

5th Academy and Conference Human Rights Go Local: What Works

“Local Governments and Human Rights-Based Budgeting: Pathways to Accountability”

2 – 5 February 2026

Methods

(Version: 30 October 2025)

The Academy takes place from 2 to 5 February 2026. The first three days are dedicated to serving as an online platform for discussing tools and instruments for human rights-based budgeting, exchanging relevant experiences and collecting and disseminating approaches that have proven successful among local governments. The programme aims at facilitating exchange on the procedural aspects of a human rights-based approach to budgeting between conceptual works and local practice, between the local and international levels and between the various regions of the world. By scrutinizing existing practices, the Academy aims to assess how public funds are allocated with respect to human rights principles – such as equality, participation, transparency, accountability and most importantly, non-discrimination – so as to enhance the visibility and practical realization of human rights for all.

The Academy intends to contribute to the OHCHR's definition of a Human Rights Economy, with methodological emphasis on reaching and supporting excluded and disadvantaged minorities and groups. In addition, the Academy's programme and set-up provide opportunities for networking among participants. Students, young professionals and individuals perusing a new career as the next generation human rights experts are provided with opportunities to engage with established human rights professionals, working in international organisations or local authorities. The events for the next generation have a topical focus on the interconnections between climate protection, human rights and budgeting. A high-level conference takes place on 5 February to present the synthesised findings and proposals of the event in the Outcome Document to local governments.

1. Aims and approach

The Academy aims to facilitate exchange on eye-level between different actors, regions and governance levels. A cooperative, peer-to-peer, and multi-actor approach will be used, with explicit efforts to recruit and empower participants representing or advocating for vulnerable communities. No lectures or traditional teaching methods are used; instead, participatory and inclusive methods will help match and synthesize experiences and approaches relevant to our topic, including those that address the real challenges faced by vulnerable groups in accessing and shaping budgetary processes. All participants are urged to actively contribute, with special supports for those with lived expertise in vulnerability or minority status.



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2. Target groups

The organisers aim to provide an easily accessible platform for knowledge, exchange and collaboration for all those working with or within local governments at all levels and in all functions who wish to explore the potential of human rights budgeting as a tool to promote local government accountability. The prime target groups are however, representatives of local and regional governments (elected and administrative representatives), who work in

- Public management and financial administration,
- Outcome orientation (group-based),
- Participatory budgeting,
- Human rights offices,
- Human resource management,
- The distribution of funding in public services in the field of housing, education, elder care.

Moreover, the Academy's target group consists of city networks and intermediaries in the field of good governance, as well as human rights professionals and practitioners, working in think tanks, academia, civil society, and international or regional organisations.

In addition to these traditional target groups, the Academy welcomes representatives from grassroots organizations, community-based and advocacy groups representing vulnerable and minority constituencies. Special efforts will be made to recruit, support, and empower participants facing barriers to access. Last but not least, the Academy explicitly encourages the active participation of members of the next generation wishing to professionalise in human rights at the local and regional levels.

The event targets all professionals and practitioners interested in co-creating expertise on the innovative approach of bringing together local government budgeting processes and human rights.

3. Broader objectives

1. Exchange experiences on human rights-based budgeting between local authorities, think tanks, human rights institutions, academics, civil society organisations and regional and international organisations.
2. Take stock of and improve the visibility of those local human rights-based budgeting approaches around the world that effectively promote the accountability of local governments. Improve the visibility of budget practices that effectively address disadvantage, systemic exclusion and discrimination.
3. Improve the understanding of local human rights-based budgeting and communicate to local and regional authorities how action plans can be successfully placed in the context of their sphere of influence. Develop concrete, actionable recommendations for local budgetary processes, ensuring the practical realization of rights for the most vulnerable
4. Encourage local governments to adopt a human rights-based approach to budgeting with the aim of promoting their human rights accountability; encourage local authorities to consider redress for populations facing borderline exclusion or poverty in the budgetary processes.



5. Expand the existing network for the exchange of experiences and develop further solid working relationships and collaborations for the future. Strengthen working relationships with organizations and networks representing vulnerable and minority groups.
6. Harness the aspirations, perspectives and expertise of the next generation human rights experts with regard to human rights-based budgeting. Empower the next generation to address persistent inclusion barriers in local budget processes.
7. Develop and adopt an Outcome Document and discuss its content with high-level local authorities and policy makers.

4. Methods and setting

The Academy convenes daily from 11:30 to 16:00 (GMT+1). Each day is structured around a plenary session, interactive workshop sessions, and a closing session, complemented by dedicated networking opportunities for different participant groups. This design ensures a balance of knowledge exchange, practical dialogue, and relationship-building.

