term strategic planning.



#### 1.4.4 GDAŃSK

Gdańsk is currently developing a policy framework titled Gdańsk as a Human Rights City, marking an important step toward a broader and more explicit human rights governance approach.

This work builds on an established institutional foundation. Since 2018, the city's Model for Equal Treatment<sup>11</sup> has provided a structured framework for addressing equality and non-discrimination. Human rights-related work is also anchored at a high political level under the Deputy Mayor responsible for social services and equal treatment. Day-to-day coordination is located in the Social Development Department and supported by the Strategy and Social Projects Unit.

The city has also developed institutional mechanisms relevant to human rights governance, including advisory structures, support services, and staff capacity-building through training and initiatives such as the Flying University of Human Rights. The development of the Human Rights City policy reflects an effort to build on this existing foundation and establish a broader governance framework for human rights across the municipality. Gdańsk's profile in this report is that of a city building on an established equality framework while actively expanding toward a broader human rights governance model.

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<sup>11</sup> Model for Equal Treatment, <https://bjp.gdansk.pl/urząd-miejski/wydział-edukacji/Model-na-rzecz-rownego-traktowania,a,178206>, accessed 25 May 2026.



### 1.4.5 SOPOT

Sopot's human rights governance context is shaped by the realities of a smaller city, where human rights work relies on strategic coordination, prioritisation, and cooperation across existing municipal structures, rather than extensive dedicated infrastructure.

Although not formally designated a Human Rights City, Sopot has taken deliberate steps in recent years to make human rights a more explicit part of local governance. In 2022, the city established the initiative Sopot City of Human Rights<sup>12</sup> to support a more coherent approach to human rights, equality, and anti-discrimination. A notable feature of this work is the appointment by the Mayor of a Human Rights City Representative, creating a coordination function explicitly for human rights implementation in the city.

Coordination of human rights-related work is located within the City's Development Strategy Department, while implementation responsibilities are distributed across different municipal departments and units. The city also engages with local stakeholders and broader municipal networks working on equality and human rights-related issues, including the Union of Polish Cities' Commission on Human Rights and Equal Treatment. Capacity-building has been identified as a priority for further development, particularly for civil servants and local politicians. Sopot's profile in this report is that of a city in an early but intentional phase of building a more structured human rights governance approach.

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<sup>12</sup> Establishment of the "Sopot City of Human Rights" Team, <https://bip.sopot.pl/e,pobierz,get.html?id=47843>, accessed 25 May 2026.

## **PART 2: CROSS-CUTTING LESSONS FROM MUNICIPAL HUMAN RIGHTS SELF-ASSESSMENT**

The experiences of the five participating cities reveal recurring practical lessons about how human rights self-assessment can be designed, implemented, and used in local governance. Although the cities differ significantly in their institutional starting points, governance arrangements, and strategic purposes, common themes emerged across their experiences. This part of the report synthesises those cross-cutting lessons, focusing on conditions shaping self-assessment implementation, the credibility and practical usefulness of the assessments produced, and the wider organisational and governance outcomes that self-assessment processes may help to generate. Its purpose is not to compare participating cities, but to identify practical insights relevant to other municipalities that are considering, undertaking or developing human rights self-assessment processes.

### **2.1 CONDITIONS SHAPING SELF-ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION**

The practical implementation of human rights self-assessment processes depends on a range of organisational, political, practical, and knowledge-related conditions. Across the participating cities, implementation was influenced by how municipalities organise responsibility, secure ownership and support, involve relevant actors, and develop the capacities needed to carry the process forward. The themes below reflect recurring implementation conditions that emerged across the experiences of the participating cities and illustrate the ways in which these conditions shaped how assessment processes were organised, carried out, and sustained.

#### **2.1.1 CLEAR ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INSTITUTIONAL ANCHORING**

Self-assessment processes function more effectively when clear responsibility is assigned to specific departments, units, and individuals within the municipality. Because the work typically spans several stages – including preparation, data collection, analysis, identification of action points, and planning for follow-up – it requires coordination and continuity over time. The process also needs to be recognised as legitimate municipal work, particularly when it depends on contributions from multiple departments or actors.

When responsibility sits within an established structure with a clear mandate, it is easier to organise the process, engage relevant actors, and connect the work to existing planning and governance processes. Institutional anchoring also reduces dependence on individual initiatives and makes it easier to sustain momentum over time. By contrast, unclear responsibility or weak organisational anchoring can lead to fragmented implementation, uncertainty about ownership, difficulties in engaging relevant actors, and difficulties in translating the assessment into concrete action.

### **2.1.2 COMMITTED LEADERSHIP AND OWNERSHIP**

Effective self-assessment processes depend not only on clear organisational structures and anchoring, but also on committed leadership and active ownership. Dedicated focal points, human rights officers, project coordinators, or informal internal champions can play a decisive role in moving the work forward, solving practical challenges, engaging relevant actors, and maintaining momentum. However, excessive dependence on a small number of committed individuals may create fragility if the process is not sufficiently embedded within the organisation.

Leadership is particularly important where the process requires coordination across departments, interpretation of complex material, or adaptation to local realities. Ownership also affects whether participants see the exercise as meaningful and relevant, rather than as a purely procedural task. By contrast, weak leadership or limited ownership may lead to loss of momentum, unclear follow-through, reduced engagement from relevant actors, and difficulties sustaining the process over time.

### **2.1.3 POLITICAL SUPPORT AND DECISION-MAKING ALIGNMENT**

Effective self-assessment processes are strengthened when there is awareness among, and appropriate involvement of and support from, politicians at relevant stages of the work. Because human rights implementation often involves politically sensitive priorities, resource considerations, or questions of policy direction, awareness among politicians can help create legitimacy for the process, and clarify why the assessment is being carried out and how the findings will be used. In some contexts, involvement from mayors, deputy mayors, city councils, or other political leadership may also help secure organisational cooperation and ensure that the work is recognised as part of the municipality's responsibilities. The appropriate form and timing of political involvement will vary depending on the purpose of the self-assessment and the local governance context.

Political involvement does not necessarily require direct participation in the self-assessment itself. However, clarity about the relationship between the process and political decision-making can support smoother implementation and create clearer pathways for acting on the self-assessment's findings. By contrast, limited political awareness or unclear political ownership may create uncertainty about the purpose of the exercise, weaken engagement, or make it more difficult to organise appropriate next steps.

#### **2.1.4 SUFFICIENT TIME, CAPACITY, AND RESOURCES**

Effective self-assessment processes depend on having sufficient time, staff capacity, and organisational resources to organise and carry out the work. Self-assessment is rarely a single activity, but a process that typically unfolds over several stages, including preparation, coordination, data collection, analysis, internal discussion, identification of action points, and planning for follow-up. This requires not only staff capacity, but also sufficient time to involve relevant actors, adapt the self-assessment to local realities, explore synergies with existing human rights monitoring or implementation work, collect and review information, and discuss findings in relation to planning and decision-making. Financial or practical resources may also be needed to support coordination, facilitation, stakeholder involvement, or external expertise where relevant.

Adequate capacity makes it more feasible to carry out the process in a structured and deliberate way, involve relevant actors meaningfully, and sustain the work across self-assessment stages and into follow-up. By contrast, insufficient time, staffing, or financial resources may lead to rushed processes, narrow participation, reduced internal reflection, and difficulties sustaining the work across stages or into follow-up.

#### **2.1.5 UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE SELF-ASSESSMENT APPROACH**

Effective self-assessment processes depend on participants having a sufficient understanding of both human rights and of the purpose and approach of the self-assessment itself. Human rights concepts, principles, and terminology may not be equally familiar across municipal departments or professional roles and participants may have different levels of confidence in engaging with this type of work. In some cases, this understanding already exists within the organisation, while, in others, training, guidance, or introductory discussion may be needed. Building a shared baseline understanding is particularly important where the self-assessment involves actors with different professional backgrounds or limited prior experience of human rights work.

Understanding what human rights mean in the local context, why the self-assessment is being carried out, and how the process is intended to function can support more confident and effective participation, reduce uncertainty, strengthen engagement, and help create a stronger shared basis for the work. By contrast, limited understanding of human rights or the self-assessment approach may create confusion, reduce confidence or engagement, and make the process more difficult to carry out effectively.

### **2.1.6 TRANSLATING HUMAN RIGHTS CONCEPTS AND SELF-ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS INTO LOCAL PRACTICE**

Effective self-assessment processes depend on the ability to translate human rights concepts and self-assessment frameworks into the realities of local governance and municipal practice. Human rights self-assessments often draw on international legal standards, concepts, or terminology that may not directly match the structures, responsibilities, or language used within municipalities. This creates a practical need to interpret, adapt, and explain how these standards, concepts and terms relate to local goals, regulations, services, roles, and decision-making processes. This may also involve adapting the framing, language, or examples used in the self-assessment so that they are workable in the local context.

Making these connections clearer can help participants understand what is being assessed, identify relevant information, engage more meaningfully with the process, and make the assessment process more workable in practice. By contrast, where concepts remain abstract, overly technical, or disconnected from municipal practice, the process may become harder to organise, less meaningful for participants, and more difficult to carry out effectively.

### **2.1.7 ACCESS TO EXTERNAL SUPPORT, EXPERTISE, AND PEER LEARNING**

Effective self-assessment processes do not require all relevant expertise or process capacity to be available internally from the outset. In some cases, external support may help make the process more manageable. This may be particularly relevant where municipalities are using a self-assessment approach for the first time or where internal capacity or experience is limited. External support may take different forms, including training or introductory support, facilitation of the self-assessment process, methodological guidance, access to human rights or other relevant expertise, or opportunities for peer learning and exchange with other municipalities. The type and extent of support needed will vary depending on existing internal capacity, experience, and local context.

Such support can strengthen confidence in the process, supplement internal capacity where needed, make implementation more manageable, and reduce the pressure on internal staff. By contrast, where important support needs are not recognised and addressed, municipalities may face avoidable practical difficulties, reduced confidence, or challenges in carrying the process forward effectively.

### **2.1.8 INTERNAL PARTICIPATION AND COORDINATION**

Effective self-assessment processes depend on involving relevant parts of the municipal organisation and creating workable coordination between them. Because human rights implementation often spans multiple departments, professional roles, and organisational levels, no single unit is likely to hold all of the relevant responsibilities or operational knowledge needed to carry out the assessment effectively. Involving relevant departments, management, frontline staff, and support functions can improve access to information, strengthen ownership, and make the process more grounded in actual practice.

Effective internal participation helps ensure that the information, responsibilities, and organisational input needed for the self-assessment are brought into the process. Coordination is particularly important where the self-assessment addresses issues that require a common understanding of the findings and coordinated action across different parts of the organisation. By contrast, narrow internal participation or weak coordination may lead to blind spots, fragmented assessments, limited ownership, and difficulties translating findings into action.

### **2.1.9 ACCESS TO RELEVANT INFORMATION AND DATA**

Effective self-assessment processes depend on access to relevant information, data, and organisational knowledge. The ability to identify where needed information is located, who holds it, and how it can be accessed often depends on staff who understand the municipality and its information flows, including the internal networks through which information is shared. Relevant information may be found in existing reports, internal databases, monitoring systems, policy documents, administrative records, previous assessments and targeted interviews. In some cases, the necessary information may already be readily available, while, in others, additional coordination or information gathering is required.

The availability of relevant information makes the process more manageable, reduces duplication of effort, supports more informed internal discussion, and improves the ability to carry out the assessment in a structured and meaningful way. By contrast, fragmented information, weak internal knowledge-sharing, or difficulties identifying and accessing information may slow the process, increase the burden on participants, and make the self-assessment more difficult to carry out in an organised, informed, and meaningful way.

### **2.1.10 CAPACITY FOR INTERNAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Effective self-assessment processes depend not only on collecting information, but also on the capacity to analyse findings and make sense of what they mean in the local context. This requires knowledge, time, and opportunities for reflection, internal discussion, and interpretation. Analysis may involve identifying patterns, recognising gaps, understanding the significance of findings, and considering what they may imply for local governance and human rights implementation. In some cases, this can be carried out within existing structures, while, in others, additional expertise or facilitated discussion may be needed. The ability to make sense of findings is particularly important where the self-assessment involves qualitative information, complex governance arrangements, or findings that require analysis and interpretation rather than simply reporting clear factual information.

Strong analytical capacity can help turn collected information into meaningful conclusions, deepen understanding of the issues identified, and support informed decision-making about possible next steps. By contrast, limited analytical capacity may make it difficult to move beyond information gathering, reduce the practical value of the process, and weaken the basis for identifying relevant next steps.

### **2.1.11 MEANINGFUL AND WORKABLE EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION**

Effective self-assessment processes depend on involving external stakeholders in ways that are relevant, feasible, and appropriate to the purpose of the self-assessment. Participation of rights holders is a central principle of a human rights-based approach (HRBA) and, in some cases, may also reflect specific legal obligations. Stakeholder participation can provide important perspectives and practical knowledge, but it requires time, planning, and clear decision-making. Municipalities may need to consider which stakeholders are relevant to involve, at what stage of the process, and for what purpose, including whether participation primarily is intended to inform the self-assessment, discuss emerging findings, identify priorities, or support future action. Participation also needs to be designed in ways that are meaningful and accessible for those involved, taking into account existing relationships, practical constraints, and the risk of consultation fatigue. Different approaches may be appropriate in different local contexts and meaningful participation does not necessarily require the same level or form of involvement in every assessment.

