

Concept Note – World Metropolitan Day – Discussion on Digital Human Rights

The motto for World Metropolitan Day 2022 is ‘Crossing Boundaries’. That urges a sense of collaboration across boundaries and the erasure of social and physical obstacles – even national borders – to build more equitable and prosperous metropolis. Digital technologies are ubiquitous and invisibly cross boundaries. They increasingly and systematically affect the social ‘fabric’ of societies worldwide. Digital technologies and internet access have a tremendous potential to contribute to address inequalities, but also to exacerbate them when not well governed.

(1) Individual

“Digital human rights” are interpreted as existing human rights which also need to be protected in the context of digital technologies. This agenda encompasses human rights considerations in the development and application of technology in cities, including its implications for the people and urban planning, either in real or virtual environments¹. The diversity of experiences based on ethnicity, race, gender identity, abilities, disabilities, age, and socioeconomic status must be represented in the decision-making processes about technologies. Public participation is a condition for democracy and, together with digital inclusion and digital rights, must be guaranteed on normative foundations.

(2) City

Cities must deal with spatial equity also on the digital space, so the policies ensure that opportunities, services, and infrastructure are accessible. Cities also needs to expand their capacities to be prepared and equipped to lead digital transformation strategies that are people-centered and support sustainable urbanization towards the public good. Digital governance mechanisms and structures integrate the digital human rights commitments into the city’s work and decision-making processes. Local governments are required to go through a process of understanding their own legal, policy and cultural context, and then develop appropriate local digital governance policies to advance governmental mechanisms and to create conditions that enable social and procedural justice.

(3) Metropolis

Metropolises appear when the functional systems of a territory exceed administrative boundaries and inhabitants connect with different jurisdictions to access opportunities, goods, services, and infrastructure. Many of them have successfully

¹ Privacy, safety, security and protection; Public engagement and community participation; Public goods, open infrastructure; Digital inclusion, Equality and Equity; Freedom, Autonomy, Control and Self-determination; Transparency and Accountability.

addressed the urgency to protect citizens from the possible negative effect of emerging technologies. The metropolitan scale is often the most appropriate one to deal with issues that are essential to the lives of individuals and communities and to address global issues.

Engaged metropolitan governance is critical to facing the immensity of contemporary urban challenges. The union of metropolises are in the best position to support other metropolises and cities to improve their performance, especially when capacities developed can solve common problems and tackle global challenges, such as gender equality and technology regulation. These issues demand a common strategic vision because technologies effects are usually invisible and respects no political or administrative boundaries.

Metropolitan management will only be effective if it manages to tear down invisible barriers that prevent the consolidation of common vision, joint strategy, solid governance, and coordinated action to bring about change and improve wellbeing. Only by doing this, digital technologies and internet access will contribute to address inequalities, and not to increase the digital divide gap.

Show best-case scenario of local protection of human rights against the negative scenario of no regulation on this topic, considering cross border effects.

(4) Organizations

Last century was marked by a strong cooperation movement among countries to stablish institutions to promote the well-being of the world peoples'². In this century, metropolises and cities are uniting to strengthen their governance³, sometimes with a special concern on the impacts of digital technologies⁴.

The Digital Rights Governance Project is an example of cooperation between international organizations with potential to benefit many cities and metropolises. It is being developed by the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, together with UN-Habitat, UCLG and Eurocities, in partnership with Open Society Foundation, and intends to

² The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat, is the United Nations agency working towards a better urban future. In close coordination with national and local governments, the agency leads the monitoring of SDG11 on sustainable cities and communities as well as the New Urban Agenda.

³ [Metropolis] In line with the association's mission and vision, as well as the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, Metropolis works to: Advance metropolitan interests; and Improve the performance of metropolises.

⁴ Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, launched by the Cities of Amsterdam, Barcelona. and New York, in November 2018, is a network of cities helping each other in the greenfield of digital rights based policy-making. The Coalition is committed to promoting and defending digital rights in urban context through city action, to resolve common digital challenges and work towards legal, ethical and operational frameworks to advance human rights in digital environments.

expand cities capacities to lead digital transformation strategies that are people-centered. The project has two main components aimed at fostering digital rights in a principled and practical way:

Digital Rights Governance Framework: a normative yet pragmatic framework for the city-wide implementation of digital rights that unfolds the foundations, structures and tools necessary for developing a rights-based governance of the digitalisation of municipal services.

Digital Rights Helpdesk: The project will support the design and piloting of a Digital Rights Governance Framework that will include digital rights technical advice, ad hoc support and advisory input focused on capacity building in the participating pilot-cities. A Helpdesk will be set up in an online platform for cities, which will be prototyped and tested during the second half of 2023.

(5) Global October

Urban October was developed to raise awareness, promote participation, generate knowledge, and engage the international community in creating a better urban future. Every October UN-Habitat and partners organize a month of activities, events, and discussions on urban sustainability. Urban October is an opportunity for people around the world to join the conversation around the challenges and opportunities created by the fast pace of change in our cities and towns.

In 2022, the World Habitat Day, under the theme **Mind the Gap. Leave No One and Place Behind**, will look at the problem of growing inequality and challenges in cities and human settlements. The objective this year is to draw attention to growing inequalities and vulnerabilities that have been exacerbated by the triple 'C' crises – COVID-19, climate and conflict. Digital inclusion and digital human rights are questions closely connected with the Urban October theme.

Format of the online panel:

Roundtable Discussion with a Moderator		
4 or 5 panelists	5' each	Explore the topics (1) to (5) listed above
Q&A	20'	Questions to be addressed by one or more experts