

Draft

The Hague Charter on Municipal Peace

This Charter is a working document elaborated to inform the discussions that will take place during the event “Peace begins here: local solutions for conflict”, organized by City of The Hague and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) during the UCLG World Council 2024 under the title “A New Peace Agenda for Future Generations”. It has been elaborated by experts taking into account the results of a survey disseminated among local governments, organisations and experts from all over the world during the month of September 2024.

Preamble

Acknowledging the growing importance of cities and territories in fostering peace, this Charter on Municipal Peace builds on the principles from key international frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the United Nations Future Summit, the UCLG Peace Prize, and forums like the Conference of City Diplomacy (2008, The Hague) and the Forum of Cities and Territories of Peace.

As cities and territories are central to addressing challenges such as violence, inequality, and polarization, this Charter outlines an inspiring framework for municipal governments to lead peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and the promotion of inclusive societies.

Key Role of Cities and Territories in Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention

The Charter on Municipal Peace recognizes the key role of cities and territories in building a more peaceful, just, and inclusive world. Peace is much more than the absence of war; by addressing the root causes of violence, fostering social integration, and promoting participatory governance, cities can lead the creation of peaceful communities.

Municipalities are well-positioned to promote security and access to justice, although in many cases, authority may lie at other levels of government. Eliminating corruption and improving transparency contribute to ensuring respect for human rights and creating safer communities.

Economic inequality and social exclusion are factors that generate social tension and drive radicalization. Local governments face these situations by implementing policies that ensure equitable access to essential services such as education, healthcare, housing, and employment. By mitigating disparities, local governments create equitable and inclusive environments where citizens can thrive, avoiding frustrations that often lead to conflict.

Participatory governance enhances local trust and social cohesion. Municipalities encourage citizens to participate in decision-making processes, ensuring that all voices in the community are heard. This inclusion strengthens the legitimacy of political outcomes, especially in areas such as conflict resolution, climate action, and social justice.

Vulnerable populations, including migrants and refugees, must be at the heart of municipal peace agendas. Expanding social services and creating care-based policies not only supports the vulnerable but also contributes to long-term peace and social justice.

Globally, women face discrimination, violence, or limited access to resources. Local governments play a crucial role in defending women's rights and promoting gender equality in our communities. By implementing policies and services that address these challenges, municipalities can create safer and more inclusive environments for women.

Local and regional governments have a unique ability to enhance multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance through decentralized cooperation. By engaging all stakeholders and fostering partnerships with public and private actors, and multi-level dialogue, cities can improve conflict prevention and peacebuilding. City diplomacy and decentralized cooperation contribute to strengthening solidarity and sustainable peace between regions and countries.

Part 1: Preventing Radicalization and Polarization

Municipalities have the capacity to be proactive in addressing the root causes of radicalization and polarization, such as economic inequality, social exclusion, and the influence of extremist groups, highlighting the need for local interventions.

- Municipal civic education programs foster respect for diversity and promote peaceful coexistence. By defending shared values and non-violence, these programs offer an alternative to extremist ideologies, creating resilient communities that embrace differences.
- Local governments can create platforms for dialogue between communities. These spaces foster mutual understanding, build trust, and reduce polarization by promoting conversations across cultural, religious, and social divisions. Cities that encourage these interactions create stronger and more cohesive communities.
- Promoting digital literacy to combat hate speech and fake news is part of the work municipalities can do to curb the spread of extremist ideologies, especially among young people. With the rise of misinformation, it is key for citizens to critically engage in countering radicalization in the digital space.
- Early intervention support systems help prevent radicalization. Municipalities can create local systems that offer psychological support, vocational training, and community engagement, keeping at-risk individuals connected with positive contributions to society.

Part 2: Tackling Urban Violences

There are different types of (urban) violences: direct, structural and cultural, which often arise from socio-economic inequalities. Addressing its causes is essential for cities to reduce violence and foster peaceful communities. By ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, housing, and employment, municipalities help dilute the structural inequalities that contribute to urban violences.