Carefully designed stakeholder participation can help ensure that external engagement is meaningful, manageable, and appropriately matched to the aims, timing, and practical constraints of the self-assessment. By contrast, poorly designed participation may create unclear or unfulfillable expectations, place unnecessary burdens on participants, reduce the practical value of engagement, or make the process more difficult to carry out effectively.

## **2.2 CONDITIONS SHAPING SELF-ASSESSMENT QUALITY**

Carrying out a human rights self-assessment process does not in itself guarantee that the findings produced will be credible, meaningful, or practically useful. Across the participating cities, self-assessment quality was shaped by the suitability of the assessment framework, the strength of the evidence and perspectives informing the analysis, and the capacity to interpret findings in a balanced and well-grounded way. The themes below reflect recurring conditions that emerged across the experiences of the participating cities and illustrate how these shaped the credibility, relevance, and practical usefulness of the assessments produced.

### **2.2.1 FIT WITH LOCAL REALITIES AND RELEVANT STANDARDS**

A credible and meaningful self-assessment depends on using an assessment framework that both adequately reflects the human rights standards against which municipal practice is being assessed and fits the realities of the municipality in which it is used. This includes questions about whether the framework reflects the legal obligations and policy commitments that are relevant in the local context. It also requires attention to whether the framework's assumptions about governance structures, mandates, or responsibilities match the municipality using it. In practice, this may mean that questions need to be adapted, removed, or reframed where governance mandates sit at the national or regional, rather than municipal, level, or where local governance structures differ from those assumed by the framework.

Assessments based on appropriately aligned frameworks are more likely to produce findings that are relevant, grounded, and credible, and that support sound conclusions about whether municipal practice is aligned with relevant human rights standards, commitments, and responsibilities. By contrast, poorly matched frameworks may produce findings that are difficult to interpret, contested, misleading, or less useful for assessing whether municipal practice is aligned with relevant human rights standards, commitments, and responsibilities, even where the assessment appears technically coherent.

### **2.2.2 CLARITY AND INTERPRETIVE CONSISTENCY**

A credible and meaningful self-assessment depends both on using an assessment framework that provides sufficiently clear questions, concepts, and criteria for assessment and on developing a common understanding of how the framework's questions should be understood and answered. Some frameworks provide clearer questions, definitions, criteria, or guidance than others, making it easier to understand what is being asked and what kinds of evidence or practice are relevant. Even where a framework is reasonably clear, differences in interpretation may still arise if different departments, services, or participants understand the same questions in different ways. This can be a particular challenge where questions rely on broad concepts or qualitative assessments that leave room for interpretation. Discussion, examples, or additional guidance may, therefore, help create a more consistent understanding among actors involved in the self-assessment process.

Assessments based on clearer frameworks and stronger common understanding of how questions should be interpreted are more likely to produce findings that are coherent, comparable, and credible, and that support sounder conclusions about the human rights implications of municipal practice. By contrast, unclear frameworks or inconsistent interpretation may lead to uneven findings, contradictory conclusions, reduced confidence in the assessment, or make it harder to draw sound conclusions about the human rights implications for municipal practice.

### **2.2.3 COMBINING HUMAN RIGHTS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE KNOWLEDGE**

A credible and meaningful self-assessment depends on findings being interpreted through both a human rights lens and an understanding of the realities of local governance. Human rights standards, principles, and concepts provide the normative basis for assessing municipal practice, while knowledge of local structures, responsibilities, services, and institutional realities helps ensure that findings are interpreted in ways that reflect how the municipality actually functions. Credibility depends not only on identifying whether formal structures, policies, or procedures exist, but also on understanding how they operate in practice and how they relate to relevant human rights standards. This is particularly important as formal policies, procedures, or governance arrangements may function differently across local contexts, and municipal structures do not neatly align with the assumptions built into the assessment framework.

Self-assessments that combine knowledge about both human rights and the local governance context are more likely to produce findings that are credible, relevant, and meaningful, through providing a stronger basis for understanding how municipal practice affects the realisation of human rights and for informing implementation responses. By contrast, assessments that rely too heavily on either abstract human rights reasoning or purely local administrative perspectives may produce conclusions that are incomplete, unbalanced, less credible, or less useful for drawing well-grounded conclusions about local human rights challenges and appropriate municipal responses.

#### **2.2.4 STRONG AND RELEVANT EVIDENCE**

A credible and meaningful self-assessment depends on findings being grounded in strong and relevant evidence. This includes using information that is reliable, sufficiently up to date, and appropriate to the issues being assessed, whether drawn from internal documentation, monitoring systems, administrative records, previous assessments, or other relevant sources. Credibility depends not only on having access to information, but on whether that information provides a sufficiently sound basis for interpretation and decision-making. The relevance of evidence also matters, as information that is readily available may not adequately reflect the specific human rights issues, groups, or local realities under consideration.

Self-assessments grounded in strong and relevant evidence are more likely to produce findings that are credible, justifiable, and useful for understanding the human rights issues under assessment and for informing analysis and subsequent action. By contrast, assessments grounded in weak, outdated, incomplete, or poorly matched evidence may produce findings that are less credible, less persuasive, or less useful for understanding the issues under assessment or shaping adequate responses.

#### **2.2.5 DIVERSE INTERNAL PERSPECTIVES**

A credible and meaningful self-assessment depends on findings being informed by diverse internal perspectives from across the municipality. Different perspectives may emerge from policy functions, management roles, frontline services, and other parts of the organisation – each offering different knowledge and understandings of how human rights issues arise in practice. The primary concern of human rights analysis is the practical realisation of rights, rather than the formal existence of policies, structures, or commitments alone.

Including multiple internal perspectives can, therefore, help identify blind spots, challenge assumptions, and reduce the risk that findings reflect only a partial view of municipal practice. This may be particularly important where responsibilities are shared across departments, where implementation varies between services, or where formal policies do not fully reflect day-to-day practice.

Assessments informed by diverse internal perspectives are more likely to produce findings that are balanced, grounded, and credible, and that focus on how municipal structures, policies, and practices affect the practical realisation of human rights. By contrast, assessments based on a narrow range of internal viewpoints may overlook important information, reinforce organisational blind spots, or produce incomplete findings that fail to capture important dimensions of how municipal practice affects the practical realisation of rights.

### **2.2.6 DIVERSE EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVES**

A credible and meaningful self-assessment may be strengthened by diverse external perspectives. Civil society actors, representative groups, experts, and other external actors may contribute perspectives, knowledge, or critical distance that are not otherwise captured within internal assessment processes. External input can help identify blind spots, challenge internal assumptions, counter overly optimistic self-assessments, and bring greater attention to how municipal policies and practices are experienced by those affected. Such input can further strengthen the assessment by contributing perspectives less shaped by internal organisational priorities or interests. The relevance and form of external involvement will vary depending on the purpose, scope, and context of the assessment. From a human rights perspective, the experiences and perspectives of rights holders are not only substantively important; their active involvement may also be required under relevant legal frameworks.

The inclusion of diverse external perspectives can help produce findings that are more credible, balanced, and better able to reflect how municipal policies and practices affect the practical realisation of rights as experienced by those affected. By contrast, assessments that rely exclusively on internal perspectives may overlook important external realities, reinforce institutional blind spots, or produce findings that are narrower, less credible, or less able to capture the lived realities relevant to the practical realisation of rights. They may also fall short of human rights standards about active participation of rights holders.

### 2.2.7 VALIDATION AND CROSS-CHECKING

A credible and meaningful self-assessment depends on checking whether initial findings hold up before conclusions are finalised. Early findings may be based on incomplete information, reflect only part of the organisation, or be unduly shaped by the perspectives of those involved in the assessment. Validation involves testing whether emerging conclusions are sufficiently supported and plausible. Cross-checking is one way of doing this, for example by comparing findings across different sources of information, departments, services, or organisational levels. Feedback or challenge from relevant external actors may also help test whether conclusions are plausible and well grounded. This kind of checking can help identify weak evidentiary foundations, contradictions, or conclusions that go beyond what the available information supports.

Assessments that include validation and cross-checking are more likely to produce findings that are well grounded, robust, and that support justifiable conclusions about the human rights implications of municipal practice. By contrast, findings that are not tested may reinforce blind spots, miss inconsistencies, lead to less reliable conclusions, and make it harder to draw defensible conclusions about municipal practice and its human rights implications.

## **2.3 ORGANISATIONAL AND GOVERNANCE OUTCOMES BEYOND THE SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Human rights self-assessment processes may generate important organisational and governance outcomes beyond the immediate findings and action points emerging from the assessment itself. Across the participating cities, self-assessment sometimes contributed to broader organisational learning, stronger governance arrangements, improved coordination, deeper engagement with external actors, and new ways of working that could support broader human rights implementation. The themes below reflect recurring outcomes that emerged across the experiences of the participating cities and illustrate how self-assessment processes can contribute to wider institutional, governance, and implementation change.

### **2.3.1 SURFACING OVERLOOKED ISSUES AND RISKS**

Beyond producing assessment findings and identifying immediate action points, self-assessment processes may help bring overlooked issues, risks, or concerns into wider organisational awareness. This may include issues that are known in some parts of the organisation but have not been recognised or addressed across the entirety of the organisation, as well as concerns that fall between departmental responsibilities or remain fragmented across different parts of the municipality's work. It may also include systemic barriers or discriminatory patterns affecting particular groups across different rights. Where self-assessment processes create structured opportunities for reflection, comparison of perspectives, or examination of practice, they may help connect fragmented knowledge and make concerns more visible across the organisation, including to those who are in a position to address them.

This broader organisational recognition can help municipalities identify implementation gaps, assign responsibility more clearly, prioritise action, and respond to issues that might otherwise remain unaddressed or recurrent. By contrast, where fragmented knowledge remains unconnected and overlooked issues are not brought into wider organisational awareness, municipalities may miss opportunities to clarify responsibility, intervene earlier, or respond to recurring or systemic problems in a coordinated way.

### **2.3.2 STRENGTHENING ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN MUNICIPAL PRACTICE**

Beyond producing assessment findings and identifying immediate action points, self-assessment processes may also deepen organisational understanding of how municipal work affects human rights and the concrete implications human rights have for municipal work. This deeper organisational understanding may involve the meaning of human rights obligations and recognising how everyday municipal responsibilities, decisions, and practices affect human rights. Organisational learning may also involve understanding how different departments or services approach common challenges, where assumptions about roles or responsibilities may not align, and how issues that are often treated separately may, in fact, be connected. Through reflection, discussion, engagement with concrete examples, or other forms of shared interpretation, the self-assessment process may help build a shared language and a more practical understanding of human rights obligations and concepts and how they translate into concrete municipal responsibilities, decisions, and practices.

This stronger organisational understanding can help municipalities recognise human rights implications more consistently, connect related challenges that might otherwise remain disconnected, and integrate human rights obligations more confidently into future decisions and action. By contrast, where opportunities for reflection, shared learning, and focused discussion of concrete cases are limited, human rights may remain abstract, be understood differently across the organisation, be treated as separate from everyday municipal responsibilities, decisions, and practices, or be seen primarily as general values or relevant considerations rather than obligations shaping municipal action.

### **2.3.3 BUILDING A STRONGER EVIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR FUTURE ACTION**

Beyond producing assessment findings and identifying immediate action points, self-assessment processes may create a stronger evidence and knowledge base for future human rights implementation within the municipality. Human rights implementation often requires decisions about where problems exist, which issues require priority attention, what forms of response may be appropriate, and how future progress should be assessed. A stronger evidence and knowledge base can be particularly important where assumptions, stereotypes, or incomplete knowledge may shape how the needs, experiences, or barriers affecting specific groups are understood.

Where self-assessment processes generate structured, credible, and decision-relevant findings, they may provide a stronger basis for identifying priorities, designing responses, addressing patterns of exclusion or discrimination, justifying action, and establishing a clearer basis for future monitoring or review. This can help municipalities act with greater confidence, make more coherent implementation decisions, allocate effort and resources more effectively, and sustain more targeted human rights action over time. By contrast, where the assessment does not generate sufficiently clear or credible findings, municipalities may struggle to identify priorities, justify action, design well-targeted responses, or establish a clear basis for future monitoring and follow-up.

### **2.3.4 STRENGTHENING LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS GOVERNANCE**

Beyond producing assessment findings and identifying immediate action points, self-assessment processes may contribute to strengthening the governance arrangements through which human rights are organised and sustained within the municipality. This may involve identifying weaknesses in existing governance arrangements, including unclear responsibilities, weak coordination mechanisms, insufficient procedures or tools, and limited monitoring or reporting arrangements. In some cases, the self-assessment process may reinforce and improve existing governance structures, coordination mechanisms, procedures, or working practices; in others, it may help establish new ones. This can be particularly relevant where the assessment highlights not only substantive human rights issues, but also weaknesses in the organisational conditions needed to identify, address, and follow up on them in a systematic and sustained way.

Strengthening governance in this sense concerns the institutional capacity of the municipality to organise, coordinate, monitor, and sustain human rights work over time. It involves creating a stronger basis for more consistent implementation, clearer accountability, and more reliable follow-up beyond responses to individual issues as they arise. By contrast, where governance arrangements remain unclear, fragmented, or weakly institutionalised, responsibility may remain diffuse, follow-up may be inconsistent, and human rights implementation may be vulnerable through relying more on individual initiative or short-term efforts than on stable organisational structures.