4.1. Plenary Sessions

The plenaries create a shared foundation for each day, combining insights from global institutions and local realities. They include: 1) an opening and welcome by UNESCO Chair and Centre; 2) impulse speeches by representatives of international and regional organisations as well as local authorities; 3) optional brief Q&A session that allows participants to clarify core concepts and raise open questions, shaping the workshops that follow.

4.2. Workshop sessions

Workshops serve as the Academy's participatory backbone, connecting global principles with local experiences. Their objectives are:

- To expand discussions from the plenaries by focusing on practical questions and challenges.
- To facilitate the exchange of approaches, lived experiences, and best practices among practitioners at all governance levels and from different world regions.
- To ground the Academy's Outcome Document in the evidence and knowledge provided by local authorities and practitioners, ensuring inter-regional applicability.

Methodology:

- Each workshop is facilitated by two moderators and supported by several interlocutors.
- For each guiding question, one interlocutor takes the lead in initiating dialogue, actively engaging participants, and encouraging diverse perspectives. Interlocutors are drawn from the Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, the Steering Group, and the Centre and Chair. The organisers prioritise selecting interlocutors from minority backgrounds, ensuring they help frame discussions and represent under-heard perspectives.
- Briefing and preparation: Moderators are trained to create safe spaces, actively inviting contributions from participants who may hesitate to speak, while managing dominant voices. Moderators and interlocutors receive advance briefing on the inputs and methodology. One moderator leads facilitation, while the second collects insights and prepares a concise synthesis of results to be presented in the closing session.



- Anonymous input channels: The organisers provide digital tools (chat boxes, polls, message boards) for participants to voice opinions anonymously if they do not feel comfortable speaking aloud.
- Safe space: Encourage participants to share lived experiences as valid and valuable knowledge, elevating personal narratives to equal standing with institutional perspectives. The organisers and moderators of workshops encourage inputs from vulnerable persons in workshop summaries and plenary feedback, reinforcing the visibility and impact of their voices.

4.3. Closing

The participants come together in the plenary room to listen to the presentation and discussion of the workshop findings. Each Academy Day is closed with the “Thoughts on the day”, which is a short inspirational commentary reflecting on the theme, distilling its human rights relevance, and linking it to the next Academy Day. This creates continuity and motivation for participants.

4.4. Networking

For next generation human rights experts

On Day 3, a dedicated networking space connects emerging human rights professionals with established experts. This event:

- Helps early-career practitioners of all ages discover potential career opportunities and role models in the field of local human rights governance.
- Provides an interactive forum to explore the linkages between climate protection, green budgeting, and human rights at the local level, focusing on “localising the Green Deal.”
- Presents next generation human rights experts potential job opportunities in the field of human rights and good governance.
- Fosters mentorship and the building of sustainable professional relationships between generations.

Day 3 facilitates exchange between human rights experts of the next generation and established experts in the field. As next generation human rights experts, we understand people of all ages who are just starting out in the field of human rights. This networking event aims to field of human rights at the local level. Last but not least, the event aims at facilitating networking and the establishment of working relationships.

The next generation programme aims at addressing the topic of Green Budgeting and localising the green deal. Together with the members of the next generation, linkages between climate protection and green budgeting with human rights at the local level will be explored.

Virtual living room

On the Academy’s last day, prior to the high-level conference, a “virtual living room” using an interactive tool is open for the participants to further exchange and networking. In the same way that cooperative relationships can be deepened in an informal setting over a coffee together in real life, this virtual space should also invite participants to do so. A virtual room will be organised with topical tables. Participants can move around using name-labelled avatars. As soon as they approach each other to a certain proximity, a virtual chatroom is opened for them to engage in private or group conversations. Written information can be exchanged via chat-functions. The



concept and setting up of the Virtual living room will pay particular attention to the empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable groups and members of minorities. This will be done by means of:

- Direct outreach and collaboration (in cooperation with minority-led organisations, grassroots groups and advocacy networks)
- Pre-event surveys (to identify and satisfy participants' diverse needs)
- Mentorship and peer-group spaces (tables)
- Respectful engagement and Code of Conduct (clear expectations for respectful, inclusive interactions and ensure event staff are trained to deter and manage disruptive activity)

These practices aim to remove barriers, foster trust, and create a genuinely welcoming environment for minority and vulnerable participants at networking events.

5. The Academy's Steering Group

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (CoE Congress), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the United Cities and Local Governments Africa and its Local Governments Academy (ALGA), the Austrian Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs, the Federal Province of Styria, the City of Graz, and the University of Graz.