- Security is fundamental in our societies, but punitive approaches tend to marginalize certain groups. Community-based strategies build trust between law enforcement and citizens. By focusing on prevention and addressing the socio-economic and cultural causes of violence, cities can enhance public safety and strengthen neighborhood cohesion.
- Coordination between administrations and violence prevention bodies—including law enforcement, schools, social services, and community organizations—creates a powerful unified response to urban violences. These collaborative efforts address both immediate security concerns and the broader socio-economic triggers of violence.
- Creating safe, well-lit public spaces along with accessible infrastructure encourages interaction and community engagement, which is essential for reducing violence. By promoting urban designs that encourage inclusion, municipalities can create environments where safety and coexistence are prioritized.
- Youth engagement programs, particularly those targeting at-risk youth, offer alternatives to criminal activity and violence. It is important to invest in educational, employment, and recreational opportunities that keep young people positively engaged with their communities.

Part 3: Reducing Disputes Between Communities

Reducing tensions between communities requires efforts to recognize diversity, promote inclusion and resolve conflicts peacefully. Local governments can encourage inclusion by organizing initiatives that celebrate cultural, religious, ethnic, and sexual diversity, fostering mutual respect and cooperation.

- Cultural exchange programs help promote respect and understanding among diverse populations. Local governments have high degree of flexibility innovation capacity, which allows to implement pilot innovative policies or programs that address specific local challenges related to human dignity.
- Ensuring citizens have equitable access to resources and services reduces tensions within communities. Local governments can promote equity by providing opportunities for everyone, regardless of background, to access public services and economic opportunities.
- Conflict mediation initiatives offer practical solutions to de-escalate disputes. Municipalities can resolve conflicts before they escalate by incorporating traditional authorities, training community leaders and offering local mediation services.
- Post-conflict contexts require strong multi-level governance to reduce tensions and support reconciliation efforts. In this area, municipal diplomacy and decentralized cooperation can play a prominent role through support measures.

Part 4: Migration and Human Mobility

Wars, human rights violations, and climate change have a clear impact on human mobility. People migrate fleeing war, suffering, injustice, and poverty, often risking their lives in search of better living conditions. Human mobility presents both challenges and opportunities for cities and territories. Migrants contribute to the workforce and bring new skills and ideas, fostering economic growth, cultural diversity, and innovation in cities. However, human mobility can generate tensions, and migrants may face social integration problems and discrimination.

- Municipalities can pave the way for social integration by ensuring that migrants and refugees have access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and housing. Inclusive policies help newcomers integrate into local civic life, reducing barriers to better inclusion.
- Municipalities can lead awareness campaigns to combat xenophobia and discrimination. Fighting hate speech and fake news contributes to creating more tolerant, inclusive, and safe environments.
- Language and cultural orientation courses help migrants adapt to their new environments. This fosters a sense of belonging, encourages active participation in local governance, and promotes long-term integration and community engagement.

Mentoring programs that connect local residents with migrants are an effective tool for social integration. These programs provide newcomers with guidance on local systems and create community ties that promote coexistence.



A Call to Action

This Charter on Municipal Peace highlights the transformative power of cities and territories to build a more peaceful, just, equal, and inclusive world by addressing the root causes of violence, promoting participatory governance, and fostering social cohesion.

Violence and conflicts can take many forms but are often linked to socio-economic and cultural injustices and inequalities. The key role of cities and territories in promoting peace and preventing conflicts must be strengthened through their capacity to prevent radicalization and polarization, combat urban violence, reduce disputes between communities, and promote sustainable human mobility.

Cities and territories know their own contexts, realities and populations. They have the capacity to find innovative solutions for coexistence and partner with civil society, business community, NGOs, citizens initiatives and a long list of actors. Thus, we need better ways to incorporate the knowledge of cities and territories to national and international debates, forging co-decision systems/schemes that co-create conditions for peacebuilding and conflict solution.

Local governments have the capacity to play a key role in global efforts to prevent conflicts and foster peace; that is so because they know/understand their own communities and contexts better than other spheres of government. It is essential to move towards multi-level governance structures in which local governments actively participate in peacebuilding initiatives. The existence of numerous networks and initiatives highlights the richness and diversity of city diplomacy and decentralized cooperation.

Ultimately, this Charter is a call to strengthen the role of local governments in peacebuilding, to advance towards just, inclusive, and peaceful societies, and to unite efforts to safeguard democracy and human rights.