### **2.3.5 BUILDING STRONGER INTERNAL COORDINATION AND SHARED OWNERSHIP**

Beyond producing assessment findings and identifying immediate action points, self-assessment processes may strengthen coordination, collaboration, and shared ownership across different parts of the municipality. Because decisions, services, and everyday practices across the municipality affect the enjoyment of human rights, self-assessment processes may help engage actors beyond those formally responsible for coordinating, supporting, or driving this work. Responsibilities, knowledge, and practical experience relevant to implementation may be distributed across the organisation rather than concentrated to those actors. As a result, those leading the work may find it difficult to secure active engagement from other departments or create shared ownership of human rights implementation. Where self-assessment processes create opportunities for structured exchange, joint analysis, or collaborative problem-solving across organisational boundaries, they may help connect actors who would not otherwise work together. Through this, the process may strengthen coordination between parts of the organisation facing common human rights implementation challenges and facilitate the recognition that responsibility for human rights implementation is shared across the parts of the municipality whose decisions, services, and everyday practices affect the enjoyment of rights.

Internal coordination and shared ownership can help reduce siloed working practices, improve coordination between departments addressing related human rights issues, make it easier for those leading the work to mobilise broader organisational engagement, and create a stronger basis for joint follow-up, implementation, or shared responsibility for future action. By contrast, where opportunities for cross-organisational exchange, joint analysis, or collaborative problem-solving remain limited, implementation may remain siloed, responsibility may continue to sit with a small number of actors, and opportunities for coordinated implementation and follow-up across departments may remain limited.

### **2.3.6 INFLUENCING LOCAL POLICY AND STRATEGIC PLANNING**

Beyond producing assessment findings and identifying immediate action points, self-assessment processes may influence broader policy development, strategic planning, and priority-setting within the municipality. Human rights implementation requires decisions about priorities, resource allocation, and the direction of future action. This is particularly true where identified challenges cannot be addressed through isolated operational or service-level changes alone.

Where self-assessment processes generate findings that provide a credible and actionable basis for decision-making, they may inform policy development, contribute to strategic plans or policy frameworks, and help shape action plans. They may also help political or administrative actors prioritise future action and inform budget allocation and planning discussions.

This can help secure formal commitments, strengthen political or administrative backing for future action, and support prioritisation and resource allocation for implementation. It can also increase the likelihood that findings shape longer-term implementation and the strategic direction of future municipal action. By contrast, where findings are not linked to strategic or policy processes, municipalities may miss opportunities to secure prioritisation, formal commitments, or resource allocation needed for longer-term implementation. In such cases, the influence of the self-assessment may remain limited to narrower or shorter-term operational responses.

### **2.3.7 STRENGTHENING EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS**

Beyond producing assessment findings and identifying immediate action points, self-assessment processes may strengthen relationships between municipalities and external actors engaged in or affected by the local realisation of human rights. Human rights implementation at the local level depends not only on the engagement of municipal actors, but also on engagement with rights holders, representative groups, civil society actors, experts, and other relevant external actors whose experiences, expertise, or cooperation are relevant to the practical realisation of rights. Where self-assessment processes involve external actors in meaningful ways, such processes may help build trust, strengthen dialogue, create new channels of engagement, or strengthen existing relationships.

Strengthening external engagement and relationships can support more sustained participation, stronger cooperation in identifying implementation gaps, developing responses, monitoring progress, and sustaining participatory human rights governance beyond the assessment itself. By contrast, where external engagement is narrowly transactional, poorly facilitated, or limited to one-off consultations, municipalities may lose opportunities to build trust, benefit from external perspectives and cooperation, or sustain the relationships needed for ongoing participation, monitoring, and implementation.

### **2.3.8 DEVELOPING NEW ORGANISATIONAL AND GOVERNANCE PRACTICES**

Beyond producing assessment findings and identifying immediate action points, self-assessment processes may support changes in implementation practices and organisational ways of working. Human rights implementation requires municipalities not only to identify and understand challenges, but to develop practical responses. Existing routines or ways of working are not always well suited to address these challenges. Where self-assessment processes create opportunities for reflection, experimentation, or collaborative problem-solving, they may help municipalities clarify implementation challenges, experiment with new approaches, adapt existing implementation practices, or develop new organisational working methods.

This can help municipalities better identify and respond to human rights challenges in practice, translate assessment insights into changed working practices, and support implementation approaches that are better adapted to the rights and needs of affected groups and local implementation conditions. By contrast, where self-assessment processes do not create space for practical experimentation or adaptation, municipalities may have fewer opportunities to test, refine, or adapt how they understand and respond to human rights challenges. This increases the likelihood that familiar implementation practices or organisational working methods will continue to be used even where they are poorly suited to address current human rights challenges.

### **FROM CROSS-CUTTING SYNTHESIS TO CITY EXPERIENCES**

The cross-cutting themes presented in this part identify recurring patterns across the participating cities, but they cannot fully capture the contextual realities of how self-assessment processes unfolded in specific local settings. In practice, the conditions shaping implementation, assessment quality, and wider organisational outcomes were often closely interconnected and took different forms depending on each city's governance arrangements, institutional starting point, and strategic objectives. Part 3 complements the analytical synthesis in Part 2 by returning to the experiences of individual cities, illustrating how these dynamics unfolded in context and what practical lessons emerged from each case.

## **PART 3: THEMATIC CITY EXPERIENCES FROM HUMAN RIGHTS SELF-ASSESSMENT**

The following case narratives illustrate how central aspects of human rights self-assessment unfolded in the local contexts of the five participating cities. Each case narrative focuses on a specific theme that shaped the self-assessment experience in one of the cities. Together, the narratives offer insight into how local conditions, practical approaches, governance choices, and implementation challenges can influence the design, implementation, and value of self-assessment processes. They also offer a more grounded understanding of the practical realities, choices, and challenges involved in using human rights self-assessment in local governance.

### **3.1 VIENNA: HOW A STRONG MANDATE AND INSTITUTIONAL ANCHORING INFLUENCE A HUMAN RIGHTS SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

The extent to which human rights (approaches) become embedded in local governance is closely linked to institutional structures and political commitment. Formal mandates, dedicated coordination mechanisms, and clearly assigned responsibilities can provide continuity, legitimacy, and the organisational capacity needed to carry out human rights work effectively. In the context of self-assessment processes, institutional anchoring can strongly influence both how the process is conducted and how its findings are used.

The experience of Vienna illustrates how a strong institutional mandate and anchoring shape the implementation of human rights self-assessment. The case demonstrates how formal political commitment, dedicated structures, and established responsibilities can support stability, coordination, and access to information throughout the process. At the same time, it highlights how the institutional context itself influences the conditions under which self-assessment is carried out and integrated into broader governance practices.

Vienna has been a Human Rights City for over ten years, and its human rights work is embedded in a City Council resolution and supported by a dedicated Human Rights Office. Over time, this has created a context characterised by a high degree of institutionalisation, accumulated expertise and strong internal connectivity. The Human Rights Office is the central actor for coordinating and advancing human rights within the city administration. Its mandate covers a broad range of functions.

These include integrating human rights as guiding principles across all areas of municipal decision-making and reporting to international mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). In addition, the office plays an active role in raising awareness within the administration and the wider city, promoting human rights education, and engaging in cooperation with national authorities and international networks. Through these activities, the office contributes both to the strategic development and the day-to-day implementation of human rights at the local level.

The self-assessment was implemented within this institutional setting by the Human Rights Office, with the Human Rights Commissioner playing a key role throughout the process. Given its mandate and day-to-day responsibilities, the office was well positioned to carry out the assessment. Its existing coordination role, combined with dedicated staff, budget and established networks, meant that the necessary knowledge, data and connections were already in place. Rather than requiring new structures, the process could be integrated into ongoing work, drawing on accumulated expertise and institutional memory. Vienna's experience illustrates several ways in which a strong mandate and institutional anchoring can influence the implementation of a local human rights self-assessment.

### **3.1.1 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK**

A key lesson from Vienna is that it is not only that the existence of a mandate that matters, but how it is translated into institutional structures. The Human Rights Office provided a clear point of responsibility, enabling the process to be organised efficiently and with a high degree of autonomy. Its established position within the administration facilitated access to information and reduced the need for additional coordination efforts.

This demonstrates how a robust institutional framework can act as an enabling factor. It supports organisational capacity, ensures continuity, and allows self-assessment to be integrated into existing governance processes rather than treated as a one-off exercise.

#### **EXPERTISE AND INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY**

Accumulated expertise within the Human Rights Office also emerged as an important enabling factor. Through years of engagement, the office has developed substantial knowledge, experience and networks. At the same time, much of this expertise is also embodied in individual staff members whose long-term engagement has contributed to building relationships, practical know-how and

contextual understanding across departments and policy areas. This institutional memory made it possible to operationalise the self-assessment tool effectively and to interpret the findings within a broader policy context.

This underlines that mandates become most effective when they are accompanied by sustained capacity-building over time. Expertise does not emerge automatically from formal structures, but develops through continuous practice, institutional continuity and organisational learning. Vienna's experience, therefore, highlights the importance of not only establishing dedicated structures, but also retaining experienced staff and creating mechanisms for knowledge-sharing and transfer.

At the same time, Vienna's experience points to the importance of ensuring that knowledge is shared and embedded within institutions. Strengthening internal documentation and knowledge-transfer mechanisms can help maintain continuity and resilience over time, particularly in the context of staff turnover or organisational change.

### 3.1.2 CENTRAL COORDINATION AND EFFICIENCY

Vienna's institutional setup enabled a highly coordinated and streamlined process. The availability of data, clearly defined responsibilities and established working relationships allowed the self-assessment to be carried out efficiently and with limited additional coordination.



*In short, the years of collaboration and networking among our colleagues have contributed to creating an environment in which even very specific information can often be accessed relatively easily.*

**Georg Wexberg, Project Officer at the Human Rights Office of the City of Vienna**

For cities with similar structures, this demonstrates the advantages of central coordination: processes can be implemented quickly, consistently and with a clear overview of available information. At the same time, cities may consider how such centrally coordinated processes can be complemented by opportunities for broader exchange and engagement, particularly in later stages such as validation or implementation of identified action points.

### 3.1.3 CONTINUITY

Vienna's strong anchoring provides an important foundation for long-term human rights work. The existence of a formal mandate and dedicated structures ensures stability and continuity beyond individual projects or initiatives. This is reinforced by the fact that the Human Rights Office has secure funding and permanent staff, allowing it to maintain its work over time rather than relying on short-term project cycles. Such continuity creates the conditions for embedding tools like the self-assessment into regular administrative practice.

In this context, the Human Rights Office is well positioned to sustain the use of the self-assessment over time. Its established networks across the administration enable it to identify where and how the tool can connect with ongoing processes, strategies and reporting cycles. This makes it easier to revisit the assessment at regular intervals and to integrate findings into existing workflows. In addition, sustainability requires not only maintaining existing efforts but continuing to develop them further:



*To be sustainable, we may need to think more broadly—and that's something the Human Rights Office can handle well within its mandate.*

**Georg Wexberg**

Using the self-assessment repeatedly also increases its value. Conducted at intervals, it allows the city to track developments over time, identify areas of improvement, and detect emerging gaps. In this sense, continuity is not only an organisational advantage but a substantive one: it enables self-assessment to move beyond a one-off exercise and become part of an ongoing learning and monitoring cycle within the administration.

### 3.1.4 POLITICAL ANCHORING

The political anchoring of human rights in Vienna provides stability and continuity, which are important for long-term implementation. However, the earlier stages of the self-assessment process (e.g. data collection and analysis of the data) remained largely disconnected from political decision-making. Political engagement is expected to play a more prominent role only at a later stage, in the implementation of action points. This sequencing illustrates one possible approach: separating technical assessment from political decision-making, while ensuring that results can feed into political processes at a later stage.

### **3.1.5 BALANCING CENTRAL RESPONSIBILITY AND BROADER ENGAGEMENT**

Vienna's experience also highlights the importance of balancing strong institutional responsibility with broader engagement across the administration. In Vienna, the self-assessment was solely carried out within the Human Rights Office, drawing on its central role, expertise and access to information. At the same time, the office operates within a broader ecosystem of cooperation that connects it to other departments and stakeholders beyond the assessment exercise itself. This suggests that broader engagement does not always need to take place during all stages of the self-assessment process, but that cities with already established cooperations and networks may benefit from these indirectly when working on a self-assessment. Engagement can also be built into later stages of the process, namely the dissemination or implementation of action points. In Vienna's case, the Human Rights Office is well placed to connect the results of the self-assessment to different policy areas and to support departments in integrating human rights considerations into their work.

A clearly mandated office can ensure coordination and continuity, while, at the same time, other cities may explore ways to involve additional actors in order to strengthen shared ownership and integration across sectors. This balance is particularly relevant for mainstreaming human rights across different policy areas.

### **3.1.6 CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Vienna's experience shows that strong institutional mandates and well-established administrative structures can significantly facilitate the implementation of a self-assessment tool by enabling efficient processes, ensuring access to information, and providing organisational stability. At the same time, this high degree of centralisation and internal expertise may constrain participation, limit cross-sectoral engagement, and weaken broader ownership of human rights across the administration. Without deliberate efforts, links to political decision-making can also remain underdeveloped.

These dynamics highlight that different institutional contexts offer distinct advantages: less formalised systems may foster broader participation and coordination, while more institutionalised settings benefit from clarity and efficiency. Rather than replicating a single model, cities should reflect on how to best leverage their existing structures. In doing so, combining institutional strength with inclusive participation, knowledge-sharing, and stronger political integration can enhance both the process and the impact of self-assessment tools in local human rights governance.

### 3.1.7 KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE VIENNA EXPERIENCE

The Vienna case reveals five key takeaways, which are as follows:

- 1. Strong institutional anchoring creates favourable conditions for self-assessment.** Clear mandates, dedicated offices and established coordination mechanisms can support efficient implementation and continuity over time.
- 2. Institutional memory and expertise are important resources.** Sustained engagement with human rights work helps build the knowledge and experience needed to carry out meaningful self-assessment processes.
- 3. Self-assessment can be integrated into ongoing administrative work.** Existing data sources, reporting structures and internal networks can reduce the need for additional coordination and make the process more manageable.
- 4. Continuity increases the long-term value of self-assessment.** Repeating assessments at intervals can help cities track developments, identify improvements and monitor emerging gaps or challenges.
- 5. Strong central coordination can be complemented by broader engagement.** Strong institutional leadership can provide structure and consistency, while involving additional actors can support mainstreaming, organisational learning and shared ownership across sectors.



## **3.2 UTRECHT: HOW TO FACILITATE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS' INVOLVEMENT IN HUMAN RIGHTS SELF-ASSESSMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

Human rights are grounded in the idea that all people should be able to participate in shaping the decisions, policies, and structures that affect their lives. This requires more than consultation alone: it means creating processes in which different voices, experiences, and perspectives are meaningfully included, particularly when assessing whether public policies and services uphold human dignity, equality, and inclusion. Participation is, therefore, a central element of a human rights-based approach (HRBA), including in local self-assessment processes.

The experience of Utrecht highlights how a participatory approach can support human rights self-assessment at the local level through the active involvement of civil society actors. This includes established civil society actors, as well as grassroots civic initiatives, from self-organised community spaces to social movements. The case of Utrecht illustrates how participation can strengthen the quality, relevance, and legitimacy of self-assessment processes by incorporating the knowledge and lived experiences of actors by working directly with affected communities. It further demonstrates how involving civil society actors not only contributes to identifying gaps and challenges but also helps create shared ownership of both the process and its outcomes.

There are several aspects that need to be taken into account when planning a participatory monitoring or self-assessment process. These include questions of who should be involved, when participation should take place, and how involvement can be organised in a meaningful way. Utrecht's experience illustrates how a municipality can approach these questions when aiming to embed participation at the centre of a human rights self-assessment process.

### **3.2.1 WHO TO INVOLVE**

Utrecht was able to build on an already existing structure: the Utrecht Human Rights Coalition, established in 2012. The coalition is a network of civil society actors and other stakeholders relevant to human rights, including the university, public bodies working on human rights issues such as the anti-discrimination office, and representatives of the city administration participating on different topics in an organised way. Importantly, the coalition is not a closed group focused exclusively on human rights. Many of its members are also active in other thematic alliances within the city, such as the poverty coalition, the climate coalition, the informal care coalition, and the coalition for equal opportunities for youth.

For the purpose of a participatory self-assessment, Utrecht aimed to involve a diverse range of stakeholders able to represent the needs, interests, and experiences of different groups within the city. The selection process was guided by the intention to integrate different human rights dimensions – including social rights, environmental rights, equality, and non-discrimination – and, therefore, to include not only established organisations and service providers, but also interest groups, resident initiatives, social movements, human rights defenders and activists, legal experts, and investigative journalists working on human rights-related issues.

Particular attention was given to involving not only well-known actors with established expertise, but also groups and individuals who are often less visible and may not use the “language of human rights” in their daily work.



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*We developed a specific method of mapping – alongside clusters of human rights and taking into account diversity of location, organisational structure and duration of establishment – and then selected out of the longlist of local organisations – 200 – a balanced assortment of usual and non-usual suspects.*

**Hans Sackers, Head of department of European and International Affairs, City of Utrecht**

The city also recognised that this selection process cannot remain static. Since the civil society landscape continuously evolves, the network of actors involved in the process requires regular review and updating. Overall, the selection process reflected the broader objective of involving people with different experiences, expertise, perspectives, and skills.

### **3.2.2 WHEN AND HOW TO INVOLVE**

Utrecht’s experience showed that, for a participatory self-assessment process, it is not sufficient to distribute questionnaires and ask participants to complete them. Meaningful participation requires active involvement throughout the entire process. In Utrecht, participation was, therefore, integrated from the beginning: from designing the process itself and defining monitoring priorities, to selecting areas for review, identifying relevant standards, conducting the assessment, and formulating conclusions and recommendations. A key principle was ensuring that participants had a real voice in discussions and decision-making processes and were able to influence outcomes.

### 3.2.3 REACHING OUT

In order to broaden participation not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of diversity, the Utrecht project team adapted its methods of outreach and engagement to the different needs of participating organisations and groups. Multiple events on different topics were organised and, in several cases, the project team visited organisations directly in their own spaces.



*Conversations were held on location – at community centres, residents’ organisations, neighbourhood spaces, cultural venues, foundations, food banks, drop-in centres, shelters, and many other public settings. This approach also meant following the rhythm of the organisations themselves, joining evening and weekend meetings and taking part in activities, campaigns, and events.*



**Sara Miellet, Researcher, University of Utrecht**

### 3.2.4 COLLECTING PERSPECTIVES AND INPUT

One of the important lessons from Utrecht was that methods for collecting information also need to be adapted to participants. The project team found that questionnaires that focused on abstract standards and concepts were of limited usefulness for engaging many civil society representatives. At the same time, the involvement of higher-level political and strategic actors within the city administration would also have benefited from more tailored methodologies. To address this, Utrecht combined quantitative information and statistics with narrative formats, including short reports, organisational experiences, and personal stories shared by residents. This approach helped create dialogue that was both strategic and grounded in practical realities.

### 3.2.5 FRAMING HUMAN RIGHTS IN ACCESSIBLE WAYS

Many organisations do not define their work explicitly in terms of human rights, but instead focus on concrete issues such as poverty, children’s rights, housing, or social inclusion. Enabling a diverse group of stakeholders to contribute meaningfully, therefore, requires translating human rights standards into practical language and everyday experiences that resonate with participants’ work and realities. The Utrecht experience showed that framing issues explicitly as human rights concerns can help make visible how a broad range of municipal policies and

practices affect people's dignity, equality, and participation. Self-assessment processes can support this by creating spaces where these connections become understandable and actionable for different actors.

### **3.2.6 ACKNOWLEDGING THE ROLE OF ALL ACTORS INVOLVED**

Successful participation does not mean limiting civil society actors to contributors within a single assessment exercise. Rather, it means recognising them as essential actors within a broader and continuously evolving local human rights ecosystem.

This became particularly visible in the organisation of Utrecht's 2025 Human Rights Day activities. The event was organised through a co-creative process involving members of the Human Rights Coalition. As a result, the initiative expanded from a single event on 10 December into a full Human Rights Month with a wide variety of activities. Events were jointly facilitated by representatives of the city administration and civil society actors, accessibility received significant attention, and activities ranged from film screenings to a Living Library. The city also acknowledged the importance of compensating participants for their active contributions.

### **3.2.7 CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Utrecht's experience demonstrates that meaningful stakeholder involvement through an inclusive participatory approach requires careful preparation, strong awareness of the different perspectives and needs of civil society actors, acknowledgement of the expertise and limited time and resources, inter alia also by ensuring adequate compensations, and a willingness to treat participation as an ongoing and dynamic process.

At the same time, the city identified several important challenges and lessons. Diversity among organisations can enrich the process, but it can also lead to tensions and differing priorities. Human rights organisations do not necessarily share the same perspectives on all issues, nor do they automatically represent all inhabitants equally. Managing these differences, therefore, becomes an important aspect of facilitation.

Another key lesson was the importance of trust. Without a minimum level of trust in the city administration, civil society actors would not have engaged in a meaningful way. Building and maintaining this trust was, therefore, essential for successful participation. The main learning in this regard, was that initiatives should not be developed FOR the city, but WITH the city – and this should be a guiding principle, requiring much more flexibility in planning.

The Utrecht experience also highlighted the need to consider how additional human rights self-assessments fit into existing local monitoring landscapes. In cities where multiple monitoring and evaluation processes already exist, creating separate human rights assessments may risk duplication or participation fatigue. Utrecht, therefore, pointed to the potential value of integrating human rights perspectives into existing monitoring and self-assessment tools as part of a broader mainstreaming approach.

A further lesson concerned facilitation expertise. Utrecht made clear that administrative staff alone would not have been able to organise and facilitate such an extensive participatory process without external support and dedicated expertise in facilitation and stakeholder engagement.

Finally, the city stressed the importance of visible outcomes. Stakeholders are more likely to engage – and remain engaged – when participation leads to tangible effects and contributes to real change processes. Participation should, therefore, not become an end in itself. While cities benefit from the expertise, insights, and lived experiences of civil society actors, civil society actors themselves also need to benefit from their involvement.

At the same time, Utrecht's experience demonstrated the pragmatic value of participatory approaches. Involving civil society actors working on human rights-related issues increases the likelihood that such perspectives will be considered in local policymaking and public debate, even if not all political action is explicitly framed through a human rights lens.



Human rights in the time span since the establishment of the coalition have gained more and more attention, being referenced in local policy debates, agenda-setting, and accountability. This is also connected with rising expectations from both council members and the community that human rights principles should guide municipal action.

**Hans Sackers**

### 3.2.8 KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE UTRECHT EXPERIENCE

The Utrecht case reveals five key takeaways, which are as follows:

- 1. Meaningful participation requires active and continuous involvement.** Participation should be integrated throughout the entire self-assessment process, from planning and priority-setting to evaluation and follow-up.
- 2. Diversity of actors strengthens self-assessment processes.** Including both established organisations and less visible groups helps ensure that different experiences, perspectives, and human rights issues are reflected.
- 3. Human rights language must be translated into practical realities.** Many organisations work on human rights issues without explicitly framing them as such. Accessible and practice-oriented facilitation is, therefore, essential.
- 4. Trust and long-term relationships are fundamental.** Participatory processes depend on trust between municipalities and civil society actors and require sustained engagement beyond one-off consultations.
- 5. Participation must lead to visible outcomes.** Stakeholders are more likely to remain engaged when self-assessment processes result in concrete follow-up actions and contribute to meaningful change.



### **3.3 LUND: FROM COMMITMENT TO PRACTICE - LEVERAGING SYNERGIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMING FOR EFFECTIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Human rights are relevant across virtually all areas of municipal work. In practice, however, activities that contribute to human rights are not always explicitly framed in those terms. This can make it harder to systematically apply human rights standards and tools, even where the substantive work relates to human rights. Conversely, where municipal work is explicitly connected to human rights conventions and standards, this can create important opportunities for coherence and synergies across initiatives that might otherwise remain separate.

The case of Lund illustrates both these dynamics. In August 2018, the Municipal Council declared Lund a Human Rights City. Eight years later, Lund's work with the RIGHTSCITIES self-assessment tool demonstrates how clear human rights framing, dedicated institutional structures and synergies between initiatives are critical to using such tools effectively. By linking self-assessment to its broadly anchored role as a Model Municipality for disability rights, Lund was able to overcome common challenges such as siloed departments and low cross-sector engagement, while also ensuring that findings were translated into sustained action. The case further shows that aligning self-assessment tools with international human rights standards – such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU Charter) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) – is key to enabling coherence across initiatives. At the same time, the self-assessment work in Lund highlights the risks embedded in human rights not being clearly articulated but instead embedded implicitly within broader frameworks such as social sustainability. This can limit the systematic use of human rights standards and tools such as human rights-based approach (HRBA).

#### **3.3.1 INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS: ORGANISING HUMAN RIGHTS WORK IN LUND**

When becoming a Human Rights City, Lund's goal was to develop a systematic approach to implement human rights across the entire municipal organisation and to integrate human rights into governance and management. Since then, human rights have mainly been the responsibility of the Programme for Social Sustainability and related plans. This program, together with the Programme for Ecological Sustainability and the Business Programme are responsible for implementing the umbrella Policy for Sustainable Development.

### 3.3.2 LEVERAGING SYNERGIES: INTEGRATING HUMAN RIGHTS SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH MODEL MUNICIPALITIES WORK

Lund City has been granted state funds to develop its work in disability rights as a Model Municipality for disability rights 2026-2028. The purpose for the Model Municipalities work is to improve implementation of equality, inclusion and diversity based on the CRPD.

Like with the RIGHTSCITIES project, the Unit for Social Sustainability is responsible for coordinating the Model Municipalities work. The unit used this as an opportunity to enhance the process and the results of both projects. The RIGHTSCITIES human rights self-assessment tool proved to be well suited to Lund's work as a Model Municipality. The work of a Model Municipality must be grounded in the CRPD and the practice of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee), which – alongside the EU Charter – also underpin the self-assessment tool. The tool also integrates children's rights and gender equality perspectives, both of which are required of a Model Municipality. Lund has chosen employment as one of the areas to work on as a Model Municipality, which is a key domain covered by the self-assessment tool.

Systematic monitoring and evaluation – the core function of self-assessment – constitutes a core feature of the Model Municipality work. Indeed, the first mandatory step is a baseline study of the current level of implementation of the CRPD as the national disability policy goal. Development will then be measured against this baseline throughout and at the end of the Model Municipalities work. Through the work done in RIGHTSCITIES, the Model Municipalities work in Lund could be inspired by a human rights self-assessment tool for European cities, grounded in the CRPD and integrating intersectional perspectives. The Unit for Social Sustainability reports that, irrespective of the good fit between the projects, it required a lot of work to translate the tool into Swedish and make the, sometimes technical, human rights language accessible. Choosing which questions to use and adapting those questions to the specific circumstances of Lund municipality also required considerable effort. The work was still worth it, as it revealed previously unnoticed human rights issues. In addition, the explicit human rights focus and language of the tool prompted discussions leading to a cross-departmental understanding of the crucial link between human rights and practical work.

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*Even though the process was demanding at times, the self-assessment tool helped create a shared language for discussing human rights across departments. Even when the questions felt technical, the structure encouraged staff to articulate challenges and responsibilities in a deeper and more consistent way. Further, the tool prompted reflection on areas that are often overlooked in everyday operations and helped bring them into focus.*

**Joana Ivarsson Vittorio, Strategist Social Sustainability and Human Rights, Department of Sustainable Growth, City Council Office, City of Lund**

Through the Model Municipalities work, the RIGHTSCITIES self-assessment work conquered general challenges in local human rights work. One such challenge is to involve different departments and sectors of the administration in human rights work. Departments are often busy with work originating from the goals and management of their own department, and neither their management nor staff may regard tasks from another department as a priority. The structures and connection created through the Model Municipalities work meant that both management and staff at different departments were ready to engage with the self-assessment tool. The usual difficulties of cross-departmental collaboration disappeared as the task was already anchored at all levels of the relevant departments as part of the Model Municipalities work. This considerably eased the process of gathering responses and it yielded thorough and comprehensive responses.

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*It was a remarkable response! Colleagues from the different departments even reached out to us to, eager to respond.*

**Joana Ivarsson Vittorio**

The incorporation of the RIGHTSCITIES self-assessment also meant that the knowledge yielded about weaknesses and good practices could feed into the Model Municipalities action plan to improve human rights of persons with disabilities in the area of employment. In addition, the version of the tool adapted by the Unit for Social Sustainability will be used to measure progress of the Model Municipalities work.

### 3.3.3 BEYOND SYNERGISING INITIATIVES: USING SELF-ASSESSMENT TO STRENGTHEN HUMAN RIGHTS GOVERNANCE

The part of the self-assessment tool based on the FRA human rights cities framework measures the local administrative and political infrastructure to implement human rights, rather than the level of implementation of specific rights. Unlike for the part of the self-assessment tool measuring implementation of disability rights presented above, the Unit for Social Sustainability in Lund had access to this information and did not need to engage other departments or units to provide responses.

The unit found that many of the foundations, structures and tools required under the FRA human rights cities framework were in place. This included the presence of human rights standards in policies and programs, the explicit commitment to be a Human Rights City, a unit responsible for human rights in the administration, participatory bodies representing civil society and systems for monitoring and evaluation. At the same time, they recognised challenges to systematically implement human rights across the municipal organisation through a human rights-based approach (HRBA) and awareness raising. One challenge is the absence of human rights framing and language in the daily work of the municipality under the umbrella of social sustainability. Some are aware that social sustainability work is human rights work. Still, the lack of explicit human rights framing and language beyond the policy level makes it difficult to create interest for and roll out explicit human rights tools, such as HRBA or awareness-raising about human rights standards. This, in turn, means that work is not actively guided by and evaluated against human rights standards and principles.



*General human rights principles such as dignity, equality and inclusion come into the work framed as social sustainability from other sources, but these may not be understood the same way as they are in human rights instruments. Also, the substantive rights actualised by the work, say the right to education, employment, health or political participation in human rights conventions and the practice by the Committees overlooking these, are not systematically used to ground, guide and evaluate work. This is where the importance of working with a human rights-based approach comes in. This is the challenge we face now in Lund.*

**Joana Ivarsson Vittorio**

The Unit for Social Sustainability, in measuring Lund against the self-assessment tool based on the FRA human rights cities framework, also identified the need to engage the political level in explicit terms of human rights by, for example, assigning a councillor with a mandate covering a systematic approach to implement human rights across the entire municipal organisation. This would mean that there would be a clear receiver on the political level of strategic human rights knowledge, such as that yielded by the RIGHTSCITIES self-assessment. While no such channel exists now, there will also be opportunities for the municipality to work strategically when events explicitly connected to human rights come up on the political agenda, for example, the 10-year anniversary of Lund being a Human Rights City.

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### **3.3.4 CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED**

The experience of Lund illustrates how the effectiveness of human rights self-assessment tools depends on the institutional context in which it is applied. In Lund, pre-existing human rights structures – such as a formal commitment to being a Human Rights City and an explicitly dedicated unit – created the conditions necessary to both implement and benefit from the RIGHTSCITIES self-assessment process.

The case highlights the potential of alignment between initiatives. The strong overlap in human rights standards between the self-assessment tool and the Model Municipalities programme allowed the municipality to integrate and facilitate processes, reduce duplication, and translate findings directly into action. The experience of Lund also underscores persistent challenges in local human rights work. Even where important foundations and structures for human rights work are in place, barriers such as siloed administration, lack of dedicated political channels and the tendency not to frame municipal work explicitly in terms of human rights, can limit impact.

### 3.3.5 KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE LUND EXPERIENCE

The Lund case reveals five key takeaways, which are as follows:

- 1. Explicit human rights structures enable implementation.** Municipalities with dedicated structures – such as units, policies, and political commitments and channels – are significantly better positioned to implement and benefit from human rights self-assessment tools.
- 2. Implicit human rights work limits strategic impact.** When human rights work is framed indirectly – e.g. as “social sustainability” – it can weaken the ability to apply human rights standards, tools, and accountability mechanisms systematically.
- 3. Alignment with international standards facilitates synergies between initiatives.** When self-assessment tools align with international standards – such as the FRA human rights cities framework, the EU Charter and the CRPD – they can be directly integrated into ongoing initiatives, increasing both efficiency and impact.
- 4. Institutional embedding solves cross-departmental barriers.** Embedding human rights work within broadly anchored initiatives, such as the Model Municipalities initiative, helps overcome common challenges such as siloed departments and low engagement across sectors.
- 5. Local adaptation, accessible language, and translation is critical to implementation.** Technical human rights language must be translated, both linguistically and conceptually, into everyday administrative practices to ensure understanding, ownership, and meaningful use. Any tool developed at the international level will need adaptation to the local context.



### **3.4 GDAŃSK: CO-CREATION BY CIVIL SERVANTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY TO PLACE THE PERSON AND THEIR RIGHTS AT THE CENTRE OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

Human rights place the person – their needs, experiences, and interests – at the centre of governance. This means that effective implementation depends not only on formal commitments, policies, or institutional structures, but also on governance processes that connect administrative decision-making to the lived realities of rights holders. Co-creation between public institutions and civil society can be an important way of strengthening human rights implementation at the local level.

The Gdańsk experience illustrates how structured collaboration between civil servants and civil society can function as a practical method for placing the individual and their rights more clearly at the centre of local governance. It also illustrates the benefits of integrating human rights self-assessment into a broader human rights policy development process to create strong institutional ownership, improved coordination across actors, and ensure that findings can be translated directly into policy and practice.

#### **3.4.1 MERGING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT WORK WITH THE PROCESS OF GDAŃSK BECOMING A HUMAN RIGHT CITY: A WIN-WIN**

Gdańsk is preparing for becoming a Human Rights City. The actor responsible for developing the policy Gdańsk as a Human Rights City, the Department of Social Development, included the RIGHTSCITIES project's work with self-assessment in the policy development process.

This merger was a win-win, as it facilitated and improved both processes as well as their result. A notable innovation resulting from this merger was the development of co-creation by civil servants and civil society as a working method. This served to place the impact of policies and practices on the human rights of the individual at the centre of local administration.

Gdańsk being on the road to becoming a Human Rights City greatly facilitated the RIGHTSCITIES self-assessment work. The human rights language used in the self-assessment was already known to the administration as a way to frame their work and this human rights framing was a pre-established priority for the city. Organisationally, the process of developing the policy for becoming a Human Rights City had an established work structure with relevant staff, civil society actors and scheduled times for meetings.

This paved the way for receiving timely and high-quality staff answers to the self-assessment questions. It also meant that the findings and solutions identified through the self-assessment work could be directly implemented through changed policy and practice, which was highly motivating for all actors involved in the self-assessment work. Finally, sections of the self-assessment tool will live on after the end of the RIGHTSCITIES project, as part of a mandatory annual reporting mechanism of the implementation of the Gdańsk as a Human Rights City policy.

Gdańsk's preparations to become a Human Rights City, in turn, benefitted from the process and the results of the self-assessment work. Since the FRA human rights cities framework and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU Charter) provide the standard for both the Gdańsk as a Human Rights City policy and the RIGHTSCITIES self-assessment tool, the tool served to identify weak points in the foundations, structures, and tools for human rights implementation (as established in the FRA human rights cities framework) as well as the enjoyment of human rights by individuals (as established in the EU Charter). Thanks to the diagnostics yielded by the self-assessment work, the structures and tools in the policy of Gdańsk as a Human Rights City was improved, as were policies and practices for ensuring human rights of persons with disabilities.



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*The work with the self-assessment made the policy Gdańsk as a Human Rights City better. It improved the long-term monitoring of the implementation of the policy as well as inspired a structure for meaningful and effective engagement with civil society. All this is now part of the policy.*

**Katarzyna Ziemann, Director of the Department of Social Development at the Gdańsk Municipality**

### **3.4.2 WORKSHOPS FACILITATING THE CO-CREATION OF POLICY AND PRACTICE BY CIVIL SERVANTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

The RIGHTSCITIES self-assessment work in Gdańsk was done in three stages. Firstly, the RIGHTSCITIES working group (made up of civil servants in the Department of Social Development) collected and filled in the data available to them through existing reports, data bases and personal knowledge and experience. Secondly, interviews were conducted with other civil servants identified as having access to missing data.

Thirdly, three workshops were conducted to validate collected data, collect additional data, analyse the data and identify action points based on the data. In the two first workshops the collected data was analysed, problem areas and good practices were identified and action points to address identified problems were developed. In the third and last workshop, the identification of action points continued, and these were presented to civil society actors for validation.

Out of these three steps, the three workshops stand out as the key to the RIGHTSCITIES self-assessment work improving the structures, tools, policies and practices for implementing human rights in Gdańsk. Three organisational factors were particularly instrumental to this end: Including a cross-section of the local administration, including civil society actors as partners of co-creation, and using human rights case studies to create a common language.

### **Including a cross-section of the local administration**

Firstly, the civil servants in the workshop included two different departments and their respective units, as well as those working with policy development, those in a managerial position and those working in the front-line of service delivery. In addition, the central administration of the city was represented. The presence of these actors with different mandates and experience made it possible to identify obstructions to the implementation of human rights at all levels. It also enabled participants to see how such obstructions were interconnected and how they could be eliminated. In addition, connecting actors from different levels increased the understanding of the constraints and opportunities of work at levels other than one's own.

### **Including civil society actors as partners of co-creation**

Secondly, civil society actors were included in the workshop as partners. They worked actively alongside civil servants in diagnosing problems with structures, policies, and practices, as well as identifying solutions to these problems. Civil society was included through their participation in the advisory councils to the Mayor of Gdańsk, as well as through additional non-governmental organisations by, as well as for, persons with disabilities, particularly in the areas of housing and participation, which were the parts of the self-assessment tool that were used by Gdańsk.

Many times, civil society participation is structured as the collection of experiences and positions from civil society by a few civil servants, while the actual work of transforming these into conclusions and action points is done at a later stage, without the active participation of civil society. In Gdańsk, the workshops did not simply include both civil society and civil servants, but were organised as a co-creation process, where data was found, validated, analysed and translated into action points through a common effort.

The impact of co-creating with civil society is clearly visible in the results of the workshops. One such feature is the inclusion of impact analysis in the monitoring of the Gdańsk as a Human Rights City policy. Focusing on the impact of a policy or practice on the enjoyment of human rights of the individual had previously been considered too far removed from municipal work. However, after extensive discussions with civil society, a consensus was reached that a focus on impact is key from a human rights perspective, as this will show how policies and practices actually impact the enjoyment of rights by the individual.

As mentioned above, the merger of the work with the RIGHTSCITIES self-assessment tool and the work with the Gdańsk as a Human Rights City policy both improved the quality of the future monitoring of the policy and ensured the future use of the self-assessment tool. In addition, the results of effective inclusion of civil society in the RIGHTSCITIES project led to the decision to replicate the co-creation workshops in the participatory monitoring of the Gdańsk as a Human Rights City policy.

“ *The most important changes we introduced to the resolution after the workshops concerned the participatory monitoring of its outcomes and analysing the impact of the city’s actions on the realization of human rights – establishing these as priority actions for the coming months.*

**Katarzyna Ziemann**

In addition to the changes concerning the structures and tools of a Human Rights City, the active involvement of civil society in the workshops led to material changes to disability policy and practice in the areas of social and political participation and housing. New information was discovered, illustrating the difference between rights on paper and rights in real life.

“ *The low results concerning the involvement of people with disabilities in political and social life were unexpected, despite the existing legal measures to equalize opportunities, which, however, do not work sufficiently in practice.*

**Katarzyna Ziemann**

In the area of housing, civil society actors brought the perspective of the dignity, autonomy and choice of the individual as a counterweight to the focus on administrative concerns and municipal property rights. On the basis of this, action points were identified, including establishing an approach to hoarding conditions that was based on autonomy; reviewing housing regulations from the perspective of dignity and autonomy; and analysing the process of obtaining municipal housing, the quality of housing and decisions to cut off water or electricity from a human rights perspective. As for the continued use of the self-assessment tool, selected questions from the tool will be included in evaluations or planning of new programs in the areas of disability rights and social housing.

### **Using human rights case studies to create a common language**

Thirdly, the workshops used the format of case studies explicitly framed in terms of human rights. These case studies were created by civil servants, describing situations when an individual's situation potentially needed action from the city. Civil society actors were asked what kind of action would be useful, and what the critical factors were for that action to be in line with the human rights and the wishes and requirements of the individual. These cases were then jointly analysed in the workshops, from the perspective of human rights.

Through the focus on a specific case and the common goal of human rights, different actors and perspectives developed a common language, rather than appearing to speak about different things. Even though perspectives and positions remained different, problems could be discussed through the common language of human rights. Importantly, general dilemmas, such as the conflict between administrative concerns and municipal property rights on the one side and the individual's right to autonomy and dignity on the other side, became visible to all through the focus on human rights actualised by a specific situation.

### 3.4.3 CHALLENGES TO GDAŃSK AS A HUMAN RIGHTS CITY REMAIN

One important lesson from the self-assessment process concerns the challenge of engaging the political level early and meaningfully in local human rights work. While the self-assessment process created strong collaboration between civil servants and civil society, City Councillors and representatives from the Mayor's Office were not sufficiently involved from the outset. This limited opportunities to co-design channels of exchange on human rights between the administrative and political levels within the Gdańsk as a Human Rights City policy. It also meant that the self-assessment process could not be used as an opportunity to build broader awareness and ownership of human rights at the political level. The important role of political engagement is also illustrated by the upcoming vote on the adoption of the Gdańsk as a Human Rights City policy.



*Without this vote, implementing foundations, structures, and tools for human rights reaching beyond the sector of social affairs will be difficult, including the rolling out of a human rights-based approach.*

**Katarzyna Ziemann**

The Gdańsk experience, therefore, highlights the importance of involving the political level from the beginning of human rights self-assessment and related implementation processes, even where this may be one of the most difficult aspects of the work.

To conclude, the co-creative workshops were pivotal in order to translate the self-assessment work into policies and practices that are anchored in human rights, implementable and, most importantly, based on predictable effects in the lives of rights holders. Still, the ability of the administration to systematically realise human rights is largely dependent on political action.

### 3.4.4 KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE GDAŃSK EXPERIENCE

The Gdańsk case reveals six key takeaways, which are as follows:

- 1. Integrate the tool into existing policy processes.** Combining the self-assessment tool with a broader initiative (such as the process of becoming a Human Rights City) creates a mutually reinforcing process. It avoids duplication, strengthens both efforts, and increases the likelihood that findings will shape policy.
- 2. Use the tool as both a diagnostic and implementation driver.** The self-assessment is not just for analysis – it can both directly identify weaknesses in structures, policies, and practices and feed concrete improvements into ongoing policy development and implementation.
- 3. Prioritize meaningful civil society participation.** Moving beyond consultation and acknowledging civil society as equal partners in co-creation is key. Civil society involvement improves the realism of findings, the quality of solutions and well as the legitimacy and accountability of decisions.
- 4. Include a cross-section of the administration.** Engage staff across roles, levels (policy, management, frontline) and, if possible, across departments. This helps uncover system-wide barriers, reveals interdependencies, and builds a shared understanding across the organization.
- 5. Adopt co-creation as a core working method.** Actively involve civil servants and civil society together in all stages, including data collection, analysis, solution design and validation. This leads to more grounded, legitimate, and impactful outcomes.
- 6. Focus on real-life impact using case-based analysis.** Using human rights-framed case studies helps shift thinking from legal compliance and abstract policy to actual impact on individuals and concrete lived experiences. It also creates a shared language across stakeholders, exposes dilemmas and makes complex issues easier to understand and solve collaboratively.



## 3.5 SOPOT: A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS SELF-ASSESSMENT

Human rights can serve as a broad way of working within a municipality, shaping how decisions are made, how priorities are defined, and how people's needs and dignity are considered across policy areas. Thus, their implementation should not be limited to one-time actions or to addressing only a small number of specific rights. Rather, embedding human rights strategically into municipal governance can strengthen the long-term protection of rights and help ensure that everyone is able to enjoy them equally in practice.

The experience of Sopot illustrates how a city can use self-assessment not only as an inventory exercise, but as a strategic instrument to support longer-term human rights governance. Human rights self-assessment is often understood primarily as diagnostic instruments. It can help reflect on the extent to which human rights principles are embedded in policies, procedures, and service delivery, and can reveal gaps, inconsistencies, or areas for improvement. In this sense, it provides a structured picture of the status quo. However, self-assessment does not constitute a strategic tool in itself. It does not automatically generate strategic direction or determine how findings will influence future policymaking and governance. In Sopot, the strategic dimension of the self-assessment process emerged through the way the city framed, analysed, and connected the assessment to future-oriented planning and decision-making. The case, therefore, highlights that the strategic value of self-assessment depends less on the tool itself than on how the process and its outcomes are integrated into broader governance and policy development.

### 3.5.1 SOPOT'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the self-assessment process in Sopot was to strengthen the city's capacity to govern human rights in a more structured, deliberate and forward-looking way. The self-assessment was not understood as an end in itself, but as a means to support specific strategic objectives.



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*The purpose was clear from the beginning. We need a tool which enables the municipality to diagnose the impact of social policies, actions, and strategy; and provide updated data which might be useful for planning and improving the municipality's programmes and activities.*

**Ewa Puzkiewicz, the Mayor of Sopot's Human Rights City Representative**

First, the self-assessment was intentionally positioned as foundational work for developing the city's Human Rights Action Plan. This meant that the exercise was not approached as a stand-alone reporting process, but as part of a broader sequence that moved from diagnosis to prioritisation, action planning and future monitoring. The aim was to generate substantive input for prioritising actions in the Human Rights Action Plan.

Moreover, the self-assessment process was used to initiate a shift in the city's overall human rights work from intuition to evidence. In many municipalities, human rights-related action is embedded in practices, sectoral programmes, or informal responses to identified needs, but not always systematically linked to explicit human rights standards or strategic planning. Sopot's approach suggests that self-assessment can help convert fragmented practices and knowledge into a more coherent evidence base that can inform policy development. This can help strengthen the city's ability to act more proactively, rather than reactively, and create a baseline for long-term planning.

The self-assessment process was also strategically directed towards the end of strengthening collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders, as well as supporting more coordinated cooperation across departments. Actors that were involved are those that engage in human rights work, interest, motivation and agency. This supports the institutionalisation of human rights in a municipality.

### **3.5.2 HOW SOPOT PURSUED ITS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

To work toward these strategic objectives, the city combined several deliberate approaches that helped make the self-assessment a foundation for longer-term governance development. These included clearly framing the purpose of the process, using participation to build ownership, translating findings into priorities for action, and linking the outcomes to broader institutional and external processes. Together, these dimensions illustrate how strategic use of self-assessment can emerge through how the process is organised and followed up.

#### **Clear communication: Framing self-assessment with a strategic purpose**

A central feature of Sopot's approach was that the purpose of the self-assessment was clearly articulated from the outset. The process was framed not only as a way to assess the current state of the local human rights work, but as a mechanism to generate evidence for planning and improving municipal programmes and activities.

This clarity of purpose was significant because it shaped how the process was understood and engaged with both internally and externally. When self-assessment is framed as a strategic exercise rather than an administrative obligation, it changes how participants relate to the process. Participants had a clearer sense of why the exercise mattered and how their contributions would be used. In Sopot, this framing appears to have helped position the exercise as meaningful and future-oriented. Rather than collecting information for its own sake, the process was linked to a tangible objective: moving from intuitive management of human rights issues toward evidence-based decision-making grounded in indicators and documented findings.

Sopot's experience suggests that strategic use depends not only on having an intention, but on communicating that intention consistently throughout the process. In Sopot, the link between self-assessment and the future Human Rights Action Plan appears to have served as an important motivating factor for departments and partners. Participants knew from the beginning that their contributions were expected to inform concrete next steps. This strengthened the relevance of the exercise and reduced the risk of the assessment being perceived as a purely symbolic or bureaucratic task.

### **Using participation to build ownership and sustain the process**

Another strategic dimension of the Sopot experience concerns how participation was not only used to facilitate the assessment, but to build support for future implementation. The process involved various actors, including the City Human Rights Commissioner, substantive departments, the Sopot City of Human Rights Team, advisory councils, civil society actors and external experts. These actors contributed at different stages, from data collection to analysis, validation and the identification of action points.

This broad involvement served an important strategic function. Rather than treating stakeholders merely as sources of information, the process created opportunities for participants to shape the diagnosis and contribute to identifying responses. This strengthened ownership of both the process and its outcomes, sustaining motivation and reinforcing the relevance of the exercise.

“ *The relevant officials appreciated that their daily activities had been subjected to professional research. They saw that the data they provided had not been "filed away" but had become the foundation of a strategic document.*

**Ewa Puskiewicz**

This also points to a broader lesson: participation can serve as a mechanism of sustainability. Strategic use of self-assessment is not only about producing better analysis, but also about generating the institutional and relational support needed to act on findings later. In Sopot, involving actors across departments and beyond the administration helped build support from multiple angles and challenged the perception that human rights are the responsibility of one office alone.

Compared to cities where self-assessment remain a more internal or narrowly administrative exercise, Sopot placed greater emphasis on using the process itself to build coalitions for future action. This does not necessarily require broad participation in all contexts, but it highlights that strategic use is closely linked to how far cities use the process to build ownership around what comes after the assessment.

“*My most important advice is: don't treat self-assessment as a one-time test to pass, but as a process of building relationships and standards within the city hall.*”

**Ewa Puskiewicz**

At the same time, participation also introduced tensions to the process. The validation of the assessment surfaced differences between the city's and civil society's perspectives, particularly where formal procedures existed “on paper” but were experienced differently in practice. Managing expectations was also important where external actors hoped for changes beyond what the process could immediately deliver. This highlights that participation needs to be actively facilitated and disagreement must be treated as part of improving the diagnosis, rather than as a barrier to the process.

### **3.5.3 INVOLVEMENT OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS**

The Sopot case also highlights that the analytical work benefited from external expertise. The involvement of external research and consulting experts as a “critical friend” helped professionalise the process, strengthen interpretation, and counter the risk of overly optimistic self-assessment. This external perspective appears to have added credibility and supported a more honest diagnosis.

At the same time, this points to a possible limitation. Strategic use that depends heavily on external expertise may raise questions of sustainability or replicability, particularly for municipalities with fewer resources or less access to external support. The case therefore suggests both the value of such support and the need to consider how analytical capacity can be built internally over time.

## **Translating findings into priorities**

Perhaps the clearest illustration of strategic use of the self-assessment in Sopot lies in how the city approached the analysis of findings. Data collection was not the endpoint. Instead, a crucial stage was the deliberate effort to interpret the responses, identify patterns and gaps, and translate findings into priorities for action.

This analytical step is critical. Without it, self-assessment risks remaining an inventory, that is a compilation of data or documents without clear implications for action. Sopot's approach emphasised moving from "what we have" to "what we are missing," using low scores, absent procedures and "blank spots" as signals for attention.

Particularly noteworthy was the effort to distinguish between immediate "quick wins" and longer-term strategic objectives. This created a bridge between diagnosis and implementation, allowing the city to identify actions that could build early momentum, while also addressing structural issues requiring longer-term investment. More concretely, it allowed officials to feel they could implement some changes immediately, which strengthened commitment and agency.

This suggests that strategic use depends on turning findings into management conclusions, not merely descriptive observations. The value lies not in data alone, but in how data are interpreted and prioritised.

## **Connecting self-assessment to external positioning**

A further strategic dimension in Sopot was the understanding that self-assessment outcomes could not only support internal planning, but also external positioning. The city viewed monitoring reports and analytical outputs as resources for engaging with ministries and the Commissioner for Human Rights, and as substantive arguments in funding discussions. The assessment was also linked to future budget prioritisation and to positioning the city in relation to broader human rights standards and networks.

This is significant because it expands the role of self-assessment beyond internal governance. Strategic use can also mean using assessment results to strengthen advocacy, support resource mobilisation, or increase institutional credibility. In this sense, self-assessment can become part of how cities position themselves in broader governance ecosystems.

Compared to cities where self-assessment remain primarily inward-looking, this reflects a broader conception of strategic value. It suggests that municipalities may gain more from self-assessment when they consider how findings can inform both internal planning and external engagement.

### **3.5.4 CONDITIONS OF STRATEGIC USE**

While Sopot offers a strong example of a strategic use of self-assessment, the case also highlights that this approach depends on certain enabling conditions.

One enabling factor was strong political support. The city repeatedly linked progress in the process to clear support from leadership, including the Mayor, and the existence of a dedicated Human Rights Commissioner. This provided legitimacy and helped sustain engagement across departments. Without such support, strategic ambitions may be difficult to translate into practice.

A second condition was time and capacity. The city reported information overload and the intensity of analysis as significant challenges. Strategic use requires resources, not only to complete the assessment, but, more importantly, to analyse findings, facilitate participation, and develop action points. Where cities lack time, staff or support, there is a risk that the process stops at diagnosis.

A third condition concerns the ability to maintain momentum after the assessment. Several risks identified in Sopot point to this challenge: bureaucratic overload, loss of motivation, funding gaps, and the possibility that strategy remains at the level of aspiration rather than implementation. This highlights a broader caution: linking self-assessment to an action plan is an important step but does not in itself guarantee change.

There is also a risk that framing self-assessment too strongly in strategic terms may overburden the process with expectations it cannot fully meet. Not all issues identified can be resolved at the local level, and some may depend on national legislation, funding structures or external conditions. Strategic use, therefore, also requires recognising limits and distinguishing what can realistically be addressed through municipal action.

### **3.5.5 CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Sopot's experience demonstrates that the strategic value of self-assessment lies not in the tool itself, but in how it is embedded within broader governance processes. By clearly framing the assessment as a foundation for action planning, linking it to evidence-based decision-making, and using participation to build ownership, the city was able to move beyond diagnosis toward more structured and forward-looking human rights governance.

The process illustrates how self-assessment can serve as a bridge between fragmented practices and a more coherent, prioritised, and collaborative approach, while also strengthening both internal coordination and external positioning.

At the same time, this approach depends on specific enabling conditions, including political support, administrative capacity, and the ability to sustain momentum beyond the assessment phase. Participation and external expertise can enhance the quality and legitimacy of the process, but also introduce challenges related to expectations, resources, and long-term sustainability. Sopot's experience therefore suggests that strategic use requires careful balancing: aligning ambition with capacity, combining inclusive processes with clear prioritisation, and recognising both the opportunities and limits of what self-assessment can achieve within local human rights governance.

### 3.5.6 KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE SOPOT EXPERIENCE

The Sopot case reveals five key takeaways, which are as follows:

1. **Use self-assessment as a foundation for future action.** Self-assessment becomes more meaningful when it is linked to concrete follow-up processes such as action planning, monitoring or policy development.
2. **Clear communication of purpose strengthens engagement.** Framing the process from the outset as a tool for future planning and improvement helps create motivation and ensures that participants understand how their contributions would be used.
3. **Participation can build ownership and sustainability.** Involving different actors throughout the process can build support for implementation and help create shared responsibility for outcomes.
4. **Analysis is key to turning data into action.** The value of self-assessment lies not only in collecting information, but in analysing findings, identifying gaps and translating them into priorities and action points.
5. **Self-assessment can support broader governance goals.** Linking findings to strategies, advocacy, funding discussions or existing policy frameworks can increase the long-term impact of the process.



## FROM CITY EXPERIENCES TO PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The case narratives in this part illustrate the diverse ways in which local governments can approach human rights self-assessment, depending on local realities, current priorities, institutional arrangements, and strategic objectives. While each case reflects a specific context, together they deepen and contextualise the cross-cutting lessons identified earlier in the report.

The following part of the report draws on both the cross-cutting synthesis and the city-specific experiences to distil practical lessons and implications for municipalities considering, undertaking, or developing human rights self-assessment processes.

## PART 4: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MUNICIPALITIES

The experiences presented in this report show that human rights self-assessment can serve a range of practical purposes in local governance. The obvious goal is identifying gaps in human rights implementation and strengthening evidence for decision-making. In addition, this report shows that self-assessment can also support broader organisational and governance development, including stronger cross-departmental coordination, stronger integration of human rights into municipal work, and more meaningful engagement with external stakeholders. At the same time, the findings suggest that these outcomes do not arise simply from undertaking self-assessment. The practical value of self-assessment depends significantly on how clearly the municipality has articulated the outcomes it seeks to achieve, and how deliberately the process is framed, communicated, designed, and organised.

This final part distils the practical implications emerging from the cross-cutting lessons in Part 2 and the thematic city experiences in Part 3. It identifies considerations that may support municipalities in designing and using self-assessment processes in ways that are contextually appropriate and practically meaningful. Its purpose is not to present a prescriptive model for municipal human rights self-assessment – reflecting the fact that municipalities differ significantly in size, resources, governance structures, institutional capacity, and strategic priorities.

## **4.1 DESIGNING SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH STRATEGIC PURPOSE**

A central practical implication emerging from this report is that the value of human rights self-assessment depends on strategic clarity about what the process is intended to achieve. Rather than being approached as a neutral technical exercise, self-assessment can benefit from being purposefully calibrated to the implementation challenges, organisational barriers, and governance issues that the municipality is seeking to address in its broader human rights work.

For some municipalities, the primary purpose of self-assessment may be to establish a clearer understanding of how human rights responsibilities are currently addressed, identify implementation gaps and prioritize actions, or generate a stronger evidence base for future decision-making. In such cases, the emphasis may be on producing a sufficiently robust and honest assessment of current practice, with due attention to evidence, interpretation, and the inclusion of relevant municipal functions and departments as well as civil society actors.

For others, the intended value of self-assessment may extend beyond establishing a baseline, identifying implementation gaps and deciding on priority actions. Self-assessment can also support broader organisational and governance development, including stronger cross-departmental cooperation and exchange; deeper internal understanding of how human rights responsibilities apply in municipal work; stronger integration of human rights into municipal organisation, governance, and practice; and strengthened stakeholder relationships. For municipalities recognising the need and value of these outcomes, this has concrete implications when considering human rights self-assessment. This report shows that such outcomes are more likely to happen where they are recognised from the outset as explicit objectives and reflected in the design and communication of the self-assessment process.

### **4.1.1 DESIGNING SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL COOPERATION AND SHARED OWNERSHIP**

Where sustained cross-departmental cooperation, exchange, and shared ownership are intended outcomes, process design should emphasise internal communication, facilitate participation in evidence gathering across relevant municipal functions and organisational levels, and designate concrete time and space for collective interpretation of findings and the identification of action points.

This may be particularly important where responsibility for human rights implementation is distributed across multiple departments, functions, or levels of the municipality. In such contexts, self-assessment may create opportunities for actors who do not ordinarily work together to develop a clearer understanding of how their respective roles, decisions, or practices relate to broader municipal human rights responsibilities. Where findings and observations are interpreted collectively, the process may also help surface implementation gaps, tensions, or coordination challenges that are less visible within individual organisational units. Importantly, this may not only strengthen the current self-assessment process but also help establish forms of internal cooperation that support broader human rights work beyond the assessment itself.

A potential pitfall is organising the exercise primarily as a technical reporting process within a single organisational unit, which may weaken conditions for longer-term cooperation, exchange, and shared ownership.

#### **4.1.2 DESIGNING SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR INTERNAL HUMAN RIGHTS UNDERSTANDING AND CAPACITY**

Where deeper internal understanding of how human rights responsibilities apply and can be fulfilled in municipal work is an intended outcome, self-assessment process design should create opportunities not only for information gathering, but for learning, reflection, dialogue, and shared interpretation across relevant municipal actors.

Depending on existing levels of knowledge and experience, this may also require some degree of capacity-building or structured engagement with international human rights concepts and standards, particularly where the ambition is to strengthen the municipality's ability to apply human rights more consciously and consistently in practice. A particularly relevant form of capacity-building may involve strengthening methodological capacity to translate human rights standards and concepts into practical municipal action, including through the use of human rights-based approach (HRBA).

A potential pitfall is adapting the process so fully to existing administrative language or routines that its distinct human rights framing is diluted, limiting its potential to strengthen understanding, uptake, and longer-term integration.

### **4.1.3 DESIGNING SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR GOVERNANCE INTEGRATION**

Where stronger integration of human rights into municipal governance is a broader objective, process design should actively explore and communicate how self-assessment can connect to the ordinary municipal governance structures, functions, and mechanisms through which municipal responsibilities and decisions are established, interpreted, implemented, and reviewed. This may include connecting to strategic planning processes, policy development mechanisms, departmental coordination structures, management and reporting systems, or existing monitoring and follow-up arrangements, even if these do not currently engage explicitly with human rights.

Potential pitfalls are failing to explore clear links between the human rights self-assessment and ordinary municipal governance processes, or failing to communicate those links in ways that are meaningful and recognisable to relevant municipal actors. Without meaningful links to ordinary municipal governance processes the potential for stronger organisational uptake and longer-term human rights integration in ordinary governance may be limited. Importantly, linkages to ordinary municipal governance processes should not come at the expense of the distinct human rights framing of the self-assessment process.

### **4.1.4 DESIGNING SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**

Where engagement and mutually meaningful relationships with external actors are intended outcomes, the self-assessment process should, from the outset, be designed around deliberate choices about who to involve, and when and how that involvement should take place.

A particularly important early consideration is which external actors are recognised as relevant participants in the process. The experiences in this report suggest that, if the objective is to strengthen rights-based engagement, it is important to look beyond the general public, established institutional stakeholders, or well-known civil society actors. This means considering how to reach communities that are less frequently consulted, as well as grassroots actors whose perspectives may reveal implementation challenges and lived realities that are less visible from within municipal structures.

Timing also matters. When stakeholder engagement is intended to strengthen relationships, trust, or the relevance of the process, involvement may need to begin as early as the design phase, including decisions about participation and the

selection or adaptation of the self-assessment tool. While later stages of analysis and validation are important opportunities for dialogue and shared interpretation, relationship-building is more likely to be strengthened where engagement begins earlier and allows external actors to shape aspects of the process itself.

The way external actors are involved is equally important. Meaningful engagement may require accessible and context-appropriate avenues for participation, including meeting people where they already are, adapting materials about and from the process so that participation is relevant and manageable, and building sufficient trust for engagement to appear worthwhile. Where the process is expected to inform action, clear communication about intended follow-up may strengthen engagement. In some contexts, more collaborative approaches, including shared interpretation of findings or co-creation of action points, may offer not only important insights but also stronger foundations for longer-term relationships and more meaningful rights-based engagement.

Potential pitfalls are designing participation in ways that are formally inclusive but practically inaccessible, relying primarily on the usual stakeholders or actors already engaged in cooperation with the municipality, involving external actors only to validate pre-formed findings, or otherwise limiting meaningful influence. Unrealistic expectations about likely outcomes, or a failure to communicate how stakeholder input has informed the process, its findings, or subsequent action, may similarly undermine trust and weaken the relationship-building value of the process.

#### **4.1.5 DESIGNING SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR CONTINUITY AND REASSESSMENT**

Where the intended outcome is to improve municipal human rights work over time, rather than ending with acting on current findings, the self-assessment process may need to be intentionally designed to make meaningful reassessment possible. The long-term value of a baseline assessment is strengthened where it can later be meaningfully repeated, allowing municipalities to track change, calibrate adopted responses, and improve over time.

Continuity can be supported through different forms of institutional anchoring. This may include explicitly linking self-assessment to the adoption or review of a major policy framework, using the assessment as the deliberate starting point for a broader organisational transformation, or embedding follow-on work within successor initiatives or thematically aligned programmes that allow work to continue.

Meaningful reassessment also depends on sufficient stability in both the human rights foundations underpinning the self-assessment and the methodological approaches used. If progress is to be assessed continuously, municipalities may need to consider which human rights standards and principles, aspects of municipal work, key questions, or ways of judging progress, will remain sufficiently stable to support meaningful comparison over time. However, continuity does not equate methodological rigidity. The approach may need to evolve as municipal circumstances, priorities, institutional capacities, or human rights commitments change.

A potential pitfall is assuming that establishing a baseline automatically creates the conditions for meaningful long-term comparison. Without deliberate consideration of institutional anchoring, stable human rights foundations, and sufficient methodological comparability, later reassessment may provide only a weak or misleading basis for judging progress or it may not take place at all.

Taken together, the strategic purposes discussed above do not suggest that municipalities should seek to pursue all of these simultaneously, or that broader ambitions necessarily make self-assessment more valuable. Different municipalities will operate under different implementation challenges, resource constraints, organisational capacities, political priorities, and levels of institutional readiness. The most appropriate use of self-assessment will vary accordingly. In some contexts, a focused diagnostic exercise aimed at identifying implementation gaps and practical action points may be entirely appropriate and may itself contribute meaningfully to longer-term human rights implementation. In others, municipalities may see value in designing self-assessment not only to diagnose current implementation gaps, but also to strengthen internal human rights capacity, support integration of human rights into ordinary governance, deepen rights-based engagement with external actors, or contribute to longer-term assessment efforts.

Importantly, municipalities may not always have full clarity at the outset of the self-assessment process about the implementation challenges, organisational barriers, and governance issues affecting their human rights work. In some cases, the process itself may reveal needs that were not initially recognised, including conditions that need to be strengthened for the assessment to function meaningfully and for findings to be acted on, such as internal coordination, stakeholder engagement, or governance integration.

## 4.2 DESIGNING SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR MUNICIPAL PRACTICE

While strategic clarity about the intended purpose of self-assessment is important, this alone does not determine whether the exercise will be feasible, workable, or capable of generating useful insights. Municipalities must also make methodological and process design choices that are sufficiently grounded in local realities to adapt human rights self-assessment into a functioning municipal exercise. This includes decisions about what the assessment should cover; how the tool is selected, developed, or adapted to fit the practical municipal context; and how the process itself is structured and embedded to support meaningful engagement and practical uptake.

### 4.2.1 SCOPING SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR MUNICIPAL FEASIBILITY AND RELEVANCE

Self-assessment frameworks often offer broad and comprehensive coverage of human rights implementation. At the same time, municipalities may need to make deliberate decisions about what self-assessment should actually cover here and now. Applying a framework in full will not always be the most workable, or even relevant, approach. Instead, scoping decisions may need to be made. These typically need to reflect the municipality's mandate, which parts of municipal work can meaningfully be assessed, and whether relevant departments or service areas can be engaged in ways that support meaningful assessment. Scoping decisions should also reflect current capacity, allowing the exercise to be conducted with sufficient depth to generate useful insights rather than superficial coverage.

Scoping should be informed by what the municipality already knows, or does not know, about human rights challenges in practice. Municipalities will often already hold relevant knowledge through complaints mechanisms, service experience, stakeholder dialogue, or recurring operational concerns, even where this knowledge remains fragmented across departments or is not yet understood in explicit human rights terms. This may point towards particular affected groups, areas of life, municipal services, or aspects of municipal work that warrant closer examination. At the same time, existing knowledge should not be treated as a complete picture of human rights challenges. Self-assessment may be particularly valuable where blind spots are suspected, where concerns are poorly understood, or where fragmented observations have not yet been connected into a clearer understanding of underlying problems.

Scoping decisions may also be shaped by timing. Where significant policy reform, organisational restructuring, service redesign, or other planned change in a particular area is already anticipated or decided on, establishing a clearer baseline may provide a further reason to include that area in the self-assessment.

While scoping is likely to be required, a potential pitfall is allowing such decisions to become overly convenience-driven. This may lead to the automatic exclusion of important issues simply because they are institutionally unwieldy, politically sensitive, or more difficult to assess meaningfully. There is also a risk that scoping simply follows what is already visible, reinforcing existing assumptions, while leaving less understood concerns unexplored. Where scope is not matched to realistic capacity, a different practical risk is that the exercise becomes overly broad, resulting in superficial coverage rather than useful insight. Scoping choices should, therefore, be deliberate, explicit and justified, rather than emerging indirectly through convenience, institutional familiarity, or practical constraint alone.

#### **4.2.2 ALIGNING SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLS WITH LOCAL CONTEXT AND SCOPE**

Whether municipalities are involved in developing a self-assessment framework or working with an externally developed instrument, deliberate methodological choices are needed to ensure that the tool fits both the intended scope of inquiry and the specific municipal context. These choices may include what human rights commitments or standards the tool assesses against, what dimensions of municipal work it examines, how questions are formulated, what terminology is used, and how respondents are asked to provide input. Choices may also include what background explanation is needed to help respondents understand the purpose of the self-assessment and how particular questions should be approached.

Existing self-assessment tools will not always fit the chosen scope of inquiry or the specific municipal context as they stand. Human rights terminology may be unfamiliar to intended respondents or framed in ways that do not translate easily into municipal practice. Questions may be overly broad, conceptually dense, or insufficiently distinct from one another, making it difficult for respondents to understand what is being asked and how they are expected to respond.

The way respondents are asked to provide input may also shape the quality of engagement, particularly where response formats encourage mechanical completion rather than reflection and contextualisation. Equally important is whether respondents are given sufficient explanation to understand the purpose of the self-assessment, why their contribution matters, and how they are expected to approach particular questions. Practical usability is, therefore, not a secondary design concern, but may, in a very real way, determine if self-assessment manages to generate meaningful engagement.

A potential pitfall is assuming that tool design choices are automatically fit for purpose. This risk applies both if a municipality is involved in developing a human rights self-assessment tool or adapting an existing one. A tool may be poorly matched to the intended scope of inquiry, the specific municipal context, or the human rights commitments that the self-assessment is intended to examine. A different risk is that efforts to improve practical usability oversimplify questions, response formats, or human rights framing to the point that the exercise loses analytical depth or its ability to meaningfully assess human rights implementation. The objective is not simply to make the tool easier to complete, but to ensure that it remains both practically usable and capable of generating meaningful insight.

#### **4.2.3 ORGANISING SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR MEANINGFUL INTERNAL PARTICIPATION AND PRACTICAL TRACTION**

Even where scope and tool design are appropriate, self-assessment will not function well unless the process is organised in ways that allow participants to develop the understanding they need to engage meaningfully and contribute informed input. This places importance on how participants are brought into the self-assessment process. Meaningful internal participation cannot be assumed simply because actors are invited to contribute. Participants may need orientation to understand the purpose of the self-assessment, why their participation matters, what kind of input is expected from them, and how their particular role fits into the broader exercise. This may be particularly important where participants are not already working explicitly with human rights concepts or where the relevance of human rights to their area of work is not immediately apparent.

Developing this understanding may require more than individual completion of questionnaires, no matter how suitable written instructions are. Interaction between participants may be an important part of the self-assessment process, particularly where understanding needs to be developed across actors with different roles, responsibilities, and perspectives. Discussion may help participants clarify what questions are asking for, relate them to municipal practice, and connect observations that might otherwise remain fragmented or implicit. This can strengthen the quality and usefulness of the self-assessment process itself, while also helping to build a shared human rights-informed understanding of the issues the exercise brings into view.

How self-assessment is positioned within existing organisational and political structures may also shape whether the process itself attracts meaningful participation, is prioritised across the municipality, and creates traction for subsequent action. Where the exercise is connected to existing coordination structures, planning and strategy processes, reporting or monitoring

arrangements, or established cross-departmental working structures, participation may be easier to secure and participants more likely to prioritise meaningful engagement. Organisational and political anchoring may also strengthen the likelihood that findings and resulting action points are taken forward through existing municipal structures and processes.

A potential pitfall is treating self-assessment primarily as a straightforward information collection exercise rather than as a process that requires participant understanding, interaction, and organisational anchoring. Where internal participants are asked to provide input without sufficient orientation, interaction, or clear organisational expectations and support, contributions may become superficial, fragmented, or reduced to formal completion. Weak organisational or political anchoring may similarly limit prioritisation, participation, and the likelihood that the process generates practical traction.

### **4.3 DESIGNING SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR CREDIBLE FINDINGS**

Even a strategically calibrated and practically workable self-assessment does not automatically produce findings that are credible. Municipalities must also consider how the process generates its findings, whose perspectives shape them, and how internally generated conclusions are examined or challenged. Strengthening the credibility of self-assessment findings, therefore, involves practical choices about participation, the conditions under which input is provided, and the extent to which findings are challenged and corroborated through other sources of information and perspectives.

#### **4.3.1 STRENGTHENING CREDIBILITY THROUGH PARTICIPATION**

The credibility of self-assessment findings depends in part on whose perspectives on the state of human rights implementation are represented in the assessment process. The participation of civil society actors including rights holders is both central to knowing how human rights implementation works, or should work, in practice as well as a part of human rights obligations and human rights-based approach (HRBA). Internally, since human rights implementation may look different from different levels of the organisation, credibility may depend on involving centralised, as well as decentralised, parts of the organisation, and both management and front-line staff.

Municipalities seeking credible findings may need to consider participation not only in terms of breadth, but also in terms of positioning, relevance and visibility. Internally, participant selection should be guided not only by formal responsibility, but by where relevant knowledge about implementation is likely to be found. In some cases, this may involve actors responsible for policy,

coordination, or compliance. In others, it may require input from those involved in delivering services, handling complaints, or facilitating participation. Externally, relevant knowledge may sit among diverse civil society actors, advisory bodies, or rights holders with direct experience of the issues being assessed. Such external perspectives may help surface implementation dilemmas, tensions, or competing understandings that are less visible from within municipal structures.

A potential pitfall is assuming that broad participation or formal organisational representation automatically produces credible findings. Where participation is shaped primarily by existing organisational structures, formal responsibility lines, or convenience, important implementation realities may remain invisible despite the appearance of broad coverage. This may be particularly relevant where understanding how implementation works in practice requires perspectives beyond municipal administration, including from rights holders or civil society actors whose experiences are not routinely visible through internal processes. Here too, breadth alone may be insufficient if participation is limited to established interlocutors, while other relevant perspectives remain absent.

#### **4.3.2 CREATING CONDITIONS FOR CANDID INPUT**

The credibility of self-assessment findings depends not only on who provides input, but also on the conditions under which that input is generated. Depending on how the self-assessment process is framed and experienced, participants may be more or less willing to acknowledge uncertainty, implementation gaps, or organisational weaknesses. Self-assessment may invite reflection, but it may also trigger defensiveness, reputational caution, or a tendency towards optimistic self-presentation.

Municipalities seeking credible findings may, therefore, need to consider what conditions make candid input more likely. Where participants perceive the exercise primarily as a compliance check, performance judgement, or politically sensitive reporting exercise, input may become more cautious. Internal hierarchies may also shape what participants feel able to say, particularly where responses are readily attributable to individual participants. Here, framing the exercise as a reflective process intended to support improvement, rather than judgement or blame allocation, may encourage candour.

The way questions are framed may also shape candour. Technical, abstract, or overly academic language may make participants uncertain about how their own experience relates to the concepts being assessed. Questions that are concrete,

recognisable, and clearly connected to municipal practice may make it easier for participants to engage openly with uncertainty, weaknesses, or implementation challenges. Interactive formats, such as facilitated workshops, group discussions, or follow-up conversations may, in some cases, further support candid input, particularly where answering self-assessment questions involve interpretation, sensitivity, or competing understandings.

A potential pitfall is assuming that participants will provide candid input simply because they are asked to self-assess. Where participants perceive risks in acknowledging uncertainty, weaknesses, or implementation challenges, responses may become cautious, incomplete, or shaped by institutional self-presentation rather than reflective assessment.

### **4.3.3 CORROBORATING SELF-ASSESSMENT FINDINGS**

The credibility of self-assessment findings may be strengthened when internally generated evidence is examined against additional sources of information and perspectives. This may be particularly important where the assessment focuses on questions of service delivery, accessibility, or the lived experience of particular groups of rights holders, since formal procedures or institutional accounts risk providing only part of the picture. The existence of a policy, procedure, or formal commitment does not, in itself, demonstrate that implementation is effective in practice or experienced as such by those affected.

Municipalities may, therefore, strengthen the credibility of self-assessment findings by subjecting emerging conclusions to additional scrutiny through complementary perspectives or forms of validation. Depending on context and purpose, this may involve processes that test or challenge emerging conclusions, including follow-up interviews, validation workshops, external expert review, or structured engagement with civil society actors or advisory bodies.

Different forms of corroboration serve different purposes. Some may help clarify uncertainties or apparent inconsistencies in internally generated responses. Others may help test whether internally generated conclusions remain convincing when considered from perspectives that are less visible within municipal structures. This may be particularly important where implementation is experienced differently by rights holders using services, civil society actors, or frontline practitioners. Importantly, corroboration does not require municipalities to create parallel assessment processes – it instead requires identification of forms of additional scrutiny that can challenge and corroborate findings. Corroboration is not, however, a substitute for ensuring that the self-assessment process itself draws on sufficiently relevant perspectives from the outset. Where important actors or forms of experience have been excluded from evidence

gathering or analysis, later corroboration may help identify gaps but cannot compensate for a weak or systematically incomplete evidentiary foundation.

A potential pitfall is assuming that internally generated findings provide a sufficiently complete picture without further challenge or corroboration. Where only a few actors are responsible for providing information, interpreting findings, and translating them into action points, important blind spots, implementation dilemmas, or discrepancies between formal commitments and lived experience may remain unexamined.

## FINAL PRACTICAL REFLECTION

Municipal human rights self-assessment should not be understood as a standardised technical exercise whose value follows automatically from being undertaken. As the practical implications in this report suggest, its usefulness depends on deliberate choices about what the process is intended to achieve, how it is designed and organised in practice, and how the credibility of its findings is strengthened. These choices cannot be made in the abstract, but need to reflect the municipality's specific institutional context, governance structures, implementation challenges, available capacity, and intended use of both the process and its findings.

The practical implication is that municipalities should approach self-assessment as a deliberate governance choice, rather than follow any single model for human rights self-assessment. Where strategically calibrated, practically workable, and capable of generating credible findings, self-assessment has the potential not only to provide a meaningful basis for reflection, prioritisation, and action, but also to support broader organisational learning, governance development, and longer-term human rights implementation.

Importantly, the decisive factor to successful human rights self-assessment is not the current level of ambition, human rights implementation, or organisational capacity of the municipality. Instead, it is the conscious design of the self-assessment process to reflect these circumstances that is key.



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